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## *Introduction*

### *The Rise of Networked Journalism*

The Gulf War was the best-covered war in history.

Dick Cheney (Frontline 1996)

### *Preface*

*Networked* is about a transformative era in the history of media, the twenty-year period from 1990 to 2010, when the web rose and newspapers declined. The book centers on the transition as it has occurred in journalism. In networked journalism, members of various publics make journalism material that intersects, mixes, and is distributed to a new heightened degree. To me, networked journalism is journalism that sees publics acting as creators, investigators, reactors, (re)makers, and (re)distributors of news and where all variety of media, amateurs and professional, corporate and independent products and interests intersect at a new level. What's more, the variety of forms and perspectives that make up news in this environment and the number of connections linking creators to one another have significant influence on the news and have expanded journalism as a category of information and genre of storytelling.

Others have described networked journalism simply as collaboration between professionals and amateurs (Beckett 2008; Jarvis 2006; Rosen 2009). Jeff Jarvis (2006), journalist and author of the high-profile blog BuzzMachine, writes that in networked

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journalism, “the public can get involved in a story before it is reported, contributing facts, questions, and suggestions. The journalists can rely on the public to help report the story.” Jarvis describes a trend where professional journalists accept input from the public while maintaining their authority over the news product, but this shift in the relationship between professionals and the public is just one element of the current changes taking place. Networked journalism is about more than journalists using a digitally equipped public as a kind of new hyper-source. It is also about a shift in the balance of power between news providers and news consumers. Digital publishing tools and powerful mobile devices are matched by cultural developments such as increased skepticism toward traditional sources of journalistic authority (Jenkins 2006; Russell et al. 2008). Contemporary journalism products and practices give new relevance to long-standing questions at the heart of what used to be called the journalism profession: How is truth defined and by whom? Which forms and practices of journalism yield the most credible product? How do consumers measure value among, on the one hand, elite media institutions, with their gatekeepers, resources, and professional codes and training, and, on the other, the bloggers and wiki-ists and emailers, with their editorial independence, collaborative structures, and merit-based popularity?

These questions became central to the debate about the 2003 Iraq War and about news of the war as it circulated on the internet, over the airwaves, and in print. Working at the time as a Networked Publics Fellow at the University of Southern California Annenberg Center for Communication, where my colleagues were researching new digital realities in youth and music and activist media cultures, for example, I came to view the heavily mediated culture of the news information industry as transformative, especially as I began to compare coverage of the 1991 war and coverage of the 2003 war. I grew to believe the similarities of the two eras underline the differences: there were two presidents Bush, two Persian Gulf wars, and two media environments.

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### *The Old and New News*

#### **Gulf War 1991: High-Modernist Journalism**

Coverage of the first Gulf War was characterized by the qualities of mass media – by the predominance of commercial and professional news product and a one-way communication model catering to a national community. Coverage of the second Gulf War was characterized by qualities of networked media – by an influx of independent and amateur news products and conversational models of communication organized around communities of interest.

The first Gulf War was not just a mass-media story, not even just another trademark mass-media story like Watergate or the O.J. Simpson chase and trial. It was more a culminating kind of story, an exclamation point to a chapter in communication history. The address delivered by President George H. Bush the night the war began, January 16, 1991, attracted the largest audience in the history of American television. Nielson estimated that 78.8 percent of the people in homes with television sets were watching and that record numbers of those viewers stayed tuned as the U.S. Air Force began its attack on Iraqi infrastructure (Carter 1991). The narrative strategy adopted by the broadcast stations was to simultaneously stoke the drama and sanitize the action. News staffs branded the event with dramatic music and titles based on Pentagon operation names like “Iraqi Freedom” and “Desert Shield.” Editors flipped among segments featuring Pentagon analysts, snapping and sparkling artillery over Baghdad, and fighter-plane footage of U.S. smart bombs delivering themselves through windows and doors of Iraqi buildings – technological footage that looked like a cerebral video-game, where each of the bombs snaked over the city toward the ground and ended in a silent flash. The intensity of the story was heightened by the fact that its subject was the first-ever “real-time” war, a media product made possible by new technology that enabled reporters to beam video over satellite feeds.

The practice of journalism as developed and promoted in the hundred years before the war – including sourcing preferences

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where authorities dominated, narrative structures that privileged the status quo, the rise of visual media culture, and the widespread adoption of broadcast technology – yielded consistent coverage of the war at the major news outlets, producing, in effect, a single narrative across media, a narrative that was, it turned out, easy to manipulate. The first Gulf War is often cited as an example of the revolutionary “CNN effect” in action, an instance where a popular twenty-four-hour international news channel significantly influenced public opinion and government policy (Belknap 2001; Livingston 1997). The idea is that by focusing continuous real-time media coverage on a particular conflict, international incident, or diplomatic initiative, the news media increase public awareness and political attention and accelerate the policymaking process. The press, in its role as the so-called “fourth estate” in representative political systems, however, has always had an influence on public opinion and policy. The CNN effect simply describes the intensification of already existing relations. The introduction of the twenty-four-hour news cycle did not mark a revolution in news media but rather a culmination, where practices were exaggerated and relations intensified, the lines separating journalists from the sources of their stories and the companies they worked for becoming increasingly blurred as a matter of perception if not of fact.

## **The Narrative**

After the fact, journalists lamented that they lost control of the Gulf War story, that they had been docile and easily shepherded by their sources. Mostly they said they had failed to properly follow the long-established codes of the profession, which, if followed, would have yielded more complex and accurate coverage (Massig 2004). The story they missed in their post-war mea culpa reporting, however, was the “perfect storm” of long-gathering professional, technological, social, and political conditions that made the first Gulf War the ideal mass-media news story, not a low point, from that perspective, but a high point, less an aberration than an inevitability.

