

Why Journalism Matters

A Media Standards Trust series

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Thank you for that. Can I just say to anybody with a mobile phone... sorry, that's my mobile phone joke tonight for anyone who might be listening. It's nice to be out – the only time newspaper editors are ever asked out now is either to give lectures or appear before select committees.

George Bernard Shaw had my favourite saying on editors - he said 'Lighthouse keepers with wireless sets know far more of what is going on in the world than editors.' 'A daily paper should have at least 3 editors, each one having one day on and two days off. At present the papers are twenty years behind the times because the editors are recluses.' I recently went to see *Der Spiegel* and was amazed to find they operate on exactly that principle. They have two editors, one week on, one week off, which sounds like a fantastic idea. Liz Forgan might... no?

Anyway, I'm not here to speak about mobile phones, but I'm here to talk about why journalism matters. And as Lionel Barber said last week, I think until a few years ago it would be extraordinary that we would all feel it necessary to gather in a room and ask ourselves that question; we'd have just taken it for granted. But now everything is up for questioning – the economic basis of what we do, the technical means of delivering what we do, the media in which we do it (whether it's simply text or other forms of media), who does it, and perhaps the biggest question of all: what it is. And I think you can't really speak about why journalism matters without asking what journalism is.

So tonight I've broken this down into four sections:

- The first is to just look at three examples of things that are happening (digitally) which I think illustrate this shifting nature of what journalism is – this question of who is a “journalist” and what this act of “journalism” is.
- Secondly I want to look at some examples of what we've been doing on *The Guardian*, and how we're developing an idea of journalism which I think has some richness and merit in it.
- Thirdly I'm going to ask where that leaves conventional journalism.

- And fourthly I'm going to ask – because we wouldn't be here unless we had agreed that journalism did matter – how much it really matters, and whether it matters enough.

1. It's digital... but is it journalism?

So starting with these digital experiments and this question of what journalism is, I want to start with potholes, because potholes are the absolute staple of local newspapers. This is a modern pothole because it's on a digital website - my original copy was of a man pointing at a pothole. You see every week in every local newspaper, and this is how news used to be done. Presumably it begins with a man bringing out a newspaper – it becomes rather expensive at that point, because the newspaper sends out a reporter and a photographer to take a picture of a pothole and publish it, and after that readers lose interest in the pothole and you have no idea whether anything ever happened to that pothole, because you move on to the next pothole.

So it's quite an expensive process, there's not much empathy involved in it. And I think it's been replaced by the slightly bolder FixMyStreet website, which is part of the MySociety network of websites, which as far as I can see is produced by four people who almost literally don't make any money out of it at all. And this is a terribly simple idea - you put in your postcode, you report the problem and you can type in EC1R 3ER (which was *The Guardian's* old postcode) and that's all the potholes around the old *Guardian* offices which apparently need repairing. And there are cycle lanes that are obstructed, there's a huge pothole by the traffic lights, water leak dripping down, light failure. And that to me is essentially what the local newspaper is, or was. It's reporting all the problems in that area, it's fantastically searchable. If you go down - it lists 'nearby potholes'. But something interesting is happening at this point because there, on the screen, it says 'fixed'; so what's happening there is that the local council – which is either Islington or Camden depending on which side of the street it is – is monitoring that site and fixing it, and as they're fixing it, they're going back and telling the people who reported it.

So it's something which is much more responsive – there is a direct transaction there between the person (the citizen) and the council, it's obviously hugely cheaper than sending out a reporter and a photographer. And I don't know if that's journalism or not. I don't know if that matters; it's arguably better than what a local newspaper does, but it seems to be exactly what a local newspaper does.

The next example is parliamentary reporting, and again that is what used to happen – that's a page from *The Times*, from 1976 – I guess it was chosen at random. Today I was thinking when I joined *The Guardian* in 1979 it was still going then. I'm expecting the younger members of the audience to gasp when they see that because it is

extraordinary to think that *The Times* had this enormous, expensive reporting staff of people who sat in the parliamentary gallery. I think George Brock could confirm whether *The Times* had its own printing-press – the hot metal machines – down in parliament, to actually typeset this stuff [George Brock calls out, ‘I think that’s a myth’]. Anyway, it’s absolutely awesome and wonderful in its way, and of course, over time, there has become less and less and less of that.

