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## 10 Gatewatching, Gatecrashing: Futures for Tactical News Media

Axel Bruns

### Prologue: A Tale of Two Tiers

1980: In response to the shortcomings in journalism's coverage of current events that he has identified in his research, journalism scholar and visionary Herbert Gans outlines a new model of news media, where the mainstream

central (or first-tier) media would be complemented by a second tier of pre-existing and new national media, each reporting on news to specific, fairly homogeneous audiences. . . . Their news organisations would have to be small [for reasons of cost]. They would devote themselves primarily to reanalysing and reinterpreting news gathered by the central media—and the wire services—for their audiences, adding their own commentary and backing these up with as much original reporting, particularly to support bottom-up, representative, and service news, as would be financially feasible. (Gans 1980, 318)

The ultimate aim of this two-tiered media system is to provide a more multiperspectival coverage of news and current events. However, in the absence of media formats that can ensure a broad audience reach without requiring significant financial backing, Gans struggles to identify pathways to realizing that vision.

Fast-forward to late 2005: U.S. President George W. Bush nominates his personal counsel and long-time friend and (as would be revealed soon, occasionally all-too-enthusiastic) follower Harriet Miers as candidate for Supreme Court Justice. Both sides of U.S. politics are critical of the nomination, which is widely seen as an instance of favoritism. In its coverage of the debate, CNN repeatedly devotes airtime to quite literally reading out “what the bloggers think”—presenting a selection of views from news and politics blogs as a kind of twenty-first-century updated version of the vox-pop interview.

Miers eventually withdraws from the nomination, but that is not important here—and neither is the extent to which blogs played a role in the demise of her candidacy. Instead, what is more interesting is the way in which CNN and other news organizations accepted bloggers' voices as an obvious part of the U.S. mediasphere, a natural

indicator of public opinion on the nominee. Compared to the traditional vox-pop (often a relatively cynical task conferred to junior reporters: “get me one in favour and two against”), however, there is a significant difference here: blogs are publications in their own right, and citing blog posts in the television news points viewers to a different media form, and to the second tier that Gans had predicted. No matter how news organizations select the blogs they quote on air, no matter whether views are presented accurately or out of context, audiences are able to access these and other blogs for themselves, gauge public opinion, even comment and post their own views in the blogosphere and on alternative news sites. Bloggers and other forms of participatory online journalism by citizens for citizens have gatecrashed the previously so-closed party of the mainstream news media; they have added a second tier of news media that comments on, critiques, and regularly corrects the mainstream news, much as Gans had proposed. As Rushkoff suggests, “In an era when crass perversions of populism, and exaggerated calls for national security, threaten the very premises of representational democracy and free discourse, interactive technologies offer us a ray of hope for a renewed spirit of genuine civic engagement” (Rushkoff 2003, 16). Though still in its infancy, the emergence of citizen journalism points to the potential of a reinvigoration of discussion, debate, and deliberation on political matters, beyond the polarized and polarizing coverage of mainstream news media.

It is worth noting that such views, and my own, are explicitly opposed to those of Jodi Dean, for whom “conflict and opposition [are] necessary for politics” (chap. 3, this volume). Dean’s approach essentially regards politicization and polarization as synonyms, and in doing so aligns itself with a long-established model of the journalism industry that postulates that any “proper” news story must take the form of a conflict-based narrative. If understood as a perennial conflict between opposing forces, however, such politics is inherently incompatible with democracy in its purest sense: a true “rule of the people” can only be established if a broad societal compromise and consensus is established through productive debate and deliberation; it cannot be reached through entrenched political antagonism.

Where mainstream journalism has interpreted its underlying ideals of objectivity and unbiased reporting to mean simply that a strictly bipartisan coverage must be achieved on any given issue (that is, giving airtime or column space in equal measure to representatives of Reps and Dems, Labour and Tories), it has already oversimplified the political process: reality is multipartisan, complex, and multifaceted, and any reduction to simplistic left/right schemas fails the democratic process. The polarized, conflict-based model of democracy, which Dean appears to champion and which ultimately manages opposing views simply through a periodic exchange of government and opposition roles, is fundamentally flawed and provides no credible alternative—it is itself what threatens “the very premises of representational democracy”, using Rushkoff’s phrase.

Mainstream journalism has been a key contributor to this polarization of politics in many developed nations—but the intrusion of new forms of (online) journalism may well swing the balance back toward a more discursive, deliberative approach. (Indeed, many of these new forms have arisen in response to the lack of nuanced reporting in mainstream news coverage, of course.) If so, the key question that arises, and that we will examine here, is how such new forms of journalism can grow beyond their beginnings as tactical media linked to specific causes and temporary actions, and how they may establish themselves as a permanent fixture in the news mediascape. As we will see, some parallels can be drawn between this process and another process of transition from short-term tactics to longer-term strategies: the rise of the European Greens from extraparliamentary activists to established political force.

### The Gatecrashers

A range of related, but differing descriptions (that are not necessarily mutually exclusive) can be applied to the new forms of news media that are at the core of this challenge to mainstream journalism. Like Gans's two-tier model, most such models initially pit two sides against one another and must therefore themselves be examined critically as potential oversimplifications—what becomes crucially important in the current media environment is to investigate the potential for productive connection and even cooperation *between* these two camps. A likely result of such cooperation is that both sides will change shape to some extent, and it is in such metamorphoses that the most innovative models for citizen involvement in mainstream journalistic processes can be found. But let us begin by reviewing some of the key descriptions of the dichotomy between mainstream and off-mainstream news media.

### Two Tiers

For Herbert Gans, the two tiers of news organizations describe different levels of journalism—one that today we would likely situate within the global media industry conglomerates, and one that describes a range of alternative services that would also strive for a broad citizen involvement: “I would argue that like other professionals, journalists should share their responsibility with others.” (Gans 1980, 323). Emerging from his study of mainstream news media processes in the 1970s, Gans's focus is especially on the reanalysis and reinterpretation of first-tier media content, leading to the addition of alternative views in pursuit of a more multiperspectival coverage of news and current events—but such value-addition services need not be the only purpose of off-mainstream news media. Some citizen media projects, like the Korean *OhmyNews* or the Al Gore-backed *Current.tv*, focus instead on the creation of original content by users for users (in the case of *OhmyNews*, with the help of paid editorial staff).

