

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS WITH THE SHORENSTEIN CENTER

“EXPLORING THE MEDIA AND POLITICS FRONTIER”

ALEX S. JONES, DAVID CARR AND DANAH BOYD

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Harvard Kennedy School

SHORENSTEIN CENTER DIRECTOR ALEX S. JONES: It is a great personal pleasure of mine to welcome our next interviewer, David Carr. If there is such a thing as required reading for American journalism, it is his column on Mondays in the *New York Times*. And it is a column that has the extraordinary, remarkable qualities of being both smart and ruthlessly honest about his own newspaper and the newspaper industry and the future of news, which makes it something that is genuinely required reading. Some of you, the lucky ones in the room, may have seen a film, a documentary called *Page One*, which was done last year and it is about the *New York Times*. And the producers and the director of the film chose the media department and specifically David to be the sort of the central focus of telling the story about the *New York Times*.

And David was basically finding himself in the situation of being the voice of the traditional values, and the values, not the traditional necessarily way of doing business over years, but the traditional values and idealism of the *New York Times* in the context of also taking the film crew to the place where he was busted for drugs some years ago. He is not your typical journalistic *New York Times* type, which made him utterly persuasive for what he was expressing and what he stands for and what he believes. It is my great pleasure to invite you to listen to what David has to say now with our other guest.

DAVID CARR: Thank you for that rather textured introduction, Alex, I'm glad you referred to other parts of my résumé people might not have been familiar with. Danah and I were talking beforehand and it won't take but two minutes of this to realize that there is one big throbbing brain up here and then there is the normal guy who is asking the dumb questions. Thirty minutes in we're going to pivot and we are going switch to you guys. Half

of what danah and I just talked about, I was completely riveted by and the other half I had no idea what she was talking about but was completely intrigued. And I think it's swell that we get to get up here, especially behind the day of programming that you see. With Clay [Shirky] at lunch, I mean, that was just — I've seen a lot of Clay Shirky talks but that thing, it was incantatory [see speech [here](#)], it was like part charm and part Rabbi, part, you know, it's just like holy buckets, I wish we had gone before.

CARR: So I wanted to go off a little bit of what Clay was talking about, which is we're in this sort of post-national media environment and its information in general as performed a jail break as has audiences and you've written about talked a little bit about what the public is. And in a sort of distributed media age, is there such a thing as public or is it just ad hoc networks.

DANAH BOYD: I find the idea, the notion of a public to be actually fascinating in part because it means different things in different ways. And to think about the public as though it's all people across all states and all times. And we think about a public in terms of different communities and different constituencies who come together because they have an imagined understanding of community. I find that this is a particularly challenging issue to deal with in light of the very network technologies.

Because without a public you don't always think about narrow notions of the public, we think of boundedness. So we think of the American public bounded by the nation states.... The challenge of a public is [that it's] actually much more amorphous. And I think this is a really relevant notion to deal with and grapple with in a mediated environment. Because we are actually dealing with multiple publics constantly coming together and constantly being challenged. Publics that can't actually be structured around defined boundaries, publics that can't actually be understood, even within shared identities. We have this complex overlay of identities and communities, connectedness, nationalities, languages that I think we are seeing rise up in all sorts of interesting ways.

Meanwhile we are sitting that on top of a network technology that makes everything highly visible. So each individual public that gets formed up becomes visible to other publics and we see contradictions coming together.

CARR: I was thinking about this this morning. I got on the Acela train in Newark, which is, you know, the future is here but we've got this high speed train that actually doesn't go very fast.

(Laughter)

CARR: But it sort of feels like it in the way it sort of works. But I was watching Occupy Wall Street in New York blow up this morning around the hashtag on Twitter of #OWS and there was this moment of — and it's kind of the third leg of the stool that Clay was talking about way it's not just I was there, I saw Justin Bieber. I was there. This is what happened to me, this is what the cops did, and there was this moment when it was like I felt like I was very much there in real time, even though I was on a train heading north. So I was part of the public, but it seems like there's these like ad hoc networks or publics that assemble around an issue and then disperse and then assemble anew.

BOYD: Although I think the beauty of Occupy is that it is actually not really around an issue. It should be around an issue, but it's not. It's actually like—

CARR: How about that the rich people stole all our money.

BOYD: So that's the story that we like to overlay on it because we need to find an issue. But I actually think that the best thing about the people showing up to Occupy is the first thing that they do when they show up is say why the hell are you here? And they start a conversation. And it's that conversation where you start to see networks form. And likewise, what we're seeing online is this curiosity, like what are these people? What are they about? They have to have an issue. They have to have a goal. And we have a specific narrative of how protests should work. How public should work. And Occupy isn't following by any of them.

