SECOND EDITION

MEDIASCAPES

New Patterns in Canadian Communication

Edited by

Paul Attallah
Carleton University

Leslie Regan Shade
Concordia University

THOMSON

— ✴ — ™

NELSON

20

Boundaries Blurred: The Mass Media and Politics in a Hyper-Media Age

Jonathan Rose and Simon Kiss
Queen's University

The media, we are told, are a vital link between citizens and government. Traditional ideals of the media see them as having a pivotal role in keeping government accountable and providing information to citizens about the health of the body politic. The centrality of the media is evident in the metaphors we employ in discussing their functions. When we speak of the media as a barometer of the citizenry or a watchdog over government, or even when we talk of muckraking journalism, we are suggesting that the media are an important link to how citizens get political information and how they understand the world around them. Canadian media scholar David Taras (1990) discusses the mass media through a number of different metaphors: media as watchdog, but also media as mirror and as distorted mirror. The former suggests that the media can be accurate reflectors of objective phenomena in the world; the latter grants more latitude to the interpretation of political life. All of these metaphors, however, assume a clear division between the mass media and the state. In this chapter we suggest that the metaphor of blurred boundaries provides us with useful insights into contemporary developments in the news media. In terms of structure, we see a blurring of boundaries between different media; between insiders and outsiders; between media and government; and between news and entertainment.

The media are, arguably, one of the most significant institutions in modern society. Timothy Cook goes so far as to suggest that newsmaking is now a central way for governmental actors to accomplish political and policy goals. "In that sense, the news media may well be an unwitting adjunct to power. . . . Making news, in other words, is not merely a way to get elected or reelected, to boost one's own ego or to be a show horse instead of a work horse; instead, it is a way to govern" (1998, p. 164). Other authors are equally emphatic in their claims about the centrality of the media in public life. Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao suggest that "journalism is arguably the most important form of public knowledge in contemporary society. The mass media . . . have become the leading institutions of the public sphere" (1998, p. 1). Canadian media scholar Paul Nesbitt-Larking (2001) makes a compelling case that the media are conduits for the creation of our culture. For him, the media shape and are shaped by our social practices, norms, and values. It is clear that

conventional scholarship on the mass media sees a critical role for the news media in their support of liberal democratic values.

Democracy is premised on the ability of citizens to deliberate and reflect on issues. Early democratic theorists decried the fact that citizens did not have enough access to information. John Dewey, for example, argued that it was not that the public lacked ability but rather they lacked resources to have a public conversation (Dewey, 1927). The media, he believed, could be this conduit between the public and the governed. In the early days of the 20th century, the solution to the problem of creating an informed public was found in the mass media.

When one examines the media today, we find that few of these democratic obligations are met. Robert McChesney has called the current situation "a disaster for anything but the most superficial notion of democracy" (2000, p. 59). Ownership and the concentration of power has attenuated the public conversation. The news media's obsession with celebrity and the inane has not provided the fuel for the democratic fire. News is now virtually subsumed by entertainment so that discerning the boundary between the two is like drawing lines in the sand at the water's edge: boundaries are temporary, regularly wiped out, and continually shifting. Where we once could discuss separate spheres of news, politics, and entertainment, we argue that these are supplanted by boundaries that are increasingly porous, so that fulfilling important democratic functions is difficult if not impossible. This carries with it significant implications for the state of democratic debate. Despite the explosion in the type and number of media sources, there has not been an increase in their quality. Moreover, this explosion has not resulted in a better-informed public. This chapter explores the paradoxes of the modern media environment and raises questions about the relationship of the media to politics. Serious questions of accountability are also raised, given the relationships between journalists and their sources. The fact that the modern media have been marked by an adaptation of the codes, narratives, and styles of entertainment raises serious questions about the relationship between politics and mass media.