That said, there certainly is good evidence for processes of content reappropriation by the second tier—rather than producing original reports and/or acting as gatekeepers in a traditional journalistic sense, for example, some of the most active news bloggers and participatory journalism contributors of present-day, second-tier media forms engage predominantly in what we can describe as *gatewatching*: the observation of the output gates of first-tier news organizations as well as of primary sources. These practitioners are watching out for material passing through those gates that is relevant to their own audience's interests and concerns and introduce it into their own coverage of news and current events; often, they combine and contrast the coverage of a number of mainstream news organizations in order to highlight differences in emphasis or interpretation and thus point to political bias or substandard journalistic handiwork. If through a recombination and reconsideration of existing materials such coverage produces compelling new insights previously overlooked by the first-tier media, it offers a means to reintroducing alternative viewpoints into first-tier media debates (see Bruns 2005). Again, this is in line with Gans's conception that clearly describes first- and second-tier news media as responding to and engaging with one another.

### **Alternative Media Production**

Other descriptions tend to reduce conflicting interpretations of the news to a struggle of activists against the mainstream and point to the early successes of alternative news sites like *Indymedia* as examples. Such descriptions “place the emphasis on the production, rather than the consumption, of media texts. And they stress the conversational dimension of the Net as the creation of DIY media, rather than just as a means of debating the writings of others” (Meikle 2002, 87). Where such focus on content production leads to a comparative absence of discussion and debate, however, it will ultimately undermine the activist project: sites which do little more than *publish* content are in danger of becoming mere PR tools for oppositional groups, simply containing press releases for the latest cause. In such cases, any real engagement between opposing viewpoints is undermined. Today's *Indymedia* Web sites might serve as an example here: since its initial successes in the 1999 “Battle of Seattle,” many sites of the IMC network have failed to match the high standards set during the glory days, and the *Indymedia* newswire has now turned to a mere clearinghouse for activist press releases.

The overall end result is then a mere shouting match between mainstream and alternative Web sites, where the relative visibility of arguments, rather than their argumentative force, is expected to influence audience opinions, and where alternative news sites therefore do whatever they can to have their content seen. While a Gansian approach enables practitioners to introduce their views into the mainstream media by skill, through careful and considered examination of and engagement with opposing

views, a merely alternative approach puts its emphasis on a gatecrashing by force—on creating so much DIY media content that some of it must eventually make it into the mainstream. (Alternatively, some activist media sites may be content to preach only to the already converted, distributing information to fellow activists yet doing little to spread the message beyond that group.)

### Tactics and Strategies

Perhaps most enduring and popularly recognized, however, is the description of off-mainstream media outlets as tactical media, in opposition to the strategists of mainstream media forms. As Meikle notes, we must understand that such “tactical media are different from . . . alternative media in important ways. Media tacticians don’t try to consolidate themselves as an alternative. . . . Instead, tactical media is [*sic*] about mobility and flexibility, about diverse responses to changing contexts. It’s about hit-and-run guerrilla media campaigns. . . . It’s about working with, and working out, new and changing coalitions. And it’s about bringing theory into practice and practice into theory” (Meikle 2002, 119–120). Such descriptions owe a great deal to Michel de Certeau’s work on strategies and tactics, and they describe tactical media practitioners as tricksters, as poachers, as temporarily reversing flows of power. In their much-cited “ABC of Tactical Media,” for example, Garcia and Lovink speak of such media as “always provisional. What counts are the temporary connections you are able to make. Here and now, not some vaporware promised for the future” (Garcia and Lovink 1997, n. pag.).

Tactical media, in this description, are profoundly temporal and temporary, then—guerrilla attacks that may leave lasting marks in popular consciousness but are themselves ephemeral and conducted from temporary, shifting bases rather than a more permanent location. Tactical media, especially in a journalistic context, can therefore also be seen as exploiting an adoption lag: the period between the emergence of new media technologies and their utilization by the mainstream, during which time tech-savvy media tacticians have an advantage over the strategists in media organizations who are still developing their ideas for how to use new technological tools safely within a corporate environment. (*Indymedia’s* early successes were due in good part to taking place during this moment, in fact.) Tactical media practitioners, in other words, do not so much gatecrash as exploit alternative entries into the mediasphere that have not (yet) been secured against unauthorized entry. They are aligned with alternative causes but pick their targets more wisely and carefully than merely alternative media; like Gans’s second tier, they incorporate gatewatching practices and a discursive engagement with the mainstream but combine this with a more explicit and specific political purpose.

Most importantly, however, they operate from a temporary, shifting, and not so much deterritorialized as fundamentally aterritorial basis. While in her contribution

to this collection (chap. 2, this volume), Alessandra Renzi takes Graham Meikle and others to task for overly highlighting this aspect in their description of tactical media (thus creating highly orthodox definitions “that automatically exclude any project or action that is long lasting,”), it is difficult to escape the centrality of this—inherently *tactical*—aspect of tactical media, and even Renzi herself repeatedly returns to a focus on the temporary character of tactical media actions. By contrast, Renzi’s own somewhat tautological definition of tactical media “not as a movement or a practice but as a space where ‘tactical things’ happen” must also be problematized further: it is crucial to keep in mind that the space of a tactical media action is never its own, but only ever temporarily appropriated from others. (Renzi’s later description of tactical media as “contact zones” is therefore more accurate, pointing as it does to the tactical superimposition of a temporary zone *over* a pre- and postexisting space.) Indeed, as we will see, the point at which tactical media groups acquire a basis of operations of their own marks the moment that they transmogrify into an altogether different, and no longer purely tactical, beast.

That said, it could be suggested that even now, well into the online age, much of the second-tier online news media forms still live off that temporary advantage over their first-tier cousins and to that extent are tactical media. Even relatively progressive mainstream news organizations are still struggling to come to terms with blogs, wikis, and other collaborative content management systems, and with a reconceptualization of their users not as audiences but as equal partners and collaborators in the news process—that is, with a move from journalism as lecture to journalism as conversation, as Dan Gillmor has described it (Gillmor 2003, vi). The second tier, by contrast, already has systems and approaches in place that address this shift. However, as these approaches solidify and become widely practiced, they are no longer simply temporary tactics—instead, they become stable, established strategies for the practice of new forms of journalism.

