

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS WITH THE SHORENSTEIN CENTER
EXPLORING: THE MEDIA AND POLITICS FRONTIER

UNEDITED TRANSCRIPT

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MR. JONES: Again, if you would just stay close to home, we're going to set up and continue. If I could ask you to resume your seats. You've heard from some very impressive people already today and you've heard some talk about incredibly powerful forces, but I think that you should know that probably the one individual who has been more responsible for costing the American economy more money than any other human being in the history of the world is Dan Okrent. A few years ago he went to a restaurant in New York called La Rotisserie Francois -- am I correct? Francaise, sorry. And on that day created what was called Rotisserie Baseball, which has turned into fantasy sports.

And the idea that they came up with was not just the idea of fantasy sports, but the management of fantasy sports teams, which I would say how many man hours do you estimate has been lost at managing fantasy sports on work time, Dan, would you just--

MR. OKRENT: Well, if I had a penny for each one, zillions. The new statistical abstract of the U.S. said that more people play that than play chess now.

MR. JONES: Well, among his many achievements. Dan, as I know, as all of you know, is the first Public Editor of *The New York Times*, a terrific writer. His book,

Prohibition, on Prohibition has just been re-published in a way that sort of got a second life in the event. He came from a magazine background to *The New York Times* having never worked at a newspaper before, but made the first public editorship one that has never been matched. And did something for that institution that is enduringly important.

I'm very glad to say that he then came to the Shorenstein Center and has been a great friend of the Shorenstein Center's and all of us up here for all the years since. Welcome and when I talked to Dan about doing this, I said who would you like to interview. There is no question who he wanted to interview, Adam Moss.

MR. OKRENT: Thank you, Alex. And thank you all for staying here for the last event of the day. There's not a great place to be in the program but we'll take it. I met Adam Moss in the early '80's. What year did you get--

MR. MOSS: '82.

MR. OKRENT: When he was around 11 years old and was a fact checker there.

MR. MOSS: You know what, it's already wrong.

MR. OKRENT: He was 12.

MR. MOSS: Wasn't a fact checker.

MR. OKRENT: He was a junior guy, very, very junior. And I needed a fact checker. And incredibly impressive. This guy just had magazines kind of coursing through his blood. And I asked a colleague who knew him well. I was a columnist for the magazine at that time and just was occasionally in the office. Tell me about this kid Moss. And they said, well, we don't know whether anybody has gone from being a junior editor to being editor-in-chief overnight but he'll be the one to do it. And though he didn't do it at *Esquire* he did rise very rapidly and then started his own magazine in the late '80's called *Seven Days*, those of us who lived in New York in the late '80's and early '90's know what a great magazine that was. Like many great magazines it therefore went out of business. And Adam went to *The Times*, first as editorial director and then as the Chief Editor of *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*.

And I believe that during Adam's tenure at the magazine he did that amazing thing, which is he actually made me look forward to reading *The New York Times* Sunday Magazine. He was in that job and then advanced to being the assistant managing editor for features for the whole newspaper and then left for *The New York Magazine* where he is the editor-in-chief today and has been for seven years. And I think the extraordinary accomplishment, Adam's accomplishment and that of his colleagues at *New York Magazine* is that they took the most tired, the most exhausted and dessicated formula in magazine publishing of the city and regional magazine and they invented something utterly new. I think it's a truly great magazine. Those of you who don't read it ought to, those of you who used to read it and gave up on it ought to pick it up again.

The National Magazine Awards of the magazine business, equivalent of the Pulitzers have belonged to *New York Magazine* since Adam became editor, including winning five in one year, which had never been done before and will never be done again until Adam does it again. So, therefore, now it gets harder. So thanks for coming, Adam. One of the things, what I would like to talk about first is the very bizarre fact, given magazine economics, that *New York Magazine* seems to be doing more and more political coverage, serious political coverage, almost more and more with each issue, hiring some very well known people to do it. And the surprising thing for those who are not familiar with the magazine business is that there is nothing that sells worse in magazines. In general interest magazines politics is poison. At *People Magazine*, believe it or not, in the 1970's people would actually have cabinet secretaries on the cover ever so often, senators.

There was a formula that said television sells better than music. Music sells better than movies. Movies sell better than sports and everything sells better than politics. And you're adding politics to your magazine. How is that happening?

MR. MOSS: Well, sort of accidentally. It's not that there is any sort of great strategic plan to it, although part of what happened is that we, *New York Magazine* has always had politics in its formula. It was improbable. It was a city magazine but Clay

Felker who started the magazine just really was interested in national politics and also felt that given the fact that the real subject of New York was what New Yorkers thought about, as opposed to the city itself. They were deeply invested in the political life of the country.

