This American Life: Radio Journalism

Beyond a Binary Conception of News

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Date: 17th of August 2015
This American Life temporary tattoo, for sale in the web shop at thisamericanlife.org
Abstract and keywords

In a context of declining audiences for traditional media, this thesis questions traditional thinking about journalism in binary oppositions. By positioning concepts like conventional journalism, objectivity and detachment on the exact opposite of unconventional journalism, subjectivity and engagement, a value judgement is often made, interpreting the concepts on the one side of the pole as pointing to ‘good’ journalism and on the other side to ‘bad’ journalism. As a way to attract audiences is supposed to lie in a more subjective and engaged form of reporting, the binary opposition creates a problem, because unconventional journalism has a hard time being accepted as ‘proper’, quality journalism. This limits the space for a fruitful discussion on what is (quality) journalism in our age, and what is not. To question this way of thinking, the study looks at broadcasts of the award-winning radio show This American Life. The show problematizes a binary conception of news as it is seen as high quality journalism while the format contains ample examples of subjectivity and engaged reporting.

Keywords: Radio, subjectivity, objectivity, conventional journalism, unconventional journalism, engagement, detachment, objectivity regime, narrative journalism, popular journalism, appraisal theory.
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Introduction

News is like a whole-wheat sandwich: you eat it because it is healthy, not because it is tasty. (25 year-old news consumer quoted in Costera Meijer 2007: 96)

Public Radio is already good at [...] giving you the news, it is very solid. What we will do is take the smell of broccoli out of the air. You'll listen not because you will be a better citizen or a better person, but because it will be an entertainment. (This American Life host Ira Glass in Weisberg 2013)

The audiences for traditional journalism are declining or even disappearing media (see Baym 2005: 260, Costera Meijer 2012: 4). This forms a serious threat to the sustainability of this type of journalism. This would have an impact on society as well, as misconduct of, for example, government officials or companies could go on for a longer period before being discovered (see Laroes 2015). As will be shown, a more subjective and engaged form of reporting, as used in narrative and popular journalism for example, appears to be one way to attract audiences (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 640, Costera Meijer 2001). However, engaged reporting can be seen by both scholars and journalists alike as a deviation from the conventional standards of the objectivity regime, which can result in doubts about the quality of such a product of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 309).

So while part of the solution might lie in deviating from conventional journalism, this creates another problem: there is some hesitance to accept the ‘quality’ of unconventional journalism as, and, occasionally, its status as truthful.

This is why it is important to contribute to the existing body of literature that shows that subjectivity and quality can go hand in hand (see Costera Meijer 2003, Dahlgren 1992, Peters 2011, Wahl-Jorgensen 2003, Zelizer 2009). For example, van Zoonen points out that popular formats such as talk shows, TV series and movies are usually not considered of high quality but actually have a quality of their own as they stimulate political discussion, making them valuable for the democratic process (van Zoonen 2005). This thesis is aimed to add to this body of literature. It seeks to create space for a more meaningful discussion on
what constitutes (quality) journalism, by questioning the dismissal by certain journalists and scholars of forms of journalism that do not seem to fit into pre-defined boundaries of what is journalism and what is not. More specifically, it problematizes a perception of subjectivity and engagement as the exact opposites of objectivity and detachment. Instead, it argues that these concepts are dynamic in nature and often overlap or work together. In the academic sense, this allows for a more accurate and inclusive study of the journalism field.

This is investigated by using the radio show *This American Life (TAL)*¹ as a case study, a program that up to now has received little academic attention. As will become clear, the long-running show is very popular, has received multiple prestigious journalism awards for its high quality and is generally seen as a source of inspiration for similar shows, yet the format clearly contains subjectivity. This makes it suitable to explore what forms subjectivity can take in an evidently successful non-traditional form of radio journalism.

The study operationalizes notions surrounding objectivity and subjectivity to offer methodological insights into how these are enacted within *TAL*. Furthermore, it combines several ways to trace subjectivity: the notion of ‘appraisals’ is used to look at the episodes on the textual and the narrative level. Several scholars claim that the use of appraisals points to subjectivity (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, Stenvall 2008). On another level, attention was paid to the position of the host and/or reporter in a story. This was to see whether they deviate from the conventions of the objectivity regime in the sense that the presentation style is not impersonal, distanced and detached (Costera Meijer 2003, Peters 2010, Peters 2011, Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, Broersma and Harbers 2014, Zelizer 2009, van Zoonen 1998 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013) and that they do not take a neutral stance (Peters 2010, Peters 2011, Zelizer 2009, Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, van Zoonen 1998 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013). Also, both transcripts and audio were studied in depth.

The focus is on the content of fourteen *TAL* episodes. Next to this, the intentions of producers behind the creation are touched upon by an investigation of secondary literature in which they describe their specific outlook and broader view of journalism. No audience study was conducted; accordingly no claims are

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¹For the remainder of this study, the radio show will mostly be mentioned by its abbreviation: *TAL*.
made about the reception of specific *TAL* content by an audience. In this study, it suffices to point to the popularity of the show in terms of listener rates and received awards, as the interest of this study is more on the extent to which subjectivity and non-conventional techniques are interwoven in the creation of a popular high quality show.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In the first chapter, the current media landscape is mapped out, as well as the academic debates that revolve around this landscape. This way, the chapter gives insight into the status quo upon which this thesis is commenting. A perception of news as either conventional or unconventional will be explained, and how the objectivity regime plays a role in this way of thinking. Academic arguments against this perception will be outlined as well as forms of journalism that deviate from conventional standards, mostly narrative and popular journalism. The potential of engagement in winning the audience back is explained, while at the same time it is shown that it is the engaged character of narrative and popular journalism that problematizes these forms of journalism.

In the chapter that follows, *This American Life* is introduced as a program rooted in narrative and popular journalism. Identified characteristics that are in line with these forms of journalism are the use of fiction techniques, a focus on entertainment and a personal tone. It is explained why this show is fruitful to study when questioning a binary conception of journalism, as it is unconventional and perceived as high quality journalism at the same time, judging from listener rates and prestigious awards won. How this works exactly is touched upon by explaining how the makers of the show think about their way of conducting journalism.

Chapter three goes into the operationalization of this research. The aim of this operationalization is to study in what ways exactly the approach to storytelling on *This American Life* deviates from conventional journalism, through its use of subjectivity. And secondly, to see how this relates to the objectivity regime. The theoretical concept of subjectivity was translated into a list of questions that was applied to the material. This took the shape of a classification schedule that facilitated the tracing of subjectivity through appraisals and the role of the host/reporter in a story.
Finally, chapter four goes into the findings that this study produced. There will be a discussion of how and why part of the subjectivity indicators seem to fit within the objectivity regime, and others seem to clash with it. It is found that the concept of alternative truth claims, the role of the host and the way in which stories are introduced play a vital part in this. After this, new methodological insights will be presented as the chapter goes into possible new indicators of subjectivity and the influence of audio-only elements. Ultimately, in the conclusion all results will be wrapped up and further discussed.
Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

Objectivity, though often contested, has been and appears to remain one of the leading concepts when studying the news (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 642). This concept seems to be always intertwined with the idea of conventional journalism, with a detached way of reporting as an important ingredient. These three concepts are not only frequently perceived to belong together and to be synonymous to a certain extent; they are also often seen as the exact opposites of unconventionality, subjectivity and engagement. However, I question this opposition. Rather, these concepts should be seen as dynamic in nature and often overlapping one another. This stance will be illustrated in the sections of this chapter, in which I lay out the theoretical framework of this thesis.

First, the current media landscape that forms the background of this thesis will be explored in more detail. This will make clear which problems are currently threatening conventional journalism, for which a solution might be found elements that are by some considered as outside of these conventions. Then, the issue of a binary conception in thinking about journalism by journalists and scholars is introduced. It will be shown that this conception carries a value judgment, which is more positive about conventional journalism than about the other so perceived ‘pole’. This illustrates why it is perceived as problematic to move more towards unconventional journalism, even though it is perceived by several scholars and journalists as a solution for the problems discussed earlier on. What is meant exactly by conventional journalism and by the objectivity regime will then be explored in more detail, showing the entwinement of both concepts. Then, the perceived ‘opposite side’ will be explored in more detail, by looking into two types of journalism that are seen as deviating from conventional journalism: narrative journalism and popular journalism. These two are selected to move closer to the object of this study, *This American Life*, as they appear to apply to the radio show. Exploring these types of unconventional journalism shows various reasons why journalists wish to deviate from conventionalism, one of the most important reasons being the preference of engaged over detached reporting. Next to this, their mixed reception shows how thinking in binary oppositions problematizes the acceptance of unconventional journalism, as these two types suffer from value judgement.
1.1 The current media landscape

A common discussion concerning the current media landscape, is that the audience is perceived to be moving away from traditional news media (see Baym 2005: 260, Costera Meijer 2012: 4). In such a media landscape, the current state of news is often painted as predominantly chaotic and under constant pressure:

We live in an age of 24-hour news channels, of infotainment, of nine-second sound bites and of celebrity journalism. We wade through a deluge of information—and misinformation—on the Internet. Fierce competition in the news marketplace calls for speedy production of attention-grabbing stories. (Ward 1999: 9)

Bird and Dardenne describe the current media landscape as one in which fewer people read newspapers or watch network news, a growing number of “internet alternatives” enters the field and news is being dominated by the interests of big companies (Bird & Dardenne 2009: 214).

Especially the rapid increase in the number of so-called internet alternatives seems to influence the behavior of the audience. As there are more options to choose from, “people need to be choosier to select a medium that meets their needs” (Chen 2011: 756). This has led to behavior termed “grazing” by Hargreaves and Thomas (2002:48): people do not just consume information from one medium, but they graze the available information providers and combine information coming to them from several directions. The creation of new information providers, such as Twitter, make it more complex to define what exactly is journalism and what is not (McNair 2013: 77). This is likely to take away some of the ‘obviousness’ of news consumption. It seems to become less normal for the audience to, for example, listen to the same radio program or read the same newspaper every day.

This potentially poses a threat to the continued existence of traditional media. For example, Costera Meijer (2012: 4) sends out a warning that “excellent journalism faces the challenge of losing its audience if it does not take into account the public’s changing habits of media consumption”. There are
consequences for society as well. For example, in the Dutch media, there is a debate on the disappearance of local media, leaving some parts of the country uncovered. The danger of this could be that local scandals like misconduct by the municipality could go on for much longer until they are discovered (see Laroes 2015).

Considering these circumstances, it might be vital for journalists to think of ways to halt dropping numbers of listeners, viewers and readers, and find a way to win their audiences back. But there seems to be something standing in the way. As will be explained in the next section, a popular-quality dichotomy stands between journalists and developing new ways of producing the news that might win the audience back.

1.2 A binary conception of news

As patterns of news consumption are changing, journalists that want to win the audience back need to know more about what the current audience appreciates in journalism. But there is a major problem in journalistic thinking that stands in the way. And this is the common perception among journalists of moving more into the direction of what the audience wants as dumbing down the news, or “giving up on quality” (Costera Meijer 2013: 2). Costera Meijer uses a powerful quote from a journalist to illustrate these worries and this way of thinking: “I do not go down on my knees. I refuse to pretend to be more stupid than I am.” (Costera Meijer 2013: 2). This fear has been addressed by several scholars. For instance, Peters refers to it as the ‘tabloidization thesis’: professional journalists are worried that the serious news standards of the past are eroding more and more, and the whole industry is moving in the direction of tabloid news (Peters 2011:300).

To understand this line of reasoning, the concept of a binary conception of news is informative. This binary conception exists out of a “radical distinction between popular journalism and quality journalism.” (Costera Meijer 2003: 15). Accordingly, news items are often classified in two opposite categories, with nothing in between. The resulting options for editors and reporters to approach

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2 I do not state here that new forms of (online) media cannot bridge that gap, but including that discussion would go beyond the scope of this research.
news are thus confined to either a “conventional approach” or a “popular approach” (Costera Meijer 2003: 15).

These opposite categories are recognized in several studies, although the names that they are given differ. Costera Meijer (2003: 15) calls the two categories ‘serious and sophisticated’ and ‘popular and light’. Sparks notes that often when discussing news, ‘hard news’ and ‘soft news’ are taken as ideal types that are positioned opposite each other. He terms these ideal types as the ‘Journal of Record’ on the one side of the journalism spectrum and the ‘True Tabloid’ on the other side (Sparks 2000: 14 in Peters 2011: 300). The ‘Journal of Record’ is perceived to strictly touch upon public life, politics, economics and society. The ‘True Tabloid’ is seen as focusing solely on private life, scandal, sports and entertainment (Sparks 2000: 12). Steensen speaks about the ‘featurization’ of journalism: an increase in human interest focused feature stories. This trend is seen by many scholars as a negative development and proof of journalism dumbing down (Temple 2008 in Steensen 2011: 50). However, this is a neglect of complexities of any type of journalism, as it divides news along the lines of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news. The first is supposed to be serious, enlightening and enhancing democracy, while the second is assumed to trivialize journalism, politics and democracy (Steensen 2011: 50).

This polarized way of thinking has been present not just in recent debates about journalism but for a longer time. Ten years before Sparks and Costera Meijer, and even twenty years before Steensen, Dahlgren spoke of “bipolar thinking” among journalists. This way of thinking positioned “rational/serious” news opposite of “irrational/frivolous” news (Dahlgren 1992: 18). Concluding, a binary conception of news has been part of journalism debates for at least two decades.

Attached to the binary conception comes a value judgment concerning quality. Journalism in the first category, which is described by previously mentioned scholars with the words: conventional, quality, serious, sophisticated, hard, journal of record and rational, is generally seen as “good” journalism. By contrast, journalism in the second category, described by the words popular, light, soft, true tabloid, irrational and frivolous, is generally seen as “bad” journalism or “improper news” (Peters 2011: 304, Carter et al. 1998 in Peters 2011: 300, Steensen 2011: 50). Costera Meijer’s research shows that, within the
journalism profession, quality is often associated with a conventional approach rather than a popular approach. This becomes clear as journalists say they experience moving towards a popular approach as a loss of quality (Costera Meijer 2013: 2). Indirectly this means that they perceive a conventional approach as leading to quality, and moving away from it as moving away from quality. Thinking this way drastically confines the space available for talking about news and what constitutes quality news (Costera Meijer 2003: 16).

As moving either towards or away from ‘conventional journalism’ appears to be perceived by many journalists as essential to judge what is ‘good’ and what is not, it is important to look deeper into the definition of this concept.

1.3 Definition of conventional journalism

When thinking about the literal meaning of conventionality, it is not unthinkable to place conventionality and quality in the same category. The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* describes conventionality as doing something the traditional way, a way that is accepted and conceived as *the right way* to do things in a certain society (2005: 335, emphasis added). A remarkable aspect of the explanation by this dictionary is that it also mentions that ‘conventional’ points to the ordinary, which is “perhaps not very interesting” (2005: 335). This argument will come back later when discussing why certain people want to deviate from conventional journalism. Another dictionary, *Wolters*, formulates conventionality as doing something according to the existing norms (1992: 235).

Academic studies of journalism also recognize certain traditional norms that indeed, when followed, are considered by journalists to contribute to the quality of the final product (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 642-643). The discussion of conventional journalism in academic texts below will be divided in two parts: conventional topics and conventional reporting styles.

1.3.1 Conventional Topic Choice

So what exactly do scholars of journalism mean when they discuss ‘conventionality’? We have already seen before that certain topics are generally
associated with conventional journalism on the one hand, or popular journalism on the other. Topics that are seen as conventional are those covering public life, politics, economics and society (Sparks 2000: 12). Additionally, Costera Meijer found the following characteristics for conventional topics as approached by the Dutch public broadcaster NOS: new events, topics covering the nation and its interests, events that have impact on large numbers of people such as epidemics or floods, topics that have impact on particular groups such as taxpayers and seniors, and foreign news.

