THE NEW ATLANTIS
A Journal of Technology & Society

Excerpt

The Rise of Guerrilla Media

Glenn Reynolds

> *Nothing is so unsettling to a social order as the presence of a mass of scribes without suitable employment and an acknowledged status.*
>
> –Eric Hoffer, *The Ordeal of Change*

Zeyad was a twenty-eight-year-old dental student in Baghdad. He had never worked as a journalist, but American journalist-blogger Jeff Jarvis found his weblog, Healing Iraq, and liked it. Jarvis, the president of Condé Nast's Internet division and a huge fan of Iraqi and Iranian bloggers, had Federal Expressed him a digital camera the week before, paying more in shipping than the camera cost. Zeyad was still learning to use it when he covered a mammoth anti-terrorist/anti-Baath demonstration in Baghdad, posting pictures to his blog.

Over twenty thousand people marched. Western media ignored the story, but in spite of this neglect, Zeyad's pictures and reporting attracted the notice of Americans. Hundreds of thousands saw his reports on the Internet, and the next week the *Weekly Standard* reprinted them, photos and all. It was a swift move: from an obscure website to coveted print real estate in less than a week. Even more striking, the left-leaning webzine *Salon* was inspired to run a story on how Zeyad had "scooped" the *New York Times*, which had published a context-less photo from the march but otherwise ignored it. Before the Internet, and blogs, the *Times*' omission would have kept us ignorant, but this time it left the *Times* embarrassed and readers aware that stories were going unreported.

Keeping an Eye on Big Media

The Zeyad story points up a typical pattern in the relationship between Big Media and blogs. Before Zeyad embarrassed the *Times*, bloggers had noticed remarks made by then Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott at Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party, remarks suggesting that Lott would have preferred to see the segregationist Dixiecrat Party (on whose ticket Thurmond had run) win the presidency in 1948. Although these

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comments were made at a gala event with numerous reporters in attendance, they weren't reported in the news until several days later, after bloggers on both the left and right had made a stink. By the time it was over, Lott was an ex-majority leader.

During the 2004 election, blogs and online media played a major role both in spotting stories that the Big Media had missed and in correcting stories that the Big Media got wrong. The most famous example involved the so-called "RatherGate" scandal, in which CBS relied on documents that turned out to have been rather clumsily forged, in a story alleging that President Bush had been given special treatment while serving in the Texas Air National Guard. Another example involved Democratic candidate John Kerry's claim to have been in Cambodia on Christmas Day 1968, which turned out not to be the case either. Yet another involved a false Associated Press report that a pro-Bush crowd had booed former President Bill Clinton when Bush reported that Clinton was having heart surgery. Bloggers who had attended the rally responded with firsthand reports that included audio and video, making it clear that the AP story was false.

These examples are some of the most famous, but focusing on them misses the point, which goes well beyond the occasional scoop. The trouble is encapsulated in Ken Layne's now famous statement that this is the Internet, "and we can fact-check your ass." Where before journalists and pundits could bloviate at leisure, offering illogical analysis or citing "facts" that were in fact false, now the Sunday morning op-eds have already been dissected on Saturday night, within hours of their appearing on newspapers' websites.

Annoyance to journalists is the least of this; what is really going on is something much more profound: the end of the power of Big Media.

For almost a hundred years—from the time William Randolph Hearst pushed the Spanish-American War, to the ascendancy of talk radio in the 1990s—big newspapers and, later, television networks have set the agenda for public discussion and tilted the playing field in ways that suited their institutional and political interests.

Not anymore. As UPI columnist Jim Bennett notes, what is going on with journalism today is akin to what happened to the Church during the Reformation. Thanks to a technological revolution (movable type then, the Internet and talk radio now), power once concentrated in the hands of a professional few has been redistributed into the hands of the amateur many. Those who do it for money are losing out to those who (mostly) do it for fun. *Beware the people who are having fun competing with you!*

Nonetheless, weblogs are not likely to mark the end of traditional media, any more than Martin Luther marked the end of the popes. Yet

the Protestant Reformation did mark an end to the notion of unchallenged papal authority, and it seems likely that the blog phenomenon marks the beginning of the end of the tremendous power wielded by Big Media in recent years. Millions of Americans who were once in awe of the punditocracy now realize that anyone can do this stuff—and that many unknowns can do it better than the lords of the profession.

In this we are perhaps going full circle. Prior to the Hearst era—and even, to a degree, prior to World War II—Big Media power was countervailed by other institutions: political parties, churches, labor unions, even widespread political discussion groups. The blog phenomenon may be viewed as the return of such influences—a broadening of the community of discourse to include, well, the community.