And most of you know about this site, They Work For You, which is essentially what has replaced this or will replace it – it’s a fantastic database of parliament and MPs. Again, you can search your local MP, you can search by subject, you can find out who he/she is, what they’ve been doing, their voting record, their expenses. You can make direct contact with them; you can set alerts about highly personalized information about any subject or person that you’re chasing. And it seems to be, again in some respects, better than what went before; not in all respects. It is almost entirely automated and so it incredibly cheap - and I don’t know if that’s journalism or whether it matters.

And the third thing is data. And what used to happen is that newspapers were the gatekeepers of data and official information; all that was used to pass on a filtered version of what we considered important. And what happens now is sites like this, in America, EveryBlock - by a man called Adrian Holovaty, who was of the *Washington Post* and is working on this interesting project where he’s just getting hold of all the data that he can put, and essentially laying it on maps. So, to start with crime, you can drill down into every neighbourhood, you can get every ward block, you can get every crime that has occurred, you can put that on a map. There’s a clever trick he does which is: you can essentially map your route to work, if you walk to work; you can put the time you need to be at work; and map your route; and you can work out how many crimes there are along that route, and you can work out the safest part of the day to walk along that route. You can make it highly personalized in the information, and the way you can use that information, and he’s putting every piece of information that he can put on it. And again, you can absolutely personalize that in order to make your own menu of what you want to know. It’s a formidable amount of information, formidably useful. I don’t know if that’s journalism, or whether that matters, but I think it’s fantastically interesting and exciting.

So I think those are all three examples of changes, in how information is organized, personalized, ordered, stored, searched for, published, and shared. I think it’s got many things in common with conventional journalism. It’s dealing with facts, with statistics, with information about public life, politics and services. And it can be mashed up in lots of interesting ways with non-factual information and comment - so you can put it together like a newspaper, with a separation of data and information and comment. It’s much more personalized than a newspaper – some people would say it was more useful than a newspaper, others would vigorously contest that. But I think it’s futile to deny

that something really interesting and exciting, which absolutely touches on, but challenges, what we would consider to be professional journalism, is going on there.

2. The future is mutual

Right, we can move on from that to four examples that I've been talking about recently in *The Guardian* and, for want of a better phrase, I've come up with the notion of a mutualised newspaper.

And I got Andrzej Krauze, the wonderful *Guardian* illustrator, to draw what I'd thought of in the past as the newspaper world that I joined, which was really all journalists sitting behind a metaphorically very high wall, and lobbing out stuff over the wall in a rather unguided way at people, hitting some of them, missing others. And I've always sensed it was like firing mortars - in that you fired the paper over the wall, you waited for any incoming, and then you got on with the same thing all over again. And I sense this is fundamentally changing, and that the younger journalists are trying to take down these walls and have a completely different sort of relationship with the reader, without those high walls at all. And if I'm right, then I think this gets over this rather tiresome debate about whether reporters are poor little creatures, and those ghastly bloggers are all morons and idiots, or whether the mainstream media are dead and these are the guys who are going to take over the world.

But I think these are – what I'm going to describe – four things in which we are essentially working together, and they are: tax avoidance, the death of Ian Tomlinson, Twitter and Comment is Free. These are all tags from new media theses, the titles, that will be familiar to some of you.

Tax Gap: 'They know more than we do'

So the tax gap was an attempt – after Tesco (and thank you for reminding me of that) - to look at some of the biggest organizations in Britain, and who was paying tax and who was not; a fantastically complicated subject. And it was literally a subject where you start within a newspaper from a position of very little knowledge. And we built into this process - it was about three months, a highly conventional piece of news investigation done by people who took a tremendously complicated subject, and boiled it down into a form in which people could have some idea of what was going on; it was the most complex subject I've had to try to get my head round, because essentially it's a bit like complex financial derivatives, where the only people who can actually understand this well are the people who write these schemes – but we did build all kinds of responsive mechanisms into this, so that we thought if we're right, if we've struck a vein, people will come back with interesting things.

And that absolutely turned out to be true, culminating in these documents which were sent to us, the *Sunday Times* and the Lib Dems. I hope you can't read them on the screen because it's illegal to read them. And these were astonishing documents because no one had ever seen documents like this. This was Barclays bank, probably the biggest legal tax avoidance in the FTSE 100. And this was them working out, with all track-changes, the story of how they could construct tax-avoidance vehicles, and the story that they would tell HMRC. So no one in the outside world had hoped to see a document like this before – fantastically interesting.