THE BLUR OF SPEED

In contemporary political life, the problem is not that we need greater access to information but arguably that we have access to too much information. For most of North America, where television sets reach over 90 percent of the population and, in Canada, where more than 70 percent of people have cable-TV access and 15 percent subscribe to pay TV (Statistics Canada, 2002), the issue is less one of access than of sheer volume. Some time ago Bruce Springsteen wrote a song where he lamented that there were "fifty-seven channels and nothing on." Now, in the age of satellite television, the choices are virtually infinite. One can choose sports channels, comedy channels, lifestyle channels, and channels for seniors, women, or children. David Taras (2001) calls these fragmentation bombs the biggest threat to national

communities and the ability to create a public space. Each one of these speaks to a particular community defined by gender, age, hobby, interest, or any number of categories. The fragmentation of the public creates markets for advertisers rather than enabling a conversation of government with the people. The media have become vehicles for producing specialized audiences of consumers rather than for producing debate among citizens.

Despite the explosion in the production of information, there is evidence that citizens are no better informed. In the United States, the world's most media-literate society, citizens lack basic knowledge of political issues. For example, a study at the University of Maryland (Kull, 2004) found that those tending to support President Bush were more likely than Democratic supporters to believe that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and that the Iraqi government played a role in the terrorist attacks on September 11. This study *followed* the Congressional 9/11 commission, which categorically refuted these widely held beliefs. In Canada, the Dominion Institute regularly chronicles Canadians' lack of basic political knowledge. One poll found that Canadians were worse informed about basic historic facts than were Americans (Dominion Institute, 2001), suggesting that this lack of knowledge is not confined to the United States.

Todd Gitlin sees the proliferation of media not, primarily, as having a fragmentation effect—though he acknowledges that component—but rather as a flood, or an aural and visual tsunami. As the subtitle of his recent book suggests, this "torrent of images and sounds overwhelms our lives" (2001). Raymond Williams, the great cultural critic, was probably the first to observe this when he said, "What we have now is drama as habitual experience: more in a week, in many cases, than most human beings would previously have seen in a lifetime" (cited in Gitlin, 2001, p. 15). For Gitlin, the mass media torrent is indivisible. It is not that media fragmentation atomizes us but rather that the flood of media does not allow any critical reflection. The much discussed effects of the media are not to cultivate a more violent society (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1986), nor to create a bored society, as Neil Postman (1985) argues. Rather "media are . . . themselves the main products, the main transactions, the main effects of media" (Gitlin, 2001, p. 10).

Faced with this continuous flood of images and ideas we are forced to erect dams to protect ourselves. There is evidence to suggest that despite the plethora of media sources, we seek out media that merely confirm our own views rather than media that might challenge us. According to a Pew Research Center study, in the United States if you are Republican you will likely watch Fox, while if you are Democrat you will watch CNN (Kohut, 2004, p. 5). Apparently, your partisanship dictates what you watch. While some might point to the phenomenal success of Michael Moore's documentary film *Farenheit 9/11* as a counterexample, the National Annenberg Election Study found that virtually all Americans who saw the film were Democrats. They were therefore already convinced of the movie's main contention that George W. Bush acted improperly after the events of September 11. According to the study, "only a handful of Republicans saw the movie; they were too

few for their attitudes to be measured with confidence" ("Farenheit 9/11 Viewers," 2004). Far from a free marketplace of ideas envisioned by early democratic theorists, modern media, though more plentiful and accessible than ever, have narrowed choices precisely because of their ineffable size and scope.

The speed and volume with which the torrent floods us also creates other problems besides the creation of filters. Susan Moeller (1999) argues that the flood of grisly images of disease, famine, death, and war has created "compassion fatigue," where the frames of the story result in a inured public whose sympathy and compassion are dulled. The media, in their attempt to deliver powerful images that pack a punch and speak to the audience, rely on formulas for these sorts of stories. They focus on stereotypical characters, the economic or cultural connection to the United States, and, of course, vivid and powerful images. This might explain the apparent rationale of newspapers around the world that on April 4, 2004, published pictures of the charred bodies of four Americans hanging from a bridge in Fallujah, Iraq. Such photos and styles of reportage do no service to informing the public but merely reinforce low levels of public efficacy and trust in elite institutions. The photos and the blur of speed reinforce the idea that with traditional media, citizens are mere observers. Having been forced to respond to a 24-hour news cycle and having to interest a public that treats political information like any other commodity, the media may have been creators of this media flood.