These topics are juxtaposed against topics covering for example private life, scandal, sports, entertainment (Sparks 2000: 12), ordinary people in uncommon situations, man bites dog stories, human interest, disclosures, heroes (Costera Meijer 2003: 19) and reportage, celeb profiles, colorful background stories, lifestyle stories, personal columns (Steensen 2011: 49).

1.3.2 Conventional Reporting Style

However, it is not only the type of topic that influences a categorization as either conventional or popular. This is illustrated by the research of Magee on the radio show All Things Considered. She wonders whether the increase in popular culture content on the show influences its reputation of being of high quality. She concludes that the program used its own distinctive “traditional, sophisticated” style to incorporate the rising number of popular culture items into their show. This entailed that, instead of interviewing celebrity actors appearing in a Hollywood blockbuster, they would choose to focus on the creative process behind making that particular film, and they would invite the makers to the show. So while the topic was popular, the reporting style was ‘traditional’ and ‘sophisticated’. This is an example of how choosing a specific style of reporting can affect quality, no matter what type of topic (Magee 2011: 52). It also means that a reporter or editor has a choice in addressing a topic in numerous ways, it is not a given that a certain topic should be covered in a certain way (Costera Meijer 2003: 22). From this we can take that, apart from the topic, the reporting style can also be seen as conventional or popular. This is why, from here on, this thesis will differentiate between topic choice and reporting style.
So what exactly is associated with a conventional reporting style? When looking at several scholars that touch upon conventionalism, there are multiple characteristics that can be distilled from their work. One concept that is present in almost every single one of these studies is ‘objectivity’. Some scholars even use the words conventional/traditional journalism and the objectivity regime/the paradigm of objectivity as if they touch upon exactly the same thing. For example, Broersma and Harbers (2014: 643) discuss the conventions of the ‘objectivity regime’, and name objectivity a well-respected marker of properly conducted journalism (ibidem). Peters says that objectivity is traditionally seen as one of the conventions of professional journalism (2011: 301) and calls ‘objective distance’ part of “well-established journalistic conventions” (Peters 2010: 846). Wahl-Jorgensen argues that objectivity adheres to the conventional ideal of journalism as a profession (2013: 305) and occasionally she merges both concepts into one, when she speaks of “reporting styles associated with conventional ‘objective’ journalism” (2013: 308). So either scholars use objectivity as an umbrella term for a set of conventions that, combined, are part of a more broad regime of ‘objective journalism’, or they name objectivity as one of the most important conventions in journalism, or they treat it as a synonym for conventionality. Either way, the two seem to be always mentioned together.

1.3.3 The objectivity regime

All these aspects have a link with objectivity, but what do scholars actually mean when they talk about ‘the objectivity regime’, sometimes also called ‘the paradigm of objectivity’? According to Schudson, the objectivity regime is a form of legitimization of journalism as a profession. It serves as a guideline for journalists to behave according to norms that appeal to the public, protecting themselves from criticism (Schudson 2001:165). It describes the working methods of journalists in a depersonalized and rationalized way. It is a set of norms, routines and conventions to which journalists are expected to adhere in their work. The assumption behind this is that adherence makes it possible for journalists to produce an objective and truthful account of social reality. (Chalaby, 1998; Schudson, 1978 in Broersma and Harbers 2014: 643). Thus, central to the objectivity regime is the assumption that it is actually possible for journalists to produce truthful stories, and that what needs to be done to achieve this is apply certain techniques associated with objectivity: facts and opinions should be separated, information should be checked with more than one independent source, both sides in a conflict should be heard, and quotes and information should be attributed (Ward 1999: 3). Then, the produced content should also make it clear to the reader that these norms were followed, by adopting a certain style of writing or speaking. For example, a so-called ‘reporter voice’ can, mainly by using quotations, push the role of the reporter to the background (White 1998 in Stenvall 2008: 1571). These actions are not something to take lightly, as the journalist’s authority depends not so much on their knowledge but on how they present it (Zelizer 1990: 367). Following all these steps is expected to reassure the audience that the journalist has done a good job (Broersma, 2010a in Broersma and Harbers 2014: 643). Only this does not mean that there are no subjective elements in the reporting, but that they are hidden from sight (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 643).

According to several authors, objectivity is still one of the ruling concepts within the field of journalism. The paradigm of objectivity has dominated the study of news for years (Peters 2011:298) and continues to do so in western journalism (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 642). Even though the ideal of objectivity has been termed unrealistic on more than one occasion (Schudson 1987 in Wahl-
Jorgensen 2013: 305, Stenvall 2008: 1571, Ward 1999: 3), it is still intertwined with the occupational ideology of journalism and discussed as such by scholars and journalists (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 308). At the same time, however, scholars and journalists have also called into question the dominance of objectivity in recent years (Peters 2011: 298). Several ways in which scholars question thinking in dichotomies, conventionality and the related concept of objectivity will be discussed in the next section.

1.4 Arguments against a binary conception

There are numerous options for what concept could be positioned on the other side of the dichotomy, opposite conventionality. What all these options have in common, is that their deviation from conventionality might result in them not being regarded as proper journalism. However, several scholars (Dahlgren 1992, Peters 2011, Wahl-Jorgensen 2003, Zelizer 2009) question this dismissal of forms of news which don’t ‘fit’ the pre-defined boundaries. This strand of literature argues for more acceptance of “traditionally non-valorized forms” (Peters 2011: 301). Here we shall look into their argumentation.

There are multiple variations of the conventionality-popularity dichotomy presented before. For example, Wahl-Jorgensen notes that subjectivity is often perceived as the exact opposite of objectivity, thus shaping an objectivity-subjectivity binary conception. Framed as such, the latter has a negative connotation and is not regarded as being part of properly conducted journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 309). However, when studying award-winning articles she found plenty of examples of subjective language. This way, she proves that what we say we appreciate as good journalism contradicts with what we actually appreciate and praise in practice.

Peters also recognizes several other “traditional” dichotomies within the journalism field, namely emotionality-rationality, hard-soft, fact-opinion, and information-entertainment. However, he also sees a trend of blurring these categories (Delli Carpini and Williams 2001, Kovach and Rosenstiel 1999 in Peters 2011: 298). It is a trend towards ‘informalization’, or ‘conversationalization’, which entails moving away from a formal and distanced public discourse (Cameron 2004: 124 in Peters 2011:298). Within academia,
scholars seem to agree on the fact that news and entertainment in the current century are very much intertwined, and the meta-narrative of objectivity is increasingly questioned (Peters 2011: 298).

Nevertheless, even though there is a movement actively diverting from thinking in dichotomies, in which Wahl-Jorgensen and Peters both take part, this type of thinking still remains. Wahl-Jorgensen describes the current situation as one in which criticism of the objectivity regime exists next to allegiance to it (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 307). And, looking at how the use of emotion is regarded in journalism, Peters notes that one is still inclined to put emotion and rationality on opposite sides when discussing quality (Peters 2011: 299). This means that, concerning discussions on quality, dichotomies are far from having ceased to exist.

So why can this be harmful, according to scholars? Most of the opponents pose the argument that thinking in dichotomies drastically narrows the definition of journalism and oversimplifies the complex and multidimensional nature of journalism today (Costera Meijer 2003, Dahlgren 1992: 8, Peters 2011: 299,). For example, Peters calls comparing emergent products (new forms of journalism) to preceding expectations (conventions of objectivity) “anachronistic” (Peters 2011:299). It ignores the present situation.

In this strand of literature, moving away from dualist thinking is seen in a positive light, as it opens up an array of possibilities to reinvent scholarly definitions of journalism to better suit the present and future. A redefinition of borders is called for, in terms of what is journalism and what constitutes good journalism, in order to be able to incorporate more genres and “to see how they can be more consciously and actively used to positive journalistic ends.” (Dahlgren 1992: 8). This element, of creating space to see what the value of non-traditional forms of journalism can be, is also advocated by Zelizer. She sees a default acceptance of journalism adhering to conventions as quality journalism. For her this is an important reason why, currently, little room is left for discussing the value of other forms. She blames the same phenomenon for a lack of discussion on the possibilities of interweaving conventional and non-conventional elements (Zelizer 2009: 6). Wahl-Jorgensen also draws attention to the possibilities of mixing elements that are perceived to belong to opposite
poles in a binary conception of news. She argues that posing subjectivity as the exact opposite of objectivity obscures the fact that it is possible to conduct proper award-winning journalism that adheres to journalism standards while incorporating subjective elements (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 316).

In the next section, two types of deviations from conventional journalism will be discussed to show what shape they can take, and also to illustrate how their unconventionality can be perceived as problematic.

1.5 Deviations from conventional journalism

There are numerous strands of journalism that are posited against conventional ‘objective’ journalism in the academic literature, such as ‘public journalism’ (Rosen 1996 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 308), ‘alternative journalism’ (Atton and Hamilton 2008 in Peters 2011: 301), ‘narrative journalism’ (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, Broersma and Harbers 2014, Clark 2000) and ‘popular journalism’ (Dahlgren 1992, Bird 1990, Peters 2011, van Zoonen 2005, Costera Meijer 2001). What these all have in common, is that the deviation from conventional journalism entails among other things choosing engaged reporting over detached reporting. As will be explained later on, engaged reporting is generally seen as attracting audiences. So it is hopeful for journalists that wish to win their audience back, but its quality is often questioned as well. This inclusion of engagement and, simultaneously, doubts about quality, will be illustrated here by exploring two types of deviations in more detail, namely narrative and popular journalism. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I cannot describe all forms in detail, and these two types seem to be the most informative for this study as they seem applicable to This American Life. Exploring these in greater depth will enhance our understanding of how a binary conception can lead to questioning the quality and legitimacy of unconventional journalism, and in doing so, will broaden our understanding of the broader discussion about engagement either enhancing or demising the quality of a piece of journalism.

1.5.1 Narrative Journalism

The term narrative journalism is used interchangeably with the terms literary
journalism and, sometimes, new journalism. These synonymous genres are ones in which techniques of fiction are applied to non-fiction, to make the story “read like a novel” (Sims 2007: 1). Though when studied by scholars the focus is usually on written journalism, the existence of narrative journalism on the radio is acknowledged as well. Some even see more opportunities in the future for it on the radio or podcast than in print (Keefe 2010: 10). According to journalist Mark Kramer, one of the main advocates of narrative journalism, it has at least these components:

At a minimum, narrative denotes writing with set scenes, characters, action that unfolds over time, the interpretable voice of a teller – a narrator with a somewhat discernible personality – and some sense of relationship to the reader, viewer or listener, which, all arrayed, lead the audience toward a point, realization or destination. (Kramer in Sims 2007: 11)

It also requires “a departure from the conventions of daily news”: the structure of a story is meant to “engage an audience in the news” (Nieman Foundation, 2013).

It was journalists’ frustration with conventional journalism failing to do just this, engage the audience, which brought to life genres like narrative journalism (Rosen 1996 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 308). Underlying it is a deviation from conventional characteristics that create distance and detachment, such as neutrality, impersonality and factuality (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 308). As we have seen before, these are all concepts associated with the objectivity regime.


A recurring criticism of narrative journalism as high quality has to do with its claim to truth. The genre suffers from doubts about its factual accuracy (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 640) and its preference for “unsubstantiated emotionally charged opinions” at the cost of facts (Ibid: 643). In academia, the
constant tension between factuality and fiction is a key subject when researching narrative journalism as it conflicts with the basic principles of the objectivity regime (Ibidem). This has at least partially to do with its deviation from conventions on reporting form and style. Broersma writes that a journalist that adheres to professional conventions in his reporting form and style is more likely to be believed by the audience (Broersma 2010:21). This is even more important than the content of one’s reporting (ibid: 27, Zelizer 1990: 367). Clark speaks of “a false dichotomy” when he posits narrative writing opposite of “traditional methods of news writing”. He describes editors discouraging narrative writing for fear of fabrication scandals (2000: 11). So in the 21st century, a negative stance towards narrative journalism over conventional journalism is still present.

Several scholars specifically problematize this criticism of narrative journalism. Wahl-Jorgensen found aspects of narrative storytelling in all award-winning texts that she analyzed (2013: 308). This seems to go against the idea that narrative journalism is not to be trusted for its factuality and its quality should thus be questioned, as winners of journalism awards are generally accepted as having produced a piece of quality and excellent journalism (Ibid: 309). Adding to this, Boynton notices that the audience expresses a need for narrative journalism. He speaks of a current fascination with “true stories” and presses the point that works of narrative journalism are not to be seen as marginal or quaint (Boynton 2005: xxix-xxx). In a similar vein, focusing on the subjective nature of narrative journalism, Broersma and Harbers recognize subjective reporting exists in more than one variation. They distinguish personal-engaged and personal-ironic reporting. In both forms subjectivity is used, but the first form still abides to the principle of the objectivity regime in the sense that it has the underlying notion that a reporter is able to give a truthful representation of reality. In doing so, it adheres to the positivist principles of traditional journalism (2014: 641). The second form questions the possibility of representing reality, by leaving room for ambivalence about truth, and thus puts itself outside of the objectivity regime (ibid: 651). Thus, narrative elements that are subjective in nature can exist within the borders of the objectivity regime, as long as the reporting is personal-engaged.

Also, an argument is that narrative journalism is to be understood as having a different truth claim than conventional journalism (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 641).
As opposed to “traditional” journalism, in which its truth claim is said to be all about facts and originates from the idea that reality and its representation are the same thing, the truth claim of narrative journalism seems to be about whether emotions come across as authentic and able to elicit an emotional reaction in the audience (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013:308-309). While Wahl-Jorgensen centers this alternative truth claim around emotions, Van Zoonen focusses on the personal aspect. She sees a cultural development in which the truth that derives from personal experiences is taken more and more seriously. She terms this development ‘I-pistemology’ (van Zoonen 2012:56). Similarly, Broersma and Harbers, when discussing the truth claim of personal-engaged reporting, say it lies in the use of eyewitness reporting and personal experiences. They argue that this truth claim is still possible to make within the objectivity regime (2014: 651). Thus, instead of viewing the truth claim of narrative journalism as “wrong”, it might be more accurate to describe it as different.

1.5.4 Popular Journalism

Popular journalism is characterized by its focus on the interests and concerns of the audience. If the average resident is not thought to be interested in a certain topic or angle, it is given less attention. News is approached from a human interest angle and the focus lies on the implications for a person as a human being. Clichés and slogans are used to reduce complexity. A personal tone is used (Costera Meijer 2003: 23).

Like narrative journalism, popular journalism also meets several image problems that result from its deviation from conventionalism. These image problems have to do with doubts whether this form could be taken seriously, and whether it is positive or negative to public interest (Temple 2008 in Steensen 2011: 50, Franklin 1997 in Peters 2011: 300). Dahlgren, for example, notices the existence of an assumption that the commercial success of so-called “irrational/frivolous” news goes at the cost of traditional goals of journalism, or “demises the public sphere” (Dahlgren 1992: 18).

However, many scholars argue for moving away from the idea that popular journalism does not serve journalism’s purpose of properly informing the public.
In the field of politics, Liesbet van Zoonen studies formats that are usually not considered to produce quality journalism, like talk shows, TV series and movies. She shows how these can actually stimulate political discussion, making them valuable for the democratic process (van Zoonen 2005). She argues that her study is “meant as an agenda to think about entertaining politics, instead of simply discarding it as irrelevant and dangerous (...). It is meant as a starting point for debate.” (van Zoonen 2005: viii).