And this came at the end of our series, so we sort of scrapped our next one. We'd already spent an awful lot of money legalling every single thing up to that point. And we sort of looked at this and we thought, 'we have no idea what this means', so we can either spend thousands more looking at this because it's so complex, and some journalists looked at this and said it's really boring. So I said, 'look, why don't we just stick them up on the web?' And I told this to the journo body, and some of them actually fainted; the journalists said 'no, no that's not what journalists do!', but I thought let's just stick them up on the web and see what happens.

And of course what happened was that this man, Mr Justice Blake, got woken up at one o'clock in morning by some sharp-eyed lawyers for Barclays who were still awake in New York and succeeded in getting an injunction – lots of journalists in the audience will know how that's done, they're known as pyjama injunctions. So here was Mr. Justice Blake in his pyjamas weighing up this difficult notion, the rather erudite Blake. And somebody by this stage had put [the documents] onto this Wikileaks site, which is this indestructible site which no one has yet worked out how to get at, and which led to an arcane discussion at the High Court about whether the fact that it was sitting on Wikileaks and it could be read by the entire world counted as publication. Mr. Justice Blake came to the conclusion that if nobody mentioned Wikileaks, no matter that everyone was Twittering the details, we could keep the secret, as if it hadn't been published. And then it's only because the noble Lord Oakeshott stood up in the House of Lords and actually mentioned Wikileaks that I could tell you that all this stuff happened.

And of course what happened then was having that published in the paper, what happened then was that in the next budget all those loopholes were closed. In terms of public service, a newspaper doing what it's supposed to do, and instant reaction - it was a pretty good example. But we absolutely couldn't have done it ourselves.

Crowdsourcing

Second example, crowdsourcing. I think you're all familiar with the story: it began with some *Guardian* reporters anxious about the tone of the way that the police were talking

about [the G20 protests] in advance. They went out and talked to all the protesters, rather than just accepting this narrative that this was going to be a very violent event. And then what happened was that they made use of conventional reporting. And by reporter, I mean Paul Lewis on *The Guardian*. Now on the day of the event he was virtually the only person who actually highlighted the death of Ian Tomlinson, and we started asking questions about the policing of this event. The quickest response was: [Telegraph: ‘Man dies after being “caught among the mob”’, Times: ‘Man who died in G20 protest “was just returning from work”’, Mirror: ‘Police: G20 victim had a heart attack’], and that is how it was reported mostly in the other papers.

But Paul Lewis just kept plugging away. He went down to the scene, he retraced the steps, he drew maps, he tried to work out the timings of it all, and he kept publishing stories that week. And of course what happened next was that we wake up to the modern notion of “crowd”. And every one of those little pink triangles is a camera. So there are thousands of reporters in any crowd nowadays. And all those people started searching through their cameras and their digital records of what happened that day. And eventually a hedge fund manager in New York (I’m guessing he wasn’t a natural *Guardian* reader but he may have been) got in touch with Paul Lewis – not with the police, not with the IPCC, but with a mainstream media organisation whom we’re supposed not to trust anymore – and said, ‘I think I have captured the moment at which Ian Tomlinson was attacked’. And we put that up on our website, and strangely the next thing that happened was that the IPCC, the regulator, came round to the *Guardian* office and asked us to take it down. So the hedge fund manager was right to take it to *The Guardian*, and not the regulator who had shown little interest in this event up to that point.

So again, it was a piece of conventional reporting that made use of tapping into the resources of a crowd and piecing that together, and in both these examples so far, that kind of digital activity is happening. There are plenty of bloggers writing about tax avoidance who have, over the years, had some effect but not very many. And there’s nothing to stop you indeed if you were to publish these [G20] pictures, but it needed the amplification of a mainstream news organization in order to have that cut through and impact.

What I like about this is that it takes *The Guardian* right back to its foundation at Peterloo, because the story of *The Guardian* is that a man called John Edward Taylor was in the crowd that day. He thought: this is an attack on people who are making a peaceful protest, the story of this needs to be told before the magistrates get their version of events out. *The Times* reporter who was there too had presumably been locked up, and so John Edward Taylor got his account on the carriage to London that night, and was published in the London papers. And he then thought ‘well, actually, why don’t I start a

newspaper?', and that's how *The Guardian* was started. So there's a direct link between that act of reporting and what Paul Lewis was doing there.

