Thank you very much for inviting me to deliver the Cudlipp Lecture and so follow in the footsteps of some first rate media figures. Not to mention Paul Dacre.

I believe I am the first Cudlipp Lecturer to have won the Cudlipp Award, 24 years ago. I do not attach too much significance to winning as the main judge was Robert Maxwell and I won it for coverage of his mercy missions to save the starving in Ethiopia.

It was quite a trip. As for the highlight – it's hard to choose between these three; when he demanded a personal butler on arrival and was told by the manager of the Addis Hilton that there was something of a shortage of butlers during the famine; the hour long meeting it took to persuade him not to come to the famine stations with us, on the grounds that pictures of Captain Bob amid the starving might not be terribly good for his image; or the day he left for home early, with a note telling us "my work here is done. I have gone home to resolve the miners' strike."

Mike Molloy, my first editor at the Mirror, delivered a great line when Hugh Cudlipp died ten years ago. "His heyday was his entire career." Of modern media figures of whom that might be said, like him or not, consider his influence good or bad, or both, Rupert Murdoch is the one who springs to mind, and stays there.

Cudlipp was a name to inspire, his legend born not merely in Mirror sales figures of five million, but in the standards he expected. Above all, it lay in what he saw as journalism's central purpose, tabloid journalism in particular, which was to explain, entertain, move and impassion in language and pictures easily digested and understood.

A lot has changed since. I think the world has changed considerably for the better, if measured in prosperity, relative peace, new opportunities. But if Hugh Cudlipp were to reappear and run his rule over modern journalism, I suspect that whilst he would share excitement at the way technology has created a much bigger media marketplace, he would lament a significant fall in basic standards, and a sameness about much media output that does not do justice to the opportunities that changed marketplace has opened up.

It is an interesting paradox that while we have more media space than ever, complaint about the lack of healthy debate has never been louder, with fewer stories and issues being addressed in real depth in a way that engages large audiences; and despite the explosion in outlets, very few days in which there is not a single homogenous theme or talking point dominating the vast output.

In an era of more pages, more space, more access, more talk, there is less said and done that is truly memorable. Even in Dacre's apologia he could only draw on Stephen Lawrence – again - as the story where he felt the Mail made an impact and did some good. Similarly, in his Mactaggart Lecture Jeremy Paxman said the BBC constantly pointed to Planet Earth as evidence of good TV combining with good ratings, but did so precisely because it is a rarity. And with every front page screaming headline that doesn't quite deliver the big story, every exclusive that isn't, every whooshing breaking news that isn't really breaking news at all, every new twist

in the McCann case that isn't a new twist at all, the public gets a little wiser every time.

Cudlipp, who warned he would sack any reporter who intruded on private grief, once said this: "A sensationalist tabloid newspaper should strive - more diligently perhaps than a 'serious quality newspaper' - to be acknowledged as mature, stable and fair in its attitudes to people and public issues."

He would find it hard to spot that as the dominant philosophy today, not just in the tabloids, so often the whipping boys, but in the broadsheets and broadcast media too. Indeed, much of what makes up today's tabloids would be recognisable to those who were around in the tabloid heyday era. It is in broadcast news and current affairs media that the biggest changes have taken place.

There has been a shift to what may be defined as a culture of negativity which goes well beyond coverage of politics. Of course, the idea of news as something that someone, somewhere would rather not see published is a good one. But it is partial. When a prevailing wisdom takes hold that news is ONLY news when it is bad for someone, and especially someone in power, then it narrows and distorts the view of the world.

Before his death, Robin Cook used to cite a study showing a shift in the positive to negative ratio in our national press of 3 positive stories for every one negative in the mid 70s, to 1 positive for every 18 negative in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even if that overstates, and in some media it certainly doesn't, it certainly reflects the trend.

I cite the case too of Jill Palmer, a former colleague who as health reporter used to fill the Mirror with stories of miracle babies, life saving operations, the heroics of NHS staff. When she was laid off a few years ago, it was made clear to her that the market for positive health stories just wasn't there any more. Says who? I think the public are just as keen on success as on failure, but failure, it is thought, is what sells, and what people want to hear and read about. I am not so sure. People – most of them – know from their own lives that whatever struggles they may have, whatever challenges the country may face, Britain is not the basket case, nor its politics and public services the abject failures conveyed through the media. When they sense that dissonance as a cultural shift, then the media goes some way towards a loss of credibility that will be hard to pull back. I think it is at that stage now.