But when you are actually in any of those communities you see that people are actually having a conversation across lines and across communities that don't normally get to interact with one another. And they are actually coming together to try to figure out where their discontent comes from. There is a collective sense of discontent. There is a discomfort with the economic state, but there's not a real understanding of what's going on, but that's actually the beauty of it. And it's especially beautiful in a highly mediated environment. Because in theory we could all do this through Facebook, through Twitter,

through any online fora that we created, but there is something about physically showing up and asking somebody who you would never normally get to talk with, why did you come here?

And it's that moment of issues being borne out of a public as opposed to issues being the defining element of the public.

CARR: I think you're on to something, because I was down there last Thursday and you go walking up and so they've got the drum circle, they've got the generators humming away to power the streaming media, which as I understand worked a little better than it did here. You know, ad hoc, do it yourself. And so all this criss-cross, you know, and yeah I did get a whiff of patchouli or two, but one of the things that was there was a great big broadsheet newspaper and it was gorgeous. I mean, it was this beautiful, like had the wingspan of the olden days and even — it's called the *Occupy Wall Street Journal*. But it did a great job of explaining something I thought, well, that's cute that they pulled that off. But then I watched the act of handing, the act of handing something, and of course I can't hand you a website.

I think it gets at this sense of placeness that we're talking about. Placeness and thingness, yes, sort of put on steroids and coalesced around social media, but in a specific place. And the reaction around the country is, hey, let's make our own place. Let's make our own place.

BOYD: And I think that's where the beauty of what we're seeing with social media is that it's not about a virtual reality that's divorced from the physicality. It's about integrating and amplifying and having that conversation. I think that your point about the *Occupy Wall Street Journal* is beautiful because it's about this moment of saying we're here to inform one another and we're here to be informed. We're here to have a dialogue and we're here to learn. And that kind of learning can happen at all different levels. And we're seeing it around that movement happening in the very physical, the one on one, they are sitting together and trying to make sense of it.

And we're seeing it amplified out into the digital as people are scratching their heads and making sense of it there. And we're seeing that digital come back into the physical in the form of those news articles that then circulate within there. So we're seeing

a conversation that has scale, that has network. And we're in such the earliest stages of it. And who knows if it will go anywhere? But that moment of getting people to engage on really critical issues and try to make sense of the world in which they exist, a world that is both local and global, a world that is both physical and mediated is actually one of the things that we need to create a healthy democracy. So I think this is just a great opportunity to try to see a new form of democratic process try to unfold, meshing all of these things that we have known historically.

CARR: Well, there is like a lot of what we are going to be talking about, there is a hybrid element of sort of offline and online, the real. And there is also the element of how do I know what I know? Is it because it's — my daughter works for Vice, which is like kind of a downtown media outfit. Do I know stuff from her? Do I know stuff from Twitter, do I know stuff from word of mouth? Is it our blog at the *New York Times*? And everybody — I feel like I know what's going on there but I feel like I don't really know how I know what I know. Does it matter?

BOYD: I think that it does in that we actually need to engage with things not as information that is given to us as a set of facts, but there is a bunch of things that we grapple with. We talk about this in terms of media literacy. We talk about this in terms of digital literacy. So I spend most of my time interacting with teenagers. So they are like my daily experience. And one of the things that is exciting to me in watching young people deal with social media and then deal with traditional narratives of media is that they are so aware within their own local purview that people are always hiding different content and they are making things sort of available and not making other thing available and they are learning to be critical within their very local community of any information that they see.

And you are starting to see that happen also with how they consume broader narratives of media. And that's where I get very hopeful. Because I think that this moment of knowing is actually very challenging. I'm jet lagged as anything because I just flew in and I spent the last couple of days in Abu Dhabi with the World Economic Forum and one of the things that was striking to me within the World Economic Forum, who we think of as such high, powerful political leaders, is how much they don't know. And I think that would scare

most people. So this idea that you have to actually know something is something that is really challenging today, because I don't think you can actually know everything.

I think you actually have to stitch together knowledge and that happens through conversation and community. And that to me is one of the hopeful things as I think about different people as they manage these technologies. How do they stitch together the networks so that they don't have to know everything but they can tap into a broader set of knowledge and start to piece things together.

CARR: I think you have a cohort that's, I mean, it shares something with the '60s in that expertise is overrated. And they are willing to use a kit to assemble. It seems like more work, but what I notice, especially say in my younger colleagues like Brian Stelter, this act of "now I'm producing media, now I'm consuming media." They are not discreet acts. There is this circle like where I am talking with Brian, I lean over his cube and I get to — I get upstairs and I just go, "Well, that little dickens was twittering the whole time."

