

## 5

# We Can All be Super Heroes

## Networked Journalism in Action: Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy

The challenge of terror has made it painfully clear that we need more journalism, not less, and that it needs to be better. I have argued that this journalism needs to be much more connected. As each journalist can do more, each will provide more. Welcome to the era of SuperMedia and the hero of the age, the “Networked Journalist.” They will still have recognizable core tasks and skills. We want someone to filter the vast information flows and to do it quickly. We have untrammled access to a great slew of facts, opinions, and imagery. We need editors. We need someone to make choices, to prioritize the data and commentary by judging its significance. And it has to be packaged. We need people who can process the information in a way that we will find accessible. And it has to be done fast. Journalism can be even more useful in giving us topical reportage that monitors what changes in our increasingly fast-moving world. To have validity as journalism, rather than simple testimony, news communication has to attain a degree of authority. People have to trust it as a version of reality that aspires to objectivity, fairness, accuracy, and thoroughness. It might be valuable without that quality, but it is not journalism. You can bring those skills to bear through a specialist agency, in other words, a journalist. Or the participants can take those roles upon themselves. Either way, you get Networked Journalism. In this final chapter I will try to set out how we can save journalism. By that I mean how we should change journalism. To do that we need to invest in Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy. I will end by suggesting what this could then offer in political terms.

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 147

Networked Journalists need to be better journalists than ever, because they are working with people who think they know better – the public. And very often they do. Information is everywhere and easily accessed, so Networked Journalists have to add extra editorial value. In this age of “information overload” there will be even more demand for journalists as editors and for trusted brands which can be relied on to filter out rubbish and to package what is useful in an authoritative way. In a world of ever-increasing media manipulation by government and business, it is even more important for investigative journalists to use technology and connectivity to reveal hidden truths. Networked journalists are open, interactive, and share the process. Instead of gatekeepers, they are facilitators: the public become co-producers. Networked Journalists “are ‘medium agnostic’ and ‘story-centric.’”<sup>1</sup> The process is faster and the information sticks around longer, spinning out endlessly. Of course, the Networked Journalist must know how the technology works and how to use it: blogs, aggregator feeds, tags, links, and all the rest of the jargon. They must be able to put video or audio online, to podcast, and to text alert. They can crowd-source and they can set up wikis. It is not all new or high tech. Journalism in a networked age is also pouring into old forms. Some tried and tested “platforms” are being rediscovered for journalism. There has been a growth in serious topical non-fiction books, such as *Fast Food Nation*,<sup>2</sup> and feature-length documentaries, like *Fahrenheit 9/11*,<sup>3</sup> to give just two examples. These are classic formats finding renewed and enhanced value in an age when the fast and the furious, the glib and the superficial, were expected to triumph. Instead, people like Michael Moore, Morgan Spurlock, and Eric Schlosser are finding a new audience hungry for long-form work. But they are also exploiting new technology to promote their films and books and to extend the impact of their work online. Networked Journalists must not only be clever enough to embrace the current set of changes but also flexible enough to exploit the next set of opportunities to arise.

The other part of the connectivity equation is public media literacy. We do not need to turn every citizen in to a journalist. But in an information economy and polity every person has a right to access. In a more connected environment people need a sophisticated set of skills to exercise that right in a meaningful and practical way. So we need to provide the learning experiences and participatory opportunities that will allow the public to be networked to journalism. At one level this is a relatively straightforward question of adjusting curricula through the education system and beyond. But at a deeper level it is also a challenge to the idea of an “informed public”.

## 148 SuperMedia

For journalism to be genuinely transparent and effective in the new media environment I have set out, society needs to understand and support a different relationship between audience and producer of news media. That means that all institutions, from government to public relations to charities will have to re-orientate their approach to the public and the media. They will have to become more media literate and more supportive of media literacy among their voters, clients, and supporters. It starts by enabling citizens to be a part of the news production process. But this is a new media world where concepts such as Creative Commons mean that media literacy is also about an intellectual and even ideological literacy as well as a set of practical skills. For this all to be the case we must invest as societies in Networked Journalism. I would argue that this is money well spent. Media literacy is a social good. It is not as vital a public service as Defense or Health, for example. But it is an important pre-condition for all the other social goods to be delivered in an efficient and democratic manner. It promotes transparency and governance through civic engagement. It is at that point that Networked Journalism gets political. So what is to be done? First, I will look at the evolving concept of media literacy from the professional journalists' point of view and then from the perspective of the citizen.

### 5.1 Editorial Diversity

Networked Journalists need to realize that they are competing with a vast array of alternative attractions. They must understand the diversity of their audience. By this I don't just mean the public's ethnic or political make-up. I mean the fact that increasingly we will all have multiple identities facilitated by new media technologies. We can veer from being personal to professional, mix business with pleasure, blend learning with entertainment and do our information gathering while interacting socially. News must do more than reflect this diversity of communications practice. It must be part of it. The composition of newsrooms must reflect their audiences in terms of their identity but also in terms of the journalists' behavior. Diversity should be seen as a resource, not a moral requirement. Networked Journalism makes this easier as the production process allows greater input from the public. But what skills and qualities will the Networked Journalist need to create a SuperMedia?

One problem is that there is a lack of editorial diversity at a time when we will need it most. Take the actual social make-up of the news media. You

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 149

might think that factors such as the global expansion of Further Education and the ease with which we can all access Internet journalism should mean that the news media would be more varied in its composition than before. Instead, mainstream media threatens to become narrower and fragmented, rather than pluralistic and rich. It is still dominated by relatively small social groups who create quite exclusive cultures. These vary according to the society and news media involved. But the concentration of media practitioners from restricted groups is common in most media markets. In the UK, for example, there has not been a widespread increase in black or Muslim journalists or journalists from outside of a middle-class metropolitan caste. This is despite a concerted effort, by broadcasters in particular, to encourage recruitment from ethnic minorities. These initiatives have been partly offset by other trends such as the growth in journalism studies in Higher Education. The professionalization of journalism tends to exclude non-elite social groups. I have no objection to media studies or journalism training courses as a way of preparing for a news media career. Quite the opposite. But these courses are hugely popular and entry is very competitive and so the problem is that they are likely to discriminate in favor of the best-prepared and socially advantaged. It may also be that it is only middle-class offspring that can afford the initial low wages offered in the entry-level jobs that give access to much of the commercial news media. Their parents will subsidize them while they work for free to gain that vital first experience and contacts. This trend has combined with a growing feeling among young people in minority groups that mainstream media is not for them as a consumer, let alone as a practitioner. It is important that media colleges work even harder to attract a more diverse intake if they are to provide the news media with the diversity of human resources that it needs. However, as always with the news media, it is the industry itself that creates the demand.

