
Revisoning Photojournalism

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'What does it mean to bear witness in a moment of crisis?' was the first question posed to the audience by Professor Stuart Allan, in his lecture Revisoning Photojournalism: Citizen Witnessing and the Politics of Visual Truths. The Deputy Head of Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Culture, was invited by Charles University's Social Sciences Faculty on the 21st of October, to speak about photojournalism. His lecture focussed especially on the impact of mobile photojournalism on the media and news industry, and how this has changed what it means to be a photojournalist.



The way we witness events, as a culture, has of course altered dramatically since the advent of mobile photograph and Internet technology. Instant wireless communication between different parts of the globe is now possible, more than possible – normal, every day. Our need as a culture, to share experiences instantly, has grown in tandem with this technology. Therefore, the question of what it means to bear witness in a moment of crisis, opens a very different dialogue than the same question would have ten years ago. We now possess the tools to capture events, and instantly upload the footage. Professor Allan refers to this as 'citizen journalism'. This citizen journalism provides an alternative to the more traditional, professional media sources. It is a different being in many ways – quicker, less professional, more personal. The most interesting though, is its 'lack of intent'. The average citizen does not usually have an agenda in reporting an event or crisis, as a professional news source might. Does this swiftness and efficiency of report, and decreased biasness, deem more traditional sources redundant?

<blockquote class="rightfloat"> <p> The lecture concluded with Professor Allan emphasising the importance of being alert to the prospect of change being brought to the photojournalism industry, yet at the same time recognising the opportunities brought by citizen journalism, to provide collaboratively for an industry that is ultimately changing. </p> </blockquote>

No doubt was left in the lecture that 'citizen journalism' is having a detrimental impact on established media companies. For example, in 2013 the Chicago Sun-Times made their entire photography staff redundant due to their plans to generate

more web-based content; even Pulitzer Prize winning journalist John White was not saved in the sacrifice. Similarly, in May of this year, the Australian media company Fairfax Media Ltd. announced plans of eighty redundancies for editorial positions, in a move towards more online content. These companies' actions perhaps indicate their fear that 'citizen journalism' is in fact making more traditional sources redundant, and that they must move towards more instant news reporting with more online accessibility.

Professor Allen also discussed the idea that citizen journalism has affected the way we deal with *the people* involved in a crisis. Two events from the previous year were used as examples – the political murder of Lee Rigby in Woolich, England, and the 2013 Boston marathon bombing. (Both reported in real time as the events were unfolding, through social media.) Due to mobile phone footage, the Lee Rigby killers and bomb detonators were identified almost immediately. The public footage of the 'visual truths' of these crises was a positive force, and achieved something more traditional styles of photojournalism perhaps could not.

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Professor Allan told of his 'pleasure' at visiting Charles University's Department of Journalism, and that he was struck not only by the differences between British and Czech Journalism, but also the many similarities. He 'hope(s) to continue the conversation in the years ahead.'

Elizabeth Moen is in her second year of an English Literature degree and working as a freelance journalist. She says the move from London to Charles University has been invigorating; Prague has bewitched her with its eccentricities and style. Interning for iForum is an exceptional opportunity for her to develop herself as a journalistic writer. She is interested in people, places, and everything in between.