The growth in scale has been the upside of change; the impact on standards the downside. The forces of technological change and intense competition have created a distorting tension between speed and accuracy. The pressures to get the story first, if wrong, are greater sometimes than the pressures to get the story right, if late. Here the broadcasters are if anything more guilty than the print media. Again, I cite in support Paxman's Mactaggart lecture, when he talked of the "expectation inflation" caused by 24 hour news. He confessed that some days he felt if he was being truly honest he should start Newsnight by saying "Not much has happened today, I'd go to bed if I were you." Instead, the pressures are to shoul louder and louder to get noticed.

Little did I know, when deciding to quote Jeremy's speech in mine, that his underpants would become something of a symbol of modern journalism – bigger but

not better – and on some days last week generate more column inches than civil strife in Kenya.

"The story needs to be kept moving, constantly hyped," he said. "So the pavementstanders in Downing Street or wherever have to pretend to omniesce, even though they've spent so long on the end of a live link that they've had no chance to discover anything much beyond where the nearest loo may be. In this context, the very slightest development which might give some sense of movement to a story is fallen upon as if it were a press release announcing the Second Coming."

I spoke recently at Richard Stott's memorial service. I recalled the time when, as Mirror political editor, I wrote a Sunday for Monday speculative piece on the Budget. Richard called me in. "Have you seen the budget?" he asked. No, I said. "Then why are you writing this crap?"

That was the editor of a red top tabloid with a stated political agenda. It is hard to imagine such a conversation in any part of the media jungle today, when events like a Budget or a reshuffle have more written about them before the event than after, usually with no reference after the event to the dozens of speculative stories that turned out to be wrong, many of them invented. I recall one reshuffle where two ministers who in the end didn't move at all were tipped for nine different jobs. On the day of course omniescing pundits said they stayed put, "as expected".

One of the reasons for the sheer volume of coverage attached to big events now is the near infinity in scale. Something has to fill it. A lot of the time, anything will do, whether political speculation, an airhead columnist, or the latest guff from last night's reality TV shows. In radio, "text us your views" is seen by some no doubt as a great contribution to debate. In reality it is random people, identity unknown, making random comments to help broadcasters fill space. Sit down in front of your TV and channel hop, and the "something" filling the space tends to be a depressing combination of the downmarket, the dull, the cheap, the occasional good repeat plus, thank God, sport, where it is the event, rather than the surrounding hype and commentary, that really matters.

So for all the good that can be said both for 24 hour news and for the internet, neither is a one way story of technological and cultural advance.

The internet gives access to news, information and consumer choices unimaginable before. On the other hand, it has further contributed to the general shortening of our attention spans. And in civic or citizen's journalism, which sounds so benign there can surely be nothing wrong with it, it has become home to a form of journalism in which there are things constantly said and written which in old media would lead to papers and radio stations being shut down. Working out where news and views are coming from, and what weight to attach to them, at a time when a new blog is created every second of every day, is now an essential part of the media consumer's toolkit. It has meant an acceptance that certain basic journalistic standards which used to be taken for granted have been eroded. News can be news simply for the fact that someone reports something, regardless of veracity. Anyone can be a journalist. Anyone can be a cameraman. A rumour can be launched on a message board and find its way

quickly, if interesting enough, into the US presidential election debate. It is a new landscape. I would love to know where it is all heading.

I enjoyed reading Michael Grade's Cudlipp lecture and his amusing account of how he got his first job under Cudlipp because his Dad fixed it for him and sent him for the "interview" in a chauffeur driven blue Bentley. What intrigued me was Michael saying how few training schemes there were at that time.

I was lucky to be trained on the Mirror Group in that I learned shorthand and "Essential law for Journalists." As a side observation can I suggest that the contempt laws appear to have broken down completely, and that too may well be a consequence of the sheer volume that has to be filled. So when we have a Madeleine case or a Meredith case or a footballer's alleged rape, these are too good as space fillers to let anything as fuddy duddy as law, or indeed fairness to those involved, get in the way. And if it leads to a fair trial not being possible – good story. Did the trial collapse because of media coverage? For yes, press green, for no press red, and keep e mailing your views.

