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The Open Gates of the Fourth Estate: Civic Literacy Meets Citizen Journalism

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Abstract: Technological and economic change within the business and social function of journalism are moving civic literacy practices ever closer to those of citizen journalism. In this article, I survey the changes underway as journalism becomes less a profession and more a practice, a way of reading and writing about society. I draw from journalism studies and civic literacy pedagogies to argue that the writing classroom has a valuable role to play in shaping civic literacy practices in concert with those of citizen journalism. Many of the practices of citizen journalism—including research, analysis, community engagement, the consideration of evidence and perspectives, a move toward new means of publication and social action—are exactly those capturing the attention of composition scholars.

The Paperless End of Newspapers: A Death

With some regularity, newspapers carry stories of the death of newspapers. Advertising revenue is down, positions are cut, and established publications such as the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, Colorado, which had printed for 149 years, are shuttered with a farewell and their own obituary as final headlines. Unstoppable technological, economic, and social forces are usually blamed. Many news readers turn to the internet, where readership of newspapers has been growing, although newspapers struggle to learn how to capitalize upon that growth. This is a grim time for traditional newspapers. It is also a time of opportunity and promise for digital literacies and citizen journalism, the potentials of which are the focus of this article. I begin by surveying the present state of journalism and considering the rise of citizen journalism, participatory culture, and news ecosystems—drawing heavily from journalism studies and civic literacy within composition—before proposing a pedagogy in which practices of civic literacy may merge with those of citizen journalism in the writing classroom.

Academics and journalism professionals are scrambling to try to come to terms with the technological, economic, and social revolution underway in journalism. They want to know what a post-newspaper newspaper might be, who will read and write and produce it, and what effects those changes might have for our democracy. As this is a growing concern, and as many of those writing about journalism are rather prolific writers themselves, there is much reading to do and much of it in the form of the blog posts that are part of the new journalism. (Jeff Jarvis's *BuzzMachine* and Jay Rosen's *PressThink* are two examples.) Readings from the field of journalism studies inform a substantial portion of the theory supporting this article. To give but one example of the concern, Princeton University researchers Sam Schulhofer-Wohl and Miguel Garrido found in a recent study that after the closure of the *Cincinnati Post* voter participation dropped and local elections were less competitive in the precincts that most relied upon the *Post* for political coverage. They note that their study is statistically imprecise but nonetheless argue that it is a negative portent for democratic life after the closure of a newspaper. "Do newspapers play a valuable, irreplaceable role in American

democracy, or can new media fill the gap when a newspaper closes?" they ask (19). In response to this open and continually debated question, Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido answer, "If voter turnout, a broad choice of candidates and accountability for incumbents are important for democracy, we side with those who lament newspapers' decline" (20). Communications and public policy professor Paul Starr similarly argues that the decline in newspapers means their traditional governmental watchdog function will go unfulfilled, allowing an increase in governmental corruption, especially on the local level. "If we take seriously the notion of newspapers as a fourth estate or a fourth branch of government, the end of the age of newspapers implies a change in our political system itself," Starr writes. "Newspapers have helped to control corrupt tendencies in both government and business. If we are to avoid a new era of corruption, we are going to have to summon that power in other ways. Our new technologies do not retire our old responsibilities." Similarly, Robert McChesney and John Nichols link the health of American democracy to that of journalism, writing, "We do not know the precise character or content of the news media that will develop; but we do know that without *bona fide* structures for gathering and disseminating news and analysis, the American experiment in democracy and republican governance will be imperiled" (xi). Here is presented one peek at the future of a newspaperless society.

To the extent that a newspaperless future is yet undetermined, there are other possibilities for civic life and literacy in such a society. In the words of Clay Shirky, a professor of new media at NYU, "Society doesn't need newspapers. What we need is journalism" ("Newspapers"). Perhaps journalism can fill the space being vacated by newspapers. Writing in *Slate*, media critic Jack Shafer argues against the implications of the Schulhofer-Wohl and Garrido study ("Democracy's Cheat Sheet?"). Newspapers carry a lot of frivolous news, Shafer writes. And when they do publish the type of investigative pieces that newspaper advocates champion, those articles only occasionally have the civic effect that journalists desire. For example, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune's* early expose on the weakness of the city's levees did nothing to avert the failure of those levees. Although, to be fair, there are comparable examples of when newspaper journalism does make a difference. The Pulitzer winners for public service showcase some of the best.

Shafer notes that today's newspaper is a fairly modern invention and that our democracy functioned well enough during our first century without a mainstream press, when the freedoms of the press were primarily enjoyed by the likes of pamphleteers, the early American equivalent to today's bloggers. "The insistence on coupling newspapering to democracy irritates me not just because it overstates the quality and urgency of most of the work done by newspapers but because it inflates the capacity of newspapers to make us better citizens, wiser voters, and more enlightened taxpayers," Shafer writes. "I love news on newsprint, believe me, I do. But I hate seeing newspapers reduced to a compulsory cheat sheet for democracy." Too frequently absent from this debate is sustained attention to what, if anything, might enter the civic spaces created with the departure of newspapers. What forms will civic literacy take if the citizenry is not dependent upon a mainstream press, a case that Shafer argues never was the case? What type of citizen journalism might rise to fill the space left by a newspaper economy in decline yet not in collapse? This is not a vision of a newspaperless society but of one where civic literacy practices and journalism are redefined, with important implications for the writing classroom.

