

14th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Day 2, April 20, 2013: Morning Session - 9:00-9:45 a.m.
The Post-Industrial Present

Chair: Joshua Benton, Director, **Harvard's Neiman Lab**

Keynote Speaker: Emily Bell, Director, **Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University**, former Director of Digital Content for **The Guardian (London, UK)**

Q & A: Joshua Benton and Emily Bell

Josh Benton: Good morning. As Rosental said, my name is Josh Benton. I run Neiman Lab at Harvard. And it's my pleasure to introduce Emily Bell. You probably know Emily from — you might know her from any number of places and activities and behaviors. You might know her on Twitter. She's great there. She, for the better part of a decade, was the head of Digital at The Guardian. She is now a professor of professional practice at Columbia and head of the Tow Center. You know, it's been a couple of years now, and I still, every time I say that, think, is it toe? Is it tow?

Emily Bell: It's Tow as in cow, as opposed to tow as in car — your car has been towed.

Josh Benton: Exactly.

Emily Bell: But we do get it. We pick up a lot of residual revenue from parking fines, so it's fine.

[Laughter.]

Josh Benton: That's wonderful. You know, it's all about revenue stream diversification. [laughter] And anyway, Emily was, among other things, one of the coauthors, along with Chris Anderson, who you saw yesterday, of the great report Post-Industrial Journalism. And she's going to talk a little bit about that and some other things. And then we'll go back to questions. So, please join me in welcoming Emily Bell.

[Applause.]

Emily Bell: Thank you very much. Thank you very much indeed, Josh. And thank you very much indeed, Rosental, for having me here at this fabulous conference and in your amazing and slightly envy-making environment here. I love being in Texas. It's a great place. I love being in Austin without all those other people, and I'm sure you know what I mean by that. [laughter] You know, it's great that the Knight Foundation supports this center and the

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work that Rosental is doing, because I think that, you know, here you have some of the sort of really interesting things happening both in journalism, education, and in journalism itself. Austin has always been a hub of great. Sort of the old weekly and you have the wonderful Texas Tribune, which is that example now as they produce always at the drop of a hat, particularly to people in Europe who say, "What's really smart? What's going on in America? What do I need to do about — know about?" It's always one of the view examples that is right at the top of mind. So, it's great to be here. It would have been nice to be here slightly earlier, but that's to do with American Airlines, and we won't dwell on that.

I am, as Josh said, the Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia. And I'll just give you sort of two seconds of why I'm here talking to you. It was inaugurated the end of 2010. And our mission was really to have a hub within the J school at Columbia which convened conversations about digital, which started a research program, which again thanks to the generosity of the Knight Foundation and The Tow Foundation, we have a town-like project program for research, which is pretty well funded. And we are actively looking for proposals in areas of impact and data and transparency. And somewhere here, though I can't actually see him, is our research director, Taylor Owen. I'm easily findable on the Internet and so is he. So if you want to.... The first thing to say is, you know, one of the great things about this conference is convening researchers and academics and actually sort of practicing journalists and getting ideas, an immense amount of it, which actually takes us forward in a way that I think not many conferences, in fact, no other conference does.

So, that's what we do at the Tow Center. And we also have an influence on the school in terms of curriculum for which we're doing a great deal of — everybody in our MS program next year will be taught in a completely different way. And for the first time, every single student in our undergraduate—sorry, not undergraduate—that would be wrong—our graduate program, the MS program, will get courses in data, audience engagement, what we now call audio and visual. We don't have tracks anymore. We don't have concentrations. We're approaching sort of journalism as this holistic profession.

Before I came to Columbia, I was a journalist. I worked in the UK. I wrote an awful lot about the business of media and the impact of converging technologies. And then I guess my sort of practice in that was mostly with The Guardian, where I was both a journalist, a writing journalist for ten years, and then an editor and a director of digital content. So some of this, I know that it's annoying when academics expound about what newsrooms should be doing. And I have to say it's much more comfortable being in that part of the world than it is in the world which actually has to implement some of these things. But it was a great grounding for me in terms of working with brilliant journalists and technologists who were trying to figure out what was next for news. And I think some of the progress we made at The Guardian in

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the last ten years was really terrific. And it was an exciting and, I think, really sort of revolutionary time. But of course, like a lot these things, it doesn't stop.