It is a by product of change, and the need to be right, right now, that the old editorial rhythms that gave people time to think before they opened their mouth, or committed to print, have gone. Discussions which used to be part of a backroom editorial process – have we checked this story out, who should we be speaking to, what are they likely to say, what are the implications if true? – are now a staple diet of broadcast news dialogue, live on air.

Real breaking news stories are, by their nature, few and far between. The need to pretend to the listener and viewer that they are happening all the time is stronger. But the public know. They are sensitive to cultural change. So to have these changes happening alongside the scandals of phone in fakery – and they really are scandals, criminal at that – is bound to raise doubts in people's minds that an industry used to getting the benefit of the doubt, not least because quality used to take up a high percentage of total output, is in danger of losing it.

The language of news assumes everyone is inside the media bubble sharing the same passing excitement of the anchor and the reporter in the field. Stories go into shorthand very quickly, based on an assumption that people have been following them closely, and in detail. The media gets bored with a story, often, before most members of the public are even aware of it. On the other hand, when the media gets fixated on a story, often because it senses the competition is, we will hear of nothing else. The McCann case is the best example. An interesting and important story, the stuff of every parent's nightmare. But it quickly became a commodity in which most of the media got close to hysteria, and some have remained there. Let us not pretend the coverage was driven by concern for the child – there are many missing children – or compassion for the parents – certainly not once the mood shifted– or regard for the truth. It has been the worst example of recent times, on a par with coverage of Princess Diana, of some newspapers thinking the word Madeleine sells, and finding literally any old nonsense to keep her name in that selling position on the front. Mature, stable and fair it is not. Unfair and exploitative it is.

I thought Michael Grade had a terrific maxim for what journalism should do. "Make the important interesting". Very Cudlipp. But the space offered by 24 hour news, Paxman's expectation inflation, the breathless talking shop, the changed role of newspapers now they are no longer the main purveyors of real news, means that the more of it there is, the less any of it matters. Growth in scale, not in stature. It is as though the need to fill the space has taken over from real investment in and thought about what should fill it. And wheras in the States, many old style current affairs programmes have survived alongside the growth of the guff, the same cannot be said for the UK. On ITV, no more World In Action, no more This Week, no more Cook Report even. Panorama is better known for the publicity it generates in advance of its programmes, thanks to its ramping across the BBC, than it is for the output.

The main task of reporters working nights on Cudlipp's Mirror was to wait for first editions, see what stories had been missed, and check them out. If they couldn't stand them up independently, they didn't go in. Now, a story merely has to be in print to be considered ripe for broadcasting. And a story is considered ripe for press coverage simply because it is going to be on TV. Media spin to fill media space. And if it turns out to be wrong well, we'll say so. Or, more likely, we'll have moved on. Not wrong for long, the 24 hour news motto.

There's little point playing the blame game in all this. It is the consequence of enormous change not always accompanied by clear thought or debate about those consequences. Indeed, you could argue, as News Corp did in a recent two page ad showing their astonishing growth under Murdoch, that the media growth story is a success story. In pure economic terms, it is. The question is what the relation between scale and standards has been. About standards, there can be an argument. About the change in scale, there can be none.

I started out as a Mirror Group trainee in 1980. If you had entered into a casual conversation about "the media" back then, you meant a daily paper that you took, probably because your parents took it. It was probably 24 pages long. You meant "the news" which you probably made a point of watching or hearing, once a day, probably on the BBC. You meant perhaps a monthly magazine that arrived through the post. That was most people's media consumption, less than 30 years ago, a nanosecond in historical terms.

Not even Murdoch would have foreseen the growth that technological, industrial and cultural change has created. Any more than Paul Dacre could when, of his time on the Manchester Daily Express, he said "Those were the days of typewriters and carbon paper, overnight pages and restrictive early deadlines. Little did I dream then that one day, as an editor, computers would give me the freedom to put together, in its entirety, a 128 page paper in 3 hours between 7 and 1030 every night."

But the confrontation of those outmoded industrial practices, most dramatically in Murdoch's move to Wapping, was but a forerunner of other changes leading to the digital age in which we have not 3 TV stations but hundreds. Most news, as it is traditionally understood, is made instantly available on TV, radio or online. Newspapers have had to adapt either by making more of their view of the world in the fusion of news and comment, or by going for greater depth, particularly in sport, business and leisure. Cudlipp would have approved of both. Newspaper sales have declined relative to growth elsewhere but I would argue they have adapted pretty well to the change, not least through the switch online.

