Thought on Tap #3 (News and Social Media)

12/13/18

Transcript:

Introduction:

0:00:03.830 *Bretton Rodriguez:* You're listening to “Thought on Tap” a monthly podcast about the role of the humanities in the world today

0:00:07.950 *Carlos Mariscal:* brought to you by the College of Liberal Arts and the Core Humanities department at the University of Nevada, Reno.

0:00:14.429 *Bretton Rodriguez:* This is Bretton Rodriguez a lecturer in Core Humanities and a co-organizer of “Thought on Tap”

0:00:18.900 *Carlos Mariscal:* and this is Carlos Mariscal an assistant professor of philosophy and also a co-organizer of “Thought on Tap”

0:00:22.020 *Bretton Rodriguez:* and every month we convene a panel of local experts to discuss the issues of the day and have a moderated discussion at the University Laughing Planet.

0:00:29.670 *Carlos Mariscal:* This month we're talking about the role of the humanities in the news and social media and now here is Bretton Rodriguez.

News and Social Media:
0:00:37.469 *Bretton Rodriguez:* So, welcome everyone to this the third session of “Thought and Tap” dealing with the role of the humanities in the news and social media, so before we get started I would like to start by thanking our sponsors. First of all as always we would like to thank Laughing Planet for letting us be here. So if we could please have a round of applause, thank you and also in addition I would like to thank the Core Humanities program and also the College of Liberal Arts for all of their support. So what I would like to do is start by introducing each of our speakers and then after that I would like to introduce the topic and then go ahead and go into some questions that I have for all of them, following that I will open it up to questions from all of you. So as you are listening please do think a little bit about questions you may have or questions that you want to ask to all of our panelists. So our first panelist is Katherine Fusco. Katherine Fusco writes about the ways different media forms shape identity and encouraged us to be either cruel or kind to one another. Also can everyone hear me okay and does it sound all right? It sounds good, cool. After completing a PhD at Vanderbilt

University, she spent several years working as the assistant director of the Vanderbilt writing studio. Since arriving at the University of Nevada, Reno, she has been proud to have her teaching honored by the Crowley distinguished professorship in the core humanities. Fusco researches about and teaches courses on film theory and 19th and 20th century American literature, she's particularly interested in silent film, genre film, theories of celebrity, the history of the American Novel, and literary realism, naturalism, and modernism. At present, she is doing research and ideas of black and white childhoods during modernism and theories of personality and celebrity during the Great Depression, so please let's hear it for Katherine. Our next speaker is Lydia Huerta. Lydia holds a joint faculty position in the Department of Communication and that of Gender, Race and Identity program at the University of Nevada, Reno. Huerta have specializes in 20th and 21st century cultural studies of the Americas with an emphasis on the relationship between social media and narratives about the US-Mexico border. Her primary research examines the cultural production created in response to the women killings in Ciudad Juarez in 1993. Other research interests focus on social movements, cultural narratives, and public policies created in the United States and Mexico which call attention to issues related to undocumented populations specifically women and LGBTQ migrants, so please let's hear it for Lydia. Our next speaker is Paromita Pain. Paromita research focuses on alternate media and global journalism practices from feminist perspectives. Before receiving her PhD from the University of Texas at Austin, she was a journalist with a Hindu newspaper, India's most respected broadsheet. She has also written for the Guardian and Al Jazeera, interested in epistemological concerns raised by emerging fictions in media that are hybrids between old and new forms between citizen and professional news practices. She has published various book chapters on the intersection of gender and social media besides looking into areas of online commentating and uncivil behavior and its impact in journalistic practices. She's been awarded scholarships to examine media practices in various countries like Israel, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Singapore.

She was a visiting research fellow at the University of Cardiff in the UK in 2008, she uses qualitative and quantitative methods and has recently started focusing on computational methods of data collection and analysis. Her research has been published in refereed journals like the journalism and mass communications educator, journalism studies, journalism practice, media Asia and feminist media theory. As an assistant professor of Global Media Studies at the Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno, Paromita explores emerging newsroom practices and concerns in a global context, please for Paromita. And our final speaker, Joey Lovato. Joey is a graduate of the Reynolds School of Journalism here at UNR. He launched two podcasts while as a student, he interned at KUNR Reno Public Radio where he later helped launch their first podcast. He has also worked on the TV show Wild Nevada at KNPB Reno Public Broadcasting and has worked at the Nevada Independent for the past two years producing their two podcasts as well as reporting and producing video content for their website, so please let's hear it for Joey. Okay so just to provide a kind of brief introduction of this theme of looking at the role of humanities in the news and in social media, so in many ways the news and social media are linked in modern society. For instance whether we like it not the majority of people in the you know in the United States receive the news via social media. As of August 2017 about 67 percent of Americans received their news from social media at least part of the time and this number