Networked Journalism is not the only solution but it offers a way to replace fragmentation with diversification. It offers a chance to replace professional exclusivity with a participatory inclusiveness that might lead to a greater variety among the people who can enter and even run the news media. Networked Journalism can bring the production skills and communication techniques of mainstream news media to online participatory journalism. It is in the self-interest of the news media to employ a variety of people who will connect with the various audiences. In addition, the public's expertise manifested in citizen journalism can help build new creativity and skills in mainstream journalism. With Networked Journalism we can all learn together on the job.

## 150 SuperMedia

What we should learn is how to enhance the increasingly formulaic, unreflective, and uncreative state of contemporary mainstream journalism. As the pace of news accelerates and as editorial budgets tighten, the way news is produced becomes more predictable and less nuanced. Networked Journalism offers greater diversity of content if it is thought through properly and imaginatively. It can provide greater range, depth, and context. What we are striving for here is what I call “Editorial Diversity.” Essentially, this is an openness to engage with new sources, perspectives, and narratives and an ability to use them to create networked journalism. Here is an example that Tom Armitage gave in an article about “Next Media”:

When riots erupted in the French banlieues last autumn, the Swiss newspaper *l'Hebdo* ([www.hebdo.ch](http://www.hebdo.ch)) sent journalists to blog from the epicentre of the disturbances, working out of a microbureau in the town of Bondy. In doing so, they discovered that what makes a blog successful isn't the technology that powers it, or any aspiration to journalism, but the voices that write it.

As a result, *l'Hebdo* changed tactics. It took seven Bondy residents back to Switzerland, gave them a crash course in journalism and blogging and then handed the blog over to them. The resulting *Bondy Blog* ([previon.typepad.com](http://previon.typepad.com)) continues to be a great success, and is still of relevance in the current French political climate. It would not exist without a fusion of old media skills with new media technology and attitude.<sup>4</sup>

This is a good example of a partnership project, there are plenty of others,<sup>5</sup> but the point of Networked Journalism is that this should become increasingly routine. This will sometimes be counter-intuitive for the journalism. As Jeff Jarvis explains, sometimes they must do less to do more:

Try this on as a new rule for newspapers: Cover what you do best. Link to the rest. That's not how newspapers work now. They try to cover everything because they used to have to be all things to all people in their markets. They took wire-service copy and reedited it so they could give their audiences the world. But in the age of the link, this is clearly inefficient and unnecessary. You can link to the stories that someone else did and to the rest of the world. And if you do that, it allows you to reallocate your dwindling resources to what matters. (Jeff Jarvis, *Buzzmachine*)<sup>6</sup>

As Jarvis points out, in an online video age this can also apply to TV news. Applying this principle should allow journalists to do more. To do, as Jarvis says, “what matters.”

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 151

To do more, journalists will have to be better equipped. To provide the kind of value-added analysis or reportage, they will have to “speak” to more sources, not fewer. They will have to be more trustworthy and authoritative in the face of the subjectivity available freely in the Blogosphere. As one historian of journalism has pointed out, this can be seen as a return to the core values of journalism. But now we need to combine good old-fashioned editorial skills with new Networked aptitudes and competences:

Burned-out reporters can be forgiven for dreaming that the coming of this analyzing and appraising [instead of basic fact gathering] will lead to a life of leisurely speculation. But, alas, more industrious reporting, not less, will be required . . . Getting at the meaning of events will demand looking beyond press conferences, escaping the pack, tracking down more knowledgeable sources, spending more time with those who have been affected . . . More and more diverse sources should improve story ideas and stories, and help reporters know more when they say what they know. (Mitchell Stephens, *Columbia Journalism Review*)<sup>7</sup>

This newly liberated editorial resource may be directed towards more local or more specialized coverage. It may also be used to pursue what many mainstream journalists have always claimed as the ultimate in news media endeavor – investigation. When Networked Journalists invest in digging deeper, they can make that go further by sharing the results rather than following their former instincts and try to protect their results. When the British *Guardian* newspaper broke a series of exclusive stories about the UK government’s relationship with the Saudis over a BAE weapons contract, it decided to put the vast amount of data it had acquired online. *The BAE Files* website<sup>8</sup> that it set up goes further than just putting all their published articles and some background features online. It has very clever interactive graphics that allow you to follow this highly complex story. It has wonderful video clips of interviews with key participants. But perhaps most importantly, it also puts a vast amount of links and primary documentation online that will allow other journalists to pursue this story further internationally. It has the potential to reform the whole way investigative journalism works. As the reporter who led the investigation, David Leigh, says, that is important because stories are now global:

We’re trying to think our way towards a new kind of journalism. Everybody says the Internet is a new world with citizen journalism, a global audience and everybody having their say, and we tried to do it that way and say “this is a

## 152 SuperMedia

new kind of journalism and we will put everything in front of everybody.” The thing is all the criminals are global now, the police forces are gradually starting to go global and now the journalists are global as well. We need to catch up. (David Leigh, *The Guardian*)<sup>9</sup>

In the old days Leigh would have written a book about this investigation and it would have gathered dust on library shelves. Instead, the *Guardian* has created a fascinating website which should attract custom. There is no substitute for giving investigative journalists more time and having faith in their ability to get results from digging deeper and researching more widely. But the Internet and other new technology can help. Websites with the crowd-sourcing potential of *The BAE Files* can push the story along by encouraging other journalists or the public to feed back information into their newsroom about this or other similar stories of global corruption.

