



DON'T STOP THE PRESS —*Global*

Preface

A combination of censorship, politics and the power of big business has seen the demise of investigative journalism over the past few years. *Monocle* speaks to four journalists spanning four of the world's major news-consuming nations to get their take on the future of the practice.

The age of the fearless investigative journalist, sweaty notebook in hand, feels like a relic from the past. Star writers and TV reporters no longer topple governments and bring down the powerful, à la Watergate. And yet all is not lost: the public may have less faith in individuals' abilities to inform them – a Pew Research Center poll of favourite US journalists revealed a fragmented landscape with no one getting more than 5 per cent of the vote – yet multiple studies show that watchdog reporting continues to resonate.

So what's going wrong? Censorship and self-censorship, certainly. External pressures are greater: business and political interests are easier to resist when the money is rolling in. Then there are the new media models that are often funded by owners with vested interests. In-depth reporting still emerges from this maelstrom but knowing where to look and how to interpret are two tools the public needs to be increasingly aware of. *MONOCLE* discusses the issue with four leading journalists. — (M)



OI John Owen UK

John Owen is professor of international journalism at City University London and chairman of the Frontline Club. He was formerly head of CBC Television News and, more recently, executive producer for Al Jazeera programmes.

“For me, people should get into journalism to expose injustice and to hold people and power to account. Stories that accomplish both of those are what I want to read. When we think about the golden age of investigative journalism we think about Watergate – Woodward and Bernstein, the Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman film – that was the heyday. That sort of

journalism seemed sexy and romantic. In the UK, investigative journalism's heyday might be represented by the Insight team led by Harold Evans. The thalidomide story was the Watergate for Britain. It was hugely financed, with great amounts of time; no one was saying, ‘Great, but get something on the web tomorrow.’

In terms of personalities, often people that know how to find out things, mine data and do the tedious things can't take it all and turn it into a story. Journalists like Seymour Hersh and Nick Davies can find the narrative; you have to have people who can make the discovery and turn it into a story. This field attracts people who might be paranoid, obsessive and difficult to deal with – if you were in a pub with them you'd move to other end of the bar – but you have to be obsessed with

things, you have to have the tenacity and the staying power. This is also where good editors come in. How do you make this stuff into a story? Do digital start-ups these days have the luxury of good editors and knowing how to tell a story? We'll see. One place that does is ProPublica [an independent non-profit 'newsroom'] because they're well funded. And a lot of their people came from the old *Wall Street Journal* when that paper abandoned this long, sprawling journalism we're talking about, when Rupert Murdoch took over.

I think what will maintain standards and build successes are brands: *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, maybe. Al Jazeera is probably putting more money into investigative journalism than anyone else: *Fault Lines* and *People & Power* are two programmes devoted to it. Maybe over a period of time their reputation will be made. Then again, an amazing reporter like Anas Aremeyaw Anas from Ghana makes methodical and thought-through stuff that you can watch on YouTube with a great narrative: it's amazing work.

The problems are censorship, self-censorship, the agendas of the owners and what's *not* getting on air. These new start-ups: what aren't they pursuing? [Amazon founder] Jeff Bezos's *Washington Post*: what aren't they touching? And Ebay founder Pierre Omidyar, who's bankrolling Glenn Greenwald's *The Intercept*: what won't they go after? What is Al Jazeera not going into in Qatar? The country is ripe for all sorts of exposure and it's not going to come from Al Jazeera, nor are you going to see hard-hitting reports on the gay community in Uganda and the Middle East on that network. Maybe the public broadcasters aren't so different either: if you look at almost every newsroom there is an element of self-censorship.

We need media literacy for adults when they buy a newspaper: if you plan to read this you might want to keep in mind the following. Maybe the title of 'investigative reporting' is a curse: it's original reporting. The challenge is how to present these stories." — RB



02 Sharyl Attkisson USA

Sharyl Attkisson was a big-name, big-network TV journalist until she quit her Washington-based CBS job earlier this year, keen for more freedom and less pressure when carrying out investigations.

Beyond its baffling traffic system and spaghetti-junction outskirts, Washington DC segues into leafy Virginia suburbia. Near the village of Aldie, more than an hour's drive from America's power base, lies a cluster of large red-brick houses with manicured lawns, one of which belongs to investigative journalist Sharyl Attkisson.