THE BLURRING BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND JOURNALISTS

Historically, the media have viewed themselves as an independent watchdog on government power (Donohue, Tichenor, Olien, 1995). However, there is evidence to suggest that this role is changing. The relationship between political journalists and those they cover in the government has come under some scrutiny in Canada. A number of journalists have given up their role as supposedly independent political observers to become highly paid public relations practitioners for governments and cabinet ministers. Could it be that the watchdog has become the lap dog? One of the more high-profile examples is that of senior CBC radio correspondent Susan Murray, who left the press gallery to become the spokesperson for the Liberal Minister of Public Works, Scott Brison. A further example is the case of Drew Fagan, *The Globe and Mail*'s senior parliamentary bureau chief, who left the newspaper to become a senior advisor to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Martin, 2004, p. A18). Jim Munson, who was a reporter for CTV, moved to the Prime Minister's Office as Director of Communications under Jean Chrétien, after which he was appointed to the Senate in 2003.

Given the increasing complexity, intensity, and speed of contemporary political media, governments (and other institutions) require highly specialized knowledge that professional political journalists can often provide. The explosion of the hyper-media

environment has also made the media more integral to government operations. In his exhaustive study of the centralization of Canadian political power in the office of the Prime Minister, Donald Savoie consistently cites the mass media as a cause:

> For the most part, [the media] is no longer just a narrator or an independent observer reporting and commenting on polit- ical events. It has become an important political actor in its own right. Television and its tendency to turn a thirty-second clip on the evening news to sum up major policy issues or, much more often, to report on something gone awry in government, have had a profound impact on government operations. The centre [of government], broadly defined, has become extremely sensitive to potential media-inspired devel- opments it cannot control and to surprises, which can give rise to political problems and embarrassments. (1996, p. 39)

Although there has always been a crossover between the professions of journalism and public relations, it is worth asking whether or not this trend is increasing or becoming more problematic. There is no straight, empirical investigation of the claim that there are journalists who are leaving the profession in greater numbers to join the ranks of elite public relations firms. However, employment growth in the public rela- tions profession has far outstripped that of journalism. The Statistics Canada census indicates that there were 13,470 journalists in the nation in 1991; this declined to 12,960 in 2001, for a decrease of 4 percent. The same survey, however, notes an increase of 16 percent in the number of Canadians practicing public relations, from 23,780 to 27,465 (Statistics Canada, 2001). While these data are stark, it should not be entirely surprising, given widespread public debate about strapped-for-cash news- rooms in institutions such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. What makes the situation even more compelling is that it takes place against the backdrop of an exploding media environment that has resulted in a 500-channel universe. If the mass media are expanding at a rapid pace, but the professionals who work in that industry are experiencing severe cutbacks, then we must ask ourselves, who is producing the content that we consume in our daily lives? Perhaps public relations officials— whether they are government, industry, or otherwise—are gaining the upper hand in the production of political information.

This trend does raise other concerns about the potential reliability of political news media. Most news organizations have a segment of their staff on the political beat, working in close proximity to those in government. If some of those journalists are seeking to join the PR ranks of those they are supposed to cover, might it not colour their coverage? Don Martin, a senior columnist with the *National Post*, has raised questions about the practice of parliamentary correspondents joining the ranks of governments. He suggests a number of steps that could be taken to re-establish boundaries between governments and the journalists who cover them; for example, governments should institute a ban on hiring journalists for one year following an

election campaign, as well as outright prohibitions on offering journalists patronage appointments to the Order of Canada and the Senate until a suitable cooling-off period has elapsed (Martin, 2004, A18).