### 5.1.1 The Wiki principle

Let us have a look in more detail at one famous example of how people have tried to use a New Media device to re-invent journalism. The wiki is clearly very different from “Old media” or mainstream news gathering. It offers facilities for communication that are different in quality and scale to liner media. But as we shall see, new technologies bring problems as well as opportunities in practice.

The wiki principle is most famously enacted in the online encyclopedia of the same name.<sup>10</sup> The idea is that a consensus is reached by open interaction. Normally, an encyclopaedia would commission an expert to write an entry, in much the same way that an Old Media journalist would be expected to report upon an event or fact. That way you get one, usually authoritative, version of reality. The wiki principle takes advantage of software to allow a collective version of reality to be produced. In practice this means that the Wikipedia is unstable because it is constantly being added to and checked. But because enough people are checking and amending, it tends towards a detailed and consensual version. Anyone who posts an extreme view or an inaccurate item is more at risk of having it removed. Tests have indicated that, overall and over time, Wikipedia is not much less accurate than Encyclopaedia Britannica.<sup>11,12</sup> Both make mistakes, but at least Wikipedia’s are quickly correctable. And in return we have this extraordinary online resource for free that has put a colossal amount of information into the public realm in an easily accessed format. I always treat Wikipedia information with caution, but I am very grateful it is there.

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 153

Could this work for journalism? Well, it has already been tried, with at least one unhappy result. Back in June 2005, *The LA Times* famously allowed readers to intervene on the wiki principle with a wiki editorial about the Iraq War. This is how technology correspondent Dan Glaister described what happened next:

By early morning, readers were inserting a tone that was more shrill than the high-minded balance of the original: "The Bush administration should be publicly charged and tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity." At 9am, the editorial was erased by a reader and substituted with another. Bizarrely, the new version echoed the position of the original. By mid-morning, the editorial had been replaced by the more reductive "Fuck USA." By lunchtime, the founder of Wikipedia got in on the act, "forking" the editorial into two pieces, representing opposing viewpoints. "I'm proposing this page as an alternative to what is otherwise inevitable, which is extensive editing of the original to make it neutral . . . which would be fine for Wikipedia, but would not be an editorial," wrote Jimbo Wales, who advised the paper on its experiment. At 4am the paper's managing editor got a call from the office. Explicit images known as "goatses" had appeared on the wikitorial page. The experiment was terminated. (Dan Glaister, *The Guardian*)<sup>13</sup>

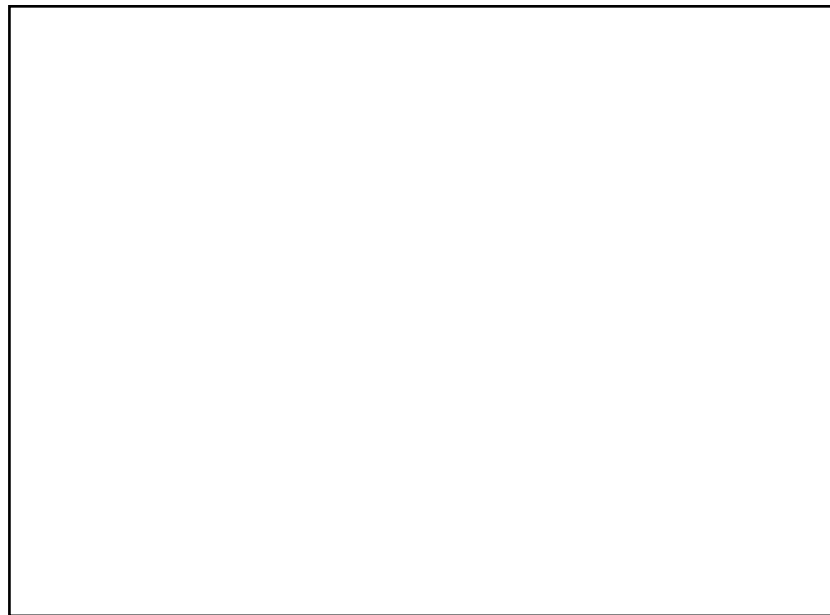
There is also a *Wikinews*<sup>14</sup> website which attempts to enact the *Wikipedia* principle for journalism. At the time of writing it was one of the dullest, least topical, and uninformative news websites I have seen. The Africa section hadn't seen a new story for more than a week. These sites seem to be most useful when there is a very major story such as Hurricane Katrina which generates enough disparate sources of information to make a wiki interesting. It seems to me, though, that both *Wikinews* and the *LA Times* experiment misunderstand how networking can work with the journalism. The *LA Times* attempt made the mistake that using the wisdom of the reader is a one-off exercise. They also assumed that the newspaper should surrender control. Inevitably, both the news organization and the readers themselves will get more proficient, but why try to construct an Op Ed article out of a mass of different voices? In that example, the wiki did not, in itself, contribute to news reporting or analysis. In Networked Journalism it does not matter if the core journalistic functions of reporting, analysis, and commentary are carried out by the "amateur" or the "professional" journalist, but one or more has to be fulfilled. The *LA Times* experiment was perfectly valid as an art work or an online chat room but it was not successful Networked Journalism.

## 154 SuperMedia

I can imagine that a wiki would work well as an attempt to create a community's version of an event. In the case of the Virginia Tech shootings (see Figure 5.1) there is some evidence that this happened to a degree in a spontaneous manner.<sup>15,16</sup> By tapping in to the whole Virginia Tech community it might have been possible to construct a fuller picture of what happened in terms of how each person at the University experienced that day's events. As Dan Gillmor wrote in the wake of the Virginia Tech shootings:

We used to say that journalists write the first draft of history. Not so, not any longer. The people on the ground at these events write the first draft. This is not a worrisome change, not if we are appropriately skeptical and to find sources we trust. We will need to retool media literacy for the new age, too. (Dan Gillmor)<sup>17</sup>

And a wiki could have informed us with an analytical approach to the incident with Virginia Tech students, officials and academics combining to offer their collective understanding of the cause of the killings and of other associated issues such as gun control. Finally, a wiki for Virginia Tech surely would surely have given us moving and involved commentary by those affected.