(Laughter)

CARR: Wait now, there's a blog post. Holy shit, he's on page one. And I just — I feel like as a digital doctor I've been extremely aggressive, but my impulses are not what are baked into him. I mean, when Bin Laden got captured I was like maybe we should make up — and I went to like open our blog and the stuff was in there. While he was talking to people he was typing, while he was twittering. And so there is this real-time impulse.

BOYD: It's funny, because in the technology industry we talk about the perpetual beta, which is a radical shift that happened in the tech industry as we move from an era of design, develop, deploy, distribute to one of put it up and mess up with it and if it breaks fix it and just keep going and constantly evolving. And I think that the news in many ways is also in that transition. There is a beauty of seeing rather than packaging the perfect story and putting it out, it's got spelling mistakes, it's got real time thoughts, it's got things that are going to have to be transitioned.

But there is this moment of using the news media, using social media to actually start a conversation and realize that a story itself is never finished. And in many ways this has always been the case. Stories have been ongoing. You would publish out the story today, you would add on to it tomorrow, et cetera, et cetera. Except the relationship about

time has changed. And what we see is that the story is evolving as people are writing it. And the *New York Times* has been phenomenal about this. You know, updated this time, updated this time, real time trying to make sense. And that's where the news media has this great role right now in being at the center of a conversation and creating a space for conversations to happen.

CARR: I think that the other thing that has gone on is the *New York Times* that Alex worked at, kind of the same job, right? Yeah, which Alex won a Pulitzer doing that. I've won some prizes you've never heard of.

(Laughter)

CARR: I'm thinking the media was more important back then, but I don't think so. I do think that what's being communicated in terms of there is less about authority and more about what constitutes verisimilitude and authenticity. We have this fight about like when you think about the pieces of media that have driven world events, they were not beautifully produced pieces of media. They were of the impulse that I was there, I saw the thing, this is what happened. And so the — and what happens is the web turns into this self-cleaning oven where information is organized, reformulated, recast until around this single image, which is riveting and great, a great waterfall occurs underneath of, as you say, sense making.

BOYD: And I guess for me that's that whole conversational bit. So part of it is we are seeing a transition right now. It's a transition from understanding the world in terms of hierarchies and boundaries to one understanding the world in terms of networks. Now, the two continue to exist, the two have always existed. But I think the news media is, in many ways, in a transition itself in that same trajectory, which is that a lot of how it has been organized and a lot of how it engages is through a narrative of hierarchy. It's in a narrative of packaging and creating boundaries. But we're also seeing this transition where it's now actually nodes within a network.

I mean, take the Bin Laden sort of example, which was sort of a beautiful moment. Here's a situation—

CARR: Because he ended up dead?

(Laughter)

BOYD: No, but it's a beautiful news moment. Here's this strange moment where Twitter theoretically unveils the fact that this is Bin Laden that has been killed. How does this actually play out. Gilad Lotan, SocialFlow, sort of went back and looked through all of the Twitter data and what he found was that lots of people were speculating in the first couple of hours. You know, was it Bin Laden? Why were they having a Sunday night announcement? What was going on? Who is it? It has to be really important. And then one of Donald Rumsfeld's staffers, right, it's like, oh, my gosh, I think Bin Laden has just been killed. And of course somebody from the *New York Times* immediately picks that up and is like that's actually — we're going to make that connection.

We know this is Rumsfeld's staffer. The likelihood in which he is actually informed is tremendous. Picks this up and flows it. So this is still an hour and a half before Obama gets onto TV.

CARR: Plus they are adding, there was a guy tweeting "choppers in the air, guns fired."

BOYD: This wasn't found until afterwards.

CARR: Right, right, but people did start pointing to him.

BOYD: Oh, yeah. And he was like, oops, I guess I live-tweeted the entire thing. I mean, that's the weird element is that people are playing reporter roles without even realizing that they are reporting. People are playing informant roles without realizing that they're informing. And that's where, again, what's so powerful about journalists who have been engaged with this is they are observing and they are trying to make sense of real time data and try to figure out how do you filter through this massive amounts of information and figure out how to pull out the gems within the large swath of data.

CARR: I'm interested in sort of expertise in professional journalism, partly because that's how I get hamburgers, so there's that. But I also think that — I used to watch our page-one meeting go off and I thought it was hilarious because you have this circle of just incredibly intelligent women and men, but all these stories that they are talking about, they are up on the web above them and they are moving in real time. And things are reordering and things are and I think, well, that's silly at a certain point to say, okay, now, stop. And here are the seven most important stories in western civilization or six or whatever. But

you know what? I've evolved and this doesn't make me — so much stuff is whooshing by me every day that even if it's sort of arbitrary and whimsical, I like that somebody is, I still am getting that codification of, okay, here are the six most important stories in the world today. Does that make me—

BOYD: No, I think curatorial roles are more important now than ever. The more information that we have the more we rely on people to curate the information that is available and tell us what's most important. The challenge in all of this is who do we actually trust? And what we are going to see is a wide distribution of people determining who they trust. The *New York Times* has done a phenomenal job through its brand, through its history, through its reputation of actually being a really powerful curator. And what we are seeing is a competition of who curates.