ABC statistics from August 2007 confirmed the rise in online when they published print circulation and online user data in the same report for the first time. Guardian Unlimited, for example, saw daily traffic of 771,242 with comparable print circulation at 363,562. It suggests the current Guardian management have their finger a bit closer to the changing pulse of the nation than did CP Scott, editor, publisher and owner of the Manchester Guardian in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who was appalled at the advent of television. "Half Greek, half Latin, no good can come of it," he said. I sometimes think of him when I'm channel hopping from repeat quiz show to celebrity chef to canned laughter US soap to breathless two way on the latest government "crisis".

But just as TV forced papers to adapt, but has not killed them, so talk of the death of the newspaper in the online era is premature. Many consumers still see newspaper websites as a complementary news source rather than a direct replacement for print. Alternatively, news may break online, but more serious commentary is still read in hard copy.

I did a blog for the Labour Party website during the last football World Cup. Traffic only really picked up if an entry was mentioned in the mainstream press or on BBC Online. When I published extracts from my diaries last year, we did the marketing via the web. But most people who went to the site first learned of it in print and on TV. Just before Christmas I received two folders of the national print media coverage for the book and TV series accompanying it. It ran to almost a thousand pages. Bigger than the book. Just.

When working for Tony Blair, I was doubtless not a conventional news consumer. Now, I read far fewer papers and watch much less news. I use the internet more than I thought I would in a decade during which I never sent an e mail. But when something really big happens, like Benazir Bhutto's assassination, I find myself drawn to live TV news. Once the single fact of her assassination was absorbed, I found the rolling coverage superficial and repetitive. The expert commentators, with one or two exceptions, were anything but. By contrast, I found some of the press coverage the following morning to be superb. The story told, and thousands of words of proper analysis around it.

It has been interesting to see how TV has had many advantages of change, particularly its monopoly on immediacy, but has scorned them and still takes an inferior role to the agenda of the print media. Anyone who has ever attended a TV planning meeting, executives weighed down by press cuttings, knows what I'm talking about.

24 hour news and the internet are long term changes of lasting impact. But there are two other changes I want to mention which I hope – though I would not bet on it - are short term and of no lasting impact. Because for all the soul searching that goes on amid the media chatterati about whither the BBC, whither current affairs, whither investigative journalism, any honest analysis of change since the Cudlipp era would have to include reality TV and a celebrity culture with its own media infrastructure as having had an important impact on both scale and standards. I was recently at a magazine awards ceremony to present a lifetime achievement award to my friend and fellow Mirror trainee Lindsay Nicholson, with whom I have had a few good arguments about the failings of the PCC on which she sits.

Over the pre awards dinner, I was grumping away about my failed attempts to stop my teenage daughter from buying Heat and its ilk on the grounds that they are not just trivial and devoid of values, but cruel and demeaning of women in particular. Janice Turner of the Times, partly for her own sport I think, got the editor of Heat over to meet me. He seemed a reasonable enough bloke. They usually do. He had a very interesting defence. "We perform a useful role. What would you rather have magazines like ours, or public executions?" I rather admired his honesty. It reminded me of the time I called a Sunday Express journalist to complain about a story he had written that I was leaving Downing Street to work for Manchester United. "It's a good story," he said. "But it's completely untrue," I said. "I know," he said "but it's a good story."

Again, the scale is enormous. I have a huge file of invites from different celebrity and reality programmes. There are the obvious ones. Celebrity Big Brother. I'm a celebrity get me out of here. Celebrity come dancing. Celebrity ice skating. I could have been a celebrity dog trainer, a celebrity safari game warden, a celebrity cabbie, a celebrity circus performer, a celebrity shark diver, a celebrity nurse, a celebrity teacher, a judge in a celebrity Chef contest, a celebrity conductor – of orchestras not buses. And I'm not even a real celebrity. Imagine the requests that go to really famous people -- like Jordan. Or Piers Morgan. Or now, in the post gusset phase of his career, Jeremy Paxman.

My favourite was the one asking me to go to America, have medical treatment to turn me into a black man, then make a film exposing racism in the deep south. Intrigued, I asked if ALL of me went black. "I think so," came the reply. "And can I go back to being white at a time of my choosing?" I asked. "I'll have to check but I think so."

