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 journalistic 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 startup, the baby of the long-established WSJ, “a contrast to WSJ, “a fairly traditional news room with a content management system”. 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 startup, the baby of the long-established WSJ, “a contrast to Quartz’s Virtual Reality team presented, 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 presence” 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

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 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 noisiness 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...