REVISED AND UPDATED 3RD EDITION

BILL KOVACH
& TOM ROSENSTIEL

THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNALISM

What Newspeople Should Know
and the Public Should Expect

THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNALISM

ALSO BY THESE AUTHORS

Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media

Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload

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Revised Edition

For Lynne
&
For Beth and Karina

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

When we first wrote this book in 2001, our purpose was different than it is now.

Our intention then was to identify common principles shared by people who called themselves journalists working in different mediums and traditions. Even then, these shared ideas and theories of journalism were not as well understood or articulated as many might have supposed, including by those in news. People in different media tended to use different vocabularies. Many often mistook their practices–the techniques they used every day at their jobs–for fundamental principles of purpose. (The concept that journalists should get at the truth of events is a principle. The use of the inverted pyramid structure for writing news stories is a practice.) Most journalists, trained in an apprenticeship model that emphasized craft, tended to dismiss as too theoretical such abstract questions as trying to define the role of journalists in society. There was also a growing culture war in news companies at the time between business and editorial people as they eyed the growing pressures caused by the coming digital revolution. The reason we wrote this book, in part, was that this vagueness about journalism's underlying principles and values had left journalists vulnerable–first to a counting house mentality that discouraged investing in innovation, then to an epochal digital disruption that demanded journalism rethink how it fulfilled its fundamental purpose on behalf of citizens.

But back then, the values we unearthed that made up the elements of journalism were largely the domain of professionals–a

loosely organized group who practiced journalism for a living and who called themselves journalists.

Now, a dozen years later, our goal in this new edition is different in one important respect. Our purpose is to identify the core principles that underlie the production of responsible journalism in which anyone in the world might be staff.

Journalism and the elements of journalism should concern all citizens today even more than they once did precisely because the distinctions between citizen and journalist, reporter and editor, audience and producer are not vanishing but blurring. Journalism isn't dying. It is becoming more of a collaboration. And journalists are not being replaced or becoming irrelevant. Their role has become more complex and more critical.

This transformation has been particularly profound since the second edition of this book was published in 2007. Media brand names that dominated the twentieth century, such as *Newsweek* magazine and the Times Mirror and Knight Ridder newspaper companies, are gone. Network TV newsrooms have shrunk by more than half, newspaper newsrooms by more nearly a third, and newspaper industry revenues by even more. To a significant degree, in less than half a decade, digital disruption has overturned the economic model that sustained news reporting and presentation for more than a century.

In the face of this, we are increasingly asked the same question:

To what extent do the principles that guided journalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries still apply? Indeed, are there any principles at all?

As the contours of the digital revolution have grown clearer, we have grown even more confident that not only do the elements of journalism endure–but in an age when anyone may produce and distribute news, they matter even more.

What has been transformed–profoundly–is how those who produce news fulfill those principles.

The reason the core elements of journalism endure is simple: They never came from journalists in the first place. They flowed from the public's need for news that was credible and useful. The

elements of journalism are the ingredients that allow people to know the facts and context of events, to understand how they should react to that information, and to work on compromises and solutions that make their communities better. Journalists didn't create these needs–they simply developed a series of concepts and methods for meeting them.

Today, these principles are more important precisely because whether a work of journalism comes from a trusted brand name is no longer the only clue to its value. In an age when journalism may come from many sources, we must all learn to navigate with a more discerning eye to know which content is credible and which is suspect.

The elements of journalism, in other words, always belonged to the public. To survive as citizens today, we must understand them, own them, and apply them as never before.

Whether a news report is produced by a citizen eyewitness, funded by a grant from an advocacy nonprofit, or delivered by a conventional news source, for instance, we still need it to be truthful. But in an age when false rumors may be tweeted in real time, how someone reporting the news fulfills the principle of truthfulness has changed substantially. A reporter cannot ignore what is already public or has been reported elsewhere. He or she must note the false rumor's presence, track its impact, and show why it should be disbelieved or what would need to be established for it to be proved true.