**Figure 5.1** Caption to follow

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 155

However, this would only have been journalism if it had been through some sort of Networked Journalism phase or function. As Academic Paul Bradshaw says on his wiki about wikis:

Like blogs, wikis will only flourish if as much time and care is invested in them as are invested in editing articles. Weaknesses identified, such as vandalism and inaccuracy can be addressed if web-literate editorial staff are assigned to monitor and facilitate the wiki – to prevent legal issues, to attract A-List contributors and build genuine online communities. (Paul Bradshaw, City University Birmingham)<sup>18</sup>

This should apply to all Networked Journalism. New media can provide shortcuts and new resources but there is no magical way to replace editorial investment. I suspect that wikis are too clumsy and require too much oversight for them to work effectively as vehicles for effective news gathering or dissemination. When an event is topical (*Wikinews*), as opposed to historical (*Wikipedia*), the wiki principle becomes less useful as journalism. But there are other New Media formats apart from wikis which may offer more to journalism.

### 5.1.2 Editorial diversity skills

It is clear that alongside traditional editorial strengths, it will take a whole new skill-set to exploit these new practices. Here's one New Media expert's suggestion of a list of the new competencies that he would expect the next generation of journalists to bring to a job interview:

I'd be looking for one of the trinity: multimedia, interactivity, data.

- Can you code a Flash stage for chaptered Soundslides?
- Can you edit audio, photos, and video into a compelling multimedia presentation?
- Can you manage a community of users?
- Can you moderate comments and forums and reader-contributed stories and photos and video?
- Can you build a maps mashup that feeds itself with data scraped from public records?
- Can you design interactive graphics in Flash?

If the answer to any one of those questions is "Yes," things are looking up, but just *knowing* that you should be able to answer "Yes" to some of these can get you hired these days. (Ryan Sholin, *Invisible Inklings*)<sup>19</sup>

## 156 SuperMedia

Sholin is enough of a journalist to admit that no-one will have all those skills. He stresses that the core ability will still be story-telling. But he is right to characterize these as a mind-set as much as a skill-set. Journalism schools and companies will have to prepare their people for this new working world.

This should make for a kind of journalism that is much better grounded in the real experience of a wide range of opinion. This does not mean that the journalist has to surrender their critical faculties to the “wisdom of the crowd.”<sup>20</sup> One of the key aptitudes that the Networked Journalist will need, akin to that of a social scientist, is how to analyze the data collected. But it will also require the editorial judgment to differentiate between the merely popular and the truly perceptive insights. Good journalism has always been about this. Too often in the past mainstream journalism has acted upon the principle of the lowest common denominator without even bothering to check what that means. In the future, as the easy journalism will be more readily available, the premium will be on the journalism that either adds value or differentiates itself from basic information. As with all good journalism there will be special value accorded to the ability to look in the opposite direction to which the herd is travelling.<sup>21</sup>

One key skill will be adaptability and an open mind. Things will not settle. While journalism struggles to adapt to the opportunities offered by new technologies, visionaries are trying to realize a new way of communicating that supersedes the very binary logic of the current Internet. At present, the Internet works so well because it can micro-process so much data so quickly. It sifts and it links but it does not think intelligently about what you are trying to find out. When we communicate with each other on the Net we do it largely on a telephonic model. What if there was a new public infrastructure that could intuit search or initiate dialogue on your behalf? And what if that function was utilized by journalists?<sup>22,23</sup> Imagine a form of journalistic research that could communicate interactively in an intelligent way with the audience. Imagine if you could ask them for their experiences of an issue and interrogate them about their responses to build up a complex picture of public opinion. It would be like having a million reporters asking questions. As the technology changes so rapidly, the danger is that we don't all have the knowledge and skills to understand how to use it. That is why we need much greater media literacy.

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## 5.2 Media Literacy

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The ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts. (Ofcom, the British broadcasting regulator)<sup>24</sup>

That deceptively basic definition of media literacy is just a starting point for the people who regulate broadcasting in Britain. Indeed, they are the people many think will be involved with regulating the Internet, too. They broaden the definition themselves to include this description:

Media literacy has parallels with traditional literacy; the ability to read and write text. Media literacy is the ability to “read” and “write” audiovisual information rather than text. At its simplest level media literacy is the ability to use a range of media and be able to understand the information received. At a more advanced level it moves from recognising and comprehending information to the higher order critical thinking skills such as questioning, analysing and evaluating that information. This aspect of media literacy is sometimes referred to as “critical viewing” or “critical analysis.”<sup>25</sup>

For Networked Journalists the definition has to be even broader. This is why: Journalism will need more editorial creativity as described above. Much of this will come through the initiative and applied inspiration that has always made for good journalism. This is the magic formula: Competition plus imagination plus investment equals SuperMedia. The global media industry has already made a huge investment in New Media. It needs to do something similar again with Networked Journalism. I hope that the shareholders and stakeholders will see the value of investing in this process. It is a logical progression of the first phase of the move online (see Chapter 1). We can already see that the public is prepared to invest its efforts in Networked Journalism. Citizens have produced vast amounts of journalism for virtually no financial reward. That will continue. But to underpin this there needs to be a deeper change in the way that society as a whole supports Networked Journalism. This is best understood as an investment in media literacy. It is about a lot more than just understanding how the media works. It should also be for everyone, not just media students or mainstream journalists. This has implications for general education as well as specific media studies or professional training.