And it's possible that blogs will have a greater influence than these earlier institutions for a simple reason: they're addictive, and many of the addicts are mainstream journalists, who tend to spend a lot of time surfing the Web and who like to read about themselves and their colleagues. This means that blog criticism may have a more immediate impact than might otherwise be the case.

If so, it will be a good thing. Americans' trust in traditional Big Media has been declining for years, as people came to feel that the news they were getting was distorted or unreliable. Such distrust, while a natural phenomenon, can't be a good thing over the long term. In this, as in other areas, competition is the engine that will make things better.

The Costs of Cutting Corners

And it had better. For the sad truth is that although bloggers are often criticized for producing more opinion than original reporting (some critics call them "parasites" on Big Media's hard-news reporting), even top-of-the-line mainstream news institutions like the *New York Times* are becoming more like the bloggers all the time, reducing staffs, cutting the size and number of foreign bureaus, and relying more and more on wire services for original reporting to which they add commentary and "news analysis" (it's "value added" rather than parasitism when Big Media does it). But the real appeal of this reduction to management is that it's cheap, while reporting is expensive. Decades of cost cutting and corporate consolidation at newspapers, magazines, and television networks have caused them to sharply reduce their core competency of news gathering and reporting. Where they used to have bureaus in all sorts of places, now they don't. Like the industrial beer makers, they've watered down their

product over a series of individually imperceptible cost-cutting stages, until suddenly it's reached a point where a lot of people have noticed that it lacks substance and flavor. That opens an opportunity for a widely dispersed network of individuals to make a contribution.

Traditionally, the big things that mainstream journalism offers are reach and trustworthiness. Critics of media bias may joke about the latter, but though reporters for outlets like Reuters or the *New York Times* may—and do—slant their reporting from time to time, their affiliation with institutions that have a long-term interest in reputation limits how far they can go. When you rely on a report from one of those journalistic organs, you're relying, for better or worse, on their reputation. And when they ask you to believe their reports, they're relying on their reputations too.

But big institutions aren't the only way to have a reputation anymore. As Web-based outfits like Amazon.com and Slashdot are demonstrating, it's possible to have reputation without bureaucracy. Want to know whether you can rely on what someone says? Click on his profile and you can see what other people have said about him, and what he's said before, giving you a pretty good idea of his reliability and his biases. That's more than you can do for the person whose name sits atop a story in the *New York Times* (where, as with many Big Media outfits, archives are pay-only and feedback is limited).

An organization that put together a network of freelance journalists under a framework that allowed for that sort of reputation rating, and that paid based on the number of pageviews and the ratings that each story received, would be more like a traditional newspaper than a blog, but it would still be a major change from the newspapers of today. Interestingly, it might well be possible to knit together a network of bloggers into the beginnings of such an organization. With greater reach and lower costs than a traditional newspaper, it might bring something new and competitive to the news business.

Ad Hoc Journalism

In the meantime, we tend to see this dynamic mostly when bloggers self-organize around a particular big event: the Indian Ocean tsunami, hurricanes or terror attacks in the United States, and so on. Like the "flash crowds" that gather by text-message and e-mail, the bloggers swarm around a topic and then disperse.

This "flash media" coverage does a lot of good. Sometimes—as in the Trent Lott case, documented in a lengthy case study by Harvard's

Kennedy School of Government, or in Iraqi blogger Zeyad's coverage of pro-democracy rallies in Baghdad, scooping the *New York Times*—this sort of coverage gets Big Media entities interested. But even when Big Media snubs such coverage, bloggers let hundreds of thousands of people read about, see, and sometimes even experience via video a story that they would otherwise miss.

I don't think that weblogs and flash media will replace Big Media any time soon. But I keep seeing evidence that they're doing a better and better job of supplementing, and challenging, Big Media coverage. I think that's a wonderful thing, and it's one reason why I'm such an evangelist for the spread of enabling technologies like Web video and cheap digital cameras. The more people there are with these sorts of things, the more of a role there will be for flash media in covering news, and for more sophisticated ways of drawing this sort of coverage together on a more routine basis. Just another thing for the Old Media guys to worry about.

The end result of the blog revolution is to create what blogger Jim Treacher calls "we-dia." News and reporting used to be something that "they" did. Now it's something that we all do. This is sure to irritate the traditional press, which has always seemed to favor exclusivity—just read any of the journalism trade papers for an example of the guild mentality that seems to pervade the field—but it may also save press freedom from the problems created by the press.

I worry that freedom of the press—which in its modern extent is basically a creature of the post-World War II Supreme Court—is likely to be at risk if people see it as merely a special-interest protection for a news-media industry that is producing defective products that do harm.

