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Intellectual Autobiography

The origins of my present interest in media lie in of the seemingly random experiences and decisions that I made during my first phase of higher education at the University of Michigan, as well as in the socio-political climate of that time and environment.

Like many teenaged students enrolled in undergraduate liberal arts-track programs, I initially found myself rather directionless in terms of academic focus – literally hundreds of routes of study were presented to me on this campus of tens of thousands. For one year, I dabbled in courses spread across a very broad range: from economics to art history, astronomy to political science – the core curriculum of the “Undecided” student.

Then in 2000, restless but imbued with the energy of the new millennium, I decided to indulge my passion for writing at *The Michigan Daily*, the campus newspaper. I view this definitive decision as the one that ultimately led me down the path that led me to this Master’s program in Media Studies at The New School. In saying so, however, I get ahead of myself in this personal history.

For a time, I remained in the leisurely niche of arts writing, reviewing new fiction, music and film for the paper. But then the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001 occurred – its reverberations quickly spreading from here in New York City to Ann Arbor before irrevocably altering the rhythms of societies across the world. Overnight, my role at the publication changed, as I dived into more explicitly political writing as a member of the Daily’s editorial board.

It was here, at the nerve center of a major campus media outlet, that a passion for journalism emerged. I was now part of a public voice that passed daily comment upon an abruptly changed world. It was a thrill to play a part in the authorship of opinion pieces that would be read by such a notably progressive community; a sense of purpose was crystallizing within me.

I remained uncommitted to an academic concentration, but it was growing clearer to me that I needed to somehow be involved with the media in a professional capacity after graduating. I explored Communications Studies, where I was exposed to such crucial media concepts as “the medium is the message,” “hot and cold media” and the idea of the “global village.”¹ Yet I found the department too broad-based for my tastes, and focused too much on theory rather than application.

And so I changed directions one last time, finally settling on philosophy as a major. It seemed like the most natural choice, since I had been taking elective courses in this discipline since practically the very start of university education, subscribing heavily to the ideal of living the “examined life.”² This much smaller department demanded a greater degree of intellectual rigor than any other I had previously encountered – I fell in love with this aspect of my new area of study.

In addition to sharpening my powers of critical thinking, studying philosophy helped to shape my worldview in a way nothing else I had experienced could. I quickly gravitated towards Spinoza – the part-time lens grinder and full-time rationalist whose ideas significantly contributed to the essential shape of ethics,

¹ Phrases introduced by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (1964)

² According to Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.”

metaphysics and epistemology. Specifically, I was most drawn his monistic view of the universe – the idea that God, nature, the province of the mind and all material things were part of a single *substance*.

Spinoza’s account of the nature of reality brought me much peace, and led me to explore the ideas of contemporary philosophers like Derek Parfit – an Oxford metaphysician who has developed several important theories relating to personal identity and mental continuity. During my senior year, I synthesized my primary philosophical interests in paper that postulated that all human knowledge – despite being relatively fragmented throughout recorded history – will one day come together to form a dynamic sort of “collective consciousness.” The idea seems to be gaining more currency with the rapid development of media technologies that are continually increasing the degree of interconnectedness between individuals.

Upon leaving UM, I took up a position at Factiva – a then relatively new joint venture between Dow Jones and Reuters.³ (I had been an intern at the company one summer while still in college, and was only too happy to return after this brief yet stimulating experience) My present role involves sifting through large volumes of content by employing Boolean logic, in order to conduct research for institutional clients (usually large companies and government agencies). I consume massive quantities of news content every day, which has allowed me to witness firsthand the exponential rate of evolution of the media landscape.

As I’ve seen traditional print media cede influence to “Web 2.0,” I’ve grown keenly interested in identifying future trends in new media and thinking about how

³ In 2006, the unit was fully integrated into the Dow Jones Enterprise Media Group.

new technologies can be deployed effectively, and to the benefit of consumers. I came to The New School with the intent to acquire a set of skills and knowledge that will allow me to go back to my present organization (or another one that is similarly positioned) and help define its media strategy for the coming years.

I actually learned about this MA program by way of some information that I read on the web about the department's graduate certificate in Media Management; indeed, it is prospect of actively *managing* media that excites me. I'm most interested in gleaning a practical knowledge of how media organizations can most efficiently connect the largest number of people, or allow information to pass as freely as possible between individuals and groups. Somewhere along the path that brought me here, I realized that media – more than any other industry or concept – is the greatest enabler of a truly globalized world. While the merits of economic globalization remain to be seen, I suspect very few can effectively argue about the downsides of creating more social connections between people.

Just as I delighted in having a voice at the *Daily*, I've been excited and happy to see millions all over the world find theirs by taking advantage of weblogs, Twitter and other free and useful tools. Aside from my rather short-term professional aspirations, what I most hope to take away from this program are the tools that will enable me to one day act in a capacity to increase access to information on behalf of populations that truly need it.

As I see it, working to shrink of the “digital divide” is one of the worthier endeavors can I realistically work toward, and I think this Master's Degree in Media Studies will give me all the tools to go about it.

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This narrative could not be complete without acknowledging the significant influences of my greatest hero – one Sheila Lobo, my maternal grandmother, who lovingly laid the strongest foundations of my intellectual development. A consummate educator, she taught at several levels of India's K-12 system before journeying to the United States to faithfully serve as my primary teacher during my formative years. To my immeasurable sadness, she passed away suddenly a little under one year ago. Right to the end, she remained an enthusiastic student of world history, eagerly poring over all of my textbooks and engaging me in the most wonderful discussions I've ever had. I pursue this degree in her memory.