Remember those Clive James programmes taking the mickey out of foreign TV programmes? Now, they're all here, and more, and people with Oxbridge degrees are thinking them up.

The area where I have the most interest, and experience, is in the coverage of politics. There are a few reasons why I left my job with Tony Blair, but one of them was that relations between media and politics had become so bad, I had become something of a symbol within that, and part of me thought maybe things would improve if I left. It wasn't the only reason but it was in the mix. I am not sure things have improved at all.

Tony Blair said shortly before he left office that there seemed to be no room in modern political coverage for shades of grey. We see and hear only the language of extremes. The coverage surrounding his successor has rather proved his point. For the first few weeks, the breathless pavement standers told how Gordon Brown could do no wrong. Then the mood shifted, the prism changed, and he went straight from hero to zero. TB had travelled much the same journey. Neither phase of coverage was accurate, for either, because both remove what actually makes politics and life interesting, the shades of grey that provoke real debate. But shades of grey don't fit

the formula. Triumph or disaster. Unalloyed success or total crisis, the most overused word in political reporting.

In a decade with TB, I think we had half a dozen genuine crises. We had hundreds described as such. Two of the genuine ones were Foot and Mouth and the fuel protest. I think the fuel protest was one of those moments when the media genuinely and collectively lost the plot. Starved of a genuine opposition in Parliament, they saw in the rag-bag army outside refineries a way of curbing the Government's power.

They pretended a show of hands of a few farmers and truck drivers was somehow representative democracy or the stirrings of the same sort of political movement which brought down communism. They saw themselves as agitators not journalists and were left feeling rather stupid when the public decided it had gone on long enough.

I think it was when TB realised the media was doing everything it could to make the crises worse, rather than simply cover them, that he started to worry less about their opinions and more about their role in our society.

For anyone interested in this area, I strongly recommend his speech on what he called "the sheer scale, weight and hyperactivity" of the modern media, the change it has meant for people in public life, and what he believes is the damage it does to the country's self confidence and self belief. Contrary to speculation at the time, I did not write it, nor have any significant input into it, other than through the shared experience of trying to deal with this changed landscape. I certainly wouldn't have singled out the Independent when the Mail is the most poisonous UK newspaper, and I know that is his view too. Indeed it is one of the most interesting paradoxes of all that the paper almost universally seen as the most poisonous is the one also seen by many media professionals as the best packaged.

TB's analysis was that the changed media context meant that all that mattered was impact. "Of course the accuracy of a story counts, but it is second to impact," he said.

He went on, and I agree with this too "It is this necessary devotion to impact that is unravelling standards, driving them down, making the diversity of the media not the strength it should be but an impulsion towards sensation above all else."

He went through the changes we made when we realised the impact our and their responses were having on politics/media relations. On the record briefings, transcripts published on the web. It may shock students here to know that when I was a journalist we were not even allowed to say the Number 10 briefings, or the person who did them, existed. Freedom of Information. Monthly press conferences for which TB cursed me monthly after I left, and doubtless Gordon does now. His appearances before select committees. All probably right in their own right. But pretty much dismissed as "spin," the second most overused media word after crisis. And there was an interesting observation from one of Jeremy's Downing Street pavement standers, Nick Robinson of the BBC, who said that to be fair to me, we tried to make changes and the monthly press conference was one of them. The trouble was, he said, that Tony Blair got so good at them, they became boring. Which kind of made TB's point – that news is only news if the politician is saying something stupid, controversial, at odds with his own policy, or which fits the pre ordained agenda for the day. A Prime

Minister making the points he wants to make, about the issues he considers to be important – that's boring, especially when you can have a political reporter talking instead.

We even had one instance where the BBC split the screen so you had TB in one half of the screen – live but mute – and a reporter in the other half talking about what he expected him to say when he got onto issues the BBC deemed to be more newsworthy. Again, in Cudlipp's day, tabloid papers had reporters whose job was simply to cover Parliamentary debates. Now the tabloids ignore the Commons, the broadsheets leave Parliamentary coverage to jokesmiths and the broadcasters confine it to ghettos, then all unite in accusing the politicians of sidelining Parliament. Outside the chamber, a leading politician's speech may, if he's lucky, and if the prevailing media mood deems it to be newsworthy, get 30 seconds – followed by a minute of a correspondent of often dubious qualifications telling the public what the political leader they elected meant. Particularly on TV, modern journalism is about the journalist not those they are talking about, or to. Perhaps inevitable in the era of celebrity, but helpful to debate – I don't think so.