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Then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney saw the war from that perspective, describing it as “the best-covered war in history.”

We provided more information in near real-time than ever before in history in any conflict. The press was not happy with the way we did it because a lot of it we did direct to the American people. Our daily briefings for example that were covered live on television. They didn't get to cover the war they wanted to cover but in fact the nature of modern combat, the fact you fight at dark at very high speeds across desert terrain, that means the old romantic notions of a reporter going out sort of traveling with the troops are a thing of the past and you have to, in fact, make arrangements for the press to cover that kind of an operation. It has to be done in conjunction with military and . . . I was interested in seeing that they got a chance to do their job but not at the risk of accomplishing the mission or at the risk of casualties to American troops. (Frontline 1996)

By “best-covered war,” Cheney meant it was the most tightly controlled and spectacularly delivered war coverage ever produced. The relatively few outlets that delivered versions of the war alternative to the dominant narrative did not benefit from the institutional backing and channels of distribution that helped saturate the world with Cheney's “best-covered war.” That narrative of events came almost entirely out of briefings organized by the military and attended by reporters from major news outlets the world over. In Iraq, as opposed to Vietnam, for example, very few reporters were allowed to visit the frontlines or to conduct interviews with soldiers, and those visits and interviews were conducted in the presence of officers and subject to both prior approval by the military and later security editing. Indeed, these “information management” tactics came as part of a public relations strategy designed to avoid a repeat of what the military viewed as the public relations disaster of the Vietnam War (Hatchen & Scotton 2006; Kellner 1992).

By almost all measures, the Pentagon's updated public relations approach had the intended effect on journalists as much as it did on the larger public. Opinion polls showed Americans overwhelmingly supported the war. According to a Pew survey (2003b),

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77 percent felt the U.S. had made the right decision in attacking Iraq. One *LA Times Mirror* poll (1991) found that 50 percent of respondents considered themselves “obsessed” with war news and that nearly 80 percent felt the military was “telling as much as it could.” Perhaps because the duration of the invasion was so brief (January 17, 1991 to February 28, 1991), support for the war and trust in the military remained consistently high. Americans also became part of the war news at the pro-war rallies that were covered nightly on television. Anti-war protests, however, received comparatively scant coverage, in terms of column inches and broadcast time. The protests didn’t fit the narrative. They were made to seem aberrational or anti-American through context by editors who ran protest coverage alongside reports of anti-American demonstrations in the Middle East (Kellner 1992). On one side, viewers were presented with flag-waving choruses of pro-USA chants; on the other, flag stompings and burnings in effigy (Bishop 2006).

It was only much later that journalists, citizen groups, and official investigators succeeded in publicizing the extent and success of the Pentagon’s control of the war narrative. Pressed for information, the military admitted a year later that many of the war’s star weapons systems had not performed as well as reported. The Stealth bomber experienced technical difficulties and the Navy’s Cruise missiles struck not 90 percent of their targets, as the Pentagon claimed at the time, but only 50 percent (Hatchen & Scotton 2006: 142). It was not until January 6, 1992 that John MacArthur, the publisher of *Harper’s* magazine, revealed in a *New York Times* op-ed some of the facts surrounding the compelling testimony of a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl identified only as Nayirah, whose allegations that Iraqi soldiers killed infant children in Kuwait were used to trump up support for the war. She had not been witness to a terrifying hospital raid by Iraqi soldiers. In fact she was the daughter of a Kuwaiti diplomat and her influential emotional Capitol Hill testimony was a fraud: the facts of the alleged raid had been exaggerated beyond recognition; and the Capitol Hill hearing itself had been a mock-hearing orchestrated by a PR firm and chaired by two sitting U.S. Representatives in

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its pay. But it all looked real on television. The Congressional setting, the men in suits posing questions behind microphones, and the tear-soaked testimony riveted television audiences primed to respond to the visual cues. Cable news flashed the testimony around the world as if it were taking place before a genuine committee hearing. Then-President Bush quoted Nayirah at every opportunity. Six times in one month he referred to “312 premature babies at Kuwait City’s maternity hospital who died after Iraqi soldiers stole their incubators and left the infants on the floor,” none of which was true (Ireland 1991) but all of which had been a very real news story.

### **High Journalism Brought Low**

This perfect storm countered the goals of the mass-media news profession that emerged in the early 1800s in the United States, where newspapers were freed from reliance on political parties and touted as a potentially post-partisan educational medium that could bolster democracy. The advent of the penny press in 1833 signaled a new breed of newspaper based on a commercial model that sought mass readership (Schudson 1978; Schudson & Karl 1986). Benjamin Day, publisher of the first penny press paper, the *New York Sun*, expanded circulation of the paper by appealing to working-class readers with sensationalistic stories that dealt with the concerns of the masses. His writers reported on crime, local politics, natural disasters, labor struggles, and the cost of living, much of which had not been considered newsworthy previously. Advertisers were willing to pay for space and the *Sun* dropped its price from five cents to one cent, making it affordable to those outside the elite classes. The economic viability of sensationalism helped move newspapers away from reliance on political parties for financial support. The penny press industry brought in more advertisers and employees and intensified competition for news and for audiences.