Studies like van Zoonen’s are typified as critiques on detachment. Just as has been mentioned in the context of narrative journalism, popular journalism also goes against concepts of the objectivity regime that lead to distance and detachment. Detached reporting is said to rob journalism of its engagement and, by doing that, it loses public interest (Lichtenberg 2000 in Peters 2011: 302). So while those critical of popular journalism fear it undermines the democratic workings of news, others claim that the engagement that is part of popular journalism is actually good for the reception of news by the public (Sparks 2000:9). Bird argues that people remember the news better if it is presented in a dramatic and personal way, and Charity thinks that the presentation of journalism should be appealing to the audience (Bird 1998 and Charity 1995 in Costera Meijer 2001: 194). Judging these quotes, Costera Meijer wonders whether core values in journalism such as detachment and objectivity should be “complemented by or maybe even replaced by” involvement and subjectivity, to the end of engaging the audience (Costera Meijer 2001: 194). As another example, in his study of The Daily Show, Geoffrey Baym discusses the effect of integrating humor and pop culture into the show’s format. He argues for “interweaving the silly and the serious”, as entertainment brings in the audience that increasingly abandons traditional news sources (2005: 273). He shows that this focus does not have to conflict with the discussion of serious issues, on the contrary: “It is possible to be entertaining in the sense of both amusement and serious thought, and each one may have the ability to enhance each other (ibid: 274).” On the level of language use, Baym argues that a less formal way of talking, resembling private conversations, can actually broaden the public sphere. This can be reached because chances are bigger that words resonate with an audience, making it easier to draw them into democratic debate (Baym & Jones 2010: 284).
All that has been mentioned about narrative and popular journalism fits into a broader discussion of how scholars and journalists should re-examine their definitions of good journalism (Dahlgren 1992: 8). The research mentioned here calls for a re-evaluation of what exactly can be seen as markers of quality. We have seen that with both narrative and popular journalism, deviating from conventional journalism roughly entails choosing engagement over detached reporting. These scholars claim that engagement should be encouraged, and not associated with a loss of quality. In the next section I will look more closely at engagement, and especially, at the concept that is intertwined with it to a great extent: subjectivity.

1.6 Subjectivity and Engagement

It is important to note here that words like engagement, or involvement (Peters 2011), or empathy (Keefe 2010) can be used to describe different phenomena. One can speak of an engaged reporter (that empathizes with its subject) or an engaged audience (that empathizes with the subject of the story or with the narrator of the story) (Keefe 2010: 3). And then there is an audience that feels more engaged with society as a whole, because of a story. This is called ‘public engagement’ or ‘political engagement’ (Dahlgren 2009). As this thesis is not based on audience research, no claims can be made about what the audience thinks or feels. However, it is informative to look at what other studies write about this to get an impression of what factors make the audience engage with a story. Drawing from the literature, the engagement of the reporter seems to be one of those factors. More engaged reporting is asked for and appreciated by the audience (Costera Meijer 2001, Broersma and Harbers 2014: 640). Wahl-Jorgensen goes as far as saying that it is only possible to create engagement through subjectivity. According to her interpretation of Pantti, an increasing amount of scholars start to realize that when journalists want to engage their audience, subjectivity is a necessary ingredient (Pantti 2010 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 309). Subjective storytelling can create an emotional response in the audience, termed an “injunction to care” (Frosh and Pinchevski 2011 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 309), or an “experience of involvement”. Peters presents this last term as a broad sociological conceptualization of emotion (Peters 2011: 298). This points to the phenomenon of a person caring about an event,
condition or person, whether the feeling of involvement is strong or weak (Barbalet 2002 in Peters 2011: 303). So while the audience is not studied here, the literature gives the impression that engaged reporting, which is subjective in character, can have an engaging effect on the audience.

When thinking in a binary opposition, subjectivity is the exact opposite of objectivity and is thus expected to conflict with the objectivity regime. However, here the importance is argued of moving towards a more dynamic definition of both subjectivity (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 316) and objectivity (Ward 1999: 3). Ward describes how objective knowledge is seen as something based on neutral facts or “absolute facts of logic and reason”, independent of perspectives. This is a claim so strong that it is easily refuted (Ibid: 3). Wahl-Jorgensen quotes van Zoonen to illustrate how definitions of subjectivity can differ, when perceived as the opposite of several definitions of objectivity:

Subjectivity seems easily defined as the opposite of objectivity in journalism. The meaning of “objectivity” in journalism is heavily contested, however, and can refer to the desire to be fair and accurate (in which case subjectivity would mean being unfair and sloppy) as well as to the intention of avoiding bias and partisanship (in which case subjectivity would mean taking sides) as well as to being a detached outsider (in which case subjectivity would mean being an interested and committed insider).


This shows that the definitions are not set in stone, and that defining subjectivity by opposing it to objectivity can lead to very different definitions and a quite problematic approach to journalism, which questions the accuracy of putting subjectivity and objectivity on opposite sides of a dichotomy.

In the same way, it does not seem accurate to divide journalists into “cool, detached” and “impassioned, attached” types (Ward 1999: 8). Rather, Ward argues that good journalists both need objectivity and attachment. He sees an objective journalist as an observer, but never as “a completely disinterested observer” (Ward 1999: 7-8). Thus, subjectivity and attachment should not be seen as opposites of objectivity and detachment, but rather as concepts that are dynamic in nature and often overlap or go together.
Subjectivity has also been described as a factor that makes a story more ‘real’ (Bird and Dardenne 2009: 214). Moving closer to our object of study, the same has been said about This American Life. The radio show is addressed along with other shows when Biewen says that they stand apart from conventional journalism exactly because they welcome the subjective. He notes that it is subjectivity that allows the shows to “achieve something closer to the real” (Biewen 2005: 5). Here, ‘real’ should not be interpreted as ‘the absolute truth’. This quote shall be interpreted as pointing to the realness of the experience of the audience, the success in making the story become alive before their eyes. This would help them to have an ‘experience of involvement’ (Peters 2011: 298) and thus would be assumed to engage the audience with a story.

1.7 Conclusion

In these last two sections we have identified two strands of journalism that deviate from conventions: narrative journalism and popular journalism. These potentially have the power to engage the audience, which is possibly a way to ‘win the audience back’. This has been posed as a goal for contemporary journalists in the beginning of this chapter. However, the engaging nature of these two strands comes from their supposed deviation from conventional journalism, among other things through their use of subjectivity. And, as we have seen, due to the dominance of thinking in dichotomies when discussing quality, deviating from conventional standards can result in doubts about the quality of a product of journalism. This is why it is of importance to contribute to the body of literature that shows that subjectivity and quality can go hand in hand. That is exactly what is aimed at in this thesis, using the radio show This American Life as a case study.

This American Life makes an interesting case study because of the show’s ambiguous nature. The way the show is structured appears to disqualify a binary conception of news. It can be seen as a quality program as it has won several prestigious prices (see Wahl-Jorgensen 2013). It is prestigious but, quite evidently, ‘non-traditional’ in terms of reporting style and often topic. But at the same time, it lays claim to some of the key journalistic tenets like accuracy, fact checking and truthful accounts.
So on the one hand the show presents itself as bringing human interest stories, focused on normal people’s lives, and often told in a way using fiction-elements that makes it feel like the story could be fiction. Often the makers also include fictional stories. Also, many topics could be described as ‘popular’, such as a valentine episode centered around personal love stories (This American Life 02/10/2012). But on the other hand, they want to be taken seriously as a show made by professional journalists “living up to all journalism standards” (This American Life 03/16/2012).³

This American Life seems to show that it is possible to make a product of journalism that can be unconventional in topic choice and in reporting style, but still be perceived as high quality journalism. In the next chapter, the history and context of This American Life will be explored in more depth.

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³ Throughout this thesis, references will be made to specific episodes of TAL. They are formatted in this style, mentioning the name of the show and then month/day/year of broadcast. The link to the online version of the broadcast can be found in the bibliography.
Chapter 2. *This American Life*: History and Context

In this chapter, *This American Life* is further explored by diving into the show’s history and looking at several factors that, combined, form the context in which the program is made. Looking into all this contributes to the literature as it offers insight in an unconventional show that is at the same time considered high quality. The first sections offer a brief introduction to the show and its links to narrative and popular journalism, which is informative to better understand the analysis later on. Among other things it offers insight into how the makers of the show perceive it, what claims they make about their own work and how they relate it to journalism. The last section functions as a validation of the claim that *TAL* has a reputation of being a high quality radio show.

### 2.1 Description of the show

*This American Life* is a one-hour weekly radio show produced by Chicago Public Media. The show has been on air since 1995 and aired its 500th episode in 2013 (*This American Life*: About). The host of the program has been the same person since the beginning: Ira Glass. Each show consists of several stories, called ‘acts’, that all revolve around a specific theme that changes every week. The types of stories are very diverse, on the show’s website it is described as such: “It's mostly true stories of everyday people, though not always. There's lots more to the show, but it's sort of hard to describe.” (*This American Life*: About). In an attempt to do so, this is a more elaborate description. Next to true stories about ordinary people, the show hosts true stories about political, economic or societal issues and the people working in these fields. Apart from that, one of the stories on the show is often a fictional story – centred on the theme of the week – read aloud to the audience by its author. Occasionally, an entire show is dedicated to one big story. These are often the result of investigative journalism.

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4 Because it was not possible to interview staff members of TAL for this thesis, the information about staff’s personal view on the show comes from secondary sources: the website, parts of episodes, an award acceptance speech, interviews et cetera. As for academic texts mentioning TAL, the results were few and these were not actual analyses of the show: a conference paper by Keefe is about journalist Alex Kotlowitz, and she briefly mentions one story he made for TAL. Additionally, the journal Visual Anthropology has done a review on the *TAL* television show and the show is briefly mentioned in a study by McClung and Johnson on podcast popularity. Because of this scarcity of academic literature on the subject, the emphasis lies on non-academic sources.
projects. Staff members conduct these on a regular basis, often in collaboration with either NPR Planet Money or Pro Publica. The former is a blog and podcast on economic issues that is part of National Public Radio, the latter an NGO producing investigative journalism projects.

*This American Life* has been classified as an “audio documentary”, which means that they “use sound to tell true stories artfully” (Biewen 2010: 5, emphasis in original). The embrace of the subjective is what distinguishes this genre from conventional news. Producers in the genre often play some role in their pieces (ibid: 5). Characters are more often common people than public figures, which are typically followed over a longer period. The makers strive not necessarily or not only to inform the audience, they want them to feel something, to go through an experience (ibid: 8).

Embracing the subjective has actually been described as the factor that gives *TAL* its strength. Cavanagh claims that “it is the reporter-subject interaction that serves to intensify the power of the story.” She calls one of the strengths of the radio format the inclusion of the storyteller’s “own thoughts and verbalized enthusiasm for the story.” (Cavanagh 2011:660).

### 2.2 *This American Life* as journalism

The staff of *This American Life* goes through great lengths to stress that their work should be seen as journalism. When asked what inspired the form of the show, Glass points at long magazine feature writing (Fisher 1999). More specifically, they see it as the application of journalism tools to everyday lives (*This American Life: About*). And especially since the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath, they do not only use those journalism tools on unconventional stories: the topic choice has since then included more conventional news topics. Producers started to do enterprise and investigative reporting on a more regular basis, that “would have been unheard of in the show’s early days” (Weisberg 2013). In an interview, Glass describes how the show went from being almost entirely based on personal stories to being much more engaged in the news:

> When we started, the mission was to apply the tools of journalism to stories that were so small that journalists weren’t doing them. Occasionally
we would do something that would touch on the news. But after 9/11 we became more interested in the news, the whole country became more interested in the news. And this show exists partly out of what we as a staff are interested in. (Glass in Weisberg 2013)

When responding to a fabrication scandal over an episode on Apple factories, the staff formulated even more strongly that they strive to “adhere to all journalism standards” (*This American Life*: 03/16/2012). This scandal broke out in 2012 when a story about bad working circumstances in Apple factories in China turned out to contain inconsistencies. It was a monologue by performer Mike Daisey, presented as a non-fiction story. However, as Daisey stated later in a special episode named ‘retraction’, he felt his work was not to be interpreted as journalism, but as a piece of theatre (*This American Life*: 03/16/2012). The ‘retraction’ episode was made after the *TAL* staff discovered that aspects of the Apple story that were stated as factual appeared to be untrue. This episode is especially informative when studying how the program defines itself. By distancing themselves of a type of storytelling which they claim not to stand for, they give insight into what they do stand for. Referring to the standards that they had for the Apple episode, the same that they say they have for every single one, Glass says: “It had to live up to journalism standards, it had to be truthful. (...) We wanted to be completely accurate in the most traditional sense” (*This American Life*: 03/16/2012). Important values mentioned throughout the course of the episode are accurate reporting, transparency, fact checking, honesty towards the audience, and also, having a relationship of trust with them, so that when you say that a story is true, that is enough for them to believe it is true. In the episode, Glass is agitated with Mike Daisey because this did not work out with him. He is referring to the moment when he heard Daisey’s story for the first time, in the theatre: “I saw you on stage saying “it happened to me”, so I saw it as true. I took your word”. This brings into mind the concept of I-pistemology (Van Zoonen, 2012) as discussed in the first chapter: according to this idea, when someone describes something as a personal experience, this adds to a perception of the story being true. This seems to point to the staff of *TAL*, next to their fact checking procedures, also values I-pistemology.

However, while their statements about journalism in the retraction episode point to truthfulness and accuracy “in the most traditional sense”, there are some
leads that the show’s reporting style and format can at times create confusion about this. Two acts that appeared in two different shows in 1997 were retracted as they spurred doubt about their truthfulness. One was about a supposed internship that could be done at the Virginia Plantation formerly owned by George Washington. Here students could supposedly experience the life of plantation slaves (This American Life: 10/10/97). The other story was a personal experience of a reporter with bad service from delivery service FedEx (This American Life: 03/14/97). In both cases, the website mentions that this act was retracted because of doubts about its truthfulness, nothing more specific.

A year after these retractions, in an interview, Glass drew the conclusion that his intentions seem to not always be understood correctly by the audience, creating confusion:

When I say something untrue on the air, I mean for it to be transparently untrue. I assume people know when I'm just saying something for effect. Or to be funny. But sadly, one of the problems with being on public radio is that people tend to think you're being sincere all the time. You say something, and then it's like, "I heard it on public radio." Which, at one level, is great. And, at another level, is an odd kind of burden. I think it's why the network sometimes has the reputation of being the home of the humor-impaired (Glass in Cox & Dionis 1998, emphasis in original).

This seems to point to a certain stance, leaving it up to the audience to understand whether something is true or not, as the cue to this can be as implicit as the tone in which something is said.

Another point possibly causing confusion, when claiming that stories on TAL are to be seen as journalism, the makers even go as far as touching on their fictional content: "The fiction we have on the show functions like journalism: it's fiction that describes what it's like to be here, now, in the world." (This American Life: About). While sounding quite extreme, this quote seems mainly to claim that fictional stories can act like journalism, and not that it actually is the same as journalism. Similarly, host Ira Glass mentions "Every week here we try to describe and understand the world by listening to writers and reporters and everyday people" (Glass 2002 in Cavanagh 2011: 660). So a very broad
definition of journalism seems to be being used here, as an actor trying to describe and understand the world.

These two examples, of leaving it up to the audience to decide about truth and of drawing a link between journalism and fiction, describe a way of thinking that seems to point to quite a broad, non-traditional definition of journalism. In the next two sub-sections, this non-traditional character will be further illustrated by looking at the narrative and popular characteristics of TAL.

2.2.1 This American Life as narrative journalism

TAL’s link to narrative journalism is mainly through the use of fiction techniques, giving the show something similar to a performance. For instance, This American Life started out with a different name. For the first sixteen episodes, it was titled Your Radio Playhouse. This name is very telling about how the staff perceives their show as a kind of performance. The name was meant to point to the fact that this particular radio program was a place to play, like a theater stage (This American Life 03/21/1996). There is no reason to believe that a shift in this attitude was what instigated the name change. The only reason that is given at the start of the seventeenth episode, is that many people hated the title (This American Life 03/21/1996). The custom to call each part of the program an ‘act’, like in theater plays, also stems from this time.

The same image of a performance pops up as on their website they describe their stories as ”movies for the radio“:

There are people in dramatic situations. Things happen to them. There are funny moments and emotional moments and – hopefully - moments where the people in the story say interesting, surprising things about it all. It has to be surprising. It has to be fun (This American Life: About).