Saying that the principles of journalism endure should not be mistaken for an argument in favor of nostalgia and resistance to innovation. To the contrary, it is a call for a deeper and broader application of journalism's purpose–adapted to the new ways that news is gathered and delivered.

In the first edition of *The Elements of Journalism*, published in 2001, we argued that the goal of journalism, its value and purpose, was to help citizens gain the knowledge they needed to self-govern and navigate their lives. The principles of journalism that we outlined in the first edition formed something that many journalists could not articulate but that was consistent throughout different styles of and

approaches to news. We described what news was for, its value, why it was created, and thus what kind of news should be made public.

In the time since the first two editions of this book were published, journalism has become a collaborative exercise, an ongoing participatory conversation among those who produce news and those who consume it. In this new edition, we will describe the contours of that collaboration and new concepts necessary for journalism to be reliable, useful, and worthy of the public service mission to which it aspires–and which in America is afforded constitutional protection.

This purpose is not easily fulfilled. Many of the changes of the last decade at first glance may seem to stand in the way of journalistic resurgence. The collapse of the advertising-based revenue model has shrunken the size of most organized newsrooms. At the same time, a new wave of social media has emerged, built around brevity, networking, and ease of use, led by YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Storify, Instagram, and others. These new platforms began to fulfill the promise that we are all producers as well as consumers in a way that the first wave of social media–blogging–had only hinted at.

The crisis facing organized journalism in the wake of these changes is not primarily an audience problem. Particularly at the local level, audiences in the digital space still get their news from trusted and familiar brands, although they come by those brands through the use of many different delivery systems. The crisis facing organized journalism is more fundamentally a revenue problem. Though the audience has migrated to news publishers online, revenue has not.

At the same time, the technology that has devastated the economic structure of news has also created powerful new tools to make the news we get better. Journalism can be more accurate, more informative, more engaging, by being produced in collaboration with the intelligence of the community once imagined to be merely an audience and by employing the machinery of the network to also make it more empirical.

The openness of the network also represents similar pulls in

opposing directions when it comes to freedom. Citizens who want to resist authoritarian regimes have more tools to do so. Yet the network is equally open to anyone who wants to manipulate the public–from propagandists to commercialists to governments.

Thus more responsibility falls on all of us as citizens and as journalists to grasp the fundamentals of journalism and to protect them. Journalism is the literature of civic life. When the whole world is its staff, understanding the elements of journalism is everyone's responsibility.

Readers familiar with this book's previous editions will find changes throughout this new one. Many of the examples illustrating the ideas we are conveying have been replaced by newer ones. In some cases, newer developments have been added to the existing incidents because they build on one another and together tell a more complex story. The new edition deals with the role of aggregators, social media, the shift toward more collaboration with community, or what some call "open journalism,"[1] more extensively than did earlier editions. At the same time, it grapples with a new wave of concentration in media that has occurred following the Great Recession, after which more media companies came under the ownership of hedge funds and others for whom journalism is not a central activity. Much of the revenue surrounding journalism now flows to companies such as Google that are engaged in its distribution but not its creation and, thus, its values.[2]

Among the changes, the chapter on journalism's allegiance to citizens has been reimagined to accommodate the fact that journalism now is often produced in venues such as think tanks, corporations, and advocacy groups. By what standards does the public decide whether work produced by organizations like these is credible? The second edition of this book talked about the rising influence of the accounting mentality in news companies and the failure of a host of mergers after 2001. This third edition includes discussion of new stresses placed on journalism's values as companies grapple with the failure of online display advertising to bring in revenue commensurate with the size of its audience on that platform.

In the first edition, we argued that the real meaning of objectiv-

ity had more to do with transparency than the absence of bias–an argument that was challenging and controversial when we introduced it then. Today, it is accepted and widely echoed. We argued a decade ago that a transparent method of verification was the most important tool for professional journalists trying to answer doubts the public had about their work. Now it is also a way to invite the public into the production of the news, to create a collaborative journalism that is better than either journalists or citizens could produce alone.