A further example of this blurred boundary is the inevitable mixing of journalists, politicians, and commentators after election campaign debates. In the first minutes following live debates, the candidates, their political allies, their political staff, third-party observers, and supposedly neutral journalists all engage in a verbal brawl as they fight for a single news frame: "my candidate won." Watching this commentary, it is legitimate to ask: Who are the journalists? Who are the politicians? Who is independent and who is not? And, most importantly, who is accountable to whom for what they say? Instead, these situations appear to be a collective free-for-all, a ritual of producing political information engaged in by actors from all sides of the process.

Perhaps the most dramatic and controversial case of the blurred line between press and government was the use by the United States military of "embedded" journalists during the invasion of Iraq. In this case, journalists from Western media outlets were attached to specific military units to travel with them, even into extremely dangerous combat situations. In order to gain access to the front, journalists were required to sign an agreement with the Pentagon, foregoing their rights to sue the government in case of damages, and, perhaps more importantly, to agree to the military's standards of censorship, including not identifying "specific number of troops," "information regarding future operations," "rules of engagement," or "information on effectiveness on enemy electronic warfare," among other blanket categories (U.S. State Department, 2003).

The ethical implications of embedded journalists are a matter of significant debate. Some suggest that this practice guarantees biased coverage, pointing to the extraordinary sense of camaraderie that develops between embedded journalists and the military units they are stationed with (Laurence, 2003). On the other hand, there are those who argue that by embedding journalists, viewers and readers get a far clearer picture of the destruction caused by war. For example, John R. McArthur, publisher of *Harper's Magazine*, noted in an interview that embedded journalists with *The New York Times* and ABC News went so far as to display pictures of dead Iraqis. "Compared to the last war, that's 100 per cent more corpses. If you measure good war journalism by the extent to which it shows the violence and death, we are ahead of where we were 12 years ago" (quoted in Bedan, 2003, p. 34).

What is certain, however, is that the United States military considers media relations and the projection of images integral to the success of its operations. The guidelines issued by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs regarding embedded journalists are quite clear on this point:

> Media coverage of any future operation will, to a large extent,
> shape public perception of the national security environment
> now and in the years ahead. This holds true for the U.S. pub-
> lic; the public in allied countries whose opinion can affect the
> durability of our coalition; and publics in countries where we

> conduct operations, whose perceptions of us can affect the
> cost and duration of our involvement. ... We need to tell
> the factual story—good or bad—before others seed the
> media with disinformation and distortions, as they most cer-
> tainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell
> our story—only commanders can ensure the media get to the
> story. (U.S. State Department, 2003)

These examples indicate one important trend in contemporary political com-
munications: in many ways, the media are no longer an independent institution.
Instead, they are integral to the political process, and they are inherently political
actors. The United States military has guidelines that emphasize the importance of
the media and communication strategies to their operations. Political journalists are
crossing boundaries to work for governments. These contradict traditional concep-
tions of journalists and how journalists view themselves. In fact, journalists will most
often recoil at the allegation that they are "political." But if we are right and today's
media are inherently political, then a major question best expressed by Timothy
Cook must be asked: "If the media are now a key intermediary institution, who
elected reporters to represent them in politics and how well is their power popularly
checked?" (1998, p. 16).

THE BLURRED LINE OF POLITICAL JOURNALISM

In the realm of hyper-media the very definition of what constitutes journalism is now
in question. No longer can we understand news media as simply news that appears
on television or radio, in print or over the Internet. But even the Internet with its
evolving structure and shifting modes of communication (i.e., from text to pictures to
video) is creating new forms of news dissemination. If every U.S. presidential election
brings with it a new innovation in political campaigning, then surely the story of
the 2004 presidential election was the growth of Web logs, the stripped down Web sites
known as "blogs." Essentially on-line diaries, blogs can also chronicle the musings,
gossip, and news of any political actor. Because they are not constrained by editors,
owners, or any pretense of balance, and because of the immediacy with which stories
can be published, blogs are a challenge to traditional media. So, when mainstream news
outlets refused to publish stories of Bill Clinton's affair with an intern, Matt Drudge in
his Drudge Report (http://www.drudgereport.com), had no hesitation. Another leading
blog, "Wonkette" (http://www.wonkette.com), caters to Washington insiders. It uses
the format of listing links to mainstream media sources as well as creating its own
stories. The blog has become not just a filter in the media torrent but also another
source of journalism and another source for journalists. In Canada, Warren Kinsella,
who was a top Chrétien aide, uses his blog (http://www.warrenkinsella.com) to influ-
ence current political debates.