Media or Journalism Studies should be renamed Media Literacy. Journalism Colleges have to recognize that they are providing the professionals for the

## 158 SuperMedia

Next Media instead of teaching what was known decades ago. This is about more than setting up an online college newspaper. Journalism training should still include writing courses, for example. But in an age of much more informal and conversational communication, journalists should be taught that there are more styles than the often-bizarre formulae of newspaper or TV presenter speak. Entrepreneurship must be part of the process because every journalist will have to be more “business creative.” This is partly because the monetization of content will become more complex. With more diverse or fragmented audiences, the producer will have to spend more time finding or connecting with their consumer. This will become an editorial process as much as a commercial one. Journalism and Business Schools should work more closely together as information becomes more important to the economy and as the economics of the media itself becomes more complex and more connected to other industries.

Media Literacy courses will have to teach about the citizen journalist and how to work with them. They have to teach the principles and practice of Editorial Diversity. Many of the ideas in the previous section require training and preparation. Some of this will be practical, but it will also be ethical. In the past journalists have been reluctant to codify their work too strictly. I think this is a sensible instinct because journalism is about the specific and the challenging. It does not work well under the sort of regulations and guidelines that are required for doctors or teachers. However, there should be much more debate and reflection within the industry. This should be available as part of the editorial diversity training process for all journalists, not just for top managers attending international conferences. And it should be a process of self-criticism that must always include the public, rather than the exclusive gatherings that often characterize the media’s self-meditations. It should not stop when the media student enters the newsroom. In a rapidly changing media environment journalists will have to become more like architects and lawyers and seek regular career enhancement training. They should also be teaching the citizen journalist. If the citizen is going to work as a journalist then it would be useful for them to understand core principles such as accuracy, thoroughness, fairness, transparency, and skepticism.

I have kept repeating throughout this book that, for the Networked Journalist, many of the core journalism skills and values will become more, not less, important. But there will need to be educational attention paid to preparing Networked Journalists for at least three interesting differences when operating online:

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 159

- 1 Creative Commons;
- 2 Freedom of speech; and
- 3 Net neutrality/copyright

### 5.2.1 Creative Commons

The idea of Creative Commons is also a campaign.<sup>26,27</sup> It is the idea that conventional copyright online is a barrier to the very diffusive genius that the Internet brings to communications. Networked Journalists should support this idea and be trained in how to get the most out of the sharing principle. This goes against the grain of mainstream journalists, who depend upon the idea of exclusivity. In practice, though, I do not see that as an issue except with image rights. Networked Journalists will have to become adept at managing limited exclusivity combined with maximum exposure. Journalism is not like most creative industries that need to protect their intellectual property to maximize income. Journalism profits by linking to multiple platforms, as most news organizations have found when being “cannibalized” by news aggregators such as Google News. It does mean that those media organizations which simply replicate facts will suffer. The audience discounts the value of basic information, but it puts a significant premium on the speed, accuracy, and packaging of the delivery.

Some media will remain at one remove. As we discussed in Chapter 1, some news organizations will still charge for access. But even this minority should still seek to be networked in the sense that they will seek to exploit the value of their consumer community. This should go further than the traditional reader survey. *The Financial Times* for example has a fantastic wealth of economic knowledge among its readers that could provide invaluable insight for its journalists. It is in the interest of all media organizations to make their consumers more media literate so they can participate in that process.

### 5.2.2 Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is another principle that the Internet has claimed for itself and which presents a challenge to mainstream journalism. Part of media literacy will be learning how to deal with the rights and responsibilities that come with the greater opportunities for freedom of speech afforded by new technology. Mainstream journalists have found themselves rather shocked at close up and personal contact with the public. The *Guardian*

## 160 SuperMedia

newspaper was one of the first to go big on blogs by its own journalists. Its *Comment Is Free* website has created a global online forum where Guardian staffers and guest bloggers provide a daily diet of opinion. Perhaps because of its minority liberal views (even in the UK the *Guardian* is a small sales broadsheet) it attracts often vituperative responses which journalists find rude and pointless. Veteran political journalist Jackie Ashley's reaction was not untypical:

I've received dozens of emails which say nothing more than, in effect, "you stupid cow, what a lot of rubbish." I really can't see the point of sending abuse, under the cloak of anonymity. It's about as grown up as kids sending each other anonymous notes in class saying "you're fat" or "nobody likes you". What I will say in defence of professional columnists is that most of us have years of experience covering say politics, social policy or international affairs . . . There will always be those who know much more about a subject than a columnist. And equally there will always be those who think they know much more. I'm delighted to hear from both: just so long as you make proper arguments and don't call me a fucking stupid cow. (Jackie Ashley, *The Guardian*)<sup>28</sup>

Even those journalists who run this kind of forum feel disillusioned:

There is a sense that blogging gives us an access that was not there in the past, but some of us are feeling disillusioned in the blogosphere. There can be a sense of Us against Them. A number of bloggers feel their job is to hold Mainstream media to account or to try to undermine our authority. That's a worthy aim as there is a lot of arrogance in journalism. But we were hoping they would give us more insights into subjects we don't know enough about. (Ros Taylor, *Guardian Unlimited*)<sup>29</sup>

This is a universal problem which has led to people like Internet pioneer Tim O'Reilly trying to work out a code of conduct. The man who invented the phrase Web 2.0 is now trying to draw up a blog etiquette.<sup>30</sup> Part of media literacy is surely learning how to conduct oneself in a conversation without resorting to lies and insult. For the Networked Journalist, media literacy is about giving outspoken views a space, without crowding out other shades of opinion. This monitoring and moderating role is something that journalists should be good at. But doing that online requires a calibration of control that preserves open access and vitality, but prevents anarchy.