In the chapter on journalism as a public forum, the nature of that forum has expanded dramatically with innovations in social media. In the second edition, we talked about how what linguist Deborah Tannen dubbed the "Argument Culture," in which media staged polarizing debates in order to attract an audience, was giving way to something new: media that offered affirmation and reassurance rather than pyrotechnic debate. We called this a new Journalism of Affirmation because it built an audience around partisan reassurance, and this neo-partisan journalism has grown in popularity since 2007. At the same time, the move from blogs to social media forums–in which everyone is a participant and commentator–has made the Web the new setting for the Argument Culture.

In the chapter on making the news comprehensive and proportional, the age of mixing news and entertainment (which came to be known as "infotainment") has given way to a new form of tabloidization, in which publishers chase maximum page views and raw numbers with material that often is at odds with long-term growth based on depth and quality. That chapter contains a new approach for news publishers to do research and use metrics in the digital age.

In chapter 10, we examine how conscience in the news has expanded from being principally a matter of how to exercise sound judgment in large institutional news settings to being a matter of exercising it in settings where the underwriter or owner is financing the activity not only for commercial reasons, but sometimes also for political ones.

Recent and ongoing disruptions in news have heightened many tensions in the last six years: tensions between champions of tech-

nology and those who feel threatened by it, between advocates of user-generated content and those who place more value on professionalism, between those who worry about the shrinking role of professional news gatherers and those who think traditional media's flaws were so great that its diminishing influence should be welcomed.

These stresses will prove healthy, once they are ultimately resolved. The same technology that has devastated the economic model of news has also provided an extraordinary set of new means for gathering and delivering it. The journalism of the twenty-first century has the potential to be more engaging, more valuable, and more informative than the journalism of the twentieth.

But in the meantime, some of these tensions have proven counterproductive. The arguments between advocates of the new and defenders of the old often fail to grasp that the two sides need each other more than they realize. This interdependence is not nearly as new as it seems. What may seem today to be inadequate examples of transparency and listening to the audience–such as letters to the editors, op-ed pages, guest columns, corrections, or even datelines and bylines–were born from the same spirit of connectedness that advocates of networked journalism champion today.

The future of news, in other words, is more firmly rooted in its history, and its enduring values, than many recognize. But whether that future is characterized by a new age of enlightenment or one of manipulation will depend more now on both what the public demands of the news and the degree to which it participates in its responsible production.

This new, third edition of *The Elements of Journalism* has been revised and modernized to help the public and the journalists who serve them in that journey.

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, January 2014

THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNALISM

INTRODUCTION

When anthropologists began to compare notes on the nature of communication in the world's few remaining primitive cultures, they discovered something unexpected. From the most isolated tribal societies in Africa to the most distant islands in the Pacific, people shared an essentially similar definition of news. They shared gossip. They talked about their leaders. They even looked for the same qualities in the messengers they picked to gather and deliver their news: people who could run swiftly, gather accurate information, and retell it in an engaging way. While tastes have ebbed and flowed and news has been at times more and less serious, historians have discovered that the basic news values have remained relatively constant throughout time. "Humans have exchanged a similar mix of news ... throughout history and across cultures," historian Mitchell Stephens has written.[1]

How do we explain this rough continuity and consistency? The answer, historians and sociologists have concluded, is that news satisfies a basic human impulse. People have an intrinsic need–an instinct–to know what is occurring beyond their own experience, the events over the next hill.[2] Being aware of events we cannot see for ourselves engenders a sense of security, control, and confidence. One writer has called it "a hunger for awareness."[3]

One of the first things people do when meeting a friend or acquaintance is to share information. "Have you heard about ... ?" We want to know if they've heard what we have, and if they heard it the same way. There is a thrill in a shared sense of discovery. We form

relationships, choose friends, and make character judgments based partly on whether someone reacts to information the same way as we do.