The 53-year-old is a seasoned professional. Until March this year, Attkisson had spent more than two decades working as a Washington correspondent for the CBS network; before then she had been an anchor at CNN. But frustration at stories she says were repeatedly quashed by her bosses caused her to leave her contract and reinvent herself as a freelancer.

"I think reporters at all networks will tell you the same," she says, welcoming MONOCLE into her house barefoot and in a teal-coloured dress. "The appetite for investigative reporting suddenly faded a couple of years ago." Sinking into a sofa in her living room, which looks out onto her

garden swimming pool, she explains that the main problem with US journalism is the ever-increasing power of big business and government, two entities that increasingly overlap. "I think there has been more corporate influence and also fear over going against the establishment."

Attkisson won her first Emmy in 2002 with a three-part exposé on the Red Cross, which uncovered serious negligence and mismanagement at the heart of the charity. She won another in 2010 for her business probe into the recession-fuelled bank bailout programme under the George W Bush administration. She was also nominated for two recent stories: one about the government's attempt to deflect questions over its security in Benghazi after the murder of US ambassador Christopher Stevens in 2012; the

second about the poor allocation of state funds for green-energy projects that subsequently failed.

In both cases, Attkisson says she had to fight to get the stories on air, partly due to a change in management at CBS in the last few years she was there. She argues that a liberal – and therefore biased – slant made the powers-that-be reluctant to cover stories that criticised president Barack Obama.

Attkisson also says that the government is making it harder for investigative journalists to do their job by making them jump through a series of hoops – and often wait until a story has dropped off the news agenda – when trying to access documents under the Freedom of Information Act. "There's no penalty, there's nothing that says the people who withheld the documents will have to pay a fine or go to jail," she says. "All they have to do is pay the legal fees [if it goes to court and the documents are released]."

As an interviewee Attkisson is unflustered, switching seamlessly from her considered answers to juicier bits that are firmly off-record. The only moment her veneer drops – and her eyes flick to the side for a split-second – is when I ask the unmentionable and delve into personal politics.

Attkisson's questioning of the Obama administration has caused her to be derided in some circles as a Republican zealot and among her detractors is the liberal think-tank Media Matters for America. So is she a signed-up adherent of the Grand Old Party?

"I don't talk about my politics," she says. "I don't even know if I've said this publicly but I'll say it to you: in my voting patterns I have not voted sometimes. I have voted Democrat, I have voted Republican, I have voted independent. I call myself agnostic: I don't have a belief in a party here."

Attkisson refutes the idea, suggested by some, that she has covered more Democratic stings than Republican ones, an allegation she says simply doesn't stand up to scrutiny. She argues that her opposition to the liberal slant of her former network would have been equally heartfelt had it been a conservative one – both

go against the ultimate goal of journalism, which is to be impartial.

Since leaving one of the US's major new channels, Attkisson hasn't seen a let up in her schedule. Alongside writing a book about the problems facing investigative journalism under Obama – *Stonewalled*, published in November – she has been working across the national local TV network with Sinclair Broadcast Group and contributing to news portal *The Daily Signal*, among other outlets.

The Daily Signal – funded by a conservative think-tank – is part of a new breed of digital media companies that has the backing of moneyed entrepreneurs or institutions. But Attkisson says that she has had full editorial freedom since she started working with the site. "How sad is it that you find more non-partisan editorial review at places that are partisan than at the supposedly fair news source where you previously worked?"

As dark storm clouds begin to gather outside the living-room windows, Attkisson says she doesn't feel particularly positive when it comes to assessing the future of investigative journalism in the US. Alongside vested interests exerting influence, there is an element of lazy journalism, she says. Everyone is picking up stories from other media sources instead of hunting for original stories and getting "a pat on the back for it".

Attkisson admits there is still excellent investigative reporting out there. Yet, as advertiser pressure increases and advertorials become the norm, she worries that the shifting landscape of investigative journalism and its sliding importance is being met with a shrug of shoulders.