So Richard Reeves and Gloria Steinem who used to actually be a great political reporter established this franchise. So there is this thing called The National Interest. It was a column and when I got there, shortly after I got there, I was talking to John Heilemann who had been a writer, mostly on technology, a little bit on politics and asked him if he wanted to do this. And he started to cover politics regularly and he was very popular. And his coverage of the 2008 campaign, which later became with Mark Halperin the book *Game Change*, just some amazing journalism. And started to, you know, when we put a political figure on the cover it actually did start to work for us.

Now, a lot of this was that that election was -- it was a pop election in a lot of ways. And when you would alternate covers on Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, those covers would sell. And those covers sold really, really well. And John was good and he told stories, which is I think the main thing that people started to read it for. It wasn't political analysis, per se, it was more sort of opening the curtain and showing you what was actually going on in the room, which actually had been the theme of the magazine entirely anyway, whether you were looking at restaurants or looking at business or looking in any other place that has a door.

So we just sort of opportunistically followed John. Obama sold fantastically, I mean, we're talking in business terms. That's not actually totally how we saw this, but Obama did sell incredibly well every time we put him on the cover. Hillary sold incredibly well every time we put her on the cover. Sarah Palin sold incredibly well every time we put her on the cover. McCain, not so much.

(Laughter)

MR. MOSS: But that sort of established for us a franchise. The fact that his book was such a phenomenon didn't hurt. The fact that then he started to sort of inspire

other feature writers at the magazine, Joe Hagan and Gabe Sherman, to do much the same thing until the magazine's coverage of politics began to be described actually as game change style political reporting, which really meant politics as narrative, politics and story telling. And that was just very successful franchise for us. And that was how we did it for a while.

MR. OKRENT: And then Frank Rich.

MR. MOSS: And then Frank Rich.

MR. OKRENT: So talk a about Frank Rich.

MR. MOSS: Another kind of accident. You know, Frank is someone who I have known for a long time. I published him at *Esquire*. We worked together off and on at *The New York Times*. He was a staff writer for the magazine for a little bit. And then when I was promoted into the sort of ridiculous job overseeing stuff, he and I did a version of what culture coverage ought to be at the paper and presented it to Bill Keller and Joel Abramson at the time and Frank called me up. He was ready to do something else, other than *The New York Times* and wanted my advice on where he should go next. And he had a couple of places he was thinking of going next and I said, well, why don't you come here. And it hadn't occurred to him at all, but we started to talk about.

I made a proposal to him of a certain kind of coverage, which would be a monthly essay and sort of weekly chats online. And he decided to come. And so he brought Frank Richness to the table, which was -- yeah, go.

MR. OKRENT: Let me get into the Frank Richness. And I'm dwelling on the business aspect only because the anomaly of and I think it applies in broadcast as well. Politics is not something that is usually commercially successful. And it has been for you and I had assumed when you brought Frank over that, well, Frank, any columnist in America who writes about politics has the following, it's Frank Rich and he would bring his readers over, but I remember you telling me and in the conversation we had, you know, about two months after Frank was there that it really had an effect on advertising.

MR. MOSS: Well, it did in a couple of different ways. First of all, Frank, I hate to use this word, but he is a brand. And what that means in journalistic terms is that he has this -- he does have a bunch of readers who will follow him anywhere. And he has a reputation. He was sort of a perfect fit for *New York Magazine* for the sort of political mindset that sort of, if you want to reduce it to sort of upper west side, sort of liberally mindset, he was the perfect -- it was perfect casting in a sense. But he also had a constituency of people who control ad dollars. And people who wanted to be where Frank was, they actually believed the proposition, the old proposition in journalism that when you have someone who brings readers over, when you have readers' eyes, you can actually also sell ads to them.

So there was that category of advertising that we got. That was like people, like the *Book of Mormon*, you know, was trying to advertise, places to advertise in the magazine and they thought that Frank's readership would be a perfect *Book of Mormon* theater going public and so, bam, MSNBC. So some of that, some of the sort of natural obvious advertising that would come with Frank. But the other thing that happened is that the magazine, you know, our proposition has been, since I've gotten there and it has been a struggle over other iterations of the magazine too is to make the case that though our name is *New York*, in fact, we are a national magazine.

And in many ways our circulation tells that story and in other ways the circulation needs to be spun a little bit. But we are a magazine of national influence. And you can talk yourself blue in the face trying to, you know, tell a car company that that's the case. And they just don't believe it, because it just says New York on the cover. Bring Frank over and it's like, whoa, Frank Rich, he is a big cahuna and so they started to see us as a national magazine, which opened up a whole category of national kinds of advertising.