When the flow of news is obstructed, "a darkness falls" and anxiety grows.[4] The world, in effect, becomes too quiet. We feel alone. John McCain, the U.S. senator from Arizona and former presidential candidate, wrote that in his five and a half years as a prisoner of war in Hanoi, what he missed most was not comfort, food, freedom, or even his family and friends. "The thing I missed most was information–free uncensored, undistorted, abundant information."[5] In classes on news at SUNY Stony Brook, students are put through news blackouts in which they are cut off from all media. During these blackouts they begin to wear clothes not suited to the weather, carry umbrellas unnecessarily, and become anxious.[6]

Call it the Awareness Instinct.

We need news to live our lives, protect ourselves, bond with each other, and identify friends and enemies. What we came to call journalism is simply the system societies generate to supply this information about what is and what's to come. That is why we care about the character of the news and journalism we get: News influences the quality of our lives, our thoughts, and our culture. News from its beginning created what technologists today call the "social flow" of information. Writer Thomas Cahill, the author of several popular books on the history of religion, has put it this way: You can tell "the worldview of a people ... the invisible fears and desires ... in a culture's stories."[7]

At a moment of revolution in communications, what do the stories we tell say about our worldview–our fears, desires, and values?

On the eve of the digital revolution, on a rainy Saturday in June 1997, twenty-five journalists gathered at the Harvard Faculty Club. Around the long table sat editors of several of the nation's top newspapers, as well as some of the most influential names in television and radio, several of the top journalism educators, and some of the country's most prominent authors. We were among those gathered.

The digital age was only beginning, but the journalists gathered that day already thought something was seriously wrong with their profession. They barely recognized what they considered journalism in much of their colleagues' work. Instead of serving a larger public interest, they feared, their profession was damaging it.

The public, in turn, had already started to distrust journalists, even hate them. And it would only get worse. In 1999, less than half of Americans (45 percent) believed the press protected democracy, nearly ten points lower than in 1985.[8] By 2011, as many people would feel the press hurt democracy as helped it, 42 percent. And just 15 percent would think the press was independent, less than half the number (37 percent) in 1985.[9]

The problem is not just public perception. By the late 1990s, many journalists were beginning to share the public's growing skepticism about the press. "In the newsroom we no longer talk about journalism," said Maxwell King, the editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, that day in Cambridge. Another editor agreed: "We are consumed with business pressure and the bottom line." The concern wasn't that the values of news had deteriorated. It was that news companies had begun to operate in a way that suggested they no longer believed in those values.

News was becoming entertainment, and entertainment news. Journalists' bonuses were increasingly tied to profit margins, not to the quality of their work. As the discussion drew to a close, Columbia University professor James Carey offered what many recalled as a summation: "The problem is that you see journalism disappearing inside the larger world of communications. What you yearn to do is recover journalism from that larger world."

Digital technology had not yet eroded the advertising revenue model that financed journalism, or diminished journalists' ability to verify the news before the public saw it. Newspaper revenue, for instance, would continue to grow for seven more years, peaking in 2005. What worried some of the leaders of America's journalistic and educational institutions was commercialization–the sense that the leaders of their companies had become more concerned with

growing profits to please investors and had lost confidence that investing in better, more innovative journalism could help them engage new audiences.

Already, largely because of the corporate structure of the news industry, newsroom leaders were worried about an important existential question. If journalism–the system by which citizens get news–was being subsumed by commercialization, what would replace it? Advertising? Entertainment? E-commerce? Propaganda? Ideological news? Fragmentation? And what would the consequence be? The idea of user-generated content, news in which everyone participated, was not yet a topic of serious discussion beyond a few digital pioneers.

Most of the people in that room had seen the industry undergo enormous changes throughout their careers. For a century prior to the Internet, disruptive technologies and new formats emerged roughly every fifteen to twenty years. Radio had come in the 1920s, followed by television in the 1950s (delayed by World War II), cable television, and then the deregulation of electronic media in the 1980s that helped give way to the new era of partisanship on radio and TV. With each new technology, new forms of entertainment emerged to compete for people's attention. The incumbent media would change, shove over, lose some hold on the audience, and then adapt as a smaller entity.