This all sounds like what is discussed is a work of fiction: a performance, a movie, or a novel perhaps. The staff of the show does acknowledge the use of a lot of fiction techniques, like characters, scenes and narrative threads. This view of TAL stories as works of fiction is reinforced by the fact that movie producer Warner Bros has a special contract with the show, which gives them the right to hear new episodes first, which they can option for movie scripts. This says
something about the strength of the narratives on the show: they are inspiring a producer of mainly fictional movies (Janssen 2003).

2.2.2 *This American Life* as popular journalism

One of the factors that connect *TAL* to popular journalism is the fact that the makers see entertainment as something valuable. As mentioned before, in their description of what *This American Life* is about, the staff stresses that it “has to be fun” (*This American Life: About*). Glass says that the fact that he and the producers “embrace entertainment as a virtue” is what sets the show apart. He describes the other work on public radio as very decent journalism, but at the same time lets it shimmer through that *This American Life* is filling a gap by bringing a show that is actually entertaining:

> Public Radio is already good at (...) giving you the news, it is very solid. What we will do is take the smell of broccoli out of the air. You’ll listen not because you will be a better citizen or a better person, but because it will be an entertainment (Glass in Weisberg 2013).

This resonates with points made by Costera Meijer in her audience research. She quotes a 25-year old that compares news to a whole-wheat sandwich: “You eat it because it is healthy, not because it is tasty” (Costera Meijer 2007: 96). She draws the conclusion that the enjoyment of consuming information is an important aspect that should be studied in more depth (Costera Meijer 2013: 9).

The staff of the show also comments on their mixing of conventional and unconventional topics. Paul Tough, former senior editor, said “*This American Life* at its best really combines the profound with the silly or fun” (Fisher 1999). In the same article, Glass expresses a “determination to cross the line between high and low” (Fisher 1999).

Another factor present in *TAL* and associated with popular journalism, is a personal tone. During his acceptance speech after winning the Murrow Award, a prize handed out yearly by the Radio Television Digital News Association for outstanding achievements in electronic journalism, Glass attributes much of the show’s success to its personal tone (Glass 2009). According to Glass, “you should
never say a sentence on the air that you couldn’t say in a normal dinner conversation”. A reporter should sound “like a real guy telling you about something he’s interested in, not a news-robot.” (Glass in Biewen 2010:55). He sees a similarity between what happens on the internet in blogs and social media, and the format of the radio show: on both formats, an emphasis lies on people’s personal lives and experiences. According to Glass, this attributes to the success of the radio show in an internet age.

2.3 Popularity of This American Life

The importance and popularity of the show is evident when looking at listener rates, awards that the show has won and its position as a vanguard for other radio formats. These aspects will be discussed here.

Concerning listener rates, This American Life has a large audience. The show is broadcasted to over 500 stations, and an average of 1.8 million listeners tune in weekly (This American Life: About). Next to this audience that listens through the radio, there is also a large amount of listeners of the podcast version of the show. At the time of constructing this chapter, the program was the most downloaded podcast on iTunes in the US as well as Canada (iTunes top 10 podcasts), and it has been a popular download there for a longer period of time (McClung & Johnson 2010: 83).

Next to these considerably high listener rates, the show has also won various prestigious journalism awards. Several scholars have studied award-winning stories as examples of journalism that is valorized and of excellent quality (Ida Schultz 2006, Ettema and Glasser 1998, Rupar and Broersma 2010 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 309). Judging from the vast amount of awards that This American Life has received over the years, it seems justified to study the show as quality, excellent, valorized journalism. The show has won numerous awards over the years either for the show as a whole, for one episode or for one act.

These include five Peabody Awards, which are awarded for outstanding pieces of radio or television, in 1996 for the show as a whole and for individual stories in

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5 iTunes is considered the leading podcast directory (van Orden 2007 in McClung & Johnson 2010: 83).
2006 (Habeas Schmabeas), 2008 (The Giant Pool of Money), 2012 (What happened at Dos Erres) and 2013 (Harper High School) for individual stories that appeared on the show (Peabody Awards). Next to this, they received three DuPont-Columbia Awards, which is seen as the audio equivalent of the Pulitzer Prizes and award excellence in broadcast journalism (Dupont-Columbia Awards). TAL received these awards for individual stories in 1999 (Scenes From a Transplant), 2008 (Which Of These Is Not Like The Others?) and 2009 (The Giant Pool of Money). Moreover, the TAL TV series has received three Emmy Awards (Cavanagh 2011: 659). Host Ira Glass has also won personal prizes: he won the title of best national radio host from Time in 2001, for he “seems to have reinvented radio” (Mamet 2001). In 2009, he won the Edward R. Murrow Award, which honors individuals whose work has fostered the growth, quality, and positive image of public radio (Edward R. Murrow Awards).

A third aspect showing the importance of This American Life is its position among similar American radio shows. I argue here that it acts a vanguard for these shows. The range of broadcasts on public radio that TAL is often associated with are all typified as ‘storytelling shows’: The Moth Radio Hour, Radio Lab and Snap Judgment (Williams 2013). Several radio reporters that contribute to This American Life also contribute to the other shows. And in some cases producers first work for one show and then go work for the other (Oatman 2013). This gives the impression that it is a small world where people know each other and work together. In this sense, This American Life is not to be seen as a unique radio show. That said, it is important to note that it appears to be perceived as a leader of the group. It is the oldest of the four shows mentioned, with The Moth Radio Hour airing in 1997 (The Moth: About), Radio Lab in 2005 (Biewen 2010: 3) and Snap Judgment in 2010 (Snap Judgement: About). When the show started, it was considered something new, as the only show that took “as its beat, well, life” (McKibben 1997:10). It was created in a time when popular shows like All Things Considered were actually moving away from attempts at these types of feature stories (ibid:10). For this, This American Life has been portrayed as a vanguard for other shows, creating “stirrings” by claiming space for “playfulness and storytelling” on public radio (Biewen 2010: 2). A renaissance of the audio documentary genre has been attributed to the show (Brand 2012: 128), and of the definition of news stories: “[The stories on TAL] are news
stories, but they are not about the news. They are changing what we think news stories are.” (Fisher 1999). Ira Glass has been typified as a revolutionary that “takes radio journalism to places it has not traveled before” (Fisher 1999), and as a “public radio superstar” (Oppenheimer 2013).

This image of a vanguard is fortified by the hosts of Radio Lab and Snap Judgement, Jad Abumrad and Glynn Washington respectively. Being popular radio hosts themselves now, they both claim allegiance to This American Life, or to Ira Glass at least. Abumrad calls Glass his personal hero (Oatman 2012) and Washington proclaims to be a ‘student’ of Glass, and recalls that his first experience with hearing him on the radio in 1997 was so powerful that it made him break up with his girlfriend:

On the way out of Ann Arbor, this show comes on—it’s this guy I had never heard before, a dude named Ira Glass. I was like, ‘Whoa!’ and she was like, ‘Turn this noise off right away!’ “That was the epiphany Washington needed. “I was like, ‘Stop the car.’ I knew right then the relationship was not going to work.” (Oppenheimer 2013)

2.4 Conclusion

This American Life was further explored in this chapter, by offering more insight into its unconventionality as well as its high quality status. Its classification as unconventional journalism was strengthened further by mapping out the characteristics of the show that derived from narrative and popular journalism: the use of fiction techniques, a focus on entertainment and a personal tone. A description of the show as influential and of high quality was justified through looking at listener rates, awards won and its position as a vanguard and source of inspiration for similar shows. We have seen that the makers of TAL perceive the show as journalism, “living up to journalism standards”, “truthful” and “completely accurate in the most traditional sense”. At the same time, though, we have already seen some hints that their chosen style of reporting sometimes creates confusion about these claims. This and other aspects will be explored further in the research, the methodology of which will be described in the next chapter.
Chapter 3. Methodology

The goal of this research is, firstly, to describe in what ways exactly the approach to storytelling on *This American Life* deviates from conventional journalism, through its use of subjectivity. And secondly, to see how this relates to the objectivity regime. Explaining how this goal is operationalized is the focus of this chapter. The theoretical concepts laid out in the first chapter are operationalized into a research design. The chosen method and sample will be presented and possible limitations of this study are acknowledged and discussed.

3.1 Research design and method

The research design of this thesis is qualitative, and the type of approach systematically descriptive⁶: I explicate different forms that subjectivity takes in *This American Life*, and how these forms relate to the objectivity regime. These choices correspond with my chosen method, qualitative content analysis and tailor it to a form commonly used in exploratory research that has the systematically mapping out a chosen set of relevant material as its goal (see Smith 2000: 314; Pleijter 2006: 137). This can lead to a typification, an explanation of cause and effect, or an insight into a development over time (Pleijter 2006: 137). Here, my goal is the former, as I investigate what typifies the reporting style of *This American Life*, using subjectivity as my leading concept.

Content analysis stands for empirical research that is performed on the contents of a medium, instead of, for example, on the people that constructed this content or the audience that consumes it (Bryman 2004: 183). The quantitative version of this type of analysis focusses mostly on numbers and has a strictly structured plan for the analysis. Qualitative content analysis, or ethnographic content analysis (Altheide 1996 in Bryman 2004: 392) is not concerned with generating numerical answers, and instead focusses more on the interpretation of text. This is not to say that quantitative analysis has no interpretative elements, but

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⁶ In the methodological sense of clearly articulating and analyzing the characteristics and patterns uncovered, as opposed to the sense of ‘just’ describing what happens in the show.
qualitative analysis really puts the interpretative nature central to its method (Pleijter 2006:11-12). Next to this, the plan for analysis is more open, leaving room for making adjustments when this seems appropriate while doing the research (Altheide 1996 in Bryman 2004: 392).

Qualitative content analysis covers a group of research methods, the most commonly used ones being thematic analysis and grounded theory (Bryman 2008: 554). Although the methods have similarities, in the case of this thesis the former seems to have certain advantages over the latter.Grounded theory instructs researchers to be fully led by the data, and to “suspend their awareness of relevant theories and concepts” until a later stage in the process. Many researchers have posed the question whether this is actually possible (Bryman 2008: 549). Thematic analysis is less strict and, as some might argue, possibly more realistic in this sense. While in this strand of analysis, as in grounded theory, it is important to read and reread the data first, after this initial process it is allowed to construct themes and subthemes (Bryman 2008: 550). This implies that the researcher can influence the direction of the research earlier in the process than would be appropriate when using grounded theory. As at this point it is already clear that the concept of subjectivity will be guiding the research, thematic analysis seems more fit than grounded theory.

Bryman collates thematic analysis with narrative analysis, which he terms as a method focusing on the stories told by people for the sake of making sense of the world and their own lives (Bryman 2008: 553). This makes it informative for tracing less obvious cases of subjectivity in the data, in the sense that it does not emphasize the literal meaning of a text, but what is behind it. (Riessman 1993 in Bryman 2008: 553). This makes it possible to search for subjectivity on multiple levels, creating more depth in the analysis. This will be explained more thoroughly in the section describing the phases of research.

3.2 Limitations

There are some assumptions and biases present in this work. An assumption is made that TAL is a popular, high quality show. Though essentially this remains an assumption that cannot be fully empirically proven, I am confident that the previous discussion on listener rates and prestigious awards that TAL has won
justifies this assumption. A point of bias is the fact that the writer of this thesis is a fan of *This American Life*, which could potentially affect the research. However, since the topic of this thesis has no focus that could turn out positively or negatively for *TAL*, this personal preference is not expected to unduly interfere.

As for methodological limitations, critics have identified several weaknesses for thematic analysis. One of these is the absence of a clear set of rules. Because of this absence, it is difficult to identify the exact characteristics of thematic analysis. However, there is a general strategy, which consists out of the construction of a framework ordering data into relevant themes and sub-themes (Bryman 2008: 554). Bury has another point of critique. He claims that the results of a thematic analysis often are questionable. In his view it remains unclear what exactly the findings are, either a collection of perception or really something pointing to an underlying ‘truth’ (Bury 2001 in Bryman 2008: 560). Whether this critique applies to this study will be addressed in the discussion of results.

A final point of criticism revolves around a recurring disagreement between those in favor of quantitative research and those in favor of qualitative research (Drotner, Kline, Murray & Schroder, 2003). The former stress that results coming out of a qualitative study only say something about the subject of study, instead of being generalizable. However, while qualitative research is not generalizable in the sense of speaking to a representative sample of a larger population, this does not mean one cannot draw parallels between similar cases, broader trends, and key debates.

### 3.3 Sample

*This American Life* episodes were chosen as the units of analysis. Each of these consists out of several acts that are presented as a whole under one uniting theme that changes every week. Fourteen one hour long episodes were selected to be included in the sample, as this amount seemed both large enough to ensure that sufficient data could be examined and small enough to fit the scope of this research. Also, the makers of *TAL* claim that since 9/11 the show focusses more on news topics (Weisberg 2013): topics that in the conventional sense would be considered news. The period after September 2001 seems the most
informative to study since the wider context of this study is the discussion on how to win back a news audience. This makes it especially informative to see how TAL handles conventional news topics, as discussions in chapter two have suggested that their method appeals to the audience.

So episodes were selected from episode 193, which is the first episode after 9/11, up till 549, which was the most recent episode when the sample was generated. To ensure a divergence of topics and seeming approaches, and thus to speak to the program as a whole, the episodes where randomly picked. I did this by taking the fifteenth episode of every year from 2001 until 2014. In most years, this is the episode right in the middle of the broadcasting season. In 2001 only the episodes after 9/11 are part of this study. So there the “middle” episode that was selected is the one that is in the middle of the episodes after 9/11. The year 2006 had far fewer episodes than the other years, it is unclear why. This is why it is the only episode that is from November, while the others are from earlier in the year. This results in the following list of episodes to be analyzed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of broadcast</th>
<th>No of episode</th>
<th>Name and description of episode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001, 26th of October</td>
<td>#197</td>
<td>Before It Had a Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There's the time when you know something is happening, but you're not sure exactly what. The illness before it's diagnosed. The era, before it's been given a title. And something changes when the name is given. Stories of that transformation...between what it is now, and what it was before it had a name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002, 2nd of August</td>
<td>#217</td>
<td>Give It to Them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It's been two years since the Mideast peace process collapsed, two years in which each side has done terrible things to the other side. We wanted to understand what that has done to people living in Israel and the West Bank, and to see if anyone is feeling hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003, 18th of July</td>
<td>#242</td>
<td>Enemy Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Living behind enemy lines among the enemy, it's sometimes hard to remember why you're fighting in the first place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004, 6th of August</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>Family Legend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005, 5th of August</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>Image Makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006, 3rd of November</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>What's In A Number? -2006 Edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007, 27th of July</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>Man vs. History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008, 8th of August</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>Fear of Sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009, 24th of July</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>Fine Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010, 25th of June</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>First Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Episode</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011, 3rd of June</td>
<td>#437</td>
<td>Old Boys Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012, 29th of June</td>
<td>#468</td>
<td>Switcheroo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013, 14th of June</td>
<td>#497</td>
<td>This Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>#529</td>
<td>Human Spectacle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1: Details of analyzed This American Life episodes
3.3.1 Format of sample

Although *This American Life* is a radio show, the format in which the sample will be studied is a combination of the audio and written transcripts. In his doctoral thesis on qualitative content analysis, Pleijter notes that it is difficult to work with moving images or sound throughout the whole research. It is acceptable to make transcripts in order to make the material "manageable". Pleijter does argue that one should be aware that this is a reduction from the original, as usually aspects like speed of talking, pitch and emphasis on words are not transcribed (2006: 38).

When looking at studies focusing on the content of radio shows, it becomes clear that it is not default procedure to use the audio material. While some scholars mention that they used recordings of a radio program (see Bosch & Mullins 2012, Crider 2014, Doliwa 2013), it happens more often that only the use of transcripts is mentioned (see Kramer 2014, Magee 2013, Stiegler 2014). And in some cases, the format in which content of a program is studied is not explained at all (see Oravec 2005, Stiernstedt 2014, Watson 2012).

