

Nieman

Reinventing Local TV News

**Innovative stations push to
attract younger audiences**

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Writer for Nieman Reports honored by SPJ



Glenn Jeffers is the winner of the 2017
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writing—national circulation category for
“A Mass Shooting, Only in Slow Motion.”
The piece, which appeared in the Fall 2017
issue of Nieman Reports, examines how
newsrooms are moving away from a focus
on mass shootings to tell more nuanced stories about the people and
communities marred by gun violence. The Sigma Delta Chi Awards
are presented annually by the Society of Professional Journalists to
recognize excellence in journalism.



Monitors in WRAL-TV's production control room offer a view of the station's augmented reality set for coverage of the Winter Olympics

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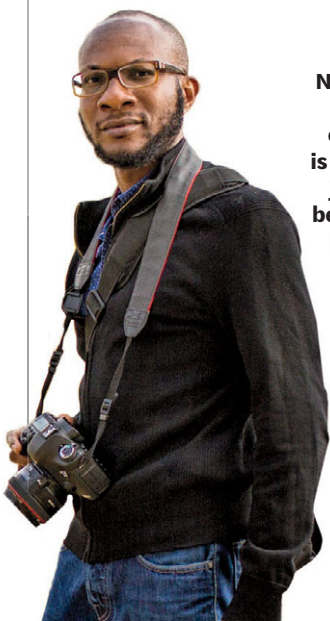
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“There are crooks everywhere you look now. The situation is desperate”

Maltese journalist Matthew Caruana Galizia on the assassination of his investigative journalist mother, threats to the free press, and a new investigative outlet in Malta

MATTHEW CARUANA GALIZIA is a data journalist and software engineer at the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). He is a founding member of ICIJ's data and research unit, which was key to the organization's Pulitzer-winning investigation of the Panama Papers in 2016. Prior to joining ICIJ, Caruana Galizia worked at the Financial Times's FT Labs and was a member of the investigative team at La Nación newspaper in Costa Rica.

Caruana Galizia is the eldest son of Daphne Caruana Galizia, the Maltese journalist who was assassinated in a car bombing near her home on October 16, 2017. Her blog, “Running Commentary,” was a leading source of investigative journalism in the island nation, which, with a population of under 450,000 people, is the smallest—and most densely populated—member of the European Union. Caruana Galizia—who long faced libel suits and physical threats for her work—single-handedly investigated everything from abuses of power and ethical failures to money laundering, corrupt politicians, and the influence of the Azerbaijani government on Maltese politics. She uncovered the many Malta connections in the Panama Papers investigation—even prior to the April 2016 publication of stories based on the leaked documents—including those of politicians Konrad Mizzi and Keith Schembri.

Authorities arrested 10 people in connection with her assassination, three of whom are being processed for indictment, but who ordered the contract killing remains unknown.

Caruana Galizia visited the Nieman Foundation in February and discussed his mother's work, the investigation into her murder, and the legal threats facing Maltese journalists.

On his mother's last words. The last sentence my mother wrote on her blog was, “There are crooks everywhere you look now.

The situation is desperate.” She meant that, as an investigative journalist, she was standing alone. The institutions of the state had been captured, compromised, and rendered ineffective, so even though she was putting the results of her investigations out there, no action was being taken. She didn't have the backing of any institution.

If you look at what's happening in Israel now with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at least the police haven't been compromised and they're still pushing for prosecution. Whereas, when my mother was alive and now currently, that wasn't the case. There was no one pushing for any kind of action on any of the things that she was revealing. This meant that she was alone and exposed.

She had no one in parliament, no one within the police, no one within the judiciary who was willing to take any action. [This] meant that, if you wanted to stop this pressure, then all you had to do was get rid of her. Even the opposition party had been completely compromised.

On his mother's approach to reporting.

Malta has no system for teaching critical thinking in the way that a country like the U.S. does. People are not taught to avoid taking things at face value. People are used to taking statements in the newspaper by politicians and not reading anything into them.

My mother never did that. She always read between the lines of everything and always saw that there was a reason for most things that happen. She had studied archaeology, and one of the things that she learned is that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It was her personal motto, an axiom that she used in her work, and it was missing from the way a lot of Maltese journalists worked. They said, “OK, if there's

no evidence in plain sight that anything bad is going on here, then nothing bad is going on.” There was no instinct to look further.

On why Malta is so little covered. I think it's a combination of things. It's a very small country that people aren't used to paying attention to. Malta has this image as a holiday destination. People aren't looking at it in the same way that they look at, for example, Sicily, where there's a lot of organized crime. The second thing is that it's been very easy for the current government of Malta to project an image of the country that is very different from the reality.

I think that the current prime minister is a kind of populist in disguise. It's very easy to look at countries like Poland now and see that something is going wrong there, because they fit the model of being far-right, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and anti-media freedom. They fit this model that we're very used to, whereas Malta's prime minister is a little different. While he's unfriendly to the free press and xenophobic and so on, he's projected this image of Malta as a country that's pro-gay rights, for example. That creates a smokescreen for the country, and it's very effective. It's hard for people outside the country to look beyond that.

I was in Paris around the time of the last elections in Malta in June 2017, and I was speaking to someone from the OECD [the intergovernmental Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development]. She told me, “Well maybe it's good that this prime minister wins the election again—he seems like quite a good guy.” It was a real shock to me to hear this, because all his outward propaganda of being in favor of some civil rights has worked, and no one could look beyond that to see all the corruption that was happening below it.

On the investigation into his mother's murder.

The past couple of months have been like watching two disasters unfold



Matthew Caruana Galizia, right, with 2018 Nieman Fellow Frederik Obermaier



A memorial in Malta to journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, killed by a car bomb in 2017

in slow motion. The first was the assassination itself—you could see it coming from a mile off—and the second was what happened afterward with respect to the police investigation.

It fits the model of other assassinations of journalists elsewhere, like with Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya. I think a few months after Politkovskaya was killed, they hauled in five Chechens who looked like they had just been taken off the street, all wearing tracksuits. They were clearly not the people who wanted to kill her. Even if they were the people who coordinated the assassination, they definitely had no motive other than being paid.

With my mother, it was so similar. The three people charged with her murder—whom she had never written about, and they probably had never even read anything she wrote—were very low-level criminals, and the government declared victory after they arrested them.

My brothers and I worked very hard to put international pressure on the government to keep the investigation open. After an event we had at the Council of Europe in January, Malta's minister of home affairs made the first public statement that they would continue looking for the mastermind. It was the first time that they had ever used that word, and it was only due to the inter-

“
My mother had studied archaeology, and one of the things that she learned is that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence

national pressure. Still, they're very keen to sell this as a kind of closed case, because of course it looks terrible when a journalist is assassinated in your country, especially if she was investigating state-level corruption.

Officials are very keen to make it seem as though she was investigating something related to drug trafficking, which is what these criminals were involved in, and she wasn't. She wasn't working on anything related to that.

The thing is, her assassins didn't just kill her. It was a complete act of impunity. They blew up her car 200 meters from our home in broad daylight. The explosion was powerful enough to blow the car 200 meters into a field. They were sending this message, “We can do this and we can get away with it.”

One of the best ways of thinking about suppression of a free press isn't as a freedom of expression issue, but rather as a failure of the state and a human rights issue. If journalists get threatened, it's a sign of deeper problems in the country.

On legal threats facing Maltese journalists. The funny thing is that Maltese journalists seem to be more afraid of what precedes the assassination, which is all the libel suits. This happened with my mother; the threats ramped up from all directions.

There were the arrests, the libel suits, the intimidation, and so on, then the assassination. What used to be most frightening to the Maltese journalists, because all of this is very new to them, is the threat of libel damages.

Maltese newspapers are very small. They each employ fewer than 50 people, their lawyers are very conservative, and they don't have any kind of international backing. In this case, these banks which they and my mother were reporting on were threatening them with libel suits, filed both in the U.S. and the U.K., worth \$40 million in damages.

That's enough to shut down a newspaper.

Even the cost of fighting the libel suits in D.C., for example—which is where they were threatening to file them—would have put them out of business.

It's extremely insidious because other journalists don't know that big law firms are threatening multiple media outlets, not just targeting them specifically. Let's say there are three competing newspapers in your city. The way these companies would work is, first they would send the letters to one newspaper, get them to remove the articles about their business. When they've succeeded, they move on to the other one and after that the third one.

At no point does any of the three newspapers find out what is happening at the other newspapers. The firms take advantage of the fact that newspapers don't talk to each other about these things and don't publish the letters.

The letters normally come with empty threats saying that more suits will be filed if the letters are published. There is no legal basis for that. The law, in most countries, says that as soon as a letter is put in the mail, it becomes the property of the recipient. The recipient can do whatever they want with it. The threats are completely empty. It's common, for example, if you write a single article about a bank, to receive letters from three different firms about that single article.

Sadly, journalists have come to look at this as a kind of occupational hazard, which I think is completely unacceptable. You shouldn't accept this as a condition of your work. In no other field does any professional accept daily legal threats as a kind of condition of their employment.

On The Shift's potential as a game changer.

The Shift, a new media outlet funded after my mother's assassination, is made up exclusively of investigative journalists. It's the first time anything like this has been set up in Malta. The journalists left their previous jobs and the business is operating mostly via small private donations.

When they've been threatened with libel suits, they've published the legal letters. That's the first time any Maltese journalist apart from my mother has ever done this.

They published the threats on their website saying, “Look, we've received this threat saying that a libel suit will be filed unless we remove these articles, and we think it's our duty to inform our readers.” I think this is a good move because it shows readers what's happening and what the journalists are risking. ■

“Journalistic Solidarity Can Move Mountains”

Investigative reporter Elena Milashina on the powerful display of journalism that countered extrajudicial killings in Russia, Putin’s inability to control the Internet, and where to draw the line in covering Chechnya

ELENA MILASHINA, who studied music in college, planned to write about arts and culture when she was hired by *Novaya Gazeta* (“New Newspaper”) in 1997. Instead, she became an investigative journalist for the paper, reporting on the Russian government’s role in deadly tragedies, including the deaths of 118 people onboard the *Kursk* submarine, the attack in 2004 when 186 children were killed at a school in Beslan, and the campaign last year of anti-gay repression in Chechnya.

Milashina spoke at the Nieman Foundation in February after she accepted the Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism. She was chosen by the 2018 class of Nieman Fellows for her groundbreaking and persistent investigative reporting on human rights abuses in Russia while enduring threats from powerful figures.

During her remarks, she noted that she had the good fortune to start her journalism career in the “golden age of Russian media,” the brief period in the 1990s after Boris Yeltsin came to power when the nation had a free press.



I work in a very sensitive region where people definitely would be killed if I make a mistake. Many times I have refused to publish a story because there is only one source and if his name gets out, he will be killed. I can’t shoulder that responsibility

On covering the Kursk disaster. The *Kursk* [in which a Russian submarine exploded and sank in 2000, killing all 118 people onboard] was my first big story. I may be the only journalist in Russia who still cares about what happened back then in August 2000. The European court’s decision was very important for Russian media, because Russian authorities were trying to forbid me to write this story [In October 2017, the European court of human rights ruled that Russia had violated *Novaya Gazeta*’s right to free expression. Earlier a Moscow district court had ruled against the paper.]

I never forget my stories, my heroes, no matter that people don’t pay attention. I still think that it’s very important to put all the pieces together and explain what really happened in that disaster.

On the killings of colleagues. Many journalists know of the murder in 2006 of Anna Politkovskaya, the most famous Russian journalist in the West, but she was not the first *Novaya Gazeta* journalist to be killed. The first was my editor Igor Domnikov in 2000 for his stories on Russian corruption. Two years later the investigative journalist Yuri Shchekochikhin, who also reported on corruption, was killed.

In 2009, my very dear friend Natalya Estemirova [a human rights activist and frequent contributor to *Novaya Gazeta*] was kidnapped and shot the day after I left her apartment. That same year my colleague Anastasia Baburova and the human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov were murdered in Moscow.

The main thing that I understood when I was losing my friends and colleagues this way was that the Russian authorities won’t

do anything to find and punish those who killed them.

The only thing that I can do to stop [the killings of journalists in Russia] is to continue the work so that the people who kill journalists understand that there will always be another journalist who will step up and continue the work.

On fear in Chechnya. If you want to get a sense of how people lived back in Stalin’s time, go and live in Chechnya now, and you will understand how scary life can be. It’s so scary that even people in other parts of Russia can’t imagine how life is for people in Chechnya.

When Anna Politkovskaya came to the region, people were standing in line to talk to her, to tell her their stories, and she was the voice for them. Ten years later, when I came to the region, people didn’t dare talk to journalists because they knew they would be punished the next day.

On the anti-gay campaign. In Chechnya the leader says publicly that his main mission is to clean the Chechen blood of gays, human rights defenders, journalists, and people who use drugs.

My story began with one story of one guy—he was a TV person, a showman—who was killed. While I was trying to check information on his death, I learned that the only reason he was killed is because he was gay. He was not the only one. Everybody was shocked. Not just the world, but even the Russian government. Mr. Putin’s office called us and asked for the facts and the names.

This story was very hard to write. I couldn’t use the names of the victims, not those who died, not those who survived. Chechen society is very conservative and it is better to be killed than to be named as a gay in that society.

It took me a very long time to confirm my information with my sources and to decide that I was ready to publish the story. We published it, and we managed to save a lot of people. That’s the only thing we managed to do. The Chechen authorities still are unpunished.

A lot of people ask me, “Why are you doing it? It’s dangerous.” Yes, it is dangerous for me, but I wonder if not me, who will continue this.

Sometimes it’s much more difficult and much more important to continue reporting without having any results, hoping that one day the system will fall down.

My sources were saying that hundreds were detained and put in the camps because they are gay. Before we published the first

story, we united with a LGBT human rights organization in Russia. We invited victims to write to us. Within two weeks after the first story, we had heard from more than 100 people who asked for help.

The next step was to put pressure on the embassies and the ministry of foreign affairs of different countries, to give visas to these people who were not safe in Russia. The only way to save them was to evacuate them to different countries. Latvia and Canada stepped forward and said, "We'll take in those people." Some other countries, like the United States said, "We can't help with this. Sorry." Sweden also said they couldn't help. We managed to save more than 120 people. They left Russia under special conditions because they received a visa and asylum very, very fast.

Recently I went to Canada, where we managed to relocate more than 40 of the gay survivors. They still feel that there is something wrong with them, that they are sick people, that they harmed their families. They feel guilty although they are brilliant people. At least they are not afraid anymore. That's the first time in my career where one story saved so many people.

Foreign journalists did huge work to bring this story to the world and get this reaction from the world. The Russian government, for the first time in 10 years, decided to start investigating those extrajudicial killings

in Chechnya. The investigation went nowhere but it was still a big achievement.

Solidarity always can be helpful and I think it's one of the precious things that happened with this story. It's a very good lesson that I learned. Journalistic solidarity can move mountains.

On prospects for change in Russia.

At the age of 40, I can see that changes are happening. They are not fast. Sometimes they are not in the direction that we would like, but the situation is changing.

We probably won't ever have the kind of free media that you used to, or were used to, in America, or in the Western world. We definitely will have something connected to the Internet. Young people will probably create different forms of media.

The state still considers that free media is the main threat for them. I hope someday it will change, but it depends not on the government, it depends on the people. Back in the '90s, the people didn't fight or didn't consider it a main value. It was given to them, just like that, and they lost it, just like that. I hope the new generation of Russian people will pressure the government.

The situation in Russia is, if you want to know the truth, you have the sources and you have the opportunity to know it. You have to want to know the truth. That's the only condition.

On state control of the Internet. Over the last few years we are seeing that the state is very eager to control the Internet. They pass laws that allow the government to put people in prison for posting something, which is ridiculous because we have a constitution that allows freedom of opinion and speech. A lot of people are in prison for one, two years, because they posted something that the government considers a threat.

I also see that the government is always behind on technology. For example, recently the government shut down opposition leader Alexei Navalny's site, Navalny Media. Everybody's watching this media by going through a virtual private network, so although the government bans the site, everybody has the opportunity to access it.

On where to draw the line. Of course, Novaya Gazeta draws lines about what it will report on and I do, too. I'm talking about a very unique newspaper. I don't know why Novaya Gazeta has survived for 20 years. If we get pressure from the government, that's never a line for us.

My lines are my sources. I work in a very sensitive region where people definitely would be killed if I make a mistake. Many times I have refused to publish a story because there is only one source and if his name gets out, he will be killed. I can't shoulder that responsibility. ■



LISA ABITBOL

Elena Milashina, winner of the Lyons Award, with 2018 Nieman Fellows Lenka Kabrhelova, left, and Edward Wong

“Money Stories are People Stories”

After decades as a business journalist, Marilyn Geewax, NF '95, turns to teaching to inspire the next generation

EXCEPT FOR MY Nieman year, I had been staring down deadlines every work day since age 22. So after four decades of newsroom stresses, I moved back to Atlanta, where I had worked for many years for the Journal-Constitution.

Leaving my job as a business-news editor at NPR, I looked for ways to shift to a new passion: teaching college students how to cover business news. Fortunately I was presented with the opportunity to be the Industry Fellow for 2018 with the James M. Cox Jr. Institute for Journalism Innovation, Management and Leadership at the University of Georgia.

The trick to firing up students to cover business is getting them to see that money stories are people stories, and that helping our fellow citizens better understand economic issues is vital for our democracy.

The stories of angry, frustrated workers have shaped my career from the start. I grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, and my earliest



Wives and union sympathizers walk the picket line at Youngstown Sheet & Tube in 1937

work as a business reporter involved covering northeast Ohio's collapsing steel industry for the Akron Beacon Journal.

Here's the tricky thing about being a 62-year-old lecturer facing a roomful of 22-year-olds: you have to avoid telling boring old war stories while providing context to help them understand today's issues.

For example, when I asked the students who they thought steelworkers blamed for the industry's job losses in the late 1970s and early 1980s, most had no clue; the rest said "China." They didn't know that 40 years ago, Japan was the "bad guy." And they were surprised to learn that NAFTA had taken effect 17 years *after* Youngstown Sheet & Tube closed. So I want j-students to see that

telling accurate, context-rich business stories requires an understanding of basic economics, history, political trends, and technological change. But it also requires them to be in the moment—fully alive to their own times.

Training young people to be passionate business journalists seems like the right work at the right time for me.

And next year, I'll be taking my act to a new venue—as the visiting professor for the Global Business Journalism Program at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

I am hoping that while my students learn about how to report on the economy, I'll be gaining a better understanding of how the world looks to millennials on the other side of the planet. ■

Investing in the Next Crop of Promising Media Companies

Maya Baratz Jordan, a 2016 Knight Visiting Nieman Fellow, on key ingredients for success

After years of building digital products for companies ranging from Flickr to The Wall Street Journal to ABC News, I made a move to the investing side to help support and coach the next crop of companies that will meaningfully shift our media landscape. As the managing director of the Comcast NBCUniversal LIFT Labs Accelerator, Powered by Techstars, I'm on the lookout for the 10 companies to include in our first cohort that begins in July.

My transition from product creator to investor was gradual; when I wasn't building new products at ABC, I was always looking for small teams building

interesting solutions that we could plug into our existing suite of products to better serve our audiences. I was also on the lookout for fledgling, innovative companies when I was a 2016 visiting fellow at Nieman, where I explored new ways to use language as a de facto interface in the age of voice and messaging-based experiences. As a byproduct of searching for new products and my time at Nieman, I found myself coaching early-stage companies; part of that effort included mentoring companies at Techstars, which over time led me to my current role.

In both advising companies and now talking to hundreds of

companies to assess potential fits for our new accelerator program, I've learned a few things that can hopefully guide early-stage media companies looking to meaningfully grow.

At Techstars, we have a philosophy for making investments, and the team represents the first thing we prioritize when deciding whether to bring a company into our fold. While the market you're in, the solution you've focused on, and the traction you've gathered are core aspects of what we consider, we've found that if a company is lacking solid team makeup, that company's vision may not see it through. What this means for founders

In Positioning a Publication for a Bright Future, Bringing in Substantial Revenue

Chronicle of Higher Education editor in chief Michael Riley, NF '95, leads a team creating in-depth reports that are a new revenue stream

SPEND MANY OF my waking hours—and some of my sleeping hours, too—thinking about how best to ensure the health and long-term growth of The Chronicle of Higher Education Inc., where I'm president and editor in chief. That's no different from anyone else running a journalism company these days.

But what may be a bit different is that the Chronicle is embracing a new approach: I'm trying to help us think beyond the journalism that has propelled us for 51 years as I talk more and more about reimagining the enterprise as an information company.

That paradigm shift has given rise to a promising line of business, namely producing smart, analytic, and in-depth reports on critical topics that our audience cares about. So far, readers have proven willing to pay for that content, fueling some significant revenue growth and a host of opportunities.

Several years ago, I started talking up this information experiment, realizing we could serve our readers with a different type of

content, something that ranged beyond our daily and weekly journalism. What if, I wondered, we produced some deep-dive reports that helped our readers do their jobs well, make better decisions, and solve the problems they face in their professional lives?

We've always been dedicated to producing indispensable content that readers will pay for, and this bet doubles down on that strategy. Like many others in our industry, I know that paid content offers a smart revenue stream for the future.

Both The Chronicle of Higher Education and its sister publication, The Chronicle of Philanthropy, are pursuing this approach. About three years ago, a small cross-company band of stalwarts brainstormed some ideas and settled on a pilot project to help readers envision the future landscape of higher education, focusing on trends and forces affecting students, faculty, and learning. We called it the "2026 Report: The Decade Ahead."

A former Chronicle journalist researched and wrote the 42-page report; editors shaped it; marketing designers produced the report; and audience development staffers sold it. This project was a success, bringing in more than half a million dollars, a result that confirmed we were on to something worthwhile.



Excellent journalism remains a core value as we reimagine The Chronicle of Higher Education as an information company

Last year, the top editors for the two Chronicles, Liz McMillen and Stacy Palmer, decided to produce multiple reports using newsroom staffers, which meant juggling resources and shifting some time away from daily journalism, allowing us to prove the concept before making a bigger commitment.

Those reports, most of them forward-looking—"The Future of Enrollment," for example—sold well, and we discovered that about six out of 10 were bought by non-subscribers for \$179 in print, slightly less for digital. Along the way, we learned some good lessons about the limitations of email marketing and the importance of building an easy-to-use Chronicle store for online purchases. And we decided to make a bigger commitment.

This year we've dedicated several editors and reporters to produce the content. More of the company is helping to create, edit, design, market, and sell them. We're developing a line of related products and sponsored events tied to the larger report themes. In addition, we're tapping into our archives to mine that mother lode of content and build targeted collections, such as "11 Must Reads for 2018," which we will sell.

I realize that some of these efforts will succeed. Others will flop. And we'll discover different approaches as we learn and adjust. Excellent journalism, with its reliance on newsroom expertise, will remain solidly at our core. But this experiment, shaped by reimagining the Chronicle as an information company, will enable us to create some new types of indispensable content. And I bet our audiences will continue to pay for that. ■

is that they should be selective and thoughtful about bringing on the right partners to collaborate with. They should think of what their company needs to succeed, which of those areas they as founders may not be the strongest in, and recruit team members who can help fill those gaps. Also, team dynamics can make or break a company, so founders should be sure their team as a whole is greater than the sum of its participants.