But parallel to the rise of commercial news and mass circulation came the rise of professionalism (Schudson 1978; Schudson & Karl 1986). Research suggests the ideal of news objectivity came

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with the invention of the telegraph in the early 1840s and the subsequent birth in 1848 of the first American wire service, the Associated Press (AP). AP and other wire services attempted to produce reporting objective enough to be accepted by the politically varied papers that they served. Striving for objectivity did not, however, become the norm or practice in journalism until after World War I. Wartime propaganda and public relations campaigns convinced journalists that facts could not be trusted; that what they reported too often had been created for them to report by interested parties. Staged media events and the proliferation of government-sponsored information had shaped reporting and the opinions of reporters. In response, news writers formed an allegiance to rules and procedures alleged to result in objective reporting (Schudson 1978; Schudson & Karl 1986). According to journalism historian Michael Schudson, objectivity meant that “a person’s statements about the world can be trusted if they are submitted to established rules deemed legitimate by a professional community” (1978: 7). The growing professional faith of journalists generated social cohesion and occupational pride, on the one hand, and internal social control, on the other. Journalists and editors, in effect, policed one another through promotion and lack of promotion, for example. By the 1920s, this pattern produced a self-conscious professionalism and a dominant ethic based on objectivity (Schudson 1978: 82).

Journalism scholar Daniel Hallin has famously referred to the subsequent era of American journalism – from the end of World War II until roughly the 1980s – as high modernism, and demonstrates that rather than being the natural or ultimate state of journalism, it was just a brief period based on very specific historical political, economic, and cultural conditions. Despite a rise in commercialism, journalists during this era were relatively free of commercial pressure, allowing for professional autonomy and dedication to social responsibility. In addition, unlike today, the period was characterized by a high level of ideological consensus in the United States centered on bipartisan agreement around Cold War foreign policy and the light corporatism and welfare state that emerged from the New Deal. This is in part why the

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objectivity norm developed more strongly in the United States than in continental Europe. This consensus, however, has long since been fragmented by the Vietnam War, conflict over race, gender, and sexuality, and hyper free-market economic policy, among other factors (Hallin 1992, 2000; Hallin & Mancini 2004).

In the 1960s and 1970s journalism and journalists reflected the increasingly polarized political landscape, responding and contributing to it by shifting to a more assertive stance, making their own role as political actors more apparent (Schudson 2003). Likewise, the shift from family to corporate ownership of newspapers, the deregulation of broadcasting, and the intensification of competition in broadcasting and between traditional and emergent forms of news media heightened the pressure on journalists to produce content that would attract more news consumers (Schudson 2003). Since the 1980s journalists have lost even more autonomy within news organizations increasingly dominated by market demands. Deregulation and the multiplication of channels have contributed to the strong reemergence of partisan media.

Hallin describes how professionalism receded, in part, because of a shift to “neoliberalism,” determinist global market liberalism, and the activism this shift inspired. “For the Liberalism of the mid-twentieth century, professionalism acted as a balance to the logic of the market,” he writes.

Neoliberalism in contrast tends to be cynical about any claim about values that cannot be reduced to market choices. Neoliberalists deride the idea that journalists serve a higher purpose than that of the market as elitist language that clearly borrows from the very different critique of professionalism advanced by a variety of social movements, which aimed to shift power from elites to citizens. (Hallin 2006)

Indeed, the charge of elitism is used by those who would like to see the news media environment both more and less dominated by the market. Although Hallin precisely traces the conditions that spurred the end of this era, he also sees no reason to lament its passing: “It makes little sense to be nostalgic for the high modernist period of American journalism, which had many problems

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of its own, and which in any case belongs to a historical era that cannot be recreated” (2006: 2).

By now, the biases produced by the culture of objectivity are widely acknowledged. Analysts say that the rules of journalism developed during the high-modern era chiefly serve media corporations (Rashco 1975; Schiller 1981; Schudson 1978) and that the culture of objectivity demands fairness and balance but only within the limits of consensus or the “common sense” of a particular political system (Hartley 1982). Sociologist and political activist Todd Gitlin (2003), for example, argues that journalistic devotion to hard fact and editorial balance led to coverage of the Vietnam-era anti-war movement that emphasized confrontation rather than analysis of issues and shaped a portrayal of the movement as operating outside the boundaries of reasonable dissent. Hallin (2006) writes:

[The] coincidence of forces in the decline of professionalism reminds us that the consequences of the decline are complex, and in some ways can be seen as representing greater democratization and greater responsiveness toward the concerns and perspectives of various parts of society, and in some ways the opposite, an increasing subjection of the institutions of communication to the interest that dominate economic life.

While the professional norms of mass-media journalism attempted to use objectivity to separate facts from values or opinions, journalism scholar Ted Glasser (1984) writes that these mechanisms for creating and maintaining truth create a predictable series of biases. First, he says, the norms of objectivity favor the status quo because they encourage reporters to rely on bureaucratically credible sources. He argues that White House sources, lawmakers, staffers, CEOs, and corporate researchers, for example, are all insiders by definition: their perspectives are limited to what works within the system, which they’re not looking to change. Second, the professional norms discourage independent thinking because they dictate that journalists are mere spectators, compelling them to attempt to leave their own inevitable opinions and insights out of their stories. Third, norms of objectivity are biased

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against the idea of responsibility: the objectivity which journalists claim exists in their stories absolves them of accountability for the content. The mass-media news, with its strengths and weaknesses, delivered the Iraq War to national and international audiences as a tightly packaged and spectacularly performed event that left little room for interpretation and dissenting opinion.

### *Iraq War 2003: Post-Modernist Journalism*

Administration and Pentagon efforts to control news of the Iraq War, which began in March 2003, were every bit as intense as those undertaken during the Gulf War. The George W. Bush administration, where Cheney was vice president, prized secrecy and information control (Boler 2008; Massig 2004) and spent billions of dollars on national and international public relations campaigns aimed at squelching opposition to U.S. forces in the Middle East and anti-Americanism generally (Hatchen & Scotton 2006). This time, in response to lawsuits journalists filed in the wake of the Gulf War, the Pentagon would “embed” members of the media with military units during operations. The military operation this time was called “Shock and Awe” and, like “Desert Storm” and “Desert Shield,” it became a network news product brand name.