At its best, journalism survived because it provided something unique to a culture: independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information that citizens require in order to make sense of the world around them. A journalism that provides something other than that subverts democratic culture. This is what happens when governments control the news, as it did in Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. We see this today in places like Singapore, where news is controlled to encourage capitalism but discourage participation in public life.

The public's growing discontent with journalism that began in the 1980s is not a rejection of journalism's values. It is a result of journalists' failure to live up to those values. Look closely at the data on trust, for instance, and you will see that even today the public has

not given up its expectation that the news will be independent and reliable, or that news be produced by people who are operating in the public interest. Data from the Pew Research Center shows that a clear majority–64 percent–of the public prefers getting news from sources that have no political point of view–and those numbers have barely budged over the course of two decades.[10] The number is even more pronounced (74 percent) when people are asked about online news content.[11] The public largely still expects the news to be produced by skilled professionals; what disappoints them is that the news has not lived up to those promises.

On one level, the credibility crisis is ironic. Many news companies had tried to adapt to a changing marketplace by delivering what they thought the public wanted, trying to make the news more like entertainment. Television news in particular had leaned toward celebrity scandal and true crime to lure viewers back–and had done so unsuccessfully. The number one topic on nightly news in the 1990s was crime, during a decade when crime was dropping. While stories such as the O. J. Simpson trial and the murder of a child named JonBenet Ramsey would buoy ratings briefly, audiences began to sense they were being exploited. The credibility research found the public decried media sensationalism–a fact some in the news business dismissed as public hypocrisy.

Distracted by the myopia of trying to keep audiences interested in old platforms and managing costs to protect profits, news companies missed something essential: People were not abandoning news. They simply were abandoning traditional formats in favor of new ones that were more convenient. First, twenty-four-hour cable news was an easier way to check out headlines than waiting for the evening newscast at 6:30, even if the later evening newscast might be a better product. Soon enough, the Web would prove to be profoundly more convenient, deeper, and eventually, more portable.

Journalists were culpable in their own way for the growing discontent and migration of the public. They staked too much faith in traditional definitions of quality news and failed to study the changing news audience. They saw the Internet as a threat to what they knew and failed to recognize it as an opportunity to reach new

audiences in new ways with new forms of content. The gathering in Cambridge in 1997 was a signal that, even before the digital disruption, many journalists sensed their industry had lost focus on the public and in a journalism that served its needs.

In short, the collective failure of the news industry to adapt to the digital revolution was rooted in a crisis of confidence about news that had been sounding alarms a decade earlier.

In the years since then, one group of oligarchies has been replaced by another. Media companies that produced news and subsidized its creation largely by selling advertising have been replaced by an even smaller group of technology firms that control access to the Internet by making devices, producing operating systems, selling apps, organizing content, and selling products online. Brands such as *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* are gone. Google and Facebook have a share of the public's attention that those old media empires could never have imagined.

In both scenarios, the same question pertains: As citizens, do we have access to independent, accurate information that makes it possible for us to govern ourselves?

The group of journalists in Cambridge that day in 1997 decided on a plan: engage journalists and the public in a careful examination of what journalism was supposed to be. As a group, we set out to answer two questions: If newspeople thought journalism was somehow different from other forms of communication, how was it different? And if they thought journalism needed to change but that some core principles couldn't be sacrificed, what were those principles?

Over the next two years, the group, calling itself the Committee of Concerned Journalists, organized the most comprehensive and systematic examination ever conducted by journalists of newsgathering and its responsibilities. We held twenty-one public forums, which were attended by three thousand people and involved testimony from more than three hundred journalists. We partnered with a team of university researchers who conducted more than one hundred three-and-a-half-hour interviews with journalists about their values. We produced two surveys of journalists about their

principles. We held a summit of First Amendment and journalism scholars. With the Project for Excellence in Journalism, we produced nearly a dozen content studies of news reporting. We studied the history of the journalists who came before us, and we conducted training in newsrooms nationwide.