Twitter: 'Here comes everybody'

Third example is Twitter, and Clay Shirky's line 'here comes everybody'.

When Twitter started, I confess I made a classic mistake – I told all our reporters not to sign up. For years I've been saying to them now, don't think of *The Times*, *The Independent*, the *Telegraph* as our main competitors because perhaps they are in print, but there's a whole big world out there of things that may not strike you as news organizations [such as Google, YouTube, Facebook] or touching our business but absolutely are, and all these things I think absolutely impact on what we do, and are – in the same ways as those three early examples [Google, YouTube, Facebook] – doing much the same things as we do in different ways. But I didn't get Twitter, and I thought, at some point, you're too old to keep up with all this stuff and Twitter just seemed silly, and I haven't got time to add Twitter to all these other things.

Of course that was completely wrong. And the thing to do, I've discovered, in what we do, is to look what the technology journalists do, because they are obviously paid to keep abreast of this stuff. That is Jemima Kiss, who is our technology correspondent, who may even be in labour as we speak (if she is she may actually be Twittering it). That's her number of followers – she has 13,000 people following her, which I think is a remarkable figure.

There was a man about five years or more ago called Walt Mossberg who was the technology correspondent of the *Wall Street Journal*, who was the first journalist to break free from his newspaper and say 'my brand is as big as the newspaper brand'. And we all thought that was tremendously interesting, so he set up on Twitter, and he's only 400 (followers) ahead of Jemima as we speak.

if you ask Jemima how she uses Twitter, the first thing she says is it's a 'technical brains trust' – so literally, as she's writing pieces, she's using those 13,000 people and saying 'I'm writing about this – who knows about this and who can direct me or who can help me with this thing that you know more about than I do'. She says 'it's an intelligent, personalized, human search, and it's incredibly valuable'. She says it's 'the best audience'. She's got 'a core of very knowledgeable and constructive commenters on... posts'. She says it's different from when you have audiences elsewhere digitally. These are people who are not anonymous generally – they've chosen to be there. If she doesn't like them she can block them. It's a good audience in that sense.

It's replacing RSS for some people – it's 'often the first place I hear about breaking news', it's like a personalized wire service. It's about establishing and feeding relationships – 'I'm fairly uninhibited in posting some personal stuff, pregnancy, grumpiness, bad jokes, arguments with estate agents and the like... Unintentionally I think this is a pretty good way of breaking down some of those perceptions of journalists being arrogant, detached, untrustworthy, and generally not very human'. So if you think of that picture of the journalists on the other side of the wall – what Jemima is doing is taking that wall down and saying 'actually, I'm like you, I have these skills, you have those skills; I have this knowledge, you have that knowledge; let's put something together here', which is very interesting. So she uses the audience to help her write pieces; when she's written them she markets them (she Tweets when she's written them); which brings the audience back into the piece.

She is part of the *Guardian* technology unit. When I first started looking at this, the *Guardian* technology unit (@guardiantech) – it's a rather grand name for about three people who are our technology pod, with some additional freelancers – that, two months ago, had 692,000 followers – that's double the circulation of *The Guardian*. I checked today to see what that figure was: it's now got 917,000. I'm just talking about journalism today, but if you're asking about the economic future of newspapers, I think that's a highly interesting figure. Nearly a million people have elected to follow *The Guardian's* technology coverage, they've voluntarily arrived at that point, and I think that's probably the most interesting statistical development there's been.

How do they use it? Well, here's one example: on April 20th Oracle had just bought Sun, and somebody said, 'well, wouldn't it be interesting to know about all these transactions involving Oracle and Sun?'. And so they posted a Google document, and two hours later the work had been done for them. All that information was pasted in, was done by, those [Twitter] followers who just went in and put in all the information. The next day the *Wall Street Journal* did the same exercise. (I should say they checked all the information before they published it, but it was all generated by the followers on Twitter.) So the *Wall Street Journal* did exactly the same exercise, and they were identical tables.

That was how we reported the G20 on Twitter, and that was Paul Lewis's personal feed on the day, which ended just before midnight with the 'protester dying'. And that was how he used Twitter during the week after. So, he was, as well as writing about it, he was going to this audience of people who weren't necessarily *Guardian* readers and saying 'here I am, I'm a reporter, I'm addressing this', and bringing people back into the newspaper to see what was going on.