Gatewatching itself demonstrates this transition. Emerged from tactical backgrounds, it embodies a conversational, active, and productive engagement with existing mainstream media content—gatewatchers draw on news reports and official publications but frequently use journalists’, politicians’, and corporate actors’ own words against them by creatively (but, ideally, truthfully) reappropriating, repurposing, recombining, recontextualizing, and reinterpreting such content to show a very different conception of reality. Each time news bloggers and other citizen journalists point to omissions, misrepresentations, or biases in mainstream media content by contrasting news stories, press releases, and other background information, they use the news media’s own tools and resources against it. Hartley describes such practices as redaction: “bringing materials together, mixing ingredients to make something new—a creative practice in its own right” (Hartley 2003, 83). He notes that “redactional journalism is not dedicated to the same ends as public-sphere journalism inherited from previous media; it doesn’t

have the same agenda-setting function for public affairs and decision-making as does traditional editing by editors (which is why I am avoiding the more familiar term).” Instead, with the adoption of redactive practices, “even as its representative democratic function is superseded, journalism itself massively expands” (Hartley 2000, 44). Redaction is the “new media” counterpart to “old media” editing and relates to it much as media mashups are related to audiovisual production: as a practice that paradoxically both undermines its predecessor and uses the outputs of the older model as its own sources. It is temporary tactic turned contemporary strategy.

Whether described as tactical, alternative, or second-tier media, recent years have seen some notable successes for off-mainstream media forms. Some occurred by design—here we might note the role played by gatewatchers in the WMD debate, Trent Lott’s resignation, or the RATHERGATE scandal, for example. At a time when any domestic media criticism of the U.S. administration was equated virtually with treason, alternative media led the way in questioning the existence of weapons of mass destruction as a reason for the war on Iraq and ultimately became visible enough to have their questions recognized and discussed; similarly, when Bush-bashing had become the fashion, second-tier media critiqued this biased stance and uncovered the unquestioning acceptance of falsified documents by seasoned journalists. Lott’s demise, on the other hand, can be seen as the success of a tactical strike aimed at removing a controversial politician: the successful reintroduction of key facts into the public consciousness at a time when most mainstream news media had long decided U.S. Senate Republican Leader Lott’s support for one-time segregationist presidential candidate Strom Thurmond to be a nonissue.

Other successes for off-mainstream news media were more coincidental and exploited the very temporary advantage (or, more often, disadvantage) of being a technologically equipped ad hoc citizen news reporter at the scene of world events before the world media had had a chance to scramble their crews—this was the case, for instance, with the instant coverage of events from 9/11 to the Boxing Day tsunami and the 7/7 London bombings. Yet others exist in areas where the mainstream media dare (or, more likely, care) not tread—in the coverage of local and microlocal issues that do not register on the impact scale of larger news organizations, or that reporters coming in from the outside would be hard-pressed to cover with any accuracy. This supports Gans’s notion that “one of the purposes of the second tier is to continue where the central media leave off: to supply further and more detailed news for and about the perspectives of the audiences they serve. In the process, these media would also function as monitors and critics of the central media, indicating where and how, by their standards, the central media have been insufficiently multiperspectival” (Gans 1980, 322).

If there remains a significant temporary, tactical aspect to the operations even of the second tier of news media organizations at present, then, the question of how to

ensure long-term sustainability for such media forms becomes all the more crucial. How, in other words, may they move beyond tactics and carve out a permanent space in the news mediasphere for themselves?

### **Beyond Tactics: Citizen Journalism**

It is possible that

these alternative information sources are being given more attention and credence than they might actually deserve, but this is only because they are the only ready source of oppositional, or even independent thinking available. Those who choose to compose and disseminate alternative value systems may be working against the current and increasingly concretised mythologies of market, church and state, but they ultimately hold the keys to the rebirth of all three institutions in an entirely new context. (Rushkoff 2003, 18)

However, this points to a serious structural problem for second-tier media if they are to be conceptualized as inherently “tactical”: are they, *should they be* engaged in this process and project of rebirth that Rushkoff outlines, a project which aims at no less than the reconfiguration of society itself for the twenty-first-century network-driven environment? Renzi notes that tactical media “are characterized by the lack of an ultimate identity or goal.” If so, the information sources described by Rushkoff can no longer be seen simply as tactical; they are now involved in a longer-term struggle that requires strategies as well as tactics. Tactical media in the traditional sense are at a crossroads, then—they can choose to remain simply tactical and temporary, or must aim to develop approaches to ensure the long-term sustainability of the second tier of news and orchestrate its engagement with the first tier.

Tarleton provides a useful outline of the problem in his discussion of *Indymedia*. “As a product of the anti-corporate globalization movement,” he notes, *Indymedia* “shares both its strengths and weaknesses. It is defiant, angry, hopeful, chaotic, creative, generous and, at times, painfully naive. It is a voluntocracy that operates mostly on youthful enthusiasm. And in true anarchist fashion, it is decentralized and highly participatory. All decisions are made by consensus” (Tarleton 2000, 55). *Indymedia* (or more accurately, the many Independent Media Centres that constitute the IMC network) may choose to maintain that structure, harking back to the now almost mythical golden age of the 1999 Battle of Seattle, which saw what was perhaps *Indymedia*’s finest hour as it provided one of the few issues- rather than conflict-based accounts of events, tactically exploiting the myopia of mainstream news coverage—yet any random sample of the current *Indymedia* newswire shows at least as much activist aggrandizement and knee-jerk fundamental opposition to all things corporate and capitalist as it does insightful commentary and coverage of events.

The tactical origins of *Indymedia* have given way for the most part to a merely alternative and oppositional stance that no longer engages with its enemies and prefers instead simply to rail at them; indeed, *Indymedia's* malaise is the malaise of tactical media and its close cousin, culture jamming, overall. At their best, “jammers use the media to draw attention to issues and problems with those same media. What makes jamming more than just juvenile trespassing is its *media literacy* emphasis. Culture jamming turns familiar signs into question marks” (Meikle 2002, 132). Yet jamming is used just as often to merely shout back at the media, in a highly visible and disruptive, yet ultimately unproductive way.