Now, this also creates a new challenge for us, which is that the curatorial role also filters the world into that which we want to hear. So part of why we subscribe to the *New York Times* is that they curated exactly like we wanted to hear, or we turn to another news media and say we want to hear this narrative only. And so one of the challenges in all of this is how do we simultaneously appreciate being narrowed and seeing what we want and deal with the fact that being exposed to things that we may not want to hear is actually part of creating a healthy civic society.

CARR: Yeah, but that doesn't naturally happen. I mean, people are assembling into verticals of interest over and over where they are finding if you want to find out about a certain thing that you have strong beliefs on on the web, you're going to find it. If you think there were explosives in the front of those airplanes and you go on, on September 11, you'll find your truth out there and you're not — and if you think those guys were complete nutters and tearing at the fabric, you'll find that. And I worry that as people take this kit and assemble, that on the cable side, on the web side, again and again people are going to assemble into sort of non-federated verticals of interest where there is no civic common, where there isn't a place. You say there's a conversation occurring at Occupy, but it's of really like minds.

BOYD: Well, yes and no. So the argument you are making in many ways is connected to Eli Pariser's work called *The Filter Bubble*. And I think his critique is right on. And one of the examples he lays out is that —

CARR: Wait, let's slow down on this, because I didn't get it the first time around, *Filter Bubble*.

BOYD: *The Filter Bubble*. So I'll explain that. So one of the arguments [Pariser] lays out is that if Google is returning the search queries that are most relevant to me and I am a conspiracy theorist who believes that whatever variation of what happened on 9/11, is Google supposed to give me back information that reinforces my 9/11 conspiracy theory or is it supposed to give me information back that challenges it. And that's a big issue. Because what is most relevant to me in a networked area may be things that reinforce biases, prejudices, or misinformation.

It also plays out that, to your point, if I want to go online and just consume things of my like mind, that I don't actually have to see a world that's anything different. Curiosity has always —

CARR: Driven only by algorithms really.

BOYD: Driven only by algorithms or, frankly, curatorial power. Like the news agencies have always curated to say this is what was interesting to you. I grew up in the era of the morning paper being the Democrat paper and the evening paper being the Republican paper. And you subscribed to one or the other depending on your philosophical and political values. Right, so we have had these—

CARR: I'm stunned that you are old enough to have lived in a place that had two papers, but go ahead.

(Laughter)

BOYD: But this element, which is the same thing gets reproduced digitally and how do we deal with that because part of it is that we're trying to create a broader narrative. I think the challenge and the onus is on all of us to break outside of our narrow world and to realize that we are being pigeon-holed and find conversations. Occupy to me, while it started out as being a lot of like minds in every way, one of the things that is interesting is that a lot of people are showing up there very curiously who don't necessarily share the

values. Is it everybody? No. By no means yet at all. But the thing is that there is enough curiosity and it's that curiosity that has created the conversations about how people feel about it.

Even this moment of saying, you know, I got into a cab last night and the first thing out of the guy's mouth is like, "You've been gone, do you know about this Occupy thing?" I was like, "Uhm, yes." And he wanted to know my opinion on it. And we had this crazy conversation from totally different cultural perspectives. But that moment of creating a conversation and being able to create a conversation publicly is what we really need to stand for, which we need to create, which is very different than just being informed. It's a difference between just being able to consume information or even just consume and produce and converse. And the key to the public that you are imagining is very much about that conversation.

CARR: And I've got to say, when things started up down there, I thought, "This is discrete, this is contained, I'm not going to end up — this is really not part of my world." And like you I have ended up in conversations where I've had to have a take, like, you know, some guy says to me, "Well, that's nothing but Communists down there." I say, "No. I was there and I think they would like capitalism to actually work. Which means when you screw up you pay and I don't." That's what I'm taking from it. The ability to sort of — this has been floating for three years and we have Gretchen Morgenson in our paper every Sunday talking about what went down. We did a ton of work, the *Wall Street Journal* did amazing work on what sort of drove the bubble, what created this absence of consequence over and over until this conversation began.

And so what I think about is [that] you still need people to make phone calls. So you need — and you still need expertise. I mean, if you go on Twitter every four seconds there is a tweet that carries information from our paper. And it becomes a Maypole, so I do think that there is value. But again and again you see information performing a jail break in a way where we're sometimes catching up. I think WikiLeaks, which Clay [Shirky] spent a lot of time talking about, you know, I loved what Clay said but I thought he was missing one thing in terms of its — I think he's right in terms of we had an involving complicated relationship.