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 161

### 5.2.3 Net neutrality

Net neutrality is a truly Internet-specific concept. It argues that the World Wide Web is intrinsically egalitarian. Information shared on the Internet should not be corralled by a pricing or access system. Part of media literacy for Networked Journalism is in understanding the value and limits of this ideal. Connectivity thrives in the public sphere of news media when there are the optimum circumstances for communication. Any barrier, tariff, and exclusion of information that happens at a primary level is counter to the free flow of material. In a pragmatic sense, it distorts the market in ideas. In a moral sense, it is politically negative if certain groups of people do not have the same ability to benefit from the Internet as others. However, journalists and the public have to understand that the online world is not unmediated even now. There are already different costs to access the Internet and broadband as well as specific areas or sites. The search function is not neutral, and linking is done in different ways with varying connectivity. For example, if someone links to my blog on an RSS feed, they see my posts, but they may not see the comments. Media literacy is about understanding how to make the maximum connectivity with the minimum bias. Where there are distortions they should be made clear. Networked Journalism has to have the media and Internet literacy to deal with threats to net neutrality, which should be at least the goal, if not the absolute reality, of online news.

### 5.3 Media Literacy in Education

It is clear that the Internet and other digital technologies bring a whole new set of complexities to the nature and processes of journalism. Both public and professionals need to be better equipped. We have already seen how media organizations have to respond. There is also a need for more general media literacy. That can only be achieved in the longer-term through education. It is generally accepted by most governments that modern societies need higher levels of education to cope with the demands of information economies. My argument is that we are still not attending to the vital role of the news media at the heart of those systems. Despite the rapid growth in specialized media studies courses and journalism colleges we are not doing enough to enable the wider population with a broader understanding and skills needed in a networked world.

## 162 SuperMedia

I have made it clear throughout this book that “the Journalist” can be a citizen. Some will be effectively full-time journalists although many won’t give up the day job. But with Networked Journalism we all benefit from greater public media literacy, even if the interaction is marginal or occasional. Public education has to prioritize media literacy so that the people formerly known as the audience are given the skills to understand this Networked Media and to be able to use the range of platforms and structures and processes that it offers. At one level this is about basic literacy. The highly text-based new media technologies depend upon good literacy on the part of the consumer. Anyone who has incorrectly typed an Internet search inquiry realizes that. But beyond that elementary competence, they have a right to be equipped to take part in the news media, either for themselves, their communities, or in networks with journalists. This goes way beyond simply putting PCs in to classrooms. This is a serious transfer of emphasis from a defensive to a positive role. It is a move from teaching media literacy as an understanding of the media to teaching it as a way of participating in the news media. It is also a shift from analytical to ethical. The public should be taught the political and social value of media activity. This should be part of everything from Civics lessons at school to professional enhancement training.

There is a historical problem with improving media literacy through education. The people who should do the teaching are themselves from a pre-Web 2.0 world. There needs to be a radical review of teacher training, not just for media studies but for all communications-related teaching. It is not just technical knowledge that is needed. Teachers need to understand that the way that people learn greater media literacy is very much a personal exploration guided and inspired by the communities involved. In other words, people learn media literacy by doing it. They begin by using the Internet to order their shopping and end up organizing a neighborhood meeting. They begin by uploading their holiday photos and end up posting their own video reports of the School Concert. So the teaching experience has to build on that intuitive applied approach rather than the traditional pedagogical structure of theory, principles, and rules.

One of the more enterprising education authorities is in the “Silicon Glens” of Scotland. The National Advisor on Learning and Technology Futures is Ewan McIntosh. He has created a network for digital educators in Scotland which shares best practice and encourages innovation.<sup>31</sup> McIntosh describes many of those in education as “twenty-first-century illiterates.” He worries that schools can spend more time blocking pupil access to the Internet than they do on promoting digital literacy. Some teacher unions have

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 163

even called for a ban on websites such as *YouTube*. Not only is this a disproportionate reaction, but it also fails to appreciate that social networking is the key to improving digital literacy, not a distraction.

This is not the place for a detailed exposition of the future of media literacy education, but some principles have emerged. Just as the public will in future create more of its own journalism, so the public must create its own media literacy. As McIntosh puts it, the role of the educator changes so that “The teacher is no longer the sage on the stage, but the guide on the side”.<sup>32</sup> There are no rules but he insists that teachers should use the same range of digital media that people have access to in their personal lives:

- Use Blogs – teachers and students have to communicate with the digital media when they are learning how to understand and use it.
- Use Games – they impart vital technical skills and ways of thinking digitally.
- Use Social Networking – it creates networks that are accessible and disseminates the learning.
- Participate – teachers have to do the same stuff as the students to understand it.
- Accept information flux: you are teaching “how to” not “what is.”<sup>33</sup>

These thoughts are not necessarily contradictory to mainstream educational methods. But digital media literacy is still often seen as a separate specialism or a low priority. In fact it is almost as important as basic literacy. It should be part of all learning and underpin everyone’s educational resources. People do show a remarkable ability to create their own digital lifestyles. But if everyone is to benefit from the full economic, social, and political benefits of the new media environment then we should invest in creating a more networked education for a networked world.

### **5.4 Media Literacy in Governance**

To create a more widely media-literate society requires a commitment to use Networked Journalism at the heart of good governance and development. This will not be easy.

From a policy point of view, if these and other new forms of boundary crossing are to grow, funding will have to shift from support for traditional

## 164 SuperMedia

journalism to promoting media literacy. Only in this way can the public become the drivers of the news and their stories. Policy support for this might not be very strong because networked journalism goes against the grain of governments. When openness conflicts with traditional modes of operation, governments become uneasy. Few political systems are predicated upon the need for an informed, let alone, networked, public. (Professor Robin Mansell, Speech to the United Nations General Assembly)<sup>34</sup>

As Professor Mansell says, politicians are not usually eager to encourage a stronger news media. There is a growing desire to promote “e-democracy.” I suspect that this is partly about politicians attempting to cut out the media from their communications with the public. Putting aside that cynicism though, it is true that the public sphere can be strengthened with the resources of new technology. But you cannot have a real increase in participatory politics without more open government. Unless those in authority are prepared to share access to their processes and devolve power then the citizen remains an observer to the machine of governance. For example, there is no point allowing residents of a housing project to set up a website if the views expressed on it have no impact. Real engagement would allow the residents to use their digital connectivity to make their own choices about how to spend a real budget. In that case, the role of the administration is to make sure those choices are well-informed. It has to be open about the relevant data and policy contexts. It is the role of the politicians to act as supporters of the digital debate. And it is the job of the news media to be part of that networked conversation. With Networked Journalism the residents of that housing estate become the citizen journalists that produce a community media that reports, monitors, and debates their digital democracy. The Networked Journalist’s role is to enable and to enhance that discourse, not to replace it. All this takes effort and it takes a real will to educate the citizenry for that networked opportunity. Setting up the technological paraphernalia such as the blogs, the online video, and the facilities for deliberative democratic interaction is the easy part. The real challenge is promoting the media literacy and then not resisting the shift in the political architecture. The journalistic functions remain vital to making that happen.