What distinguishes productive engagement from merely disruptive culture jamming or tactical media is the existence of an overarching sense of purpose, of underlying aims, of longer-term goals—and this distinction is also at the heart of Henry Jenkins’s critique of culture jamming, as he takes to task one of the leading theorists of this media form, Mark Dery, for “describing all forms of DIY media as ‘jamming.’ These new technologies would support and sustain a range of different cultural and political projects, some overtly oppositional, others more celebratory, yet all reflecting a public desire to participate in, rather than simply consume, media” (Jenkins 2006, 150). Against this, Jenkins positions his “cultural poachers”: “Culture jammers want to ‘jam’ the dominant media, while poachers want to appropriate their content, imagining a more democratic, responsive, and diverse style of popular culture. Jammers want to destroy media power, while poachers want a share of it” (Jenkins 2006, 150).

The problem for tactical media, however, is that such approaches are no longer purely tactical. Jenkins’s cultural poachers, with their vision of a better style of culture and their ambition to share in media power, employ tactical action in the pursuit of strategic goals: sharing media power is only a possibility for those who move beyond a fully deterritorialized, tactical stance. To share power necessarily means to establish one’s own space, one’s own basis of operations, in the mediasphere—a move beyond guerrilla tactics operating in enemy territory and toward a homeland of one’s own.

As Lévy put it in 1997, “until now we have only reappropriated speech in the service of revolutionary movements, crises, cures, exceptional acts of creation. What would a normal, calm, established appropriation of speech be like?” (Lévy 1997, 171). One answer may today lie in a beginning shift of focus from purely tactical (news) media (operating on an issue-to-issue basis and in guerrilla strikes on the mainstream) to citizen journalism (pursuing the idea of a more democratic form of journalism that operates systematically from a strong base of its own). The return of citizen involvement to what through most of the twentieth century has been an increasingly industrialized journalistic field would do much to claim back a share of media power, as postulated by Jenkins. As Heikkilä and Kunelius note, “democracy requires open access to public institutions and resources for knowledge. This holds for journalism, too, for it is a public institution regardless of its ownership. Therefore, access to journalism

should be open to all citizens. . . . The variety of voices in journalism is thus the measure of its ‘publicness’” (Heikkilä and Kunelius 2002, n. pag.).

Citizen journalism is inspired by the positive ideas to emerge from the *Indymedia* experience—the coverage of nonmainstream themes and topics, and the open debate of issues that does not inherently privilege any one participant. Such journalism is focused not on the mere provision of “facts” as determined by a small group of journalists and editors, but instead highlights the discursive, dialogic, and even deliberatory nature of public engagement with the news. Phenomena found by Chan in her study of the participatory technology news site *Slashdot* translate across to citizen journalism overall: “Highlighting the expertise of users and the value of their participation, news reading shifts from an act centred on the reports and analyses of news professionals and designated experts, to one often equally focussed on the assessment and opinions of fellow users on the network.” (Chan 2002, n. pag.). The core approach here is a collaborative one, as *KuroShin* operator Rusty Foster notes—“first, in the sense that a lot of people collaboratively write and help edit the site. But second, . . . in the sense that the story itself is not the final product, it’s just the starting point, because ultimately the goal of every story is to start discussion, to start a lot of other people saying what they think about it” (“New Forms” 2001, n. pag.).

This collaborative, dialogic, deliberative engagement between site participants, who in the process act both as users and producers of the site—in short, as a hybrid *producer*, engaged in produsage rather than simply production or consumption (see Bruns, 2006a)—ultimately leads to the realization of Gans’s goal of multiperspectival news coverage: as he put it in 1980, “ideally . . . the news should be omniperspectival; it should present and represent all perspectives in and on America. This idea, however, is unachievable. . . . It is possible to suggest, however, that the news, and the news media, be multiperspectival, presenting and representing as many perspectives as possible—and at the very least, more than today” (Gans 1980, 312–313). Citizen journalism, conceptualized in this manner, is positioned as an alternative and a corrective to the first, mainstream tier of the news media but no longer stands in fundamental opposition to it, as the perspectives expressed in that tier have a valid role to play in public debate as well. Instead, it engages those “mainstream” perspectives and (where appropriate) debunks them as the views of individual political and lobby groups, think tanks, and news proprietors rather than as representative for a more diverse range of societal views, values, and beliefs. Or, as Gans described it in his 2003 update on his multiperspectival vision,

Ideally, multiperspectival news encompasses fact and opinion reflecting all possible perspectives. In practice, it means making a place in the news for presently unrepresented viewpoints, unreported facts, and unrepresented, or rarely reported, parts of the population.

To put it another way, multiperspectival news is the bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media. (Gans 2003, 103)

The most crucial question for citizen journalism, then, is no longer one of tactics, that is, of how to gain the best short-term impact on the media and public consciousness. Instead, it becomes more important to ensure a place for multiperspectivity in the mediasphere and, thus, for citizen journalism itself, for the long term. Most importantly, this means increasing the visibility of citizen journalism projects and, in doing so, redressing the balance between the first and second tiers of the news media. As James Carey put it (though writing before the rise of online citizen journalism to public recognition), “what we need in this circumstance is to revive notions of a republican community: a public realm in which a free people can reassemble, speak their minds, and then write or tape or otherwise record their extended conversation so that others out of sight might see it” (Carey 1997, 14).

Citizen journalism, then, provides a pathway for off-mainstream news sites as they progress beyond a purely tactical stance, avoid the simplistic oppositional posturing of alternative media, and develop into a fully formed second tier of news media. Such questions of moving beyond the temporary gains available from tactical action and into the establishment of permanent bases for new ideas and approaches are not new, however: they have been faced by a variety of other initially tactical groups in the past. For example, useful comparisons might be drawn here between the present situation of off-mainstream news media and the dilemmas faced by another originally tactical and oppositional movement, the Greens (particularly, perhaps, in their Western European forms), during the 1970s and 1980s. Emerging from a fundamentalist, autonomist, extraparliamentary community that had some loose connections with, or at the very least stated sympathies for, the European anticapitalist radical and terrorist groups of the 1960s and 1970s (such as *Brigate Rosse* and the *Baader-Meinhof Gang*), the Greens also faced a choice between continuing on a tactical path and remaining in a position of fundamental opposition to the political establishment or moving toward the adoption of longer-term strategies and an involvement in the mainstream political process. Ultimately, in most cases, a split into “fundies” and “pollies” ensued; some leaders continued engaging in alternative grassroots campaigns while some took up parliamentary posts and political office (with some attempting the uncomfortable option of continuing on both paths simultaneously). Few political figures embody this shift better than Germany’s Joschka Fischer, who morphed from stone-throwing, antiestablishment street protester in the 1970s into member of state parliament in the 1980s, and later became one of the first Greens ministers in Europe; he concluded his political career as a Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister of Germany in 2005. Equally respected even by political enemies, and criticized by fellow travelers for selling out, Fischer symbolizes the possibilities as well as the dangers inherent in moving beyond the relatively comfortable familiarity and predictability of temporary