appears to be growing in the summer of 2016 during the final stages of the presidential elections about 62% of Americans claim to receive their news from social media. The increase of individuals using social media to receive the news is particularly significant since following the results of the 2016 election, many people blamed social media for disseminating false misleading news information. This brings up another issue as well, over the past few years many people have been losing faith in the news and the news media and losing faith that the information they receive is accurate. In a recent Gallup poll, for instance a majority of all Americans as well as over 90% of those who identify as Republican or Conservative say that they lost trust in the media. This mistrust of the media has become such an accepted part of modern society that we even see some news corporations taking advantage of the situation by marketing themselves as one of the few organizations that could be trusted today. The New York Times, for instance is currently running an advertisement with the slogan "The Truth is Worth It," implying that purchasing a subscription to the newspaper guarantees the reader access to the true account of world affairs that is missing from other such news organizations. There are many different reasons for this decline in trust in the media, however there are also a few obvious causes. One such cause is a current political environment, for instance it was the president of the United States himself who popularized the term "Fake News," a concept that has been widely embraced by people on both the right and the left of the political spectrum. So another possible cause for the decline in trust in established media outlets is the increased use of social media as a means of disseminating news stories, in particular in a world where anyone can receive news stories that reflect their own ideas and beliefs thus creating echo chambers and that reinforce what they already think. Many people seem increasingly willing to doubt anything that contrasts with their beliefs. This brings us to our main topic namely what is the role of the humanities in relation to the news and social media today, moreover what if any responsibility do we as scholars of the humanities as well as individuals trained in humanistic disciplines have to evaluate and engage with the critiques of the news media and it's increasingly close relationship to social media? So just to kind of go ahead and just kind of have this as a starting off point, okay a jumping off point. I want to kind of go into my first question for the panel as a whole and so the question I want to start off with today is in what ways do you see the humanities impacting the news and social media in society today? So Katherine do you want to start us off and we'll just kind of move this way.

0:08:37.400 *Katherine Fusco:* I was sitting at this end and thinking that meant I got to go last. Yeah and I will say that I may be a sort of perverse member of this panel in some ways because I explicitly work on things that are not true. I work on literature and fiction film and so unlike some of my other colleagues, who have I'm sure wonderful things to say about fact and about truth and a more kind of documentary version of things. I work on fictional things and so one thing that I think my lies, the kind of objects that are lies that I work on, can help us think about is sort of other worlds right whether it's speculative fiction, worlds that feel very much like our own. There's a kind of imagining that the text of art works of film of literature helps us do whether that's looking at fictional texts for example like The Handmaid's Tale and seeing, you know, a possible resonance, a kind of emotional resonance, a kind of like deep resonance or it's utopian thinking, right. A kind of looking to literature to offer us forms of utopia. That there's a kind of value maybe in certain kinds of humanities. Disciplines that look like they're engaging

the headlines, that look like they're engaging the news but do it in this very slant way, that do it in this adjacent way. I think that's why things like Black Mirror for example are so popular right now, they take social media and come at it slant, come at it in this imaginative way. So I'll just sort of throw my body of lies out there as a kind of way of srt of saying what my position here is a little bit.

0:10:25.790 *Lydia Huerta:* Well in a manner similar to Katherine, I also kind of look at fiction and in a way how we fictionalized true stories quote-unquote true stories right so kind of how things have a life after an event happens on social media and kind of what story gets built after the effect and I kind of come at it from ethics perspective which is more philosophy which again is part of the humanities and we often don't remember them it's very important to remember that ethics are a really big part of how we even present ourselves in social media, how we discuss things as social media and kind of how different aspects of ourselves are manifested or hidden in social media and kind of how that creates or doesn't create different narratives or different opportunities for people to discuss things. Also the access of social medium right so how does social media actually provide access to people who wouldn't normally have access to other things so one of my favorite stories to tell those of you can study Cuba probably appreciate this I was recently in Cuba and they have these parts called Wi-Fi parks and it was really interesting because there are these outdoor spaces where people used to go and talk to each other, but now everybody's on their social media connecting with people all over the world right and plugging into different news stories or other whatever they might be doing but they're not talking to each other necessarily, they're on social media. Also looking at how you know the humanities and the way in which we communicate with each other via where it'd be like mini stories or mini haikus and social media or letters to friends or whatever are manifested through the use of social media and in a way also kind of like how our disciplines are changing right because in academia there is a movement towards the digital humanities which is also another aspect of how social media sometimes gets incorporated into academia.

0:12:30.230 *Paromita Pain:* Essentially when we look at social media and humanities first and foremost we have to admit to ourselves that these are not two watertight areas and when we look to see how the social media and the humanities not only influence, draw on, and learn from each other we will have to see where these two areas have actually made the difference. Humanities down the ages have had perhaps the most influence on critical thinking and communication social media is an extension of our communicative adapt abilities and technologies so being an extension of a way to communicate also means that we need these two critical components of critical thinking and communicative ability right I mean just because it's technology and just because it's social media and has to do with news doesn't make it completely disparate and not dependent on what the age-old offerings of the humanities section was and all these perhaps will be. So to me, as a scholar of Media Sciences, I see great areas of learning and exchange between the areas of humanities and social media perhaps mostly because I do not see them as completely disparate bodies. So the humanities can definitely teach social media users you know more critical thinking, more ethical ways of thinking, more ethical ways of news distribution and production whereas social media perhaps can, you know I would like to use the word teach but provide examples of newer ways to

communicate to the humanities, so to me these two fields are extremely interrelated simply from the way they can draw and learn from each other.

