

Time to reflect (and you really do need it)

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2011-12-23

This is a time to reflect, and boy, do you need it. Anyone working in journalism in 2011, just about anywhere, has probably had one of their busiest years.

It feels like [an extraordinary 12 months](#) where the big stories just keep on coming. The new ways to do the job keep multiplying while the resources are spread thinner.

We'll be reflecting on all this (it's what Polis is there for) in our big annual journalism conference on March 23rd 2012. You are all welcome to that but take a few seconds out now to ponder. Go on. You deserve it.

Journalism takes a lot of knocks. The phone-hacking scandal and the Leveson inquiry in the UK has given the false impression that our newspapers are a national disgrace. In fact, as one Swedish journalist on a visit to London told me, they are much better than their Scandinavian counter-parts. It doesn't matter who is right, but it reminds us not to continually put down the job done by professional hacks.

Let's also note the incredible contribution now made by the public through networked, interactive journalism. That is the new story of journalism around the world. We saw through the Arab uprisings how citizen media is more than just a way to witness. It did provide millions of eyes and lenses focused on those dramatic events. But it was also a direct force for organising and celebrating political action and for debating change.

Incredible stories from Norway and Japan tested journalistic resources and ethics to the limits. How do we cope with grief on that scale? How do we report such extreme emotion and physical harm?

The answer is that we make mistakes. Was it right for so many Scandinavian newspaper websites to shut down comments in the wake of the Brevik shootings? Did the global media get the nuclear scare in Japan in proportion?

Journalism is an imperfect art. Sometimes it is soiled by criminal, corrupt, or commercial motives that distract it from the pure tasks of reporting, analysis and comment. Often it is bullied and bashed into silence or distortion.

But for those of us in relatively free societies it can be more effective than ever before. For those in less free states, the possibilities of expression are greater, too. Authorities from Amazon (the company) to Zimbabwe (the country) have shown resistance to openness but the struggle continues.

WikiLeaks. Mexican anti-drug activists on Twitter. Guido Fawkes. Not all perfect by any means. But all part of a changing expression ecology that offers potential for greater political freedom.

I remember when I first joined the BBC nearly 25 years ago being greeted by a veteran hack who told me that 'the game is up, this place is finished and journalism is done for'. I guess John Birt had upset his world but he was wrong. It faces challenges, cuts and crisis but the BBC and the rest of journalism will survive and thrive.



Just look at the world out there. Packed full of stories. It seems to me that post-modern life is getting more uncertain and complex. As they say about climate change and the weather – expect more extreme events. Well, that's what we're there for isn't it? To cover those?

The world is heaving with people who love information and debate, so much that they often help make the news for free. They need journalism to live their daily lives and to make sense of a difficult planet and a confusing welter of data and numbers.

Our job is what it always was. Only connect.

Polis is now in its sixth year and busier than ever. It sometimes feels like I have less time to reflect than I did as a regular newsroom journalist. I am lucky in that I can write books (usually at weekends and holidays) to help me gather my thoughts.

Yes, you've guessed it. I have another one on the way that tries to make sense of one of the last year's most spectacular and controversial media events. "[WikiLeaks: News In The Networked Era](#)" is out in January.

Meanwhile, have a great break – if you are getting one – and join us again in 2012 for another mega media year.

Keep in touch with me on Twitter: [@charliebeckett](#)

You can also follow our [@PolisLSE](#) Twitter feed for updates and live tweeting of events

Please also sign up for our newsletter and to register for the March 23rd conference by emailing Polis@lse.ac.uk

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