The ideas in this book began as the fruit of that examination, and they have grown with years of study since. What you read here is not an argument about what journalism should be. Rather, it is a distillation of how those engaged in creating journalism interpret what citizens think journalism is for and how, in turn, journalists should deliver it. It is predicated on the belief that the history and values by which journalism evolved should inform the journalism of our new century. There is no reason for the new journalism to be a repudiation of the best of the old, for journalism has always been a living thing. Every generation, building on what came before, has created it anew.

As such, we offer here a set of principles for anyone who might produce news in the twenty-first century, whether they be a professional in a newsroom, a citizen eyewitness posting pictures on a photo-sharing platform, or someone trying to distill the reports and conversation from social media and turn them into news. It also offers a guide to what values consumers should look for in the news they encounter.

The first edition, published in 2001, was a description of the theory and culture of journalism at the end of the twentieth century. The second edition, in 2007, began to account for the arrival of the digital age in a more sustained way. This new edition explores the relevance of journalism's core values in the face of the collapsed economic model that has shrunk most organized newsrooms, and the rise of social media that has transformed news into a broader and more pluralistic process.

Some of the language we use has taken on a different connotation in the time since the last edition of this book. While once, as we said in the preface, the word *journalist* described a group of organized professionals–working in what C. W. Anderson, Clay Shirky,

and Emily Bell have called Industrial Journalism–now it describes anyone who might find him or herself producing news and who aspires to do it ethically and responsibly.[12]

This is an important change, but in many ways a less fundamental one than some imagine. We have always argued here that the question has never been who is or isn't a journalist. It is whether the work produced lives up to the character of what we would call journalism. That is still true.

Even before the epochal changes brought by the digital age, the roots of what has occurred were firmly planted. While most journalists could not easily articulate a theory of journalism (or even agree if they were engaged in a profession with shared principles), most people in society expected journalists to operate according to professional theory.

To add to the confusion, our educational system expects students to graduate high school and college with literacy in concepts of algebra, geometry, foreign language, and literature. Yet there is little serious demand or coherent effort to teach young citizens to comprehend what we think should be considered, as we said in the preface, the literature of civic life–the news.

This lack of clarity, for both citizens and newspeople, has weakened our journalism. If one accepts the tenet that democracy and journalism rise and fall together, it also likely has contributed to the polarization of American politics and the failure of the country to address the economic crisis that has beset the United States and the world since 2008. A lack of clarity about what journalism should be, and how to intelligently consume the news, has left both journalists and citizens less equipped to cope with the effects of the digital transformation, which demand more clarity of purpose from those who produce the news and greater awareness from those who consume it.

Unless we can grasp and reclaim the theory and practice of a free press, we risk allowing our first constitutional right to disappear. The quality of the journalism we consume now is far more a matter of what the public demands than simply what publishers want or can afford to provide. And a free press is distinct from free speech. The acts of reporting and commenting on the day's events

relate to each other, but they are not synonymous. The quality of our democratic life depends, in short, on the public having the facts and being able to make sense of them. And that, even in a networked age, requires journalists. Whether we have them increasingly will depend on whether citizens can recognize the difference between propaganda and news–and whether they care.

For all the changes, there remain clear principles we require of our journalism, principles that citizens have a right to expect. The principles have ebbed and flowed over time, but they have survived because they provide things that citizens need from the news in order to adjust to the demands of life in an increasingly complex world. These are the principles, in other words, that have helped both journalists and the people even as journalism has changed with technology and new social demands. They are the elements of journalism: The first among them is that the purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing.

To fulfill this task:

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as a monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must present the news in a way that is comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.
10. Citizens have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news as well—even more so as they become producers and editors themselves.