Another thing I've seen successful founders do is seek out the mentorship and network that will help their company grow. Much like Nieman is the network that bridges the best

minds in journalism to solve tough problems, Techstars is the network that helps entrepreneurs succeed; if it takes a solid team to get one company off the ground, it takes a network of the right people to help propel that growth. A good network shares both the tested wisdom that can help an entrepreneur avoid roadblocks, as well as the connections that could help bridge that company with the right business development and growth opportunities. In addition to Techstars' global network, companies selected to participate in our accelerator will receive access to and mentorship from decision makers at Comcast and NBCUniversal, the byproduct

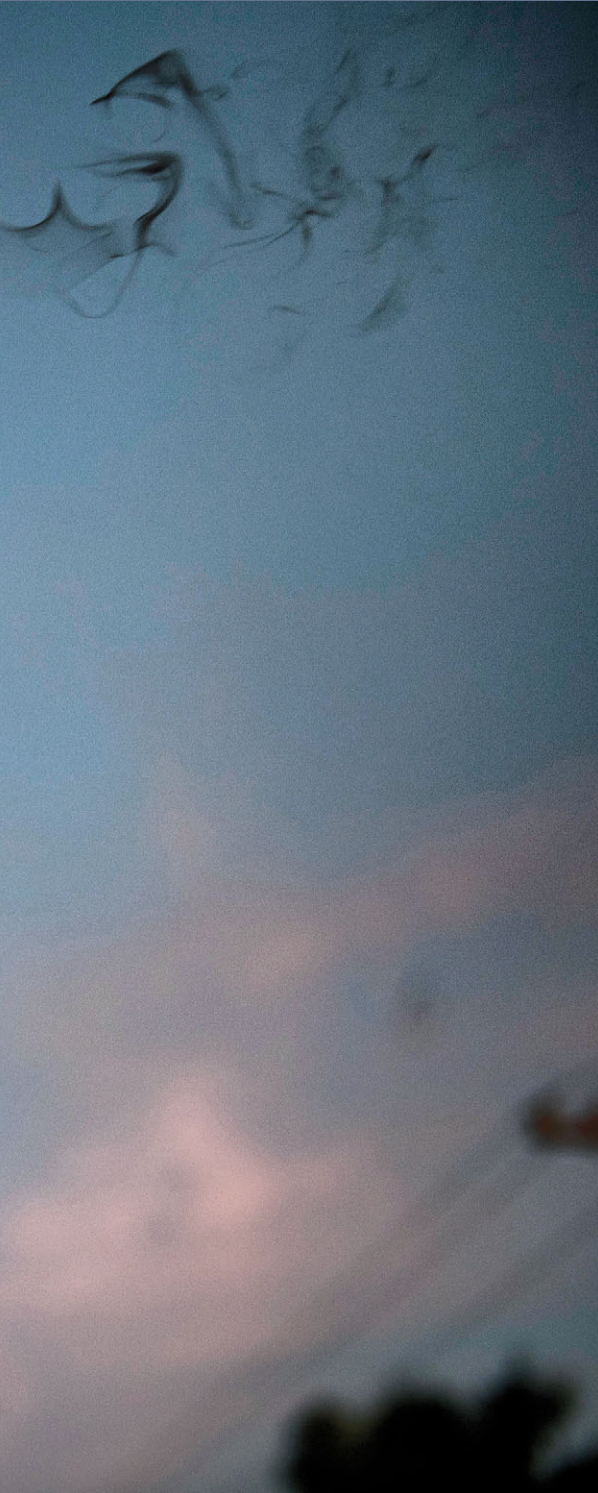
of which can present invaluable growth opportunities.

A third important piece successful founders do well is actually something that many of us in the greater Nieman family may have an organic knack for: storytelling. It seems obvious, but to bring on team members, investors, and even customers/users, company founders should have a clear and concise elevator pitch that meaningfully expresses what they are building. I've met dozens of interesting companies I wasn't at first intrigued by because they couldn't express simply enough what they do. Active investors can meet hundreds or thousands of companies a year.

Just think of the companies who may have been passed on for investment because they didn't have a great elevator pitch.

A lot has changed in journalism and entertainment over the last decade, and I believe the teams who will help steer us into a better future are the ones who know these art forms intimately and care about preserving their core place in society. I look forward to supporting those founders and companies, and I hope to see some promising teams from the Nieman network apply to our program. If you're a media entrepreneur interested in learning more, please head to techstars.com/comcast. ■





“IT’S A FIGHT FOR THE IDEALS WE STRIVE FOR”

BY MARITES DAÑGUILAN VITUG

Despite the obstacles in an increasingly hostile environment, independent Filipino news outlets are doing vital work



UN WHAT SEEMED like an ordinary work day in February, Filipino journalist Pia Ranada, who covers President Rodrigo Duterte, arrived at Malacañang Palace for a routine press briefing. A guard told her she was no longer allowed inside the compound. With her mobile phone, Ranada videotaped the interaction as she showed her press credentials and asked the guard from the Presidential Security Group (PSG) a series of questions. He tried to block the camera with his hand but Ranada held on.

The 27-year-old reporter for Rappler, a leading digital news outlet, where I am editor at large, says her hands were shaking when she composed her first tweet about the incident. However, she acted on what her editors burned into her memory: to chronicle any form of harassment or attempts to block access to Rappler's beats. "But more than that," Ranada says, "I felt that it was a newsworthy event and something the public needed to know about." (That day Ranada was allowed into a briefing in the New Executive Building.)

Ranada's ban from the presidential palace is just one example of the Filipino government's intimidation and threats against the media. Despite the obstacles, though, independent Filipino news outlets are continuing to do vital work in an increasingly hostile environment.

Harry Roque, the president's spokesman, said Duterte himself ordered the ban, likening Ranada to a "rude" guest: "If your guest is rude to you in your own home, can you blame it if the rude visitor is told to leave? It's the same with the president."

Reporters Without Borders called the

government's decision a "serious violation of media freedom" and the Manila-based Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) said in a statement: "The message [of Malacañang] is clear. It is that journalists can and will be prevented from doing their jobs should they, like Ms. Ranada, ask government officials the tough questions ... to get at the truth and to hold the powerful to account." The Office of the President has since expanded the ban to all events where Duterte is a speaker. In March, Ranada was barred from covering the president's speech to a group of entrepreneurs in Manila.

In addition to publicly criticizing journalists like Ranada and their work, Duterte has threatened media businesspeople like the Rufino-Prieto family, owners of the Philippine Daily Inquirer, who are negotiating the sale of the leading daily to Ramon Ang, a wealthy businessman close to the president. The largest TV network, ABS-CBN, is on edge as Duterte has vowed to block the renewal of its franchise, which expires during his term in office. Duterte does not regard press freedom as a right guaranteed by the Constitution. Press freedom "is a privilege in a democratic state," he said in an interview with reporters in January. "You have overused and abused that privilege in the guise of press freedom."

A climate of fear is present because of the thousands who have died due to the extrajudicial killings Duterte has ordered as part of his deadly drug war. Official figures as of March show that at least 4,000 suspected drug users have been killed in police operations. But the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates, an NGO, says the figure

PREVIOUS SPREAD: JES AZNAR/GETTY IMAGES ABOVE LEFT: BULLIT MARQUEZ/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS ABOVE RIGHT: NOEL CELIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



PREVIOUS SPREAD:
A woman holds a candle at a Manila protest calling for an end to drug-related killings

LEFT TO RIGHT:
Rappler CEO Maria Ressa addresses supporters after the online outlet's license was revoked

A seminarian lights a candle during a prayer rally condemning the government's war on drugs

could be more than 12,000. The Philippines has repeatedly appeared in the global impunity index of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), ranking 5th in 2017. More than 40 journalists have been killed in the past decade, mostly in the provinces, away from the eyes of the national media.

Congress is dominated by Duterte's allies. On May 11, Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, a Duterte critic, was ousted from office after the government petitioned for her removal. Duterte himself has threatened to abolish the Commission on Human Rights, which spoke up against the killing of suspected drug users. He subsequently said the threat was made in jest. He ordered the suspension of a ranking official of the Ombudsman, a state agency on the frontlines of fighting corruption in government, which probed the president's finances.

The Philippines has also been confronting the phenomenon of "fake news" since the presidential election campaign in 2016. Duterte's campaign used social media to spread false stories—such as Pope Francis praising Duterte and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong endorsing his candidacy—and to attack his rivals. “

“Divisive campaigning happened in the

Philippines six months before it happened in the U.S.,” says Clarissa David, a professor at the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication. “The problem is disinformation. ... In this country, the focus of disinformation campaigns has been on attacking political personalities. Very often the content's tone is angry, a lot of it designed to outrage and to make the public emotional. This appeal to emotions is what is polarizing.”

A case in point: In May of last year, Mocha Uson, assistant secretary in the Presidential Communications Operations Office, shared on her Facebook page a photo of soldiers, kneeling as they prepared to battle terrorists in Marawi City in Mindanao, southern Philippines. She called for the public to support the soldiers. A Twitter account, supposedly run by members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, showed that the photograph was, in fact, of Honduran police in 2015 calling on God to stop violence in Honduras, according to an English translation of the original post.

In February, as the Philippines was commemorating the 32nd anniversary of the people power revolt that ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Uson conducted a poll among her followers. Her question: “Was

the 1986 people power revolt a product of fake news?” Eighty-six percent replied yes. What the country is seeing now is a “normal continuation of the campaign,” says Randy David, sociology professor at the University of the Philippines and a columnist for the Philippine Daily Inquirer who has been critical of Duterte.

Another factor, according to Jonathan Corpus Ong of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Jason Cabañes of the University of Leeds in the U.K., is the involvement of advertising and public relations professionals as “architects of disinformation.” Ong and Cabañes conducted a 12-month study of “fake news” and “troll armies” in the lead-up to the 2016 presidential election. Ong and Cabañes interviewed operators of fake accounts on Facebook and Twitter and the “strategists”—advertising and PR gurus at agencies by day who often also freelance for outside clients, including political campaigns—who provided the scripted narratives. The researchers recommend setting up a “self-regulatory commission” to require disclosure of political consultancies as a way to stop the spread of divisive and false information.

Seminars on media literacy—particularly on fighting disinformation—are gaining traction, especially among young people. In February, the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Rappler, online newsmagazine Vera Files, and the ABS-CBN News Channel got together with CMFR, bloggers, academics, and Media Nation, a civil-society project that convenes journalists to discuss the industry and its problems, in a two-day seminar on addressing misinformation.

RANADA'S BAN FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF THE FILIPINO GOVERNMENT'S INTIMIDATION AND THREATS AGAINST THE MEDIA

Stills from the animated video Rappler created to tell the story of Captain Rommel Sandoval, who died in the Marawi siege



Many in the audience were students from leading universities, including the communication departments of Ateneo de Manila University and De La Salle University and the journalism department of the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication.

Since last year, the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), an organization of national and community newspapers, has connected with seven universities through day-long seminars on spotting “fake news.” “We want the students to think and analyze,” says PPI’s training director Tess Bacalla. “We provide examples to make them see the pattern, that government machinery is being used to peddle fake news.” PPI’s most recent session was in March at the Universidad de Manila. “I learned to be more picky about the things I share on my social media accounts,” says Harley Jefferson Dimaano, a 19-year-old communications student. He says the seminar was an eye-opener. “I can now spot fake news.” He checks accounts to verify sourcing and, if he determines a post is fake, he clicks the report button on the social media platform.

At Vera Files, a group of journalists, mostly women, work in a small rented room in an old building in suburban Quezon City, fact-checking Duterte. The U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy has been funding Vera Files’ fact-checking project through a grant since 2016. The site’s 2017 year-end video shows Duterte speaking before his communications group, admonishing them to tell the truth. Cut to the next scene: a TV interview in which Duterte admits falsely accusing his fierce critic, Senator Antonio

“WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH FAKERY AND FALSITY ON MANY FRONTS. WE HAVE TO STAY THE COURSE, STAND OUR GROUND”

— ROSARIO GARCELLANO, PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER OPINION EDITOR

Trillanes, of having overseas bank accounts.

Vera Files also conducts workshops on fact-checking and fighting fake news at universities around the country, often with the PPI. Ellen Tordesillas, who heads Vera Files, gives a short talk on how to spot fake news, the importance of primary sources, and the need for fact-checking, while other speakers describe how journalists work, the process of vetting sources, and the strict ethical guidelines that are followed.

Other news organizations are getting involved, too. A leading TV network, GMA, has started an online show called “Fact or Fake,” calling attention to false reports posted on dubious websites and shared thousands of times. In a recent episode, “Fact or Fake” showed that a news report claiming that Duterte was immune from prosecution by the International Criminal Court—which is investigating extrajudicial killings in his war on drugs—is fake.

The report quoted a supposed international law expert from Oxford College and the accompanying photograph was of a German politician.

At least six Philippine media companies and organizations are led by women. They include ABS-CBN, GMA, The Philippine Star, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Vera Files, and Rappler.

A recent study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies shows that women have occupied around 40 percent of management positions in the private sector over the last 15 years. But women are still under-represented in the Cabinet, Congress, and local elective offices.

In addition to the attacks from the government, online hate messages against individual journalists are common. Jodesz Gavilan, 24, joined Rappler fresh out of university and was able to experience journalism before Duterte. President Benigno Aquino, Duterte’s predecessor, “just resorted to calling out the press to be fair but these often faded away since he didn’t have a massive troll army to echo his every cry,” she says.

Today, Gavilan, who covers human rights issues and NGOs, says, “The threats are misogynistic in nature most of the time. They’ve threatened violence, such as rape and murder, warning me to shut up lest I want to be part of the numbers killed in Duterte’s drug war.” When she is able to confirm that the sources are not trolls, she does her own sleuthing and reports offensive accounts to employers and schools. In an effort to educate the public about threats to the media, Rappler has produced a short video featuring six journalists—two from television, two from news websites, one freelance

ERNEST FIESTAN AND NICO VILLARETE/RAPPLER



photographer, and one foreign correspondent—who share similar experiences.

Rappler itself continues to report, despite the fact that in January, the Securities and Exchange Commission, a regulatory body, revoked the site's license to operate, alleging that it has foreign owners, in violation of the Philippine Constitution. Rappler is 100 percent owned by Filipinos. The site is operating while the case is on appeal. Since the decision to shut down Rappler, journalists and civil-society groups have organized Black Friday protests in various venues, including universities.

And Rappler's work goes well beyond covering Duterte. The site experiments with new forms of storytelling, using animation and 360-degree video to report on the war against terrorists in Marawi. The animation focused on a soldier who died saving one of his troops, while the virtual-reality documentary placed viewers amid the ruins of the war zone.

Rappler is also forging partnerships with government and civil-society groups. *Agos*, a Filipino word that means flow, is the site's long-running campaign for disaster preparedness. Typhoons regularly strike the Philippines, and *Agos* produces content on how to mitigate risks during disasters. "Government agencies still tap us to help them in popularizing drills," says Gemma Bagayaua-Mendoza, head of research. "We activate our volunteers every time there is an impending weather disturbance or a humanitarian crisis. Last year, we introduced a new dashboard that could help us efficiently route verified critical-incident reports to groups that can respond on the ground."

Another initiative, *#NotOnMyWatch*, was

a nine-month project with the Department of Interior and Local Government and various local government units. Rappler created an online platform through which members of the public could report evidence of government corruption. According to Bagayaua-Mendoza, over 4,500 citizen reports were gathered, while the social media campaign reached a total of 16 million users on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the website. Though few reports were referred to government—whistle-blowers were reluctant to be identified—"What we did then was use the reports as leads for stories, both for investigative reporting and to educate the public on typical scams in government," says Bagayaua-Mendoza.

At the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, which has a fierce history of holding public officials accountable, things are uncertain as the owners, the Rufino-Prieto family, conclude the sale of the newspaper to the president's ally Ang. "There is no pressure to be less assertive and to self-censor, but any astute reporter will sense that there is something different in the newsroom," a longtime staff member says. Stories about sensitive topics, like the International Criminal Court complaint against Duterte and the president's finances, are toned down and those linking him to corruption seem to be off-limits, according to one staff member who requested not to be identified. In the past, human-rights and corruption issues were front-page stories. Under Duterte, these have been buried in the inside pages.

So far, the op-ed section remains feisty. Columnists who have been critical of Duterte have remained. "I was not told that certain

columnists or regular contributors of commentaries would have to go," says Rosario Garcellano, editor of the opinion pages. "I take care, now more than ever, that our 'fearless views' mantra is reflected in a mix of views for and against the government, although criticism often takes up much of the content." John Nery, who writes an opinion column and some of the editorials, says, "We have to fight for the newspaper we believe in." This thought has kept him and some of his colleagues going.

Garcellano was a journalist during the martial law years under Ferdinand Marcos. When she was a John S. Knight fellow at Stanford University in the late 1980s, she remembers telling her colleagues "how hard we struggled to keep our heads—and integrity—above water. I also recall saying that I merely lost a job at the onset of martial law, but others lost their lives." Today, she says, times are similarly difficult but "vastly different" because "we have to deal with fakery and falsity on many fronts. We have to stay the course, stand our ground. We have to report and make sense of the continuing narrative for others. We have to tell the story."

That conviction seems to be shared by the next generation of Filipino journalists. When in January Rappler's Ranada was asked by the young editors of *Scout*, a print and online magazine for youths, what they can do to uphold press freedom, she replied: "You can help just by speaking up ... being critical of government propaganda. ... This is our generation's fight, the fight of millennials. This fight is not just about Rappler. It's a fight for the ideals we strive for, that any freedom-loving citizen should strive for." ■

Reinventing Local TV News

BY SARA MORRISON AND ERYN CARLSON





To attract
young viewers,
stations are going
digital-first,
crowdsourcing
reporting,
experimenting
with augmented
reality, and
injecting more
personality into
the news

W

WHEN THE REV. Billy Graham died in February, Raleigh-based WRAL-TV provided expansive coverage of the famed evangelist's life and legacy. That was no surprise since, after all, the pastor was a North Carolina native, and—though his funeral was held in his hometown of Charlotte, more than 150 miles away—generations of Raleigh-area residents had watched Graham's global crusades, which WRAL broadcast beginning in the 1970s, on their home television sets.

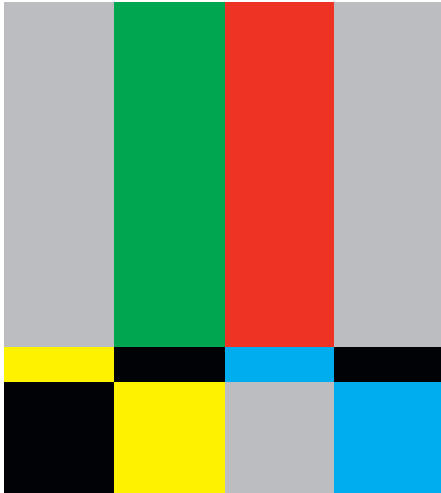
In addition to reporting the news of Graham's death, the station produced a 30-minute special, "Remembering Billy Graham." It aired the day of his funeral, which was livestreamed on the WRAL website, Facebook, and their mobile news app as well as broadcast live on television, pre-empting the noon newscast.

Those interested in even more coverage of Graham could have turned to WRAL's over-the-top (OTT) apps, available for Roku, Amazon Fire, Apple TV, and Chromecast. Any apps or online services such as Netflix, YouTube, and Skype, which bypass distribution via a telecommunications provider qualify as OTT. Shelly Leslie, general manager of audience development at Capitol Broadcasting Co., says the station added 35 pieces of Graham-related content—including clips of the motorcade bringing the preacher's body to

the cemetery in Charlotte—to the OTT apps. "We blew out regular content on the 'watch now' section of our OTT apps," says Leslie, who was previously WRAL's creative director. "We're constantly experimenting with different content there and seeing what people *want* to watch."

WRAL, the flagship station of Capitol Broadcasting, which owns two other TV and several radio stations in North Carolina, was one of the first local television news stations in the country to develop an OTT app. Their Roku app, first rolled out in 2010, offers streaming access to tens of thousands of clips from the station's archive. Viewers can access everything from live and archived newscasts to live streams of legislative hearings, school board meetings, and court trials. Sports fans can watch events that don't make the evening broadcast. These are live streamed on the OTT apps, WRAL.com, or its niche sites covering professional, college, and high school sports. OTT users also have access to WRAL documentaries from the past two decades, restaurant reviews, and podcasts from Capitol Broadcasting's sports radio stations.

WRAL-TV's content covering the life, legacy, and funeral of Billy Graham, below circa 1955, is available on a wide variety of apps and platforms



Another area in which WRAL is innovating is augmented and virtual reality. Many local newsrooms have been experimenting with augmented reality in their newscasts for several years, but WRAL is taking this a step further, recently opening its own AR/VR studio, which, according to Leslie, is the only one of its kind between New York and Atlanta. The studio enables WRAL to create a virtual world that presenters can interact with, which anchors did during the station's coverage of the Winter Olympics. During their nightly half-hour broadcasts throughout the games of "The Olympic Zone," anchors appeared to be located on the snowy mountains of Pyeongchang, South Korea. Augmented reality was used to place life-sized graphics, such as featured athletes, within the virtual set.

"We're also developing our AR/VR studio into a separate business as a resource to the gaming industry, agencies, and corporations that want to explore AR/VR without having to send their crew to Toronto or LA," says Leslie. Those with experience and their own graphics can rent the studio itself, or they can hire WRAL's in-house team to produce their concept.

Likewise, the station's efforts with OTT apps are creating a new revenue stream, garnering funds from the branded and paid content and ads for their OTT content. "Our data indicates there is absolutely a new audience watching via streaming, and I fully expect that to explode over the next two years," says Leslie. "While demographic data is still lacking in this platform, we're seeing steady growth month-to-month. The biggest surprise has been live newscast viewing, particularly morning news, [on the apps]."

WRAL is not alone in fostering innovation in local TV news. At a time when local TV news is often written off as formulaic, with sensationalism triumphing over substance, advertising stagnant, and viewership declining, a host of stations is experimenting with new ways to attract audiences.

Local TV news is still what the majority of Americans turn to to keep informed. According to Pew's most recent State of the News Media report, published in 2017, more people get their news from television than any other source, and, of those viewers, the majority get that news from their local TV station—and their websites. In smaller markets, especially, television stations' websites—not those of newspapers—are often the dominant source of local news online, according to a recent report by the Knight Foundation. What's more, unlike many print and digital-only publications,



FCC chairman Ajit Pai in 2017. The FCC recently rolled back rules limiting media ownership, allowing companies to own more stations

local TV news is still profitable. In 2016, local TV over-the-air advertising revenue totaled \$20.6 billion, and nearly 85 percent of that was made by some 800 "news-producing stations," according to Pew, with data from market researcher BIA/Kelsey.