MR. OKRENT: I'll move away from the commercial aspect now. So your most recent hire that I am aware of was Jonathan Chait from *The New Republic*.

MR. MOSS: Right.

MR. OKRENT: And I guess this isn't necessarily so about Heilemann, but it seems to me in the pages of your magazine and certainly in the attitudes presented by both Rich and Chait, you used the term upper west side. There is an assumption that I perceive in the magazine that you have a readership of basically good, solid, left of center, solid liberal maybe, some further to the left, but it's a small community in a large forum. Or put it another way, unlike the *National Review* or *The Nation* with their ideological communities, you have found a community and then you realize it's as if you realize there is a common world view that you are expressing. That it's less -- your not presenting a spectrum of political coverage, you're nailing a particular portion of your readers.

MR. MOSS: Which is also more or less accidental. I mean, everything that we do in the magazine is for a certain kind of reader, not every kind of reader. And we have an idea of who the reader is among the readers' attributes is a certain range of political opinions. That doesn't mean we don't want to challenge those political opinions. We like to do that often. But certainly our assumption is that we're talking to a certain kind of person. And though we did not mean to become a partisan political magazine we have kind of accidentally become that way, largely because of the power of prose, the power of journalism, the power of analysis. Frank, who writes from an extremely powerful polemical point of view, he changes the magazine just by the virtue of him being there. We've just hired -- as you said, we've just hired Jonathan Chait who is just an amazingly smart, wonderful analyst. I mean just political analyst whose politics are slightly I think more centered than Frank's, but certainly -- I mean Frank has moved I think a little bit to the left--

MR. OKRENT: When I was with *The Times* I claimed that I was kind of in the center. I said, yeah, the odd one in the middle of Broadway.

(Laughter)

MR. MOSS: Well, I mean he's moved a little more Krugman like, I think, and away from the sort of the place that he was when he started. That has nothing to do with him

coming from *The Times* to us. It has to do with his own response to this political climate that we're in. But the thing, just to get back to business, because you're I guess interested in that is that -- so Jon Chait's job is to write daily on our site, which is now, I mean, just in terms of the magazine company that we have, our digital side is actually quite a bit bigger an audience certainly than our print side. And is in a lot of ways the future of what we're doing. We're really trying to build a major digital journalistic enterprise.

So Jon Chait is on every day, three times a day. His coming has exploded the readership of the site. And his stuff, which is, you know, it's hard core political analysis. The stuff that, you know, yeah, if you're *People Magazine* would not work for you. Here it is working incredibly well for us. And what's more it has -- and you can measure that. That's the amazing thing about the digital community. In print you make guesses all the time about what people actually want. Online, for better and for worse, you can count those. You can count response. So when Jon Chait writes something, bam, readership soars. And that actually has an economic benefit for us as well.

The other thing that it has done though is we have a fairly active commenting community who are not necessarily in all cases the kind of people that you want talking about your material. A lot of them are, you know, it's been a less than high minded discourse, let's just say. Shocking. But Jon has actually changed the discourse all across the site. It has suddenly in the last three weeks the amount of commenting, the amount of community and the amount of engagement. And frankly, I mean, this is just my own subjective, there is no way to subject this to any kind of metric, but you just look at it and the conversation is smarter. So it's having an effect all over the place.

MR. OKRENT: So what's coming up then? You have something?

MR. MOSS: Yeah. So we have now found ourselves and, again, this is like completely opportunistic. We hired Heilemann, we hired Frank, and then Jon Chait became available and I was just a huge Jon Chait fan and we went after him when he was kind of in play. And then we suddenly woke up about a month ago and realized that

we had these three powerhouse talents writing about politics for us. And we published them in different intervals. And on the site itself we have these sort of younger writers, Dan Amira and this other woman named Maureen Malone writing about politics who also, there stuff was starting to accumulate a kind of volume of readership that was really exciting. But our site itself is such a horizontal mix of stuff, because we have a fashion site as part of this. We have a food site, we have an entertainment site. That we were afraid that people were not really general interest readers anymore and particularly not online.

And that we were creating a tremendous identity confusion in having this hard core political stuff along with--

MR. OKRENT: Restaurants.

MR. MOSS: Or even worse, like red carpet party pictures. So we are creating our own political site which will do basically one year from the '12 elections.

MR. OKRENT: Year before.

MR. MOSS: Yeah, sort of November, whatever that date is, six, seven.

MR. OKRENT: So when does the print magazine stop and it become strictly a digital enterprise.

MR. MOSS: Not while I'm editor I hope. We thought after the financial crisis, which hit us pretty hard like it hit everyone pretty hard that, you know, print was not going to survive this. We lost, just got socked in the stomach. We lost so much print business, print advertising business. But what was happening was that the online business, which got hurt a little bit, was still actually doing pretty well. So we thought, all right, well, okay, we're adjusting. We're going to become a digital company. The magazine may not last very long.