Why these ten? Some readers may think items are missing here. Where is fairness? Where is balance? As we researched journalism's

past and looked toward its future, it became clear that a number of familiar and even useful ideas associated with news were too vague to rise to the level of essential principles of journalism. Fairness, for instance, is so subjective a concept that it offered little guidance on how to operate. Balance, on the other hand, was an operational method that was so limited it often distorted the truth.

Another myth was that independence required journalists to be neutral. This confusion arose when the concept of objectivity became so mangled it began to be used to describe the very problem it was conceived to correct. If our work here does nothing else, we want to recapture the original meaning of objectivity intended when the concept migrated from social science to journalism early in the twentieth century. Objectivity was not meant to suggest that journalists were without bias. To the contrary, precisely because journalists could never be objective, their methods had to be. In the recognition that everyone is biased, in other words, the news, like science, should flow from a process for reporting that is defensible, rigorous, and transparent–and this process is even more critical in a networked age. Today, when content comes from so many sources, this concept of objectivity of method transparently conveyed–rather than personal objectivity–is more vital than ever.

In the new open ecosystem of news and information, the role of professional journalists is also smaller, and the role of citizens is larger–but not all voices are equal. Those with the means to prevail in an open marketplace–money, organized strategies for dissemination, and carefully designed networks to magnify a message's reach–have an advantage. If the "industrial" or professional press of the twentieth century constituted a fourth estate, and the new open system of citizens as producers and witnesses now constitutes a fifth estate, it is important to recognize that this new group also includes the institutions and actors journalists once covered–newsmakers who want to influence the public for commercial and political purpose. Yet it is an oversimplification to imagine that more sources simply means more truth. For all of the utopian enthusiasm, if we lose sight of the principles that make news trustworthy, the contri-

butions of a smaller fourth estate and the new contributions of a fifth together will add up to something less than what society needs. We will lose the press as an independent institution, free to systematically monitor the other powerful forces and institutions in society.

In the new century, one of the most profound questions for a democratic society is whether news can survive as a source of independent and trustworthy information, or whether it will give way to a system of self-interested propaganda, of citizens consuming information in narrow channels or "filter bubbles," in which all claims are un-refereed and the loudest win. The answer will depend not just on the availability of reliable news but also on whether citizens learn to recognize which news is reliable; on what we demand of the news and those who produce it; whether we have the clarity and conviction to articulate what an independent press means and whether, as citizens, we care.

Some may ask whether there is a specific program laid out here to do that, to "fix" journalism's problems. Our answer to that comes in two parts.

The first part of the answer is that the yearning for a formulaic solution, a single defining moment, or a bold action does not reflect how change occurs.

The second part of the answer–the reason one will not find here a five- or ten-point program to solve the problems of journalism's role in society–is that our collective experience of more than seventy years in this business suggests a clearer lesson on how to find that solution.

The answer will be found when those who produce the news master the principles of journalism and rigorously apply them to the way they work and think every day. And it will be found in citizens recognizing good work, creating their own, and thereby generating more demand for it. The solution will be found the same way that athletes perfect performance: in the repetition of doing, until these elements become second nature. This is what will breed clarity of purpose, confidence of execution, and public respect.

The key to this, first, is to distinguish between the principles that guide journalism's purpose and not confuse them with the more ephemeral techniques that one generation develops in a specific

medium to fulfill those principles. Only by recognizing the primacy of principles, and not confusing them with practices, can journalism evolve in a new century, with new technology, in a way that it can ethically fulfill the same democratic purpose it has in the past and create a new journalism that produces reliable information for the wired citizen.

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What Is Journalism For?