And I think that one of the mistakes that we sometimes make as journalists is we like stories to finish and then we like to move on. We have to be in perpetual motion now. We have to be in perpetual motion with our teaching. We have to be in perpetual motion with our journalism, with our technical knowledge with how we intersect with the outside world and the wider world of publishing in digital formats.

One of the things we did... Josh just said to me, "Oh, well, you can always fall back." He said, "You can always fall back on your post-industrial talk." And I thought, oh, hang on a second. That was the report that we published, oh, six months ago. It doesn't feel like it's like ancient history yet, but I do think that is actually the pace of change. It's such that a lot of the things that we described in our report... There it is. I urge you to download it. I once said I would never, ever, ever put another PDF on the Internet, but I did it. [laughter] So, if you haven't read all 122 magical pages, I'll try and condense some of it for you this morning.

I was really lucky to work with Chris Anderson and with Clay Shirky as coauthors on it. What we did was we set out really to look at the changing nature of not just the job of the journalist, but also what that means for the institutions that support journalism or contain them and the ecosystem in which they operate, which was obviously a much bigger task than we should have tried to bite off, and hence, the snappy 122 pages. We thought that some of the things that we said were relatively uncontroversial. They may be more controversial than I think. That may be why Chris Anderson has gone home this morning instead of staying here to take flack. [laughter]

The central tenet of it really is that the industrial age of news is drawing to a close, you know, those cavernous newsrooms. And I've worked in one. I was in one yesterday. They still exist. Some of them are relatively new. They're kind of like almost the steel mills of news and bulletin production. You know, we'll look back on them in five or ten years time—really not much further in the future than that—and think, what were we thinking? You know, what was all the space for? Why did we invest all of this money in the overhead of the physicality of news? We didn't think they were sustainable or fit for purpose in a world where you have reduced resources and infinitely expanding information possibilities.

So, you know, having sort of made the, I guess, kind of assumption, which I think—and if people don't share it, I'll be very interested in hearing your thoughts—that, you know, we can't really describe an industry anymore, because it is so fragmented now in terms of, what do we mean? Clay Shirky's phrase for this is, and we have this in the report, "There is no longer something which can broadly be described as the press addressing

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something which could be broadly described as the public.” Our ecosystem is much, much more kind of fragmented than that.

One of the things I’m going to talk about today, really, which is just a tiny bit of the report, is, some of the things that we say and the assumptions we make about the individual journalist being the center of this. That I guess if I pulled one theme out and said, you know, this is what’s really different, it is that we feel that what’s happening at the moment.... And we’re really anxious not to use the word *future of journalism*. In fact, we produced the whole 122 pages. We did not use that phrase once, nor did we use the word *digital*, I don’t think. That what we’re.... I can hear somebody checking that one, looking. [laughter] But just as we’ve been talking about the stories, the atomic particle of news, you know, the journalist is obviously the atomic particle of journalism. So if you were going to pull out one finding to the report and say this is important, I would say it’s the one that says, “Institutions of news, in as much as they will exist in the future, have to support the individual, rather than the other way around.” And that’s a real inversion in how we’ve been thinking about things.

You know, we journalism schools have been training people for jobs that exist, for career trajectories which are very predictable, for becoming part of a brand which is outside of themselves. I think now we are having to rethink that around individual skill sets and presence. I don’t know, how many people here have seen Netflix “House of Cards”? Excellent. You already know what I’m going to say then. [some laughter] I mean, first of all, the whole thing is very ____ [09:50]. So House of Cards was made by Netflix, not a huge TV production studio, but an online delivery system for video-on-demand. Entirely constructed—well, not entirely constructed, but mostly constructed through sort of intense analysis of data feedback on what people would watch, how long a series they would watch, if they liked political thrillers. Hey, guess what? They like Kevin Spacey. The center of this story, we have a journalist who works for a very — it’s very difficult to know what the title actually is in real life, but it’s called The Washington Herald. And it has a powerful female owner and an editor who falls out with our heroine, who leaves the Washington Herald with its process and its editorial standards for something called a slug line, where journalists loll about on beanbags and post straight to the Internet.