"We are in the midst of a citizen-driven media revolution, the outcome of which no one can predict," Leonard Witt writes (55). "But one thing is fairly certain: public journalism has morphed into the public's journalism." Witt, a professor of communications and himself a former journalist, is referring to the certainty that old media models are fading while the public is taking greater control and a greater participatory role in creating and consuming its own journalism. No longer will journalism be written in the public's interest for a public that only reads the news. In the new citizen journalism, the public is news consumer and also news writer, editor, and publisher. Shirky also mentions revolution

in a recent blog post, relating the digital transformation affecting the newspaper to the social and technological transformation ushered in by Gutenberg:

When someone demands to know how we are going to replace newspapers, they are really demanding to be told that we are not living through a revolution. They are demanding to be told that old systems won't break before new systems are in place. They are demanding to be told that ancient social bargains aren't in peril, that core institutions will be spared, that new methods of spreading information will improve previous practice rather than upending it. They are demanding to be lied to. ("Newspapers")

Shirky is writing here of the newspaper industry's attempts to reckon with the transformations affecting them. He finds an industry in denial, one that fails to realize the revolutionary scope of the changes taking place. I am interested in the new systems mentioned by Shirky and referenced by Witt. I am interested in what forms these "new methods of spreading information" might take and how those forms and methods relate to social practices for civic literacy for and beyond the composition classroom.

In the next section, I review the dominant questions concerning civic literacy within rhetoric and composition, with special attention to democratic hopes of the digital revolution. I then explore the idea of citizen journalism through Jenkins's idea of participatory culture, an idea which is useful in attempting to take stock of the citizen-driven media revolution referenced by Witt and Shirky. Focusing upon redefinitions of journalism and journalism's relation to the public, I give special attention to the interrelation of the mainstream press and the blogosphere in digitally mediated environments, or what Jarvis describes as news ecosystems. There are advantages to and very relevant concerns regarding a shifting model of journalism, and I take account of these. Next, I continue to examine blogs as the preeminent site of an emergent citizen journalism. Blogs will be understood as engaging specific new literacy skills. I connect the idea of citizen journalism blogging to more traditional ideas of civic literacy within composition. This connection raises questions regarding access as well as the reading and writing skills necessary in order to develop civic literacy skills in digital environments. Finally, I turn to the composition classroom as a necessary place to explore these ideas and further the goals of civic literacy in digital environments. If the literacy practices of journalism and citizenship are changing as traditional newspapers are dying, then writing instructors need to take account of those changes and help prepare students to participate in the new civic literacies of a civic journalism age.

A Review of Questions Concerning Civic Literacy

Citizenship is a longstanding concern within the Western rhetorical tradition, going at least as far back as Isocrates, who established the cultivation of democratic citizenship as a pedagogical focus. The goal of teaching students to be better citizens for the good of the democracy is often included not only in the objectives of course syllabi but also in the mission statements of writing programs and universities. These are principles that many agree with, although there remain questions regarding their specifics and their enactment. These issues are raised anew in a recent article by Amy Wan, in which she questions what she calls "the ambient nature of the use of citizenship" (29). Citizenship is often evoked, Wan notes, but is rarely and vaguely defined. In that way, "citizenship," and by extension "civic literacy," is able to be just about everything to everybody. "What often goes unarticulated in these configurations," Wan writes, "is how writing skills and other literate practices actually make citizens—that is, what kinds of citizens we hope to cultivate when we talk about citizenship in relation to literacy" (29).

For too long the answer to Wan's question of kinds of citizens seemed to be citizens who write letters to editors. As Christian R. Weisser notes—in an observation that speaks to the experiences of many composition teachers—civic writing practices in the classroom often have been limited to a particular assignment, such as that letter. A letter does not much improve one's practice and position as an involved citizen, especially in a community with fewer newspapers and fewer editors. Elizabeth Ervin goes further by suggesting that we begin in questioning our own participation in the composition and rhetoric work of citizenship. Additionally, Kerrie Farkas has found that although there are strong arguments to be made for participatory citizenship on the local level, the actual value of and opportunities to engage the political process such as through public comment at community meetings is quite constrained and ineffectual. And, returning to Ervin's question, how many of us engage our rhetorical and literacy skills by speaking at city council meetings? Ervin argues that we first should reexamine the classroom discussion of civic issues to see classroom participation as significant work for students still developing their civic identities because, as she attests, "I've come to believe that this quiet, reflective brand of participation has genuine civic value" (392). Scholars such as Thomas Miller and Melody Bowdon and Weisser have promoted greater attention to archival research and historicizing and contextualizing civic rhetoric and literacy practices. Historical approaches demonstrate the social, cultural, and transmutable natures of civic literacy practices. Others, such as Jeff Smith and Donald Lazere, have advocated for composition as part of a broader and possibly interdisciplinary curriculum that includes analysis of media and political rhetoric. While some would argue that composition should take a larger role within the humanities in addressing a perceived lack of critical awareness of political systems, rhetorics, and media, Wan argues that "a composition course is not supposed to be a class in civic education" (46). She suggests that we focus more on the "habits of citizenship" that are and can be learned through literacy education. Like Ervin, Wan supports more structured opportunities in the classroom for the development of such habits, concluding, "And we should create a space where our own citizen-making through the teaching of literacy is a more deliberate activity, one that enlivens the concept of citizenship by connecting classroom practices to other instances of citizenship production" (46). That raises again the question of practices, particularly as they relate to citizenship and production. Connections to citizen journalism within composition and rhetoric, however, have yet to be made.

