

Mario Vargas Llosa

At the World Editors' Forum in conversation with Alejandro Miró Quesada, from *El Comercio*, Peru

AMQ: What is good journalism for Mario Vargas Llosa and what is bad journalism?

MVL: I think that good journalism is decent, trustful journalism, journalism that conveys an objective vision of what is going on in the world, and bad journalism is journalism that lies, that distorts the real world, that disseminates confusion. I think the basic problem is that in our times, journalism has been becoming more and more a form of entertainment. Many people read papers, weeklies, or watch television, looking for entertainment much more than for true information about what is going on, and this has provoked the degradation of journalism.

AMQ: Should well-made journalism get involved in this discussion and criticise this journalism? Should it get involved in all this debate?

MVL: Debate can be useful. But the best way to fight against bad journalism, against yellow journalism, journalism that is entertainment, is by a good example, doing exactly what good newspapers, radio, or TV programmes have been doing; telling the truth, trying to convey good information in order to be able to take a position about what is going on. This is what has been the fantastic service that journalism has provided since the beginning. I am not against entertainment, of course not, I think that entertainment is perfectly licit, but I think that it is very dangerous to think that it is the most important goal of journalism. I think that if you believe this, distortion is inevitable.

AMQ: Anyone can claim to be a journalist and act as one. For you, who is really a journalist?

MVL: Well, I think a journalist now is a professional. As in all professions there are different

kinds of specialists. Because knowledge has become so vast, so complex, so diversified that not even the most talented and well-trained journalist can write about everything, it is absolutely impossible. Specialisation is indispensable among journalists and I think also very serious training. When I started it was considered that a journalist was someone who became a professional by working as a journalist. I don't think this is true anymore. I think a journalist needs, like an architect or a lawyer, very serious training, not only of the techniques but also the historical, civic and moral dimension of the profession.

AMQ: What are the professional and intellectual skills that modern journalism must have to be capable of properly observing and analysing this globalised world of today?

MVL: You should write with a serious knowledge of what you are writing about. This is a basic requirement. But also you need to have instincts and creativity. A good journalist is also a kind of creator, someone that uses language. And for that you need skills. And for these skills you need first, training, culture, but also flair and instinct. It is something that is very difficult to define.

AMQ: Many people talk with nostalgia about the good old quality journalism. Have journalistic values changed through the years?

MVL: It is true that in the past there were great newspapers and magazines. But there were also many very bad newspapers and magazines. It is true that now, as the world has become much more complex and there are so many different techniques and means of information, the challenges for journalists are enormous and the

adaptation has not been easy. But I wouldn't be so pessimistic as those people who believe that journalism in the past was a model and that this model has disappeared. I think this is a romantic prejudice.

AMQ: In many developing countries, readership and even credibility are suffering. Is it because of the competition from the Internet and all the new media, or is it because of the press not fulfilling its job?

MVL: Well, I think in many cases, journalism has abdicated because it is facing very difficult challenges, many media consider that the only way to conquer or retain the public is banalisation or frivolisation of journalism. And this of course is very, very dangerous.

AMQ: Do you think that this is the main threat for today's journalism?

MVL: I think it is probably the greatest challenge that journalism has in modern times.

AMQ: Are you optimistic about the future of journalism?

MVL: Oh yes, without any doubt.

Avatar Adam helps Reuters get a (second) life

by Anne Taylor

Reuters, the world's biggest financial news service and data provider, has a virtual agency in a virtual world, headed by a virtual bureau chief known as Adam Reuters, who reports on news in the virtual world.

You can find Adam Reuters (Adam Pasick in real life) heading up the virtual Reuters bureau on an island inside Second Life – an online world that has more than eight million registered users and an economy worth the equivalent of \$500-million.

Adam Pasick introduced his Second Life alter-ego at a Reuters masterclass at this year's WAN/WEF in Cape Town.

Describing Second Life as "the most talked about and most exciting thing in the media world", Pasick said Reuters had signed up in October last year to "get experience of the virtual world".

Although many independent journalists and bloggers have joined such virtual worlds, Reuters was the first established news agency to dispatch a full-time reporter. In fact, Reuters invested enough money to buy an island, which is modelled on its head-



Adam Pasick works for Reuters in the real world; avatar Adam Reuters works for the Reuters bureau in Second Life.

quarters in Times Square, New York. On the island, visitors can access a Reuters newsfeed, which is a streaming video that users can activate. "We wanted people to know the Reuters brand. This is a bit of an experiment for us," Pasick said.

After all, joining Second Life is a sure-fire way for a traditional media company to create virtual credibility. This is important for an industry unquestionably in flux.

As David Schlesinger, Reuters UK editor-in-chief, told the masterclass, the era of

one-way journalism is over:

"After the London bombing, we received a flood of images and videos from citizen journalists. Since then our engagement with bloggers and informal journalists has exploded."

The agency works on a collaborative model that brings audience, subject and journalist together – and their involvement in Second Life is key to that. "People are participating and making their voices heard in a new and innovative way,"

says Pasick.

For those of you in the real world who haven't heard about Second Life yet, it's a virtual community, which has its own economy, businesses and currency, known as Linden dollars. Its growth in the past year has been dramatic, with about 25 000 new residents every day. Created by US firm Linden Labs, it has a registered membership of over 8.6-million users (up from 2.4-million in January). It's big. And it is only going to get bigger. According to Gartner Research, quoted in a

recent *Newsweek* article, four out of every five people who use the Internet will actively participate in Second Life or a similar medium by 2011. "If Gartner is to be believed (and it is one of the most respected research firms in the field) this means that 1.6-billion – out of the total two-billion Internet users – will have found new lives online," says *Newsweek*.

At this stage, South African participation is quite limited. To make the experience pleasant, you need a high-speed connection, and Second Life is broadband intensive.

Other media in Second Life: UK pay-TV company SkyNews, with a virtual replica of its newsroom and presenter Adam Boulton, plans to become the first 24-hour news channel in Second Life by giving away virtual TV sets so that Second Life residents can watch SkyNews in their virtual lounges. Go figure.

German publisher Axel Springer, which owns Germany's top-selling newspaper *Bild*, has a tabloid called the *Avastar*, which carries news that happens in Second Life.

Channel 4 offers some of its TV programming on a virtual TV network. It recently launched 4Radio, which offers podcasts of programmes from music to speech.