I’m only on Episode 7, so I’m going to guess that it ends badly, [laughter], but nevertheless I think that it sharply observes a sort of underlying truth about the direction of travel, which I don’t think is going to reverse. So, you know, how news organizations and institutions allow journalists to organize themselves and support them in their work, I think, will not just be something you have to do, but it will be a determinative of success.

I was interested to hear yesterday that in a business talk you were discussing the idea that not only having converged legacy in online models is going to hamper you, but ultimately, unless you have them separate, you’ll

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not survive. I mean, that's a kind of big claim, but one which I increasingly think is probably true as well. And it's not a trend that is just confined to journalism. I recently asked a leading sports new exec who came to class to talk about digital news strategies, "What keeps you awake at night?" Because this was a very successful broadcasting journalism franchise. I said, "What do you think is happening next? What keeps you awake at night?" And he said, "What keeps me awake at night is Jay-Z." [laughter] Turns out not just his music. And I said, "Why would Jay-Z be keeping you awake at night?" He said, "Well, because Jay-Z is about to sell his stake in the Brooklyn Nets for a very small amount of money." Because effectively it's pretty worthless. He didn't say that. I'm just saying that because I'm a Knicks fan. [laughter] Because the power has gone over the last 50 years from the league to the franchise to the individual. And to go from owning part of the Nets to being an agent is a complete demonstration of how that power is going.

So, you know, I'm not saying that Andrew Sullivan is necessarily comparable with LaBron James, whose earnings are \$53-million, but we're beginning to see or we're already seeing some of this movement, I think, from, as it were, the packaged journalist and the institutional brand into this same world that we've seen happening somewhere else. I mean, probably a better LaBron as a parallel would be Nate Silver, who was traded to The New York Times complete with a franchise of the 538 blog ahead of the 2012 election and then very rapidly became.... I can say this because Jill is not here yet. The fading franchise suddenly found that they had traded in a Most Valuable Player in the form of Nate Silver and his analysis. But that was a career that was completely crafted outside the mainstream of how we would normally conceive careers in journalism. You know, Nate was a blogger who first of all started off configuring baseball statistics software; then became more interested in general in sports and spread betting; then interested in applying some of the same techniques to politics; and ultimately, one of the kind of leading voices in political analysis in America. And he did not start down table on a metro newspaper going out and doing education and health beat stories, which is not to say that those are not absolutely vital things. I'm just saying that the world from which we see sort of information journalism careers now emerging is completely different.

So, almost as soon as we published the report, Andrew Sullivan very kindly agreed to run a personal experiment in post-industrial journalism by going solo. He went, if you like, the opposite direction to Nate Silver by saying, "Uh, I don't need The Daily Beast. I don't need the Atlantic to do this. I'm going to do this on my own. I'm not going to have any advertising. I'm going to sell subscriptions." I think that, you know, he has \$650,000 so far in subscribers. He needs a little bit more than that. I think like every bit of news, it's struggling. If you like, it's not a model that's going to necessarily work the first time around, if at all. We don't know whether those revenues are replicable or not, but they are certainly closely watched, because Andrew's move represents, as I say, this general movement that we all have

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to be aware of, because whether you are an individual journalist or whether you are a newsroom, you have to think about how to accommodate this.

One of the things that we were criticized for in the report, one of the few things, well, we were criticized about many things, but this is one of the things that we were criticized for, was saying, "You haven't told us what these new newsrooms will look like. Where shall we put the desks? How big should we be?" I think there's an enormous amount of research to be done in what those optimal models will look like, but I also think that there's a great deal that you can do wrong in making one recommendation for something that you've already described as no longer being an industry. What I do think is that the steel mills of now will probably more represent — more look like talent agencies or something in the future which is much more around a studio model, where journalists are able to organize themselves much more rapidly.