Amy Goodman, host of the syndicated daily radio and television news show *Democracy Now*, reported the way the government seemed to be building consensus for the war. The Gulf War of the 1990s had been pitched as a battle against dictatorial aggression and a move to protect Kuwaiti sovereignty. This time Goodman and others saw a “concerted effort to convince the American people that they should be afraid, that they were threatened, that there was an imminent threat” (Boler 2008: 200). White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card established an administration marketing team called the White House Iraq Group to sell the war by pushing the idea that Iraq posed a nuclear threat to the United States.

The campaign succeeded. Nearly all major national polling

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organizations reported public support for military action in the 70 percent range during the first few weeks of the war. Perceptions of how well the war was going also were consistent across polling organizations (Pew 2003b). A Pew survey conducted during the first five days of the Iraq War found that 72 percent of Americans believed the decision to take military action against Iraq was correct, while 22 percent thought it was the wrong decision. The survey also found that public attention to news coverage of the war was on par with interest in the first Gulf War. About 79 percent rated Iraq War coverage as good or excellent, roughly the same number as during the Gulf War (Pew 2003a).

Seven months into the Iraq War, however, Gallup found that the percentage of Americans who viewed the invasion as a mistake had jumped substantially, from 25 percent in March 2003 to 40 percent in October 2003. Four years into the Iraq War, a February 2007 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reported that public opinion about the war and about media performance in covering the war had plummeted. Most Americans now reported having little or no confidence in the information they were receiving – from either the military or the media. Fewer than half (46 percent) said they had a great deal or fair amount of confidence that the U.S. military was giving the public an accurate picture of the situation, and even fewer (38 percent) were confident in the media's war reporting (Dimock 2007).

The 1991 Gulf War lasted roughly one month. The Iraq War, however, dragged on for years after Baghdad fell and even after dictator Saddam Hussein fled and was captured, tried, and hanged. Information control broke down. Stories created by the White House Iraq Group began resurfacing in increasingly more thinly dissected versions. The dominant military narrative that the Iraq War would be a new kind of lightning war with limited casualties facilitated by U.S. technology fell apart as Iraqi society descended into sectarian violence and U.S. troops took on the role of public safety officials and occupiers. The resulting slogging chaos and absurdities were captured in quotidian detail, for example, by the student-made internet video series *Hometown Baghdad*, which was hosted by major U.S. online sites like Salon.com. The young

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video makers behind Hometown Baghdad were not embedded with American soldiers. They didn't go to U.S. military briefings. On the contrary, they knew the city and the country better than did any foreign journalist. Their video diaries went through virtually no editorial layers. They didn't run their recorded life-experiences past official or pro-war sources to balance them out with counter-interpretation. Hometown Baghdad matched with corroborating blogs coming from Iraq, like RiverBend, which called into question dominant news narratives at every turn. Soon the alleged links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda were being called into question on the nightly news and in newspapers. The search for Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction turned up nothing. The heroic rescue of U.S. Private Jessica Lynch was revealed as farce.<sup>1</sup> News and images of U.S. military torture and Iraqi and U.S.-led coalition casualties began first trickling and then streaming out into the international mediasphere from alternative sources such as blogs and email and cell phones. What's more, some of the key producers of this alternative news product included members of the U.S. military: that is, Iraq War soldiers, who were more fully "embedded" with the Pentagon's operations than were any of the journalists on the ground but who were also much less heavily monitored, even though they owned the kind of frontline communications equipment reporters from any previous war zone could only have dreamed of possessing.

In the leadup to the war, activists and journalists online monitored mainstream media coverage. They critiqued what they viewed as tepid reporting of anti-war protests. In a study of the newscasts aired at ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS during the two weeks leading up to the Iraq invasion, the watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting found that of 393 interviews conducted, only three were with anti-war leaders (Boler 2008: 201). In that same period, however, millions of people in cities throughout the world were demonstrating against the war, part of the largest anti-war movement in history. Editors at major newspapers, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, responded to a critical email campaign by apologizing for not covering the protests and the anti-war movement more actively and for not

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featuring the protests more prominently in the weeks leading up to the start of the war.

One of the major media scandals of the Iraq War centered on the way the *New York Times* was manipulated into reporting the administration's line on the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction. In an extraordinary editor's note, the *New York Times* acknowledged errors in its reporting of the story:

We have found . . . instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. . . . In some cases, the information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged – or failed to emerge. . . . We consider the story of Iraq's weapons, and of the pattern of misinformation, to be unfinished business. And we fully intend to continue aggressive reporting aimed at setting the record straight. (*New York Times* 2004a)

Many of the flawed stories were written by Judith Miller, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who had covered the Middle East for years. Miller was later jailed for refusing to reveal the name of the anonymous source she relied upon for her Iraq weapons stories, Irving Lewis Libby. Critics accused Miller of crossing an ethical line by establishing close relationships with a small coterie of key Bush administration staffers, including Libby, and not seeking to verify the information they were feeding her. Miller went to jail, they said, to protect the identity not of a whistle-blower, for example, but of the operatives who had used her to publish their case for the war. The story she wrote based on the information she was getting wasn't true. Miller wasn't protecting a source. She was protecting herself against evidence that she had been played by the administration (Massig 2004).

Nevertheless, *New York Times* editor John Geddes in a fall 2005 speech to the Associated Press Managing Editors Conference described events surrounding Miller's reporting and defended the newspaper. He said it was journalism, not Miller, that the *New York Times* was protecting when it decided to back her decision

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not to reveal her source. Geddes's speech was impressive for the commitment it displayed to the ideals of the profession. Geddes defended the norms and codes guiding the profession by apologizing for not following them, which was his explanation for the bad coverage. The mistakes wouldn't have happened, he said, in effect, if we had only followed the rules.