This argument about, 'yeah' but I haven't got time to read it' – if you're interested in the future of newspapers, then follow those four people [[@cshirky](#) [@niemanlab](#) [@jeffjarvis](#)

@amonck]: they'll all tell you more or less all you need to know about the future of newspapers. They're all slightly obsessive about it; they're all very modern. By the time I get up they have scoured the world's press – in the past I would have paid £50,000 for a consultant to do that work for me. But here it's all organized and free by the time I'm up for breakfast.

So I'm trying to get everybody to Twitter on *The Guardian*. I told this to an audience of journalists in Norway, and they said: do you, personally, as editor-in-chief, do you edit all these Tweets before they go out? And I said no, they just Tweet. And they said that would never happen in Norway because the editor-in-chief would have to pass everything/. And there will be a disaster one day – somebody will Tweet something stupid and we'll all have a sort of gigantic inquest – but meanwhile, I think it's an incredibly liberating, personalized experience of communication between the reporter and communities within the larger organization online.

Comment is Free: 'The wisdom of crowds'

And the fourth one, probably the most familiar one, is Comment is Free. We all know what the traditional model of comment is on a newspaper – think of the *New York Times* and you think of Paul Krugman, Maureen Dowd, Frank Rich and Tom Friedman and they're all wonderful columnists, and we would all like to have them on our newspapers. But if it's foreign affairs, you're probably going to get Tom Friedman or Roger Cohen, so whether its Venezuela or Mexico or China or Russia or Africa or the Middle East, you're going to get Tom Friedman or Roger Cohen's views on that. And a couple of years ago we just decided to invert that model: we all emptied our address books, and said, 'that can't be right that these are the only people who are worth listening to on these subjects'. There are all these people who are fantastically knowledgeable, know far more than we do on these individual subjects, and if we put all these people together and give them a platform, you're going to have something incredibly interesting and rich. And we now publish about 230 pieces a week on there, with 85,000 comments, and traffic going up to virtually 9.1 million page views.

And there are some incredibly interesting things happening, like that atheist bus thing that started on Comment is Free with somebody trying to raise £7000 for a big poster on the side of a bus questioning if God existed. But within 72 hours she'd raised £170,000, and there were lots of buses going around Britain.

There are lots of examples now – there was the 'Message for Obama', where we asked people to come up with strong visual messages, not on our platform but through Flickr, and a lot of people came back in to the paper, and we're publishing that as a book.

And there's Stephen Fry's letter to himself – the sixteen year old Stephen Fry, where he was giving himself advice as a child. And what happened was that people started, for about the first 20 posts they were perfectly unremarkable pieces around this – and then somebody wrote a letter to himself at 16, or wrote a letter to herself, and we got these remarkably frank outpourings of really wonderful content, which again I think we should – we will – publish as a book.

We did it again with politics, with us kicking off this debate about how politics should look, getting huge response on the individual threads and putting that back into the paper, doing a mass poll, and lots of other examples. We've put up an open strategy where anyone can now take any of our content and do anything with it, and some people do odd things like analysing all the swear words used in *The Guardian* and others do interesting things like that.

So what I like about this idea of 'mutualised' news organizations is that it gets over this 'us against them', and 'us and them'. They couldn't do some of this stuff without us; we couldn't do most of it without them. It is blurring the line between journalist and reader. It is breaking down the perception of the distant journalist on the inside of power, which is how I think people still think of a lot of journalists. If it works, it should build trust, because people are participating in it. It's building communities of shared interest, which includes economic interest as well as journalistic interest. It's much more diverse and plural than a conventional newspaper. And it gives you – in an age where newspapers are going to be strapped for cash in terms of their own resource – it gives you this huge external resource, which I think is going to be an incredibly interesting thing, especially as I come to talk about revenue models.

So that just gives the second part of this picture of what journalism is becoming, and how you define journalism.

3. Goodbye to all this?

What does that mean for conventional journalism? Does that mean that conventional journalism is gone? Well I don't think that. I think what I'm trying to suggest is that this pairing of 'what we do' and 'what they do' is the interesting thing – and I think there are many things that mainstream media (though we all hate that phrase) and trained journalists do which, in collaboration with others or on their own, are still really important. You mentioned 6 things this morning that Lionel [Barber] was talking about last week. Here are some of my own:

Amplify – I think this ability to take a large audience and amplify what people are saying, is what gives journalism so much of its power and influence when exposing information

to the widest possible view, and giving more weight to what otherwise would be fragments and fragmented views.