tactical responses and into participation in established and enduring political environments. (The degree to which such participation is open to initially tactical agents is determined in part also by contextual factors, of course—in dictatorial regimes, for example, there may be little opportunity for nontactical forms of involvement by opposition groups. When such involvement does become possible, however, it is important that tactical groups do not dismiss this opportunity outright, out of a false sense of traditional allegiance to tactical action.)

### **Toward a Post-Gansian Mediasphere**

A wide variety of such post-tactical citizen media Web projects have emerged today—ranging from the better news-related blogs to dedicated citizen journalism Web sites like *KuroShin*, and from pro-am publications like *OhmyNews* (combining professional editors and amateur gatewatchers, now also in its Japanese and international versions) to citizen multimedia efforts such as *Current.tv* (which, in addition to its Web site, also operates a U.S. cable TV channel broadcasting the best of its user-submitted content). However, it remains true that “a crucial use of the Internet is to attract attention from other media” (Meikle 2002, 61): much citizen media remains in a parasitical, or at best symbiotic, relationship with the mainstream. At the same time, first-tier news organizations are also expressing increasing interest in what has made some citizen journalism projects successful and are beginning to replicate those citizen-led approaches in a corporate framework, with varying degrees of success. As Lasica writes, “all of this begs the question: Will forms of participatory journalism and traditional journalism complement each other, or collide head on? It may be a bit of both.” (Lasica 2003b, n. pag.).

Whether complementation or collision, what is evident is that the Gansian two-tier model may be an increasingly inaccurate description of the multifaceted relationships between industrial and citizen journalism (and that, indeed, any description that builds on a dichotomous, binary division between two entrenched sides is no longer sustainable). As noted already, there is a limited embrace of second-tier media by the mainstream, which looks at such journalism alternatives “not through a limited lens of a political-economic anti-globalisation channel but through the professional lens of a ‘competitor-colleague’ journalism which may yet prove to be the crucible for new ways of reconnecting journalism, news and media professionals with ideals of sharing access and participatory storytelling in journalism” (Platon and Deuze 2003, 352). At its most basic, this has occurred through the adoption of bloggers’ views as a better alternative to the vox-pop interview, and the cooption of key bloggers as expert pundits into news and current affairs reporting. Further, we have seen the emergence of genuine blogger-journalists from Glenn Reynolds to Margo Kingston (but also the appearance of journalistic “faux bloggers” that adopt the title, but run their sites as

little more than traditional op-ed columns and have no interest whatsoever in engaging in a constructive dialogue with their audience). Beyond this, it remains to be seen how the more systematic embrace of blogs and other citizen journalism technologies will play out: for example through BBC Online's blogs, or in the wake of Rupert Murdoch's stated position that in a participatory, Web 2.0 media environment, journalists "must challenge—and reformulate—the conventions that so far have driven [their] online efforts" (Murdoch 2005, n. pag.).

Beyond this direct engagement between industry and citizen forms of journalism, however—crashing each other's gates, as it were, and intertwining the tiers—we can also make out the shape of altogether different models for online journalism production. In the first instance, they are situated at a kind of "tier 1.5", intermediaries between the ends of the journalistic spectrum, but in the process they might undermine the tiered structure of the news mediasphere altogether. Predecessors and precedents for such sites exist for example in the New York-based *MediaChannel*, which facilitates and moderates the engagement between the multiple perspectives expressed in news reportage—as editor Danny Schechter puts it, he "hoped that our evolving space could become a home for much more diverse content and in-depth reporting than is found in the increasingly entertainment-oriented mass media, as well as in staid media reviews" (Schechter 2000, 38)—and in the Australian *Online Opinion*, a site of public intellectualism that serves as a neutral ground upon which government ministers, politicians, intellectuals, academics, journalists, and citizens can engage in debate and dialogue. Both sites are clearly nontactical: they are spaces in their own right, not temporarily superimposed tactical zones in someone else's territory. In their dealings with both mainstream news media and off-mainstream activist and oppositional groups, however, they still exploit temporary opportunities for engagement and impact—yet they do so in the pursuit of long-term strategic aims of increasing media transparency and improving public debate. This intermediate stance enables them to maintain the respect of and attract participation from both establishment and activist camps, as well as involve contributors from the wider populace.

Such sites point to the possibility of a greater range of hybrid industry/citizen journalism approaches conducted on a "pro-am" basis (see Leadbeater and Miller 2004)—a model for which *OhmyNews* provides perhaps the most successful example to date: here, upon submission by its tens of thousands of participating citizen journalists, "all stories are fact checked and edited by professional editors" (Kahney 2003, n. pag.). While not yet as sophisticated as *OhmyNews*, other news operators are beginning to take notice, realizing that "when some media outlets start making participatory media work effectively, media companies that dig in their heels and resist such changes may be seen as not only old-fashioned but out of touch" (Bowman and Willis 2003, 50). BBC News Online and *The Guardian Online* both engage with and link directly to the blogosphere and other citizen journalism sources, for example, and more such

connections are emerging rapidly. Beyond this, the development of a project like the Al Gore-backed *Current.tv* will be interesting to track as well—not only as a means of gathering citizen-produced media content and harvesting the most highly rated content for a cable TV channel but also specifically for the quality of the DIY television news content that may emerge through it.