On a gray December morning in 1981, Anna Semborska woke up and flipped on the radio to hear her favorite program, *Sixty Minutes Per Hour (60MPH)*. Semborska, who was seventeen, loved the way the comedy revue pushed the boundaries of what people in Poland could say out loud under Communist rule. Although it had been on the air for some years, *60MPH* had become much bolder with the rise of the labor union Solidarity. Sketches like one about a dim-witted Communist doctor looking vainly to find a cure for extremism were an inspiration to Anna and her teenage friends in Warsaw. The program showed her that other people felt about the world the way she did but had never dared express. "We felt that if things like these can be said on the radio then we are free," she would remember nearly twenty years later.[1]

But when Anna ran to the radio to tune in the show on December 13, 1981, she heard only static. She tried another station, then another. Nothing. She tried to call a friend and found no dial tone. Her mother called her to the window. Tanks were rolling by. The Polish military government had declared martial law, outlawed Solidarity, and put the clamps back on the media and on speech. The Polish experiment with liberalization was over.

Within hours, Anna and her friends began to hear stories that suggested something about this crackdown was different. One story involved the dogwalkers in a little town called Świdnik, near the Czech border. Every night at seven-thirty, when the state-run television news came on, nearly everyone in Świdnik went out and walked his or her dog in a little park in the center of town. It became a daily silent act of protest and solidarity. We refuse to watch, the people were saying in deed if not word. We reject your version of truth.

In Gdansk, there were the black TV screens. People there began moving their television sets to the windows–with the screens pointed out to the street. They were sending a sign to one another, and to the government. We, too, refuse to watch. We also reject your version of truth.

An underground press began to grow, on ancient hand-crank equipment. People began carrying video cameras and making private documentaries, which they showed secretly in church basements. Soon, Poland's leaders acknowledged that they were facing a new phenomenon, something they had to go west to name: the rise of Polish public opinion. In 1983, the government created the first of several institutes to study public opinion. Similar institutes would soon sprout up throughout Eastern Europe. But public opinion was something totalitarian officials could not dictate. At best, they could try to understand it and then manipulate it, not unlike Western democratic politicians. But they would not succeed.

After the Soviet bloc collapsed, leaders of the movement toward freedom would look back and think that the end of Communism owed a good deal to the coming of the new information technology and the effect it had on human souls. In the winter of 1989, Lech Walesa, the man who shortly would be elected Poland's new president, visited journalists in Washington. "Is it possible for a new Stalin to appear today who could murder people?" Walesa asked rhetorically. No, he answered himself, in the age of computers, satellites, faxes, VCRs, "it's impossible." Technology now made information available to too many people, too quickly. And information created democracy.[2]

In retrospect, looking at the evolution of democracy in Russia

or China or genocidal regimes in Africa, we may wonder if Walesa was caught up in the euphoria of the moment. But his sentiment was less a reflection of naïveté than a burst of optimism coming from a part of the world that was just discovering technology and its power to do good and inspire people to fight for their freedom. And in six years, the Internet would be fully converted from a scientific and governmental system to a commercial one, available for everyday use.

What is journalism for? For the Poles and others in the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe, the question was answered with action. Journalism was for building a sense of community that the government could not control. Journalism was for citizenship. Journalism was for democracy. And as Czech president Václav Havel told a group of journalists gathered in Prague in 1991, journalism was for taking back the language from a government that had subverted it with propaganda that undermined freedom of thought itself. Millions of people, empowered by a free flow of information, became directly involved in creating a new government and new rules for the political, social, and economic life of their country. Is that always journalism's purpose? Or was that true for one moment, in one place?

Today, the question "What is journalism for?" is the implicit subject of much of the discourse found online about technology and news, and in a seemingly endless series of physical gatherings to discuss the same topics. While that discourse often has the political and theological tones of a revolutionary movement, it is far healthier than the lack of reflection about journalism's purpose that tended to dominate the twentieth century.

In the United States, during much of the last century, journalism was something of a tautology. If you owned a printing press or a broadcasting license, journalism was whatever you said it was. When we began our journey to identify the core principles that underlie reliable news some sixteen years ago, Maxwell King, then editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, summarized this lack of reflection by offering the answer journalists of the time were likely to provide: "We let

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