The rules, however, had changed. The start of the Iraq War corresponded to the rise of the internet as a medium for professional journalism and analysis as well as for rapidly expanding user-generated content. By 2003, a vibrant field of readily accessible public communication had formed, for example, by academics, bloggers, citizen-sponsored journalists, and what journalism scholar Orville Schell (2004) called "second-tier news outlets." The new material augmented and often clashed with material produced by the mainstream media. Indeed, the second Bush administration soon seemed to be conducting wars in two theaters that it had not fully researched and did not understand: post-Saddam Hussein Iraq and the web-enhanced mediasphere.

In 1991, the year of the Gulf War, the World Wide Web had literally just been invented by Tim Berners-Lee. By the start of the Iraq War in 2003, according to a Pew Internet and American Life Project report released that year (Pew 2003a), 77 percent of Americans had used the web to find information about the war, to learn and share differing opinions about the conflict, and to send and receive emails where they pondered events, expressed their views, and offered prayers. Two November 2004 surveys by Pew determined that 8 million American adults said they had created blogs; blog readership jumped 58 percent in 2004 to 27 percent of internet users; 5 percent of internet users said they used RSS aggregators or XML readers to find news and other information delivered from blogs and websites; and 12 percent of internet users had posted comments or other material on blogs (Rainie 2005).

The story of Abu Ghraib, of the conditions maintained and the abuses carried out by U.S. personnel at the prison just west of Baghdad, is one of the emblematic networked news stories of the war. Personal digital media technology produced the evidence at the heart of the story and online news outlets were key

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in distributing that evidence as news. A 2004 report authored by U.S. Major General Antonio M. Taguba found sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuse of Iraqis by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib. Considerable evidence supported allegations, Taguba wrote, including detailed witness statements and the discovery of graphic photographs and video taken by American soldiers. Taguba didn't include digital photos and video with his report but they became the primary source material for the news media once the story broke.

CBS news magazine *60 Minutes II* was the first to air the story in April 2004, using as one of its main sources a video diary created and emailed home by Army Reserve Staff Sergeant Chip Frederick, one of the perpetrators of the abuse. A few days later, the *New Yorker* published a story by Seymour Hersh (2004) on the prison and included photographs taken by U.S. military prison guards. The article was followed in the next two weeks by two more articles by Hersh on the same subject: "Chain of Command" and "The Gray Zone." The horrible, bizarre, transmittable, reproducible digital images of Abu Ghraib and the victims and the perpetrators of abuse there rocketed across the web. The *New York Times* (2004b), the *Boston Globe* (2004), and other outlets called for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's resignation. The cover of the *Economist* (2004), which supported President Bush in the 2000 election, carried one of the digital snapshots with the headline "Resign, Rumsfeld."

Two years later, as the war and heated debate about the war dragged on, Salon.com obtained and published files and other electronic documents from a U.S. Army internal investigation report on the scandal that had been leaked to the press. The report included a review of

all the computer media submitted to [the Army] office, including 1,325 images of suspected detainee abuse, 93 video files of suspected detainee abuse, 660 images of adult pornography, 546 images of suspected dead Iraqi detainees, 29 images of soldiers in simulated sexual acts, 20 images of a soldier with a Swastika drawn between his eyes, 37 images of military working dogs being used in abuse of detainees and 125 images of questionable acts.

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According to Jeanne Carstensen, Salon.com's former managing editor, the internet was the perfect medium for the story:

The Abu Ghraib package was a journalistic opportunity that comes along very rarely, and it was a perfect marriage of an extremely important journalistic story that had to be told, and the right medium to tell it in. It was perfect because creating galleries of those photos on the web was the best way that you could ever hope to present such an archive and we were able to build it in such a way that now exists as the definitive record of the Abu Ghraib scandal. (Unpublished interview 2007)

Salon.com had unlimited digital space to publish and archive the story and its supporting documents. These now live on the web as accessible and as clear as the day they were posted. Salon.com was free of the constraints that had reined in most of the traditional news organizations reporting the story, many of which published a minimum number of Abu Ghraib images, which they felt were too disturbing and controversial.

The story of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib is one among many instances where the loss of control of the story on the part of the Bush administration and the Pentagon echoed the loss of control of the story on the part of newspaper and television news editors and reporters and publishers. Members of the public on a whole new scale enjoyed direct access to the raw material of the news and the means to analyze, package, publish, and distribute it, and they did. That action changed the news and journalism in profound ways: stories filed by embedded reporters were trumped by soldiers' personal emails and photos; Western-trained journalists were criticized for lacking crucial knowledge of the cultures on which they were reporting; Western audiences surfed to Arab outlets to get news and to view footage absent from Western reports; independent reporters raised their own funding through online donations; satirical remixes of political speeches were created and circulated; independent websites posted images that mainstream outlets passed over; independent documentary filmmakers armed with low-cost digital tools shot, edited, advertised, and distributed their work online; and mainstream

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media were scrutinized and disinformation was exposed often within hours or days.

### *Networked: Technology as Culture; Journalism as Culture*

The most obvious changes in the news media landscape over the twelve years between the Gulf War and the start of the Iraq War were the widespread adoption of the World Wide Web,<sup>2</sup> the proliferation of low-cost digital tools, and the ubiquity of digital networks. This, however, is not a book about technology. It is a book about how news is being transformed by the ways people are using technologies to find, create, organize, present, and circulate news and how conceptions of journalism and of the work of journalism and its purposes are expanding. Raymond Williams' (1973) concept of dominant, residual, and emergent products of distinct social and cultural structures reminds us that historically unique environments lead people to develop certain kinds technologies and to use them in historically specific ways. New technologies are adapted, tweaked, or hacked to meet prevailing needs (Brown & Duguid 2002; Hine 2000; Ito 2008).