We're in business with you. No, you're a source of ours. No, we're publishing your stuff but we're breaking your nose in a front-page profile. You know, it was something to behold.

[What] drove WikiLeaks was not ubiquity of information. They did take and plop a bunch of stuff out there. Nothing happened. It was scarcity of information. Engage the competitive dynamics of professional media organizations by giving it [to] three to five [news outlets]. They'll redact the names, they'll report out these stories. And I thought that part of the learning curve of WikiLeaks was amazing. I mean, tactically they changed, right?

BOYD: So WikiLeaks in many ways had three stages and Clay talked about two of them. But the first stage is that they put out information on online fora and no one noticed. They put out tons of information regarding Afghanistan and no one noticed. The second thing they did was they tried to actually editorialize and create a story. And collateral murder in many ways was an editorialized version of what they thought they needed to get out there about what's happening.

CARR: You're talking about edited videotape of a helicopter.

BOYD: Correct. Which had two things. One was they put in subtitles, you could actually read it. They shortened the actual video and they actually labeled it "Collateral Murder," which was the editorialization process. And that sparked all sorts of controversy because what were they doing, was this really a source, et cetera, et cetera. And the third one is in many ways the scarcity, which is they started out by saying we are going to restrict access to these cables and negotiate it with partners. One of the things, from my perspective of what WikiLeaks is in many ways doing, is that it's trying to challenge the news media in saying, "Your responsibility, dear news media, is to be a check and balance to power. And you in many ways have failed."

So we want to be a check and balance to you so that you can be a better check and balance to power. And this raises a huge question about what does it mean for the news media to be a check and balance to power in a highly networked age in which it is in many ways one of the relevant actors of that system of power.

CARR: I think that a couple of weeks ago I was in London and Vaughan Smith, who runs a Frontline Club there ... said, "Would you like to come up to the English countryside and have lunch with Julian Assange? It's not really working." I'm like, "Hell yes I would like

to.” And I get up there and we’re like there is this nice English countryside, it’s the manor, it’s — everything is lovely. And we’re like having lunch and there’s nine or ten people gathered around. I’m next to Julian who was fun and nice in a certain kind of way, in a sort of spooky, spectral, cool way, like what is really up.

(Laughter)

CARR: But anyway, he’s just — we’re just chatting along and he said, “Well, the primary sort of skills in a mainstream journalist is the ability to censor himself and to lie on behalf of the powers that be,” and I was like ... I think I just choked on my trout salad a bit. And I thought to myself, he’s not just saying this to provoke, he really believes it. And so we — in certain ways he did great business with us, but then we ended up honing on him. He ended up honing on us, but what I wonder about is what makes — what made WikiLeaks powerful is this is a demand/scarcity issue. What you are always short of in the investigative world is the whistle blower. And in this case the whistle blower is naked, in a cell, under military control and so deeply beat you would need a miner’s helmet to find him, right. So that was the consequence.

Julian Assange is in the English countryside, will not go to Sweden to confront questions that he engaged in inappropriate behavior with two women there because he believes he is going to end up as an extraditable and he’s going to become a Beanie Baby. It was clear to me in talking to him that he is afraid. And so I think to myself, maybe this isn’t a replicable sort of moment.

BOYD: And meanwhile in the United States we are on a witch hunt to go after any hacker who has any affiliation, social or technical, with the organization, Luke [Harding]’s organization, that does WikiLeaks. I mean, even just watching the news come out this week about Jake Appelbaum’s interrogation and having to turn — Google having to turn all of his conversations.

CARR: It’s out of warrant, no warrant.

BOYD: So this becomes this really interesting challenge about how we continue to lock down dissidents who try to challenge authority. My hope and my hope in terms of the history of this country has been that we continue to thrive, even though as dissidents

challenge and we come back and say maybe we don't want to continue down these witch hunts over and over again.

But the thing is that these witch hunts are a way in which traditional forms of power try to very much oppress subversive elements and try to oppress any voice that is challenging to authority. Do I think that this will continue to pop up? Yes. I don't think that whistleblowers are dead. I think that we will see them come up in new form. And it's about people feeling empowered and believing that it is more important that the truth get out than the consequences that they personally face. And I think that's about a specific kind of person. Bradley Manning in many ways is an accident of history. In many ways he was not an expected whistleblower. We were retroactively calling him a whistleblower, but in many ways he wasn't. He was a very, by all accounts, a very confused young man.

But the thing is there is this moment where I think whenever we see power abusing itself we will see people trying to challenge it. And I think we are seeing that globally in really interesting ways. And I think new technologies will continue to pop up to try to give people different avenues of doing this. But I think that we will constantly see this pressure. I heard a brilliant talk recently by [Spanish sociologist] Manuel Castells and he said that one of the beautiful things historically is that new technologies have always challenged different kinds of power in really clear ways. It destabilizes.