But, as Alex Beam notes in the *Boston Globe*, media folks often encourage such a view, by failing to stand up for the free-speech rights of non-Big-Media folks:

> Apple Computer sued 19-year-old journalist Nicholas Ciarelli in January [2005] for disclosing trade secrets on his Apple news website Think Secret. A typical Think Secret annoyance: The site correctly predicted the appearance of the Mac Mini, a small, low-cost Macintosh computer, two weeks before the product was officially announced.
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> Ciarelli is accused of doing exactly what reporters all over America are supposed to be doing: finding and publishing information that institutions don't want to reveal….
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> Where are the always-vocal guardians of the First Amendment? Where

> is the American Civil Liberties Union? Where is the American Society of Newspaper Editors? Where, for that matter, is Harvard's Nieman Foundation?

Apparently, Ciarelli's status as "non-traditional media" has cost him support. But that's a mistake. Big Media outfits have been squandering their credibility and public regard for decades (see, for example, Dan Rather and Jayson Blair, or the exaggerated stories of death and lawlessness after Hurricane Katrina), and I suspect that this is likely to put free-press protections at risk. It's easier to support freedom of the press when you think the press is responsible. Ironically, their greatest hope for salvation is for lots of nontraditional media to get involved in publishing too, giving the public at large a greater stake in freedom of the press.

Saving the First Amendment—From Us?

If Americans regard press freedom as someone else's protection, they're likely to be much cooler toward the First Amendment than if they regard press freedom as their own. And that sense of ownership is more likely to develop if the explosion of self-published Internet media, often sniffed at by traditional media folks, continues. If Big Media is to be saved, it may be Little Media that is responsible.

Another question is whether Little Media can be saved from itself. Some people, invoking the usually sad fate of e-mail lists and online bulletin boards, wonder if Web journalism is doomed to be overrun by "trolls" and "flamers" who ruin things for everyone else. I think the answer is no. In legal and economic analysis, a "commons" is a resource that anyone can use. The classic example is the common grazing field shared by everyone in a village. As long as there's enough to go around, its common character is a benefit: there's no need to waste time dividing it up and assigning rights when there's enough for everyone.

The problem is when there are more people wanting to use the resource than it can support. Everyone could just cut back—but since there's no guarantee that other users will cut back, a rational user won't cut back but will try to grab as much as possible before someone else gets it. Grazing becomes overgrazing in a hurry under these circumstances, and everyone is worse off. Soon, there's nothing to do but to move elsewhere, as the previously settled area becomes a desert. The classic term for this problem is "the tragedy of the commons," after a famous article by that name.

This model wouldn't seem to fit the Web very well, though. There aren't many commonly held resources, and most of them aren't really

limited. Bandwidth, maybe, in shared networks, but that's pretty easy to address. (Actually, the use of overall Net bandwidth for spam may fall into the "overgrazing" category, but that's a topic for another day.)

But if there's one scarcity that everyone will agree on, it's time. Napoleon told his generals, "Ask me for anything but time," but he didn't know the half of it. For my own blog, I try to get around to as many sites as possible, but it's a hopeless effort: the number of new sites is expanding far faster than I can follow. And e-mail is worse. I get hundreds of e-mails.

But that difference—between visiting sites and receiving e-mail—is one reason why I think that the blog world, and the new journalism that resembles it, won't succumb to the tragedy of the commons the way that e-mail has. Think about an e-mail list: everyone can post freely to the list, but by doing so they consume readers' time. In a sense, there's a common pool of reading hours available, determined by the number of hours the average reader is willing to devote to mail from the list, multiplied by the number of readers. Each post to the list consumes some of that time, but at minimal cost to the poster in relation to the amount of time consumed. And the bigger the list, the greater the payoff (other people's time consumed) versus the cost (the poster's time).

Left to themselves, then, you'd expect that e-mail lists and similarly structured systems would succumb to a tragedy of the commons: excessive posting that consumes so much time that people abandon them and they die. (As a corollary, it would seem likely that the people whose time is the least valuable will post the most—since they incur the lowest cost in doing so—and if you assume that their time is less valuable because they're, well, dumb or crazy, then the more posts you see, the lower their likely value.) This does seem to describe the fate of many e-mail listservs, which start out well, with a few members, flourish and grow for a time, but then degenerate into flamefests and collapse. A similar phenomenon seems to affect chat rooms, message boards, and the like. Some people are suggesting that even well-established sites like Slashdot may suffer from this kind of thing, though I think the jury is still out on that one.