0:14:52.730 *Joey Lovato:* Alright so I'm not as articulate as everybody else, I am not I'm not an academic but I do talk to a lot of people just as the nature of a journalist, you know you're interviewing people all day but the humanities, I think really play a major role in journalism because journalism is a major part of humanities, you know you're writing, you're learning and humanities is about understanding people and understanding the people around you and journalism is a way to do that. You can talk to people around you and you can understand who you're talking to and if I'm talking to a group of friends, you know we've got a common message or usually sharing but when you go into the news you're ingesting stuff that maybe isn't as savory as talking to a friend or a loved one and obviously you're sharing those opinions back and forth but when you're reading the news you're communicating with the world outside of your small little bubble, right. If you read the New York Times, if you read Washington Post, if you read anything we're getting a perspective outside of Reno or outside of the University and even outside of your friend group there's always a smaller and smaller bubble until you get just to the self but the more news you you like take in the more your understanding the people around you or at least hopefully understanding the people around you and even if you don't necessarily agree with it because a lot of news these days is not necessarily as objective it's a lot of editorializing and I think that's a big problem that we've reached in the news market these days is that everyone's reading something and you're reading someone's opinion, you're taking it as fact and I think that's a major problem that a lot of people don't seem to realize is happening. So when you're reading you're just taking in the the world around you in a different way that can hopefully give you a better perspective about everyone else around you. I don't know if I was more articulate or not (laughter).

0:16:50.030 *Bretton Rodriguez:* So kind of building off this idea of kind of using the humanities to think about media a little bit I'd like to kind of ask you also how do the humanities or how can the humanities address some of the problems concerning the perception of media today in particular concerning some of these issues and kind of shape our engagement with concepts such as Fake News and also deal with this issue of trust as well can the humanities help kind of rebuild this trust or regain this trust that people have in media in some sort and also dealing as well with this issue of partisanship. So these are like three huge questions and you guys have two minutes to answer it, so why don't we go ahead and Lydia do you want to start us off this time, are you feeling brave?

0:17:38.660 *Lydia Huerta:* So from a pedagogical perspective I think the humanities can really help with having people understand what satire is, what irony is, what parodies are. I think a lot of people have forgotten how to read and especially since most of the communication happens on social media or by via text. People say, "Oh you can't read tone" and I'm like, "Yes you can, yeah tones a thing, it happens." So I think in terms of the role the humanities having those moments to discuss, "Hey look at the Borowitz Report is actually hilarious and its satire and this is what it's satirizing." I remember a discussion some of my friends had on social media where somebody posted something from the Borowitz Report and they're like, "Oh this is horrible we

need to like go to the streets" and whatever and then somebody else was like, "Dude it's satire," right. So I think there is definitely a loss of how to identify these forms of humor and social commentary and I think in terms of the work that humanities can do is sort of like reemphasizes what these forms look like. I believe that BuzzFeed a couple weeks ago had the five forms of Fake News and one of them was actually satire and irony and I was like, "Because it's not news," but I'll leave it there.

0:18:57.890 *Paromita:* I think in these destructive times the humanities have a greater role than ever to play in the field and arena of journalism, you know the classes in religion, in logic, in ethics that we take in humanity how can that be translated over into the news production business you know the wisdom and the imagination that we get from subjects and humanities all of that has a role to play in the different ways we frame news, the different kinds of stories we tell because ultimately what we are aiming for is truthful storytelling and that is common to the humanities as well as to the best and the most basic tenets of journalism.

0:19:48.489 *Joey:* So when you can we talked about the perception of of the news a lot of times when someone comes up to me and they're like, "Oh you're a reporter," and they're like, "Well are you left or you right," you know are you Republican or are you Democrat and I'm like, "What do you mean am I left or am I right, I'm a reporter, I'm just trying to report the facts," and everyone's like, "Well what's your spin on it?" Well it's amazing that everyone just expects a reporter to have a spin without even like talking to me right like so many people will just assume that the Nevada Independent where I work right now is like is really left but recently we started reporting on Democrat Ruben Kihuen who is under a sexual harassment investigation and is potentially running for Las Vegas City Council now even though he is stepping down from the Congress but now that we're reporting on that they're like, "Well you guys are so right because you're reporting against the Democrats," but then if we report on something that's against the Republicans people are like, "Oh you're so left." Well just because we're reporting on something that doesn't necessarily agree with your worldview doesn't necessarily mean that we're left or right, it just means that we're trying to convey a message as truthfully and honestly as we as we can but so many people expect it to be one way or the other and they want it to be one way or the other, they want to be told like, "Oh the Republicans are horrible or oh the Democrats are Horrible," and they want to just reaffirm their worldview and I think that's the biggest problem with the perspective of the media people go to the media looking to be told that the left or the right is correct or it doesn't have to be the left or the right it can be any sort of subject but as long as they're already held beliefs are being reaffirmed that's what they want from the media a lot of the times I find or at least if they're going to look for the opposite side they're only going there to find an argument to strengthen their own personal opinions. So the perception of the media I think has really gone downhill unfortunately and I think a lot of that is due to social media as well because anyone can be a reporter now I mean anyone could put something on Facebook or Twitter or whatever but having a vetted journalists and you know going through the process of fact-checking is a lot harder than you think, I mean I just did like a really simple story yesterday on a new technology caucus that's being formed in the legislature here in Nevada and I mean we spent four hours just making sure that like every everyone that was on the caucus was their names were spelled right and even

things like we said the date of when it was formed and then none of us could confirm like, "What was it yesterday or was it last week?" and so we just scrapped it, we're like "We cannot confirm that it was this day," so we just took it out of the story because we didn't want to leave any sort of falsities into the story, so yeah.

0:22:37.909 *Bretton:* Katherine do you want to add something to this as well or?