She wraps up with an anecdote concerning a story she broke about Hillary Clinton when she launched her presidential primary campaign back in 2008 – one with potentially serious political repercussions. Her boss at the time was a self-declared Democrat and close to the Clinton clan so Attkisson was worried about approaching him with the idea. His response? "He told me, 'A great story is a great story – fuck it.'" For Attkisson, continuing to measure value by that same benchmark may just be the saviour of American investigative journalism. — EJS



03 Carolina Neurath Sweden

She hasn't even turned 30 but she's already been called Sweden's best financial journalist. Carolina Neurath's investigations for national newspaper SvD into the highest spheres of business can't be stopped by the reticence of the big and powerful.

How would you say investigative reporting is doing in Sweden? It has never been more dynamic than now. On the one hand the media is becoming more and more shallow with the purpose of keeping people entertained in a "click frenzy". But as a counter-reaction there is an extreme thirst for investigative journalism. I've seen it in the response from my readers: I think they want it.

How did you get into investigative journalism in the first place? I've always liked to write and I've always been a questioning person. If a company earns a lot of money, many newspapers like to celebrate their result and not always ask how they did it. I always question the version that they are giving. After a while working as a journalist I realised it's more fun to write about things that companies don't want you to write about but, as their press offices are getting bigger, they're creating a wall around them and making our job a lot harder.

What is the best thing about your job? It's the impact that it can have, making the world a bit better. When you work really hard and then you publish and get a large response, that's fantastic. The worse thing about it though is that you get some people who really hate you. But you just have to learn not to care about it. — CHR

04 Milena Gabanelli Italy

Her stern, resolute voice is synonymous with unforgiving zeal on Italian TV. Milena Gabanelli has been the host of public broadcaster Rai's investigative journalism show *Report* for 17 years. Prizing her independence above all things has made her a national icon of integrity.

You've been doing this job since the late 1980s. How has your profession changed since then? My first approach to investigative journalism was telling the stories of the Japanese Yakuza, the Khmer Rouge and factions in Mozambique. We at *Report* are still an anomaly in that every author is a freelancer who shoots and directs his or her own piece. This is a model that works at lowest cost for maximum results. Throughout the years things have evolved thanks to the fact that anyone can now shoot video on their phone cameras, meaning you can source content at no cost straight from the users. But these precious contributions only give you the "facts" in themselves – and facts need to be interpreted and placed in context. Truth still requires the analysis and experience of a journalist.

What are the main issues in investigative reporting? TVs and newspapers are shrinking the space they allow for investigative reporting because of its cost. Investigations require time – and time is money. On the other hand, investigating can also mean clashing with powers that can determine your survival: that is, advertisers. The only organisation that can still sustain the costs and go its own way is public service.

Otherwise, journalists from different titles can join together and ask the public for a subscription fee – as in the case of ProPublica – and citizens will pay for quality reporting.

Do you think investigative journalism is shifting towards an online subscription model? I have a daughter who's 29 and has always gathered the information she wanted from the internet. She doesn't watch TV; she reads her news online. I think real in-depth reporting is a necessity for an "older" category of people. The great challenge for investigative reporting today is learning how to be concise, which doesn't mean you don't have to do the hard work: you still have to understand facts but then you must distill them to their essence and transmit them.

Many people look at Italy and think of Silvio Berlusconi and limited freedom of expression. Did you ever face any censorship? There has never been one single instance of anybody telling me, "No, you can't do that." Of course, there have been plenty of discussions as there should be. But I can tell you that more than censorship, what's really dramatic in Italy is self-censorship. Too many people are sitting at their desks because they have some political party to thank. This triggers a chain mechanism that leads people not to do things because they think they're not going to be allowed to do them.

Is it better to be young, reckless and idealistic or experienced and disillusioned? It's great to be young, reckless and idealistic: then, as time passes, you become disillusioned. Young people, as such,



must be idealists: I was and I think I remained an idealist. And maybe reckless, too. Surely I'm a bit more disillusioned because that's what experience brings. But I still haven't lost my enthusiasm. When we start on a new story the enthusiasm is always the same; I don't know if it's a pathology I should be worried about.

What makes a good investigative journalist? A good dose of patience, courage and ambition.

Last year Italian comedian and political activist Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement voted you as its favourite candidate to become president of the republic. How did you take it? Those 24 hours were extremely demanding. I wanted to find the right words to explain to those who trusted me that, when called, people with civic roles do reply but that accepting would have been a pure act of vanity. It was unthinkable. To agree to be a candidate for any party would have meant taking sides and I could not have accepted it while still doing my job. — CHR