But what happened is as the recession eased up a little bit is that all this business started to flow back into the magazine and actually we did all these sort of tricks. We started to sell the magazine for a lot more money as people -- they used to be able to pay really pittance for it and now it actually costs something. And we didn't lose any

circulation. In fact, our circulation is very strong. We're having the best ad year since right before the recession. So I actually, you know, I can't speak for all print, but I think the print magazine is going to last for a little while.

MR. OKRENT: Well, a little while, I grant you. But eventually, I think you would agree that we're moving toward the post-print era.

MR. MOSS: The logic is that, yes.

MR. OKRENT: I'm just wondering whether we get there or not, what's the distinction in the kind of -- in journalism that you do online relative to journalism that you do in print. Or is there no distinction?

MR. MOSS: Well, sure there is. I mean, the stuff that you do originally, I mean, our collective websites, we're putting material up about every six minutes and we're writing overnight and we're writing on the weekends and we are functioning much more like a newspaper in that sense. And 90 percent of our readership online is for original web content. That stuff is fast. It's shorter. It tends to be more of a commentary type thing. It's a kind of aggregation. It's like aggregation plus. We hope to add something as we move information around. But it's doing a lot of collating the interesting stuff that is going on all over the place.

And we would like to be doing more, you know, eventually we will be doing more original reporting on the web, although there is all sorts of resource questions about it if you have to produce so much content because the thing is so hungry. You can't liberate someone from their blogging seat in order to do that.

MR. OKRENT: Doesn't that lead to commentary overwhelming reporting?

MR. MOSS: Yes, it does. So that in some ways a lot of what we're doing online is commentary. That's our business. However the other thing I was going to say is that when we do -- we now publish the magazine essentially, we publish it for the magazine readers but we also publish it for the digital readers so that the magazine stuff, which is much more obviously reported and deeper and people can spend up to six months writing an article, that stuff, when we put it online is the most popular stuff we do. And

the readership is huge for it. So that when we used to be publishing if, you know, if you wrote an article for the magazine your audience was the 400,000 print readers that we have. Now you write an article for the magazine your audience is 10 million people.

MR. OKRENT: Potential audience.

MR. MOSS: Your potential audience, right. That's true. Not you, Dan.

MR. OKRENT: Thanks. So it's available, but are they reading it?

MR. MOSS: Yeah. I mean not all 10 million of them.

MR. OKRENT: So long form--

MR. MOSS: Long form is working. Yeah, it's working. People are -- I don't know that they are actually reading it in front of a screen. People read in all sorts of ways. They save it to Instapaper, they print it out. But the stuff has high readership. It's popular content.

MR. OKRENT: So you'll be hiring more political people?

MR. MOSS: I think we're okay politically for the moment. But one of the, as I said, though it was by accident, we are now moving into a period where, I mean, I feel as a journalist it would be both irresponsible and kind of no fun not to be covering this political moment because it's just so interesting and I think important. And it's kind of a bonus that it also happens to be good business for us. But I don't want it to completely overwhelm the rest of what we do. We have just invested a tremendous amount of resource. We have an amazing amount of talent doing cultural reporting. We have a site called Vulture, which is part of our overall site, which is amazingly good entertainment site.

And we have a fashion site, which is good and we're growing that too, so it's not like we're becoming an all politics all the time.

MR. OKRENT: I'm going to steal one of my last questions from the first question that we began the day with when Ken Auletta asked Vivek Kundra, I believe it was at the beginning, what would you do if you were the editor of the *Boston Globe*? I'm going to move it to New York. You get a phone call tomorrow and say you have to take over *The*

Times, there is no one else who can do it. Jill acknowledges it herself, so she's handing you the key. So can you -- anything that you have learned doing this, you know, with a very different audience in many ways but similar in some ways, could it be applied to a major metropolitan paper or specifically that major metropolitan paper or major national paper.

MR. MOSS: I feel like *The Times* is kind of doing it. I mean, really, a lot of what we have done at *New York* is actually borrowed from *The New York Times*, is trying to use the web. One of the great thing, one of the amazing things about *The New York Times* is that in such a calcified print culture, when they started to do content on the web they just somehow changed their culture. They were liberated. They did all sort of, you know, Dave Carr, is he still here? You know, he did wacko stuff that would just never, this carpetbagger business that would just never ever be allowed in the print part of the paper.

They started to adapt to the kind of readership that you have in this other medium, while not -- I think they did that very successfully while not losing the basic mission objectives of *The New York Times* and not losing *The New York Times'* audience. So I would hate that job.