Journalism is also a social construct. The best way to understand the field of journalism is to look at what news and news work means within the culture of journalism rather than attempting to study it from the outside as product or institution. Journalism historian James Carey famously calls for a departure from the "transmission" view of journalism to a "ritual" view, which understands communication as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed." Drawing on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), he suggests studying communication as culture in order "to understand the meanings that others have placed on experience, to build up the vertical record of what has been said at other times, in other places, and in other ways" (Carey 1988: 62). Along these same lines, journalism scholar Barbie Zelizer (1992) argues that journalism should be considered not only a profession but also an interpretive community,

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where members are united by a shared discourse and by collective interpretation of key public events. In her analysis of coverage of John F. Kennedy's assassination, she demonstrates the process by which journalists interpreted events in a way that argued for their own (the journalists') legitimacy as storytellers. Journalism scholars Ted Glasser and James Ettema (1998) approach investigative journalism as a form of social and moral inquiry and use interviews with journalists to explore the tensions and contradictions that characterize professional mainstream American journalism. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2005), in his analysis of the "journalistic field," argued that the journalistic product is primarily shaped by the ways members of the field negotiate among themselves. He contended that to understand journalism, one cannot look to readers' needs and expectations. Instead, he wrote, "the essential part of what is presented in [the newspapers] *L' Express* and *Le Nouvel Observateur* is determined by the relationship between *L' Express* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*" (2005: 45).

Most journalism scholars, however, have focused their attention exclusively on the culture and products of mainstream professional outlets, which is only a small and shrinking dimension of contemporary journalism. Zelizer writes, "Consider the repertoire of candidates that would not currently merit membership under the narrowed definition of journalism: A Current Affair, MTV's *Week in Rock*, internet listservs, Jon Stewart, *nakednews.com*, reporters for the Weather Channel, and rap music are a few that come to mind" (2004: 6). Media scholar Peter Dahlgren (1992) calls this the "metonymic character" of journalism scholarship, or the tendency to define journalism based on the study of only a small portion of news products and producers. Although scholars are widening their perspective as alternative news forms and news producers proliferate, an artificial division continues to separate the study of so-called "mainstream" and so-called "alternative" journalism and is manifest in the way scholars still mostly treat anything but traditional news practices as only tangentially related to news discourse (Russell 2007).

Studies that do consider alternative journalism, such as the research by the Goldsmith Leverhulme Media Research Center

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published in *New Media, Old News* (Fenton 2010), often measure it according to the elitist democratic model. This model is commonly associated with Walter Lippmann, an influential critic of journalism and celebrated journalist, a founding editor of *The New Republic*, and two-time Pulitzer winner for his syndicated column “Today and Tomorrow.” Lippman saw the central role of the press as acting on behalf of the public as “watchdogs” of the powerful elite (Benson 2010). Journalism scholar Rodney Benson points out that, according to this model, new media exacerbate the crisis in journalism and thus in democracy, mainly because economic and institutional shake-ups have been met with a decline in “watchdog” or accountability journalism, especially at professional news outlets. That view, he argues, overlooks both the many new forms of accountability journalism being created, and the diverse functions of journalism beyond its watchdog role. Benson identifies three broad schools of thought in democratic theory – elitist, deliberative, and pluralistic – and argues that how we understand and evaluate journalism in the networked era depends on which of these democratic models are emphasized and valued.<sup>3</sup> He suggests that if we look beyond Lippmann’s elite model of democracy, we can see more clearly the ways new media might support rather than corrode democracy. The deliberative model, for instance, sees journalists as facilitators, working to promote dialogue among members of the public through communication in which they are encouraged to participate. The aim here is to support reflection and robust understandings of news-related policies and issues in order to improve the quality of public life (Benson 2010; Christians et al. 2009). And the pluralist model sees journalists creating energetic engagement with diverse forms and perspectives to encourage *understanding across lines of difference* that empowers publics (Benson 2010; Bohman 2000). As examples throughout this book will illustrate, projects within and outside mainstream media outlets strive to make news a conversation among members of the public and journalists and to facilitate more dynamic engagement between and among diverse publics. Benson’s astute analysis reminds us that our ideas about what forms and functions constitute journalism impede our ability to

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understand and effectively create the journalism of the future. If we judge journalism only by its role as a watchdog, for example, we overlook other equally important functions flourishing in the emergent environment, including journalism that facilitates deliberation and that enhances pluralism. By focusing on emergent cultural forms and practices related to journalism, the aim of this book is to expand the terms of debate around news, news publics, and the function of journalism as a democratic tool.

## *This Book*

*Networked* identifies three aspects of the rise of networked journalism, which offer new or newly prominent possibilities for democratic engagement: amateur and non-market production; the role of niche and special-interest groups in opening up and “networking” the news environment; and the ascendance of the aesthetics of parody, remix, and appropriation.<sup>4</sup> These characteristics of the new news environment also serve as the organizing structure of the book. The book presents and critiques examples of these aspects of the networked environment and analyzes the way they influence news product, practices, and roles.

Between 2004 and 2010 I conducted interviews with more than sixty news media producers working in six different countries. I also interviewed journalism educators and followed conversations taking place online, in academic journals and at conferences. This study of and engagement with the culture and practice of journalists is combined with analysis of news content related to the case studies presented in the book. For the case studies where I examined various networked journalism products, I conducted qualitative analysis of content and commentary.

While many of the case studies, projects, and journalists informing the book are international in scope, its focus is primarily on U.S. developments, influenced by the U.S. blend of journalism history and cultural practices, industry organization, and concerns surrounding infrastructure and intellectual property issues. U.S. journalism is marked by advanced software development, for

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example, and limited but increasingly mobile phone penetration and mobile internet access (Varnelis 2008). I have found that the journalism culture in the United States seems relatively stubborn in clinging to traditional journalism models and practices. While researching this book, I have been made constantly aware of the fact that journalism is evolving along different trajectories depending on national, political, cultural, and economic contexts. This book in no way claims to cover the transition outside of the U.S. I have deliberately focused on the specifics of U.S. journalism, a variety that is broadly influential and significantly influenced by a more expansive emergent networked society and culture.