The same social, media, and technological changes that have rocked the newspaper industry have also altered the practice and understanding of the "habits of citizenship" and the "practices of democracy" within writing instruction. In his CCC Chair's address, Lester Faigley, with an eye toward "literacy for participation in democratic community life, civic engagement, and social justice," observed two relevant revolutions underway, those being the revolution of the rich and the digital revolution (34). While the first constrains access to the practices of democracy, the second promises to expand them. This leads to the web 2.0 revolution, which has opened in pedagogically vital ways access to digital consumption and, more importantly, the tools of digital production. As the DigiRhet.org authors summarize, "As individuals and as educators, we have a responsibility to understand the power of purposeful discourse—particularly in public digital spaces—and the ways it can either be used for democratic, socially responsibly ends, or used to marginalize and colonize" (241). They focus on three threads in their goals for teaching digital rhetoric: community, critical engagement, and application. Of those, critical engagement is especially useful for the ways it promotes "the development of an understanding of the rhetorical complexities inherent in the use of digital technologies, and an understanding of how digital can change both the ways users approach tasks and the ways they see the world," such as seen in citizen journalism (247).

The digital revolution, along with the deterioration of a robust journalistic media, has contributed to the need for teachers who share as a goal civic literacy to work with the new literacy habits of citizenship. Civic and digital participation appear to reinforce one another. A recent study published in a working paper by the Digital Media and Research Learning Hub within the University of

California Humanities Research Institute argues for "greater focus on the potential value of digital media literacy education as a support for the quality, quantity, and equality of civic and political engagement" (Kahne, Feezell, and Lee 21). The expectation is that by engaging such habits of citizenship, students may be stronger writers, readers, and citizens, within and beyond digital environments. There can be significant barriers of expertise and technological competence that limit civic participation, and these should be addressed in civic literacy pedagogies. In promoting a civic rhetoric that addresses barriers and imbalances in civic participation, especially in areas of expertise, W. Michele Simmons and Jeffrey T. Grabill address questions of knowledge and performance through attention to invention. "Nonexpert citizens can be effective, but in order to be effective, they must have an art that is powerfully inventive and performative," they write, adding, "It is obvious that a meaningful civic rhetoric that is effective in contemporary public spaces must help people write, speak, and compose new media effectively" (422). Simmons and Grabill highlight roles that new technologies play in civic engagement, roles that can both limit and be an asset to civic literacy and engagement.

The transformative civic possibilities of new production and broadcast technologies are on display with every YouTube video from the Arab Spring or the Occupy movements, which then become part of the news environment. Students are interacting with these stories as news consumers and potentially as news producers, as citizen journalists. Within a digital rhetoric of critical engagement, they are also better able to wear both hats and consume news as producers, or to produce news as consumers. Michael Schudson concludes, when situating civic literacy within one's own time, "The task is to recognize and learn to exploit the constraints and opportunities of our own situation" (368). The task here, then, is to recognize the opportunities and need for citizen journalism in support of the habits and goals of civic literacy, and for civic literacy pedagogies in support of a smarter and more invigorated culture of journalism.

Citizen Journalism as Participatory Culture: A Transformation

Both citizen journalism and participatory culture help explain the changing relationships between media and audience. Citizen journalism may be best understood as participatory culture at work against old forms of media consumption, in this case the consumption of newspapers. To view citizen journalism as an example of participatory culture, I turn to Jenkins:

The term *participatory culture* contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that one of us fully understands. Not all participants are created equal. (3)

Jenkins's definition focuses upon relationships and interactions and the loss of role distinctions between production and consumption, old and new. The idea of participatory culture is not so much that a new form replaces the old but that the new and the old relate to one another in new ways. Jenkins is also sure to note that power is not equal within this culture as some individuals, and especially corporations, have greater say and presence than others.

It is useful to compare Jenkins's definition of participatory culture with the definition of citizen journalism popularized by Rosen, a professor of journalism at NYU. Rosen writes, "When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession, that's citizen journalism." There are some significant points of overlap in these definitions. The first is Rosen's characterization of "the people formerly known as the audience" and Jenkins's interaction between media producer and media consumer, an interaction that can take place between the same person

performing dual roles. A second area of overlap in these definitions is at the point of "roles" and "rules" in Jenkins's definition and the "tools" in the definition offered by Rosen. Participatory culture is changing how people read and write the news because the roles, rules, and tools involved in that reading and writing are changing. The internet offers a relatively inexpensive means of interacting with the media even as media producer. This is the "participatory culture" that Jenkins mentions. And this is all enabled by continuing advancements in technology and changes in behaviors.

Jenkins calls the changes underway in the media industry a "paradigm shift" (5). Many academics and journalists speak of the changes in more drastic terms as revolutions and ends of eras. Witt writes that "Today anyone with access to a computer can have the equivalent of a printing press—indeed, everyday citizens can have a multimedia publishing house with global reach, at their fingertips" (49). For Starr, these changes in news production and consumption constitute the end of an era. "We may be approaching not the end of newspapers, but the end of the age of newspapers—the long phase in history when newspapers published in major cities throughout the United States have been central to both the production of news and the life of their metropolitan regions," he writes. Starr is here relating the end of traditional newspapers to the end of a way of life in America.