In the process, the role of journalists—and even more crucially, that of editors—changes fundamentally: they are no longer arbiters (or gatekeepers) of what points of view, what descriptions of news are relevant or appropriate, but instead focus more strongly simply on ensuring the technical quality and factual accuracy of published contributions. As Gans describes it, “story selectors would continue to set aside personal values, for their prime value would be perspectival diversity. In the process, the journalists’ enduring values would no longer play a major supporting role in story selection, although commentators could continue to apply them. Even so, these values would not disappear; rather, they would be expressed in and by the new diversity of sources” (Gans 1980, 315). The *evaluation* of information and viewpoints, on the other hand, takes place through users’ discursive and deliberative engagement on the news site itself: as Clay Shirky famously puts it, “the order of things in broadcast is ‘filter, then publish.’ The order in communities is ‘publish, then filter.’ . . . Writers submit their stories in advance, to be edited or rejected before the public ever sees them. Participants in a community, by contrast, say what they have to say, and the good is sorted from the mediocre after the fact.” (Shirky 2002, n. pag.).

However, even this reversal of the editorial process is unlikely to be the end point of developments. It is already evident from current trends that the days of the dedicated news *site* as the key point of access to news reports may be numbered: today, multitudes of users combine first- and second-tier RSS newsfeeds in their Web browsers and newsreaders, using these for off-site (and even off-line) headline and news blurb browsing even without ever visiting the originating news site—and certainly without regular visits to any one news Web site. RSS scraping services even provide feeds for sites that do not offer such feeds of their own volition, and overall, the bundling and aggregation of news feeds from vastly different origins in combined listings both in user clients and on aggregator sites from *Syndic8* to *Technorati* and *Google News* significantly undermines the recognition and relevance of established news brands. In a networked environment, the news is becoming increasingly viral, and the role of a handful of global news organizations as international news leaders may be in decline: a random glance at *Google News* will show the *New York Times* alongside the *Malaysia Star*, *Aljazeera.net*, *Chosun Ilbo*, the *Macon Telegraph*, *Salon*, *The Guardian Unlimited*, *Monsters and Critics.com*, *The Council on Foreign Relations*, and *Blogcritics.org*, for example. Which source is chosen by users who are interested in a specific story may be influenced more by the recency, headline, or indeed the loading time of individual reports than by the brand name associated with it.

Beyond this, of course, such news reports are further distributed or diffused through full or partial reposts, links, and commentaries on blogs and citizen journalism Web sites, regardless of whether this practice is authorized or encouraged by the originating news agency, further removing reports, once published, from the control of their publishers. In essence, this approximates what could be described as a kind of news-sharing in analogy to filesharing—an unruly flow of information and commentary between the news media tiers and through the gates of various publishing organisations (see Bruns 2005).

### **Toward Alternative Story Forms**

Such observations support Alleyne's view that "the ability of new technologies to drastically enhance the quality and velocity of information and to personalise the distribution of such information has deposed the old concept of 'news.' News media have derived power from their ability to determine the definition of news. . . . The new technological capabilities have undermined the news media's authority in this area" (Alleyne 1997, 33). They point to the potential of developing new forms and formats for news reporting—a process that could lead simultaneously into a number of different directions. On the one hand, the new forms of engagement with news reports through RSS feeds and other forms of off-site access to story blurbs could be seen to point to a need to condense the traditional journalistic inverted-pyramid writing style even further, reducing news reports to snappy blurbs that will catch the attention of casual browsers. On the other hand, it is exactly this long-standing reductionist standard in news reporting, with its attendant tendency to focus on easily representable conflict narratives, which has contributed to the rise of citizen journalism as a means of correcting the overly simplistic and stereotypical tropes common to much of industrial journalism.

An alternative direction, then, lies in the pursuit of discussion, debate, and deliberation as an essential element of journalistic coverage. As Heikkilä and Kunelius describe it, "deliberative journalism would underscore the variety of ways to frame an issue. It would assume that opinions—not to mention majorities and minorities—do not precede public deliberation, that thoughts and opinions do not precede their articulation in public, but that they start to emerge when the frames are publicly shared" (Heikkilä and Kunelius 2002, n. pag.).

Jodi Dean and other critics might question the extent to which such public deliberation can truly take place, and they describe an environment in which isolated groups deliberate among themselves without having a wider impact; this is what Dean describes as the "fantasy of participation" in her chapter in this volume. However, such views exaggerate the isolation of individuals and groups: instead, the structures of the Net (and indeed the wider social patterns of communication within which

Internet use is embedded) are such that they more accurately resemble a vast number of more or less extensively overlapping spheres of conversation and deliberation that *are* able to implicitly influence and explicitly speak to one another. Renzi's description of tactical media as constituting "counterpublics" or "dynamic spaces of discourse" (also in this collection) is much closer to the mark.

Participation *is* a fantasy if we take the extreme view that it must mean participation by all netizens in all discussions at all times; it is anything but a fantasy if we view it more realistically as a distributed form of engagement from which shared understandings emerge that are in turn introduced into yet other discussions and deliberations. The structure of deliberative communication in this model has moved away from the centrally moderated communication forms of face-to-face group meetings (or their more formalized counterpart, parliamentary debate), and toward a decentered, distributed, networked model that operates on a more flexible, ad hoc basis that is better suited to the environments of online communication.

At any rate, a more deliberative, participatory form of journalism is highly compatible with the Gansian call for multiperspectivity in journalistic coverage, of course. At a time when agency reports, the statements of officials, and research reports are increasingly publicly available by default, such journalism works by compiling these sources into news dossiers that stimulate public debate, rather than into supposedly definitive reports of fact which stifle it. In this framework, the all-too-often institutionalized disdain of journalists for their readers and viewers has no place—"the journalist does not work in 'splendid isolation,' partly because of the sheer abundance of information and the fact that publics are perfectly capable of accessing and providing news and information for/by themselves. Institutional players (profit, governmental, non-profit, activist) are increasingly geared towards addressing their constituencies directly instead of using the news media as a go-between" (Bardoel and Deuze 2001, 98).

No longer a conduit for the messages of these players, journalism's role, then, becomes the contextualization of the content of such direct addresses. The journalists' service to the public is now no more the production of content in the form of news reports itself but the provision of the value-added service of acting as a guide through what is already available material—a gatekeeper of information no longer, the journalist becomes a gatewatcher (Bruns 2005), but this role can be played by citizen journalists as well as by members of the traditional journalism industry. Further, beyond the gatewatching process itself, journalists can engage as knowledgeable but no longer specifically privileged participants in the discussion and debate of public issues that must necessarily follow from the publication of the initial source materials, and their contextualization through (citizen-) journalistic processes.

