Decentered-Podcast-047-2019-12-29.mp3

Rob Watson [00:00:10] This is a Decentred Podcast from Rob Watson. Conversations about community media. Look out for Decentered Media on Twitter and on iTunes, or go to https://decentred.co.uk

Rob Watson [00:00:21] Traditionally, the end of one year, and the start of another, is a time for taking stock of what we have achieved and accomplished. It's a time for reflecting on what we have been doing and asking if we want to keep doing these things, while trying to follow the same path in the new year. A healthy approach to reflection swings between those things that we feel we are personally responsible for, and the wider worldly domain in which we are simply one actor among many. This week, I'm going to sit down and try to capture some of my reflections, both personal and strategic, about what I believe needs to be done to support the ongoing transformation of our media in the coming year. And what we might stop doing so that we don't exhaust ourselves in a futile attempt to keep the certainties of the past alive.

Rob Watson [00:01:29] I'd like to do this while also reflecting on how we can maintain a forward looking and positive outlook, and not give in to fatalism or dejection. I'd like to foster, for myself at least, a continuing sense of progress in promoting improvement and positive change. It's very easy at the end of 2019 to be massively disheartened and depressed. I think I'm a little bit of both. The political climate is confusing and polarizing. The certainties and expectations that many of us have held on to in the past have been destabilised. The urge to 'get things done' at all costs, has taken over from the prudence and caution of 'looking before you leap.' Certainty and uncertainty are now intermixed and intertwined, and it's difficult to make sense of what's going on, who to trust, and where to grab hold of something solid.

Rob Watson [00:02:26] We are destined to live in interesting times, as the cliché goes, but the real question is of who's making are these times, and what will our individual and collective response be as we try to get to grips with them? On what basis will we sort and sift the temperate voices from those who advocate disruptive change? And from those who advocate, in a calmer manner, a sense of peaceful and measured reflection?

Rob Watson [00:02:55] The changes and pressure that we face are deeper-rooted than the headlines that we see in a few of our newspapers. The headlines and tweets that we see in our social media feeds, and relayed in our broadcast media, might suggest one thing, that we are all heading in one direction. But calm, reflection and thinking will help us to understand that we might, instead, be heading in a completely different direction altogether. As Luke Skywalker says in the Last Jedi, the assumptions that we are making about how events will turn out, are almost certainly wrong.

Rob Watson [00:03:30] The social changes that we respond and react to then, and the forces that drive them, will take some purposeful mental processing, if we were to make focussed a meaningful choice in the future. Some of the changes that have been most concerning for me, and the work I've been developing with Decentered Media, relate to the changes we are witnessing in personal communication, broadcast media, civic communication, learning and the workplace. The sense of change in these areas is widespread and profound. These changes are giving rise to new challenges resulting from a global, interconnected and interdependent social economy.

Rob Watson [00:04:11] Technology disruption is at the forefront of many of these changes, as we are seeing the introduction of new platforms and services that reshape the way that we buy and sell things, connect with one another, organize how we get around, and how we entertain ourselves. We tend to think of ourselves as living in a purely physical and material world. What we experience on a day-to-day basis, leads us to believe that we are in a world of mechanical cause and effect. So it's understandable that we've not grasped the full implication of the shift, from what Nicholas Negroponte called atoms to bits. Which is the defining feature of the shift of the information and digital economy.

Rob Watson [00:04:53] Our lives will increasingly be organized, less around the movement of goods and physical things, and more around the processing of data and the sharing of information. As we now commonly expect, there's probably an app that will service whatever requests we want to make. Travel information, medical information, financial information, deliveries, stock levels, transactions, are all now played out in real time on our smartphones.