*Networked* employs an expanded definition of journalism and of journalists, one that reaches beyond the products and producers of traditional journalism that are typically the focus of academic work and public debate. Journalism here refers to the wealth of news-related information, opinion, and cultural expression, in various styles and from various producers, which together shape the meaning of news event and issues. Journalism has extended far beyond stories created for television broadcast outlets or for publication in traditional commercial newspapers and magazines. Journalism can be a conversation that takes place in the blogosphere; an interactive media-rich interface on a mainstream or alternative news site that provides context to a breaking story; the work of any number of fact-check sites; a tweeted camera-phone photo of a breaking news event; a comment or comment thread on a news site; a videogame created to convey a particular news narrative, and so on. In such an environment journalists are no longer strictly the people who gather information and create news stories from that information for a living.

The U.S. Senate in 2009 debated who should be able to call upon federal shield laws drafted to protect journalists from having to reveal confidential sources. The initial wording of the law focused on the craft of journalism over the business of journalism. The law identified a journalist as a person who:

- (i) with the primary intent to investigate events and procure material in order to disseminate to the public news or information concern-

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- ing local, national, or international events or other matters of public interest, regularly gathers, prepares, collects, photographs, records, writes, edits, reports or publishes on such matters
- (ii) has such intent at the inception of the process of gathering the news or information sought.

The revised definition broadened the scope to include people who work with a wide variety of media. These new journalists:

Obtain the news or information sought in order to disseminate it by means of print (including, but not limited to, newspapers, books, wire services, news agencies, or magazines), broadcasting (including, but not limited to, dissemination through networks, cable, satellite carriers, broadcast stations, or a channel or programming service for any such media), mechanical, photographic, electronic, or other means. (Seward 2009)

Yet before the new shield law was adopted, the definition was further revised to apply to only those who “work as a salaried employee of, or independent contractor for, an entity.” The final version excluded amateurs of any sort, including student reporters, bloggers with a day job, so-called “citizen journalists,” and part-time and unsalaried news writers and broadcasters. This tendency to define journalism by its business model and by the technology through which it is distributed is not unique to lawmakers. In fact it is, as mentioned above, a major shortcoming of much of the journalism scholarship of the past decade, which has pitted old and new forms against one another, failing to recognize the ways new and old media and professional and amateur authors work in the same environment, influencing each other in form and content to shape the meaning of news events and issues (Seward 2009).

## **Cultural Narrative and News Transformations**

Professional journalism norms have long been challenged by alternative or radical media products and practices created in opposition to the content and structure of mainstream news media products and practices (Atton & Hamilton 2008; Couldry 2000;

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Downing 2000; Gitlin 2003). New media technologies and products from the printing press to satellite television have been touted for their revolutionary capacities. What's new in the networked era is the extent to which alternative forms are proliferating and overlapping with mainstream forms within the media landscape, which is partly the case because networked publics are developing connections with one another and expanding the sphere of legitimate debate (Hallin 1986). In the mass-media era, traditional news media largely defined the sphere of legitimate debate because the public was connected to the media but not to one another. Today it is much cheaper and easier for user-participants to find each other and exchange opinions and information. In doing so they often realize that the official news-generated sphere of debate doesn't reflect their own (Rosen 2009).

Chapter 2 is about a new public. Just as the telegraph transformed views of time and space and changed the way journalism was practiced, pushing it toward styles and forms that were appealing to geographically dispersed audiences, the proliferation of low-cost digital communication tools and networks has transformed the role of journalists and of the public. No longer merely news audiences or consumers, networked news publics are engaged – with each other, with news producers, and with news sources – in new ways. News publics are now practically aware that the mass-media of the past, which had come to seem natural, is not the only possible form.

The notion that there is a new more central role for news publics in the newsmaking process is the basis for one of the central cultural narratives surrounding the changing journalism landscape: the empowered publics narrative. Scholars like Henry Jenkins and Yochai Benkler, whose work has significantly shaped understanding of the news media environment both within and outside the academy, celebrate the rise of networked publics and their wide influence on media industries. Benkler (2006) theorizes that we are at the beginning of a shift away from commercial media and centrally organized knowledge production toward “non-market” and distributed production. He suggests that the network, with its “variation and diversity of knowledge, time, availability, insight,

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and experience as well as vast communications and information resources,” has taken over the watchdog function of the press, making it irretrievably a peer-to-peer activity. Similarly, Jenkins describes a more socially distributed intelligence in the activities of spoiler groups for the reality television show *Survivor*. By gathering information from all over the world and communicating over the internet, networked fan groups collectively produce knowledge that far exceeds what local fan groups could muster. The information environment created through networked engagement extends beyond entertainment into news. He writes that “by pooling information and tapping grassroots expertise, by debating evidence and scrutinizing all available information, and perhaps most powerfully, by challenging one another’s assumptions, the blogging community is spoiling the American government” (Jenkins 2006: 332)

Chapter 2 argues that changes in conceptions of journalism correspond to changing views of publics and demonstrates the ways both are shaped to varying degrees depending on the specific case by enduring notions of professional authority, new technologies, and market demands. While publics are now networked, and compelling examples exist of non-market production and of new forms of information gathering and engagement, these phenomena are not always reflected in how the public is being integrated into journalism products and practices. By examining the roots of what today has developed into broad-based participatory journalism, we can see the way various news organizations and projects are attempting to bring the audience into the production process and signaling various and shifting conceptions of the public. Drawing from interviews with journalists and editors involved in projects that experiment with amateur news production and/or audience participation at the BBC, the Huffington Post, France’s Bondy Blog, among others, the chapter explores ways in which notions of the public and its relationship to news are changing. The chapter also demonstrates how networked publics are still very much shaped by the various conceptions of publics held at professional news outlets, which are by and large still reluctant to embrace the full participatory potential of the new environment.