Moreover, when scholars mention the use of audio material, their methods and/or results do not always reflect this. For example, Barnhurst (2003) studied the increase of the centrality of journalists and their opinions on public radio shows *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*. He used transcripts from *Lexis Nexis* and audio links from the radio program’s website (Barnhurst 2003: 4). Though Barnhurst (2003: 5) chose to analyze both the audio and the written text, none of his variables seem to touch upon aspects that can only be heard and not be read, like the above-mentioned aspects Pleijter notes, such as speed of talking or emphasis. Dori-Hacohen (2012) looked into different types of host-caller relationships. He used radio shows that he listened to when broadcast on the radio, and some self-made recordings and transcriptions of these recordings.

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7 All articles in academic journals on radio that appeared in the last five years available through the University of Groningen library were scanned for their methodology. This included the *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, the *Journal of Radio Studies* and *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*. 
He claims that he tried to get as close as possible to the reality of listening to the radio, by not listening to programs in their entirety, and occasionally listening while driving. As his dataset he presents the results of listening, making summaries of topics, recording and transcribing numerous items. He does not explain how he made use of the results of listening (Dori-Hacohen 2012: 153). Like Barnhurst, he does not seem to make explicit use of audio-only aspects either. The only sign of taking these aspects into consideration is his differentiation between two types of studied radio formats, one of which features “sound effects and sound bites” and the other which does not (Dori-Hacohen 2012: 166).

Alongside the fragmented landscape sketched here are statements made by scholars expressing the need for focusing more on the audio. Magee actually makes a case for this when naming possibilities for future research:

> A limitation of this content analysis is that it does not delve into those issues of how sound and music play into the formation of stories [...]. Actual programs and reports could be analyzed on more than just transcripts for future studies, as there is a case to be made for how the actual physical structure of stories through the auditory medium convey specific messages and emotions. (Magee 2013: 249)

Even more so, *This American Life* accompanies every transcript on their website with the following disclaimer: “*This American Life* is produced for the ear and designed to be heard, not read. We strongly encourage you to listen to the audio, which includes emotions and emphasis that’s not on the page” (See *This American Life* 02/10/2012). This makes it seem even more appropriate to pay special attention to audio-only elements. So the existence and influence of speed of talking, pitch and emphasis on words will be acknowledged and explored in this study, something which is relatively innovative for analyzing radio news programming.

As referred to above, the website of This American Life offers access to both transcripts and audio of every episode. Occasionally, the audio is omitted from the website if a story’s factuality has been questioned (See *This American Life* 01/06/2012). In these special cases, only the transcripts are available for study.
3.4 Operationalization

The theoretical concept of subjectivity was translated into a list of questions that was applied to the material. Several academic notions on how to trace subjectivity formed the basis for these questions. The goal of this operationalization of subjectivity was to enable description of the forms in which it appears on This American Life and to analyze this in conjunction with elements traditionally associated with the objectivity regime. This teaches us something about the forms that subjectivity can take and makes it possible to question whether or not these forms go against the objectivity regime.

Firstly, the notion of ‘appraisals’ as put forward by Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) and Stenvall (2008) was used. According to these authors, subjectivity can be recognized by the use of appraisals. These can be found in three forms: expressions of affect (mention of emotions or feelings of reporter or source), judgments of individuals or groups (mention of the type of person that someone is, what kind of character someone has, evaluating behavior) and appreciation or evaluation of objects (valuing the worth of something concrete or abstract) (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 311, Stenvall 2008: 1578). Wahl-Jorgensen argues that their key role in a story is to make audiences connect emotionally with it, to revoke an “injunction to care” (ibid: 316). Next to this, on a more indirect level, Wahl-Jorgensen looks at factors pointing to subjectivity that are not in the text but more in the story as a whole. These are detailed description, juxtaposition (posing something as normal as opposed to something abnormal) and personalized storytelling (using the personal story of an individual to dramatize a broader theme). These three storytelling elements are supposed to be subjective in the sense that they imply a certain preferred judgment to be made by the audience when hearing them (ibid: 311). The same is said of the use of stance adverbs, which form the second notion to be used in this study. Stance adverbs are words such as ‘obviously’, ‘clearly’, ‘apparently’ and ‘presumably’. According to Lipari, words like these point to the opinion of the host or reporter on the information that is addressed, and imply a preferred interpretation of this information (Lipari 1996: 821).
Apart from these aspects that can be studied on the textual and the narrative level, attention was also paid to the position that the host and the reporters take in stories. This was to see whether they deviate from the conventions of the objectivity regime in the sense that the presentation style is not impersonal, distanced and detached (Costera Meijer 2003, Peters 2010, Peters 2011, Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, Broersma and Harbers 2014, Zelizer 2009, van Zoonen 1998 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013) and that they do not take a neutral stance (Peters 2010, Peters 2011, Zelizer 2009, Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, van Zoonen 1998 in Wahl-Jorgensen 2013). This partially overlapped with the textual and narrative analysis, as both ways of looking at episodes pay attention to emotions expressed by the reporter or host, for example. However, this second way of looking at episodes did contribute, for it allowed me to go into questions like whether a reporter is very present in the story or not, is actually a vital part of the story or whether he or she states an opinion in a way that would not be detected using only analysis on the textual or narrative level.

Acts were analyzed both individually and in the context of the episode that they are part of. This made it possible to look at how the narrative develops over the episode. This is important as I argue that the way acts are arranged and combined in an episode adds meaning to the episode as a whole.

As this phase was qualitative and not quantitative, what is of interest is not the amount of cases in which indicators of subjectivity occurred. Rather, the emphasis lied on the shape that subjectivity takes.

These were the key themes and questions used to trace indicators of subjectivity:8

- Text of the act: Does it contain expressions of affect, judgments of individuals or groups, appreciation or evaluation of objects, or stance adverbs?
- Story of the act: Does it include detailed description, juxtaposition, or personalized storytelling?

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8 The complete classification scheme can be found in Appendix I.
• Role of host/reporter in the act: Does the host and/or the reporter play a role in the story, reveal something personal, take a side, speak about him/herself in the first person, or directly address the audience?

Some acts were not analyzed by using these key themes and questions. This would happen in two cases: when it was mentioned that the storyteller was a writer or comedian. Or when the background of the storyteller was not mentioned at all, acts would fall into this category if the storyteller was also the subject of the story. I would argue that these types of acts are, because of their specific character, not expected to adhere to the ideal of objectivity (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 310). More so, since an important part of my research revolves around the position the reporter takes in a story, I would argue that it would be unfruitful to apply the above mentioned set of questions to acts in which the story is told by the same person that the story is about. However, this does not mean that these acts were completely left out. I did take note of the way these types of stories were introduced, and when reflecting on the episode as a whole, they were taken into account as well.

In the course of the analysis, indicators of subjectivity that came from the literature were supplemented with several indicators that came from studying the sample and seemed to point to subjectivity as well. These were the use of sarcasm, interpretation, imagination or scene reconstruction and eliciting emotion. These new indicators are explained and discussed in the Research Findings chapter.

Another addition was the introduction of the ‘intermezzo’ in my scheme. While conducting the research, it became clear that host Ira Glass sometimes adds more in between two acts than just closing one and introducing the other. Sometimes he actually mentions a new topic that has no connection with the previous or upcoming act, except for the overall theme. These were integrated in the classification scheme as intermezzos.
Chapter 4. Research Findings

After analyzing fourteen episodes of *This American Life*, in this chapter I discuss the results. As was to be expected, there is some subjectivity in every story in the sample. I have not found a single act that contains none of the indicators of subjectivity previously outlined. The intensity and the way in which the subjective elements occur differ drastically, though, as well as the assumed role that they play in the story. Some of these assumed roles seem to fit within the boundaries of the objectivity regime, while some seem to clash with it. I will start this chapter with some clarifications about referencing, after which I will discuss how part of the indicators seem to fit within the regime because of their alternative truth claims. Then I will turn to the indicators that seem to clash with the regime, and I will describe the special position that the host seems to play in this. I then explain how the introduction of acts instructs us in terms of the way subjectivity can be spread throughout a story. After this I turn to possible new indicators of subjectivity that came to the fore when conducting the analysis. Then the influence of audio-only elements will be discussed.

4.1 Some notes on referencing

To enhance the simplicity of referencing to acts in this chapter, every act in the sample was assigned a unique code that is listed in the table below. Also, the terms STO and SUB are used. STO stands for storyteller, and points to the main narrator of the story, often a reporter, writer or the host. SUB stands for the subject(s) of the story: the person(s) that the STO is telling the story about. For extra clarity, when fragments of acts are included in this chapter, the indicators of subjectivity present in a fragment are made **bold**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episodes</th>
<th>Acts and Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># 197 Before It Had a Name (2001)</td>
<td>Prologue: TAL1pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1: TAL1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermezzo: TAL1int</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2: TAL1b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3: TAL1c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>Give It To Them (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>Enemy Camp (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>Family Legend (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>294</td>
<td>Image Makers (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>320</td>
<td>What's in A Number? (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>361</td>
<td>Fear of Sleep (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>386</td>
<td>Fine Print (2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When looking at the ways in which the predetermined indicators of subjectivity appear on *This American Life*, what is striking is that a separation can be made in what they seem to be used for. Sometimes they carry a value judgement, while others appear to merely serve a descriptive goal. Where the first would not seem
to fit within the boundaries of the objectivity regime, the latter would. This is informative as it questions the assumption that subjectivity -that is not hidden from sight- cannot be part of journalism adhering to the objectivity regime (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 643). Also, the fact that one indicator can be used in multiple ways strengthens the idea that subjectivity can take many forms and thus should not be seen as static.

This different ways in which one indicator can take shape in the story, was most prominent with the indicators ‘use of the first person’ and ‘appreciation or evaluation of objects (valuing the worth of something concrete or abstract)’. These were also the indicators most omnipresent in the sample. In the case of the STO using the first person, the supposed aim was identified as either (1) illustrating the story by connecting it to a personal anecdote, (2) stating a personal taste or opinion, (3) playing a role in the story to bring across how the audience might have felt when they would have been in the situation, or (4) give insight into the story making process. The first two seem to not fit within the boundaries of the objectivity regime. The third one is not so clear, though, and the fourth can actually be part of the regime, as will be explained in the next section. When considering the supposed aim of using appreciation or evaluation of objects, the divide was between (5) description of a certain state or (6) judging something. Here, as well, the first seems to go well within the objectivity regime, while the second does not. To illustrate these aims, these are some examples of how they appeared in *TAL*:

1. The first time I talked to Rod [...] someone that I'm close to was having all sorts of medical problems [...] and the doctors couldn't figure out what was causing the problems. And in the absence of information, she did what Rod did. She blamed herself. And I think this happens a lot. (TAL 1pro)

   This second story's [about] manliness. I find that even the men I know who you think would be least concerned with manliness are still completely concerned with it. I have this friend, Michael, who is constantly talking about what is manly and what is not manly. [...] And he's gay. He's a gay. He's a gay. He's a gay. It's almost like being a gay has made him more obsessed with manliness than any of my straight friends. (TAL5b)
Here, the subject of a story (blaming yourself when you cannot get a grip on a situation, manly behaviour) is illustrated with an anecdote from the personal life of the host (the illness of someone the host is close to, the behavior of the host’s gay friend).

2.

One of the things I found most charming about the band is this fact. (TAL 5a)

The most radical part of Timpone’s pitch, at least to me, is that if you’re trying to cover a town like Flossmoor, [...] being on the ground is actually a hindrance. (TAL 12b)

Here, the STO expresses a personal opinion on something in the story, makes something the most important (the most charming, the most radical).

3.

We’re in a grey conference room. [...] Watching it all, I feel very nervous for the band, for the kids, for the parents, for everyone. [...] I know the show is going well when, at one point, josh has broken one of his guitar strings. (TAL 5a)

As we drive by [the Israeli soldier that threatens to shoot if we don’t abide to the curfew right now], my adrenaline floods, and I think, we could die here, right here in Sam’s olive green Hyundai. (TAL 2a)

Here, the STO describes the details of a situation he/she is reporting on by describing the effect that it had on him/her (being at the concert, driving through Palestinian territory).

4.

A couple of weeks after I talked to them, I called Kathy to check in. (TAL 3c)

Looking at her, thinking she might be Cindy Sherman, I thought if you were to try to put on a costume to exactly blend in with the crowd at the Museum of modern art, this is the costume. (TAL 12pro)

As a foreigner watching "Sweepstakes Life," most of the time when the studio audience cracked up, I felt sick. I thought, what could possibly be funny about this? (TAL 14a)

Here, the STO offers insight in how the story was made. Sometimes this is very factual (when the STO explains that after a few weeks of no contact she phoned
the SUB to see what’s new), and sometimes this is something more, when the STO goes into personal thoughts or feelings to explain why a topic intrigues them (as the rest of the story is about the question ‘Was this woman the real Cindy Sherman or a fake?’ or ‘How does Sweepstakes Life work and why do people like it?’)

5.

Over time, [the situation on the square] got more and more intense. (TAL 3d)

Political debate in Iran was robust. (TAL 9a)

Here, the STO merely seems to give a description of a situation.

6.

We have scientists pondering what we should say the first time we find an extraterrestrial to talk to, and what boneheaded things people want to say to them. (TAL 10pro)

Journatic does longer stories too that actually require real reporting. But even there the quality is questionable. (TAL 12b)

Here, the STO seems to give a value judgement in the shape of a personal opinion about the things people want to say to extraterrestrials, or about the quality of the work of journalism company Journatic, that she is reporting about.

Now that the ways in which indicators of subjectivity are present in TAL have been mapped out, in the next two subsections I will go deeper into why I would assume some forms to be in line with the objectivity regime and some not, and what this tells us.

4.2.1 In line with the objectivity regime: alternative truth claims

Looking at these forms that subjectivity can take in terms of the use of first person and evaluation of objects, there seems to be some sort of a sliding scale for the level in which the subjectivity interferes with the objectivity regime. For example, description of a state or situation does not seem to conflict with the regime necessarily, whereas expressing a value judgement presumably would. Also, one of the most frequent reasons for using the first person in my sample, giving insight into the story making process, seems to function as a way to
account for the choices made in the story. It reveals some of the work that is done behind the scenes, while constructing the story. In a way, this creates more transparency about the whole process. This seems to function as proof to the audience that the search for truth was conducted in a proper way. This is interesting as it is usually seen as something that the objectivity regime sets out to do. So these fragments seem to share the same goal as journalism adhering to the objectivity regime, in trying to convince the audience that the search for truth was conducted in a proper way. What differs is the way they try to be convincing, as in journalism strictly following the regime the use of subjectivity is removed from sight, while here the subjectivity is actually stressed to create transparency (Broersma and Harbers, 2014: 643). Consider for example these two fragments, coming from the same act (TAL 12b):

Needless to say, I liked him right away.

Timone declined to put me in touch with any of his Filipino employees. But I reached out to half a dozen of them on my own.

In the first example, STO uses the first person, an expression of affect and what I would argue is something similar to a stance adverb (‘needless to say’) to make a straightforward judgement about someone that appeared in the story. But in the second example, she uses first person to describe the way she has gone about to collect her journalistic material.

Another example is the following fragment. It is more complex than the previous one as it holds a judgement and an insight in the story making process in the same sentence, but one could argue that they are serving the same goal:

And that seemed to me like-- well, I'll be honest, it sounds like something an evil puppet master would say. So I had to. I talked to Toshio Tsuchiya on the phone. (TAL 14a)

STO mentions a feeling of puzzlement or distrust about what the SUB told her about somebody else, and this judgement is the reason that she decides she needs to talk to Tsuchiya personally. So while this is a judgement, it seems to function as an explanation of the next step in the making process, thus being transparent about her work. Also, hearing both sides in a conflict is a typical attribute of journalism adhering to the objectivity regime (Ward 1999: 3).
Another striking mechanism that also seems to point to the same goal of fortifying the truth claim, is present in a story about forced confessions in Iran. This story contained very few indicators of subjectivity. However, when it did, it was in moments where the STO transferred information to the audience in an indirect way. We had to accept her as a secondary source, instead of hearing the information straight from the source itself. In the following fragments, we do not hear the voice of an interviewee, the former student activist (while the rest of the act mostly consists of the voice of the main interviewee, the Iranian journalist) and we do not hear the tapes of forced confessions ourselves (TAL 9a):

I talked to one former student activist

Watching, reading, and hearing about one Iranian confession after another, it's impossible not to notice a distinct and unchanging editorial vision at work here.