0:22:44.289 *Katherine:* Only a little thing, which maybe goes back to what Lydia is saying and also some of these kind of concerns about facts and I do feel like we are in this moment where facts are tricky things not actually because we don't have access to facts but we have lots and lots of access to lots and lots of facts, in fact. So in some ways we have too many facts, you can go find your fact and I think there's also lots of research out there that actually the more facts you consume the more entrenched you become. So if you are somebody who believes in the conspiracy theory and you're presented with facts, the facts that you're presented with become further evidence of how deep the conspiracy goes. You become more entrenched in your position not less, there's sort of information about this with climate change denial and the more people learn like the more facts they encounter about climate change, the more paralyzed they feel about it, it doesn't actually— learning facts about climate change— doesn't inspire environmental action. So we are in this moment, I think again where I think journalists have a really important role to play, folks in the more traditional humanities have a really important role to play to see how do we construct narratives around facts, how do we consume facts and things like this but it's not like there's, you know, I just asked you for some facts at the beginning and was like, "Take out your cell phone, please. Can you find this out for me?" I can find out most facts where you know with the days of barroom betting on facts is over, we can know what we want to know and in some ways that's a problem.

0:24:21.340 *Bretton:* We can still bet on facts, it's just I'll look them up and I feel like I'm going to win. So let's change gears a little bit and let's focus on social media this kind of place where we get a lot of these facts, this place where we can get reinforced in a lot of our positions and so I was wondering if you all could just think a little bit about how social media especially the use of social media as a platform for spreading news stories has affected the production and dissemination of information really around the world. Paromita would you like to start us off here?

0:24:48.879 *Paromita:* Now I'm a great believer in the great collective good of the social media, social media in general let me qualify that before I get stoned or something but to me you know building on what you just said, facts can often seem like you know the homes we live in. Social media are just extra doors and windows to perhaps get into our homes now whether we decide to enter through the back door or use the front door will depend on our needs, the context, and what kind of critical thinking is leading us to choose one door over the other so that makes social media a prominent means of access to not just facts but information that is out there. Now of course we can, we can monitor information, we can monitor the way people access information and all of that as a means to ensuring that people get only facts but if we leave it to this kind of monitoring to make sure that I get only facts then I am leaving myself

open to you know decisions that are made by say other people whose intentions may not always be to make sure I receive facts. So then as an audience where does our responsibility lie in ensuring that we are thinking critically enough and accessing information that is factual and correct? So while social media has opened up you know distribution and production of news and huge ways, it also leads us to think about issues of audience responsibility how much agency are we giving to those who are using social media and wanting to access information. Sometimes it's important to look at the problem from the viewpoint of audience agency and empowering audiences and how does it change the way we look at you know news dissemination on social media.

0:27:16.690 *Bretton:* Great thank you, Joey do you wanna continue from there.

0:27:24.280 *Joey:* I maybe have a little bit more of a pessimistic view of social media being a reporter but I think that you know at the end of the day all of like we post our stories on social media every day every time we make ready a story we post it on Facebook, we post it on our Instagram, we post it on our Twitter so that people can see it. It's a different way of accessing information that just that's true but also how well that information gets out there is up for sale I think I mean these companies are in it for a profit right they're still companies it's not like this is just a public forum they need to make money in some way and a lot of times we have to pay money to promote a story that we wrote that we want people to see and you know people that don't have as good intentions can pay just as much money to get their opinions and their stories seen as well and it may not necessarily be true or factual or it may be an inflammatory opinion and getting your opinion out there is not the worst thing but I think when you're paying for it as compared to just you know a lot of times people used to go to the newspaper and read the newspaper but now you go to Facebook and you look for the newspaper you want and read it there and a lot of times they have to pay for that something and I don't think a lot of people think about, so.

0:28:33.350 *Katherine:* I have a stupid thing to say. I have to get the title right this is a film that does not exist not the basketball film by a similar title. Are any of you familiar with the conspiracy around the film Shazam with the comedian Sinbad in it? Okay, that is not a real film, do not leave here thinking that that is a real film. Sinbad himself has said no such film as this exists although he is supposed to have starred in it. There's a film with a similar title and a similar sounding premise from the same era but Shazam is not a film, okay so don't leave here today thinking it is. There's a thing that's sort of used for good and for ill about social media, so social media makes you feel both in some ways more lonely perhaps than you should and in some ways less lonely than you should and in particular it's around conspiracy that you can feel less lonely than you should. So like going back to barroom betting because that's apparently where I am very jealous of you, I'm like eight months pregnant I can't have a beer with you all tonight but so you know if you were living in Reno Nevada 20 years ago and said, "Do you remember that movie with Sinbad it's called Shazam," you would be the only person at the bar thinking that and the bartender would tell you, "No stupid you're thinking of X," but now you can connect to thousands of other people who think they vaguely remember the movie Shazam and describe the poster with Sinbad crossing his arms like this on it and suddenly you don't feel

like the one person you got told to shut up by the bartender at the bar, you're plugged into a network of people dispersed around the world who can confirm your opinion that this film exists. There are many more dangerous examples of this than the movie that doesn't exist but it's one way in which the way information spreads and the way we get to feel about our inclusion in that spread of information I think can be a really tricky thing, so,