Rob Watson [00:05:22] These changes have been a long time coming, but they're now being fully realized and are tangible. They are being accomplished, however, in a way that we are largely unprepared for. We are still unready for the way that the decentralized economy, with its disruptive and transparent system of value creation, is going to change things. What seems like an intangible set of ideas and concepts is rapidly becoming a tangible reality. The systems that are driving our social arrangements are no longer just reports in technology blogs or financial journals. The open ledger systems that are being created by block chain pioneers, or crazy speculators, depending on your view, are going to radically alter the whole basis of our economic, cultural and social systems.

Rob Watson [00:06:14] What we've assumed as the process of value creation in our economy is going to become increasingly decentralized, which means that 'who' and 'what' we can trust is going to become increasingly dispersed, and perhaps, placed back into the hands of people acting in their own social networks, rather than being captured and warehoused by institutions and companies.

Rob Watson [00:06:39] Indeed, large corporations look set to become less important as they lose their traditional role as intermediaries or repositories of value. Their role as a facilitator and repository for trusted and trustworthy social information and economic value will decline as individual agents in the networks will become more important. The social economy will place a premium on personal integrity, usefulness and ability to deliver a service, and products that are relevant to those who want them.

Rob Watson [00:07:15] Exchange value in the network will not be based on your social standing, and which organization that you belong to, but on your ability to deliver insight and useful information that can be trusted by your clients, colleagues and community in a timely and transparent manner. The question then is do we simply continue embracing these waves of disruptive technology uncritically, or do we ensure that we are supported with enduring critical skills and literacies that can help us to deal with the shifting and changing world that we are increasingly likely to be a part of?

Rob Watson [00:07:53] In the coming year is going to be important to think again, and again, about how we create learning opportunities for all people in our communities. Young and old, rich and poor alike. How will we facilitate experiences and opportunities so that all can learn how to make their own decentralized media and communicate openly and honestly with the communities that they identify with?

Rob Watson [00:08:22] What do we need to put in place so that we can respond to the experience of others in positive and outward looking ways? What will we need to put in place in order to be able to grow with confidence and face the challenges of this interconnected world? Such as climate disruption and global inequality? The task of media education in the future, I believe, is to prepare all our fellow citizens with the capacity that they need to operate in a decentralized, information-based world. This will be a world in which trust is not assigned to brands or institutions in the way that it has been in the past. It will be a world of user interaction, metrics and feedback. As a result, learning must break out of formal institution to become more open and collaborative, exploring innovative and non-traditional routes. However, value still has to be placed on what people 'become' as a result of their learning experience, not simply just what they get for it.

Rob Watson [00:09:28] Our young people particularly will be entering a world in which they will be expected to be independent and self-motivated, in which they will need to be trusted and accountable to their communities, networks and clients, and in which they will have to show a capacity for collaboration, learning and innovation. How do we teach about the virtues and values of trust? How do we teach the

practical benefits of mutual respect, understanding and tolerance? How do we prioritize meaningfulness over measurement of outcomes?

Rob Watson [00:10:06] The best way to achieve change then, is to foster a culture of ecological responsibility, civic engagement and social entrepreneurialism. This does not mean setting targets or introspective measuring change as an organization, or as a totalised society. Instead, it means engaging with people on the basis of their social and cultural experiences, recognizing their value and the role they play in the communities in which they live and identify with. Charities, civic bodies, community media groups, and open learning organizations will need to act as part of a social network with strong collaborative links. We will be responsible for fostering the conditions in which the personal development of our communities will be embedded and can take root, and through which a strong sense of belonging can be fostered.

Rob Watson [00:11:03] A willingness to face these difficult challenges should be at the forefront of any expectations that we place in our fellow citizens. The promotion of these virtues, that come from attempting to find solutions, and not just to point out problems, will be more easily understood if we can show the benefits of what we all gain from a learning process that is supportive, inclusive, creative, respectful and developmental.

Rob Watson [00:11:45] You've been listening to the Decentered Podcast. I'm Rob Watson. If you want to find out more information, contact me on descent and media by Twitter or go to https://decentered.co.uk.