And the first thing that any powerful system tries to do is re-stabilize, re-stabilize power. But what's at stake right now is that the challenges to power are happening so fast at this point that we, in the new technologies to do so, that we're seeing an increasing destabilization. And this is actually what raises the question of what does stability of power mean in this technologically mediated environment. And I think that's where all of these issues turn into a gnarly hairball that it's hard to untangle, but I think it's about the non-stability as opposed to a stability and saying we need to have a stable force and we'll have to have whistleblowers. I think we are going to see it reform and reconstitute itself over and over again.

CARR: I'm going to steal the conceptual elegance of "gnarly hairball" and not give you credit.

(Laughter)

CARR: We've reached that portion of the program where far more articulate and smart people will begin asking the questions. That would be you guys. [Carr indicates the audience.] While you guys rapidly assemble at the microphones because you are dying to find out what danah thinks about — I was listening to Julian, had a couple of his colleagues up there, and all their sort of dark ops and theories about why the chopper landed and what's happening with their e-mail and line-of-sight conversations and I'm thinking this is — this is really kind of silly. But then they started corresponding with me after I visited. If you aren't catching folks, I don't really want it. I don't want you sending to my Gmail account and it gave me just a little bit of a feeling about, I was kind of chuckling at [them], and then I realized, well, they're being watched and now here I am corresponding with them. And the hair on the back of my neck stood up just a bit. Go ahead, sir.

FROM THE FLOOR: Thank you, very much. My name is David Skok. I'm a Nieman Fellow here at Harvard this year. First of all, David, thank you for the reporting that you do. It's rare to find somebody who actually analyzes the media critically, who works for a media organization. So your courage in doing that is appreciated by everybody here, I'm sure. My question is surrounding the platforms that we use to tell these stories, Twitter, Facebook, Google, these are private companies that have their own profit motive and in a way we have become so myopic about them. Television stations are regulated, radio stations are regulated. And I'm just wondering at what point do these platforms get their feet held to the fire or do they even need to be? Is this something that we should be concerned about?

BOYD: Well, I think your question is really critical and I think that part of what challenges all of this is who is doing the regulating and under what context? Because in many ways our narrative of regulation, as Clay was pointing out, is about a boundedness of nation states. It's about a certain kind of structure. But what does it mean to regulate in the global way? And in some ways I don't think we are even prepared to have that conversation meaningfully yet. I think that there is no doubt that we've reached a point where we are not actually having a public space that is without a commercial interest. The digital environment is no longer the Usenet days of distributed networks. Should it be? Should we be building those systems? Certainly. But that's not where we are at right now.

And I think that there is a level of accountability in different ways that becomes really critical. The way I go back to it is I come back to Larry Lessig and I think Larry Lessig is an extremely important way of thinking about it and reminding that there are four ways in which any system is regulated that become very powerful. One is the market. Two is the law. Three is social norms. And four is technology, architecture or code. And I think that as we think about regulation and the role of it we should be using regulation in that fourth mode, so we're not just automatically jumping to the law as the answer. Because the law, even when it does regulate, often messes up and it often doesn't give us what we want. We've certainly been seeing that with traditional media narratives.

But how do we actually make certain that we have an informed citizenry so that social norms are part of the regulatory force? And that's actually where I think the media can play a critical role. The more the media sheds light on what goes on on these systems and what happens, the more social norms can serve as a regulatory force, an empowered regulatory force. Another is different questions of market power, because as these things are part of an ecosystem, it's not just about the one particular company but it's about the relationships between those companies that become pretty powerful.

And finally actually code and technology become really important, which is building alternatives and challenging the kinds of ecosystems that we have through technology. All of those come together and serve as a beautiful ecosystem for regulation that is not just about pinpointing to law.

CARR: Yeah, but I think that in sort of Lessig's tree, the most persistent, the most immediate is the commercial — the fact they work in a commercial environment, so before Google did Google+ they did Google — what? Buzz. And it's like, oh, the five people that I e-mailed, ah, it's like what are you doing? And immediately there was this crazy reflex from Facebook re-dos, you know, throws a lot of your rights under a bus and people are responding. The fact that they work in a commercial cultural environment and they depend on the trust of their audiences does put a certain governor. Yes, no?

BOYD: I mean, I think — I'm not challenging your premise. I think that there are major problems in what is happening in these technological systems. There is huge problems with regard to privacy. There is huge problems with regard to the way in which

commercial interests actually control data. All of this is there. The challenge is that a legislative framework, it's which legislative framework? The American one? The Chinese one? The Egyptian one? Whose legislative framework works? And I think that certainly because we are talking about an American company in many of these cases and we're talking about American servers we often go to that, but we also have tons of unintended consequences of trying to regulate these spaces.