Yet a shift is happening. Veteran news executive Mark Effron says the decline of local TV news over the past two decades could have terminal results if the industry fails to act now. "Because it is a slow drip and it's not a big hole in the ground that TV stations are falling in, there is less of an urgency and a desire to innovate in a ruthless, all-out manner," says Effron.

Now a journalism instructor at Montclair State University's School of Communication and Media in New Jersey, Effron spent the bulk of his career in local and cable TV news as well as radio. "By all metrics, local television is still a very profitable medium, but it's not as profitable as it was. Profit margins have shrunk over the last 30 years," says Effron, as

have ratings. "That doesn't mean that they're still not making a lot of money and reaching a lot of people, but they're reaching less people and making less money."

People of all demographics are turning away from television, and this is reflected in their news consumption. In 2016, Pew reported, 57 percent of adults said they often got their news from television, while 38 percent said they often got their news online. Just a year later, that gap had narrowed considerably: 50 percent television to 43 percent online.

Local TV still draws in the largest percentage of adults when comparing local, network, and cable TV news, but it has also seen the steepest drop-off in viewership in the last year. Pew reported that from 2016 to 2017 the share of adults regularly getting news from local TV fell from 46 to 37 percent. Only 18 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds often get their news from local TV, compared to 57 percent of those older than 64.

Education and income also play a role; nearly half of those who regularly watch local TV news have a high school education or less while about a quarter of viewers are college graduates, and those viewership shares are similar for those who make less than \$30,000 a year versus those who make \$75,000 or more.

Afraid of alienating older viewers, stations are wary of innovation that may draw new audiences in. "Even though I think a

Local TV news still attracts larger audiences than network and cable, but it has also seen the steepest drop-off in viewership



lot of television news organizations are really trying [to attract younger audiences], in some ways there's a sense that the audience is always going to be an older, lower socioeconomic demographic," says Effron. "I think it becomes a little bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy."

The deterioration of the local news media poses dangers. Local stations are less likely today to offer robust coverage of city hall and state government. Reducing local news coverage may leave citizens less knowledgeable about issues of civic importance in their own communities.

A number of initiatives are under way to strengthen the local news ecosystem, including an effort by Facebook to connect users with local news and the Knight-Lenfest Newsroom Initiative, a \$4.8 million Knight Foundation-funded project to share best digital practices among metro newspapers. The second phase of the Knight-Lenfest effort focuses on local television. A collaboration with the Center for Innovation & Sustainability in Local Media at the University of North Carolina's Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism, the project works with two local television stations and other media outlets in North Carolina to share best practices and create a network of sustainable news outlets.

A \$2.6 million Knight grant is aimed at advancing innovation and journalism excellence in local television newsrooms. The grant recipients are Arizona State

University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and Arizona PBS, the public television station based at the school; the Emma Bowen Foundation, which will recruit college students of color for media internships at local television stations; the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA), which will design a new annual training conference promoting the First Amendment and innovation; Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), which, to foster investigative journalism, will host data boot camps, workshops, and trainings, and will launch a new digital watchdog TV network; and the Carole Kneeland Project for Responsible Television Journalism, which will train newsroom leaders on topics ranging from community engagement and ethics to digital strategy.

Meanwhile, at Northeastern University's School of Journalism in Boston, professors John Wihbey and Mike Beaudet are in the middle of a project called Reinventing Local TV News. They will partner with a handful of television stations around the country and, with help from graduate students, will experiment with some of the stations' best journalism, telling the stories using non-traditional methods—perhaps adding animation or data visualizations. They will test the original and the remixed versions in their broadcasting partners' respective markets to see how audiences respond.

While TV stations are well-positioned to create high-quality, internet-native videos that might attract younger audiences who don't watch television, too few are doing so. While 63 percent of stations say they are trying to attract younger demographics, according to a 2017 RTDNA survey, the majority

Many stations are hesitant to innovate because they don't want to risk turning regular viewers off



defined those efforts as simply using social media. Only about 14 percent said they are looking at what they classified as "younger-oriented content on digital platforms." Wihbey and Beaudet hope their project will show local TV stations how important it is to innovate and provide them with suggestions on how to do it.

Though local TV news stations have plenty of evidence from their print counterparts that the cost of inaction may be high, many have been slow to take action. Several months into the study, Wihbey and Beaudet say they've found "pockets" of innovation—such as Denver's KUSA 9News. By and large, however, local TV news is stuck in its formulaic comfort zone, both in terms of which stories it tells and how it tells them. "Most television stations haven't ventured far from the decades-old model of delivering a local newscast," Beaudet says. "They often just repurpose their broadcast stories for digital and are more interested in racking up clicks than providing useful, engaging content online that might actually tempt a millennial to tune in to the traditional broadcast."

Beaudet believes that most stations are hesitant to innovate because they don't want to risk turning viewers off. They're also used to making the bulk of their money from ads and, increasingly over the last few years, the retransmission fees that cable and satellite providers pay broadcasters for the right to carry their signals. Compared to the \$20.61 billion in TV ad revenue local TV stations made in 2016 (election ads boosted that figure), they drew in \$7.93 billion in retransmission fees and a relatively puny \$1 billion in digital ad revenue, Pew reported.

Further complicating the future, the local television landscape is in a state of change. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules limiting media ownership have been rolled back, allowing companies to

Kyle Clark (facedown) hosts a personality-driven reinvention of the 6 p.m. newscast on KUSA 9News in Denver. It's attracted new viewers



own more stations, thereby giving a few companies an outsized influence. By 2016, five companies—Sinclair, Gray, Nexstar, TEGNA, and Tribune—owned 37 percent of all local stations, totaling nearly 450 stations among them. In 2004, those same five companies owned 179 full-power stations, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of SEC filings data. Their combined revenue has more than doubled, from \$3.6 billion in 2004 to \$8.3 billion in 2016.

As these companies' holdings and revenue grow, many people with a stake in the local TV news industry are concerned about plans for their stations. That's especially true for Sinclair, the nation's largest broadcaster, which owns more than 190 stations across 89 markets and plans to buy all of Tribune's stations for nearly \$4 billion.

This would give it access to an estimated 72 percent of American households. To increase its chances of winning FCC approval for the Tribune deal, Sinclair said it plans to sell stations in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, then enter into agreements to operate the stations.

Not only are critics of the deal concerned about the dangers of media consolidation—particularly that the reach of independent and minority broadcasters would be diminished—but about Sinclair's approach to news. Sinclair has a history of issuing “must-run” news and commentary segments, scripts, and recurring features to its stations, limiting truly local fare. Recently, Sinclair required its anchors to read from a script saying they were “concerned about the troubling trend of irresponsible, one-sided news stories plaguing our country.” In early April, after Deadspin created a supercut of the promos that went viral, the company faced widespread pushback, with critics labeling the ads as pro-Trump propaganda. The company defended itself in an internal memo, obtained by CNNMoney, with senior vice president of news Scott Livingston writing, “The critics are now upset about our well-researched journalistic initiative focused on fair and objective reporting.” Livingston added, “For the record, the stories we are referencing in this campaign are the unsubstantiated ones (i.e. fake/false) like ‘Pope Endorses Trump’ which move quickly across social media and result in an ill-informed public. Some other false stories, like the false ‘Pizzagate’ story, can result in dangerous consequences.”

Not all stations owned by the five biggest broadcasters are driving to innovate; indeed, sometimes it's smaller stations that, despite having a more limited reach

and fewer resources, are leading the charge. For example, New Orleans' Fox 8 WVUE-TV—a station that undertakes investigations with national impact—is owned by the midsize Raycom Media, which owns or operates 65 stations in 20 states.

Lee Zurik was investigating rising drug prices for Fox 8 when a pharmacist mentioned that some customers' health insurance copays were causing prescriptions to cost more than they would without any insurance at all—and the insurance companies were pocketing the difference.

Customers had no idea this was happening because pharmacies signed confidentiality agreements preventing them from telling anyone about the difference in price. The pharmacist who was Zurik's source trusted that the highly acclaimed investigative reporter, who also anchors two of Fox 8's newscasts, would keep the pharmacist's identity confidential. Zurik's source provided documents proving what he was saying and talked about the price inflation on-camera—albeit with his voice disguised and face obscured. Zurik confirmed the information

Comedian Reese Waters co-anchors WUSA's new morning news show “Get Up DC.” It features trivia contests and trending stories

with other pharmacists.

Zurik's story, “Copay or You-Pay? Prescription Drug Clawbacks Draw Fire,” aired in May 2016 as part of his “Medical Waste” series. The reaction was immediate and widespread. People were outraged to find out that their insurance might be causing them to spend even more money on the drugs they needed. Outlets such as Bloomberg, CNN, and the Los Angeles Times subsequently did their own versions of Zurik's story. So far, class action lawsuits have been filed against UnitedHealthcare, Cigna, and Humana as well as pharmacies CVS and Walgreens. Some states, including Zurik's home state of Louisiana, are considering legislation outlawing the “gag clauses” that his report uncovered. The practice was a national issue, but it took a local TV news investigation to uncover it.



Chris Finch, Fox 8's digital content director, says the station promotes Zurik's stories on social media channels and typically hosts a live session on social platforms as a follow-up. "Facebook Live [videos] are the best way to tease stories on that platform," says Finch. A typical investigative segment will get roughly 15,000 views, and having someone who provides instant feedback on live posts tends to increase the amount of time people spend watching the videos, says Finch. "The largest obstacle is coordinating someone who has the knowledge to answer questions in the feed while Lee answers questions live. It's an orchestra."

Another recent Zurik investigation, "Cracking the Code," examined the costs of medical procedures. The series was a partnership between Fox 8 WVUE, NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune, and ClearHealthCosts, a New York-based journalism startup that aims to bring transparency to the health-care marketplace. The project included, on Fox 8's website, a Health Price Check Tool, which allowed users to look up prices of various medical procedures and compare costs (both with insurance and out-of-pocket) at different locations and providers.

To help bolster the tool as well as collect information that could be used for reports in the series, the news providers asked audiences to anonymously upload their own medical bills. Health Price Check was easy to access from the mobile app—a smart move considering about two-thirds of Fox 8's digital audience comes from mobile devices, thanks in part to push alerts from Fox 8's mobile app as well as Facebook, Finch says.

"Without question, mobile is probably the highest priority for news stations," and Fox 8 aims to give people a television experience on their mobile devices, says Finch. Stories like Zurik's are tailored to provide the best experience for audiences regardless of which platform they're using. Desktop viewers may see more graphics and mobile users will get more clickables within the story to help keep the audience on the device longer, says Finch.

Like many cities in America, Cleveland's streets are plagued by potholes, something that WEWS News 5, one of the stations owned by E.W. Scripps, reported on several times over the years in its popular "Pothole Patrol" segments. When investigative reporters Jonathan Walsh, Samah Assad, and Faith Boone dug into why the roads were so bad, they uncovered problems with the city's method for evaluating and fixing streets. Their report, "Broken Roads, Broken

"Because it's a slow drip and not a big hole in the ground, there is less of an urgency to innovate in a ruthless, all-out manner"

—MARK EFFRON, FORMER NEWS EXECUTIVE



System," demonstrated the importance of local TV news in holding institutions accountable and how a local station can use digital tools, including interactive maps and a feedback form, to enlist viewers' help in investigating and telling the story. "If you give the viewers the opportunity to interact with a story, they get to see and truly understand why the story is important and how it impacts them," Assad says.

The city said it used a 2009 database of letter grades assigned to every street and a "worst first" policy to guide repaving decisions. It took Assad several months to get her hands on that database. Assad and Courtney Danser, then News 5's executive producer of digital, created an interactive Google map that viewers could use to see what grade their streets had received. Another map showed what streets had been repaved between 2009 and 2015. On a feedback form, viewers could grade their street and then see if it lined up with the city's grade for it. Viewers were also invited to send in photos.

This feedback from viewers was crucial to the reporting itself, revealing inconsistencies between the database and actual road conditions. Assad and the digital team discovered that some of the 16,000 streets listed in the report were either misnamed or nonexistent. Other streets were missing from the report; entire neighborhoods were skipped. Many of the worst streets—which should have been prioritized for repaving—were neglected for years and even decades. Meanwhile, streets with good grades were repaved.

Curious, they looked at the condition of streets that City Council members lived on. Sure enough, many City Council members' streets had recently been repaved despite already being in good shape. They also found that City Council members had a say in which streets in their wards should be

repaved—which meant that the city wasn't relying solely on the "worst first" method. Besides, national experts on camera called the "worst first" ineffective.

Walsh highlighted other problems as well. On a street with a perfect rating from the city, Walsh lay down in a pothole so large and deep that his entire body fit in it.

News 5 has done several follow-up segments, some of which were inspired by viewers' feedback, and viewers are still weighing in via the feedback form. The "Broken Roads" series won a regional Emmy for continuing coverage as well as a regional Murrow award for excellence in innovation. In response, Cleveland announced it would work on shifting from a "worst first" to "fix-it-first" philosophy over the course of the next few years, and that it would be increasing funds for resurfacing projects, recommending spending between \$12 and \$18 million a year, compared to just \$4.4 million spent in 2014, \$7.5 million in 2015, and \$10 million in 2016.

Innovation is paying off for News 5. Danser says the station has seen a steady increase in downloads of their mobile app and in Facebook audience growth. The station continues to produce stories with digital-only components, including "Cleveland Abandoned," which investigates the proliferation of dangerous abandoned properties, despite the mayor's promises to tear them down. Like "Broken Roads," it asks viewers to contribute to the reporting. "They tell us their stories and we investigate," says Danser, who is now digital executive producer at ABC11 News in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. "We have a responsibility to not only tell, but also to listen. And that's something these digital projects are helping us do more of."

Of the "big five" broadcasting companies, TEGNA—which owns 47 stations and says it reaches 50 million adults on television and 35 million adults on digital every month—stands out from its competitors in terms of innovation efforts. The company holds innovation summits, bringing together journalists from its newsrooms across the country to brainstorm what broadcast news should be in the digital age. In Washington, D.C., it hired comedian Reese Waters to co-anchor WUSA's new morning news broadcast "Get Up DC." The show, which premiered in January, combines humor and trending stories with local news, weather, and traffic, and includes new segments such as "The Most DC Thing" and person-on-the-street trivia and other contests with passersby.

Another TEGNA station, Denver's KUSA 9News, also is pushing boundaries.

In August 2016, it launched “Next with Kyle Clark,” a personality-driven reinvention of the 6 p.m. news broadcast. Instead of weather and traffic reports mixed in with fluff pieces and crime stories, the 30-minute broadcast, hosted by popular anchor Clark, combines news and views for unique perspectives on what’s happening in Colorado.

Clark’s commentary is irreverent and honest. Case in point: reporting on a large rock in a local Target parking lot that cars regularly got stuck on top of. Tipped off by a Denver thread on Reddit devoted to the boulder and its “victims,” “Next” staked out the parking lot for Facebook Live viewers; a few minutes into the livestream, a red SUV was high-centered on the rock. “Next” made light of the situation that frustrated drivers and amused onlookers and tallied the cost to drivers whose cars were damaged. Ultimately, the station’s reporting led to removal of the rock—referred to as “one of [Next’s] dearest contributors.”

So far, “Next” has been a mixed bag; ratings are slightly lower than its predecessor, but it is still in first place (9News has led the market for years) for its time slot. The best news: 70 percent of “Next’s” audience is new to the 6 p.m. broadcast, according to the station’s internal numbers. And Clark, who still co-anchors 9News’s traditional 9 and 10 p.m. broadcasts, has a knack for commentary that goes viral. A rant against viewer-submitted snow-covered patio furniture photos (“Why is it that every time it snows we whip out photos of our patio sets like we’re showing off baby photos of our kids?”)

WEWS News 5 enlisted viewers’ help in an investigation of Cleveland’s road conditions, which grew out of their popular “Pothole Patrol” reports

was covered by BuzzFeed, Huffington Post, and featured on the “Today” show. Another rant about a pet owner who left his dog in a hot car has been viewed 1.5 million times on Clark’s Facebook page.

9News also brought fresh thinking to “Blame” by investigative reporter Kevin Vaughan. “One of the mantras we have in this company,” he says, “is to be innovative, try new things, do something you’ve never done before and see how people react to it.” “Blame” examined the 2001 death of Jill Wells, who was shot in the head while she, her 6-year-old son Tanner, and her husband Mike were target shooting in their yard. Mike told police that Tanner accidentally shot Wells, and, after a brief investigation without an autopsy, the county coroner agreed. The story was told in a podcast, in print, online, and on TV.

Vaughan, who had first looked into the fatality in 2011 when he worked for The Denver Post, decided to revisit the case now that Tanner was an adult and his family was willing to participate. The Wells family lives near Colorado Springs, which is beyond the reach of 9News, so Vaughan’s 14,000-word story was simultaneously published in The Gazette in Colorado Springs and on 9News’ website. Vaughan referenced the police and coroner’s reports, Wells’ life insurance policy application, and her husband’s request for the payout, which was made the day after she died. Vaughan says, “I conceived this partnership with the idea that it would present the narrative version of the story in a community where there was great interest—and that that, in turn, would drive readers and viewers to our website and our airwaves.”

He knew from the start that his investigation might lack a definitive conclusion;

Wells’ husband died in 2008 shortly after police re-opened an investigation into her death. Tanner did not want to be interviewed for the story, but wrote a statement insisting that he was the one who shot his mother. Vaughan countered this with a psychologist who said children’s memories tend to be unreliable, as well as a theory that Mike may have shot his wife while standing behind Tanner, who heard a gunshot, saw his mother fall, and assumed that he was the one who fired the rifle.

In May, 9News reported that the manner of death on Wells’ certificate was changed from “accident” to “could not be determined.” The case illustrated the flaws of Colorado’s coroner system, which allows people with no law enforcement or medical experience to decide which deaths merit an autopsy.

For TV, the story was told in three segments, which were later stitched together for a half-hour special. The podcast was modeled on the popular true-crime “Serial.” On the website, the story was accompanied by case documents and a timeline with relevant photographs and audio clips, including the 911 call after the shooting.

Allison Sylte, a web producer for 9News, says the documents got the most views. Some features that worked on the desktop version of the site didn’t work for mobile readers. As the majority of 9News’ digital viewers came from mobile devices, Sylte says, it will be crucial that future enterprise stories do a better job with the mobile experience.

In an unorthodox move, the podcast went live four months before the TV and online stories. The 14-part “Blame” podcast, put together by 9News’ longtime investigative photojournalist and producer Anna Hewson, attracted more than 100,000 listeners—enough to prove that a podcast has potential to bring in revenue. Average engagement time on 9News’ website was high, exceeding 10 minutes; users usually spend less than a minute on stories. The story garnered about 500,000 views.

The innovation efforts of 9News, just like those of WRAL, Fox 8 WVUE, and WEWS News 5, are proof of how the local TV news landscape is, however slowly, shifting. “We have to really know our viewers and what matters to them. We have to listen,” says Capitol Broadcasting’s audience development manager Leslie. “Now more than ever, I think the audience is craving content that really matters to them and their daily lives, but they don’t want us deciding what that is for them. How do we give them choice? You have to get your audience engaged first.” ■



THE ARTISTRY OF VISUAL ARTS WRITING

From heady journals
to Tumblr manifestos,
innovation in art
criticism is happening
outside the mainstream

BY MARY LOUISE SCHUMACHER



“Female Robot” is one of the paintings by Kiki Kogelnik featured in Triple Canopy’s sickness and health-themed issue Risk Pool



WHEN POP ARTIST

Jeff Koons had a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, it seemed every art critic had to have his or her say. But it was Carolina Miranda of the Los Angeles Times, thousands of miles away, who got the last word—without any words of her own.

Miranda celebrated the colorful and hyperbolic language used to describe the 2014 show in a poem, what she called “cut-up Koons criticism,” assembled from phrases in the avalanche of reviews. Her from-the-hip, literary aggregation not only celebrated Koons, it offered insight into the kind of heat, groupthink, and competitive one-upmanship an art-world phenom like Koons could generate among critics. He was described as the “reigning artist-king,” “a bland Mitt Romney Teletubby,” not “really that different from BuzzFeed,” and “the most potent and inventive artist of this mad, frothy era.”

Miranda’s work is proof that arts journalists can be inventive at a daily newspaper or its website. But it’s a rarity. It was one of the only specific examples of innovative visual arts writing at a legacy media outlet that arts journalists pointed to in a recent survey.

While arts writing is going through one of its richest periods of innovation, with an explosion of forms in recent years, much of the experimentation is happening well outside of traditional media. The internet seems to have reminded at least some writers of the kind of artistry that’s possible in art criticism, says Charlotte Frost, author of a forthcoming book, “Art Criticism Online: A History.”

Gilda Williams, art critic and author of the go-to handbook “How to Write about Contemporary Art,” suggests we may be living through the most expansive era in the history of arts writing. “By and large the quality of writing has gone way up,” says Williams. “It’s a much broader sort of ecosystem and it’s often more enjoyable to read. The internet has really improved that.” As for the richest territory of inventiveness, that is happening at “the fringes,” Williams argues.

The fringe, in this case, includes a broad range of projects that bear resemblances to literary magazines, heady art journals, memoir, fiction, stand-up comedy, Tumblr manifestos, performance, and art. The production values tend to be high, the thinking dense, the forms endemic to the internet, and the writing literary and often personal. And yet, like Miranda’s poem, there is often a decidedly high-low sensibility, a playful irreverence or wit that makes serious thinking about art approachable.

Good, old-fashioned prose, insight, and—most essentially—judgment remain core to many of these experiments. Indeed some of the most noteworthy examples are less about digital bells and whistles and more about how words are used and art discussions framed.

Questions about what arts journalism might look like in the future were difficult to answer for many respondents to a survey I conducted while the 2017 Arts & Culture Nieman Fellow. More than 300 visual arts writers and critics working regularly for U.S. publications took the survey, which included more than 100 questions about the priorities and pressures of the field. Some of the questions replicate those of a survey done 15 years prior by the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University, which provides a basis for comparison over a period of dramatic change to both media and culture. About a third of respondents hold staff positions, while the rest are primarily freelance writers working for a mix of legacy publications and digital platforms from more than 35 states and several countries. The broader results of the survey will be published later this year.

The idea of an expansive era seems remote to many whose newsrooms have grown small and resource strapped. In those places, if arts journalism continues at all, sticking to the basics and doing them well tends to trump reinvention as a means of survival. “They don’t have the staff anymore,” says Christine Ledbetter, arts editor at The Washington Post.

There are, of course, plenty of exceptional arts journalists who are not particularly interested in reinvention. Sites like 4Columns, for instance, have been recognized for doubling down on craft and traditional forms of criticism to great effect. Most of the critics that survey respondents found most influential fall into this category, too. Roberta Smith of The New York Times and Jerry Saltz of New York magazine topped that list. Saltz, who is married to Smith, recently won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Criticism. For all of the heat and energy he generates on social media, he’s a pretty old-fashioned critic, who reviews big shows and important artists. The examples of inventive arts journalism that arose from the survey and subsequent reporting could inspire a shift in sensibility and a willingness to invest in an area of journalism that many editors and publishers have effectively written off.