Any form of participatory project that seeks to build democratic interactivity through digital communications without addressing the role of the (Networked) news media is missing a vital element in building the new public sphere. Policies that encourage the free flow of information and interaction with the public are policies that create an environment in which

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 165

Networked Journalism can flourish. Networked Journalism can be a part of an enhanced public discourse that can contribute to meeting the complex challenges we face. This challenges the classic framework of a media that passes messages from the government to the governed. And so, in a sense, it can seek to address the problems inherent in Lippman and Dewey's debate about an "Informed Society."<sup>35</sup> Previously, there have been two camps. One suggested that the public can make better political decisions if only they were given proper information. The other says that politics is too complicated and that there are limits to the ability of the general public to become significantly involved in running things. Likewise, the two camps disagree about the media. One suggests that if only the media were more intelligent, sensible and responsible then we would have a better informed populace. The other stresses the innate limits of a topical news media with its commercial imperatives and its structural lack of time for reflection, deliberation, and consideration.

The Internet and New Media appeared to some people to offer a way of smashing through this debate. Some Internet evangelicals thought that it might give the people the power to take over the media and government. All politics would be digitally disintermediated. But as we also saw, there is nothing innately democratic about new technology. The Internet can facilitate greater connectivity, but it can also produce more atomization. It can afford greater access to information that the voter needs to make political choices, but it can also fragment the public sphere and make it a less cohesive space for debate. Networked Journalism demands a different role for media literacy that offers a more circumspect, but still progressive hope. It avoids the mechanistic fallacies of the e-democracy activists who are prey to the idea that by putting everything online or by giving everyone a website you inevitably increase political participation. Networked Journalism offers more moderate and complex benefits but they are potentially more significant in the long term. They can only be realized through an investment in media literacy that links a better understanding of communications to an insight in to power.

### 5.4.1 The politics of Networked Journalism

It is at this point that Networked Journalism should be seen as political. I am not insisting that Networked Journalism inevitably has a particular political effect. On the contrary, it is very much what people make of it. But I believe that it has within its dynamics an impulse towards a more connected,

## 166 SuperMedia

understanding, and secure world. A more academic way of looking at it is to say that Networked Journalism offers the chance to put flesh upon the rather complex concept of a “Cosmopolitan” media:

The idea and ideal of cosmopolitanism captures precisely this ethical dimension of mediation as enabling or constraining a particular type of reflexive connectivity towards other people who we are different from but share the same world with. Cosmopolitanism, an ancient old concept first celebrated by the Stoics, is here used to reflect on the performative role of Western media in constituting “our” public space in contra-distinction to “others,” at the moment when they claim to simply represent it. (Professor Lilie Chouliaraki, London School of Economics)<sup>36</sup>

In other words Networked Journalism offers the possibilities of “closing” the distance between people, even on a global scale. It does this not just through the technology of communications, but by a more contextualized reporting that gives voice to the subject. Instead of simply reporting upon “the other” we are able to report “with” people who are separated from us by geography, class, or other social factors. This does not mean that divisions are healed, but at least they can be crossed:

When it comes to portraying distant others, the traditional media often fail us badly. They often do not grant those at a distance their own humanity – they either push them away so that we do not see their humanness, or they bring them so close that we cannot see their distinctiveness. But distant others have to be recognised as – others with humanity. Traditional media are often asymmetrical, dysfunctional and flawed in this respect. Networked journalism provides a basis for optimism that public dialogue may become more hospitable, caring and a just space for all. (Professor Robin Mansell, speech to UN General Assembly)<sup>37</sup>

As Professor Mansell rightly stated in her address to the United Nations, any new media technology is two-faced. It can present negative as well as positive potentialities. But Networked Journalism does at least bring decentralized decision-making, non-hierarchical structures and a greater diversity to bear upon media practice. It puts humanity back at the heart of news communications. This brings with it a greater demand for media. It will be expected to play a bigger role in our social interactions. As it becomes a larger part of people’s lives it will acquire greater power. And with that power come responsibility. “Responsibility” is a word I have generally shied away from

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 167

in this book because I think there are good justifications for Networked Journalism, apart from any moral plea or injunction. Now is the time to consider the ethics.

In the past, journalists have tended to see the politics of their work as a proxy for non-media politics. Partisan journalists like John Pilger<sup>38,39</sup> or P.J. O'Rourke<sup>40,41</sup> have tended to concentrate on their journalism as a form of persuasion or revelation that serves political ends. This is an admirable form of mainstream media that adds ideological richness to the flow of news mediation. However, it does not, in itself, change the relationship of the consumer or the subject with the mediator. Networked Journalism can do that. Unlike past versions of the "journalism of attachment"<sup>42</sup> or "committed" journalism, Networked Journalism does not place the moral compass solely in the hand of the journalist. But it does ask the journalist to consider the ethical context of what they do and the way they do it. This is not some soul-searching plea for moral virtue, self-sacrifice or altruism. It is instead an insistence that the politics of connectivity should inform the journalistic framing of an event or issue. This process subtly shifts the nature of journalism from being essentially a representation of a spectacle to a process of connectivity. Good journalism has always sought to be more than "artificial eyes" as it seeks to explain and empathize. But should it be in the business of advocating or even providing "artificial hands"? Networked Journalism has the ability to communicate human problems in a way that offers possibilities beyond reportage and analysis. Networked Journalism stresses empathy and implies political actions, but as the starting point, not the by-product, of reportage. By placing the consumer or co-producer within the process, instead of at the end of it, you bring the viewer into connectivity. By enabling the subject to be part of the process through interactivity and media literacy you likewise bring them in to connectivity. For me this is the best moral potential of journalism. With Networked Journalism that ethical outcome is a product of the way it works. Any more is pure politics.

