

It was thirty years ago that Robert Heinlein, ironically a right wing ideologue, created the concept of Fair Witness in his landmark vision of the future, *A Stranger in a Strange Land*. He argued that a multi-planetary, variegated human society would need a particular kind of person in order to survive -- a person specially trained and trusted to observe events fairly and dispassionately enough to satisfy even the most cynical second hand viewer that an objective reality was being transmitted. So importantly did he view this role, that he conferred supreme social status to Fair Witnesses.

But to me, probably easier for me since I've left journalism, this discussion of evolving journalism is somewhat beside the point. We are in the middle of that transition now, technology will make it virtually unstoppable anyway.

The main point is that it all facilitates fragmentation and stratification both within, and across, borders and what that means to the issues I began with -- governance in the absence of shared agenda and shared information experience.

The concept of national influence over content through regulation of carriage will be a memory.

Digitization and data transmission will render control, and even monitoring, impossible

The problem is that much of this talk about information technology is talk about how one subset of society, national and global, gathers and consumes information. How transnational elites will have difficulty coming to terms with changes to information transfer and what strategies they will employ to restore credibility, commonality, trust, reliability and sustainability to the information they themselves must have.

More worrying to me is the likely decoupling of broad masses of electorates from information itself, let alone from the discussion of new forms and safeguards.

At least initially through this transition we know that it takes a level of skill to navigate the information highway. It certainly requires an allocation of time for which there is intense competition. There are compelling and entertaining alternate choices. And the easy, one stop shops of general information are increasingly weaker, more idiosyncratic and less satisfying.

When there is no civic premium paid to sharing information experience and no practical way to do it or enforce it, and worse still, when trying to connect demands a level of patience and skill people are unwilling to invest, logic says the likeliest outcome is more and more detachment from all but the most threatening or overwhelming kind of information. That means a general differentiation in knowledge about context, process and even basic facts among the various strata.