There's another good, I think, sort of parallel example of this in games development, where you've seen large packaged games from large companies, like EA and Sony, devolving into these groups of sort of developers who work together sometimes on really, really tiny bits of specialism to produce not one enormous game every two years, but dozens of small viral games all the time. You know, if you open your eyes to what's happening elsewhere in the world of digital creation, you can see many, many examples of this, and journalism is not at all immune from it.

So, I mean, if you like, the bad thing about this world is that it puts pressures on the individual journalist, it demands more in terms of their time and attention, and there is less reward, and there is a less predictable career path. You know, we acknowledge in the report and say how much we admire the work of places like SCOTUS Blog and Homicide Watch. And actually just the other day the Pulitzer's gave a prize to this, which is Inside Climate News small unit, very specialized, running out of Brooklyn, looking at climate change, but we all know that those models also are not particularly, as it were, sustainable or they haven't yet all found their model. SCOTUS Blog relies very heavily on cross-subsidy. It's actually run by people who also run a law firm, which I would say is a very handy thing to do if you're thinking of funding journalism. People often criticized The Guardian when I was there for not having a business model. We actually had a very good business model, which was we had this large money-making unit called Auto Trader, which cross-subsidized the journalism that we did at The Guardian. And I think one of the off adjustments to me has been the sensibility in America that says, "News has to make a profit to be any good at all." I don't think that's how the rest of the world sees it. I think increasingly America is adjusting their attitudes as well.

So, these extra demands that they put on the individual raises an interesting question, I think, for journalism schools and newsrooms about what to teach, how to prepare people, who to look for, and what to do. I think being an

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expert in the process of journalism is a valuable skill for now, but really deepening of specialist knowledge and specialization of subject areas is going to be an absolute requirement, not just subject areas, but also the more difficult technical skills. And these can be overhauled, sort of a broad range of things. I mean, Jonah Peretti would say that curating twelve disappointed cats who look like world leaders is a real skill. And it's very important if your business model relies on disappointed cats, to have somebody who knows more about putting together slideshows of disappointed cats than anything else. So this isn't just confined to, if you like, sort of the accountability journalism that we talk about in the report.

I guess we go into this in much more length, but I've tried to distill what I think are sort of the five things that we need journalists or we need to sort of train and think about journalists doing in the future. There could be more than five, but five is a good list. It would be seven if it was BuzzFeed, because it's always an odd number. So, as I said, the first point is really, as I say, just on this specialization point. Now of course, journalists all need to know what a story is. Time and time again, we have people coming back to J school and saying, "I really want someone who can report and who knows what a story is." That's absolutely true. And I would hope that we aren't graduating many people who were not able to do either of those.

But we also need journalists now to have much more knowledge about, I think, data skills, basics, statistical literacy, which is generally missing from newsrooms, certainly technical literacy. And yes, we do say all journalists should learn to code. We don't say that all journalists should code as a profession, but everybody should have some basic knowledge about what can be achieved with the technology that they're working with. I think we often think about journalism's natural alignment as being with presentational skills, with being with marketing and public relations. It's storytelling. It's what in the report we call the 'performance of information.' But increasingly, I think, it will also depend on alignment with data science skills too.

One of the reasons we're doing a deal at Columbia in computer science in journalism is exactly for this reason. Our most recent hire is the head of our Brown Institute for Media Innovation. It's Professor Mark Hanson, who is not a journalist at all, but a statistician, who does some absolutely amazing visual representations with data. He's teaching 35 students at the moment, many of whom have never coded a line before in their lives, to write scripts, to extract data from copes of documents. And I think that, you know, we have to reach outside the field for some of those skills to make it better.