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### 5.5 Conclusion

This is how SuperMedia can save the world. It does not have the answer to a problem like Climate Change. But it will address the issue in a way that offers a networked understanding and the possibility of engagement. The public needs to understand but also to be involved. If the world is to deal with global warming then solutions will only be found both by international

## 168 SuperMedia

consensus and by a popular acceptance that individual lifestyles must change. Barring some technological feat of magic, we as citizens will need to have more knowledge and more power to reduce carbon emissions. For any policy to work, it must engage individuals to act in a coherent manner. For example, people will have to be motivated by empathy with those who suffer from the consequences of global warming. They also have to be empowered to influence those with the means to change policy. I am not arguing that the news media has to act as a propaganda machine for the Green movement. If anything, the record of Environmentalists in the past for exploiting the media actually suggests we should be as skeptical of their claims as that of business or government. But a Networked Media offers the public a chance to be more than simply informed. By increasing the dialogue between public and power it can facilitate change. In the end, it is about turning media literacy into political literacy. This is what Professor Roger Silverstone meant by his idea of a “Mediapolis.”<sup>43</sup> The “Mediapolis” is not a utopian place or project but instead a very realistic attempt to conceive of and practice journalism. It insists on the possibility of media as part of change. To be able to do this Networked Journalism must strengthen virtual or digital relationships. It can allow us to:

understand connectivity in an increasingly networked age, and what the moral and ethical consequences of this particular but core dimension of mediation are. (Professor Roger Silverstone)<sup>44</sup>

Media literacy, in the deeper sense that I have tried to outline here is about helping to build that connectivity. That is why I repeat that Networked Journalism will not emerge without a real understanding of its implications and potential. It is not just another label for New Media. It will require investment, imagination, and innovation.

At present, Networked Journalism is still a novel concept, which may explain the pressing need for much more research and support for innovation. The state of the industry; the training and education of the professionals; the social possibilities; the political potential of this new kind of journalism; all these are barely being monitored, let alone investigated and researched with serious institutional backing. It will require a coalition of the media business, the public media sector, education, and government to address this deficit. POLIS,<sup>45</sup> the think-tank I lead, is an attempt to galvanize this sort of activity by bringing international journalism and society together to research and debate the possibilities of journalism.

## Editorial Diversity and Media Literacy 169

I do not want to overstate the deterministic case for Networked Journalism. Even if we are able to achieve the kind of news media I desire, there are no guarantees that it will secure us a happier, safer, or richer world. I am also asking quite a lot of society in terms of investment and effort to create Networked Journalism without a certain reward. But I do believe that the business case, the public policy case, and the social case for Networked Journalism are irresistible. In themselves these arguments are good enough reasons to want to make Networked Media Literacy a reality.

The future will be different again. Any forecast beyond five years is of very limited value, which is why I have not made one. Networked Journalism is not a one-off solution or a prediction. It is a new way of sustaining journalism and its public role in a way that combines old virtues with new potentialities. As we move forward, the landscape will continue to change beneath our feet. Already many of the advantages of new media technology are taken for granted by the present younger generation. That is good, because it means we can move beyond the utopian/dystopian dialogue to a more pragmatic but bold agenda. We can be less starry-eyed about the gadgets and more earnest and ambitious about the practice. We can learn that the pace of change will move at different speeds. It seems that mobile TV is being taken up far less quickly than was thought less than a year ago. Online video is proving hugely popular but in a much less sophisticated way than many providers thought. Convergence is increasingly possible and yet the move from PC to TV or even TV to PC has not happened yet. Interestingly, the conventional blog is now seen as something for older people rather than the revolutionary format that it styled itself just a decade ago. The possibility of a "Semantic" web that has intelligent search functions promises to open up another dimension to online communication and connectivity. Yet whatever platform it takes, Networked Journalism must retain a sense of its principles.

This book has attempted to describe what Networked Journalism should be, but I am more interested in the dynamics than the details. I am more excited by the potential than prescriptions. My hope is to achieve what the late Professor Roger Silverstone wanted from a forum for the research and debate into journalism and society:

There has to be a way to consider the issues: to till the ground perhaps, so that it becomes more fertile and so that the seeds of political action and professional judgement have greater likelihood of germinating. (Professor Roger Silverstone)<sup>46</sup>

## 170 SuperMedia

I have outlined the threats to journalism. But I want to end on a sense of the possibilities. This is the most wonderful time to be a journalist. It is also the most opportune time for a citizen who thinks that the news media should be a positive part of their world. No more a mirror, we the media are now a SuperMedia network.

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### Chapter Summary

- We need more journalism but it must add social and editorial value.
  - Networked Journalists should reflect the diversity of the make-up and behavior of their audience.
  - Networked Journalists need to use more diverse and creative editorial techniques to build connectivity.
  - The public will add extra diversity and editorial value.
  - Media studies must become a Networked Journalism thought leadership program.
  - Media Studies must include business studies and the public.
  - Media Studies must address core issues such as Creative Commons, Freedom of Expression and Net Neutrality.
  - Media Studies in education must become a positive empowerment program.
  - Media Studies in governance must become part of all democratization projects.
  - Higher Education and social research funders need to take research into the news media and Networked Journalism much more seriously.
  - Networked Journalism is a way of creating a more cosmopolitan mediapolis.
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