Report – there can be no argument about this point, about the importance of reporting, of quick, knowledgeable, accurate, medial, comprehensible, trustworthy reporting: all the things that journalists are trained to do, and which I still think are absolutely needed to make sense of an ever-more complex world. And I absolutely emphasise the word ‘trust’ which I think will matter even more with ease of publication and as barriers of entry are lowered so that anybody can come in: the importance of verification, of operating to high ethical standards, of correction, clarification; all these things have become more important. There will always be more expert people out there, but I think they will still need us as intermediaries. Thinking of some of examples, of things like climate change and complex financial derivatives (the reporting of which is Robert Peston’s job) – these are things that are not easily graspable or comprehensible without the skills of really knowledgeable and able journalists who can explain it.

Aggregate – again, this coming together of these isolated, fragmented pictures. I’ve described lots of things that are searchable and personalised all of which are fantastically useful. But somebody has to have the job of pulling this all together into a picture that mirrors society at large and giving it a context, never mind taking the time.

Defend – I got this from John Lloyd at the Reuters Institute in Oxford, because I once heard him talking about the solidity that the news organization brings to the work of reporting. A news organization standing behind the use of reporting is a tremendously important thing. We can all think, the journalists in the audience, of examples where you’ll be faced with push-back on a story you’ll be doing, whether it’s from a large corporation, government or a local council. I can think of examples abroad – what’s been happening in Russia, what’s going to happen in Italy – where you need the solidity of a large media organization behind you in order to defend reporting.

Challenging & campaigning – I think it’s one of the accepted pieces of wisdom in the world today to say we’d all feel powerless in our lives if we were utterly unable to influence the forces that control our lives. And I think the mainstream media gives individuals the power to challenge and change things in a way that they feel they don’t have through other conventional ways – including conventional politics.

Describe - like Amelia Gentleman’s *Guardian* piece about what it’s like to live in an old people’s home – a remarkable piece of taking the audience behind a closed world. She sat there for a week and just described what she saw. I think that is an incredibly powerful role.

Prioritising – again, we’ve heard a lot earlier this evening about people making their own judgements about what they consider important, and that’s one level of the spectrum in which I think of the *New York Times* – i.e. of coming together in that it’s a bit like a religious ceremony, as they sit there and try to think which stories are worthy of being on the front page of the *New York Times*, and what is the exact order in which they will be prioritised. And that is the *New York Times* imposing its sensibility on the world, and saying these are the things that we consider important.

Comment – needs no comment.

Finance – again we all know what we’re talking about there. In *Guardian* terms, some of the big pieces that we’ve done over the last year – Ian Cobain’s work on torture; David Leigh’s work on British Aerospace; Felicity Lawrence’s work on food production; and all that work on tax avoidance. All these are very long, painstaking and expensive pieces of work, which by and large are not going to be handled without mainstream organizations

So I think, having begun by describing these other forms of journalism, I think – I hope – [this] just emphasises not only the role the media plays, but what we do. We should never forget that, anymore than we should blind ourselves to the incredible opportunities opening up to people – who don’t call themselves journalists – to contribute their knowledge and expertise and opinions.

But that final word ‘finance’ takes me onto this final stretch which is really trying to imagine the situation which I think we’re all facing at the moment of standing on a precipice and trying to imagine what will happen if the finance runs out. How would that change – not journalism – but how will that change the world? And I think the short answer is that without the news and journalism there’s going to be more corruption, muddled inefficiency – but let’s just stick with corruption for a while.

4. Why Journalism Matters

Some of you will have read a rather wonderful essay by Paul Starr in the March 5th edition of the *New Republic*:

One danger of reduced news coverage is to the integrity of government. It is not just a speculative proposition that corruption is more likely to flourish when those in power have less reason to fear exposure.

And he quotes a lot of convincing academic research that makes the correlation between corruption and free circulation of daily news and newspapers in society. The correlation is as follows:

Controlling for economic development, type of legal system, and other factors, they find a very strong association: the lower the free circulation of newspapers in a country, the higher it stands on the corruption index.

And there's this passage:

News coverage is not all that newspapers have given us. They have lent the public a powerful means of leverage over the state, and this leverage is now at risk. If we take seriously the notion of newspapers as a fourth estate or a fourth branch of government, the end of the age of newspapers implies a change in our political system itself. Newspapers have helped to control corrupt tendencies in both government and business. If we are to avoid a new era of corruption, we are going to have to summon that power in other ways. Our new technologies do not retire our old responsibilities.