0:30:48.860 *Lydia:* Building from what Katherine said, I think in a way I do see the benefits of having a social media that spreads things especially for counter narratives that wouldn't normally be published in major newspapers like the New York Times. I'm thinking specifically about my friends over at Native Lives Matter where a lot of stories of indigenous struggles just don't happen to be published in major newspapers or magazines or so forth, so I make a conscious effort to make sure I plug into these blogs or tumblers or whatever where I can kind of sort of get a different perspective on what's happening on reservation lands etc., etc. Same thing for news in Mexico because in Mexico actually, got one of the most dangerous places to do journalism in the world because basically if you're a journalist they can kill you really easily. There's other outlets through social media where you can publish things about what is happening and it allows people to sort of know, "Oh look this is what the major newspapers are reporting about, however there's this other stuff happening that you should be paying attention to, specifically for example right now in Mexico they're trying to build a train, the Maya train that will go through all the Yucatan Peninsula and basically unite all of the tourist sites right but what is not in the major news media is the Mayan towns and what their feelings are about that. So there are reporters who are going down to the Yucatan and interviewing indigenous populations and there they're publishing access to what their perspectives is through social media where it'd be Facebook, Twitter, whatever and have like blogs where they can address this specific issue and in a way that's really good; however, the cynical part of me is also in the same way as Joey, thinking to myself well people have to make money right and there was a very controversial study published about Facebook's use of emotional contagion a couple of years ago and so when you start seeing how your feet gets manipulated without you actually like have anything to do with it and the algorithms that sell you stuff on Amazon. I recently was having a discussion about syllabi and all of a sudden I get this this book The Visual Syllabi and I was like, "This is creepy. I was just having this conversation with my friends on Facebook about whether students prefer visual syllabi or not," so you have to really be wary of how that actually works in the news as well. There's a great little book called the Geopolitics of Emotion; tiny little book it's like 11 bucks on Amazon you should definitely just check it out.

0:33:20.170 *Bretton:* Great, thank you. It's actually a great kind of segue I think to thinking a little bit about the influence of social media and society in general and thinking a little bit about the way social media serves this role in kind of shaping individuals and also society as a whole.
If it can listen to us, if it can kind of give us this feedback then what is it doing to kind of shape us, how does it kind of shape us as individuals? So Joey, do you actually want to start us off with this nice, simple, easy question.

0:33:47.650 Joey: Yes, so again I'm not a social media expert by any means but I think that the like shaping people through social media is again I mean we've already talked about how it

connects everybody together but again it does make you feel really alone because you can see what everyone else is doing but then you feel like you're not doing something and it makes you feel bad about it. I also think that it's interesting because… Can you repeat the question please?

0:34:15.340 *Bretton:* So how does social media shape us as individuals and also shape us as a society as a whole?

0:34:29.080 *Joey:* Okay so again you want to be connected and I think that the need to be connected with people is stronger now than it ever has been but I think it's interesting because it's a specific generation at least I found and I don't know if like younger students have found this but a lot of younger people are not using social media as much as they used to. I think people that are 5-10 years older than me are like the ones who peaked in social media in terms of Facebook and in terms of Twitter specifically but in my first journalism class when I was in there the professor asked you know how many of you have a Twitter account and like five people raised their hands and it was it was interesting to see because I didn't have a Twitter account and I was like, "I don't really-- it's not something I'm interested in," but then I had to make one obviously because like journalists and I kind of dread using and I'm not gonna lie I don't enjoy using Twitter and I think a lot of a lot of younger people and correct me if I'm speaking out of turn here but don't particularly enjoy using social media as much as people just a little bit older than them. I think it's something that they adapted to like the society adapted to but didn't-- I'm sorry not society journalists adapted to it and they tried to like take social media on but now people are moving away from it and they're not sure what to do.

0:35:44.420 *Bretton:* I'm feeling the shame as someone who's like 10 years older than you who has a Twitter. Katherine do you wanna defend us older folks a little bit, as older social media users.

0:36:05.000 *Katherine:* No, I don't want to defend us. It's interesting what Joey's saying though. I think there is recent research though about how teen pregnancy rates are as low as they've ever been, death by drunk driving in car accidents is as low as it's ever been, that sounds good, but what it means is that teenagers are not out having sex with each other and drinking, their at home alone. That's the downside is that the reason the teen pregnancy and death by drunk driving is down is because teens are actually lonelier, they are having their social life via social media so like you know the upshot is less pregnancy and death, the down shot is lonelier teens. I guess you have to pick your battles.

0:36:53.750 *Lydia:* Well I also think it's about what types of social media right so for example I was in college and I was one of three schools that had Facebook because I went to BU so it was really weird because it would be a parties and then like people would be like, "Oh let's go on Facebook, okay cool," and then like a month or two months later there was people in Texas that added me on Facebook and was like, "Okay this is weird," and then all of a sudden my cousins in Mexico are adding me to Facebook and their daughters too and I'm like, "What is happening, this is really really uncomfortable but okay I can adapt." Recently I was talking to some students like, "Do you have Snapchat?" and I was like, "What's Snapchat?" and so they

tried to teach me and I just couldn't get into it and I was like, "What's the point of is like ha and then send?" To me Facebook's a place for me to put articles and things I want people to be aware of right and since I'm kind of that older generation, I really find that social media it's useful to connect them with people and having sort of these dialogues and I maybe it's because of the type of friends I have I don't know but I definitely do think that the other forms of media that have to come out since Facebook, such as Instagram or even Snapchat are used by different demographics. Even for example, Instagram like I have articles on Facebook but I have all my personal stuff on Instagram like the pictures of my dog, it's things like that. So it's weird how I, myself curate my own social media spaces and also in a way I think that a lot of the older generations signed up to Facebook and stuff and they had this nostalgia like this: "We went to high school together"; "I want to see what someone was doing." I definitely noticed it was like some of my administrative assistants around the years where they were and their 60s and they were like reminiscing about their high school years and looking at all their friends and what their friends did with their lives, those kinds of things. So I think there's also voyeurism involved in social media that we don't often think about as to why we use social media, especially the younger generations I think there's a different meaning and intention in that.