And that's where I'm not convinced that jumping to legal regulation is always the best bet. In many ways I really wish that the news media would actually better understand how these technologies work and make certain that they hold these companies' feet to the flame. Because I will say the media's coverage about some of these privacy issues has actually done wonders for challenging it and making people rise up and even making regulators pay attention. So if you look at regulators in Europe, regulators in Canada, they are paying attention in part because the way that the media has actually given information to constituents who are challenging them. That's why a part of an ecosystem, rather than jumping immediately to law.

CARR: I think that the *Wall Street Journal* did some excellent work.

BOYD: It was beautiful.

CARR: Yeah, right until I felt their hands up my skirt using some of the same technology I was really impressed by it.

(Laughter)

CARR: But great work on behalf of their reporters. A bit of sort of aggression on the business side in terms of — go ahead, sir.

FROM THE FLOOR: Karl Hakkarainen. Danah, you talked about talking with teenagers a lot on matters of skepticism and how they relate to what are the sources of authority for them, largely through social media and how all that gets filtered. We've also heard a lot of angst among old-school journalists who are saying where are the authorities, who are the — call it gatekeepers, call it editorial boards, curators, whatever the term is. So I've got teenage grandkids. And there are some fracture lines, personally, less between me and the grandkids than their parents, our children. Because those folks in the 40-to-60 bracket are often really bewildered by what the hell is going on and having to learn from

their kids about life, about communications and to the talk of the day, about media and politics. That more of this is bubbling up through the new technology with the result that many of, again, that 40-to-60 bracket, scares the yogurt out of them.

CARR: But we want to land in a question here.

FROM THE FLOOR: Okay. So the question is, can you describe the ways in which those generations can and do react or interact at their best?

BOYD: When my mother came to the United States as a teenager, she came home with her American history book and my grandfather took one look at this, being British, he threw it out. He decided it was all wrong. Everything in it was wrong and she should not be taught any of this. Of course, this is sort of this beautiful moment of the idea that there are facts and there are British facts and there are American facts. And clearly the British facts were more important than the American facts, regardless of which country she was in. One of the challenges of growing up in the highly mediated environment is that you actually need to start resolving the idea that some things don't have one set of facts.

One of the beauties to me about Wikipedia, if you actually look at the discussion on the American Revolution article in Wikipedia, it's basically a battleground between the British and the American. Trying to say whether they could understand these dissidents as terrorists or whether, you know, they were revolutionaries and all of these different things. There's a moment where you can use these technologies in these discussions to actually strike and open up the idea that there is not simply one narrative of history. Of course historians have been doing this for a long time, but it's not how we teach history in an American context.

Within the generational dynamics I think that there is no doubt that a lot of traditionally trained 40-to-60 year olds who have been taught, spoon fed even, that there are facts and there are good guys and there are bad guys and everything is black and white are really struggling. It's funny to be in an academic context where we critically analyze everything just as a daily activity and we have to realize that that is not necessarily the norm. What's powerful is that in some ways young people are growing up with the norm that we understand in academia much greater, which is actually how to critically interrogate things.

Now they don't inherently get that. And they are not necessarily always trained in it and they are often rebelling against their teachers who are also in the 40-to-60 bracket about what's going on here. That's actually why I think, especially as scholars and intellectuals who care deeply about public life, we need to take all of the critical thinking and the ways that we actually operate as scholars and figure out how to make certain that critical thinking gets embedded into a broader sense of conversation, especially for the 40- to 60-year-olds who are dealing with the coping skills based on transitioning from a value system that it is, in some ways, being undermined by technology.

CARR: Just a point of order I want to say the British will always win the historical argument because of the authority conveyed by the accents.

(Laughter)

CARR: It's going to sound like a better fact, it just is. Go ahead, sir.

FROM THE FLOOR: George Mokray, independent scholar and glad that now I'm 61. I would like you to talk a little bit about the conversations and the qualities of the different conversations. You mentioned civics as opposed to politics. Couple of weeks ago Lawrence Lessig had conference here on a constitutional convention. And it ended up with what should we do to carry this forward. The idea was to have mock constitutional conventions in a variety of different places. And it seemed to me coming away from that meeting what they were talking about was civics, reintroducing a civic conversation with people. And then Occupy Wall Street happened and Occupy Boston, and so forth and so on.

And what I've seen there is people not claiming leadership. "I can only talk for myself," they would say, time after time after time as they are being interviewed in New York or in Boston or in Washington. And I've seen [it] also in Boston counter-demonstrators.

CARR: We want to head toward a question.