The second thing, which is, we talk about transparency a lot. We don't really kind of think about what it means at an individual level for journalists. Journalists need to be transparent, and they need to be transparent in how they construct their stories and how they arrive at their conclusions. You know, we've seen some really extraordinary reporting this week, both the good and the bad of journalism. And we've seen, if you like, sort of the worst

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end of it, which is almost this kind of industrial defiance of the truth, where The New York Post sat with a piece on its front page for three, maybe four hours, saying that 12 people had been killed in the Boston Marathon blast. Now, either they thought that that was true, in which case one has to question their basic level of competence, or they didn't care whether it was true, which is, if you like, even worse. But what was interesting, of course, was the corrective that was happening elsewhere all the time. The questioning and the ability for journalists to say, "I don't know," "I don't know enough," "I can't tell you yet, but this is what I do know," is really very, very powerful.

I was following.... I've been following individual journalists as much for West, Texas and Boston as I have for journalism brands, and I'm sure that's true of everybody else in the room. Probably the most striking example of this recently was John Broder at The New York Times, who reviewed a Tesla car. Did you all read his Tesla review? Yes. Titters from there. It was where he described road testing a car. Elon Musk, the owner of Tesla, then immediately came back and posted data to prove that what John Broder — well, to try and prove that what John Broder had said was not right. He said, "He's clearly been driving in circles around a car park trying to run the battery down on this very expensive electric car." John Broder, of course, said, "I was driving in the dark around a car park looking for a plug to put the sodding thing in, because it was running out of battery."

But Margaret Sullivan, who's the public editor of The New York Times, I think said a really profound and important thing. She said, "It's no longer enough just to have a notebook on the front seat. You know? We've got to be accountable and transparent whether we like it or not." And the subsidiary point to that is that journalists must be able to do their work in public. And we don't, again, sort of think that we're not doing our work in public. But that idea of having scrutiny and pressure on your method and your output, responding to feedback in real time, is actually really, really important.

Some newsrooms, like my former employer, The Guardian, call themselves open these days. I don't actually think transparency and openness are something that you can choose to opt in or out of. I think it's there. I think openness is a good strategy for how you face it. But I think, again, you know, the individual journalist, the more that you cannot hide behind the page, the more you need to be able to do your work in public and interact with sources and citizens. Not just about the substantive issues in the story itself, but how you arrived at them.

This is a really horrible one for any journalists in the room. Journalists need to be self-organizing and collaborative. This is not in our natural skill set at all. It sounds so self-evident that it may not be worth stating, but I think it is. I was very struck recently by the offshore leaks collaboration, where you had 40 international news organizations scouring this enormous cache of emails relating to offshore banking and where it had come from. And

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collaboration, I think, doesn't — I think that story became almost more about the process than it did about the individual stories coming out of it. But that's because it's like a sort of... Was it Dr. Johnson or whoever it was who said, you know, "A dog will heel on its hind legs. It's not that it's done well, it's that it's done at all." And I think that these collaborations are new to us, but they will become increasingly common. This will have to happen on an individual level. How many journalists would actually like to collaborate with people that they know in areas of mutual interest, but are stopped from doing so because of the competing nature of their respective employers? I think that to get journalism to scale, you will need to see far more of these lightweight collaborations where people sort of intersect with each other on a regular basis.

And then another point which I don't think is controversial but actually is the thing that probably causes most debate in certainly journalism schools and certainly in the outside world, which is, you need to be able to, I think, above all become better faster. Real-time storytelling is part of journalism which is only going to grow in importance. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't pause and we shouldn't be able to produce long-form journalism that creates great context. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be building wonderful databases and graphics and things that tell stories in more profound and rich ways. But the point is that unless you can deliver what my co-teaching colleague Jonathan Stray at the AP describes as epistemology on deadline, then you will increasingly find it difficult to create traction and interest among an audience. I don't think, again, that this is optional. I don't think everybody will end up doing it, but I think it will become an increasingly important part of journalism that we can't ignore.