In these fragments, the STO stresses her own role in the story, as an eyewitness. She talked to an activist, she synthesized all these Iranian confessions and now presents her key findings to the audience. This becomes clear as she uses first person in the first fragment, and a juxtaposition and evaluation of objects in the second: she poses something normal (noticing that the editorial vision is distinct and unchanging) opposite of something abnormal (not noticing it). The first reads like an assurance: trust me, even though you won’t hear his voice, I talked to him (I did not hear his story from someone else). And the second reads like a validation of her perception: you did not study the confessions, but trust me: if you had, you too would have seen that there is only one conclusion you can draw. So in these cases, subjective indicators seem to serve as a way to build up trust in the story.

The same mechanism can be seen in the act about a study counting civilian casualties in Iraq (TAL 6a). There are only two instances where the reporter speaks in the first person:

The military denied my request to talk on the record about civilian casualties.

In talking to people in the military, off the record, I heard a couple of arguments against counting civilian deaths.
These are both moments where the reporter needs to bring across information that he cannot do by letting us hear the voice of the primary source.

I argue here that in these cases there is a focus on eyewitness reporting and personal experiences. These can be seen as serving an alternative truth claim, that in the first chapter was referred to as I-pistemology (Van Zoonen 2012: 56) or personal-engaged reporting (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 641). This type of reporting still adheres to the objectivity regime, as an underlying notion of it is that the reporter is able to give a truthful representation of reality (Ibidem). Only in this strand of reporting, it is not detachment but the use of eye witness reporting and personal experiences that make the claim for truth (ibid: 644). In the examples mentioned here, we follow an STO on their quest for finding the truth: they go look for another source, experience a situation, they talk to people. So while they undertake these actions using subjective elements, they make use of a truth claim that is still possible to make within the confines of the objectivity regime.

Having attributed a part of the goals for using indicators of subjectivity to fortifying a truth claim, I will discuss other presumed goals in the next subsection.

### 4.2.2 Outside of the objectivity regime: the host's special position

When looking at other occurrences of indicators of subjectivity that do not seem to point to enhancing a truth claim, what is striking is that these appear to be almost exclusively reserved for the domains of the host Ira Glass: prologues, intermezzos and introductions of acts. This counts for the use of the first person to illustrate the story by connecting it to a personal anecdote, and for the use of first person to state a personal taste or opinion. These are often combined with expressions of affect or appreciation or evaluation of objects. For example:

As early as I remember, I was afraid to go to sleep. This began when I was six. My uncle Lenny went off to Vietnam. And that opened up this chapter in my life where I was obsessed with death. […] For those of us who fear sleep, there is a lot to fear. And that's what we're going to talk about on today's radio show. (*TAL 8pro*)

Three weeks ago I was walking down the street, it was nighttime, I was with the dog, and I thought of this. And literally I said out loud, "Oh god. Oh God, no, no,
no." Here's what I remembered. In junior high school, I was really, really young. I tried to feel up a girl in front of her family. [...] When this came back to me, it was really just as horrifying. [...] And I bring this all up to say, we are all so clueless as we learn about making out and sex and all that stuff. (TAL 10inter)

Apart from their subjectivity, these previous examples do seem to serve a certain goal for the show. It might be a technique to introduce an act or episode in a personal way that might help to get the audience’s attention. But there are also fragments where something more seems to be happening. In this following sentence, Glass gets personal in a way that only he does in my sample:

I’m Ira Glass, still a little cold this week, but feeling just fine (TAL 10pro).

The first part of the sentence can be seen as having a technical function, warning the listener that the quality of the sound might not be as good as usual. But the second part seems to be nothing else than a statement about the wellbeing of the STO. Also, in the next fragment it becomes clear that Glass allows for things to get even more personal:

Etgar Keret

Maybe this says something about our relationship. Maybe you are always excited. But just when I’m around, you become this kind of cold fish.

Ira Glass

I’m a really good friend. (TAL 12pro)

Here, Glass is actually not only mentioning something personal, but also reflecting – jokingly – on his own personality, by using first person and evaluation of an object. These examples appear to show that particular types of subjectivity are not actually part of the stories, but are in everything that is in between. This seems to suggest that there is special status reserved for the host on This American Life, suggesting he is ‘allowed’ more subjectivity than is used in the acts. He seems to be able to go further into using subjectivity than other STO’s. For example, this fragment, which is an introduction to a story about health care insurance, contains multiple indicators of subjectivity. It has juxtaposition, expression of affect, evaluation of objects, first person, direct address of the audience and statement of an opinion:
Even **die hard** news consumers **have to admit** this **sad** truth about the health care debate. **It’s usually really, really boring. I ask you**, is there any writer in the English language gifted enough to compose an interesting sentence involving the long-term financial health of Medicare? **No, there is not.** *(TAL 9c)*

While this introduction is completely interspersed with indicators of subjectivity, the story that follows actually contains relatively few indicators. This tells us something about the spread of subjectivity: a story that contains relatively few indicators of subjectivity can still be introduced in a very subjective way. Also, the language use of the host is strikingly different than in the thrust of the acts. For instance, his use of the expression of affect ‘It’s usually really, really boring’ makes this last fragment sound more informal than any act on the show. The possible reason for this could be drawn from Baym, who, as was discussed, deems a less formal way of talking that resembles a private conversation as a factor that could broaden the public sphere. According to him, words that resonate with the audience make it easier to draw them into public debate *(Baym & Jones 2010: 284)*. By addressing the debate as ‘usually really boring’, the host seems to try to soften the audience for the story. By approaching the topic in a way that is familiar with the audience, as he assumes here that they usually find it boring too, he acknowledges their feelings. The next step he takes is telling them that this story is actually different. This could potentially enlarge the chance of the audience being receptive for this story. This sheds light on possible reasons why the host seems to have a special role.

The special role of the host, which allows for more subjectivity in the domains around the acts (introductions, prologues, intermezzos) underscores the dynamic nature of both subjectivity and objectivity. *This American Life* contains both acts with ample or very little subjectivity indicators, and these acts can also be introduced using little or many subjectivity indicators. Objectivity and subjectivity can overlap and coexist in one journalism format. This way, the binary opposition of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ is questioned, as almost every act in the sample carries elements of both.

4.3 **Equal introduction of all types of acts**

One question that was taken into the analysis was how acts were introduced.
This turned out to be quite an insightful element when considering *This American Life* as an unconventional form of journalism. Because where conventional journalism adhering to the objectivity regime would leave no room for ambiguity about the truthfulness of stories (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 647), this does happen in *TAL* because of the way in which stories are introduced. All stories, whether fictional or non-fiction, or made by a journalist or someone else, are presented in the same way in the introduction. This makes it possible for the audience to start listening to a fiction story thinking it is non-fiction, and by doing this *TAL* actively creates the room for ambiguity that journalism adhering to the objectivity regime would avoid at all costs.

When looking closer at the introduction of acts, one thing that is striking is the fact that the STO is almost never introduced by more than his or her name. Because of this, the listener rarely knows what to expect before the story starts. It is unclear whether the STO is a journalist, a writer, or something else. Also, all acts are introduced as ‘stories’, no matter whether what follows is a product of months of research or a reading by a poet. Sometimes some more information is given at the end of the act:

Mike Birbiglia, performing a story from his new one-man show and his new book that is coming out this fall. (*TAL* 10a)

But more often, this is not the case, and only the place where the STO lives is mentioned:

Susan Burton lives in New York. (*TAL* 9d)

Similarly, it is rarely mentioned whether the upcoming story is fiction or non-fiction. *TAL* displays very ambiguous behavior when it comes to this. Consider this introduction:

We have this story about what is hidden inside us, the secret agents within from writer Etgar Keret. Among other things, he says it is a story about his real life girlfriend. Actor Matt Malloy reads it for us. (*TAL* 3c)

This is one of the few acts that can actually beforehand be interpreted as fiction, because of the fact that the creator is a writer and the story is read out by an actor. But Glass also mentions that the story is about a real life girlfriend, hinting at non-fiction. As the story begins, it becomes clear that this girlfriend turns into
a man at night, making it very improbable that the story is real. Adding to the confusion, Glass says in the prologue of this same episode:

Today on our radio program we have that story happening to several different people in several different places in several different ways. True stories from WBEZ Chicago, it's TAL distributed by Public Radio International. (TAL 3pro, emphasis added)

This choice of words, which is different from the standard lines that Glass normally uses, gives the impression that all the stories on today's show will be non-fiction: “true stories”. As was mentioned before, this is not the case. TAL seems to play around with the word ‘real’.

On the opposite side, at the end of a story by a comedian about her father, Glass goes through great lengths to show that the facts on the story were checked:

It may not come as a surprise that some facts in this story are in dispute. Pura declined to comment [...]. Jackie's dad, who we reached by email, suggested that Jackie is an embellisher and quote, "a rather vulgar comedian." [...] Jackie's sister and brother told us that they have the same memories of her father doing these things that Jackie does. (TAL 12d)

This sudden disclaimer for a story by a comedian could probably partly be ascribed to the fact that it came only eight episodes after the Retraction episode, in which TAL had to admit that there were inconsistencies in the story that they aired about working conditions in Apple factories (This American Life 03/16/12). However, this has not been standard procedure since then, so this particular disclaimer still stands out. It creates the question what this means concerning other contributions to the show. Were they not fact checked before?

The unison of all acts being introduced in the same way, without any clarity about the storyteller or whether it is fiction or non-fiction, creates an image as if the difference between stories with a (un)conventional topic and/or a (un)conventional reporting style does not really matter to TAL. Or they see them as equally important, or they assume their audience will understand what they are listening to without their help. This would confirm what is said in chapter two, when Glass is quoted: “When I say something untrue on the air, I mean for it to be transparently untrue. I assume people know when I'm just saying something for effect. Or to be funny.” (Glass in Cox & Dionis 1998).
The apparent randomness in making clear what is real and what is not, has the same effect. All in all, the signal to the listener seems to be that all stories are treated the same and seen as equally valuable. So while TAL claims that they aim to “live up to all journalism standards”, adhering to truthfulness and accuracy “in the most traditional sense” (This American Life: 03/16/2012), at the same time they appear to value fiction stories as much as non-fiction stories. This is quite an unconventional approach and adds to the image of TAL as non-traditional long form journalism.
4.4 Indicators retrieved from the sample

During the research, several indicators of subjectivity came out of the sample instead of the literature. I have categorized them as ‘interpretation’, ‘imagination’, ‘sarcasm’ and ‘eliciting affect’. The first three can be found at the narrative level, the last one at the textual level. As with the other forms, the fragments below contain other indicators as well, that here too I have made bold.

Interpretation

These are notes made by the STO in which he or she draws conclusions from what he or she sees or hears. Observations are interpreted to have a certain meaning. This way, STO expresses a personal opinion of what a SUB means to communicate. Also, the STO becomes part of the story by adding an extra layer of meaning to it.

You can read almost anything into that final, "who will judge my work?" The shame reporters feel when they hold the camera on someone in tears, the desire for recognition, the realization that his achievement consists of making people relive their worst moments. And the hope that documenting this tragedy might alleviate any guilt he might have felt about living in America while his relatives died at the hands of the Nazis. (TAL 1a)

He speaks confidently [...]. But in his hand, he's working a set of worry beads. (TAL 2a)

In talking to him, it felt like he's really worked hard to turn that traumatic experience into a positive story he tells himself. (TAL 14a)

In the first fragment, using expressions of affect and evaluation of objects, the STO takes one quote from the SUB and then attributes all kinds of thoughts and feelings that the SUB might have had to it. There is no evidence that these were actually things that were on SUB’s mind (SUB is deceased and the STO looks at his audio material). In the second fragment, using evaluation of objects, the STO judges the way someone speaks, but then contrasts that with what she sees. The subtext seems to be that the SUB appears to be confident about the situation on the outside, but on the inside he is worrying about it. The STO gives his actions a certain meaning that does not derive from what the SUB is telling her. In the last
fragment, using evaluation of objects, the STO says that the literal text that someone tells her actually means something else. In all these three examples, the STO argues they know more than they actually can be sure of when only looking at what is actually communicated.

**Imagination / scene reconstruction**

Similar to ‘interpretation’, the indicator ‘imagination’ points to the STO going beyond mere observation. But this indicator even goes one step further, as the STO imagines a scene that he or she could not have witnessed. This seems to have links with scene reconstruction, a technique in narrative journalism where reporters describe a situation as if they witnessed it, while they have not. However, there it is seen as important to go through great lengths to ensure that the reporter gets as close to what the scene really looked like as possible (Lorenz 2005). Here, in the following fragments, it is not fully clear whether that happened, or that the STO just imagined it. Either way, the action of reconstructing a scene reveals STO’s role in the story, and thus makes it an indicator for subjectivity:

Nasubi sat there, his head hung, a contestant in a real-life hunger game, the smell of ramen lingering in the air. (*TAL* 14a)

And so [...] he boarded a Royal Jordanian Airlines flight, fell asleep and woke up in Amman, Jordan where his ceasefire project would begin. (*TAL* 7a)

Now with these first two examples it is technically possible that the STO has asked the SUB whether the smell of ramen noodles remained in the air for some time, and whether the SUB slept on the plane. In this last example, this is less likely as the STO has not spoken to the SUB at all since he has deceased, and STO uses the words ‘I picture him’:

I picture him alone in his office, playing and replaying passages to filter words from the noise, visited occasionally by his daughter Elena. (*TAL* 1a)

**Sarcasm**

Sometimes the STO mentioned something with a sarcastic undertone, which could only be noticed by listening to the audio. This yields to a preferred judgement of what STO is saying, and thus seems to be a good indicator of subjectivity. It sometimes takes the form of an implicit political statement.
It turns out that part of what made North Korea so angry lately is being included on that list, is being called evil. (TAL 1int)

Because Mr. Zimmer, at some point we're all going to have to choose sides in this war. Speaking for the other humans, I want to say you're either with us or against us. (TAL 3b)

That's certainly a very zen way to look at it. (TAL 14a)

In the first two examples, using expression of affect and first person, STO makes a joke while pointing to America’s foreign policy on installing an ‘axis of evil’ and Bush’s famous statement denouncing anyone that is against the Iraq war. By ridiculing these, STO seems to reveal a personal opinion against these policy decisions. In the last example, using evaluation of objects and the stance adverb ‘certainly’, the sarcasm seems to point to the STO actually saying that she disagrees with the SUB looking at the situation in a ‘zen’ way.

Eliciting affect

When working on the indicator ‘expression of affect’, it came across quite often that it was the STO asking the SUB for an expression of emotions or feelings. This is an interesting indicator to include as it seems to be a stronger sign of subjectivity than a SUB expressing affect without elicitation. Because when actively eliciting affect, the STO plays a more active role in the story.

So you’re not mad at her? (TAL 3d)

Were you scared? (TAL 6a)

It seems like this was one of those cases where all of you seemed really, truly angry. (TAL 9c)

It must have made you feel so crazy. (TAL 1pro)

In the first two examples, a certain emotion is asked for. The last two seem to be even stronger as they are not questions but suggestions about what the proper emotions would be in the situation.

These four additional indicators point to several ways in which subjectivity is used to add extra meaning to a story. The STO emphasizes his/her appearance in the story by drawing conclusions about the meaning behind what is heard or
seen. Or he/she expresses an opinion through a sarcastic remark or suggestions about the appropriate feelings.