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Chapters 3 and 4 address the narrative of decline, a less hopeful yet equally powerful narrative that argues emergent technologies are eroding the quality of news and, thus, the quality of public culture. It is widely acknowledged that the economic decline of the news industry has reduced the ability of the press to produce accountability journalism, or journalism in which reporters investigate government and corporate wrongdoing (Fenton 2010; McChesney & Nichols 2009, 2010; Schudson & Downie, 2009). Media scholar Robert McChesney and journalist John Nichols argue that this is the single most significant development in journalism. In their book *The Death and Life of American Journalism* (2010), they declare democracy in crisis because of the state of the news industry. They blame corporations for creating frivolous and poor-quality news, the internet for forcing them to do so, and the government for not contributing significant financial support to deliver quality journalism. While they commend online journalism that generates quality original reporting like ProPublica and Talking Points Memo, they argue “these fixes are mere triage strategies” (McChesney & Nichols 2009). The cure, they believe, is government subsidies that will support a return to the journalism that has receded in recent years. For Cass Sunstein, legal scholar and current Administrator of the U.S. Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, the problem is not exclusively lack of accountability journalism but what he describes as an increase in the personalization of news, which allows people to sequester themselves among likeminded people and avoid contrasting points of view or topics outside the realm of their interest. He argues that people should be exposed to material that they would not have chosen in advance because “unplanned, unanticipated encounters are central to democracy itself. . . . They are important partly to ensure against fragmentations and extremism, which are predictable outcomes of any situation in which like-minded people speak only with themselves” (Sunstein 2001: 9). Without this, he argues, we have become polarized – a political culture where people tolerate only those who share their own views.

Chapter 3 challenges this narrative of decline by examining how early attempts at personalizing the news have evolved. After

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reviewing early online news experiments and the subsequent emergence of so-called “Web 2.0” technologies and their support of an increasingly sophisticated infrastructure for social exchange, the chapter looks at changes in habits of news producers and of networked publics, and the ways these changes are manifest in the coverage of the December 2009 United Nations Summit on Climate Change, ultimately arguing that there has been a shift from personalization to socialization of news, and with it new potential for accountability journalism and for public engagement.

Chapter 4 further challenges the narrative of decline by suggesting that there are new or newly central forms of civic expression that go unacknowledged by those who insist that the new news environment is inferior to the old one. This chapter examines the history of *détournement* as a political tool and argues that its contemporary manifestations – remix and parody – have become an increasingly significant part of the networked news landscape. By examining popular contemporary news parody – including *The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Yes Men* – this chapter argues that, contrary to the assertions of those who claim these new genres signal cynicism and a breakdown of civic engagement, these alternative discourses are both a product of and antidote to the particular challenges faced by contemporary global culture and are creating new forms of engagement that are acting partly at least to revive civic culture.

Chapters 3 and 4 do not so much refute the demise narrative, but rather suggest that there is more to the story. There is nothing untrue about the arguments of those who worry about journalism – accountability journalism generated by traditional news outlets has declined in both quality and quantity; we are no longer collectively exposed to the same news; and contemporary political polarization seems intense. These are important elements of the shift in journalism to acknowledge and document, and to a great extent my work builds on this scholarship. My quarrel with the demise narrative and the scholarship that feeds it is primarily its narrow focus and its amnesia over the shortcomings of the old model that have been outlined in this chapter. My own point of view has more in common with those who celebrate the potential

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of the new environment as a basis for a revived public culture. We are not ever going to return to the professional and centralized news of last century, nor should governments subsidize any retreat to the past. On the other hand power structures that exist offline will not magically level off because of new tools and networks, and this book aims to explicate rather than gloss over tension between emergent and traditional journalistic practices, products, and institutions.

The final chapter suggests ways we can create and maintain the conditions necessary for a networked news landscape to flourish and meet the needs of the public, arguing that the future of journalism depends on our collective ability to create and accept new organizations, technologies, policies, practices, and ways of understanding our role in the new media environment.

## **Notes**

- 1 Jessica Lynch publicly countered the story in the mainstream media that she was a war hero, telling Diane Sawyer: “[The Pentagon] used me to symbolize all this stuff. It’s wrong. I don’t know why they filmed [my rescue] or why they say these things.” (<http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/11/07/lynch.interview/>). In 2007 she testified before the United States House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform that the Pentagon erroneously portrayed her as a “Rambo from West Virginia,” when, in fact, she never fired a shot after her truck was ambushed (<http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/iraq/2008/03/18/jessica-lynch-recalls-her-captivity-in-iraq.html>).
- 2 The World Wide Web was invented 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee but it did not become a major tool of journalism until the mid- and late nineties, when newspapers began experimenting with putting their content online and when personal computers became cheaper and thus more widely used.
- 3 Several recent works have treated in-depth the various roles and functions of journalism, for example Clifford Christians et al. (2009) identify four press roles as monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative. Michael Schudson (2008) writes of the six functions as being information, investigation, analysis, social empathy, public forum, and mobilization. While these characterizations differ from one another and from Benson’s three theories of democracy and their corresponding roles of journalists, all have in common an acknowledgement of the press being more than a watchdog, emphasizing its various roles as a facilitator of discourse and of dialogue among various groups.
- 4 These developments are drawn from the essay “Networked Public Culture” (Russell et al. 2008).

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