So, despite all the blogosphere hype, is the world of blogs headed the same way? It could be, but I'm going to predict that it isn't. The reason is that people who post on blogs can't commandeer the time of others: nobody will read their stuff except voluntarily since—unlike e-mail on a listserv—reading a weblog requires a deliberate act. As a blog reader, you control your time; as the member of an e-mail list, you don't. So although individual blogs may collapse into Usenet-style flaming, they'll either lose

their audiences or accumulate a reader base that wants to read flaming, in which case it's not really flaming—for our purposes—at all.

As Nick Denton says: "[T]his is the way to deal with flamers: let them post on their own damn sites. And then let everyone else ignore them. Weblogs are a gigantic interlinked discussion forum, in which it's trivially easy to route around idiots."

It's another example of what some people (well, Jeff Jarvis, and now me) are calling Jarvis's Laws of Media:

> Jarvis's First Law: Give the people control of media, they will use it. The corollary: Don't give the people control of media, and you will lose. Jarvis's Second Law: Lower cost of production and distribution in media inevitably leads to nichefication. The corollary: Lower the cost of media enough, and there will be an unlimited supply of people making it.

I think that he's right, and that the implications go beyond routing around idiots. And so, I suspect, does Jonathan Peterson, who wrote:

> At a very fundamental level, the Big Content companies don't understand the revolution that is happening in the digital media realm. They still see us as *consumers* only capable of digesting their offerings and handing over money. They really don't seem to understand that the reason we are buying PCs, video cameras, digital cameras, broadband connections and the like is that we want to create and share our creations. The quality of "amateur" content is exploding at the same time that Big Media companies are going through one of their all-time lows in music and television creativity. No wonder we're spending more time with our PCs than we are with our TVs.

And when "making" media is cheap, and an unlimited supply of people are "making it," what happens to journalism? Something that journalists may not like: Journalism, right now, is in the process of reverting to its earlier status as an activity, rather than a profession.

Which brings me to my last prediction. Actually, it's one I've made before, in a *TCS Daily* article: "[I]f Big Media let their position go without a fight to keep it by fair means or foul, they'll be the first example of a privileged group that did so. So beware." In the wake of the humiliation visited on Big Media by such debacles as RatherGate, I think we're already beginning to see signs of that backlash, complete with the growth of alarmist articles (like a recent cover story in *Forbes*) on the dangers posed by bloggers. And the press establishment's general lack of enthusiasm for

free speech for others (as evidenced by its support for campaign finance "reform") suggests that it'll be happy to see alternative media muzzled. Big Media outfits haven't been very enthusiastic about extending the "media exemption" of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance "reform" act to bloggers, for example. You want to keep this media revolution going? Be ready to fight for it. I think people will be. Am I too optimistic? We'll see.

I could write more about the role of blogs in changing politics and media, but that task has been admirably performed by Dan Gillmor in *We the Media*, Joe Trippi in *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, and especially by Hugh Hewitt in his book *Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation That's Changing Your World*. But what I can do is give you an insight into some of the people who are going beyond blogging and into independent journalism—doing the kind of thing, thanks to technology, that only Big Media employees used to be able to do.

One of them is J.D. Johannes, whose blog and documentary (see FacesFromTheFront.com) have attracted a lot of attention. There's been lots of unhappiness with media reporting from Iraq. But where people used to just complain about that, now people are doing something about it. Johannes is one of them. I interviewed him recently.

> ***Reynolds:*** What's your project all about? How did you come up with the idea?
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> ***Johannes:*** The project is about telling a story that otherwise would have gone untold. The story of one platoon of Marines, all of which are volunteers, as they root out insurgents in Iraq's Al Anbar province. The story is told through three mediums: Web, at www.FacesFromTheFront.com, local TV news stations in Kansas and Missouri, and a long-form documentary for local PBS tentatively titled "Outside The Wire." Washburn University has partnered with me for the documentary, making me an adjunct professor in the Military and Strategic Studies Department. The PBS station, though licensed to the university, has been a challenge.
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> Local TV affiliates were not going to Fallujah to follow a group of Reserve Marines from their area. Local PBS stations were not going to Fallujah to produce a long-form documentary about Reserve Marines from their area. The big networks were never going to cover a group of Reserve Marines from Kansas City. The daily newspapers were not going to cover them. The story of the courage, dignity, and compassion of this group of Marines would never be told, unless I went. The only time local stations or newspapers cover a local Marine or soldier is if they die in combat. That is an outrage.…

Reynolds: How has technology played a role in letting you do this sort of thing? Would it have been possible twenty years ago? If possible, feasible?