MR. OKRENT: I won't give it to you then.

MR. MOSS: But I think *The Times* does a pretty good -- I think in that sense. I mean, if you're asking me, I'm not sure entirely the sense you are asking.

MR. OKRENT: Let me move it away from that. To me, one of the distinctions and maybe you could describe it as a shortcoming of your political coverage, you cover politics but you don't cover government that much. *The Times* feels an obligation to have somebody cover the Justice Department, covering the Defense Department. Are you shrinking from covering government? Do you think your readers aren't interested? You don't have the resources for it, or do you think it doesn't make any difference?

MR. MOSS: Well, I mean, you have to make choices. And when I say that we're becoming more newspaper like, you know, I say that with one gigantic caveat, which is

that we can be selective, highly selective in what we cover. Nobody feels, you know, we don't have that public trust burden of covering everything. So we're very happy to have *The New York Times* cover governmental process. Although I have to say that Jon Chait, for instance, does some of that stuff. And we are kind of testing our readers to see how much they want. And if suddenly we found that people are absolutely fascinated with parliamentary budget procedure, you know, we could start a little blog on that.

MR. OKRENT: I think the European community is the subject of--

MR. MOSS: Well, it is actually -- that's an interesting thing to say, which is that like Europe is huge obviously and has so much impact on all the things that we write about and yet, we're not covering the euro.

MR. OKRENT: Well, as a magazine you have the freedom to not have to do anything, right?

MR. MOSS: Really, that's true. Except cover New York restaurants. You have to do that.

MR. OKRENT: If you don't have New York restaurants you're in big trouble.

(Laughter)

MR. MOSS: People are going to be pissed off.

MR. OKRENT: So there's the freedom of not having an obligation, but would you sometimes think that maybe, as you move more and more in this direction, that you begin to develop an obligation. In other words, an audience that begins to expect you to be a serious important source on politics should lead you into, you know, maybe we need to if not back off the restaurants, we can back off a few other things and take on the civic responsibility that publications have.

MR. MOSS: Yeah, I mean, I think that that's possible. I think that's a long ways away. And especially as you move digitally people don't actually even see you, I mean, this is hardly a secret, but most of the ways people come to your content is not through your front door. They are not looking at *New York Magazine* content. They are looking at a piece of content that *New York Magazine* happens to be publishing. So they're

taking that filleted content anyway. They are finding it through a link, they are finding it through a conversation that someone else is having about it. We have decent readership of our home page. But like most digital publications, most of the readers, they chase a single story or several. And then when you're there you try to get them interested in the other stuff. But often that's not even what they want.

MR. OKRENT: That was the next question. If they are coming into these portals that are really defined by subject matter, you are disaggregating the impact of your being *New York Magazine*, of having--

MR. MOSS: Which has been a very hard thing, a very hard thing to get used to as an editor. As a magazine editor in particular, even more than as a newspaper editor, you are -- your job has always been to create an environment, a whole very controlled environment where you want people to be in a certain mood and state of mind. And that's sort of the magic in many ways of the *New Yorker* more than even just the quality of their journalism. It has a certain hum that people have always loved to read. And then you are in the digital wild west and you just have to lose, you lose a sense of brand. I mean, brand is like, okay, you're doing that because it helps you organize how you -- what kind of journalism you do. But in terms of how readers are coming to you, it's every piece for itself.

MR. OKRENT: Can you get to the place where you don't care? That's fine, so long as they are reading it?

MR. MOSS: I'm almost there. I mean, it's been a lot of years. You know, yeah.

MR. OKRENT: What do you ask of your people in terms of doing things? Magazine writers, do they have to do stuff online as well? If you ask them to tweet, you ask them to do--

MR. MOSS: We're pretty bad at asking. And they are pretty temperamental about saying yes.

(Laughter)

MR. OKRENT: Okay, well, you're bad at asking. I'll turn it to someone else to do that. We've run through the first half of this and ready to take questions if anybody has them.

MR. JONES: Thanks, Dan.

MR. OKRENT: I had a feeling you would have one.

MR. JONES: I do actually. When you introduced Adam you talked about him taking this sort of the model of the *City Magazine* and turning it into something extraordinary. And what he really seems to be moving toward now is a version of what you would think *Time* and *Newsweek* might be or might have become. Adam, when you look and when you take Dan's question about what would you do and you look at *Newsweek* and you look at *Time Magazine*, how do you see those models? Are there lessons that *New York* has now learned that should have applied, could apply still to them? Is *Newsweek* still a viable creature now that it's merged with AOL?