The subtext here is this: We are living through a technology-induced cultural revolution and it’s not being covered particularly well. The ways we think about and derive meaning from art have changed dramatically, along with the ways we communicate and consume media and information. Some of the best arts writers today not only have a well-developed perspective on art—and write engagingly about it, of course—they also have a broader point of view about how visual culture is reshaping our lives.

What follows are scenes from a vanguard in arts writing. Most of these projects have been around long enough to learn from their experimentation. I selected work that could be explored deeply and pleurably, and I owe a debt of thanks to the survey’s respondents who drew me toward meaningful research and reading, including a surprisingly tall stack of books.

TRIPLE CANOPY

When the subject of arts writing and its digital future comes up, this New York-based journal is often the first to trip from the lips. Its mantra, to “slow down the internet,” is an ideal that people like to root for.

The editors have described themselves as lackeys from the publishing world—fact checkers and fledgling editors and writers—seeking a place of their own. They are literary minded and much of their philosophy is embodied in the site’s book-like orientation in which readers move through much of its content horizontally, from left to right. The standard vertical scroll of most web pages is the product of programmers and their big blocks of code, they argue, and that format is more conducive to skimming or scanning than actual reading.

The idea is to leverage the capacities of the web while being an antidote to its overwhelming volume and pace. Triple Canopy resists the internet’s general sense of urgency by publishing in “issues,” collections of content around a single concept that can take

several months to fully unfurl online and at various in-person events. In this way, Triple Canopy can feel like a series of high-concept research projects that everyone in the publishing chain is in on, from the editors who craft a poetic prompt, the contributors who respond, and those who are committed to reading over a period of time. Lines of inquiry are pursued in a kind of temporary, networked community. It is oddly participatory for a website that allows no comments or online interaction whatsoever.

While Triple Canopy’s editors describe what they do as arts writing, the e-journal doesn’t publish anything resembling a traditional art review. Instead, they seek to gather sharp and diverse minds around philosophical questions in such a way that insights on art and contemporary culture are a natural byproduct. Formats might include a piece of experimental writing, a performance, a digital game, an art object, a public discussion, or—most likely—some hybrid of such things.

For instance, Triple Canopy’s most recent issue, Risk Pool, explores ideas about sickness and health. So far, it includes an experiment in typography that makes a common typeface more readable to those with dyslexia and vision impairments; an epistolary essay by Johanna Hedva about collaborative healing and political resistance; a sequence of poems by Prageeta Sharma with paintings by Ragna Bley; and a report from the Aspen Ideas Festival by Corrine Fitzpatrick. Like good episodes of “This American Life,” the varied takes on individual subjects such as The Long Tomorrow (the future), Standard Evaluation Materials (standards of measurement), or Vanitas (vanity) tend to resonate in combination.

After a decade of existence, one of the takeaways of Triple Canopy may be about the quality of its voices. People with literary star power, both heavyweights and up-and-comers, show up on the masthead, in the “issues,” and at the journal’s fashionable fêtes. It doesn’t hurt when your collaborators include figures such as Hilton Als, the Pulitzer Prize-winning New Yorker critic; Rachel Kushner, a 2013 Guggenheim Fellow and novelist; and Lynne Tillman, a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist and revered critico-fiction writer. “A lot of the work of criticism is about the people who are doing it ... and the technologies, while they transform ways of working, don’t actually alter that fact,” says Lucy Ives, a former Triple Canopy editor and contributor.



Preparatory sketch for Zini, a Studio Manuel Raeder-designed typeface for the issue Standard Evaluation Materials

Triple Canopy is in the midst of rethinking its publishing model and online platform, in part to reach a wider audience and further “combat the economy of attention,” says the site’s editor, Alexander Provan. Triple Canopy, which is supported by memberships and institutions, may ultimately produce less content. The editors may focus more on getting audiences to spend time with their content, Provan says. That could mean presenting work on multiple platforms, multiple times in multiple cities, working with regional institutions and partners, for instance.

With its future in mind, Triple Canopy recently held an event to support the next generation of inventive arts journalists, a “Publication Intensive” hosted by The Underground Museum in Los Angeles that featured an auspicious gathering of emerging talent from around the globe. A lot of thought goes into Triple Canopy’s collaborations and mindful uses of technology, says Frost, who in her forthcoming book positions the site and other online journals such as e-flux and The New Inquiry as part of a new establishment in cultural writing. But, Frost adds, the site is not particularly accessible for broad audiences.



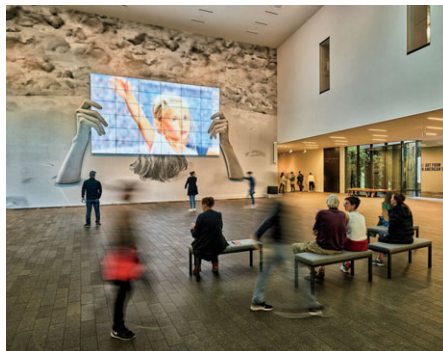
In rethinking how often Triple Canopy publishes new content and what it does to attract readers, the site “seeks to combat the economy of attention”

—ALEXANDER PROVAN
EDITOR, TRIPLE CANOPY

One of the art world's more in-the-now, countercultural publications, Dis magazine, is making the quintessentially unfashionable journalistic move: pivoting to video. Dis is looking to be "aggressively entertaining," though, to compete with the likes of Netflix and Amazon programming rather than the digestible videos that news organizations produce, says Lauren Boyle, one of the founders of the collective behind the site. "We enlist leading artists and thinkers to expand the reach of key conversations bubbling up through contemporary art, culture, activism, philosophy, and technology," the Dis collective states online. "Every video proposes something—a solution, a question—a way to think about our shifting reality."

The New York-based artist collective of the same name, which includes Boyle, Solomon Chase, Marco Roso, and David Toro, had already slowed publication for its online magazine, launched in 2010. The internet's noise became increasingly hard to break through, says Boyle. While the online magazine maintained a healthy audience, the number of people who reached the end of its long-form articles had decreased over time, she says. Also, while Facebook was essential to Dis' early growth, the magazine's content became less favored by the social platform's algorithm over time, too, says Boyle, adding that Twitter and Instagram were less useful for attracting audiences: "It got to the point where just no one saw anything that we posted on social media."

And so Dis, with a name that literally means to critique and that brings terms such as disrespect, discourse, discursive, and dystopia to mind, has gone post-Facebook and post-reading. It unveiled its "genre-nonconforming" streaming service in January and releases new programming on a weekly basis. The shift represents "a counter strategy



Many of Dis's first videos debuted at San Francisco's de Young Museum



In a Dis video series about technology thinkers, host McKenzie Wark's head is detached from his body via special effects

to our incomprehensible moment of post-truth, a clickbait cultural landscape that has generated misinformation and overexposure as a general condition," the collective states in an artist statement for the de Young Museum in San Francisco, where the Dis videos also debuted.

To drive home the point that we've all lost our heads in an era of inattention, one of Dis's inaugural releases was the "General Intellectuals" series with media theorist McKenzie Wark. The series is based on Wark's book of the same name, which profiles important thinkers. Wark's talking head is detached from his body via special effects, turned on its ear, so to speak, as he provides tutorials on society and technology. In one episode, he explores the ideas of cultural theorist Sianne Ngai, who breaks aesthetics down into three basic categories, "the zany," "the cute," and "the interesting." It is her way of explaining how we see art and the world.

Some of Dis's videos critique the forms of entertainment they resemble. For instance, artist Ilana Harris-Babou's visual essay "Reparation Hardware" has the feel of a promotional video unveiling a line of products at Restoration Hardware as well as TV programs that romanticize the work of "genius" artists in their studios. Harris-Babou remixes aspirational languages that, in turn, have the ring of political speech, retail advertising, and artspeak. In the video, we see her make tools from clay, dysfunctional objects she attempts to use in a kind of absurdist performance.

Harris-Babou is expressing something about the futility of repairing the American dream given the history of oppression and exploitation in the United States, a history in which enslaved Africans were themselves commodities. She's also pointing to the narratives embedded in the retail culture and

HGTV-esque shows so many of us consume passively and uncritically.

A video by artist, critic, and curator Aria Dean, "Eulogy for a Black Mass," begins in a similarly reflexive way. The video essay, which explores the idea of blackness as it relates to meme culture, opens with what feels like a laptop takeover: a blinking cursor tapping out words on a screen. Those words are then deleted, letter by letter. It's as if we're witnessing thought in real time: "This is ... a eulogy ... for a form."

Memes unfurl, too, and we hear Dean's voice: "Memes have something black about them. The something is complicated and hard to make recognizable. It has to do with a lot of black people making memes, caressing them, carrying them to and fro, spreading them. On a very practical level there is a blackness to claim, a blackness related to intellectual property and labor. There is an imminent theft to be guarded against."

So far, Dis programming has also included a series about mothers and daughters by artist-comedian Casey Jane Ellison (known for her online talk show "Touching the Art," which satirized the art world's mind-numbing discussions while providing a meaningful alternative to them), a conceptual cooking show, a cartoon about work, a children's show about capitalism, and a documentary on the "seasteading" movement. Both Ellison and Dean were mentioned by survey respondents as inventive artist-critics worth watching.

Most videos are in the four- to five-minute range, and some include artist-produced pre-roll, a wry alternative to ads. Dis videos can be streamed for 30 days and are marked with expiration dates. The service is free, for now, though Boyle says the Dis collective, which gets some support through its curatorial activities, hopes to charge for subscriptions later this year.

BLACK CONTEMPORARY ART

Black Contemporary Art started as an intervention into the art world, a way to make black artists more visible. Since its founding in 2011, the Tumblr blog and its founder Kimberly Drew have become authorities within that world. The visual blog is described as “a place for art by and about people of African descent,” and has presented thousands of artworks by thousands of artists from around the world.

“It is pulling together so many different forms of art,” says Tara Pixley, a photographer and media scholar with expertise in visual representations of gender, race, and sexuality. “There are films here. There are images, paintings, collages, portraits of important people like James Baldwin, poetry (after) Assata Shakur, like all of these things coming together to create this incredible tapestry of black thought, black life, the black experience through art.”

Recently, the Tumblr has featured images of the multimedia collages of black women and girls by Deborah Roberts, the fashion photography of Nadine Ijewere, a portrait of two girls by Miranda Barnes, and several works by photographer and multimedia artist Lorna Simpson. Part of what’s radical about the site, Pixley adds, is the way cultural touchstones of such range, from a Frank Ocean song to an Ellen Gallagher painting, are placed on the same level, inviting us to consider them as equally deserving of respect and consideration. For artists, being featured

on the site can lead to real-world opportunities. “I’ve met people who saw my work on that platform,” says Dis contributor Harris-Babou, who creates conceptual ceramic works, performances, and video installations. “I got to be in a museum show in Georgia ... and have my work shown next to a Martha Rosler video that inspired it. I got to travel to Paris and install my work there from someone who saw my work on that blog.”

Black Contemporary Art has become a go-to resource, used in art history courses, for instance, and Drew has become an influential speaker and social media powerhouse. She has a following of more than 175,000 on Instagram and more than 20,000 followers



“Social media offers a platform where we can hold space by sharing art that inspires us and represents us”

—JANEÉ OSTERHELDT
COLUMNIST, KANSAS CITY STAR

Black Contemporary Art presents works by and about people of African descent, such as “Sore Arms” by Jessica Spence



on Twitter, where she goes by @museummammy, celebrates black culture, and sometimes calls power to account.

Black Contemporary Art, and a few projects like it, have had an impact on the art world, influencing commercial dealers and large institutions alike, says Sarah Douglas, editor-in-chief of ARTnews. The site is an example of what some have called Tumblr art criticism, making an argument through the accumulation and combination of images. “You see artists of different generations next to each other, and it really makes an impact,” says Douglas. “You know, this material was all there to be mined, and it takes someone with a strong perspective and desire to come in and do it in a new way.”

Drew, who is the social media manager for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and also a curator, writer, and activist, was drawn to the call-and-response nature of the Tumblr environment. The meme-driven discussion she created empowers others to submit and reblog images of works by black artists. “Remember: each of us has a role in writing art history and producing cultural memory,” the site’s administrators posted recently.

“I think Tumblr and Instagram provide a great opportunity for representation we don’t otherwise see in mainstream media,” says Jeneé Osterheldt, culture columnist for the Kansas City Star. “Artists of color aren’t restricted by the stark white walls of elite museums where black art has been historically tokenized or rarely fairly recognized. Social media offers a platform where we can hold space by sharing art that inspires us and represents us, highlighting unsung work and promoting shows that critics otherwise ignore.”

To understand how the Black Contemporary Art Tumblr functions, making a critical argument with images, it’s instructive to look at another—very different—project launched the same year, artist James Bridle’s The New Aesthetic Tumblr. Bridle was making a case for a visual trend, suggesting there is something about the way our machines, robots, smart phones, and satellites see the world that has changed the way we look at things, too. The result is an aesthetic of looking down onto, into, and through spaces and objects in a way that’s unique to our Google Earth era.

“As different as they are, Black Contemporary Art and The New Aesthetic are doing a similar thing,” says Ben Davis, national art critic for artnet News. “Through aggregating images, [they are] sort of defining a sensibility and the criticism emerges from that sensibility. That is a very internet-era way of approaching things.”

ON PHOTOGRAPHY

By borrowing the title of Susan Sontag's definitive collection of essays, "On Photography," for his New York Times Magazine column, Teju Cole claims a kinship with a formidable public intellectual and polymath. He is similarly promiscuous in terms of his obsessions, which range from 16th-century Northern European painters to Nigerian pop, from the telling textures of cityscapes to the physical act of taking a photograph.

Cole is one of the only photography critics writing for a general-interest audience in the U.S. today and was also, along with Carolina Miranda of the Los Angeles Times, one of the few arts journalists working at legacy outlets noted in the survey for inventive work. Cole is also a celebrated novelist, art historian, street photographer, and recently named Guggenheim fellow. His debut novel, "Open City," won the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award in 2012.

Certain philosophical questions tend to recur across the whole of Cole's work regarding the limitations of sight and the role of photography. His chosen platforms, from the novel to Instagram to his essays, represent different modes of thinking, all of which are employed to tackle these inquiries. He is looking at the "vehicles through which we see" the world, says Megan N. Liberty, an arts journalist who wrote about Cole's work for the Los Angeles Review of Books last year. He is also exploring a cultural phenomenon

about the sense of dislocation that photographs can create, the separation between where we are and what we look at.

After the mass shooting in Las Vegas last year, for instance, Cole wrote a column for the Times Magazine about post-massacre photographs of broken windows. He made observations about windows, shattered and not, through the history of photography and explored the role of glass in making and looking at photographs, from the glass plates of antiquarian cameras to smartphone screens. At the end of the column, he came back around to the present moment and the devices so many of us hold: "The mobile phone is a kind of window, and



Teju Cole is looking at the "vehicles through which we see" the world

—MEGAN N. LIBERTY
LA REVIEW OF BOOKS CONTRIBUTOR

it is always on the verge of breaking. The image world, echoing the real world, is correspondingly fragmentary. This is perhaps what makes the various photographs of the broken windows at the Mandalay Bay resort so poignant. And perhaps here, we do have a political lesson. An intact window is interesting mainly for its transparency. But when the window breaks, what intrigues us is the brittleness that was there all along."

One could read Cole's columns without ever looking at his Instagram feed, reading his fiction, or listening to his Spotify playlists, but to do so is to miss out on his more experimental side. One of the things that's inventive about Cole's practice is the unique way his social media activity informs his criticism. At times, Instagram has been a platform for Cole's intellectual field notes, an updating apology, of sorts.

"If you read the column regularly and you are familiar with his voice, reading and seeing his Instagram is really exciting because it has a similar tone, but it's a completely different project," says Liberty, referring especially to his "Blind Spot" project, which started on Instagram but evolved into a book, exhibition, and performances. "It gives you more insight into his mode of looking and seeing. It also shows what he's working on personally ... as an artist," says Liberty, who writes about text-and-image relationships.

For the "Blind Spot" project, Cole creates tenuous and poetic associations between text and image. Rather than captions or literal references to the images, he writes expressively and provides "nuanced visual and metaphorical context," Liberty wrote in her review. Sometimes he notes a time and place in the writing that is months off, drawing attention to the gap or passage of time. The imprecise connections between images, text, and time invite interpretation. He is conditioning us toward a form of close looking, to see beyond what's immediately present in the photograph.

Cole also keeps his followers attentive by shifting gears on social media. He inspired a debate about racism as it relates to the language and sentimentality around relief work in Africa in a series of tweets in 2012. He famously coined the term "White Savior Industrial Complex." About two and a half years later, he took a "Twitter break" and never went back. Cole has started doing something entirely new on Instagram, posting photographs of details of paintings. Sometimes the images are accompanied by no words at all. Sometimes he includes literary fragments, meditations on contemporary politics, or short exhortations.



Describing the effect of a vintner's nets blowing in the wind in Rivas, Switzerland, Teju Cole wrote in "Blind Spot," "The scales fall from our eyes. The landscape opens"

MAGGIE NELSON

In a survey in which there wasn't a lot of consensus about who was producing inventive and noteworthy forms of art criticism, one name came up several times: Maggie Nelson.

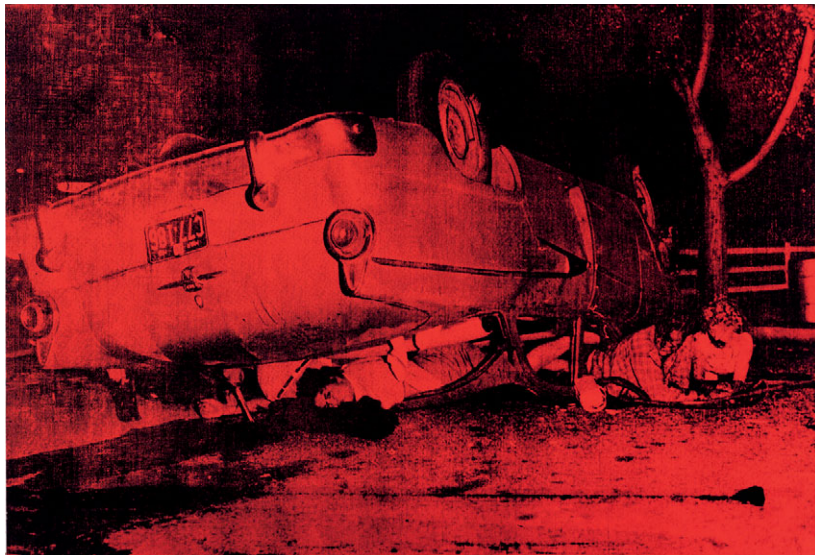
Nelson is known for a mode of writing that combines vulnerability and seriousness, that puts criticism and intellectual pursuits within the context of embodied, complicated, lived experience. She won a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant in 2016, in part for her genre-defying forms of nonfiction. Her work is sometimes described as critico-memoir, though she'll use the term "autotheory" too. Usually, she is thinking her way through ideas—on queerness, gender, sexual politics, violence, media spectacle, and motherhood, among other things—through the lens of her life and with the help of a constellation of artists, philosophers, and theorists.

In "The Art of Cruelty," from 2011, Nelson's most squarely art critical work, she recounts unruly and conflicting responses—repulsion, pleasure, boredom, and bewilderment, among them—to a range of artworks in which brutality is part of the aesthetic. She is opinionated but rarely definitive about the avant-garde artworks she explores, including



"We have a lot of doubt about traditional criticism and are continually looking for other forms... [ones that] acknowledge the many ways of seeing"

—LORI WAXMAN
ART CRITIC, ARTFORUM



Andy Warhol's "Five Deaths," circa 1963, is part of a series that Maggie Nelson discusses in "The Art of Cruelty"

a Jenny Holzer project related to the rape and murder of Bosnian women or a William Pope.L piece about racial hatred. Important thinkers—including Susan Sontag, Hannah Arendt, and Antonin Artaud—are like companions convened on the page.

In "The Argonauts," from 2015, Nelson relates her experiences in queer homemaking and becoming a mother. From page one she drives her readers to the core of her love affair with the gender fluid artist Harry Dodge: "The Santa Ana winds are shredding the bark off the eucalyptus trees in long white stripes. A friend and I risk the widowmakers by having lunch outside, during which she suggests I tattoo the words HARD TO GET across my knuckles, as a reminder of this pose's possible fruits. Instead the words I love you come tumbling out of my mouth in an incantation the first time you fuck me in the ass, my face smashed against the cement floor of your dank and charming bachelor pad. You had *Molloy* by your bedside ..."

In a kind of literary jump-cut, Nelson then vaults from ravenous sex to Ludwig Wittgenstein in the next paragraph, where she ponders language, the inexplicable, and her own motivations for writing.

Later in the book, Nelson recounts an academic showdown between feminist theorist Jane Gallop with her "endearing style" and feather earrings and art historian Rosalind Krauss in her silk-scarf chicness. Those gathered look at images of photographs of Gallop with her son, in the bathtub and lounging naked, and a tug-of-war over the appropriate use of Roland Barthes ensues.

It is these sequences of thoughts, in

various prose styles, that accumulate over the course of the slim book. These episodic passages, sometimes addressed to Dodge, or "you," can be just a sentence or a few pages.

Nelson was one of several authors of books, writers of experimental fiction and memoir with art criticism embedded within their work, noted in the survey and subsequent reporting. Some of these writers emerged in recent years, while others have been at it for some time. In addition to Cole, they include Ben Lerner, Rachel Kushner, Hilton Als, Michel Houellebecq, Chris Kraus, Eileen Myles, Lynne Tillman, and Kathy Acker.

"We have a lot of doubt about traditional criticism and are continually looking for other forms of it," says Lori Waxman, a freelance art critic for the Chicago Tribune and Artforum who is known for writing about art live as part of her "60 wrd/min art critic" performance project. "Some of these new modes of writing that overlap with criticism ... they have built into their structure a deep acknowledgement of the many ways of seeing something." The best writing on Christian Marclay's much-reviewed "The Clock," Waxman argues, for instance, was in Lerner's experimental novel "10:04."

What Nelson and some of these writers represent, says Frost, is a reviving of what's been lost through the professionalization of criticism, both of the academic and journalistic sort. What a philosopher and poet can do so well is open a concept out, so it's not just about critiquing art for critiquing's sake, says Frost. Nelson helps her readers get to larger ideas embedded within experiences of art, she adds. ■



In 2017, an exhibit in New York of work by Laura Owens led to protests and coverage in *Hyperallergic*

AGAINST THE ODDS

Hyperallergic is a digital standout in the world of arts journalism

BY MARY LOUISE SCHUMACHER

VEKEN GUEYIKIAN HAD a problem. It was 2009, and he was in love with an unhappy arts writer.

His husband, art critic Hrag Vartanian, had grown weary of low-paying writing gigs and the constraints of the 800-word reviews he wrote for art market-focused magazines. Gueyikian, a digital marketing strategist, and Vartanian talked about starting an online arts magazine, but friends and acquaintances in art world circles warned against it. No one was making real money in online arts publishing, they were repeatedly told. “I mean, literally every single person we talked to said you could not make a business with online art publishing,” says Vartanian.