Starr and others studying and theorizing the changes underway have little doubt as to the cause of such a shift. They blame new technologies, specifically the internet. Shafer writes that "The underlying cause of their [journalists'] grief can be traced to the same force that has destroyed other professions and industries: digital technology" ("The Digital Slay-Ride"). Shirky further notes, "There is no general model for newspapers to replace the one the internet just broke." He advocates a "chaotic" news environment that attempts the practice of journalism in multiple ways ("Why We Need"). Of course poor economies and other pressures are contributing to the death of newspapers, but they are seen as lesser factors. Newspapers and journalists here are framed as victims of history and technology, like the travel agents and stockbrokers who passed before them.

An important point to note in this digital revolution and media upheaval is that with changes in technologies come changes in relationships. These changes are fundamental. Jenkins clues into this when he writes, "Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift. Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences" (15). Not only is the form of the news changed, the very way people relate to the news and, by extension, their community and government and the rest of the world, all of those relationships as influenced by the news are also changed. Jenkins builds this understanding through historian Lisa Gitelman's definition of media as both "a technology that enables communication" and a set of "social and cultural practices that have grown up around that system" (14). In regard to the news media, the technological changes are evident in the ease and thrift of digital publication as compared with traditional newsprint publication, a much more resource- and labor-intensive process. The printing press is replaced by WordPress.

Cultural changes are evident in how people relate to newspapers. Many of those who mourn the slow death of the newspaper do so with references to the tactile pleasure of holding the paper as they read it over breakfast. The physical newspaper is a product, and people relate to it as a product. They have no part in its content production other than perhaps writing a letter to the editor. Digital journalism, however, is much more of a process as it is never complete, the web pages are always in a state of update and renewal, the blogs and blog comments always taking additions. Jarvis, a professor of journalism at CUNY, makes some useful distinctions between traditional journalism as product and new journalism models, such as citizen journalism, as processes ("New Business Models for News"). News as product, Jarvis writes, is "dictated by production and distribution," "owned and controlled and monopolized," "centralized," "once-a-day," "one-way," "one-size-fits-all," and holds "perfection as a standard." In contrast, the new journalism as process "never starts, never ends," is "transparent,"

"enabled by links," "enables networks," and allows "input and collaboration at all levels." These are fundamental differences that reach well beyond the technology of the newspaper. They echo changes in how the academy has viewed writing first as a product and later as a process. If the technology were all that were changing, then people would still be reading their once-a-day morning paper over breakfast, just on a technology other than newsprint. And then traditional newspapers might still be strong business models as they simply would change their output to a different technological medium. The more important changes that we are experiencing are those that Jenkins and Gitelman note, in the relationships and social and cultural practices that are enabled by the new technology of news as process.

The changes in relationships between consumer and producer, audience and news, have prompted people to start questioning their basic understandings of journalism. Among the most basic and important of those questions is, simply, "who is a journalist?" That was the title for a roundtable debate held at the first-ever World Journalism Education Congress in 2007 and printed in *Journalism Studies*. Journalism professor Alan Knight, using language emblematic of participatory culture, noted in that debate that "journalism paradigms are changing" (122). He continued, saying:

Journalists were once defined by where they worked; in newspapers, or radio and television stations. The Internet promises everyone can be a publisher... . So who in the future should be called a journalist? Anyone applying professional practices within recognized codes of ethics will be differentiated from most bloggers as well as our friends at Fox News. What will they be doing? Seeking to create non-fiction, buttressed by transparent sources ... News. Where will we find them? Anywhere there's a computer with an Internet link. (123)

Knight is a little stricter than some in his appeal to professional standards and codes of ethics for citizen journalists; many in journalism studies are trying to find ways to recognize citizen journalists while also drawing distinctions between the public and the professionals, and Knight seems to be doing a little of this. The premise of his answer is echoed by panelist Alex Gerlis in abbreviated form when he writes, "When we now ask 'Who Is a Journalist,' the answer is no longer anyone who is employed as journalist. The answer is that potentially, anyone and everyone can be a journalist" (126). The important message in both of these quotes is that the definition of a journalist has changed. The old definition focused on where a person worked and emphasized journalism as a career in noun form. It was static. The new definition reconceptualizes journalism no longer to be a career station but an activity, transforming the word from a noun to a verb. Now anybody can be a journalist, at least part time, because anybody can do journalism. Journalism is not so much what you are but what you do. This is the idea behind citizen journalism, and it is having a democratizing effect upon the media by opening it up to more voices and greater participation, although that hopefully democratic opening is always constrained and under threat. As Knight comments in the debate, "The Internet allows almost anyone to become not only a media critic, but also a reporter and a producer" (117). Here again the relationship between media consumer and producer is altered as journalism becomes more of a practice than a job description. The internet is the catalyst for these social and cultural alterations.