MR. MOSS: Not AOL, but the *The Daily Beast*, but yeah. I don't know whether *Newsweek* is viable over time. Tina Brown is trying various things. One thing she absolutely seems to be trying is to put a strong women's focus on it and maybe as she plays that out that will work. It doesn't try to be a conventional news magazine, but a magazine that has a more sectorized readership. *Time Magazine* is actually doing really well right now, bizarrely, when people have been predicting its demise for years and years and years. And they sort of see themselves the same at *The New York Times* sees itself and, you know, as a sort of more straightforward version of its old self and doing a very active and in *Times* case, I think, also a very good job online.

So we learn from them. We're much more idiosyncratic than they are, than either of them. We sort of see our mandate because what readers expect of us is having more fun. We are, as much as we see the sort of public trust part of what we do as important, we're also trying to give readers pleasure. Intellectual pleasure, we hope, and other kinds of pleasure also. But you should have a good time reading *New York* and its

attendant parts. It's not homework. And so maybe in a sense we see ourselves a little bit differently.

MR. OKRENT: Aren't you also lucky that your circulation, you only need to have half a million circulation. You don't need to make three million people happy.

MR. MOSS: That is absolutely true. And the core is New York, New York City and the New York City sensibility, which is a very happy place.

MR. OKRENT: What part of the readership is New York?

MR. MOSS: In the magazine? In print it is one-third New York City Proper, one-third the outlying areas and one third national. Online it's exactly the opposite.

MR. OKRENT: Identify yourself, please.

FROM THE FLOOR: Hi, I'm Diane McWhorter. I'm a journalist. I'm over at the Radcliffe Institute. I may be the only person here who wrote for Seven Days.

MR. MOSS: I remember.

FROM THE FLOOR: Anyway, Adam, I wanted to know if you would comment on the effect that the move to digital has had on the quality of writing and whether this is something that you're, I mean, as a reader, I notice a really decline in the ability to sustain an argument. There's this remove to the aperçu and just kind of flabby, flatulent writing generally, even in shorter pieces. So I just wondered whether you run into that and whether it's hard for you to find sort of old fashioned magazine writers who can really keep up the quality.

MR. MOSS: Well, I think what's happened is that there is just all kinds of writing that plays out. And there are good and bad versions of each. There are good web writers and there are bad web writers. There's a lot of people who can do kind of amazing things in 400 words or 800 words. I mean everything is not micro, but things tend to be shorter and people are good and bad at that the same way that op ed columnists at *The New York Times* or elsewhere are good or bad at that, at the 900 word form. In terms of long form magazine writers, sure, it is harder to find good long form magazine writers these days. But I don't blame the web, per se, for that.

I think that there is not a whole mess of stepping stones where you learn to write at an alternative weekly. There are fewer alternative weeklies. And then you move from there to writing for a smaller kind of magazine and you move from there, etcetera. That kind of apprenticeship of writing doesn't really happen. The magazines that are still existing for the most part, I mean, obviously, there's magazines like *The Atlantic* and the *New Yorker* and us, I hope. But a lot of people learn to write at magazines where they essentially doing celebrity profiles or they are writing about, you know, writing confessional stuff, which is fine. It creates a different kind of writing.

MR. OKRENT: Where do you find you new talent?

MR. MOSS: You find it from other magazines. There's a lot of shared writers, I'm afraid to say, among magazines. You sometimes find it from newspapers, although less and less. Our cover story on Monday is written by a person who has never written a long form magazine story before and she's a blogger for Daily Intel, one of the blogs and she is used to writing -- she used to write at Slate, but she's used to writing in 800 word forms and we gave her a 6,000 word subject to take on and she did a great job. So it's not--

MR. OKRENT: We'll be the judge of that.

MR. MOSS: Yeah, all right. I've read it, you haven't.

FROM THE FLOOR: Walter Shapiro, former Shorenstein Fellow. Now at *The New Republic* and someone who worked with Dan Okrent at the *Michigan Daily*, a newspaper before *The New York Times*. This is also the first--

MR. OKRENT: We don't talk the 19th Century.

FROM THE FLOOR: This is also the first time in my life I have ever asked a question inspired by a Twitter feed. But looking at the feed up there I realize, Adam, that your statement, we put up new content on the web every six minutes, has the potential to be famous. Because the way it was just picked up by person after person. So I want you to clarify, is that 240 items a day? Were you talking every six minutes during

the working day? Is this Monday through Friday? Exactly how do you get that number, because it's about to take off.

MR. MOSS: All right. Then I better clarify it fast. It's basically during working hours. It probably starts at that speed at about 8:30 in the morning, ending about 7:00 and then it lightens considerably from 7:00 to 7:00 in the morning, but we still publish at that point, maybe eight or nine things overnight. And the weekend has the same pattern as the overnights. So thank you for asking me.

