Editorial: Special 10th anniversary issue – the future of journalism

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To celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, we look to the future. The future has always exerted itself on the present. In practices as wide-ranging as climate prediction, the projection of risk assessment in determining educational achievement and the actuarial methods used to determine the objects of law enforcement, the future lingers in ways that simultaneously have more and less relevance to how we engage with the present.

The academy is not immune to the seductive charms and limitations of the future. Physics, probabilistic paradigms in economics and demography, celestial mechanics, and even the notions of causality all make the ability to predict and project the future central to an array of intellectual projects.

So too with journalism. Journalism comes with a contradictory set of expectations. It is expected to wither in an age of financial volatility, decreased revenues, porous borders, layoffs and buyouts, chipped prestige, diminished audiences, concerns about physical safety and variable content. Conversely, it is expected to flourish: information abounds and is more accessible than ever before, the varieties of content and form are unequalled in history, and more people are involved than at any other point in time as both journalism’s producers and its consumers.

The task of auguring the future comes against these conflicting sets of expectations about journalism’s next stage of development. On the one hand, projecting the future could tempt us into thinking about coming changes with complacency, optimism and a renewed faith in all that we identify as news. On the other hand, it might intensify our concerns, jeopardize our hopes and leave us wondering what to make of a phenomenon that has been with us as long as information but whose durability is no longer recognizable or certain. Is it just human nature to lament about the present so as to keep us moving toward some future-oriented target for our actions? Or are we focused on a real and concerning set of problems?
This issue of *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* travels a bit in each direction. Asked to address what they thought the future of journalism would look like, the members of its editorial board offer variable and often contradictory answers that, as a meta exercise in the shaping of inquiry, say much about how academics orient themselves to times, developments and issues yet to be experienced.

Some scholars choose to narrow their field of predictions by focusing on contexts, either geographic – US journalism, Australian news – or content-driven – science journalism, alternative journalism, working-class journalism. Others seek to broaden their auguring task by highlighting the key problems facing journalism as it moves into its future – globalization, changing business pressures, internationalizing journalism education, diminished work conditions and definitional ambiguity. Still others offer new ways of configuring journalism’s operation – the second person effect, offsetting disintermediation, the three step flow. And finally, other scholars seek to pinpoint how journalism has changed or might yet change further: is European news leading the way of the journalistic project? Can multi-platform journalists alter the landscape of news-work? Will India emerge as a new venue in which to think about all things journalistic? Will journalism save itself by reorienting towards workers rather than consumers?

There are problems with envisioning the future of any phenomenon. The work of prediction presumes that conditions stay the same or continue changing in similar ways. How we accommodate uncertainty, contingency, accidents, historical and situational specificity says much about the tasks of prediction and projection, neither of which always hold fast over time. In 1876, an internal Western Union memo predicted that the telephone had too many problems to ever be of value. And in 1923, the Nobel Prizewinner in Physics said that we would never tap the potential of the atomic bomb.

Against these parameters our journey embarks into the future of journalism, as envisioned by our editorial board members. Reflect on their topics, ponder their choices and move with them on their temporally motivated provocations. Hopefully, they will tell us much not only about where journalism might be in 10, 20 or 100 years’ time but where we are today in its surround.

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