Blogs became an important part of the election cycle in the role they played in propelling Howard Dean from outside populist candidate to front-runner for the U.S. Democratic Party's presidential nominee. In this case, blogs supposedly enabled Dean's campaign to raise extraordinary amounts of money—$5 million per month in the second half of 2003, more than any other Democratic contender in history (Edsall, 2004)—and helped grassroots activists connect with each other, communicate with each other, and plan campaign events from the ground up.

Blogs also play an important role, not just in grassroots political organizations, but as alternate news sources. One prominent case in point occurred during the 2004 presidential election campaign, when CBS News mistakenly reported the existence of documents that supposedly proved President Bush had shirked his duties as a member of the National Guard during the Vietnam War. Within hours of the story being broadcast on the CBS nightly newscast, conservative bloggers had downloaded copies of the documents and raised serious questions about the documents' veracity. Forty-eight hours later, the controversy had spilled from the "blogosphere" into the mainstream media and quickly led CBS News to apologize and launch an internal inquiry into how the story had passed internal checks.

The importance of this incident lies in the increasing ability of bloggers to hold the mass media to account. Whereas the traditional media have often understood themselves to be the primary watchdog of government power, blogs allow citizens to hold the media to account in their political coverage. A common complaint levied against the political media is that they cannot be held accountable. Traditional means (letters to the editor, ombudsmen, etc.) are often too weak or too slow to respond to biases, slants, or outright errors propagated by the mass media.

Simple errors or biases within prominent newscasts in the midst of a campaign can quickly take on the status of what has been called congenial truths, a concept that William Fox applies to Canadian politics. Congenial truths are "a pact between the reporter and the reader, an understanding of reality that is mutually acceptable" (Fox, 1999). Fox discusses one Canadian congenial truth as our belief in Jean Chrétien as "le petit gar de Shawinigan"—we are willing to believe this as a congenial truth despite any evidence that might contradict it. In the case of the CBS newscast, above, the news story was a product of the congenial truth that President Bush had inappropriately avoided his military service; unchallenged, it would have substantially contributed to the strength of that truth within public debate. The interdiction by conservative bloggers was able to substantially alter the progress of the story. In this case, at least, blogs gave citizens a potentially powerful entry point into the 24-hour news cycle, subjecting mainstream journalists to real-time scrutiny, commentary, and accountability.

Blogs are important in other ways as well. Drezner and Farrell (2004) emphasize the role that political blogs played in United States Senator Trent Lott's political troubles in 2002. In that instance, videotaped comments made by Lott, in which he expressed sentiments sympathetic to segregation, were prominently discussed throughout the blogosphere, with liberal-minded bloggers expressing their outrage.

The debate on-line became so fierce that the traditional media were forced to pick up the story, generating enough political pressure that Lott, at that time the Senate Majority Leader, was forced to resign. Moreover, Drezner and Farrell argue that blogs have significant advantages in the opinion-formation process, often shaping important political events early on. Whereas members of the traditional media must go through some basic processes of vetting and editing before their accounts can be put forward, these constraints are nonexistent for bloggers. It might be that blogs are the 21st-century version of the penny press in the 19th century (Tucher, 1994). In the Canadian context, bloggers could serve as early interpreters of key political events such as debates, throne speeches, budget speeches, or Question Period debates.