So there is a very distinguished Princeton academic envisaging what is happening with the wrecking of American news media, and the likely consequences.

But nearer to home – well, we know that this deadly combination of recession, technology, falling circulations and disappearing advertising is hitting first regional and local press and broadcasting. I'm going to be completely gloomy about this, because I tried to indicate earlier that I think there are fantastically optimistic things happening – in terms of local digital communities, in ways I've sketched earlier – and I think they're all going to have a powerful role to play. But similarly this bit of journalism, I've just described, is going to have to be done by someone, and bloggers have other lives (most of them) and they can't replicate the work of covering power on a systematic basis that needs to be done. And that makes me worried about all those public authorities and courts, which will in future operate without any kind of systematic public scrutiny. I don't think our legislators have begun to wake up to this problem, I don't think they've begun to wake up to what's happened.

How big is the gap? Well I've emailed Paul Horrocks, the veteran editor of the *Manchester Evening News*, because it's a long time since I've worked on a local newspaper, and I said, 'just tell me, Paul, what's on your newlist? What are the authorities that you as a newspaper still cover?'. So he said to me these are the ones in Manchester that we cover:

- General Medical Council
- General Dental Council
- Police Authority (various committees)
- Fire Authority
- AGMA – Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (replaced the GMC)

- GMITA (the former GMPTA) – transport
- NWDA publications (no public meetings) - North West Development Agency
- Strategic Health Authority
- Meetings of the Main hospital trusts such as Pennine, Children’s hospital, South Manchester
- All of Greater Manchester’s Primary Care Trusts
- Check *Hansard* every day

And then on Manchester council itself, they cover all these committees:

- Executive Committee where all the main decisions are made
- Full Council
- Children and young person’s
- Citizenship and inclusion, overview and scrutiny committee
- Communities and neighborhood overview and scrutiny
- Licensing and appeals committee
- Planning and highways
- Audit committee
- Children and young people overview and scrutiny committee
- Health and well-being overview and scrutiny
- Resources and governance overview

And that’s not even mentioning the courts, the coroners, the inquests, the industrial tribunals, and I know a lot of judges are very concerned about this – these courts that are sitting that no one is now reporting. Justice just going on, without being covered.

So as we face the climax – and I hope I’m not being overdramatic – of the infrastructure of local news in press and in broadcasting – I know ITV is wondering whether it can afford to go on funding local news – I think this brings us back to the question of why journalism matters. Who is going to monitor all of those [public bodies, as in Manchester], when news organizations are no longer able to cover them? And I think that raises the question as to whether journalism, this kind of public service journalism, is a kind of utility in itself, and whether losing a newspaper would be like losing one of those vital services which the *Manchester Evening News* does its best to cover – whether a newspaper is in its way any less important than those bodies. I would say that a newspaper is as integral to the life of a community, as any of those bodies.

The vogue word for what we’re expected to produce and invest in is ‘public goods’ – Paul Starr again. Public goods are notoriously under-produced in the marketplace. And news is a public good. And yet since around the mid-19th Century, newspapers have produced news in abundance at a cheap price for readers, and without any direct

subsidy. So the question that everybody I think is beginning to grapple with is: if the market place in this country can't provide these public goods, what form of funding could be considered in order to provide them?

We live in a country that I think is incredibly fortunate to have public service broadcasting. And I think some people are now questioning this idea of public service reporting, to compliment the idea of public service broadcasting. Now I know some people shrink from any kind of public subsidy, and amongst those are most local newspapers. In fact they recoil from it: it is a given that newspapers don't take public subsidy; they don't want to be regulated, they want to be free and independent. And there are some people who just have an ideological objection and think that newspapers are no more deserving of public subsidies, than other kinds of failing industries.

When I first raised this subject about nine months ago I was not overwhelmed by a rush of enthusiasm, people who wanted to embrace this idea – and that's fine – but I think we must face up to the fact that if there is no public subsidy for some form of public service reporting, then the world as described by Paul Starr will come to pass in this country. And if newspapers can't or won't do this kind of reporting – not because they don't want to, but because they can't afford to or they won't take any subsidy to do so – then we have to ask what other mechanisms there are for doing that type of thing. I think this is a much larger question than simply about journalism; I think it's a big question for society itself. And I sense, as the wolf gets nearer the door, all kinds of people who dismissed the idea initially are beginning to wonder.