Again, I would like to agree with something Jeremy Paxman said in his Mactaggart lecture. "I thought the way we responded to Tony Blair's speech was pretty pathetic," he said. On the central charges – that the media behave like a herd, have a trivial and collective judgement, and prefer sensation to understanding – he said "I'm sorry to say, but I think there's something in all of these arguments."

But there was a collective refusal to engage on the substance. As Paxman put it, the media just "pressed the F12 key. Yah booh. You're a politician. We're media yahoos. Get over it."

(I should also warn Jeremy that his is one of the quotes we shall be using in the litany of marvellous things said about my book when the paperback comes out later this year, namely his observation that my diaries will be a gold mine for future .... psychiatrists.)

The debate TB hoped to spark about the nature of the media and how we might improve political discourse in a way that led to the public being better informed came and went in a day because the collective media judgement was that it wasn't a debate to have. "Feral beasts" got the headline and the cartoons. The caravan moved quickly on.

There is a third side to the triangle of course, and that is the public. Politicians and media can criticise each other. The politicians because they want to be elected, and the media because they need to retain audience are not terribly keen on criticising the public. But unless and until the public actually think it matters, nothing much will change.

As to how much it does matter, here I am in my own grey area zone. I don't know. There is TB who had more bad press than anyone in UK history, if measured in volume, and yet won three elections, achieved a lot of what he set out to do, and left at a time pretty much of his own choosing to go on to do other things. Talk to anyone in sport and many rage at the modern media and two I have personally heard raging are Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger. Yet both are still there, still going strong, still successful because in the end what they achieve is more important than whether they get good press for doing it, or in Alex Ferguson's case even talk to the BBC about it.

In politics, you have to communicate and you have to have a media operation. In business, because of the speed with which a story can damage your brand, reputational issues mean you have to be conscious of your public and media profile. In sport, the media is a key reason for growth in interest and income and most top level sports people have contractual obligations to fulfil. But when I heard Fabio Capello saying he would be learning English quickly, so that he could speak English at his next press conference, I thought "wrong priority." He will have millions of words written about him. Not one of them matters alongside results. If he can get the results without spending his time worrying about the media, that is the right priority.

And here is the bad news and the good news. The bad news for journalists is that the media, however seriously people who are in the public eye take it, is not taken as seriously as it once was – by the public. The public know politicians may spin them a line, but they have a sense they are being spun someone's line every time they read a paper or listen to a pavement stander. They are more likely therefore to root their judgements in their own lives, rather than in what they read. One of my favourite factoids is that Labour support among Mail readers rose between 1997 and 2001, when Dacre was spending the equivalent of millions in an anti-Blair propaganda drive. It didn't work because the language was too extreme, the message too undiluted and people work things out for themselves.

TB was an effective electoral politician in part because he was very good at reading public mood. I think in his speech on the media he was onto something the public are onto ahead of the media, That is the understanding that it is bigger, but not better. They will drive change. It is leading already to much more personalised and fragmented media consumption, driven largely though not exclusively by the web.

And the good news for those who are on the receiving end is that provided they are strategic, robust, worry less about the day to day and more about the long term, they are in a far stronger position than sometimes they may feel. When we started out, I admit I was obsessed about every headline, every bulletin, every statement made by anyone in Labour ranks who might make news. Do not forget we were engaged in cultural change in a party where once Newsnight called the press office to ask for someone to speak on the party's defence policy and the press officer said "Do you want someone to speak for the policy, or someone to speak against, or I can get you both?" No thank you.

But once the changes were made, basic disciplines accepted, and once the media age actually became a reality, then the communications that counted were those of a strategic nature.

That gives the policy makers and the decision makers much more strategic space than they might imagine. The politicians who are successful are the ones who will trust to their values and long term judgements and the knowledge that in the end they have the power to make real change, and that change, success or failure, will decide the judgement upon them. It is why I believe GB to be in a stronger strategic position than the current hero to zero prevailing wisdom would have it.

There can also be the case made - and with it some blame no doubt in our direction - that in seeking to manage the new landscape, politics has started to mirror some of the media's negative aspects. In everything we did, in order to change the terms of trade so that Labour was no longer disadvantaged, we built in media handling plans to ensure as best we could that the reality of what we were proposing, as opposed to any negativised version, got through over time to the public. Equally, with comment taking the upper hand over news, we did more to seek to influence comment too.