MR. OKRENT: What kind of attention does it get relative to copy that goes into the magazine? Number of pairs of eyes that see it--

MR. MOSS: On the weekends and nights, or in general? Well, I mean, everything has a different size audience. An individual blog post, if it gets 10,000 readers that's really a successful blog post for us. A magazine article online gets 200,000 or 300,000, sometimes more.

MR. OKRENT: What about the eyeballs that are applied to it before it gets posted? In other words--

MR. MOSS: What's the editing process?

MR. OKRENT: --between the editing process online and in print?

MR. MOSS: The editing process online is zero, pretty much. And a set of eyes looks at it very fast, but basically people are responsible for their own content. Sometimes this stuff gets revised after it's put up, if a mistake has been made. But it's on to the next thing. And if someone is publishing a bunch of crap they won't be allowed to do that again. But we don't stop it before it goes out.

MR. OKRENT: Doesn't that suggest that maybe those of us who are used to that journalism have been obsessing about the wrong things, too many editors, trust your writers to do the work that they do and if they don't do it well, get new writers. I mean, if you feel confident putting your brand, your name on work that doesn't get edited, why not the same for the magazine?

MR. MOSS: Well, two reasons. One is magazine work is more complex. And actually the editor/writer relationship is, you know, turns out to be more important and does actually change. I mean, stuff changes enormously from the first draft to publication. The stuff is -- I'm talking particularly about the long form stuff, you know, a 6,000 word story is really worked on, really a lot. Now are editors necessary? Is that your question? I would say yes. Maybe they're over prized. I'm not sure I would make that argument, but I can hear it. I can see it. I think the, you know, and I have to say that I'm not that comfortable with stuff that goes out without editing, but that's the practical reality is that it's a speed business. And I've gotten used to over time, you know, we don't scrub very much. We publish some stuff that I don't love sometimes. There's a lot of stuff that I do. And a lot of stuff maybe even that would be caught and not published by editors who are being too cautious. Not cautious, but being too kind of conservative about what they think the readers are interested.

MR. OKRENT: You can also destroy what you put up online that you don't like. You can get it offline very quickly, right?

MR. MOSS: No. I mean, you can change stuff. But famously everything online is there forever.

FROM THE FLOOR: I'm Bill Lanouette. I was a Fellow here in 1988. And I have a question about the comparison that is being made here with the *New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* being sort of serious magazines that sometimes have big pieces. What's the role today? I know the *New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* both have a rigorous fact checking process. What is fact checking like at *New York* and might it change if you take on more substantive stuff?

MR. MOSS: Well, we do. We fact check the magazine just as thoroughly as -- just as thoroughly as probably *The Atlantic* and maybe not as the *New Yorker*, but pretty thoroughly. And we don't fact check stuff online, but it gets fact checked in essence by the readers who will correct it very, very fast if you've made a mistake. But an interesting parallel question had to do, you know, at *The New York Times*, I work at *The*

New York Times Magazine. We had a rigorous fact checking procedure. The newspaper doesn't. The newspaper has no fact checking. They rely on reporters to do their own work and there is some minor fact checking that copy editors do. But it's essentially not fact checked. It's a system that has worked pretty well over time.

And Michael Kinsley used to have a famous belief and he put into practice in the places that he edited, that all fact checkers were unnecessary and they just made writers lazy.

MR. OKRENT: There is that wonderful story of Kinsley as he was interviewed by William Shawn at the *New Yorker*, who was interested in hiring him. And they began to talk about fact checking and Shawn said, well, if it's in your magazine, in *The New Republic*, we consider that trustworthy and that that's fact checking. Michael thought, shit, we make this stuff up.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: Nik Gowing. I get the feeling you're feeling quite confident about a sustainable business model emerging at the moment in terms of patterns of readership, how people are accessing your output, when they access it, generationally as well. Or am I being a bit over optimistic or seeing a framework emerging which you are not so confident in? In other words do you think you've now got a framework which will be sustainable through the next year or two and possibly sustainable for longer when it comes to all these variables and imponderables that everyone is debating at the moment?

MR. MOSS: I'll you a year. I think I feel confident about a year. But if you're asking me if I'm confident whether this is sustainable over five years, ten years, I would be nuts to say I would feel confident about that, knowing--

FROM THE FLOOR: But do you think you've identified trends, which are now pretty consistent?

MR. MOSS: There are trends that are working for us right now. There are trends that are still growing. And so I feel we're going in the right direction. But this business is

changing so fast. People's reading habits and consumption of media is changing so fast. The advertising business, which really we are still in the advertising business as a business model question. We don't charge for any, you know, we charge for the magazine, but that's actually a very minor part of our revenue. Essentially we are supported by people who want to advertise to our readers. And I think the advertising business is in even greater upheaval than the journalism business. So I couldn't predict whether that aspect of what we do is sustainable.