At that time, ad revenue and arts writing jobs were in freefall at legacy publications and the economic climate was challenging and uncertain. There was a crowded field of upstart art blogs, but they were mostly labors of love that made little, if any, money. And the established art press, glossies like *ARTnews* and *Artforum*, didn’t seem especially interested in investing in their online operations, Gueyikian says.

Nine years later, many of those independent visual arts blogs are still struggling or long gone, much of the art press is catching up online, and *Hyperallergic*, the for-profit “blogazine” Gueyikian and Vartanian launched,

has risen to rival the arts journalism of legacy media. “I think that they managed, kind of against the odds, to reinvigorate art criticism,” says Sarah Douglas, editor in chief of ARTnews. “There’s been this mantra since however long that art criticism is dying, and I think they managed in their own way to breathe new life into it.”

Indeed, Hyperallergic was the only digital newcomer that topped a list of publications in the U.S. well regarded for the quality of their criticism, according to a survey I conducted while the 2017 Arts & Culture Nieman Fellow at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard. The top of that list included titles such as *The New Yorker* and the *Los Angeles Times* and mainstay art publications such as *Artforum* and *Art in America*. Hyperallergic was also named the top digital resource for arts journalists, according to the survey of more than 300 visual arts writers and critics working regularly for U.S. publications. Some of the more than 100 questions about the priorities and pressures of the field replicate those of a survey done 15 years prior by the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University. This provides a basis for comparison over a period of dramatic change to both media and culture. About a third of respondents hold staff positions, while the rest are primarily freelance writers working for a mix of legacy publications and digital platforms from more than 35 states and several countries. The broader results of the survey will be published later this year.

Hyperallergic describes itself as “a forum for playful, serious, and radical perspectives on art and culture in the world today.” It is known for strong—and sometimes controversial—opinions and a diverse range of content, including traditional reviews, news, personal essays, podcasts, interviews, gossip, poetry, history, and comics. “I think it’s the breadth of what they cover, and sometimes they cover topics that you don’t find elsewhere,” says Christine Ledbetter, the arts editor for *The Washington Post*, adding that she reads Hyperallergic and appreciates the competition. “It’s the things that maybe I’m not looking for ... It’s the surprises. I guess that’s what I like about it.”

Today, Hyperallergic employs a staff of nine, most of whom work out of one room in a light-filled former factory in Brooklyn. Editor-writers work side-by-side at long tables surrounded by art books. Titles for dozens of in-the-works articles fill whiteboards on the walls. Hyperallergic also works with about 100 freelancers, an increasing number of whom are on contract to write regularly from different regions across the country, says Vartanian, editor in chief.

More than a million people read Hyperallergic each month, says Gueyikian, who is publisher. The site’s revenue in 2017 was \$1.5 million, up from about \$1.1 million in 2016, he says. The couple have invested personal savings and have yet to pay themselves full salaries. Their first profitable year was 2014, and they have been primarily funded by ads since, breaking about even each year, Gueyikian says “Essentially, they are one of the few, if not the only, commercially viable, native-to-online publishing institutions to emerge in the last decade,” says Sky Goodden, editor and publisher of *Momus*, an online publication that emphasizes art criticism.

About 98 percent of Hyperallergic’s revenue comes from the ad network Gueyikian created to support the site—and ultimately the partner he cared so much about, he says. It’s called Nectar Ads.

Gueyikian gave up his job in corporate advertising to run the ad network. Before he launched the network, Hyperallergic was a digital newborn, effectively a personal blog for Vartanian. The men paid a couple thousand dollars to get the WordPress site up. Gueyikian had a hunch that creating ads for visually sophisticated clients was an opportunity to avoid the “race to the bottom” of garish and interruptive digital ads.

The idea was to create beautiful ads that readers would recognize as part of an art-literate community, Gueyikian says, adding that he regards accepting ads for the site as an endorsement of sorts. Many of the arts organizations Gueyikian approached—museums, nonprofits, art schools, art services—had never paid for digital ads before, and he spent a lot of time in the early years educating them on terms such as “impressions,” he says. Ads for luxury products and fashion brands that sought to target the wealthiest part of the art world are rejected, he adds, unless the brands are promoting an art-focused project.

“If you look around media in the art world, the advertising is often welcome,” says Gueyikian. “It’s often part of the experience ... So I tried to use that to our advantage and work with sponsors that our community wants to hear from, whether it was for an exhibition at the Met or an MFA program.”

To offer advertisers scale, Gueyikian created a network of like-minded art sites where the ads could also appear. Nectar Ads started with just three sites and has grown to a group of 11. That network reaches about 4 million readers a month and includes sites such as *Rhizome*, *Colossal*, the *College Art Association*, *Art F City*, *Aint-Bad*, and *Spoon & Tamago*. More than a quarter of Nectar’s ad revenue goes back to the network’s sites, Gueyikian said.



In the wake of the #MeToo movement, Hyperallergic published new allegations of sexual harassment against artist Chuck Close



Hrag Vartanian (left) and Veken Gueyikian, co-founders in 2009 of Hyperallergic

Nectar Ads has worked with more than 500 sponsors since it launched, creating ad campaigns with fixed budgets and fixed schedules. These include web-based ads, mobile ads, newsletters, and native ad campaigns. Sponsored posts, which often anchor wider ad campaigns, are increasingly important to the bottom line and represent about 20 percent of ad revenue, Gueyikian says. To distinguish these posts from regular content, Hyperallergic uses a “Sponsored” label, a different layout, and the sponsor’s logo in place of a byline.

Advertisers have included museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; art schools such as the Rhode Island School of Design, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; publishers such as Yale University Press and MIT Press; auction houses such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s; and brands like Adobe, Epson, Perrier, Pernod, Audi, and AT&T.

As for audience, Hyperallergic is aiming to be accessible and relevant to readers who are curious about art but who are not just art world insiders, Vartanian says. Among other things, that means covering issues of the day and social movements through the lens of contemporary art and artists. It also means combining political activism with criticism and reporting.

Hyperallergic attracted attention early on through its coverage of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, particularly developments at the Egyptian Museum, where antiquities were endangered, and also the role of artists and graffiti in the uprising. The site’s coverage began with the aggregation of reports from across the web and eventually included reporting from the ground.

The site also covered cultural trends surfacing from the web when mainstream media was slow to do so, says Charlotte Frost, author of the forthcoming book “Art Criticism Online: A History” (Glyph, 2018). Today part of our visual culture is the internet itself, from emojis to memes and beyond. What Hyperallergic has done well is produce criticism of that digital culture, says Frost. She especially noted the writing on selfie culture by Alicia Eler, who has since gone on to become the art critic for the Star Tribune in Minneapolis.

Hyperallergic encourages an “organic approach to story gathering,” Vartanian says. That means “being

receptive to uncommon ideas” that fascinate writers rather than covering blockbuster exhibits and art fairs, he says. “I remember once we published a piece about W. E. B. Du Bois’s amazing infographics from the early 20th century and just a few weeks later [artist] Theaster Gates did something with those same images independent of us and our story,” says Vartanian. “I loved that because it showed me that our writer was in sync with what artists and art people were also interested in at the moment.”

Recently, the site has ventured into harder news, thanks to the #MeToo moment. In January, it published a report by Claire Voon and Jillian Steinhauer about art world heavyweight Chuck Close, which included four new accounts of inappropriate sexual behavior backed up by corroborating sources.

Hyperallergic publishes about 4,000 pieces of content a year, and the most popular stories tend to reach between 50,000 and 100,000 readers, says Vartanian. About 35 percent of readers come to Hyperallergic through its daily newsletter, which has a subscriber base of more than 100,000 and features a personal letter from Vartanian on Tuesdays. Vartanian shares what’s on his mind in the letters, which reflect the busy life of an editor who is often on the road. An additional 25 percent come to Hyperallergic through social platforms like Facebook, 20 percent come through search engines, 15 percent come direct to the homepage, and about 5 percent come via links at other sites, says Gueyikian.

Vartanian and Gueyikian acknowledge that articles about famous artists or cheeky content do perform well. Boing Boing recently picked up a Hyperallergic report about a guerrilla yarn bombing of a toilet at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, for instance, the kind of thing that can bring new eyeballs to the site. Still, Vartanian and Gueyikian are routinely surprised by the mix of things readers gravitate to in large numbers. In a recent 30-day period, the most popular articles were about artist Damien Hirst, the bulldozing of a Frank Lloyd Wright building, the relationship between tuberculosis and 19th-century ideals of beauty, a documentary film about the art market, and Edvard Munch’s little-known photography.

Some of the more popular content comes from places outside of the art capitals. When Milwaukee-based writer Debra Brehmer wrote an essay about the Wisconsin artist Mary Nohl in 2014, comparing the locally vilified artist to witches burned at the stake, traffic was significant. That piece, about a misunderstood, outsider artist who created a sculptural environment out of her home, brought local expertise to a national audience.

Hyperallergic has a set of part-time editors who work independently on content posted on the weekends, when the offerings are longer and tend to be more literary and reflective. “It’s sort of taking a way of looking back and reflecting on different exhibitions or shows or books or poetry,” Vartanian says, comparing the weekend content to *The New York Review of Books*. “The weekday is much more present tense and engaged.”

Hyperallergic works with a lot of young writers, and while it was acknowledged as an influential publication by survey respondents, Vartanian and Jillian Steinhauer,

the recently departed senior editor, were the only regular writers in the mix of individual critics considered influential. In fairness, the top of that list is short and made up of the usual suspects, mostly from legacy outlets such as The New York Times and The New Yorker.

Hyperallergic is not without its critics. Momus' Goodden, for instance, has publicly accused Hyperallergic of not playing enough of a leadership role when it comes to pay rates for arts writers. "I just don't see any accountability there ... and I find it all the more glaring because they have assumed this primary role for audiences online," says Goodden.

Hyperallergic pays freelance writers at least \$100 per contribution, and the rates can go higher for features or deeply researched pieces. Hyperallergic has increased its rates over time and relies less on the work of freelancers than it once did, says Vartanian. Today, about 37 percent of Hyperallergic's budget pays for its staff and another 14 percent goes to freelance. By comparison, Momus pays a minimum of \$300 to its writers and artnet News pays \$400 to \$500 for an essay and a minimum of 50 cents a word for shorter news items, according to Goodden and Ben Davis, national art critic for artnet News.

Davis, named one of the nation's more influential critics by survey respondents, suggests readers may be starting to turn away from publications like Hyperallergic and many others in the larger media landscape that favor, at least in part, quick-fire opinion that courts controversy. "I think there is a level of burnout with that kind of coverage," Davis says, careful to add that his own publication has been similarly criticized for its velocity and listicles. "You know, that's a general phenomenon."

Vartanian agrees that going after a vast audience can be a dead end and says Hyperallergic has shifted focus, especially in the last year, toward deepening loyalty among its core audience. Part of this was a conscious decision to avoid toxic discussions. A few years ago, Hyperallergic's content on race, gender, and other sensitive subjects saw an uptick in hateful comments, says Vartanian, who is of Armenian descent. "[We] realized that going viral and reaching a broad audience was becoming a complicated issue in the new online climate," he adds. Sometimes that means taking a pass on would-be internet hits and investing in reporting of intense interest to some. Last December, for instance, Hyperallergic took up what could have been a minor story in a local paper, the downsizing of a fine art library at the University of Texas at Austin, turning out additional articles, including a piece about how the

university changed course. "For us, we were able to make it a bigger story," says Vartanian. "I bet librarians across the country read that." Both readers and advertisers seem to want the site to focus on material that people will fully digest and share, he says. "We realized in the last year that our revenue went up when we stopped chasing the numbers," Vartanian says.

Hyperallergic is also sometimes taken to task for its activist approach. In one instance, a group of artists and writers criticized Hyperallergic in a Facebook thread last November, suggesting the site was lopsided in its reporting about a protest at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where Los Angeles painter Laura Owens was having an opening. The article in question included a Q&A with the protesters and no response from Owens, who was being accused of "artwashing" the gentrification of the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles. L.A. writer Carol Cheh says, "There's a lot going on underneath the surface" of the dynamic at play in Boyle Heights between local residents and artists. "So Hyperallergic publishes that piece ... and it just automatically assumes that Laura Owens is the evil enemy, you know, the insensitive, wealthy, one-percent painter. I mean, it kind of automatically buys into that narrative and doesn't bother to do any investigative journalism."

In response, Vartanian says the site had covered concerns related to Boyle Heights long before and after the publication of the Q&A and that the site's reporting must be viewed as a whole. Twenty articles that date as far back as November of 2015 appear on a Hyperallergic page devoted to Boyle Heights-related coverage. The site also published Owens' response four days later. "The idea that one article would somehow explain an issue isn't necessarily the way we think of it," says Vartanian. "It's part of a bigger conversation. It's also partly coming from the atomization of the internet ... It's not something we created. It's something we recognized, that conversations have to continue, that they change and they form."

Vartanian says Hyperallergic is more than willing to sit out news cycles when caution and more reporting are needed. He pointed to several examples, including a piece about what had been described in The New York Times and elsewhere as a discovery of Arabic characters on a Viking textile, a story that raised questions about the influence of Islam in Scandinavia. Hyperallergic located a writer with expertise in the subject and added a needed perspective to a widely circulated narrative, Vartanian says.

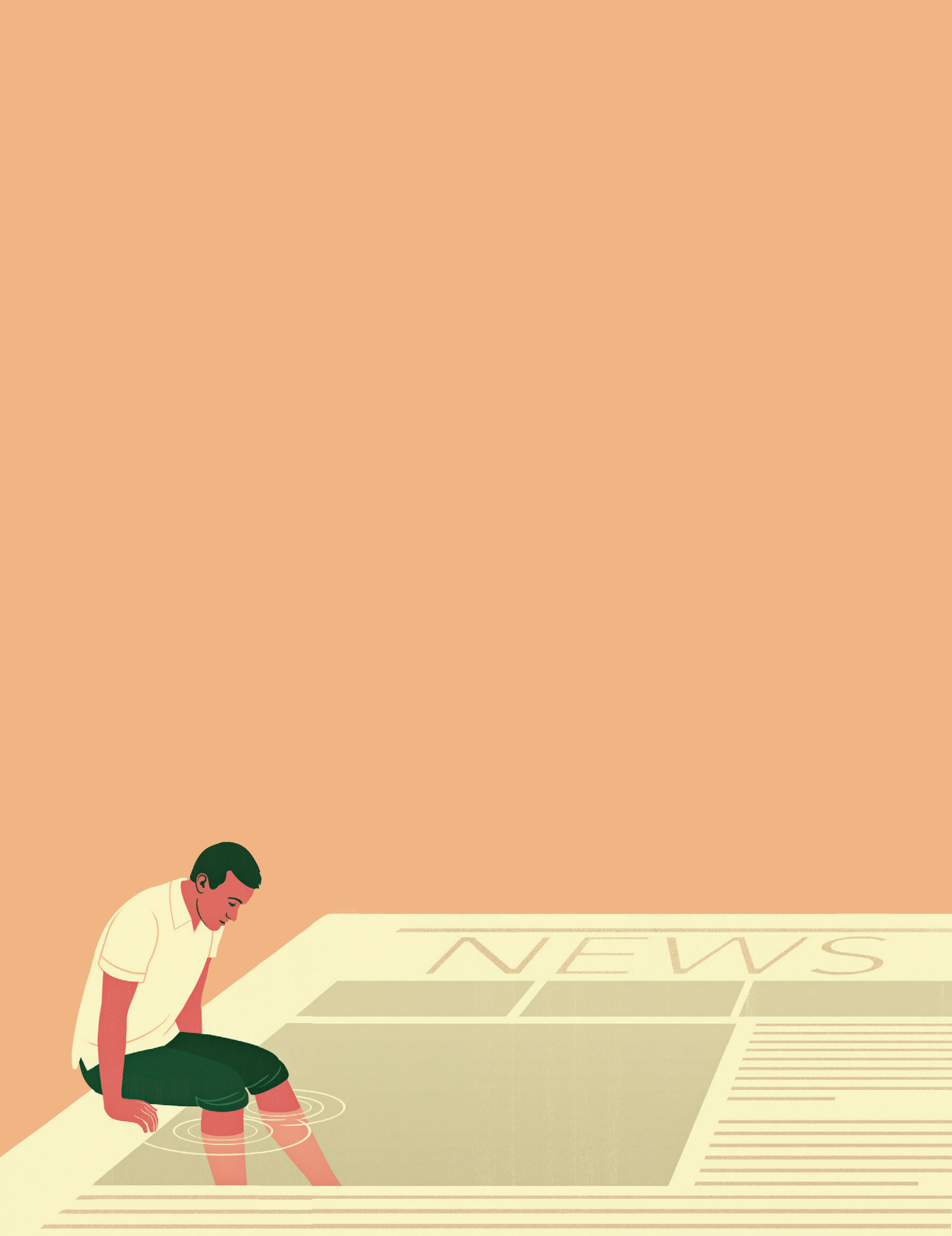
Talking about the future of Hyperallergic, Vartanian uses the word "decentralize" a lot. He wants to break up his own power, he says. They are considering new, independent platforms, sections, or even parallel publications, he says. They are also looking at new forms of sustained coverage, gathering a diversity of voices around particular ideas or topics. It's that kind of ongoing coverage that increasingly penetrates readers' consciousness, he adds. "We aren't interested in the old idea of someone who pontificates and expects everyone to listen and obey," says Vartanian. "Our greatest challenge is always revenue, more than talent, will, or ambition." ■

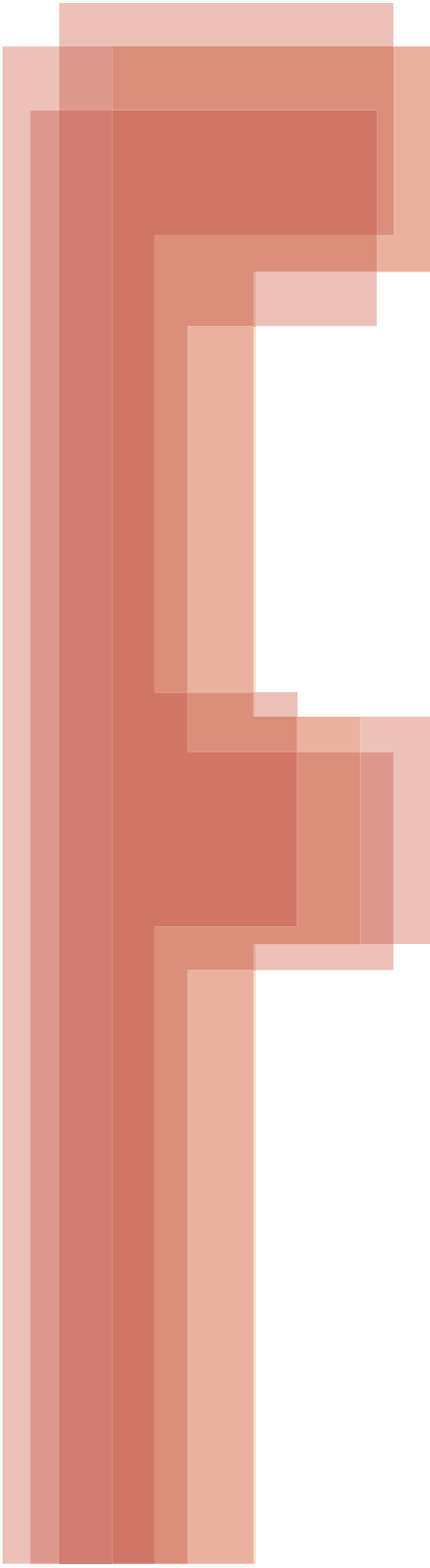
"Being receptive to uncommon ideas" is a guiding philosophy

—HRAG VARTANIAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF, HYPERALLERGIC

CAN EXTREME TRANSPARENCY FIGHT FAKE NEWS AND CREATE MORE TRUST WITH READERS?

BY MICHAEL BLANDING
ILLUSTRATION BY JOEY GUIDONE





FRONTLINE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Raney Aronson-Rath was in her office late last summer when special projects editor Philip Bennett walked in. He'd just been watching the raw footage from Frontline's upcoming documentary, "Putin's Revenge," a two-part program about Russia's attempts to influence the 2016 election. The interviews were amazing, he said. What if they put them online? All of them.

"We'd been talking for a long time about what we could do at Frontline to really put a stake in the ground, that we are committed to transparency," Aronson-Rath says. "A lightbulb went on, that this is the one we should go big on."

The production team swung into action. At the same time editors and interns were working to produce the program to air that fall, behind the scenes they were also preparing 70 hours' worth of interviews to post on the web. They fact-checked each, and vetted them with lawyers with the same care they did for the documentary itself.

But Aronson-Rath and her team didn't want to dump 56 interviews for audiences to sift through on their own. They used open-source software Bennett had helped create to make the films searchable by text, so viewers could easily find footage on specific subjects. They could even splice out a section and share it on social media. The result is an exhaustive look at the issue of Russian hacking and an unparalleled look behind-the-scenes at the reporting process. In four months, the videos had more than 300,000 views, with 40 percent of web traffic referred by social media. What's more, visitors spent twice as long with the interviews—an average of 28 minutes, much longer even than Aronson-Rath and Bennett anticipated—as the average visitor to the Frontline site. One viewer commented, "Things that I myself wouldn't have considered as part of the story now have relevance. It gives me a moment for pause. I am now watching from an expanded viewpoint and it's interesting

to see what is corroborated through other sources and what is not."

The Transparency Project, as Frontline calls the effort, is one of a number of new attempts by media to open up the process they use to create their journalism to engender more trust with audiences. In a January Gallup/Knight Foundation poll of more than 19,000 Americans, the average respondent ranked their trust of media at 37, with 100 being the highest score. Just 50 percent of respondents said they had enough information to sort out facts in the face of media bias, down from 66 percent in 1984. Among Republicans, that number was 31 percent.

Frontline has long been putting the complete transcripts of its interviews online, but putting the searchable videos online is a dramatic expansion of that proposition, laying bare the process of making documentaries, warts and all. "You see the real deal, people swiping their face, laughing, looking nervous," Aronson-Rath says.

In many ways, the new push for transparency is a response to the current media environment of "fake news"—both the dissemination of actual false stories online and through social media, and the cries from the current administration that stories it doesn't like are "fake." As more and more Americans get their news through social media, content gets divorced from context that allows readers to decide whether a story is trustworthy.

"People are getting their news through every possible medium and on every possible device," says Melody Kramer, senior audience development manager at the Wikimedia Foundation and a columnist for the Poynter Institute. "It's a challenge to figure out the veracity of the information, where it came from, what the point of view is, or how it was put together." That creates more of an imperative for news organizations to pull back the curtain to explain to readers how they report and write stories. "It becomes incumbent upon organizations that



As far back as 2009, Harvard technologist David Weinberger declared that “transparency is the new objectivity”

are trying to improve our lower-d democracy to open up a window into how they do the work they do.”