The advent and rise of citizen journalism is part of an ongoing series of changes in the public's relationship to the media, although citizen journalism is a different change in kind. Journalism professor Joyce Nip outlines five models of connection between mainstream journalism and the public. She begins with traditional journalism, in which "professional journalists are the gatekeepers who filter through the happenings of the world, select the significant events, and report them for an audience" (216). The public plays no part in traditional journalism except as consumers and perhaps interview sources. Various versions of public and participatory journalism follow in response to

traditional journalism. They attempt to bring the public's voice back into journalism through greater interactivity, and they pursue stories that are considered in the public's interest as a way to promote the development of a democratic society. Still, in these models, the professionals serve as gatekeepers or moderators. The last model Nip offers is that of citizen journalism, in which "the people are responsible for gathering content, visioning, producing[,] and publishing the news product" (218). Nip offers these models as a progression, with traditional journalism allowing the least public involvement and citizen journalism the most. What she misses here is that citizen journalism is a new kind of model in that it removes professional journalists as essential to the process. Professional journalists still play a great and vital function in the news ecosystem—and more on that later—but in citizen journalism the professionals do not have to be part of the process at all, not even to the diminished degree that the public at least had to be an audience for the professionals in traditional journalism. In citizen journalism, the public is both producer and audience. (That audience role is often overlooked and under-theorized. Informed consumption of news, as one acts as one's own content editor and can read as a news consumer as well as producer—a significant change in reader position—should be seen as an important quality of citizen journalism.) This is the type of paradigm shift that Knight, Shirky, Jenkins and others are talking about.

A shift in the role of the journalist through participatory culture likewise necessitates a shift in the role of the citizen. This again relates the important developments in audience. Jenkins proposes an understanding of what this shift might entail in connection to the concepts of the monitorial citizen and collective intelligence. The monitorial citizen is an idea borrowed from Michael Schudson; Jenkins describes it as "the idea that citizens may collectively monitor developing situations, focusing greater attention on problem spots and accessing knowledge on an ad hoc or need-to-know basis" (310). The monitorial citizen replaces the informed citizen because the abundance of information makes it impossible for a citizen to keep up on everything pertaining to civil life. Instead, the monitorial citizen knows enough to watch from a distance, keep abreast of changes and government actions, and intercede with other citizens as causes arise. When people talk about applying the ideas of the monitorial citizen and the practices of participatory culture to the civil sphere, Jenkins writes,

What they are talking about is a shift in the public's role in the political process, bringing the realm of political discourse closer to the everyday life experiences of citizens; what they are talking about is changing the ways people think about community and power so that they are able to mobilize collective intelligence to transform governance; and what they are talking about is a shift from the individualized conception of the informed citizen toward the collaborative concept of a monitorial citizen. (219)

These shifts and changes coincide with the shift from a traditional model of journalism to a citizen journalism model in which the citizenry itself performs many of the watchdog functions traditionally prescribed to the mainstream media, as referenced by Starr in his concern that a decline in newspapers will result in an increase in corruption. The role of monitorial citizen, if taken up by the citizenry, could help stanch such an increase in corruption. Moreover, one benefit of such an engaged citizenry is that involvement with government is then no longer limited to voting and the consumption of mainstream news. Instead, in Jenkins's proposal, the realm of political discourse moves closer to everyday life experiences. As Jenkins writes, "The next step is to think of democratic citizenship as a lifestyle" (245). In a citizen journalism model this lifestyle includes producing, monitoring, and consuming the news, broadly defined as everything from reportorial or topical Facebook updates to freelance reporting.

The continuing results of this shift in citizen journalism through participatory culture are new news ecosystems in which the citizenry and the mainstream press both play important roles. Jarvis locates

the individual within these news ecosystems as being at the center of a personal news cycle in which the individual chooses, consumes, contributes, and collaborates on the media ("The Press Becomes the Press Sphere"). Instead of news originating with a producer and being transmitted in one direction to a consumer, the news in the press sphere is multivalent so that the public gets its news from multiple sources in multiple ways, ways which are interconnected among themselves. So a story might appear in a twitter feed, get picked up by *The Daily Show*, go to cable news and the mainstream press, and then become reinterpreted in the blogosphere. In this way news operates in an ecosystem, with each individual news consumer/producer being at the center of his or her ecosystem of media new and old, friends and family, and the mainstream press and the Internet. There is also an important place for more traditional media in these news ecosystems. This follows the idea of media convergence. As Jenkins describes media convergence, "If the digital revolution paradigm presumed that new media would displace old media, the emerging convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways" (6). Citizen journalism will not replace traditional journalism, just as the emergence of one new life form does not necessitate the extinction of another.

Citizen journalism and traditional journalism have an important relationship in the news ecosystem. In many ways, they are symbiotic. Knight observes that blogs are well positioned to provide eyewitness sources (120). This positioning, as well as the blogger's ability to crosslink to other sources, increases blog credibility and assists the mainstream media by providing first-hand accounts and pictures. This was on display in the blog coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the Bombay terrorist attacks. Much of the mainstream media turned to blogs for eyewitness material. At their best, bloggers contribute to the news ecosystem the same way that grassroots political movements contribute to the democratic system. This is the contribution that citizen journalists as bloggers can make to the new news ecosystem. When they pool information, debate evidence, and challenge one another's assumptions, the blogging community is employing collective intelligence.