FROM THE FLOOR: Well, I want you to talk about the different qualities of these kinds of conversations, from flame wars to now, where people are saying to counter-demonstrators, "Well, tell me. I'm here. Talk to me about what your issues are with what I'm doing here in Occupy Boston." And to this kind of different welcoming conversation that

is happening, a civic conversation that is happening, which is not a flame war and which is not political. It's civic. And there is something different there.

BOYD: I think one of the challenges is, especially when we think of things being mediated, we're used to only seeing the "highest quality conversations." One of the things that we see, because of technology, is technology makes visible that whole range of conversation. All of a sudden we can look into the really mundane, the absolutely inaccurate, the "how on earth is this tangentially relevant?" all the way up to the really serious critical analyses. And I think that that's actually both terrifying, because you realize that the world doesn't all think like you, and even if you hold yourself up to having esteemed conversation that you might critically say others do not. The idea that you have this moment of seeing the wide array of different perspectives. Is there a wide array? Certainly. Has there always been? Definitely.

It's just that now a lot of those conversations are much more visible. And that's about the value of the visibility issues and I think that we should recognize that what technology does more than anything else is make visible the good, bad and ugly of every day life.

CARR: I feel the weight of time. I want to get to both these guys. We're getting toward the end, so go ahead, please.

FROM THE FLOOR: Sure. My name is Melissa Galvez. I'm a student here. Actually my question does piggy-back a lot on what you guys have been talking about in the last two questions so maybe the answer will be short. But it seems when you mentioned *The Filter Bubble* and the sort of silos where people live in terms of their beliefs that you seem very optimistic about the idea that this conversational habit that is happening in Occupy Wall Street really will spread and touch on other communities that are not a part of it, especially people who can't get there. So I sort of wondered what makes you very optimistic that this real debate in conversation and everything that we do here in academia and that is happening in Occupy Wall Street really will spread and touch the places in this country or the communities that aren't a part of it, or are siloed by their own choices?

BOYD: I guess for me what's exciting is not necessarily that it will spread as in the Occupy is a contained object that will spread, but that even the fact that it exists has been

sparking conversations. And we often have certain events that spark conversations. Elections are always a classic one in the United States where people talk, not necessarily about the issues, but they at least talk at some level, even if they are talking about the reasons why they are ignoring the actual event. In the same sense is that Occupy is such a curiosity. It's such a weird thing. People don't understand what it is, that that alone is what the sparking function is of conversation.

Will everybody reach some sort of consensus and make meaning out of it? No. But it has become a water cooler effect and personally, as far as civic engagement, I would rather have the curiosity of "What the heck is this Occupy thing?" be the water-cooler effect than the latest *American Idol*.

CARR: Although that's pretty compelling. Just one last [question].

FROM THE FLOOR: Thank you. Just a very quick one. I'm Montague Kern from Rutgers University, a former Fellow here. I have two, one question for each of you, both very quick. First one relates to *The Filter Bubble*, which you brought up. And have just read *The Filter Bubble* and have assigned it in class. And one thing I have noticed about it is that in it Pariser talks about — you talked about commercial interests being there, but your term was that is what we would expect to find in a network environment, that there are commercial interests. He talks about it a bit differently. He says that in fact it's advertizing which is driving Google to make the person who lives in New Jersey get a totally different take on an issue as compared to the person who lives in Yugoslavia.

MR. CARR: These guys are going to Taser me if I go on too long.

FROM THE FLOOR: That was my question.

MR. JONES: If you would, speak into the mic, too.

FROM THE FLOOR: My question for David is around the area of documentary film and film itself, because you were just in [*Page One*]. And I wonder what your feeling is about documentary film and film as sparking conversations. I find that a very interesting issue.

CARR: I think that leaving aside my role as the tallest midget in a movie about newspapers, the ability of documentaries because of ubiquity and speed of the technology to come in in real time like books used to and just land with such force, I think is

breathhtaking. And a lot of the best narrative long-form journalism I'm seeing is the step back in the form of a documentary that's coming out 18 months after the event. I mean it's just wild to watch.

FROM THE FLOOR: I agree with you. I hope to invite you to a symposium on documentary.

CARR: We're going to wrap it up with that. I want to just point, a personal privilege, say I did not look at the Twitter screen once.

(Laughter)

CARR: What is the most interesting news? It's news about you and the minute that I would look up there it would be something about my zipper being down or that I'm spitting when I'm talking and I'd be paralyzed.

(Laughter)

CARR: So I made it through without looking. Did you look at all?

BOYD: You made me just look.

CARR: Okay, but you didn't otherwise. That's the thing about the modern presentation is with the real time Twitter feed, must not look.

(Laughter)

JONES: Thank you. Thank you, David.

(Applause)