4.5 Audio-only elements

As was set out earlier in this thesis, special attention was paid to potential elements that could only be found when listening to the audio. It already became clear in the last section that sarcasm was one of these. Here I present several more that I have traced, ranging from laughter and juxtaposition to non-verbal implicit judgement.

Laughter

Laughter was an element that most of the time did not become clear when only reading transcripts. This is an example from a story on protesters Kathy and Joy becoming friends despite protesting for opposite goals (TAL 3d):

Joy

[Kathy’s] come over and stood with me. She's even borrowed my flag one day.

Blue Chevigny

What did you borrow the flag for?

Joy

To burn.

Here, Joy answers for Kathy as a joke, saying she wanted to burn the flag. However, this being a joke and not serious does not become clear from the transcript. While this example does not necessarily point to subjectivity, the fact that laughing is not part of the transcripts makes it more difficult to interpret the tone of the interview. In some fragments there were so many laughs between the interviewer and the interviewee (only to be noticed on the audio) that it changed the perception of the act from a formal interview to an informal conversation between friends. This happens in the next fragment, where the SUB works at a new type of journalism enterprise that lets its reporters write local stories on towns that they are far away from (TAL 12b):
Ryan Smith

So I ended up calling the high school. [...] And [the principle asked] why don't you just come by the school tomorrow? [...] And it was a little awkward for me. Because here I am in Chicago. And he's assuming that I'm a reporter in Houston for the Houston Chronicle. So I was like um, why don't we just do this over the phone?

Sarah Koenig

You didn't tell him?

Ryan Smith

I didn't tell him. I just pretended I was from the Chronicle. I was like hopefully that they don't ask. Because I don't really feel like explaining it. Because I don't even understand it completely.

Throughout this fragment, STO and SUB are both laughing all the time. Nothing in the transcripts points to this. The laughing does not only make the interview less formal, but also the STO seems to reveal an opinion when laughing at the situation SUB is describing: she seems to denounce the journalism that SUB is conducting. Here, subjectivity in the shape of posing an personal opinion is hidden in a audio-only element.

Juxtaposition

Another instance of only audio revealing an indicator of subjectivity is a story on how health insurances deal with their clients. Here, a juxtaposition is revealed by the emphasis that the STO puts on certain words by raising his voice:

Rescission is what happens when an insurance company decides that you lied when you applied for a policy with them-- you pretended that you were healthier than you really were, or you concealed a serious and expensive illness, or you simply made a mistake without intending to, and omitted something about your health that they might want to know. [...] The subcommittee found a guy in Virginia who lost his coverage because the insurance agent who sold him the policy incorrectly wrote down the guy's weight on a form, and then never showed it to the guy to double check. A patient in Utah who needed surgery lost their insurance because of a mistake, an omission, on their spouse's application. (TAL 9c, emphasis added)

These words stand out more as the STO raises his voice, and it seems like the STO wants to emphasize how abnormal this procedure is, how crazy the
mistakes are that are made. By doing this, STO is taking a side and thus plays a role in the story.

*Implicit judgement*

As a last example of what can only be traced in the audio, at least on one occasion the audio filtered out a non-verbal implicit judgement made by the STO. This judgement could not be traced by using the indicators and the transcript. In this act, the STO is calling people throughout Iraq to get a sense of what is occupying the minds of Iraqi’s currently. She just asked a university professor about sectarianism, which is an important source of violence at the moment. He has just told her that everyone publically denounces it, but in private Sunnis hate Shiites and vice versa, engraving the conflict between both groups. Then, she asks him about his personal view (*TAL 14c*):

**Nancy Updike**

Is this what you think, you personally, when you go to University, you talk against sectarianism if anyone brings it up. But when you get home, when you're private, you're like, this is the way it is, is that true for you, personally?

**Mohammed**

Yes. Yes, actually. It's the truth. I myself do it. Yes. Yeah. Frankly speaking. I'm going to be frank with you.

**Nancy Updike**

Yeah.

**Mohammed**

Nancy, hello?

**Nancy Updike**

I'm here.

**Mohammed**

Nancy?

**Nancy Updike**

I'm here. I'm here. Can you hear me?

**Mohammed**

Yeah. Yeah, I told you, yes.
Nancy Updike
Yes.

It does not come out of the transcript, but when listening to the audio, the STO turns out to be silent for a long time, which makes the professor ask about the connection. However, this fragment does not seem so informative if it were only about a bad connection. If that was really what was going on, than why did STO decide to leave this fragment in the act? It comes across as if the STO wants to implicitly show the audience her astonishment with the professor’s answer. She seems to implicitly denounce the fact that he himself contributes to the conflict by hating the other group, and by doing that STO states a personal opinion.

This assumption is strengthened when looking at another act, which looks similar in a way.

The secret archives, is that literally what they're called, the secret archives? I mean why were they set up? OK, when you call it the secret archives though, it makes it sound sinister. It makes it sound like it's there for the protection, to really protect the Church. I'm not saying that's what it is, but that's how it sounds. (TAL3a)

The fragment is a bit messy: STO sounds surprised by what he hears. The listener hears him searching for words, tripping over them, and pausing here and there. But the words that are said contain information (he is formulating a question) so it seems more logical to keep it in the fragment. But in the case of the other fragment, the words do not contain any specific information, so if there was not a subtext attached to them, it would have been more logical to cut them out. So I would propose that the example of the Iraq story is a non-verbal judgement, and thus a fragment of subjectivity, that can only be noticed by listening to the audio.

As was shown in this sub-section, the tendency of some scholars to research radio while only referring to the transcripts (see Kramer 2014, Magee 2013, Stiegler 2014) leaves out several possibly interesting findings. An informal interview can be interpreted as a formal one, missing out on the STO inserting his/her opinion into the story by laughing at certain elements. The same can be said about the use of silence: as was explained here, silence can reveal an opinion of an STO and thus give a story an extra layer otherwise unnoticed. Emphasis on certain words, also revealing an opinion, gets lost without the
audio. This all strengthens the idea that the transcript is merely a reduction from the original (Pleijter 2006:38) and that there is a lot to say for using the audio itself.
4.6 Conclusion

*TAL’s* characteristics are rooted in narrative and popular journalism, which are seen as deviations from conventional journalism (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 651, Clark 2000: 11, Dahlgren 1992: 18, Temple 2008 in Steensen 2011: 50, Franklin 1997 in Peters 2011: 300). As such, *TAL* is generally seen as a radio format breaking with conventions as posed by the objectivity regime. However, this chapter has found that this is not always the case. Certain instances of subjectivity have been identified as fitting within the boundaries of the regime, namely (1) playing a role in the story to bring across how the audience might have felt when they would have been in the situation, (2) giving insight into the story making process, and (3) description of a certain state. This has shown that the array of practices that fit within the boundaries of the regime is far wider than often assumed. Also, the explicit use of subjectivity does not necessarily need to break with the regime (Broersma & Harbers 2014: 647).

At the same time, this chapter has also identified several instances where subjectivity did seem to clash with the regime, some of which are almost exclusively reserved for the domains of the host, outside of the stories. These are (1) stating a personal opinion or taste (direct, or indirect through laughter, juxtaposition, silence, sarcasm, eliciting affect), (2) interpretation, (3) imagination or (4) judging something. The ambivalence about truth that is created through the introduction of acts, in which all types of stories (either fiction or non-fiction, made by a journalist or someone else) are presented in the same way, also falls outside of the boundaries of the regime.

This forces us to reassess the idea of a binary conception of news. This idea assumes that there is either conventional journalism, leading to quality, and unconventional journalism, not leading to quality (Costera Meijer 2003: 15). Yet the format of *This American Life* combines breaking the rules of the objectivity regime with adherence to them. This ambivalent position disqualifies the strict line that is drawn between conventional and unconventional journalism within a binary conception of news.
Conclusion

This research has explored the concept of subjectivity in fourteen episodes of radio show *This American Life*. Indicators of subjectivity taken from appraisal theory and theory on stance adverbs were used to explore the episodes on the textual and narrative level. The role of the reporter was considered on the level of stories as a whole. By exploring the textual conventions of an evidently successful non-traditional form of radio journalism, this research has mapped out the diversity of forms that subjectivity can take, and how these relate to the objectivity regime.

Considering the program as a whole, the fact that a high quality radio show is full of unconventional elements, challenges the idea that quality of journalism lies in the following of certain conventions. This challenges the objectivity regime as it argues for adherence to conventions to appeal to the public and to avoid criticism (Schudson 2001:165).

That said, on the level of the data, both elements adhering or contesting the objectivity regime were located. Here, first I look into cases where the regime seems to have been adhered to. In the research findings, we have seen several instances where an STO uses indicators to give insight into the story making process (STO mistrusting the information a source gives her about someone, and then deciding she needs to speak to the person himself). Or plays a role in the story to bring across how the audience might have felt if they would have been in that situation (STO driving through Ramallah at the time of a curfew, anxious that she might be shot). Or emphasizes the fact that he or she was there in person to talk to people we do not hear on the audio (STO handing the audience the opinions of army members, that he was not allowed to put on the record, on counting civilian casualties). I argue here that in these cases there is a focus on eyewitness reporting and personal experiences. These can be seen as serving an alternative truth claim, that in the first chapter was referred to as I-pistemology (Van Zoonen 2012: 56) or personal-engaged reporting (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 641). This type of reporting still adheres to the objectivity regime, as an underlying notion of it is that the reporter is able to give a truthful representation of reality (Idem). Only in this strand of reporting, it is not detachment but the
use of eye witness reporting and personal experiences that make the claim for truth (ibid: 644). In the examples mentioned here, we follow an STO on their quest for finding the truth: they go look for another source, experience a situation, they talk to people. So while they undertake these actions using subjective elements, they make use of a truth claim that is still possible to make within the confines of the objectivity regime.

On the other hand, elements have also been traced that seem to contest the objectivity regime. This for example happens when an STO expresses a personal opinion or shares a personal anecdote to illustrate the story. While these examples also very occasionally took place within the acts, the fast majority was in the introductions. These introductions also drew the attention because in almost all cases the audience was completely left in the dark about what type of story was coming. It could either be fiction or non-fiction, produced by a journalist or someone else: the audience would get no clues. In theory, this could result in a listener taking a story as non-fiction while it is fiction, or starting out listening thinking an act is non-fiction and then getting confused halfway. TAL playing around with the word ‘real’, using it for stories that then turn out to be fiction, adds to this confusion. This all goes against the objectivity regime as it creates room for ambivalence about truth (Broersma and Harbers 2014: 643).

These elements discussed as contesting the objectivity regime mostly take place in the domains of the host: prologues, introductions and intermezzos. As was argued before, this seems to mean that a host can take a special position in a program, ‘allowing’ him to use more subjectivity than is used in the actual stories. This could serve certain goals as well, one of which I briefly touched upon by connecting my data to theories of Baym on language use. The effects and goals of this special, more subjective role, not in but in between stories, could be subject for future research. Here, what I would like to draw from it is that it underscores the dynamic nature of both subjectivity and objectivity. This American Life contains both acts with ample or very little subjectivity indicators, and these acts can also be introduced using little or many subjectivity indicators. Objectivity and subjectivity can overlap and coexist in one journalism format.

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9 To be clear, this is different from the above mentioned use of personal experiences, which fits within the regime. As in the sample personal experiences pointed to the STO experiencing something within the story, where personal anecdotes only referred to the theme of a story.
This way, my research questions the binary opposition of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’, as almost every act in the sample carries elements of both. This is why I would argue for speaking about subjective and objective ‘elements’, which creates room for the perception of a piece of journalism containing both elements, instead of being either subjective or objective. Furthermore, when subjectivity occurred, this sometimes contested the objectivity regime but sometimes also adhered to it. The complex nature of both concepts and the forms that they can take argues for a dynamic instead of static definition. This helps create the space argued for by scholars (Costera Meijer 2003: 16, Dahlgren 1992:8, Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 316, Zelizer 2009: 6) for a constructive discussion on what is (quality) journalism and what is not, free from pre-defined boundaries.

On a methodological level, this research has suggested several possible new indicators for subjectivity, which have been defined as interpretation, imagination or scene reconstruction, sarcasm and eliciting affect. When applied in a context where subjectivity is looked after, they enrich the toolbox of the researcher. Furthermore, paying special attention to audio-only elements has resulted in finding several examples of subjectivity that could only be traced in the audio. This suggests that future research on audio material would benefit from not only using transcripts but the audio as well. Subjectivity through silence would make a very interesting point of further research, as was briefly mentioned when looking at the effect of an STO being silent after her interviewee, an Iraqi professor, just confessed to conducting questionable behavior.

This thesis started out with a quote from a 25 year-old news consumer, comparing news to a whole-wheat sandwich: “You eat it because it is healthy, not because it is tasty.” (Costera Meijer 2007:96). I argue that by “interweaving the silly and the serious” (Baym 2005: 273) and through engaged reporting, This American Life might make it possible to make news “tasty”. Future research on the audience of the show would be informative to see how this works out.
Academic books and articles


Chen, Gina M. ‘Tweet this: A uses and gratifications perspective on how active Twitter use gratifies a need to connect with others.’ *Computers in Human Behavior* 27 (2011) 2: 755-762.


**Book reviews**


**Conference papers**


**Working papers**


**Reports**


**Non-academic articles**

McKibben, Bill. ‘Media Matters: This American Life.’ *The nation,* 24-11-1997, 10.


**Dictionaries**


**Speeches**


**This American Life episodes**

Episode 17, 03/21/1996: Name Change No Theme.
http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/17/name-change-no-theme


Episode 197, 10/26/2001: Before it had a name. http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/197/before-it-had-a-name


Online articles

Cox, Ana Marie and Joanna Dionis. 'Ira Glass: Live and Uncut. MoJo interviews Ira Glass, host of public radio's hippest show.' Mother Jones

Fisher, Marc. 'It’s a Wonderful Life.' American Journalism Review
www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=326_(July/August 1999)

Janssen, Mike. 'Hollywood finds kernels for movies in This American Life' Current

Mamet, David. 'Ira Glass: He has retuned radio with old-fashioned storytelling' TIME
http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000292,00.html (July 9, 2001)

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Oatman, Maddie. ‘How StoryCorps Captured the Soul of America.’ *Mother Jones*
http://www.motherjones.com/media/2013/10/interview-dave-isay-storycorps-10th-anniversary (November/December 2013)

Oppenheimer, Mark. ‘NPR’s Great Black Hope’ *The Atlantic*

Weisberg, Jacob. ‘500 episodes and counting, part 1’ *Slate*
http://www.slate.com/articles/video/conversations_with_slate/2013/06/this_american_life_500th_anniversary_ira_glass_interview_focuses_on_show.html (June 29, 2013)

Weisberg, Jacob. ‘500 episodes and counting, part 3’ *Slate*
http://www.slate.com/articles/video/conversations_with_slate/2013/07/ira_glass_interview_why_this_american_life_feels_so_different_from_other.html (July 2, 2013)

Weisberg, Jacob. ‘500 episodes and counting, part 4’ *Slate*


**Webpages without authors**


http://nieman.harvard.edu/NiemanFoundation/ProgramsAndPublications/NarrativeJournalism.aspx, October 21, 2013


http://themoth.org/about, November 11, 2013
http://www.thisamericanlife.org/about/about-our-radio-show November 7, 2013

http://www.cpb.org/aboutpb/awards/murrow/ April 15, 2015
### Appendix I: Classification Schedule

The episodes were analyzed by filling in the schedule below for every single prologue, act and intermezzo. For convenience, all are addressed as ‘act’ in this schedule (‘Act prologue’, ‘Act one’, ‘Act intermezzo’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of broadcast:</th>
<th>No of episode:</th>
<th>Name and description of episode:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of act:</th>
<th>Duration of act:</th>
<th>Name and description of act:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

What can be said about the introduction of the act?

What kind of act is it: a reportage, a conversation, or..?