At the same time, transparency can serve a defensive function, insulating the media from attacks of political bias or unfairness. As far back as 2009, Harvard technologist David Weinberger declared that “transparency is the new objectivity,” making a writer more credible in the eyes of readers not through adherence to a supposed standard of impartiality, but by making clear the “sources and values that brought her to that position.”

Among those organizations leading the current charge to increase transparency is the American Press Institute (API), which in 2014 produced a report entitled “Build Credibility Through Transparency.” The report advocated for publications to “show their work” by being clearer about their sources and correcting mistakes. In the run-up to the 2016 election, API consulted with news organizations about how to better disclose sources, using PolitiFact as a model. But it was unprepared for the level of hostility toward media and the allegations of bias and “fake news.”

“That’s when we started seeing a problem with misinformation, of which ‘fake news’ is part of that universe,” says Jane Elizabeth, accountability program director, who was surprised by the lack of media literacy among audiences and their willingness to believe outlandish stories with little sourcing, such as the debunked Pizzagate conspiracy theory. “Readers were confused and unable to tell the difference between misinformation, disinformation, and ‘fake news,’” Elizabeth says.

She places most of the blame on the current administration for deliberately sowing that confusion. “Trump’s candidacy had everything to do with this,” she says. “It was the type of campaign we had never dealt with before.” At the same time, she faults the media for not opening its doors to show the level of editorial care and vetting that

goes into the news. “People think anyone can write something and press a button and it appears online.”

The first step toward transparency, she says, is to listen to readers about what they don’t know—and what they want to know—about how news is gathered, verified, and reported. “Otherwise, you are just divulging the wrong things.” Some things that might seem obvious to journalists, such as the ethics of using an anonymous source, may be opaque to readers and sow confusion and distrust.

API is not the only organization working with publications to improve transparency. Transparency advocate Josh Stearns of the Democracy Fund has spent the last two years working with newsrooms across New Jersey on how to better engage with readers and open up their reporting to scrutiny. While such initiatives can be time- and resource-intensive, he says, they can also help bolster revenue by explaining the value of rigorous reporting.

“Helping people understand the labor that goes into reporting is a powerful way to build a relationship with the reader that will cause them to want to support it,” Stearns says. Such support can go beyond merely financial. “If we want the public to stand up for our rights for FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] requests, or when local mayors want to block us, then we want to have the public’s back and we want them to have ours.”

Other active transparency initiatives include the Trusting News project run by Joy Mayer and supported by the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri, which has surveyed thousands of journalists and readers and is working with 14 newsrooms on experiments to engage more authentically with readers; and the newly launched News Co/Lab, funded mainly by the Facebook Journalism Project and run by veteran journalist Dan Gillmor at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University, which is partnering with the McClatchy newspaper group.

One of the most ambitious efforts to improve media transparency is the Trust Project, an initiative of the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. Led by journalist Sally Lehrman, the project worked with newsroom leaders from 75 publications to develop a common set of standards for transparency it calls “trust indicators.” In November, about 10 publications began rolling out the indicators worldwide, including The Economist, Mic, and The Washington Post. Significantly, the project has gotten social media sites and search engines including Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Bing on board as partners; the sites have agreed to start using the indicators in their feeds to give users a measure of the trustworthiness of articles.

“In the case where the work is divorced from the brand, you can see some of the markers that might help you know this piece of journalism and the quality behind it,” says Lehrman. Unlike, say, a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, which would rely on an outside entity to certify a brand as trustworthy, the project presents a set of guidelines to publications they can adapt as they see fit, under eight headings, including standards and practices; author expertise; citations and references; and diverse voices. (Partners are free to use the TrustMark, a T logo designed by the project, or not.)



ProPublica makes a habit of responding publicly to its critics, even to critiques that are published on other sites

Under standards and practices, for example, the project requires that organizations clearly post their mission statement and ethics and corrections policy, both on a site level and with each individual piece. “These are often straightforward to journalists, but at the same time they are not often spelled out,” says Lehrman. “A lot of people don’t realize they exist.” Even in cases where sites include such policies, they are often hidden, buried on a second or third page on their website.

In addition to providing greater information about the publication, Lehrman and other transparency advocates are also pushing to include more about story authors, including their local or demographic background, years of experience in covering subject matter, awards they have won, and languages spoken—which is especially important for those covering minority or refugee communities.

Publications may also consider including a statement with stories they publish, particularly for stories that might be controversial or political in nature and open themselves to criticism. “It really forces the reporter to think about, why did I do this story, why was it important?” says Elizabeth. For example, a story written in a newspaper in a farming state about the use of toxic fertilizers could open journalists up to allegations of bias against the farming industry. “You really need to explain why you are stepping into this volatile subject,” says Elizabeth. “We are doing this story because our state has the highest percentage of dangerous nutrients in the water. Just so people don’t think ‘look, that liberal Democrat is trying to ruin our economy,’ just to show it’s a serious topic worth consideration.”

Just as important is that publications come clean when they make errors. Publishing on the web, it can be tempting to make changes on the sly, hoping that readers won’t notice. But that’s bad practice, say transparency advocates. Not only do readers

notice when a story changes—which may increase skepticism over time—but also consistently seeing corrections on other stories might increase their perception that stories without corrections are accurate.

As News Co/Lab’s Dan Gillmor says, over time that may cause the public to believe a publication less, but trust it more. “The more you explain what you screwed up on, the more people are going to realize that journalism has its flaws, so the belief that any given story is 100 percent correct will drop,” says Gillmor, who is working with The Kansas City Star to develop a model corrections policy. “But I would hope that the trust in journalists to work really hard to make sure you know about the mistakes and correct them would improve.”

Transparency advocates recommend making corrections at the same level as the original mistake—if the error was on the front page, then the correction should be, too. For stories online, corrections should be clearly noted at the beginning or end of the article. Some publications are experimenting with putting corrections inline, either through crossing out and inserting text or noting corrections in the margin with a link to the corrections note.

Furthermore, a growing consensus among advocates is that the old adage that you don’t repeat a mistake in making the correction is no longer true. Because users may not be reading the publication daily or have seen the original story, it raises more

questions than it answers to leave readers in the dark about the original error. Rather, the correction should clearly state the original error, as well as the correct information.

The big question right now is whether such transparency will lead to an increase in trust. Research by Michael Koliska, a Georgetown University communications professor, suggests that there are no easy solutions when it comes to creating more trust. For his Ph.D. dissertation, published in 2015, Koliska set up several experiments in which he gave six versions of an article with varying degrees of information, from one that didn’t even have a byline to one with a byline, author bio, and information about the sources and production process.

The additional information, however, had no effect on whether readers found the story more trustworthy. In fact, says Koliska, readers barely seemed to register it. When he included a picture of the journalist on the page, and then showed a lineup of pictures afterward, participants only picked out the right one about a third of the time. “There are a lot of these kinds of things that people just didn’t care about,” he says. “The transparency information was too peripheral to the story.”

In another paper published in 2016 in the *Journal of Media Ethics*, Koliska and his colleague Kalyani Chadha argue that rather than “digitally outsourcing” transparency information by adding transparency features to web pages or publishing separate stories about the process behind the article, journalists should work the information into the story, giving more background on the process and extent of the reporting and sources consulted as part of the story itself rather than relying on hyperlinks or author bios.

That doesn’t mean that providing transparency indicators isn’t worthwhile, says Koliska. As awareness of “fake news” and disinformation grows, it may cause people to seek out more information about transparency. “They will realize that they are

not getting the high-quality product they want—they are getting McDonald’s sold as a Whole Foods meal, and crave something better,” he says.

Research by the Trust Project shows that may already be happening. Working with the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, the Trust Project funded a study in which some 1,200 participants read online articles on different topics; some included the trust indicators, such as author bios, links, a “Behind the Story” companion article, and an indicator of whether the publication belonged to the Trust Project.

A small majority felt that such indicators would increase their trust of the publication, with the most (63 percent) citing the Trust Project logo, followed by a “Behind the Story” section (59 percent) and a list of corrections and ethics policies (53 percent). In addition, by a small but statistically significant margin, readers were more likely to use adjectives like “reputable,” “reliable,” and “can be trusted” for articles with indicators. “As newsrooms grapple with ways to win over doubting audiences, we find the study results encouraging,” the authors of the study noted. “The results ... demonstrate that Trust Indicators can affect what people think about the news.”

As much as the online environment has eroded trust and created the need for more transparency, it also offers unique tools to

increase transparency. As Frontline’s Putin documentary shows, nowhere is that the case more than in allowing journalists to “show their work” by providing access to the original source material so readers can make up their own minds about how it was used.

The Trust Project has advocated for a separate “citations and references” box that lists the key sources an article relies on; some partners such as Mic and The Economist are already using those boxes. When the project did a focus group to gauge their effectiveness, they found they increased perceptions of credibility even if readers didn’t click through to the underlying sources. Just letting the reader know that a journalist conducted additional research, even if it wasn’t included in the piece can increase reader confidence. “What if at the end of the story you listed the number of sources you reached out to, even though 20 of them were on background,” Stearns proposes.

Some publications are taking sourcing to the next level by including not only interviews, but underlying documents and source material to bolster claims in a story. ProPublica has long been a leader in this endeavor, using Document Cloud to upload and annotate documents for readers to peruse. “It has always been core to how we do our journalism,” says editor in chief Steve Engelberg. “In an era of complaints about fake news the best answer we can have in the fact-based universe is to provide the reader with as much fact as possible.”

For a story about death and complication rates by surgeons in 2015, ProPublica included a Surgeon Scorecard with a searchable database readers could use to look up specific doctors. The site also included a detailed discussion of its methodology for calculating rates, quotes from experts backing up their methods, and an editor’s note from Engelberg describing the reasoning behind the story. At the end of the note, Engelberg invited criticism from readers with a dedicated email address

to receive them. While the site has pushed back against some of the criticism, it has taken some of it to heart, such as the fact that it only takes into account inpatient procedures, and will be using it to adjust their methodology for a planned Surgeon Scorecard 2.0.

ProPublica has made a habit of responding publicly to its critics, even when they publish their critiques elsewhere—acknowledging it when they feel the critics have a point, and pushing back when they feel like they don’t. “At the end of the day, we live in a universe where people are going to say things about your work, and there is no waving it off, like we have the printing press and you don’t,” Engelberg says.

In some cases, ProPublica has seen unintended consequences from its transparency—like when it published a database of rates of prescriptions by doctors to draw attention to an epidemic of overprescribing opioids and other potentially dangerous drugs. Analyzing web traffic, ProPublica’s editors noticed an uptick in traffic to the database, after Google searches such as “doctors who prescribe narcotics easily,” implying that readers were using the database to find doctors to prescribe them drugs.

Rather than pulling the database, ProPublica made the fact a further exercise in transparency, running an editor’s note explaining the problem, and adding a new disclaimer to the database warning about the dangers of addictive drugs. “This is an ethically tricky area,” says Engelberg. “We weighed the possibility that we were going to make it worse, but if you are in a glass house cajoling institutions to be transparent, then to know something about our work and not make it public seemed against the principles of what we do.” In deciding whether and how to release controversial documents, the more publications can let the reader into their decision-making process, the better they might be received by audiences. In January 2017, when BuzzFeed released



Video of interviews with nearly 60 sources are available online as part of Frontline’s efforts to be transparent about the making of its 2017 documentary “Putin’s Revenge”

the Steele dossier containing allegations that the Trump administration colluded with the Russians, for example, it provided little explanation of the pros and cons of making the unverified document public—saying only that it wanted to let “Americans make up their own minds about the allegations.”

Arguably, the publication could have taken readers behind the scenes to provide more detail about how they made this tricky journalistic decision, and how it aligned with their ethical and procedural policies, says Elizabeth. Such a thoughtful explanation may have mitigated some of the questioning and backlash it received from politicians and other news outlets about the choice. “I do believe BuzzFeed editors could have offered readers a little more gut-level transparency about their decision to release the dossier,” Elizabeth says. “But every one of these situations is an opportunity for all of us to figure out how to do it better next time.”

In addition to opening up their sources to scrutiny, some publications and journalists have taken the public inside the reporting process—as The Washington Post’s David Fahrenthold has done while reporting on Donald Trump’s supposed donations to charity. From the start of his reporting, Fahrenthold posted his progress on Twitter, showing his followers photos of his notebook listing charities he was exploring. The openness paid off with members of

the public and other journalists tweeting him tips, including one Univision journalist alerting him to the location of a portrait of Trump—who bought it with charity money—on the wall at a Florida golf club.

When the nonprofit Project Veritas set up a sting operation to trick the Post’s reporters with a false claim of a woman having been impregnated by U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore, the Post produced a story and 10-minute video about how it uncovered the sting, and even set up a sting of its own, showing the woman in an interview with a Post reporter, and explaining why it broke the agreement of confidentiality, since she had misrepresented herself in an attempt to embarrass the paper.

The Post further elaborated on how it broke the story about Roy Moore’s legitimate accusers in a video produced by reporter Libby Casey, part of a new series called “How to Be a Journalist,” which seeks to take readers inside the goings-on of the newsroom. “I was getting so many questions from friends and other people who aren’t in media about how we do what we do,” she says. “It showed me that with a little transparency we could turn our storytelling around to show how we do our work.”

Casey interviews her colleagues in an irreverent, almost jaunty style in an effort to present them in an authentic, human light. In interviewing reporter Stephanie McCrummen about the Roy Moore story, for example, she discusses the anxiety reporters feel knocking on doors with a notepad ready. Another video features database editor Steven Rich, who describes how he submitted 1,500 FOIA requests last year—detailing how readers can submit their own open records request to the government. “If we can demystify the process, it does empower people to learn what their own role can be in a democracy.”

The Toronto Star has quickly become a model of transparency with its efforts to open up the newsroom to reader scrutiny.

Last year, the paper’s managing editor Irene Gentle started seeing an uptick in complaints and harassment against the paper that corresponded to the skepticism south of the border against fake news. “She became frustrated by the fact that we know there is a lot of hard work behind our journalism that is being done by solid ethical principles,” says public editor Kathy English, “but readers weren’t getting that.”

Starting in May 2017, the paper launched its own Trust Project, hiring a transparency reporter, Kenyon Wallace, whose beat is the newsroom; each week he picks a topic and interviews reporters about how they cover it. So far topics have included how the paper covers politics, how the science reporter vets scientific claims, and how the restaurant critic reviews new eateries. Back in January, Star reporters and editors participated in an Ask Me Anything (AMA) on Reddit, in which readers queried them on issues ranging from the paper’s corrections policies to how it covers outrageous candidates like Toronto’s late mayor Rob Ford.

That effort was driven by the younger journalists, says English, despite qualms by her and other veteran colleagues. “I didn’t know what to expect and whether there might be some ugly trolling—and there was a little bit,” she says. To keep the conversation civil, however, the paper had an experienced moderator approve comments and make sure questions didn’t get out of hand. The Star’s transparency efforts may be working; according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, trust of journalism rose 10 points in Canada over the past year, to 61 percent. While she says the Star can’t take complete credit for it, as one of the country’s biggest newspapers, it may have had something to do with it.

More outlets are experimenting with social media as a way to create communities for subscribers to interact directly with reporters and staff. The Dallas Morning News created a Facebook group in September for subscribers only, where they can ask reporters



The Kansas City Star’s transparency team is developing a model corrections policy, designed to increase transparency



At the Dallas Morning News, publicly admitting mistakes in some cases has led to more open dialogue with readers

and editors about decisions the paper has made; it's now up to 1,400 members. "We wanted to get to know them and for them to get to know us as a way to overcome some of the mistrust that sometimes exists," says engagement editor Hannah Wise.

Wise was worried initially that the group would be one big forum for complaints. But having discussions play out in public has given the paper a way to show it cares and correct misunderstandings. When one reader complained about not having his paper delivered, editor in chief Mike Wilson jumped in to make sure he got a replacement. When a headline was incorrect, some subscribers complained the paper didn't have copy editors anymore. "It was late at night, and I said, we do have copy editors, they are still here right now trying to do work—you are welcome to meet them," says Wise.

In other cases, admitting mistakes has led to more open dialogue. When covering an issue of separation of church and state in a nearby suburb, a reporter inadvertently used the word "crusade," which readers pushed back on as an unfair use of a religious term. The reporter admitted that she hadn't intended to use the word in that way, and would be more careful in the future. "Since then, the person who has given her the most grief has 'liked' every story she's written," Wise says.

In another case, some readers were upset by a weekend guide featuring a gay couple on the cover. Wise explained to the group that the paper's role was to reflect the community, and not censor things some readers might not agree with. "We let the community have the discussion, and I was heartened to see that the majority of the group said, how can you say this about people who love each other?"

In addition to inviting readers virtually into the newsroom, some publications have even gone so far as to invite them in physically as well. City Bureau, a nonprofit news organization in Chicago, hosts a "public

newsroom" every Thursday night, in which reporters offer talks and workshops on their investigative reporting processes and solicit public advice and contributions.

Matt DeRienzo took that a step further as Connecticut statewide editor for Digital First Media, opening up a "newsroom café" to the public that was part coffee shop, part community center, and part library where people could peruse the publication's archives. "The Little League and the Garden Club would meet right inside our newsroom," DeRienzo says. Over time, having community members in the newsroom resulted in giving journalists more sources and perspectives they could work into stories, adding more nuance and complexity.

At the same time the publication was physically inviting people into the newsroom, it was also aggressively soliciting feedback on the web through its corrections policy. Rather than just posting corrections when errors were made, the site included a box prominently placed on every story that asked the community to fact-check articles, and contact the reporter through a form if anything was incorrect. In addition to correcting errors, readers often wrote in with missing information and additional perspective that reporters sometimes worked into other stories. "People don't assume you are open to that unless you tell them," says DeRienzo, who is now executive director of Local Independent Online News (LION) Publishers. "It led to a lot more context

and accuracy." For publications considering increasing transparency, the decision takes forethought and planning. "It's a lot of work and very resource-intensive," says Wikimedia's Kramer. She recommends publications think first about their reasons for wanting to be more transparent, whether it's to acquire deeper sources, improve trust with readers, or create more engagement about local issues, and then choose the elements of transparency likely to further those goals. However it's implemented, she says, the push has to come from the top, and be tied to clear performance goals for employees so they have an incentive to spend the extra effort. "It has to be something management supports and creates a structure for," she says.

For journalists used to keeping their decisions on what to include and not include in stories to themselves, opening up what they do to such scrutiny can be disconcerting to say the least. "It makes journalists uncomfortable sometimes, because they feel like it is making them a part of the story rather than being able to hide what we do," says the Democracy Fund's Stearns. Journalists spend a lot of time and care crafting their stories to give them the proper balance and serve an interpreting function for the audiences—exposing processes and source material can be nerve-racking.

"Those fears are absolutely legitimate," says Stearns. "It's a scary thing, and I totally honor and respect that. The question for me is not should we do it or shouldn't we, but when should we do it?" Just because a publication embraces transparency doesn't mean that reporters have to post interviews and notes for every story. Publications should be strategic, say advocates, choosing stories to start that might be important or controversial, such as investigative stories or enterprise journalism exposing an issue of pressing local concern. "It may feel risky," says Stearns, "but it will also make you unimpeachable." ■

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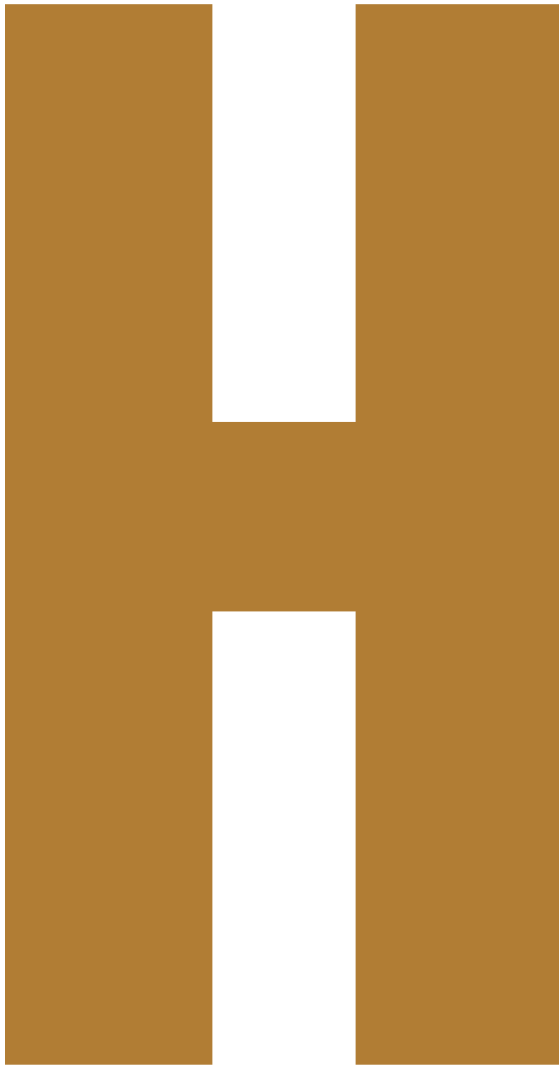
Narrative writers on
the similarities—and
crucial differences—
between journalism
and screenwriting

WHAT JOURNALISTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WRITING SCREENPLAYS

BY RICKI MORELL







OW MANY JOURNALISTS regard the Watergate scandal as a love story? Peter Landesman does and that is, arguably, the key to his success as a screenwriter.

Landesman was sitting in a Chicago bar when he heard on the television news that Mark Felt, second-in-command at the FBI in the 1970s, had just outed himself in the July 2005 issue of *Vanity Fair* as Watergate's Deep Throat. Landesman remembers turning to the guy next to him and saying, "Who the f... is Mark Felt?" He resolved to make a movie about the Washington bureaucrat who changed the course of a nation: "I knew immediately it was a great story, someone that anonymous doing something that brings down the presidency."

But he also knew he had to step away from the well-trodden ground of "All the President's Men." He needed to find the emotional heart of the story, and he found it in Felt's relationship with his wife.

The 2017 movie "Mark Felt: The Man Who Brought Down the White House" centers on the connection between Felt's public actions and his relationship with his emotionally troubled wife. The film shows how Felt's toxic home life and his anger at being passed over to be director of the FBI fueled an urgent need to bring down a corrupt presidency. "Journalism is about information," says Landesman, who was a *New York Times Magazine* contributing writer before turning to screenwriting and directing. "Movies are about an emotional tether to the audience."

Turning real-life events into screenplays requires an understanding of a simple truth: Film focuses on the "intimate world," as opposed to the "public world" of journalism, in the words of Mark Harris, a distinguished professor in the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts.

With a number of this year's Oscar nominees and other critically acclaimed films based on real events, journalists may dream of transforming their work into feature films. But even those who have succeeded in Hollywood say writers steeped in the art of reporting must be ready to make adjustments—in everything from their conception of narrative to their understanding of the difference between nonfiction and cinematic truth.