So, those are my five points. I think with this emphasis on the individual journalist, this is not to say that we don't need institutions. This is where I'm sorry that Chris Hanson has run away, because he's an expert on institutions. We actually need institutions more than ever. But we need them to be built in a way that recognizes this personal journalistic-centered future, rather than tries to replicate some sort of corporate past. Because after all, even LeBron James does need Miami Heat. So as I say, I think that the world that we're going into is about a fractured, fragmented, and individual future, where we have to as journalists think of better ways to configure ourselves and to make the kinds of institutions that can support the sort of journalism that we want to see being done and that can be supported, rather than the legacy organizations that luckily somebody else already said yesterday really are not going to survive in the future unless they have that adaptability, and preferably they have that adaptability in a completely different path for us.

So, Josh, if you want to. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Q&A Session

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Josh Benton: In the interest of sparking a debate, let me push back against some of the things that you said just now.

Emily Bell: OK.

Josh Benton: It sounds like.... In the Post-Industrial Journalism report, one my favorite paragraphs was the paragraph in which you say — or you and your coauthors say, “We’re not going to talk about The New York Times, because discussion about the future of news and journalism often gets reduced to a discussion about the future of The New York Times.”

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: It’s not very helpful. They are an edge case.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: I wonder if you’re sort of doing the same thing by.... You know, I think we can all agree it’s good to be LaBron James. It’s good to be Andrew Sullivan.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: To be really essentially an edge case within the world of journalism.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: It sounds like you’re sort of describing the death of the great journalistic middle class.

Emily Bell: Well, I think I probably am. I don’t think that’s anything that I would.... I think that that’s right. I mean, I don’t think it’s a right thing to be happening, but I think that we know what’s happening in the world of finance, and in the world of government, and in the world of journalism, which is you are seeing a squeezing of the middle. You know? At story level, at institutional level, people who occupy the middle are in jeopardy. And I don’t say that with any great delight, because I’m one of those people.

Josh Benton: Don’t you have a moral responsibility to shut down like 80% of America’s journalism schools, though? I mean, we’re producing....

Emily Bell: Do I have a moral responsibility to shut down 80%? I hope not.

[Audience reacts.]

Josh Benton: Question time.

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Emily Bell: That would be a bad place to end up with this discussion, I think.

Rosental Calmon Alves: Yes!

Emily Bell: Well, first of all, that just presupposes when you say there's a whole middle-class of journalism. We're still talking about the institutional organization of journalists here. We're not talking about whether we need journalists or whether we need people to be trained with journalistic skills. So first of all, you know, journalistic skills like computer science skills are increasingly applicable across a wide range of professions. You know, we just had a... I know Columbia like The New York Times is an edge case. But we just had a careers fair, which much to our own surprise was over-subscribed. There were 30 employers we couldn't actually fit into the building. And we were trying to figure out why this was. And it was because there were so many now new employers who are not necessarily journalistic, but want a journalist working for them, who would come and employ. So, I'm not saying that... All of these things start at the margins and some of them move to the core and some of them don't. We either sort of think, well, the great middle class of American journalism is safe and fine, or we think people are getting their news from Reddit, [or] people are finding and explaining things to each other as much as they are finding it through mainstream media. And that puts us in a position where we have to rethink this. And where we definitely add value is in that the individual journalist is now the person that people follow. You know, your brand is really important. I hate that word *brand* for the journalist, but it is. Your credibility and your integrity and your speed and your availability are actually really important to the people who consume your news.

Josh Benton: But at the same time, this is a question I always struggle with. I remember a time ten years ago when I discovered RSS and I thought RSS was the most amazing technology. This wonderful way that you could curate the set of feeds and all the rest.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: And I thought, gosh, everyone is going to do this.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: And it turns out not everyone is going to do that. And even in forms like that, like Twitter, I mean, fundamentally a lot...

Emily Bell: Well....

Josh Benton: I mean, basically, I wonder the degree to which the media diets of people like me and people like you and imagine most of the people in

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this room might be warping our perception of what are still, frankly, most people's news habits online. I mean, research shows us that they have a set of three or four news sites that they go to on a regular basis. They are not following bylines. They are not curating. But the kinds of behaviors that we partake, that we have....