In TB we had a leader who could master this new landscape better than anyone, but precisely because he was such a good communicator, people sometimes overlook the fact he was also exceptional at the really important part of the job – policy and decision making. In watching the Tories go for David Cameron, a PR man by trade whose single most important achievement prior to becoming leader was making a speech without notes, and the Lib Dems go for a good looking 40 year old about whom next to nothing is known, you wonder if the parties are following the media in putting what looks right ahead of what matters, short term media impact ahead of long term strategic strength.

I did a TV programme with Tim Bell recently, who said to me there was no point me banging on about how the Tories would have to come up with serious detailed policy - their strategy is to avoid it and let Cameron just play the media game. If it works, then politics has a problem.

As for GB, I mentioned him following TB's hero to zero journey. What was the turning point? It was the on-off election talk, in other words a media handling question, not something of lasting impact upon people's lives.

As Geoffrey Goodman knows, I was reluctant to do this event. Usually when I talk about these issues, all that happens is the usual suspects have the usual whinge, with a different F12 key pressed. I said yes, frankly, because of Geoffrey and out of respect for Hugh Cudlipp. But fair to say that my experience on the political side of the fence has seen any idealism I had about journalism dimmed close to being extinguished, while I continue to have a great respect for politics and many politicians. I can defend the changes we made to communication. I can see why some people didn't like some of what we did. But the arguments against us were hugely exaggerated in my view, and rooted in the media's obsession with itself, and in making themselves the sole arbiters of what is news, what is worthy of debate.

Politicians and journalists both have a job to do, and should try to do them without regarding the other as subhuman. Both have a problem with trust and turnout. Politics needs to stand up for itself better in the face of change. The media needs to face up to the need for a genuine debate about its own role, and to understand its responsibilities in a modern democracy go beyond making money and filling space.

They say they want debate but do they? TB didn't really get the debate going. Jeremy didn't really get the debate going, any more than this will. People like John Lloyd at the Reuters Institute work hard trying to get a mature dialogue going that goes a little deeper than "politics bad/media always right" but they tend to be sidelined or viewed as traitors to the media cause. I would be happy to play a role in contributing to a debate about how the media might develop in a way that strengthens democratic argument and people's understanding of the world, but I do not believe the bulk of our media wants that debate. It may change but only if, amid all the other things people really care about, they care about this.

Let me close on this. I once asked Bill Clinton what it was like having the whole world talk about your sex life? He said provided he couldn't hear them all at the same time, he was fine. A few years ago, I interviewed President Clinton for TV. I reminded him of a conversation he had with TB on the day the Starr Report came out. There he is, waiting for the world to gorge on every aspect of his personal and political lives, and he is on the phone to TB talking about the decommissioning of Soviet nuclear weapons. I asked him how he managed to stay focussed in that way. He said the force of the modern media is such that too many decision makers define their reality according to that day's press – "it is almost always a mistake." He said he had a clear objective – survival. He had a strategy – get up every day and find those issues where he could make a difference. He had tactics – to make sure the American people knew that was what he was doing. An extreme example, but I think a good one, of how to keep going under fire in this new landscape.

I record in my book making the point that if the media had real power, as opposed to the ability to influence a debate, he would have been a goner many times over. But he survived.

When I left Number 10, because there was a lot of coverage, I got a lot of letters. Some saying Good Riddance. Some saying thanks for what you did for Labour and for Tony. And some, fewer than the other two categories, but worrying, from people saying they have thought about going into politics, but they see what happens to people who put their heads above the political parapet – the near universal media contempt, the refusal to see much good in any of them, the difficulty in ever having complex points about complex issues debated let alone understood, the rooting through dustbins, the targeting of families – and they think why bother with all that when they could have easier, more pleasant, more lucrative lives in business or in the media or others walks of life?

But to show you I have moved on, I can honestly say if this speech gets any media coverage or not, I don't care. What the top line is, I don't know. I am just glad to have had the chance to see some old friends, and make a few points that you may or may not think worth making.

And I leave you with this thought – the person who has perhaps had the most positive profile for a more sustained period than anyone else in Britain, and possibly the world, is the one who has never ever given an interview, namely the Queen.