Additionally, bloggers may be very knowledgeable about their locales or particular areas of interest of use in a type of citizen journalism called the hyperlocal. An April 2009 story in *The New York Times* identified hyperlocal blogging as a growing area in citizen journalism due in part to the technological convergence that allows stories to be easily indexed and accessed geographically. This hyperlocal coverage can then act as a first level of reporting to be picked up by larger and more traditional media outlets. Indeed, Claire Miller and Brad Stone recount in *The New York Times* article that *The Star-Ledger* of Newark, New Jersey, twice in a month referenced stories first reported on a hyperlocal site (although those hyperlocal stories were produced by a paid journalist). Former journalist Mark Potts writes of the relationship between citizen journalism and the mainstream press, particularly in the context of the hyperlocal, that "Citizen journalism doesn't replace old-fashioned shoe-leather journalism. It augments and extends it by providing new ways to cover news that journalists can't get to and by giving 'audience' members a voice" (67). He makes a good point except that citizen journalism does more than give the audience a voice; it transforms the role of the audience. In some of these ways, blogs can be seen as a testing ground for stories, and they are continually monitored by professional journalists for story ideas.

As in any ecosystem, relationships between bloggers and professional journalists, and even between bloggers and other bloggers, are complex and uneven. Communications professor Tanni Haas cites a study in which Shirky found that among 400 politically oriented blogs, the top 50 received 50 percent of all the links (391). Haas further notes that some of the most popular political blogs are maintained by writers who double as professional journalists, writers such as Andrew Sullivan at *TheDailyDish* and Mickey Kaus at *KausFiles*. "Considering that a small number of weblog writers wield a strong influence on the blogosphere as a whole, mainstream journalists only need to attend to the opinions of these weblog writers to obtain a relatively accurate impression of the distribution of opinions on any

given topic," Haas writes (392). This is not yet, and may never be, the democratic news environment that champions of citizen journalism have hoped for.

Just as professional journalists depend upon blogs for eyewitness accounts, hyperlocal coverage, pro bono research, and story ideas, so are citizen journalists heavily reliant upon traditional journalism. Except for the rare exception, citizen journalists and bloggers do not have the resources or the institutional support of professional journalists. They do not have editors and copy editors; at best the readers of their sites fill these roles. Citizen journalists may be unaware of journalistic codes of ethics. They obviously do not have foreign bureaus. The great majority of citizen journalists lack the time, training, or resources to do original reporting, although there are efforts to change this funding of independent research, a move that brings citizen journalism ever closer in practice to traditional journalism. As a result, the majority of the civic and political coverage by citizen journalism is commenting upon and linking to stories by the mainstream press. They offer point of view and interpretation. Haas notes that several studies have found "the topics discussed on weblogs follow the narrow range of topics featured in mainstream news media" (389). She argues that rather than challenging the opinions of the mainstream media, bloggers end up reinforcing mainstream content by depending upon it for material. This dependence undermines one of the potential advantages of citizen journalism, that of linking to multiple viewpoints and allowing readers to contrast them. Citizen journalism does give greater attention to alternative viewpoints than traditional journalism would be expected to. But it could do more.

Some critics have seized upon the limitations of citizen journalism in an argument for the superiority of traditional journalism, an argument that sometimes fails to recognize that citizen journalism is not a proposal but a described reality. Critics such as Fred Brown argue that embracing citizen journalism could lead to a diminishment of the authority of mainstream journalism, and that this would be a bad thing. To have an interactive "conversation" with the public, Brown writes, "can only diminish the traditional media's voice of authority. It may also allow the media to become less aggressive and more passive. Let the readers and viewers decide. We'll do what they want" (35). This is an incomplete accounting of the relationship between the mainstream press and citizen journalism. There are very legitimate issues of authority and ethics that need to be addressed in citizen journalism, but mainstream journalism needs to likewise address some of the same issues, as it has not always kept the confidence of the public. In answer to criticisms of citizen journalism, Knight writes, "Freedom of speech threatens to become universal, empowering bloggers to articulate, advocate, proselytize, and sometimes mis-inform, dis-inform, vilify, threaten and subvert—all of the things journalists once had pretty much to themselves" (118). As part of the same debate, journalism professor Cherian George argues that "narrow definitions of journalism play into the hands of authoritarian states" that would want to identify and oppress journalists (129). George continues, writing that given the scale and business environment of much of the mainstream press, "Some aspects of professionalism may be little more than this: a bureaucratic necessity for efficient operation of large-scale commercial news enterprises" (131). In other words, the professionalism of the mainstream press is simply a way for news to be produced more efficiently, not necessarily of a higher quality or with better values.

This is an important debate between citizen journalists and professional journalists, some of whom are the same people. Jenkins notes the lack of objectivity among bloggers as many of them take partisan or otherwise ideological positions. But then objectivity has always been an unrealized ideal in journalism. Honesty and objectivity, after all, are not the always the same. Jenkins finds the debate between professional journalists and bloggers to improve the work of both. As he frames it,

In such a context, bloggers will be jousting with mainstream journalists story by story, sometimes getting it right, sometimes getting it wrong, but always forcing a segment of the public to question dominant representations. One can't count on either side to always

provide the public with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Yet, the adversarial relationship between these two forces holds the opportunity to correct many mistakes. (228)

This takes us back to the symbiotic relationship between citizen and mainstream journalism in news ecosystems. Both are bettered through their relationship. Knight enters the debate to offer suggestions that bloggers would do well to adopt. Bloggers could start using by-lines, give more support for their stories, and apply codes of ethics to their activities (122). Gerlis further adds that all journalists should do more to better adhere to professional standards and ethics, such as giving more attention to accuracy, increasing the verification of material, emphasizing the differentiation between fact and opinion, and safeguarding sources (127). These may also be read as qualities that distinguish good academic writing. With that thought, it is to the relationship between citizen journalism, civic literacy, and academic writing instruction that I turn now.