Text of Act

Does the text of a story contain any (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- expressions of affect?
- judgments of individuals or groups?
- appreciation or evaluation of objects?
- stance adverbs?
Expression of affect
Judgments of individuals or groups
Appreciation or evaluation of objects
Stance adverbs

**Story of Act**

*Does the story as a whole include (and if so, describe thoroughly):*

- *detailed description?*
- *juxtaposition?*
- *Personalized storytelling?*

**Role of host/reporter in the Act**

*Does the host and/or the reporter (and if so, describe thoroughly):*

- *play a role in the story, if so in what way?*
- *reveal something personal, such as a personal anecdote, an opinion or feelings?*
- *take a side?*
- *speak about him/herself in the first person?*
- *directly address the audience?*
What else can be noticed about the actions of the host and/or reporter?

Audio-only Aspects

What is noticeable when listening to the audio? Any comments on audio-only aspects, such as the use of music or other possible sound effects, the tone of voice, speed of talking, emphasis or pinch?

Other

Any other remarks?

Episode as a Whole

What can be said about the relationship between acts that form one episode? Their order? Their conventionality or unconventionality?

Notes while analyzing
Appendix II: Example of Completed Classification Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of broadcast: Oct 26, 2001</th>
<th>No of episode: 197</th>
<th>Name and description of episode:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Before It Had A Name</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There's the time when you know something is happening, but you're not sure exactly what. The illness before it's diagnosed. The era, before it's been given a title. And something changes when the name is given. Stories of that transformation...between what it is now, and what it was before it had a name.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of act:</th>
<th>Duration of act:</th>
<th>Name and description of act:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>A farmer talks to Ira Glass about how his cows started to give less milk, and he could not figure out how.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Classification of Act**

*What kind of act is it: a reportage, a conversation, or..?*

A conversation between a farmer and TAL-host Ira Glass

**Text of Act**

*Does the text of a story contain any (and if so, describe thoroughly):*

- expressions of affect?
- judgments of individuals or groups?
- appreciation or evaluation of objects?
- stance adverbs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression of affect</th>
<th>With his question ‘It must have made you feel so crazy’, Glass seems to try to elicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
the mention of emotion by the source.

He does the same when he asks the farmer what he thinks of his new job, the answer being ‘I love it’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judgments of individuals or groups</th>
<th>no</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation or evaluation of objects</td>
<td>“That eerie, unsettling period” Glass himself describes the phase that the farmer was in like this. He classifies the phase that he wants to introduce as the theme of the episode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stance adverbs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Story of Act**

Does the story as a whole include (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- *detailed description?*
- *juxtaposition?*
- *Personalized storytelling?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detailed description</th>
<th>x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juxtaposition</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized Storytelling</td>
<td>The story of the farmer is told to be exemplary for other cases where something does not have a name yet (and not necessarily connected to a bigger problem of electricity plants polluting water)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Role of host/reporter in the Act**

Does the host and/or the reporter (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- *play a role in the story, if so in what way?*
• *reveal something personal, such as a personal anecdote, an opinion or feelings?*

• *take a side?*

• *speak about him/herself in the first person?*

• *directly address the audience?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play a role</th>
<th>x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reveal something personal</td>
<td>Glass connects the situation of the farmer to ‘someone that I am close to’, and by doing this, he makes it very personal. However, that fact that Ira himself is close to the person does not really seem to matter. The aim of this seems to use the comparison to distill a certain state: ‘how one feels before really knowing what is going on.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a side</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>Glass speaks in the first person when he introduces the premise of the show: “I think this happens a lot”. To connect the story of the farmer to something bigger, he actually makes a personal statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly addressing the audience</td>
<td>Glass, when describing the idea of the theme of this week, says things like “You know?” directly to the audience. As if he wants to make sure that his explanation of the theme is really understood by the audience. Makes me think of Glass mentioning in interviews that he wants to sound like people normally sound when they talk. Adding this (of course unanswered) You know, seems to be part of this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*What else can be noticed about the actions of the host and/or reporter?*
Audio-only Aspects

What is noticeable when listening to the audio? Any comments on audio-only aspects, such as the use of music or other possible sound effects, the tone of voice, speed of talking, emphasis or pinch?

You can hear desperation in the voice of the farmer

Other

Any other remarks?

What strikes me is that, even though the disease of the cows turns out to be part of something that is not just a private problem (the drinking water of the cows is polluted by a nearby electricity plant), this is not dealt with in more depth, as would have been with a traditional topic: environmental issues threatening farmers. However, it is barely discussed, the thing that gets all the attention is the feeling between not knowing the cause of the problem (and blaming yourself) and knowing (that the problem is caused by a company). So here the theme is introduced by a story that has ‘conventional news’ potential, but this potential was chosen not to be acted upon.

No of act: 1
Duration of act: 31 min
Name and description of act:

Mr Boder Vanishes.

In 1946, a man named David Boder started to investigate the Holocaust before it was known as the Holocaust. He dragged a primitive recording device around Europe and gathered the first recorded testimonials of concentration camp survivors. But his research was largely ignored, and his recordings forgotten for decades. The tapes are broadcast for the first time nationally on tonight’s show. Carl Marziali tells the story.
What can be said about the introduction of the act?

Introduced by Glass. What strikes me is that he specifically says this is the story ‘of a man who…’, not ‘about the holocaust’ → personal, small.

Classification of Act

What kind of act is it: a reportage, a conversation, or…?

Reportage including interviews and historic material

Text of Act

Does the text of a story contain any (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- expressions of affect?
- judgments of individuals or groups?
- appreciation or evaluation of objects?
- stance adverbs?

Expression of affect

The reporter seems to be continuously seeking the emotional side of Boder, because he thinks it is odd that he cannot hear that side in the holocaust recordings. For example, he quotes the family historian: It's hard to resist the pattern that having betrayed-- that in part, his study of the people of the Holocaust and his determination to get there, and to catch the stories in there purist telling. It's hard to resist the interpretation that in part, this atoned for the freedom from that kind of torment that he achieved by simply leaving.

And at a point further on, the reporter mentions: But it wasn't until the very end that cracks appeared in his customary reserve. This sounds like he actively kept
on looking for emotionality.

| Judgment of individuals or groups | Reporter calls Border ‘an unlikely figure’. Also, he judges or even condemns his ways of conducting the interviews: You would think that a researcher talking to refugees after the war, a psychologist of all people, would show the appropriate sensitivity. |
| Appreciation or evaluation of objects | He showed up in the NYT with ‘some invention’ called..: sounds a bit degrading. Later his research switched focus and took on an ‘urgent’ tone: also sounds like a value judgement. |
| Stance adverbs | You would think that a researcher talking to refugees after the war, a psychologist of all people, would show the appropriate sensitivity: this quote, that was mentioned above as well, also seems to contain something that functions as a stance adverb: appropriate. Apparently there is something like the appropriate sensitivity, and Boder is lacking this, according to the reporter. |

**Story of Act**

Does the story as a whole include (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- *detailed description?*
- *juxtaposition?*
- *Personalized storytelling?*

| Detailed description | |
| Juxtaposition | It seemed strange that a Jewish man who had come face to face with the attempted extinction of his people would title his |
article, "The Displaced People of Europe, Preliminary Notes on a Psychological and Anthropological Study." Here, the reporter juxtaposes the behavior of Boder with what he sees as normal, as an explanation of what fascinates him about Boder.

**Role of host/reporter in the Act**

*Does the host and/or the reporter (and if so, describe thoroughly):*

- *play a role in the story, if so in what way?*
- *reveal something personal, such as a personal anecdote, an opinion or feelings?*
- *take a side?*
- *speak about him/herself in the first person?*
- *directly address the audience?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play a role</th>
<th>The reporter actually starts out very distanced. He introduces the historical material and plays pieces of it, only talking to repeat a sentence that was difficult to understand.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reveal something personal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a side</td>
<td>You would think that a researcher talking to refugees after the war, a psychologist of all people, would show the appropriate sensitivity. This quote, that was mentioned before, reporter seems to take a side against Boder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Person</td>
<td>After introducing the topic very distantly,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
there is a switch in which the reporter starts talking about himself. He thoroughly describes how he stumbled upon the stories, and stresses that he thought there was something odd about them. Then he explains that he wanted to find out about the private life of this man, what was driving him, and, basically, why wasn’t he more emotional about everything?

From this point, he also keeps speaking in the first person when he introduces the people that he interviewed. He does not just introduce them, but says ‘I went to see...’

| Directly addressing the audience | Yes |

**What else can be noticed about the actions of the host and/or reporter?**

The role of the reporter changes during the act. First, he is distanced, merely introducing the story and repeating sentences that are difficult to hear in the original material. Later we hear him as an interviewer and another moment he lets someone speak without playing a role apart from introducing the speaker. However, at one point he explicitly puts himself in the story when he describes how he stumbled upon the material and decided to look into it. This could be interpreted as pure clarification of how he as a journalist went about his research, but what is interesting is that he judges the presumed emotions of Border. Firstly, he interprets how Border felt, and then poses that as odd. The fact that he is so interested in knowing more PERSONAL facts about Border, about WHAT DRIVES HIM and his EMOTIONS while doing the project, is also informative.

**Audio-only Aspects**

*What is noticeable when listening to the audio? Any comments on audio-only aspects, such as the use of music or other possible sound effects, the tone of voice, speed of talking, emphasis or pinch?*

x

**Other**
Any other remarks?

New indicators of subjectivity:

1. Reflection. As he tries to get a clear view on what this material stands for, what it is exactly that he feels when he listens to it, he tries to also persuade his audience to see things the way he sees them: "Maybe it's a kind of dramatic irony, the ratio of our own awareness to the speaker's lack of it. Maybe it's the way people talk when they barely know what's happened to them, before analysis and judgment show up to put everything in its place." [...] Often in the recordings, you get the sense of two worlds meeting for the first time and trying to figure each other.

2. Interpretation. The reporter does quite some interpretation of what he is hearing or what things he encounters COULD mean. → You can read almost anything into that final, "who will judge my work?" The shame reporters feel when they hold the camera on someone in tears, the desire for recognition, the realization that his achievement consists of making people relive their worst moments. And the hope that documenting this tragedy might alleviate any guilt he might have felt about living in America while his relatives died at the hands of the Nazis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of act:</th>
<th>Duration of act:</th>
<th>Name and description of act:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermezzo 1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Axis of Evil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Text of intermezzo**

Does the text of a story contain any (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- expressions of affect?
- judgments of individuals or groups?
- appreciation or evaluation of objects?
- stance adverbs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression of affect</th>
<th>x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judgments of individuals or groups</td>
<td>Sure, North Korea, Iraq and Iran, they were bad before we pinned the name Axis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of Evil onto those countries. He calls these countries ‘bad’

Appreciation or evaluation of objects

Axis of evil, a perfect example.

Stance adverbs

Of course we choose a theme. Here, of course is a stance adverb. They assume that the audience already knows this information.

### Story of Intermezzo

Does the story as a whole include (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- **detailed description?**
- **juxtaposition?**
- **Personalized storytelling?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detailed description</th>
<th>x</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juxtaposition</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized Storytelling</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Role of host/reporter in the Intermezzo

Does the host and/or the reporter (and if so, describe thoroughly):

- **play a role in the story, if so in what way?**
- **reveal something personal, such as a personal anecdote, an opinion or feelings?**
- **take a side?**
- **speak about him/herself in the first person?**
- **directly address the audience?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play a role</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reveal something personal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a side</td>
<td>Yes, he seems to take a side in calling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
countries ‘bad’. However, though the literal texts makes it sound as he sides against these countries, but the irony that I hear as a listener makes me think that he actually sides against those who came up with the idea of the axis of evil. It is actually a very political message, wrapped in a joke.

**First Person**

When the name penetrate into us, the person or the place or the thing has penetrated into us too, I think. And if that doesn’t seem to true to you, Heather O’Neill provides these real-life case studies.

Here Glass emphasizes that the theory about how things work is his own: I think

**Directly addressing the audience**

When the name penetrate into us, the person or the place or the thing has penetrated into us too, I think. And if that doesn’t seem to true to you, Heather O’Neill provides these real-life case studies.

Here he directly addressed the listeners about his theory of how things work.

_What else can be noticed about the actions of the host and/or reporter?_

Glass is using irony in this intermezzo. It can also be seen in the sentence: “It turns out that part of what made North Korea so angry lately is being included on that list, is being called evil.” → ‘it turns out’, ‘so angry lately’.

**Audio-only Aspects**

_What is noticeable when listening to the audio? Any comments on audio-only aspects, such as the use of music or other possible sound effects, the tone of voice, speed of talking, emphasis or pinch?_
The irony is easier to hear than to read, as it is also in the host’s voice.

Other

Any other remarks?

In this intermezzo Glass touches upon a very conventional news topic, foreign affairs, but approaches it in a very unconventional way: with an ironic joke. Actually he does two interesting things:

- use of irony

- he formulates the stance of a country as if it were the emotions of a human being: ‘so angry lately’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of act:</th>
<th>Duration of act:</th>
<th>Name and description of act:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 MIN</td>
<td>Of course I remember your name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A short story about the moment when we suddenly learn the name of something that has heretofore been unnamed for us...and about the difference between knowing the person, and knowing the person's name. Heather O'Neill is the author of Two Eyes Are You Sleeping, a book of poetry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What can be said about the introduction of the act?

Glass introduces the story as follows: When the name penetrate into us, the person or the place or the thing has penetrated into us too, I think. And if that doesn’t seem to true to you, Heather O'Neill provides these real-life case studies. What is striking, again, is that there is no mention of what O'Neill is (journalist? Writer? High school student?). The other thing is, that he says she will bring something like ‘real-life case studies’. It is not explained what these are, but ‘real-life’ suggests that it is not fiction. Only in the end, when Glass closes the story, we find out that she is a poet.

Classification of Act
What kind of act is it: a reportage, a conversation, or..?

Personal story, told by an “I” that has the same name as the writer of the story

Any other remarks?

I did not thoroughly research this act, as it was written by a poet and focuses on personal experiences, of which it is unclear whether they are fiction or non-fiction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of act:</th>
<th>Duration of act:</th>
<th>Name and description of act:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14 MIN</td>
<td><em>A Bad Day for Plates</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The story about what happens when you discover the medical reason your mother was such a bad parent all your life. Laura Tangusso tells the story of how she and her siblings learned the name of something they’d always wondered: What was wrong with their mother?

What can be said about the introduction of the act?

Laura Tangusso has this story about how things changed in her life, and in her whole family’s life actually, when events in their past that they interpreted one way suddenly got a different name.

-it is not explained who Tangusso is

-it is made clear immediately that this is a story about her personal circumstances, thus an unconventional topic and reporting style.

Classification of Act

What kind of act is it: a reportage, a conversation, or..?

Personal recount of the storyteller (background not mentioned) and interviews with her siblings
Other

Any other remarks?

I did not thoroughly research this act, as the subject and the storyteller are one.

What strikes me is that TAL appears to allow people on the show that do not fit the conventional description of a journalist. The person that made this act was described as a teacher, this is her first radio story. So that could mean anything.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of act:</th>
<th>Duration of act:</th>
<th>Name and description of act:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 MIN</td>
<td>You Call that Love?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is that moment when you're falling for someone, before either of you says the word love...but when you both FEEL it. But then once the word love is applied to a feeling...is it possible we're all actually referring to different feelings? Jonathan Goldstein tells a story about what if the word love didn't exist. He's the author of the novels [...] and [...]

What can be said about the introduction of the act?

- Consider please the word, love. Glass addresses the audience directly: Giving an instruction.
- The storyteller is only introduced with his name.
- It is said that he ‘has some thoughts about that question’ → a bit vague, but seems to point to the fact that this is his own opinion. It is unclear what will follow.

Classification of Act

What kind of act is it: a reportage, a conversation, or..?

Personal recount of the storyteller
Other

Any other remarks?

The story starts out with a general monologue on the word ‘love’, and then halfway turns into a personal story about the writer’s experience with love. I did not thoroughly analyze this act because it is produced by a writer and the storyteller and the subject are one.

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xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx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