Emily Bell: I'm not sure that's true. I mean, Pew just recently released some statistics that said 75% of people get their news through word of mouth. Right? Which is like, I mean, that's a huge can of worms right there to have the lid peeled back on. What does *word of mouth* mean? Where were you when you heard about...? Where were people when they heard about West, Texas? You know, how did you hear about it? Were you sitting in front of a monitor or were you watching or were you looking at The Dallas Morning News? Which incidentally has done fantastic coverage. No. You probably got it from the network. You know, I might have seen it.... Where was I when the Pope was inaugurated or whatever? I was in class. One of my students who shouldn't have been using their phone but was said, "Oh, white smoke." It's like that's how we find out things these days.

Josh Benton: There's the network of Twitter and Facebook and the rest.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: But there's also the network of CNN and MSNBC and CBS.

Emily Bell: Let's talk about CNN. Yes. [some laughter] No, no. And that's right. And they employ — they still employ large numbers of journalists. I wonder, and again, I was hearing from somebody who knows much more about this than I do the other day, who actually works in a network position. You know, I wonder if those networks are not in the same position that newspapers were in about 2004, which is a time of high profitability, bonuses, thinking the world can never change. Looking at something like Netflix and House of Cards and thinking, you know, well, actually, yeah, it's a kind of neat experiment, but it's no big deal. You know, we can't look at these things as being immutable, because they were configured in such a different time. You know, they really were configured in such a different time. And when you say that, well, most people don't have our media consumption habits, I'm fortunate enough to have three children who are all boys and all under the age of 16. And their media consumption habits are so completely different, you know. They are not a statistically robust sample, my three children. But just broadly we know from looking at statistics from around that age group, if you want to reach urban kids between the ages of 18 and 24, if you don't reach them on their phones, you're not going to reach them at all.

Josh Benton: Mm-hmm.

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Emily Bell: You know? And do you need the kind of infrastructures that we have for broadcasting, for mass-media production to do that?

Josh Benton: I mean, I guess my thinking, though, is that, Netflix is a new institution.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: I mean, the world of streaming video, large-scale providers is just as, if not more narrow, there's Netflix and a few other competitors, all of which happen to be large corporations for the most part. I just wonder if... I think of political blogging. Ten years ago, if you went to a liberal blog or a conservative blog in that era, you saw a blog roll that had, you know, 500 individual bloggers.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: What's happened over time is that's consolidated into Talking Points Memo and Politico.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Josh Benton: Technology blogging was based around individuals and now it's the Verge and all the rest. I guess I'm just curious whether this is more of an atomization and a move towards individualization and the individual as king or whether it's simply sort of an accordion where things spread out and then they come back together as new institutions formed to replace them.

Emily Bell: Well, I think that a lot of what you say is true. And if you talk to the historians, academic historians, they will say none of this is new, which is probably true, but not very interesting when it comes to kind of motivating yourself to think about, you know, how you can figure these things out. But, I mean, there are a couple of things, one of which is, you know, there are current sort of flaws in... You know, the accordion is pretty stretched right now, I would say. And how it's going to look when it kind of comes back together, I think, is definitely going to be different to how it looked sort of 30 years ago. We know that. That's not... We know that there is sort of the individual power [that] brings with it another problem that I didn't really talk about, which is just how the aggregational platforms for that, whether it's YouTube or Google or Twitter, are wonderful, wonderful tools, but they are not inherently journalistic. You know, there are problems with that. So, there are lots of things for us to figure out in how these things are pulled apart and remade. So, you know, I think the atomization is happening now, which is the direction of travel for, I said, you know, the next—I mean, who knows how long we can make predictions for—but, you know, 18 months or whatever, is the phase that we're in right now.

Josh Benton: 20 minutes.

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Emily Bell: And it feels that way. And it's not, as I say, it's not to say that this is either right or wrong, it's just an observable pattern.