0:39:10.670 *Paromita:* I'll be the first to confess that I use social media to stalk, spy on, and look at people all the time, I'm horrible. Coming back to see how social media is gradually shaping Society, first we have to see how has social media added to the public sphere? So just going by that one question, social media has certainly provided space to very very marginalized voices that we did not have before. Now with this edition of marginalized voices there is addition of various kinds of other voices. It will be easy to say the social media definitely has added to amplification and sharing of different voices, opinions, and views. All very nice now, but once you have so many voices competing for space and attention within a certain space, for me as a scholar of the humanities and social media the questions that arise are: what are the voices that are still getting drowned out? Because in any public sphere, there are certain voices that will be louder at certain times. Secondly, what are the ethical concerns and challenges that are being raised in a public sphere that now has so many different types of publics? So right now at Facebook there is a huge controversy that is raging where professional journalists were brought in to you know fact-check and help Facebook counter this aspect of Fake News and then these journalists in an interview to the Guardian Newspaper have said that essentially this model was not working; they weren't able to counter Fake News and when they told Facebook that you know your models not working, Facebook started looking at their finances and trying to check to see if these companies could be brought down or silenced in any way. To me the issues of social media are more than just of sharing an amplification of voices. A question that means really close attention are all these ethical situations and challenges that are being raised and how do they go about exploring these questions and honestly finding concrete answers. Social media has shaped society in a way by opening up new social spheres that previously did not exist. We draw on our previous learned behaviors to work in these new social spheres that have opened up bringing with us all the fears and frankly bad behavior learned in other spaces and it's interesting to see how then this works in the sphere of social media.

0:42:34.660 *Bretton:* That's great, thank you. So I want to open it up to questions from you all but really quickly I do want to ask the panel just kind of where they see social media and this relationship between the news and social media going in the future. So maybe you kind of in the next five years or so if you want to kind of hypothesize what's coming next but if maybe we could answer in like 30 seconds, like 30 seconds and under, nice easy question.

0:42:58.119 *Katherine:* I'm not gonna answer that question because you wrote down a different question then the one that you just asked then when you sent the questions to us. So you asked us initially, how do we see the relationship between the humanities and the news and social media and I wanted to answer this question instead because I also wanted to talk about and some of the humanities as a space outside of the news and social media. I'm part of film Twitter and Dana Stevens, who's the film critic for Slate, just published her top 10 list of films for the year and she said, "What do we get from good cinema?" and she said, "In years that feel like they're characterized by meanness, aggression, and stupidity, these are the kind of like embers that we have to warm ourselves by and like maybe that's the depressing thing but I think that is important. If we are in an ashen wasteland, what brings us pleasure, what brings us joy, what can sustain us through this and one might say, "It's complex, beautiful things that are not soundbites, that are not you know written in so many characters but works that we can return to again and again," so that's my plug for the humanities outside of the news and social media.

0:44:25.600 *Lydia:* I think in terms of the humanities and social media look for the creators for creating the Twitter haikus. There's a lot of really cool Twitter haikus, there's a lot of people who are getting very very creative and combining Kanye/ Wes Anderson blogs which if you like Wes Anderson or Kanye, there's some really interesting amazing things out there in terms of memes and understandings of interpretations of films and so forth and so yes I mean I think the creative production that social media allows for is really important and while, yes the news can be grim and the way in which social media and/or the news are using social media can be problematic sometimes. I think that if we're aware of where these things are coming from and why they're coming to us, it will get a better understanding and also just taking the time to discuss it with our friends outside of social media like, "Hey did you see this piece that was written and it was really interesting, like they really humanized migrants," for example.

0:45:24.820 *Paromita:* I think for social media right now perhaps as an audience it is time to stand up and reclaim our rights and position over this new space called social media for that we need to create perhaps a new roadmap because we do not have road maps here because the territory is so new. So using social media's power to create collectives it is time now to gather together as a collective, as a collective audience to start fighting these issues of Fake News and misinformation that we see on Twitter and on Facebook. It's believed that it takes a village to raise a child, let's all start being that village to take care of each other on social media.

0:46:26.130 *Joey:* I'm going to be the pessimist again. I agree that the people that we're talking to tonight I think most of you guys-- we know what to look for when we're looking for Fake News and what we hear about-- but the people that are susceptible to it are not going to be

entering these kind of conversations most of the time and I think that they're just going to become more and more susceptible to it and it's just gonna become worse and worse in those circles and I think that's also going to drive people apart and create a larger divide. I think that the positive is that as Facebook gets older so to do the users and I think that less people are gonna be using Facebook, so it's gonna go away eventually anyways so no one else is worried about it.

0:47:08.849 *Bretton:* Alright awesome, so does anyone have any questions for our panelists? I'd like to open it up and kind of really hopefully hear from you all a little bit, so questions please go for it.