There have been interesting suggestions from Ofcom, and from Lord Carter's digital review, looking at what might happen if ITV does indeed pack its bags from local news and get out of it. There is a very interesting idea of contestable funding, by which local news organisations can get together and form consortia essentially to provide an alternative to the BBC monopoly on broadcasting. I think local newspapers again were cool on that idea initially, but I suspect if that idea were ever to catch fire and advance, and local newspapers saw, for instance, independent producers saying, 'well, actually, we wouldn't mind a go at that', then I think local newspapers might change their tune in terms of getting together to do that kind of reporting.

But you then wonder who else can do that kind of service, the basic public service reporting. A fundamental service of reporting, of course, on public authorities, not *Hansard*-style, not verbatim, not They Work For You, but bringing reporting some of those qualities I described earlier from conventional media, made available for everybody.

I'll start with a complete non-starter, which is that 'the BBC could do it'. And the advantage of the BBC doing it is that it already has the public money. The money is

there, and it would be just a question of the BBC deciding how to allocate it. So for instance it costs I think about £90 million to run BBC Three, and BBC Three is an interesting thing – the BBC likes it because of the demographic it attracts. But I think there is a big question as to whether that money wouldn't be better spent on this fundamental vital task of public service reporting, than the kind of thing that BBC Three does. Now, the advantage of that is that it would be an easy question to reallocate BBC resources, and it doesn't get into the question of top-slicing to give to anybody else. And so that was a non-starter because people don't like the idea that if the BBC gets all that money it raises all the fears of monopolism, and you saw all the anxiety when the BBC announced that they were going to do something like that in terms of local news.

But I think there's another nascent idea which is the press's position, which is a public service organisation. I know that Tony Watson and Paul Potts from the Press Association are working on that idea at the moment. And their idea is something like this: in return for subsidies, the Press Association would contract to publish straight-news reporting of designated public authorities and courts that clearly would be usable and shared by anyone who wanted to. And the PA could themselves subcontract much of that reporting to local newspapers on two conditions: first, that it meant news standards of accuracy and balance and fairness, and secondly that it could be distributed and shared by everybody. I think that this is how the New Zealand Press Association works. I think it's a PA model where the PA distributes content which is then used directly by the newspapers and then all the local newspapers feed into the New Zealand PA – that's the idea that I'm trying to describe. So newspapers would have to get over this barrier that they just report for their own newspapers. They would have to share this money. Newspapers would be entirely free to challenge, campaign, criticise, comment and abuse the politicians that they were writing about, but there would be a factual bedrock on which to build. It's the absolute division between fact and comment which C. P. Scott wrote about in 1921.

The PA is now seeking actively to trial this, and is looking for funding, so if there are any of you who are rich, in the audience, I urge you to think about this because I think that the advantage of the PA doing it is that it takes away the monopoly of the BBC. The PA is a tremendously respected organization, and there's no reason why they couldn't do it. I think the need is there. And I question as to whether the will or the sense of urgency is there. But I think it's going to be needed pretty quickly.

I just want to end with this. As I was travelling here I was remembering coming here last for the British Academy dinner that was held in the wake of the Hutton report – on the BBC's reporting, of Andrew Gilligan. It was the most distinguished dinner I've ever been to, and tremendously grand people that were there, all the institutions of state. I had no idea why I was there, but there were peers, there were cabinet ministers, there were spooks, and there were soldiers and there were judges – they were the cream of British

society. In fact, Lord Hutton himself was there. And they were discussing the war in Iraq, and one by one they went around the table: the spooks talked about their failure; the cabinet ministers who were there talked about their failure; the parliamentarians talked about the failure of parliament; the soldiers talked about how intelligence had failed. And after that dinner emerged, I think, an unlikely hero in the form of Andrew Gilligan. He's an unlikely journalistic hero: he's shambling, he's a bit obsessive, his story wasn't 100% right in ways that could have stood up in court. But all these people there, and all the institutions of the state, they all said actually the press was the only bit which did its job, in that Andrew Gilligan got something into the bloodstream. He got something out, into the debate, that needed to be got out. It was just interesting how he had done what a journalist should do, and the press had done its job. And that came not from the journalists, it came from all the other people who were sitting there, apart from possibly Lord Hutton.

So that was just my memory of last being at the BA, so I just want to thank the British Academy for holding that dinner, and thank you all for coming.