Josh Benton: Do we have time to take a question or two? Let's take a question or two from the audience. There are microphones. They are available to be used. Let's start over here. Kevin.

Kevin Davidson: Hi, there. Kevin Davidson, Investigative News Network. So, transparency, I think, is a key issue. We have a commitment to transparency as non-profits, where we insist that our member organizations, which are all non-profits, post who their donors are above a certain level.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Kevin Davidson: However, when you're talking about investigative journalism, which can take months and months, you know, if you look at, for example, at gag laws, there was a terrific USA Today ad piece. You know, there are laws now that are on the books that are trying to effectively prevent investigative journalism by making it, you know, illegal to hold onto information.

Emily Bell: Yeah.

Kevin Davidson: So, when it comes to the sausage making piece of it and it comes to transparency in investigative journalism, I'd love to get your thoughts about where those boundaries may need to be.

Emily Bell: What you're describing, again, is one of those things which is that very, very difficult kind of negotiation that we're now going to have between things like transparency and privacy, where we've had exactly sort the issue in the UK with the phone hacking case, which was all about corruption in journalism and may well end up in the very unfortunate position of there being more restraint on press, rather than greater freedom to investigate. So, when I'm talking about transparency, as I say, it's really about the ability to account for your method and why you do certain things. And I don't think anybody would say.... Well, first of all, protection of source in the 21st century is a really crucial and difficult issue for journalism. You know, how do you keep somebody safe who gives you information is very, very hard. And it's something that we should all be thinking about and trying to do. Holding onto certain information to protect individuals who might give it to us or to protect ourselves is something which is an essential part of the journalistic process. Drawing these lines is not easy. And government will want to draw them in a slightly different place, and businesses will want to draw them in a slightly different place. Journalism has to equip itself with knowledge of the issues and know what it thinks. I mean, I think most good journalists do know what they think about these things. But it's not simple. You know, I think that there is a fine line between source protection, making

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sure that you hold accountable, and also sort of doing your work in public and being trustworthy and trusted. And as you say, you know, kind of telling people who is funding you is an absolutely sort of crucial part of the trust that you have. Telling people where you got all of your information from would completely undermine the journalism that you do, because you expose your sources. A lot of journalism is about these kind of gray area judgment calls and it always has been. You know, it's not a high-minded profession where we're kind of bounded by our own sort of innate rules and magnificence. It's always been slightly messy in that respect, and it's going to get more complex and messy, I think, particularly in that area.

Josh Benton: From Kevin to Kevin.

Kevin: Hi, Emily.

Emily Bell: Hey, there.

Kevin: So just for reference, I used to work with Emily.

Emily Bell: You did.

Kevin: And I have to say your comment about the hollowing out of the middle, that was one of the reasons why I decided to sort of take the voluntary redundancy from The Guardian, because I just thought, this is the middle, this is not a good place to be.

Emily Bell: OK.

Kevin: But I think in terms of unpacking that, what does the middle look like? And how do journalists sort of respond to that narrowing of the middle? What does that mean for the individual journalist? Because you do a lot of coverage in terms of that, in terms of the report.

Emily Bell: I think it means specialization. And I think that's what we really saw in the report, which is ultimately the deep, the deep vertical and the higher value of specialist skills. It's not necessarily going to make journalism viable in all cases, but without it, you're definitely not going to be viable. And I think that's the problem when we talk about middle. We sometimes talk about the ability to kind of do anything across a broad range of subjects, you know, in a way which is perfectly good. Unfortunately, there are so many things now which can do that, which is outside the profession of journalism, that it's not going to make us sustainable if that's all we can do. And that's why something like Texas Tribune is, you know, again, it's a unicorn in some respects. But it's an interesting start to saying, well, what more can you do if you have specialist knowledge and techniques that other people don't have to get information more efficiently and more engagingly to your public?

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Josh Benton: All right. Let's all go make unicorns. Join me in thanking Emily.

Rosental Calmon Alves: Thank you.

Emily Bell: Yes, a unicorn factory.

[Applause.]