Michael Maren, a foreign correspondent turned screenwriter, believes journalism is the perfect training ground for film, and cites some big names to prove it, from the late romantic comedy writer Nora Ephron to Mark Boal, who wrote "The Hurt Locker." Citing essayist David Shields, Maren calls the film industry's search for the next big true story "reality hunger." Shields' 2010 book by that name was a manifesto arguing for an artistic movement that obliterates the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. He argues that they are artificial in a world where fiction has become mundane and reality is more shocking.

Intellectual arguments aside, the screenwriter's prerogative to focus on a narrow slice of truth, of course, can spark a real-world backlash. Steven Spielberg's movie "The Post" chronicles the two weeks leading up to *The Washington Post's* 1971 publication of the Pentagon Papers, the secret documents that revealed how the

government lied about the Vietnam War. But the narrative, written by first-time screenwriter Liz Hannah and “Spotlight” writer Josh Singer, revolves around the professional blossoming of Post publisher Katharine Graham, played by Meryl Streep. Although the movie focuses on The Washington Post, it was The New York Times that broke the Pentagon Papers story and won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

Borrowing a term from comedian Stephen Colbert, Landesman calls this artistic license “truthiness.” It’s unacceptable in journalism, but it can make a powerful movie.

Journalistic skills can both help and hinder the screenwriter. Both crafts require an understanding of the essence of a story, an ear for dialogue, and an ability to listen. But journalism’s reverence for information, context, and comprehensiveness can hamper the fast-paced plot needed to make a screenplay work. Exposition is a challenge, says Harris, an Academy-Award winning documentary filmmaker. Too much backstory slows the pace of a film and too little sows confusion. “Film is a medium that you experience in continuous time,” he says. “If you miss something, or if you’re confused, it gets in the way of experiencing the film.”

Letting action tell the story also can be difficult for a journalist: “People reveal themselves in action more compellingly than they do in dialogue.” Context and background that would take up paragraph after paragraph in a magazine piece might be condensed into

PREVIOUS SPREAD:
Ernest Lehman’s screenplay for “North by Northwest” describes in detail this almost 10-minute scene with Cary Grant

“The Post” focuses on the professional blossoming of Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham, accompanied in this undated photo by editor Ben Bradlee

a film montage. Real-life characters may be melded into a composite, and fictional scenes may be added to heighten the drama.

Two 2016 productions about football star and murder defendant O.J. Simpson highlight some of the differences between a journalistic and a fictional rendering based on the same real-life events. In the journalistic rendering, the documentary, “O.J.: Made in America,” the infamous car chase down Los Angeles freeways is shown as it happened, with aerial footage from news reports. In the fictional series “The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story,” writers take viewers inside the white Bronco and construct dialogue between Simpson and his friend Al Cowlings, who was driving the car. Although some of that dialogue was based on police recordings, some of it was made up. Harris calls this “the license to imagine things.”

Unlike a piece of journalism, which is usually static once it has been edited, a screenplay is a living document. Even if a producer loves a screenplay on paper, once shooting begins, a director will make changes on the fly, and then an editor will make more changes in the editing room. “It’s commonly said that a screenplay is written three times: the original shooting script is rewritten when you shoot and then again when you edit it,” Harris says.

Margot Lee Shetterly, author of the nonfiction bestseller “Hidden Figures,” discovered the difference between writing movies and books when she became a story consultant for the hit film. In 2014, the first-time

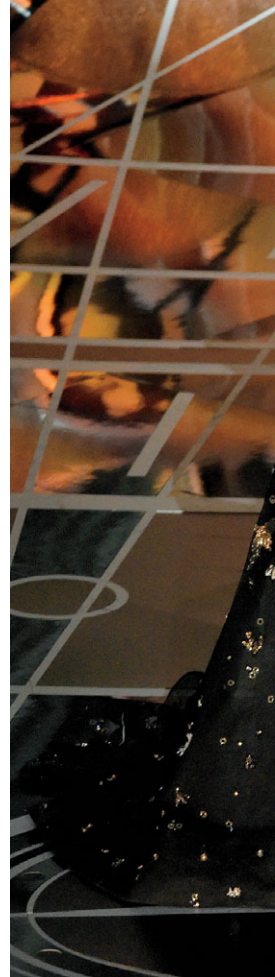


author landed both a book and a movie deal based on her 55-page proposal about the African-American women mathematicians who helped launch NASA's space program. Producer Donna Gigliotti spotted the proposal's potential and shepherded the film to Hollywood success. She hired Allison Schroeder to write the screenplay while Shetterly finished her book. The women had a good working relationship, but Shetterly says it was still difficult to accept the paring down of the real story for the movie. The book, which covers 1943 to 1969, is a deeply researched look at the lives and work of the African-American women employed as human "computers" at NASA. The movie focuses on a dramatic 18-month period beginning in 1961 that culminates in astronaut John Glenn's launch into space.

"The book and the movie are apples and oranges," says Shetterly. "When you're writing nonfiction and you're immersed in the facts, the documents, the oral history, you have to fall in love with what you're doing. At first, it was very hard—the decision that the producer and the screenwriter made to cut it to that one period. But in retrospect, it was a critically brilliant decision."

Schroeder, who with co-writer Theodore Melfi was nominated for an Academy Award for best adapted screenplay, wrote the first draft in three months, before Shetterly finished the book. Once Schroeder, whose grandparents worked at NASA, earned Shetterly's trust, Shetterly shared source material with her and answered detailed questions to help give Schroeder's writing authenticity.

Typical of the differences between the book and the movie "Hidden Figures" is the use of a memo versus a crowbar to end segregated bathrooms at NASA offices



Mathematician Katherine Johnson, whose story is told in "Hidden Figures," in 1962 on the job at NASA



LEFT: NASA/DONALDSON COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES
ABOVE: CHRIS PIZZELLO/INVISION/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



From left, Janelle Monáe, Taraji P. Henson, and Octavia Spencer, stars of “Hidden Figures,” join Katherine Johnson, seated, onstage at the 2017 Oscars

Still, many of the most powerful movie scenes were fictionalized. For example, the NASA official played by Kevin Costner takes a dramatic stand against segregation. He discovers that the mathematician Katherine Johnson, played by Taraji P. Henson, has been forced to walk far across NASA’s Langley Research Center campus to use a restroom for black employees. Horrified, Costner arrives with a crowbar and knocks down the “colored” sign in front of the bathroom door. In reality, the scene never happened and a dry memo from an official put an end to the “colored” bathrooms. In fact, Costner’s character is a composite of many mid-level managers.

“I think he was meant to represent pragmatic distracted people, who when presented with a human face, were able to open their eyes and to take action,” Shetterly says. “When their mission was imperiled, they said we don’t have time for racism.”

In another scene, Mary Jackson, played by Janelle Monáe, convinces a judge to let her take night classes at a white school so she can become a NASA engineer. Jackson walks into her first class to find she’s the only woman as well as the only African-American. The teacher tells her the curriculum isn’t designed for her. This moment didn’t appear in Shetterly’s book. The screenwriter drew it from her own life. The Stanford graduate had just walked into an international economics tutorial while studying abroad as a graduate student when the professor told her, “I don’t know how to teach a woman.”

In an effort to be true to the book, Schroeder submitted a first draft that started in the late 1950s. A rewrite focused

on the drama of the early 1960s because it had a natural three-act structure around the Space Race: the Russians are beating the U.S.; NASA vows to catch up; John Glenn becomes the first American to orbit the earth. But the hard-won respect and acceptance of the three African-American main characters drove the emotional arc. Gigliotti says she knew she had a winner when “people started weeping while reading the last 30 pages of the script.”

Almost every screenplay follows the three-act structure. It dates back to the 4th century B.C., when Aristotle’s “Poetics” described the dramatic arc: a beginning that sets up the plot, a middle when the plot reaches its climax, and an end, when the plot is resolved. In his classic book “Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting,” Syd Field updated the concept for film, calling it the set-up, the confrontation, and the resolution.

“I learned that most of the scripts that read well—meaning they featured lovely sentences, stylish and literate prose, and beautiful dialogue—usually didn’t work,” wrote the late screenwriting guru. “While they might read like liquid honey flowing across the page, the overall feeling was that of reading a short story or a strong journalistic piece in a magazine like *Vanity Fair* or *Esquire*. But that’s not what makes a good screenplay.”

In Field’s format, two plot points or turning points connect the acts. The first turning point connects Act I to Act II; the second connects Act II to Act III. The building blocks of the three acts are individual scenes. A typical screenplay might contain 200 scenes in 100 to 120 pages. Each page is considered a minute of filming, and those



In the film “Frida,” screenwriter Diane Lake focuses on Frida Kahlo’s tempestuous marriage to fellow artist Diego Rivera

minutes are important because they are directly tied to cost and the project’s bottom line. Dialogue carries the scenes forward and, these days, it’s often fast-moving—no more than four lines per character. The days of the talking heads are gone. Action and setting are written out in detail, and background information is inferred—all while crisply advancing the plot.

The written version of a famous crop duster scene in Alfred Hitchcock’s “North by Northwest” shows the art of describing a visual medium in words. In the scene, a low-flying plane chases Cary Grant’s character, Roger Thornhill, across a wide field. In most of the scene, Grant is alone and has no dialogue. Yet screenwriter Ernest Lehman described every moment of the 9 minute and 45-second scene. It begins this way: “Thornhill is alone again. Almost immediately he HEARS the PLANE ENGINE BEING GUNNED TO A HIGHER SPEED. He glances off sharply, sees the plane veering off its parallel course and heading towards him. He stands there wide-eyed, rooted to the spot.”

This attention to cinematic detail is crucial. When adapting a book to a movie, Emerson College screenwriting professor Diane Lake first marks every scene in the book that feels visual. Lake wrote the screenplay for “Frida,” the 2002 biographical film about Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, based on a biography written by art historian Hayden Herrera. That book was her “bible,” Lake says, as she tried to create a simple, human story about someone who had become an outsized folk hero. Kahlo’s life had almost too much drama for one movie. She was crippled by polio, almost died in a bus accident at 18, and endured a tempestuous relationship with her husband, the painter Diego Rivera, who slept with her sister. Lake needed to narrow the story’s focus, and she decided it was, above all, a love story: “It’s Frida and Diego, how they affect each other, how these two explosive personalities connect and grow together.”

Lake is not a journalist, but some of her research resembled reporting. Lake had never been to Mexico, other than a day trip to Tijuana, so the studio agreed to send her down to soak up the atmosphere. She visited Kahlo’s homes and schools so she could better imagine her life.

Screenwriters, like biographers, must find what Landesman calls “an emotional portal” into the main character. “What makes this person tick?” he says. “Once I identify that, everything I do as a screenwriter or a director, I do through the prism of that portal.”

For his 2015 “Concussion,” Landesman wanted to make a film about widespread brain injuries in National Football League players. A 2009 GQ magazine article, “Game Brain,” by Jeanne Marie Laskas, inspired him. But he didn’t want to make a documentary, so he needed to find a dramatic center for the film. He focused on the Nigerian doctor who in 2005 discovered chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a progressive degenerative disease, in an American football player. Actor Will Smith plays Dr. Bennet Omalu, an idiosyncratic outsider who follows the facts and challenges the NFL’s orthodoxy. “It was actually an immigrant story, not just being black in Pittsburgh, but being Nigerian. It both made him vulnerable and inoculated him,” Landesman says.

“He was not swayed by the ‘American-ness’ of football, and was able to look at the danger.”

Discussions about the film became public because of hacked Sony Pictures’ emails released on WikiLeaks. “We need to know exactly what we can and can’t do and if this is a ‘true’ story or not,” Amy Pascal, then a Sony co-chairwoman, wrote in an email. She urged caution when departing from the facts. Landesman says he agreed to some changes based on lawyers’ recommendations but didn’t compromise the essential truth of the movie—a process familiar to any journalist working on a tough story.

Screenwriting offers a blend of art and commerce that can be both exhilarating and frustrating for journalists. Maren, the former foreign correspondent, took to screenwriting after freelance reporting assignments started paying less. He had spent much of his career chasing stories in war zones such as Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda. HBO optioned his first book, “The Road to Hell,” about foreign aid. The network paid him more than \$100,000 for another project, which was also never made. He found an agent and sold the options to several more screenplays. At that point, he was fed up. He started producing and directing his own scripts.

Still, Maren is optimistic about the prospects for journalists in the film industry. Reporters’ experiences can make a screenplay believable. “Whether you’re covering the war in Afghanistan or your local school committee election, journalism puts you up close with real people in real situations at times of stress when big things are at stake,” he says. Journalists are used to asking, “What’s the story?” and then shaping messy real-life events into a structure. They are trained to have an ear for dialogue, which is one of the building blocks of a screenplay. And they are used to writing economically, another requirement for a screenplay.

Still, Maren warns that it’s difficult to turn one’s own journalistic writing into a screenplay. “I usually advise people don’t write the script for their own nonfiction,” he says. “You’ve got to basically take the book or story and smash it to bits and reassemble it in a three-act structure for the film.”

Lake, author of “The Screenwriter’s Path,” agrees. A producer may ask a journalist to write a screenplay adaptation—usually while hiring someone else to write the real thing. In fact, even seasoned screenwriters may find that they are just one of a crowd of writers of the final script. When Lake was brought in to work on “Frida,” other writers had already submitted multiple scripts that were rejected. When she asked to look at these earlier drafts to avoid their mistakes, she was told to find her own vision. She did, and her screenplay won out. But the credits include the names of people who wrote earlier versions as well. “It’s just a different kind of art, because of the collaboration and the huge amounts of money,” she says.

For journalists used to the gratification of publication, the screenplay’s circuitous and often mysterious path to fruition may feel frustrating. In fact, often, success may feel far different than a page-one article or magazine cover story.

“Cash the check and enjoy it,” advises Maren, “because the movie will probably never get made.” ■

The End of the Ad World as We Knew It

In “Frenemies,” media reporter Ken Auletta examines the collateral damage wrought by an age of consumers living an ad-free existence

BY KEN AULETTA

While covering the media business for The New Yorker for more than 25 years, Ken Auletta has profiled many of the most important leaders of the Information Age and reported on the disruption roiling the industry. Among his books are “Three Blind Mice: How the TV Networks Lost Their Way” and “Googled: The End of the World As We Know It.”

In the introduction to his twelfth book, “Frenemies: The Epic Disruption of the Ad Business (and Everything Else),” published by Penguin Press on June 5, he notes that the flight of advertisers from old to new media which started in the late 1990s has accelerated in the current century. “In the public imagination, we were still in the age of Don Draper, but I began to see more and more clearly how this industry that had been intrinsic to the disruption of old media was itself facing fundamental challenges to its existence.” He writes, “The once comfortable agency business is now assailed by frenemies, companies that both compete and cooperate with them.” For the advertising and marketing sector, worth up to \$2 trillion, these are anxious times.

An edited excerpt:

WHATEVER FORM ADVERTISING and marketing takes in coming years, a certainty is that data-fed targeting will be a pillar. Irwin Gotlieb, chairman of GroupM, a subsidiary of W.P.P., believes that in the future, agencies will have to guarantee results to clients, and better results will boost agency compensation.

*From “Frenemies” by Ken Auletta.
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We can also be certain that privacy will remain a third rail to marketers, always worried that governments will grow alarmed and impose regulations. The European Union, for example, passed legislation restricting the ability of companies to collect personal information without the user’s consent.

Some, like Andrew Robertson of BBDO, believe that the blizzard of different platforms and better targeting will place a premium on creative advertising that captures people’s attention and will invite advertisers to spend more to lure those identified as potential customers, as advertising spending becomes more cost effective. Others, like MediaLink CEO Michael Kassin, offer a bleaker view. “My biggest fear is that the inextricable link that existed historically between serving up content financed by commercial messages, that link is broken because consumers can get their content without commercials now. Think what it would have cost you to get Life magazine if there were no ads in it. It was subsidized by advertising.” But today too many people “just won’t watch commercials.”

So what replaces the commercials?

“We will live in a subscription world,” he boldly, and I believe wrongly, answers.

Tim Wu is among the most prominent advocates for replacing ads with subscriptions. Harking back to 1833 and the first ad-subsidized newspaper, the New York Sun, he calls this “the original sin.” In his provocative book “The Attention Merchants,” Wu argues that in advertiser-supported media the reader or viewer is not the customer; the advertiser is. Thus, letting advertisers into the tent inevitably means a diminution of quality, because advertisers pressure the platform to deliver a bigger audience. More news about Kim Kardashian magnetizes an

audience. The way to improve media is to pay for it, he says, preferably with subscriptions and micropayments. Wu is not alone. In February 2017, Twitter cofounder Evan Williams, who had raised \$134 million to improve journalism by forming Medium, an ad-supported blogging and publishing site, announced that he was laying off one third of his staff and ending its reliance on ads. Echoing Wu, he told Business Insider that ad-driven media was “broken” because corporations fund it “in order to advance their goals. ... We believe people who write and share ideas should be rewarded on their ability to enlighten and inform, not simply their ability to attract a few seconds of attention.” When Jim VandeHei left as CEO of Politico in 2016 to start a provocative online publication, Axios, he assailed the “crap trap” of “trashy clickbait” designed to attract more page views and thus to satisfy advertisers. The “trap” was set by a reliance on ads. For Axios to produce quality journalism, he said, “readers will have to pay up and if they need and love the product, they will, and gladly so.”

The thoughts are noble, the analysis of what often ails advertising-supported content is correct. But the economics don’t support the noble idea. The economics of Axios certainly doesn’t support VandeHei’s bold words, for roughly 90 percent of Axios’s revenues, one of their principal investors says, comes from corporate sponsorships, or advertisers who are granted a sandwiched paragraph and often a picture introduced with headlines like this: “A MESSAGE FROM BANK OF AMERICA.” Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump didn’t agree on much in the 2016 presidential contest, but they did agree that most Americans in the middle were being squeezed, their incomes frozen. Although median income did rise between 2014 and 2015, it was little changed from the pre-recession year 2007. The Census reports that median household income in 2009 was \$54,988; by 2015 it had inched up to only \$56,516. And those just below median income but above the poverty line saw their income drop. The Brookings’s Hamilton Project found that, after adjusting for inflation, wages in the U.S. rose just 0.2 percent over the past forty years.

Think about the subscription toll today, including mobile phone, broadband, cable or satellite TV, newspaper and magazine subscriptions, Netflix, HBO or Showtime, Amazon Prime, apps, music. Jeffrey Cole, who teaches at USC, says the average household pays monthly subscription charges of \$267 per month, which does not include

electricity, gas, and other unavoidable monthly bills.

How do most overstretched consumers pay more? They probably don't. There are, of course, successful efforts to reduce dependence on advertising. Hulu is growing its subscriber base. The Apple App Store rang up \$2.7 billion in subscriptions in 2016. Spotify's subscriber base swelled from thirty million to fifty million in 2016. Amazon's Prime membership, for a modest annual fee of \$99, offers an estimated 100 million subscribers free delivery, free streamed movies and television shows, free music, and other enticements. The New York Times's reliance on advertising revenue has been cut from 80 percent to about 40 percent. (But unlike most newspapers, the Times like the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times—could pull off this feat because they successfully raised the subscription price and their affluent readers were willing to pay.)

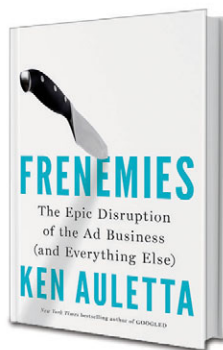
Some novel experiments to lessen reliance on advertising have also been tried. Rather than impose a paywall to deny free online access to news stories, a practice followed by most newspapers, the Guardian provides open access. But at the bottom of each story they append this:

Since you're here . . .

... we have a small favour to ask. ... If everyone who reads our reporting, who likes it, helps fund it, our future would be much more secure. For as little as \$1, you can support the Guardian. ...

Readers can then click on a credit card or PayPal link. A total of 300,000 readers volunteered a contribution, the Nieman Lab reported in November 2017. Another 500,000, they reported, either joined various membership programs for a monthly fee granting them access to various events and newly published books, or were print or digital subscribers. These monies now eclipse the Guardian's ad revenues. (Nevertheless, the Guardian is still bathed in red ink, losing \$61 million in fiscal 2016–2017.)

For those not wanting to see ads, YouTube offers Red for \$9.99 per month. Many other platforms charge extra to be free of commercials. It is not uncommon to hear the argument advanced by entrepreneur Kevin Ryan, a founder of DoubleClick and Business Insider: many could afford new subscriptions



“Frenemies: The Epic Disruption of the Ad Business (and Everything Else)” by Ken Auletta (Penguin Press)



Today's advertising world bears little resemblance to Madison Avenue in the 1950s

because they “are going to Starbucks and paying five dollars a day for a coffee.”

Maybe. But let's return to the economics. The New York Times's subscriber base is expanding nicely, up by 46 percent between 2015 and 2016. They, like the Washington Post, have done a spectacular job puncturing the untruths and disarray of the Trump administration, and they've been rewarded with a burst of new digital subscribers. These subscribers have made the Times less reliant on ad dollars. This is great news. But, and here's the rub: the Times makes most of its profits from the print newspaper, including 62 percent of its advertising revenues. And it's not clear how a much-cheaper-to-produce digital newspaper could generate comparable ad revenues.

Why? The average reader of the print edition of the Times spends about thirty-five minutes a day with it. But the average online Times reader spends about thirty-five minutes a month. Because advertisers know readers spend much less time looking at their ads, they pay about 10 to 20 percent for the same online ad as appears in the newspaper.

Despite the growth in digital subscribers, and the rise of circulation revenues of 3.4 percent, and the growth of digital ad revenue of 5.9 percent, the overall revenues and profits of the paper fell in 2016. This left the Times to caution about its future in its 2016 annual financial report, “We may experience further downward pressure on our advertising revenue margins.”

By the end of the third quarter in November 2017, the Times reported that despite the further

erosion in print newspaper revenues, overall revenues rose by 6 percent. Obviously, if the Times could one day abandon its print edition, the cost savings in paper, printing, and distribution might offset the disproportionate profits the print paper generates. Or if the Times can increase its subscription revenues from 60 to 70 percent, as it hopes it can, analyst Ken Doctor has written that the Times could escape from its struggle to maintain slim profits to “generate actual, lasting growth, ahead of inflation.” Alas, Times profits in the years ahead will be slim. And like other smart analysts, Doctor knows that if the Times succeeds in maintaining slim profits, it will be an aberration, not a trend for other newspapers. The dominant trend was defined by Gannett's USA Today and its 109 regional newspapers, and chains like McClatchy and A. H. Belo, which saw their 2017 print advertising and circulation losses exceed their digital advertising and subscription gains.

No question: consumers can reconfigure their cable bundles and can make choices among various subscription models. But to believe that the bulk of consumers who live on tight budgets can afford subscriptions as a substitute for the ad dollars that subsidize most of our “free” media and Internet activity is to ignore the math.