Teaching Civic Literacy in Digital Environments: A Life after Death

Much of the work of citizen journalism takes place on blogs. That blogs are exploding in popularity as personal writing sites is common knowledge. Knight cites a 2007 study under the auspices of Technorati, a specialist internet searching company, that found 1.4 blogs were being created every second of every day (119). Academics have increasingly turned their attention to blog environments and writing as teaching tools and sites of study. In their auto-ethnographic study of blog writing, Julia Davies and Guy Merchant found blogs to be sites of new literacy practices that functioned as global and local communities and combined the personal with the public through the rhetorical construction of personal identity (168-169). These are exactly the kind of literacy practices that teachers of writing are encouraged to develop when the New London group argues that "literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (9). In the case of civic literacy, these technologies include citizen journalism in the form of blogs. For those writing instructors who believe part of their mission is to teach civic literacy, blogs and web news literacy practices must enter pedagogical considerations as civic literacy increasingly relocates to the digital sphere.

Lazere defines civic literacy as involving "mainly the application of more or less traditional elements of academic discourse toward the development of critical citizenship" (*Reading and Writing* xii). In this definition the purpose of academic discourse is not limited to academic discourse but is applied to the development of critical citizenship as a process of inquiry. Such a civic application of the rhetorical skills embedded in the academy and often required of introductory composition courses frees instructors from the sense that their courses are restricted to service courses and job training. Academic discourse, and education more broadly, are then put in the service of citizenship and democracy. Lazere has argued that civic literacy—based upon critical thinking skills and the participation in local and national political discourse—should be at the heart of the composition classroom. As Lazere writes, "I make the immodest, and basically conservative, proposal that we redefine English studies as a discipline centered on critical thinking and national public rhetoric" ("Postmodern Pluralism" 283). He bases his proposal in part on the reasoning that no discourse is more important for the personal wellbeing of student and the civic wellbeing of the country and the world than is the civic and political discourse that has been overtaken by corporate, moneyed, and other powerful interests. A writing course that includes explicit introduction and participation in this discourse, Lazere argues, is the best way that many students will have access to it. "Our classroom studies should address the rhetoric of debates on international, national, *and local* issues in politics, environmentalism, and, above all, economics as it impinges directly on every student's life," Lazere continues (284). He is in the company of a broad coalition of composition scholars who argue for the importance of the quality of content—specifically content that address

civic and public debate—in the composition course as a way of introducing students to wider public discourse and as a way of developing the rhetorical skills that will serve them as well as their community as they continue with college and life. Lazere views the rhetorical skills of academic discourse as nonexclusive to academic discourse or critical citizenship but as overlapping both. If they do overlap both, the greater good seems to lie in the area of critical citizenship.

Teresa Grettano, who adopted a course rationale similar to Lazere's, explains in an article on course design what she understands to be the relation of civic literacy to the teaching of composition. She cites Cary Nelson, with references to Thomas Jefferson and John Dewey, in arguing that "Humanities education is the foundation of a critical democratic citizenry ... and that our job as educators—and in English in particular—is to help students critically look at public language and discourse" (71). Lazere likewise argues that the humanities and particularly English studies are uniquely suited for the development of critical citizenship because of their attention to "basic reading and research skills (including an introduction to locating and evaluating sources of information on public affairs, in periodicals, books, and reports), the critical insights of literature and literary theory, the analytic tools of logic, argumentative rhetoric, and general semantics" (*Reading and Writing* 11). All of this is a lot to include in a single semester, especially for an introductory course. Fittingly, Lazere has argued for civic literacy as part of a broader and interdisciplinary curriculum within the humanities and covered over multiple courses, including those on political and economic rhetoric, critical thinking about mass media, propaganda analysis, and civic literacy practices. He advances an agenda that would "give priority to the factual knowledge and analytic skills that students need to make reasoned judgments about the partisan screaming matches and special-interest propaganda that permeate political disputes" ("A Core Curriculum for Civic Literacy"). Still, the basic civic goals and their relationship to composition retain their applicability to composition instruction in general. Although instructors cannot expect students to become critical citizens in a matter of weeks, they can help them develop the intellectual and discursal habits that would lead to such civic positioning.

Aiming civic literacy pedagogy at concerns of citizen journalism offers the advantage of further emphasizing the social qualities of research and writing, an emphasis that approaches Jenkins's idea of collective intelligence. Too often education is viewed as an individual rather than a social enterprise. In discussing civic literacy, there is a risk of emphasizing the individual's development of civic literacy skills while losing sight of the larger project of civic education. Lazere's argument for the importance of civic literacy is not limited to the individual's ability to partake in civic discourse, as Lazere considers the wider importance of civic education and the cumulative effect of individuals partaking in civic discourse to raise the level of that discourse. This is, again, a responsibility for teachers in English and rhetoric. Lazere writes in "Literacy and Mass Media," that

the low level of cognitive development to which the discourse of American mass media and politics is presently geared is woefully inadequate for the effective functioning of a democracy, and scholars of literature and language, whatever their own political convictions might be, have a responsibility to work toward raising our public discourse to a more reasoned level of dialogue. (237)

Lazere's article was published in 1984 when television, not the internet, was the principle site of concern and investigation for issues of literacy and mass media. Although I do not share Lazere's concern about the supposedly detrimental effects of television viewing upon a student's cognitive development, I do think Lazere's attention to the level of public discourse and the health of a democracy—especially in mass media and on the internet—remains valid. Civic discourse is alive and well on the internet, which offers discursal opportunities well beyond those of television and more traditional mass media, although this is not an area of the internet that students necessarily frequent.