At the same time, it should be noted that the apparent rise of "expert" punditry, especially in broadcast news coverage, is also an outcome of this shift. Such pundits

are similarly positioned as knowledgeable participants in a public debate, but, contrary to the open engagement in citizen journalism environments, the limitations of the broadcast medium make it largely impossible for a truly *public* debate to take place and for the “users” of television to respond in kind and on equal footing with the talking heads of the “experts.” Indeed, the standard pundits of broadcast and print news are often chosen not so much for their insightful views but instead for representing opposed party-political positions and thus providing what is considered by producers to be “hard-hitting,” “confrontational,” and “entertaining” television, radio, or print content. However, they may ultimately serve to polarize rather than promote public debate—or, as satirist Jon Stewart unequivocally put it to the hosts of “left versus right” CNN talk show *Crossfire*, “you’re hurting America” (Stewart 2004). Television’s use of pundits to embody differing political opinions and serve as representatives for a society-wide public dialogue would be legitimate if such pundits did indeed accurately represent major groups in society, but, in reality, the personalities chosen are more often selected for their predictable or, in fact, predictably stereotypical, performances than for their ability to show a nuanced deliberative engagement with opposing views.

By contrast, the best citizen journalism aims to construct a “deliberative situation [where] expert knowledge has no privileged position. All the participants are experts in the ways in which the common problem touches their everyday lives. Thus, opinions and knowledge expressed in deliberation articulate the experiences of the participants” (Heikkilä and Kunelius 2002, n. pag.). In other words, in this environment, exponents of the news industry have no competitive, brand advantage (one of the reasons why they tend to shy away from such fully open engagement with their audiences). Worse yet, the highly controversial presenters, pundits, and op-ed writers of traditional journalism (from Bill O’Reilly in the United States to Andrew Bolt in Australia) do indeed often have a particularly poor track record of participation as equals in a public debate: much of their work depends on the context of a pulpit-style delivery that allows no direct response from those it addresses. As Kovach and Rosenstiel describe it,

The press has [helped] create a new class of activist pundits: loosely credentialled personalities who often thrive on being provocateurs. These people are treated as authorities, but they actually are neither news sources nor journalists. They lack the expertise to offer informal analysis. They also have no responsibility for impartiality or even accuracy. . . . The argument culture may be undermining the reporting culture, and news organisations are helping encourage the process as they increase the range of programming and material they produce. (Kovach and Rosenstiel 1999, 21–22)

Against this, citizen journalism sites offer the potential and the place for a more open, multiperspectival, democratic debate; this is further augmented by the distributed, decentralized discussions of the blogosphere. Traditional journalism cannot

afford to ignore this space for long, as even Rupert Murdoch has noted, unless it wants its conflict-based, dyadic narratives to be seen as increasingly old-fashioned and out of step with public perception. (At the same time, it is important to realize that citizen journalism is not a zone entirely free of power structures, either; opinion leaders and key debaters emerge here, too. Additionally, the relative disempowerment of traditional experts in citizen journalism environments may not be entirely desirable. However, citizen journalism offers the potential at least for a partial reshaping of the traditional positions of power in discursive engagement: discursive power is allocated here mainly according to the individual merit of participants' contributions, rather than based simply on their institutional affiliations.)

### Futures for Tactical Media

Dialogic and deliberative engagement with news and current events presents a clear and important opportunity for off-mainstream media forms to move beyond the tactical moment and develop longer-term strategies for a post-Gaussian mediasphere. As Rushkoff puts it, "While it may not provide us with a template for sure-fire business and marketing solutions, the rise of interactive media does provide us with the beginnings of new metaphors for cooperation, new faith in the power of networked activity and new evidence of our ability to participate actively in the authorship of our collective destiny" (Rushkoff 2003, 18). Nonetheless, the playing field remains markedly uneven, and opposition from the journalism industry establishment is unlikely to diminish soon. Further, as Meikle points out, few citizen journalism activities "are effective without the eventual participation of the older media" (Meikle 2002, 5).

In order to move beyond a second-tier, tactical existence, citizen journalism can choose from a variety of strategic options. On the one hand, it can vigorously pursue a gatecrashing approach: reformatting its stories for easier pickup by the mainstream journalism industry and, thus, taking on the industry on its own terms. With this approach, "one way to measure the success of many of the projects . . . is to ask how effectively they can use the Net to force their cause onto the agenda of the mainstream media" (Meikle 2002, 8). However, this also risks the loss of a distinct identity and loses the gains possible through a more debate-driven, deliberative model of news coverage. The notable stagnation of *Wikinews*, nominally a citizen journalism project, but one that has all but outlawed the *discussion* of news and current events in favor of its dogged pursuit of the mythical journalistic ideal (or mirage) of objectivity, sounds a clear warning here (see Bruns 2006b). By contrast, citizen news sites that *are* successful at the mainstream journalism industry's game may be just as likely to be swallowed up by it (future developments surrounding *OhmyNews* will require close scrutiny in this context): sites that produce quality, traditional-style journalistic

content while using citizen volunteers as authors and editors must no doubt make very attractive takeover targets for Murdoch's NewsCorp and its competitors.

A second strategy could focus on building close ties with the key news aggregators such as *Google News* and *Technorati*—the conduits for emerging newssharing networks. However, their mostly automated approach, and their basis on standard journalistic story formats, could again push citizen news toward a further reduction to such formats, again losing the benefits of debate and deliberation; *Google News* is an effective tool for discovering the latest news headlines from around the world but provides little indication of where the most insightful and engaging discussions and evaluations of the meanings and implications of news events might be found. Additionally, in such aggregated environments, it is as hard for citizen journalism sites to develop brand awareness and keep control of their content as it is for the outlets of the mainstream journalism industry.