Yet the conundrum is that the advertising ATM machine subsidy may also be unreliable. The thought many marketers try to banish is whether for consumers-spoiled by Netflix and YouTube, by ad-skipping DVRs and ad blockers, by personal devices we hold in our hands—the interruptive ad message may be a relic. Are consumers irrevocably alienated by sales pitches? Has the consumer, on whom marketing relies, become a frenemy? ■

Introducing the 81st Class of Nieman Fellows

The 27 journalists who will study at Harvard in 2018-2019 include four funded by new fellowships



Soji Akinlabi
Nigeria

Lead producer and CEO of Africa Business Radio, will study the U.S. public media business model to learn about best practices



Shaul Amsterdamski
Israel

Economics editor at Kan, Israel's public broadcasting corporation, will study how to deliver complex economic stories to a broad audience



Christina Andreasen
Denmark

Editor of digital development and social media at Berlingske, will study how legacy media can successfully turn digital by incorporating new skill sets



Samantha Appleton
U.S.

Photographer, will examine the concept of otherness in the American psyche, from slavery to war, and how it affects news in the current century



Juan Arredondo
Colombia/U.S.

Documentary photographer, will study the impact photography can have on reconciliation in post-conflict societies



Tanya Ballard Brown
U.S.

Digital editor for NPR, will focus on the growing intersection of humor/satire and journalism and how it can help build community



Benny Becker
U.S.

Public radio reporter for Ohio Valley ReSource and inaugural Abrams fellow, will study ways to fund infrastructure in rural communities



Anica Butler
U.S.

An editor at The Boston Globe, will study change management and design thinking to learn how newsroom culture can become more nimble



Mea Dols de Jong
Netherlands

Documentary filmmaker and journalist, will study the evolving rules for quality audiovisual journalism and storytelling on the internet



Mattia Ferraresi
Italy

U.S. correspondent for Il Foglio, will study the roots of American liberalism and its discontents, from the postwar consensus to now



Myroslava Gongadze
U.S.

Voice of America's Ukrainian Service chief in Washington, D.C., will study strategies to counteract a new era of Russian information warfare



Kaeti Hinck
U.S.

An editor at The Washington Post, will investigate how neuroscience and psychology can inform the digital news ecosystem

After two semesters at Harvard, the three journalists chosen as the inaugural Abrams Nieman Fellows for Local Investigative Journalism will receive funding for up to nine months of fieldwork for a public service reporting project. The fellowships are funded by a grant from the Abrams Foundation designed to strengthen local

news coverage in underserved communities across the United States. Also with this class, the Nieman Foundation is launching the Robert L. Long Nieman Fellowship, which honors the memory of journalist, filmmaker, and news executive Robert L. Long and supports the work of exceptional Turkish journalists.



Esther Htusan

Myanmar

Correspondent for The Associated Press, will study conflict, inequality, and injustice and their impact on Myanmar and the region



Jonathan Jackson

U.S.

Co-founder of Blavity, Inc., will study the emergence of black media in the digital age and ways to measure black cultural influence



Mary Ellen Klas

U.S.

Capital bureau chief for The Miami Herald, will study the relationship between declining journalism resources and local corruption



Uli Köppen

Germany

Head of data journalism at Bayerischer Rundfunk (ARD), will study how coding can aid the investigation of algorithms and machine bias



Sevgil Musaieva

Ukraine

Editor-in-chief of Ukrayinska Pravda, will study a range of media markets to determine the best practices for fostering independent journalism



Steve Myers

U.S.

Editor of The Lens in New Orleans, will study how nonprofit, investigative news sites can reach civic-minded audiences



Peter Nickeas

U.S.

Reporter for the Chicago Tribune, will study the effects of trauma on children and use that understanding to inform editorial decisions



Yoshiaki Nohara

Japan

Tokyo-based economics reporter for Bloomberg News, will study depopulation and its economic consequences in Japan



Francesca Panetta

United Kingdom

Executive editor for virtual reality at The Guardian, will explore how experimentation with emerging technologies can be more strategic



Nathan Payne

U.S.

Executive editor of Michigan's Traverse City Record-Eagle and inaugural Abrams fellow, will examine the local impact of mental health policies



Laura N. Pérez Sánchez

U.S.

Investigative journalist and inaugural Abrams fellow, will examine Puerto Rico's ongoing reconstruction and the use of hurricane relief funds



Brent Renaud

U.S.

Filmmaker, photographer, and journalist, will study the effects of trauma and mental and emotional illness on rates of poverty and violence



Gabriella Schwarz

U.S.

Managing editor of Flipboard, will analyze how the rise of aggregators have changed the news and how that change is impacting democracy



Matthew Teague

U.S.

Correspondent for National Geographic and others, will study how to best cover the emerging interdependence of faith and politics in the U.S.



Afsin Yurdakul

Turkey

Anchor and correspondent for the Habertürk News Network and inaugural Robert L. Long fellow, will study impact of Syrian refugee crisis on Turkey

In selecting the Nieman class of 2019, Nieman Foundation curator Ann Marie Lipinski, a 1990 Nieman Fellow, was joined by Kathleen Carroll, board chair of the Committee to Protect Journalists and the past executive editor and senior vice president of The Associated Press; Jerold S. Kayden, the Frank Backus

Williams Professor of Urban Planning and Design at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design; Wendi C. Thomas, founder of MLK50: Justice Through Journalism, a Memphis-based news project, and a 2016 Nieman Fellow; and James Geary, Nieman's deputy curator and a 2012 Nieman Fellow.

NIEMAN NOTES

1955

Sam Zagoria died at his home in San Francisco on April 2. He was 98. A political reporter for The Washington Post following World War II, Zagoria returned to the Post in 1983 to be the paper's ombudsman.

1960

Ralph Otwell, a former editor of the Chicago Sun-Times, died on March 8, 2017 in Evanston, Illinois. He was 90. During his tenure as editor, from 1968 to 1984, Otwell oversaw coverage that won the newspaper six Pulitzer Prizes. He also oversaw, in 1979, the paper's Mirage Tavern exposé. For the 25-part series, the Sun-Times teamed up with the Better Government Association to operate a Chicago tavern—staffed with undercover reporters—to investigate municipal corruption.

1961

John Herbers' "Deep South Dispatch: Memoir of a Civil Rights Journalist" was published in April by the University Press of Mississippi. The manuscript had been accepted before he died in 2017. His daughter Anne Farris Rosen, also a journalist, helped complete it.

1969

Harald Pakendorf is the author of "Stroomop," about being editor of an Afrikaans newspaper during apartheid. It was published by Penguin Random House in March.

1972

Gregory Nokes is the author of "The Troubled Life of Peter Burnett: Oregon Pioneer and First Governor of California," published by Oregon State University Press.

1982

Johanna Neuman is author of "Gilded Suffragists: The New

York Socialites Who Fought for Women's Right to Vote," published by NYU Press.

1984

Nancy Webb is the author of "In the Absence of Grace," an essay that appears in "States of the Union," published by Mascot Books.

1991

Tim Giago has been elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Giago, the owner of Native Sun News Today, will be inducted in October.

1997

Paige Williams is the author of "The Dinosaur Artist: Obsession, Betrayal, and the Quest for Earth's Ultimate Trophy," being published by Hachette in September. It explores the fossil trade through the story of a man's attempts to sell a dinosaur skeleton from Mongolia.

1998

Howard Berkes is a member of the NPR/ProPublica team that won an IRE Award for "They Got Hurt at Work, Then They Got Deported." The series exposed how insurance companies targeted injured undocumented workers for denial of workers compensation benefits.

Phillip Martin is a member of the WGBH team that won a Sigma Delta Chi Award from the Society for Professional Journalists for their investigation "The Gangs of Nantucket."

1999

Chris Hedges is the author of "America: The Farewell Tour," which will be published by Simon & Schuster in August.

2003

Susan Smith Richardson is the new editorial director, newsrooms at Solutions

"From Wisconsin to Whyalla"

Lukas Award-winning book by Amy Goldstein, NF '05, about decline of middle class resonates in New Zealand

Amy Goldstein, NF '05, is the winner of the 2018 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize for "Janesville: An American Story." Her book is an intimate portrait of the dwindling middle class, seen through the lens of a small Wisconsin city that had the nation's oldest operating General Motors assembly plant until it shut down in 2008. In their citation, Lukas Prize judges called the book "a triumph of narrative nonfiction in the tradition of J. Anthony Lukas."

Since it was published by Simon & Schuster a year ago, this story of what happens to workers, families, and a community when good jobs go away has been attracting readers locally and far away. Goldstein, a Washington Post

staff writer, has returned to Janesville twice for community conversations about her book's themes. In May, she appeared at writers' festivals in Sydney, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand. At the former, she took part in a panel discussion, "Economic Inequality: From Wisconsin to Whyalla" examining how the loss of manufacturing jobs has affected communities and considering the political implications for democracies. "Janesville" is being translated into a half-dozen languages, including Russian and Chinese.

The J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize, which comes with a \$10,000 award, recognizes superb nonfiction writing on a topic of American political or social concern. The prize is part of the J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project, presented annually by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism and Columbia Journalism School.

Other winners of this year's Lukas Prize Project awards are Chris Hamby and Rachel Louise Snyder, whose respective books "Soul Full of Coal Dust: The True Story of an Epic Battle for Justice"

(Little, Brown) and "No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Violence Can Kill Us" (Bloomsbury) were each honored with the \$25,000 Lukas Work-in-Progress Award.

Stephen Kotkin was honored with the \$10,000 Mark Lynton History Prize for his book "Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941" (Penguin Press).



Amy Goldstein focuses on factory jobs

Journalism Network. She had been the editor and publisher of The Chicago Reporter.

2004

Masha Gessen is the author of “Never Remember: Searching for Stalin’s Gulags in Putin’s Russia,” published by Columbia Global Reports.

Susan Orlean is the author of “The Library Book,” to be published by Simon & Schuster in October. Orlean investigates the unsolved catastrophic 1986 fire at the Los Angeles Public Library.

2009

Carla Broyles is now senior editor for recruiting and training at The Washington Post. Most recently, she was editor of the Post’s National Weekly edition.

David Jackson is a member of the Chicago Tribune team that won a 2017 IRE Award for an investigation—in the wake of the death of a toddler—into the failures of the Illinois family services department.

2013

Jeneen Interlandi has joined The New York Times editorial board to write about health, science, and education. She will also write for the magazine.

Souad Mekhennet has been awarded the Stern magazine editorial board’s special prize for her accomplishments in reporting on terrorism and Islamic extremism.

Laura Wides-Muñoz has joined ABC News as executive editor for news practices. She is based in Washington, D.C.

Betsy O’Donovan has a new job as an assistant professor of journalism at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington.

2014

Wendell Steavenson is the author of “Paris Metro,” a novel published by Norton in March. It tells the story of a journalist, based in Paris, as terrorism threatens her city.

2015

Dawn Turner was a resident fellow this spring at University of Chicago’s Institute of Politics. She held seminars on topics relating to African-American images in the media and their impact on policies.

2016

Andrea Bruce is the winner of the 2018 Anja Niedringhaus Courage in Photojournalism Award from the International Women’s Media Foundation.

Anja Niedringhaus was a 2007 Nieman Fellow. Bruce also was awarded a 2018 CatchLight fellowship. Each fellow will receive \$30,000 for a visual storytelling project to drive social change.

Todd Pitman is a member of the AP team honored with a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for “Rohingya Exodus,” their coverage of the Rohingya crisis.

2017

Brady McCollough has joined the Los Angeles Times’ sports department as a reporter. McCollough had been projects reporter for sports and news at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Karin Pettersson is the new director of public policy at Schibsted Media Group. She also is chairwoman of the media freedom board of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers.

Jason Rezaian is a global affairs analyst for CNN. He continues as a global opinions writer at The Washington Post.

“This is how we did it”

A prize-winning series by Jason Grotto, NF ’15, underscores the value of transparency



Jason Grotto showed the math bolstering his investigation

“The Tax Divide,” a four-part series reported by Jason Grotto, NF ’15, and published by the Chicago Tribune and ProPublica Illinois, is the winner of the 2017 Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Journalism. The result of a two-year investigation involving more than 100 million computer records, the series exposed an unfair property tax assessment system in Cook County, Illinois. The error-ridden and inequitable assessment system punished poor homeowners and small businesses in Chicago and surrounding suburbs while simultaneously providing unsanctioned tax breaks to more affluent homeowners and commercial property owners.

Taylor Award judges deemed the series “a remarkable piece of investigative reporting,” with judge Rob Davis adding, “Where this story really sings is in its own transparency—both in confronting its subjects with detailed findings and in stating clearly: ‘This is how we did it.’ This series demonstrates foundational transparency, repeatedly showing readers the bedrock upon which the conclusions are built.”

The \$10,000 Taylor Award, which was established by the Taylor family, who published The Boston Globe from 1872 to 1999, is presented annually to encourage fairness in news coverage by America’s journalists and news organizations.

Grotto told Nieman Reports that, seven months after publication of the series, the “county published an independent study that corroborated all of our findings. That was the coup de grâce. Transparency is not just insurance. It’s a force field, protecting you from attacks.”

Grotto also reflected on the challenge of finding property owners to humanize the statistics-heavy series: “Property owners from poorer neighborhoods were especially suspicious about sticking their neck out. After years of being overtaxed, they had zero belief that our work would lead to change. So it took multiple trips and many hours to convince people to go on the record, take photos, etc. Along the way, the most compelling examples sort of popped out at us. When I went to a building that the assessor had overvalued by nearly 50 percent and found out it was a daycare called Sweet Pea Academy, I knew I had a score. My colleague David Kidwell talked to a woman who was afraid of losing her home because of her property tax bill, and she worked at a homeless shelter called A Little Bit of Heaven. That’s gold.”

“The Requesting of Good Things” Journalism, like religion, is an act of faith

BY DUSTIN DWYER

I DIDN'T ALWAYS KNOW I wanted to be a reporter. I came at it sideways, in college, after deciding to major in creative writing. There's no career path for writing majors, so I did what a lot of aspiring writers before me have done: I went to my college newspaper and convinced them to give me a chance.

The stakes were low. I started on the features desk. Still, I'll never forget what happened the first time I turned in a story. When that paper came back, all I could see was the red. Every line was marked up or scribbled over. Most of the markings didn't even make sense to me. The red ink was splattered on the page, washing over every word of my precious prose.

I don't remember the topic of the story or the specific edits. What I do remember is the feeling, how my idea of writing and of storytelling shifted. As I had the red markings explained to me, I saw how imprecise and unorganized my story had been. I realized that journalism was going to require more of me.

This was more than an edit. It was a moment of transformation. It was baptism.

It took me a while to think of it that way. I still thought I was just there trying to do something with my writing. But I was also learning journalism's core beliefs. I adopted them on faith.

Journalism is a secular profession. Most of the journalists I work with are not people



Every story is a request, often deeply heartfelt, for change. These prayers of ours often go unanswered. Yet we go on praying, filing stories day after day



of faith. Many are ardent atheists. It took me years to realize the connection between journalism and religious practice. But I'm not the first to see it.

Jay Rosen of NYU laid out his case in an essay published online in 2004. In that essay, Rosen pointed to the journalist's creed, written by Walter William, the first dean of the Missouri School of Journalism:

I believe in the profession of journalism.
I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.

And so on.

This creed itself echoes the Apostles' Creed I grew up reciting every Sunday at Catholic Mass.

When I stopped going to church in my 20s, I thought I'd simply lost my faith.

Years later I realized I'd lost my faith in the church at nearly the same time I found it in journalism. I wasn't lost, I was converted.

The comparison of journalism and religion doesn't map out perfectly. There are obvious, major differences. But I realize more and more

how much the practice of each is the same.

As journalists, we spend much of our time in study and reflection. Our faith requires us to break bread, and drink in communion with our sources and fellow journalists. And most of all, we devote ourselves to prayer.

The catechism of the Catholic Church explains the role of prayer with this quote from St. John of Damascus: "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God."

Rosen, in his essay "Journalism Itself is a Religion," quotes his fellow journalism professor James W. Carey, who says "The god term in journalism ... is the public."

We can mash together the two quotes and say this about prayer in journalism: Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to the public or the requesting of good things from the public.

How is this not what we do with every story we write?

None of us are in the business of journalism simply to transcribe words and facts. That is part of what we do, but it is not our purpose. We do what we do so that it will have an impact with our god—the public. Every story is a request, often deeply heartfelt, for change.

These prayers of ours often go unanswered. Every journalist can tell you of the stories they labored over, and lifted up to the public, only to find the public didn't notice or didn't care. Yet we go on praying, filing stories day after day, week after week, persistent in the faith that these prayers, will lead to "good things" for our society.

I realize not everyone will identify with the analogy here. Most journalists I know are solidly secular. Many grew up with no experience of organized religion. But for me, the comparison is as obvious as it is useful. It helps me understand why I stick to this profession, even in the face of so many problems. Sometimes my doubts about journalism are as powerful as the ones I felt in the church. Like most journalists, I've thought of leaving more than once.

I stay not because I believe in the institutions of journalism, or because I believe in its impact. What I believe in is the practice of prayer. I believe in raising my mind and heart. I believe in requesting good things from our audience, even when no good things come. I believe every story is a prayer. I believe, even on my worst days, in the profession of journalism to tell those stories.

Amen. ■

Dustin Dwyer, a 2018 Nieman Fellow, is a reporter and producer for Michigan Radio

Save the Date

The Nieman Foundation turns 80 this year, and the anniversary arrives at a time when journalism is under unprecedented threat—and when the work of the free press is more vital than ever.

Join us at Harvard October 12-14 to discuss this historic moment with some of the brightest stars on campus; explore new ideas and innovations to strengthen journalism; and celebrate the work of extraordinary Niemans around the world who continue to “promote and elevate the standards of journalism.” See a full schedule and register online at nieman80.org



Guardian US reporter Lois Beckett, a 2009 Harvard graduate, gave the keynote address for the 2018 Christopher J. Georges Conference on College Journalism. Held annually at the Nieman Foundation, the conference provides training and networking opportunities for college journalists. Watch the video at nieman.harvard.edu

NiemanReports

“The Standard Bearer”

Before being assassinated in a car bombing last fall, Daphne Caruana Galizia was Malta’s most formidable independent journalist, and her blog served as the small European nation’s leading source of investigative reporting. In an essay titled “The Standard Bearer,” Times of Malta columnist Ranier Fsadni explores the elements that made Caruana Galizia’s blog so groundbreaking.

Opinion: What Journalists Can Learn from “Black Panther” and “Get Out”

2015 Nieman Fellow Dawn Turner reflects on the films and why we need more stories that put the struggles of African-Americans into context and highlight their heroes.

NiemanLab

BuzzFeed’s Craig Silverman on Misinformation

The media reporter outlines some of the dangers ahead as our society moves from the old mantra of “trust, but verify” to an era of “verify, then trust.”

Why the “Golden Age” of Newspapers Was the Exception, Not the Rule

One perspective often missing from discussions about the many troubles impacting the news media today is a historical one. Professors Heidi Tworek and John Maxwell Hamilton explore how such a perspective may also help the media alleviate some of the problems it faces.

NiemanStoryboard

The Pitch

Writers and editors share their tips and pet peeves regarding story pitches and annotate successful pitches. Contributions include insights from California Sunday Magazine editor Douglas McGray and an annotation from writer Paul Tullis, who shares one of his pitches for The New York Times Magazine.

5ish Questions for Amy Padnani

Nieman Storyboard chats with The New York Times’s digital editor of obituaries about “Overlooked,” the series that features obits of women and people of color who didn’t get a Times obituary when they died, but should have.

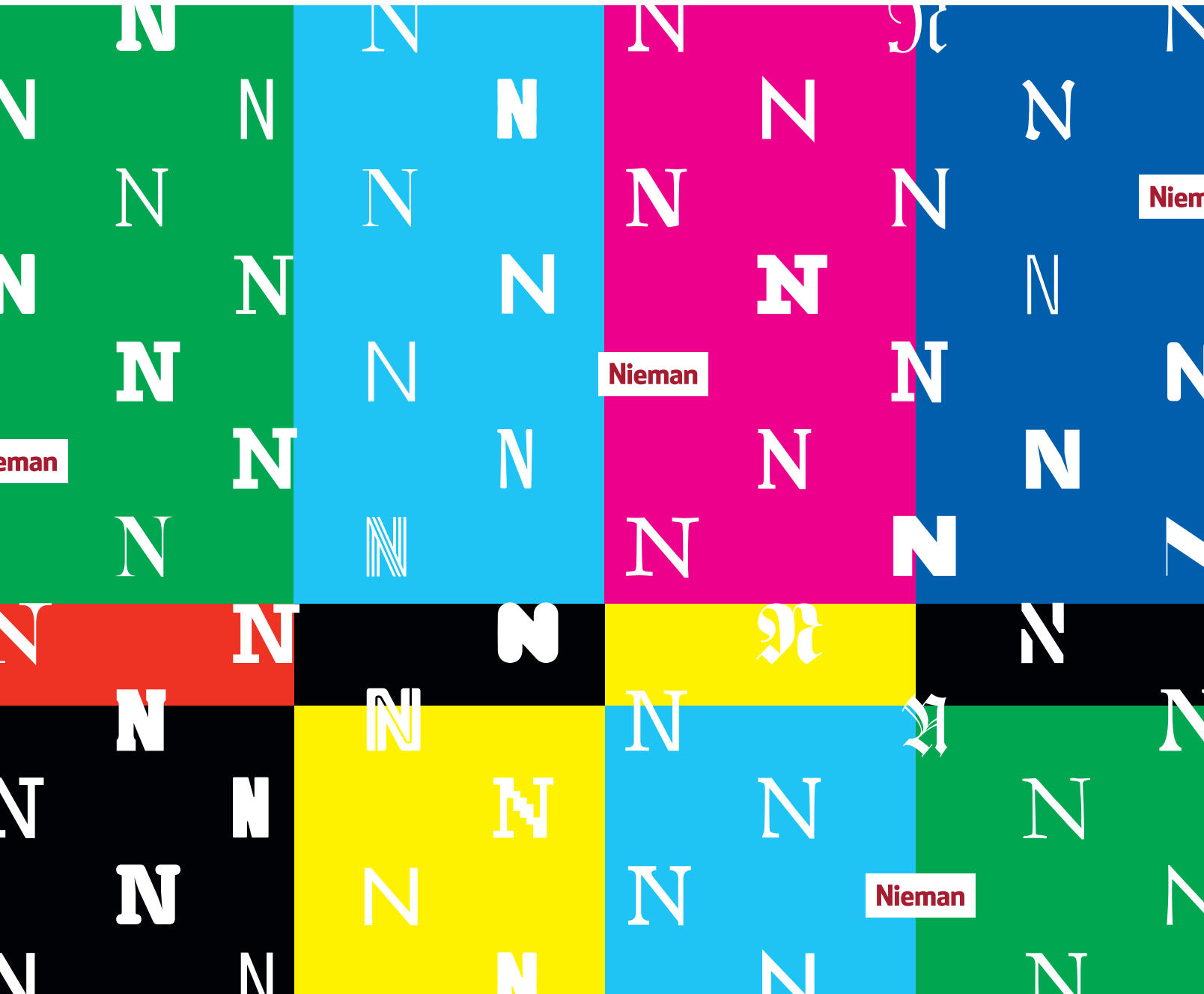
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