THE BLURRING OF ENTERTAINMENT AND NEWS

U2 singer Bono appears at the federal Liberal Party leadership convention that elects Paul Martin in 2004; Bruce Springsteen appears with U.S. Democratic candidate John Kerry in the last few days of the 2004 campaign. In both cases the photos and stories are front-page news. Just after the bombing of the World Trade Center, *Politically Incorrect* host Bill Maher is publicly chastised by White House spokesman Ari Fleischer for calling American politicians cowardly. In his rebuke, Fleischer says Americans "need to watch what they say, watch what they do. This is not a time for remarks like that; there never is" ("The *Salon* Interview," 2002). In 2003, country music stars The Dixie Chicks are pilloried in the press and have their music pulled from radio stations when they criticize George Bush's policy on Iraq. In all of these examples, the political views of celebrities become grist for the media mill. Our society has a longstanding fascination with the power of celebrity. That the potent combination of the mass media and capitalism has accelerated the growth of celebrity is not new (Gitlin, 1980). What has changed is that celebrities are now being sought out—or targeted—for their political views. In becoming the new pundits, they have demonstrated how news and entertainment cannot be separated.

One of the most significant political challenges to President Bush's reelection effort and to democratic debate came not from the traditional political media but from Michael Moore's feature film *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The impact of the film should not be underestimated. For example, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United Kingdom took the extraordinary step of publicly refuting claims made in the movie in an exclusive interview with BBC News. The movie is the highest-grossing documentary ever made, grossing approximately $119 million (U.S.) in ticket sales (Smith, 2004, p. 98). Shortly after the film's release, MoveOn.org organized thousands of private screenings of the film, offering private groups the opportunity to hear the filmmaker address the groups over telephone links. Moore was explicit in urging participants to support Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry (Gilgoff and Tobin, 2004, p. 38).

A similar story is found in the phenomenal growth of the satirical comedic news show, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. This nightly comedy program mocks political actors and the political media simultaneously. The high point of Stewart's political influence, perhaps, came with a much publicized appearance on CNN's daily debate show *Crossfire*. On that show, Stewart publicly chastened the show's hosts and, by extension, the broader political media. On the American election night, many networks (CNN and CTV being two examples) seemed to throw in the towel and embrace celebrity/journalism when they broadcast Stewart's comedy show in the middle of electoral returns. Viewers who tuned in during the comedy show would find little difference between *The Daily Show's* news-style presentation and a regular news-cast. Both had attractive anchors sitting behind a desk and reporters filing stories about who might win, routinely interrupted by any electoral results that emerged. It was difficult to determine if comedy was co-opting the election or the election was simply material for a comedian. Either way, the line between entertainment and news was completely blurred.

Should the political warnings of a comedian be taken seriously? Perhaps in this case, there is little-to fear. A study of over 19,000 respondents during the presidential campaign found that viewers of *The Daily Show* had higher levels of campaign infor-mation than did those who did not watch late-night comedy or those who watched other shows such as *The Late Show with David Letterman* ("*Daily Show* Viewers," 2004). There are no data to suggest that the show is a cause of increased political informa-tion; rather, it is more likely that the show's content requires a certain amount of political awareness on the part of its viewers to be successful. There are other, more general reasons to be cautiously optimistic about this development. First, in an age where youth voting is abysmally low, there may be positive benefits in seeing spokes-people more representative of that generation. Second, a poll of Canadians in 2000 suggests that 61 percent of Canadians have not very much or no confidence in the media (Canadian Opinion Research Archive, 2004). Hearing alternative voices might offset the apparently low esteem in which the media are held.

The theme of the blurring between news and entertainment has been addressed perhaps most successfully by Neil Postman (1985) in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In that work, Postman argues that the trend toward treating entertainment as news and news as a form of entertainment represents a powerful threat to demo-cratic debate. He suggests that the threat to modern democracies is not from Big Brother, but from ourselves through our collective ennui. Though he did not live long enough to see the emergence and growth of reality TV, there is no doubt that Postman would see it as proof that television, in particular, is a medium completely unsuited for deliberation.