0:47:25.020 *Questioner:* I was recently reading an article on MSN talking about the Baby Boomer generation and specifically how they're the loneliest generation; however, I helped my mom make a Tinder a couple weeks ago.

0:47:33.599 *Bretton:* I did not see that coming that's great. Questioner: She's 67 and I was just wondering, yeah I've noticed sort of this pervasive lack of social skills in either very young social media users or on the older side, I shouldn't say very but on the older side and I was just wondering how you thought we could maybe combat some of those with in terms of socializing with in social media?

0:48:05.430 *Katherine:* I actually have a fascinating thing about Tinder that I just learned. So there is a recent article in The Atlantic about how little sex everyone's having now and like the use of Tinder is fascinating. People are getting laid far less on Tinder than one anyone imagined, so people think that people are like having all kinds of sex through Tinder but they aren't. They're looking, they're browsing in the same way that they browse on Facebook but they aren't actually making the connection so like basically everybody thinks that everybody else is having a lot more sex than they are and like one thing that's kind of fascinating is like the death of in-person flirting. So yes, I can't remember what it's called, but it's a it was the cover story in The Atlantic and so basically people polled now have sort of said that like if someone flirted with them in the bar they would think they were a weirdo because that's not how things are happening now. So I mean in a sort of simple way it is this sort of weird browsing and kind of curation practice that is happening in you know the space of places like Tinder that people sort of like see as the way to connect now but it means that we're really rusty like no one knows how to flirt, basically. People don't know how to do it in person and so it's sort of sad but it's a fascinating article if you can find it so I don't know that totally answers your question, but yes just more person-to-person interaction. I think you've seen these movements with like the dinner parties where everyone stacks their phone in the middle of the table and whoever picks up their phone first has to pay the bill so to try and relocate ourselves into the habits of interpersonal communication, basically.

0:50:01.820 *Lydia:* Yeah, I think also I mean in terms of like families or I started noticing going to restaurants and seeing couples looking at each person looking at their phone, not talking to each other and I was like, "That's really sad, it's so sad," right but like people don't actually

know or are not aware that they're doing it or if it's just like we're so kind of connected to our phones, right. Also being mindful and I was talking to Daniel Enrique Perez other day and he was like, "I just don't have my phone on, like there's moments right when I'm with my friends and I want to be present and I don't have my phone on," and I'm like, "That's a really good practice," right and I tried that for five minutes and I was like, "Oh my God." I think it's important it's important for us to start doing that and teaching people that are younger than us to also do that, right like looking at people at their eyes when you're talking to them like it's super important because I have people who just like talk to you and they're like looking over there and just like right here, this is really strange. I think just having those tiny little changes to see if we can as a counter movement to this like intense socialization via social media.

0:51:10.810 *Paromita:* You know moving away from these very interesting topics of sex and flirting-- we'll come back to it, it is interesting. You know if you look at social movements for example the Arab Spring completely different things happen, I mean people get together not to flirt, not to have sex, but to march the streets in the danger of getting shot and arrested and tortured to bring about change. How has social media you know torn people apart from these basic social issues of getting together and talking and yet have managed to bring perfect strangers together to start fighting for something as hard and as dangerous perhaps as political regime change? What are the connections, are there any connections at all? I mean I'm somebody who will march the streets with you but can't look at you in the eye and flirt, right.

0:52:24.050 *Joey:* Okay so to bring it back to sex. About three or four weeks ago I was at a brothel reporting on the death of Dennis Hof but I was interviewing some prostitutes and they told me that one of the biggest mental health issues in today's society is loneliness that was really really profound actually and really interesting and I think that they were talking about a lot of people go to the brothels not even necessarily for sex but just to talk and I was really taken aback I was not expecting that going to the report on the death of a notorious Nevada pimp. I think that going to your question of like how to you know cure this loneliness, I mean getting together with people is always good right I know for me personally I've been going to the board game bar a lot recently I don't know if any of you know where that is but I like video games but instead of playing video games me and my friends will go to the glass die-- the board game bar-- and we'll just play board games instead and we'll put our phones down and I think finding things like that to do or really good ways of getting away from technology and getting away from that loneliness that you may need to cure by going to a brothel, so.

0:53:40.010 *Bretton:* Great thank you, do we have any other questions for our panelists? Yes please.

0:53:44.780 Questioner: So in more stable times the humanities prided itself on exposing the fictitiousness or the ideological underpinnings of scientific facts or journalistic facts and to me I want to hold on to that but it turns out it seems the history of that project has turned into kind of a caricature of Donald Trump saying the New York Times is Fake News so I guess my question would be how do people working in the humanities deal with the kind of naive positivism that

would assert that facts are facts and there's kind of no ideological basis for those facts for the presentation of those facts? Yeah so I guess I'll leave it there.

0:54:33.710 *Joey:* So people can think that Fake News is like a new thing, it's not it's been around forever but so many people are like because it's just more visible now and so you guys have always been fighting it like it's just now it's like out in the open because of social media and because of you know it's just because of the climate that we're in people use this word Fake News and it's become such a ubiquitous term but I mean you go back to like even the first newspaper in Nevada the Territorial Enterprise which Mark Twain wrote for. He was notorious for writing like horribly fake stories and they knew what they were reading when they were reading it and now I think maybe that has changed a little bit but the humanities have always in a way been fighting that and now it's just you know finding a different platform to kind of continue fighting those fights. Back then people understood what they were reading when they were reading Mark Twain and they were understood that like this is probably satire and when they picked up a newspaper they didn't expect this to be 100% factually correct but they were still getting some sort of information that would help them throughout like their day but now they pick it up and they're like, "Is this true or is this not?" should I be like telling my friends this or should I not be and I think just finding a path to kind of help people be speculative is kind of the first step in fighting that.