The responsibility for scholars of language and literature, to take up Lazere's argument, must then include working toward greater access and participation in that civic discourse.

Access is a constant consideration in arguing for attention to citizen journalism in writing courses. Donna Alvermann reminds us that student home internet access cannot be taken for granted. Some students still lack such ease and familiarity of access and have to depend upon public computers at the library in order to get on the internet. A public library computer is never as convenient as a home computer, and, as Alvermann notes, home access generally includes greater experience with all the social and cultural practices that surround internet technology use (15). But instead of an argument against the teaching of new literacy practices, the problem of disparate access only strengthens the case for such a pedagogy. If students are lacking access, if they are lacking the social and cultural practices that would assist them to more fully engage in their communities, then it falls upon teachers and the educational system to assist them in realizing the full potential of democratic participation, in this case through the work of citizen journalism and civic literacy instruction.

Blogs are noteworthy as literacy sites and opportunities for instruction because of how they provoke readers and writers to re-examine their relationship to reading and writing. Carolyn Miller identifies some of the common features of blogs as their "reverse chronology, frequent updating, and combination of links with personal commentary." As blogger and journalist Andrew Sullivan notes, to read a blog is a very different experience than that of reading a novel because the reader of the blog starts with the material that was written most recently and continues through that which was written earlier. Sullivan finds that writing a blog forced him to look at writing and authorship differently because blogs offer more collaborative opportunities with readers and—given their immediacy and archival tendencies on the web—hold writers accountable in a more honest reckoning with error and revision. Through links, blogs showcase the interconnected relationship of specific discursive sites and events, and they combine the personal with the public, as Davies and Merchant found. This latter quality is also mentioned by Miller, who writes, "We must characterize the generic exigence of the blog as some widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self; furthermore in these particular times, we must locate that need at the intersection of the private and public realms, where questions about identity are most troubled." Issues of public and private discourse and identity are not unique to blogs, but I do believe that blogs raise these questions, particularly in the area of civic discourse and engagement, in fruitful ways. My expectation and hope is that for students accustomed to traditional academic writing and formats, blogging will make strange those rhetorical acts of which they are unaware and those with which they have become too familiar. It might also better engage them as writers and readers participating in their democracy. I realize that open-access student blogs are not generally all that well-read outside of the community of their friends, family, peers, and instructors. But the opportunity that anybody surfing the web might read that blog is an important consideration for them as they write and can change the writing. Or maybe it is that their friend or mother, checking in on their work at college, reads the blog and takes that as an opportunity to continue a discussion on politics and current events that began as a critical blog post. This is important work. In the end it is not the blogging itself that is transformative for the students. It is instead the literacy habits that they form—critical ways of reading the daily news in *The New York Times* (a reading that I often assign in my courses) and responding in conversation and writing to interpretations and other commentaries upon that news—that become transformative. In other words, following the best of compositional habits, it is not the blogging (too often unread by the larger community) but the student doing the blogging (always his or her primary audience and project) that is the site of the most important work.

I am not arguing that blogging and other civic literacy projects on the web become the sole focus of the composition classroom. Instead I am arguing that such work is easily incorporated with more traditional essays and assignments of rhetorical analysis and research writing within the classroom,

and that doing so adds value. My argument builds upon those of Lazere and others who have positioned civic literacy practices as central to the work of writing instruction. Beyond those, I add that educating students for civic literacy in the digital age may be understood as essentially educating critical citizen journalists, contributing in perhaps a small way to the very important function of journalist training that is being lost with the death of small newspapers. Writing instruction has an important role to play in helping students take on the position of citizen journalists in the new media ecosystem. By doing so, writing instructors might also help answer some of the shortcomings of citizen journalism. The lack of editorial oversight could be addressed in the class through peer review and instructor comments. The lack of a code of ethics could likewise be addressed since academia holds ideals similar to those of journalistic integrity. Many of the research and writing practices valued in academia apply nearly as well to journalism in the identification of issues, the location and evaluation of sources, the attention to honesty, and attention to accuracy and the efficient use of language. The role of audience would also be improved through the instruction of reading practices that included attention to major press sites, such as *The New York Times*, and blogs and how those sites and many others, including the student writers/readers themselves, function in news ecosystems.

Society is in need of more critical news writers and consumers as well as more civic-minded citizens, needs that could be partially addressed through writing instruction in civic literacies and journalism. Jenkins concludes by writing of the importance of applying ideas to participatory culture and new literacies to pedagogy. "We need to rethink the goals of media education so that young people can come to think of themselves as cultural producers and participants and not simply as consumers, critical or otherwise," he writes (270). I cannot think of an area where such a rethinking is more needed or of greater potential use than that of news and civic discourse. To teach students how to enter that discourse as potential citizen journalists is to teach them to employ new literacy practices for their own prosperity as well as that of their democracy. In that way journalistic practices, if not the profession of journalism itself, might find life even after the much-heralded death of newspapers.

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