The growth of reality TV programming around the world is a strong testa-ment to this idea. In the U.K., the final two candidates in the reality program *Pop Idol* "polled more votes than the Liberal Democrats in the general election" (Corner and Pels, 2003, p. 1). Each episode had more viewers than did the 10 o'clock news during the real election campaign. In Australia, more people watched

the final episode of *Australian Idol* than the election debate. Even the treasurer acknowledged that "a lot of people would have turned on [the debate] to see how it was going then they'd start wavering with their finger on the remote control" (Symonds and Schultz, 2004). In the United States, the Showtime network had a reality TV show called *American Candidate* where viewers were invited to select the people's candidate. While candidates were not voted off the island *à la Survivor*, they were subjected to the same sort of competition where two individuals faced off to see who was the victor and who the vanquished. Lest anyone doubt the seriousness of this, the prestigious University of Virginia Center for Politics held an all candidates' debate with both entertainer Montel Williams and noted academic, Larry Sabato. The program was neither entertainment nor news but, with its blurred boundaries, a new hybrid of infotainment where you could not discern the expert academics from the talk-show host.

The growth of non-traditional media, whether in the form of blogs or as a response to why citizens are flocking to entertainment/news, gives us reason to examine what needs these other forms of communication are filling. Their popularity stems from a craving for substantive political debate, alternative narratives, and news frames that are simply not being provided by traditional media. Instead, the traditional political media have become part of the political process, themselves political insiders. Rather than frowning on the intrusions of Jon Stewart and Michael Moore into the political process, we need to ask why they—and not traditional news—are capturing the imagination of viewers.

IS PUBLIC JOURNALISM THE ANSWER?

If the new forms of media are no longer able to provide the kind of information required in a democracy, then what ought to be done about these new blurred boundaries? Jay Rosen, one of the most vocal adherents of "public journalism" (sometimes called civic journalism) argues that what is needed is a new way of doing journalism that recognizes these blurred boundaries and uses them to construct a dialogue with the public. For Rosen, public journalism sees a radical transformation of the role of journalists in society. Public journalism asks journalists to address citizens as participants, not spectators; to help the public act on its problems, not just learn about them; and to improve the climate of public discussion (1999, p. 262).

It maintains some elements of impartiality while abandoning others. For example, the Canadian Association of Journalists has a "Statement of Principles" that lists fairness, freedom of speech, diversity, privacy, balance, and public interest as guiding principles. While public journalism would not abandon these ideals, it would recognize that journalists have an obligation to address compelling social problems and that often means taking sides in a public conversation. While this notion might subvert our traditional understanding of what journalists do, under

public journalism the media provide a platform for meaningful deliberation and debate. By using newspapers as forums for public discussion, by allowing the public to frame issues put before political elites, public journalism changes the media from watchdog to participant. Newspapers (through on-line discussion boards) and television news (through town hall meetings) have begun to adopt some of the central tenets of this movement, but these are the exception, not the rule. Public journalism may offer a solution, as it respects citizens and sees the role of journalists as facilitating this great conversation with government rather than providing bite-sized and intellectually unfulfilling nuggets of news.

We have tried to show in this chapter that the mass media are undergoing tremendous structural changes. Since the boundaries surrounding media have become more open, this should be taken as an ideal opportunity to illuminate what media do and in doing so, shine a light on what that shows us about our own democratic practices and habits. A vibrant media is a necessary precondition for a vibrant democracy.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the ethical issues surrounding the military practice of embedding journalists?
2. Can you think of recent examples of "compassion fatigue" in the media?
3. According to the authors, how has entertainment media and news become increasingly blurred? Provide a recent example.
4. Why do you think there has been such an increase in the popularity of blogs and blogging?
5. What other forms of entertainment media can inform youth about political and news events?

REFERENCES

Bedan, Audin. (2003, April 7). More skewed, very biased. *Maclean's*, 34.

Canadian Opinion Research Archive. (2004). Retrieved November 2, 2004, from http://www.queensu.ca/cora/trends/tables/Confidence-Media.htm

Cook, Timothy. (1998). *Governing with the news: The news media as political institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Corner, John, and Dick Pels. (2003). The restyling of politics. In John Corner and Dick Pels (Eds.), *Media and the restyling of politics*. London: Sage.

Daily Show viewers knowledgeable about presidential campaign, national Annenberg election survey shows. (2004). Annenberg Center for Public Policy. Retrieved November 5, 2004, from http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/naes/2004_03_late-night-knowledge-2_9-21_pr.pdf

Dewey, John. (1927). *The public and its problems*. London: Allen.

