

Tech, less terror

JOURNALIST, EDITOR and writer Cassie Werber, co-founder and board member of Hacks/Hackers London, came to the September London Freelance Branch meeting to tell us about collaborations between journalists and techies in a world where these distinctions are, some say, increasingly blurred.

Cassie was formerly a theatre director and then an energy reporter for *WSJ*, among other journalism gigs. She now writes for *Quartz* online magazine.

Quartz is an example of the type of project presented by visiting speakers to the Hack/Hackers London monthly meet-ups. In contrast to *WSJ*, “a fairly traditional news room with a content management system”, in *Quartz* “there is not really any divide between the journalists” and the techies. The magazine has a “WordPress back end” platform: journalists write copy straight into this production system. They also “do their own tagging” (with keywords to help search engines find the story); do “chartbuilding” (making infographics, pie-charts and the like); do “search engine optimisation” tweaks; and “source and edit images... create a package” to send to their editor.

Journos at *Quartz* don’t do deep tech. There is a team of people who code and who do the “back end tech”. The publication is still a start-up, the baby of the long-established

US print magazine *The Atlantic*. Eventually *Quartz* will have its own advertising revenue stream. These and other projects or “pitches” for “digitally done differently” are the sort of thing that gets discussed at Hacks/Hackers London. The people who go to the meetings are not actual hackers in the sense of breaking into computer systems, but aim to embody the earlier sense of doing

ence” at such events.) Hacks/Hackers London is supposed to be a safe space where journalists can debate as yet “unresolved issues” around journalism becoming “a digital business”. It hopes to make “digital journalism... a bit less terrifying.”

As well as much “talk about jobs”, there have been mentoring sessions. And attendance at Hacks/Hackers London has, we are told, resulted in



Cassie Werber of Hacks/Hackers London

Photo © Hazel Dunlop – see her prison pictures at <http://inside.hazeldunlop.com>

creative stuff with techie stuff.

Although a co-founder of “disruptive” online currency Bitcoin gave a talk there, it is, Cassie stresses, “not an activist organisation.”

Another example of a Hacks/Hackers London presentation, described in the pub afterwards by a regular attendee from LFB, was the *Guardian*’s Virtual Reality team presenting their project on prisons two weeks before its official launch. (The LFB member said they’d received useful advice on “your online pres-

“at least one marriage.”

Hacks/Hacker’s London’s popularity, though, means you’ll have to be alert to get tickets to their gigs, which are released a few at a time in advance.

They have a network of “about 5000” and room for 200 at their events, which they don’t want to make any bigger. Watch their website for details www.meetup.com/HacksHackersLondon – the next one’s on 19 October at Twitter UK.

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Brussels sprouted leaks

WHATEVER happens between the UK and the EU in the next few years, developments in EU policy are important here. It’s possible that the UK government will agree to comply with future EU rules in return for tariff-free access to the Single Market – the “Norwegian model”. We don’t know, and we don’t believe government has the faintest either.

Even if the hardcore Brexiteers win out, EU policy will set the main

context for UK developments. And in September we were hit with a spate of leaks from the EU Commission – its civil service – on plans to change the law on authors’ rights and copyright. Then these seem to have brought on the official proposal – a Draft Directive – a little earlier than expected.

The proposals are quite modest, and parts of them may indeed provide a platform for opposition to the

expected efforts by Google, Facebook and company to move UK law in the direction of US copyright law post-Brexit, whatever that may be.

As expected, the Draft Directive does not live up to the pleasing noises made by their bosses the Commissioners (see the July *Freelance*) on dealing with the unfair contracts imposed on us. The failure to directly address imposed contract terms and

See EU COPYRIGHT on page 2

LFB meetings

10 October

New ways to sell photos

14 November

Panel on journalists’ co-operatives

See back page & twitter.com/NUJ_LFB