0:55:50.310 *Paromita:* I'll build on that, just because it is the New York Times doesn't mean that it is true news or the news as it should be all the time. Reporters do not necessarily you know want to give out wrong information but the way information is presented or the way information is framed can sometimes create the wrong impression you know and I'll give you an example: all of us know about the Affordable Health Care Act controversy how many of us really know what the Act actually does and how much will the Act actually cost the government if it is really bought into function and if it does in any way replace Medicaid or you know act as a supplement? I was doing this study was looking at over 300 stories covered in the New York Times and not one single story mentioned that if you take this Act you get covered for you know diseases number one, two, and three and if you do this and screw up the Act won't cover you. The constant focus on conflict, the constant focus on he-said she-said often makes news unwittingly give out wrong information, create wrong connections in the audience's mind and as scholars and as teachers from the humanities perhaps what we do not do so well in our classrooms is we teach students history and geography, we do not teach them to question the news and that I think as a discipline the humanities should actively take up and work on. The idea of questioning what you read is not just you know content to your subject textbooks but also to something that is such an integral part of our lives which is news.

0:57:56.859 *Lydia:* Building on that, I think questioning is really really important skill to have and when we don't teach that or teach it in a way in which leads to discussions and kind of like analyzing the pros and cons and so forth it really disseminates our capacity for thought. I mean a brain is capable of doing so many things and we only use like 10% of it so I mean it's interesting right because people got really frustrated when I asked questions I'm like, "Why?" like what do you mean why and I'm like, "Yeah like why is that? Well I don't know," well we

need to have this conversation right like why, how, those are all critical thinking skills and it's really interesting because students will often tell me, "I just want the right answer," and I think that's a result also of K-12 testing right this part test. All the ways in which our young people in our humanity, in our society are being taught to think just for the answer for test right and not learning to think broadly. I'm a kid of a Montessori right, I learned to question a very young age which really did not go well with my parents right because everything was a why or how or how come or you know it's blue but why is it blue right and it always led to this like curiosity and that is definitely something I have noticed in my 15 years of teaching change in students the curiosity that used to be there automatically doesn't seem to be there as much and what is what I am seeing more is like what's the right answer, well there is no right answer. So my goal as a teachers for students to leave my classroom more confused then how they came in like that's my practice in terms of trying to teach students kind of how to think about things a little bit more holistically right because if we don't do that in terms of the humanities, in terms of even the sciences right like that that's how you form a hypothesis it's like, "Why, where's the evidence? Was that evidence really real? Is that actually going lead us here?" but even with the conversation about climate change, I mean there are enough studies out there that suggests that there is climate change happening, not to mention we're seeing it in our environment. So how did you put all those things together questioning that and then have a position. People are so afraid of having positions now it's like, "Oh I'm a climate denier and that's it," well yeah that's a position but then why? If you can't explain to me why then you don't have a position so I think that something is really important to consider.

1:00:30.400 *Katherine:* I had a sort of wild thing to say after that which I'm very sympathetic to this question because I think for those of us who study earlier periods, we're familiar with bad science. So like if you study 19th century US history you might know for example of the disease called Drapetomania which was a disease that slaves were diagnosed with which was the disease of running away. So the 19th century racial science believes in Drapetomania and backs it up through the scientific methods of its era. So the disease hysteria which like comes from the uterus you know was a disease based in the science of its day, right. I think one of the things that's very tricky right like at the same time that I want to insist as a citizen of my own time that global warming is real, I'm also a student of history and I know that science is generated in its cultural context right and so I think there is like one of the things that's good about the communities is that like we are trying to think in a kind of complex way right to sort of say that like everything is contextual, like both words matter right like words have definitions and this is you know important to us that words are defined but they're also in context and this sort of like shuttling back and forth I think is really important and I think that is something that we often get away from really quickly when we get into political discussions is context. So I think that's one way that maybe we can retain some of this like slightly questioning spirit right like I have my own weird probably conspiratorial like anxiety about who gets diagnosed with borderline personality disorder like I think it's hoax. Don't go out there and like tell people it's a hoax because this is my own crazy conspiracy theory but you know like something from that will turn out to be bad science, we can't really know what it is cause we're swimming in the culture but kind of like attending to the fact that we're all swimming in the culture I think can be useful and that's actually a skill that we do have in the humanities that like maybe there is a

way to kind of like retain this questioning attitude if we remind ourselves that like we too are swimming like in these waters, I don't know.

1:02:53.870 *Lydia:* To add to that, the Psychological Association that removed like homosexuality as disease, right. I mean that was recently but why was it? Because we had these counter narratives that kept coming up and they're like, "Wait, no, no, no," right and in a way I think it's really important to kind of like contextualize and I totally agree with Katherine. I think that's one of the things the humanities does it's like you look at a chair and yeah it's a chair but what's in the space between the chair and we have to look at that as well which not a lot of other disciplines do.

1:03:32.130 *Bretton:* So I have some bad news we are out of time so I would encourage all of you to ask your questions to our amazing panelists after we adjourned and if we could just give them a round of applause as well. Alright that's it, thank you everyone.

END.