Dominion Institute. (2001). 5th annual Canada Day history quiz. Retrieved November 2, 2004, from http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=1255

Donohue, George. A., Phillip J. Tichenor, and Clarice N. Olien. (1995). A guard dog perspective on the role of media. *Journal of Communication, 45,* 115–132.

Drezner, Daniel, and Henry Farrell. (2004). The power and politics of blogs. Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association. Retrieved May 19, 2005, from http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~farrell/blogpaperfinal.pdf

Edsall, Thomas. (2004, January 7). Dean fundraising sets party record: Goal of matching Bush is still far off. *Washington Post,* A4. Retrieved November 7, 2004, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A60457-2004Jan6.html

Farenheit 9/11 viewers and Limbaugh listeners about equal in size even though they perceive two different nations, Annenberg data show. (2004. August 3). National Annenberg Election Study 2004. Retrieved November 2, 2004, from http://www.naes04.org

Fox, Bill. (1999). *Spin wars: Politics and new media.* Toronto: Key Porter Books.

Gerbner, George, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillmann (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17–40). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gilgoff, Dan, and Michael Tobin. (2004, July 12). Moore or less. *U.S. News & World Report,* 38.

Gitlin, Todd. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

———. (2001). *Media unlimited: How the torrent of images and sounds overwhelms our lives.* New York: Metropolitan Books.

Hackett, Robert, and Yuezhi Zhao. (1998). *Sustaining democracy: Journalism and the politics of objectivity.* Toronto: Garamond Press.

Kohut, Andrew. (2004, July 11). More news is not necessarily good news. *The New York Times,* section 4, p. 5.

Kull, Steven. (2004, October 21). The separate realities of Bush and Kerry supporters. The PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll, The American Public on International Issues. College Park, MD: Program on International Policy Attitudes, and Menlo Park, CA: Knowledge Networks. Retrieved from http://www.pipa.org

Laurence, John. (2003, March–April). Embedding: A military view. *Columbia Journalism Review.* Retrieved November 11, 2004, from http://www.cjr.org/issues/2003/2/embed-laurence.asp

Martin, Don. (2004, October 19). From media hack to ministry flack. *The National Post,* p. A18.

McChesney, Robert. (2000). The global media giants. In Robin Andersen and Lance Strate (Eds.), *Critical studies in media commercialism* (pp. 59–70). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Moeller, Susan. (1999). *Compassion fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death*. New York: Routledge.

Nesbitt-Larking, Paul. (2001). *Politics, society and the media: Canadian perspectives*. Toronto: Broadview Press.

Postman, Neil. (1985). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. New York: Penguin.

Rosen, Jay. (1999). *What are journalists for?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

The *Salon* interview: Bill Maher. (2002, December 11). *Salon*. Retrieved November 5, 2004, from http://archive.salon.com/people/interview/2002/12/11/maher

Savoie, Donald. (1996). *Governing from the centre*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smith, Sean. (2004, October 24). Will Oscar listen? *Newsweek*, 98G.

Statistics Canada. (2001). *2001 census of Canada*. Census. Cat. No. 97F0012XCB01018.

———. (2002, December 2). Television viewing, Fall 2001. *The Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/021202/d021202a.htm

Symonds, Emma-Kate, and Jane Schultz. (2004, September 14). Idol moments defending PM. *The Australian*, p. 6.

Taras, David. (1990). *The newsmakers: The media's influence on Canadian politics*. Toronto: Nelson.

———. (2001). *Power and betrayal in the Canadian media*. Toronto: Broadview.

Tucher, Andie. (1994). *Froth and scum: Truth, beauty, goodness, and the ax murder in America's first mass medium*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

U.S. State Department. (2003, February). Public affairs guidance (PAG) on embedding media during possible future operations/deployments in the U.S. central commands [sic] (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR), Sections, 4G1, 4G6, 4G9, 4G14. Retrieved November 7, 2004, from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2003/d20030228pag.pdf