FROM THE FLOOR: Prediction is not quite what I was asking. Whether you are feeling increasingly comfortable that a degree of stability is emerging in the patterns.

MR. MOSS: Yeah, I mean, I do feel stable about readership right now. Obviously I feel very nervous about the economy. I'm sure everybody does. If it drops again as it did three years ago that's tough for us. Because it's expensive to do what we do. So reasonably confident.

FROM THE FLOOR: Let me ask one more. I mean, when it comes to this, digital advertising, I work at the BBC and we're getting commercial revenues, significant commercial revenues around the world now from digital platforms as opposed to our license being funded and stuff. And we're seeing a significant change now. I'm not in that side of the business. There's a firewall between the journalism and the commercial side. But there is a clarity of a degree of confidence now among the advertisers that what you see digitally on something like this now does have enormous potential, possibly well beyond the traditional forms of linear advertising.

MR. MOSS: Our digital business is fantastically strong at the moment. There are other kinds of digital businesses that we're just starting to experiment with, iPad kinds of things.

MR. OKRENT: What would happen if we started to charge the digital content, even if you charged very little?

MR. MOSS: We don't know.

MR. OKRENT: Do you talk about it?

MR. MOSS: Oh, yeah. And I think it's--

MR. OKRENT: Are we all waiting to see whether *The Times'* effort is going to work?

MR. MOSS: *Times* and other magazine models. I think everybody is looking at everybody else to see what ultimately people will be willing to pay for. I mean, we're different from other magazines' digital operations in that we have a successful digital advertising business. People want to advertise, so that we actually need the eyeballs. Places like Condé Nast, they were sort of late in getting to the game, so that they're much more comfortable getting people to pay for material online because there is no advertising risk. For us there obviously is. We don't want to lose the momentum of our readership because we can still make money off of them. Also we like them.

MR. JONES: Can I ask one more question of you? You've become -- don't deny it. You've become an iconic figure in the magazine business, you really have. You have been so successful.

MR. MOSS: I do deny it.

MR. JONES: Okay, well, deny it. You deny it too? Okay. But my question to you is this, you are the editor of a weekly magazine, what is your job now? I mean, what do you spend your time, just in a percentage wise doing?

MR. MOSS: Well, a lot of what I do is edit the weekly magazine still. I work with a very talented bunch of editors and writers to figure out what we should publish in the magazine this week, work with the photographers and figure out the cover and all of that stuff. I'm more hands on about that part. Then I oversee the digital part where there are other hugely talented people who actually know a whole mess more than I do about what they are doing. And I listen to them and I try to guide them and direct them and sort of move the thing strategically as opposed to actually edit copy. I read the stuff we publish at the same pace that anyone else does. Usually at night I will sit there and read everything we've published all day. But I will not have seen most of it before.

I worry about personnel, because personnel is huge, particularly online personnel is huge. You're really trusting. You're giving them the keys to the car, they're driving. And so you have to be picking the right people for that. I spend a lot of time worrying about that. I worry about the large strategic questions of how people read and how people are going to read and whether we should, you know, what we exactly should be doing on the tablet and that sort of thing. But like most jobs like this, what do I do? Personnel, management. You know, it's like you dream of having jobs like this for a long time because you think it's all going to be sort of journalistic fun, but actually what is it is that you are in charge of a lot of talented people's happiness. And that's the hard part. And that doesn't change, no matter what.

MR. OKRENT: I think we've got it. Thank you, very much.

MR. JONES: Thank you both.

(Applause)

MR. JONES: And I'm sorry, you are.

(Laughter)

MR. JONES: This has been a great day. And now you are, I don't know, it looks like the weather is not too great, but there are tents in the courtyard of the Kennedy School. There is food and drink to refresh you. There is later, if you wish, at 7:00 a migration up to Harvard Yard for the 375th anniversary of Harvard observance. Tomorrow we will gather at 9:30 for breakfast and at 10:00 o'clock for a resumption of the program. Two more conversations then. I thank you all. I especially thank those of you who are participants. I see David is still over here and maybe there are some others around. This has been a great day, it really has. I think it's been wonderful and I've really enjoyed it myself. I hope you have. Have a good evening and now let's go have a drink.

(Whereupon, at 4:52 p.m., the session was adjourned.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the preceding transcript is an

accurate record based on the recordings of the proceedings

taken before: Alex S. Jones

In the Matter of:

EXPLORING: THE MEDIA AND POLITICS FRONTIER

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Place: Cambridge, Massachusetts

- 11/1/2011

Allyson R. Farley Date

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