Instead, then, perhaps the most promising strategy is to remain true to those aspects of their operations that set the best exponents of citizen journalism and tactical media apart from the journalism industry. As we have seen, industrial journalism produces tightly filtered statements of "fact" that are claimed to be objective and complete and command acceptance rather than encouraging critical examination. Against this, citizen journalism must highlight the need to interpret, discuss, and debate stories, and therefore position news as inherently subjective and incomplete. Industrial journalism aims to reduce its stories to what are believed to be the core elements and conflicts, where citizen journalism should remain mindful of the wider contexts within which any one news story must be placed. Therefore, one of the core challenges for citizen journalism "is to develop ways of telling stories which are issues-focussed, without replicating the conflict-based narrative structures of the established media" (Meikle 2002, 99)—stories which instead provide the basis for debate, discussion, and deliberation. Such projects can be pursued in partnership with progressive members of the industry, blending the best of traditional journalism (for example, skills in story writing and investigative reporting) with the gains made through citizen journalism's more participatory approaches; as Lasica describes it for news blogging, "instead of looking at blogging and traditional journalism as rivals for readers' eyeballs, we should recognize that we're entering an era in which they complement each other, intersect with each other, play off one another. The transparency of blogging has contributed to news organizations becoming a bit more accessible and interactive, although newsrooms still have a long, long way to go." (Lasica 2003a, 73) An *OhmyNews*-style pro-am approach provides one possible pathway into the future for such intersections, then. As Bowman and Willis put it, "If journalism is indeed about informing the community and lifting up our fellow citizens, we need to evolve. We need to tell better stories and, while doing so, we need to engage the world" (Bowman and Willis 2003, 60).

### Conclusion: The South Korean Joschka Fischer of Journalism?

*OhmyNews* is certainly not the only interesting model for future post-tactical citizen media, and, certainly, it is not without problems of its own. However, it represents an iconic example for the possibilities of citizen journalism. Writing in 2003, Bowman and Willis observed that “with the help of more than 26,000 registered citizen journalists, this collaborative online newspaper has emerged as a direct challenge to established media outlets in just four years” (2003, 7), and it has since spawned Japanese and English-language subsidiaries. Indeed, “‘OhmyNews is as influential as any newspaper,’ a South Korean diplomat told the paper [*The Guardian*, in 2003]. ‘No policy maker can afford to ignore it. South Korea is changing in ways that we cannot believe ourselves.’” (Kahney 2003, n. pag.).

At least in the South Korean context, *OhmyNews* can be seen as an example of tactical media moving beyond the temporary tactical moment, adopting longer-term strategies, and becoming “respectable”. While “calling itself a ‘news guerilla organization’—and adopting the motto, ‘Every Citizen is a Reporter’” (Kahney 2003, n. pag.)—it is now nonetheless a major and established news outlet in the country and can therefore no longer be considered “tactical” in any traditional sense of the word; in the South Korean mediascape, it has claimed a space of its own as a basis for its operations. Its success lends credence to Rushkoff’s assertion that “we are heading not towards a toppling of the democratic, parliamentary or legislative processes, but towards their reinvention in a new, participatory context. In a sense, the people are becoming a new breed of wonk [*sic*], capable of engaging with government and power structures in an entirely new fashion” (2003, 63–64)—and it is perhaps no surprise that this phenomenon has emerged from one of the most wired nations on earth.

In a journalism context, then, the site’s founder, Mr. Oh, could be described as a South Korean equivalent of Greens leader Joschka Fischer, from a number of perspectives. On the one hand, he has blazed a trail beyond a merely tactical response to the political and journalistic establishment in his country, moving well past a temporary, guerrilla-style engagement and toward positioning his model as a highly credible and visible alternative option for the long term. On the other hand, however, as a veteran journalist himself, Oh also showed a pathway away from the oppressive environment of a highly conservative South Korean news industry and toward the more deliberative citizen journalism model espoused by *OhmyNews*. Where Fischer made the German Greens movement and party acceptable, respectable, and, ultimately, electable into government for a very wide cross-section of society, so Oh has turned citizen journalism in South Korea into a form of news that a large part of the population is ready to take seriously, trust, and, most important, is willing to participate.

Much as has been the case for Greens parties throughout the Western world as they have come to terms with their newfound place in the political process since the 1980s, what happens next for *OhmyNews* (and for other examples of post-tactical citizen journalism) will be crucial. Will *OhmyNews*' citizen journalism fundamentally affect and alter the journalistic traditions of the South Korean mediasphere—has it successfully infiltrated its target, able now to change the system from within? Or will it suffer subsumption into the day-to-day news cycle, its differences from the journalistic mainstream gradually worn down until it is little different from its existing competitors? Analogies for both processes can be found in the recent political histories of the tacticians-turned-strategists of the Greens movement and in other domains beyond this. On the one hand, *OhmyNews*' enduring success could continue to show that the processes of mainstream Korean journalism are no longer compatible with life in one of the world's most wired nations; much as the Greens helped highlight the shortcomings of the political establishment of their time and, thus, became a factor in its rejuvenation, *OhmyNews* could position itself as a more appropriate model for Korean journalism in the twenty-first century. On the other hand, however, the greater contact with the older models that is also a result of such success could also serve to influence *OhmyNews* in turn: as it develops, *OhmyNews* may be forced to work more directly to the continuing beat of the traditional journalism industry (returning, say, to more conflict-based narratives in order to make its content more compatible with that of other news outlets); it may find that it has to reach compromises just as the political arm of the Greens movement had to compromise in order to operate within existing parliamentary environments, and some of these compromises may be difficult to accommodate.

As regards *OhmyNews*, and the citizen journalism movement overall, it is as yet too early to make any definitive judgments on how this process of negotiation with the older models of journalism will play out, and it is thus all the more important to keep track of developments here. It is, however, appropriate to note that citizen journalism provides us with what Rushkoff describes as “an opportunity for renaissance: a moment when we have the ability to step out of the story altogether. Renaissances are historical instances of widespread recontextualisation. People . . . have the ability to reframe their reality. Renaissance literally means ‘rebirth.’ It is the rebirth of old ideas in a new context. A renaissance is a dimensional leap, when our perspective shifts so dramatically that our understanding of the oldest, most fundamental elements of existence changes. The stories we have been using no longer work” (Rushkoff 2003, 32–33).

At the same time, what the renaissance image points to is also that this is a process that is unlikely to have an end point and, indeed, may be cyclical instead: if and when citizen journalism assumes its new role in a posttactical, post-Gaussian mediasphere,

we may soon thereafter see the emergence of a new generation of tactical media activists who in turn will be in opposition to both industrial *and* citizen journalism, will develop their own journalistic models, and will subsequently themselves undergo a further posttactical transformation.

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