Johannes: This project, the way it was thrown together, would not have been possible ten years ago. The major technological leap forward is in the low cost availability of 3CCD cameras that shoot broadcast-quality video and off-the-shelf video editing software that rivals television production equipment. Ten years ago, a production quality camera would cost $25,000–$40,000. The editing equipment would have been a Video Toaster or two bulky decks and two bulky monitors. The total cost being around $100,000. But now, it's $4,000 for a 3CCD camera, $1,000 for Adobe Premiere software plus features, and $2,000 for a laptop computer. We ship video from Iraq using a combination of FedEx and NorSat KU band satellite transmissions. Neither of which would have been feasible twenty years ago.

The Web end of things obviously wouldn't have worked twenty years ago. Ten years ago, the Web part of the project would have been slower, with fewer and shorter video clips. The FacesFromTheFront.com website would not be nearly as rich in content ten years ago; server space would have been too expensive. Ten or fifteen or twenty years ago, a person with a large, well-established video production company could be doing what we are doing. But a small company or a start-up company? Not a chance. The initial capital investment would have been too great.

Reynolds: Do you see a trend toward independent news gathering and filmmaking of this sort? Should the Big Media folks be worried, or should they see it as an opportunity?

Johannes: The technological trend should result in more independent news gathering and filmmaking.... The availability of the cameras, recorders, affordable server space, and affordable software will open up the news game to more people. Over time, news gathering will reflect the technology that makes it available, but the Big Media will resist it. Not the business end of Big Media, they will adopt it, but the reporters, producers, and editors will resist it.

The second phase, and this will be the angle TV is likely to take, is in specialized syndication. Every local TV station has a "Statehouse" reporter. What makes these reporters so special that their coverage should be respected? Nothing, other than they work for an identifiable and reliable media outlet. Do they have any special knowledge of law, politics, government, economics, policy, etc.? No. They have a bache-

> lor's degree in mass media or journalism, possibly the worst education possible outside of a teaching degree.
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> I worked in television for four years producing newscasts every day. These reporters are some of the least equipped individuals to be covering important topics that affect people's lives. And in TV news, performance abilities are rewarded more often than analytical ones. And there is a "paying your dues" aspect to TV news. Everyone must start at the bottom and work their way up, unless they have a patron or a well-placed uncle. The concept of some guy with a camera being able to produce stories and analysis superior to that of the Big Media is a threat to the status quo, and humans hate threats to the status quo, especially if it affects their livelihood. The news directors and producers would be incredulous at the idea of some lawyer covering the statehouse. That would be an infringement on their turf.
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> But upper management could see the economy of scale. If one man and a camera could cover the statehouse under a syndicated contract for $6,000 and get one station in four markets to buy in, he could make $24,000 a year for working just six months. If he had something else on the side, he could make a respectable living. The resistance would not come from upper management, but from the news director, who would see this freelance interloper as an invader. In a newspaper, the same resistance would come from the lesser editors. Indeed, I experienced this firsthand a few times with the Iraq project. But most original news coverage by bloggers resembles first person rambles, not news. A mere change in style would go a long way.
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> Because most bloggers are hobbyists, serious citizen journalist hobbyists, they are not able to devote the resources necessary to original reporting. The bloggers provide the best background information and in-depth analysis, but they rarely produce fresh news. When enough bloggers take the leap, and start reporting on the statehouse, city council, courts, etc., firsthand, full-time, then the Big Media will take notice and the avalanche will begin.... If it can be done in Iraq, it can be done in statehouses and city hall.

Johannes is right. Technology has made all sorts of things possible. Twenty years ago, or even ten, it took a huge infrastructure to allow one guy in a safari jacket to report from places like Baghdad and pretend he knew what was going on there. Now it can be a do-it-yourself project, and unlike the "bigfoot" reporters of major media, who tend to drop in for a few days and then move on, the do-it-yourselfer is more likely to stay

on the ground long enough to actually learn what's going on firsthand. This is probably bad news for terrorism, which is an information warfare operation disguised as a military one, and one that is based on taking advantage of the kind of reporting (hysterical and shallow, for the most part) that traditional mass media tend to do.

I suspect that the growth of guerrilla media—ranging from operations like Faces from the Front, to reporting by freelancers like Michael Yon (interviewed below), to reports from Iraqi bloggers and even e-mails from soldiers—has made the terrorists' task tougher, as the reporting is by people who are much closer to what's really going on and are much more closely connected to their audiences.

I also agree that the local-reporting angle is likely to be big. Most media coverage is wide but shallow. Individuals can actually outperform big news organizations when it comes to reporting on a single topic, and as it becomes easier for individuals to develop and market niche expertise, we'll see more of that. How will Big Media respond? It will be interesting to find out.

Meanwhile, another journalist, Michael Yon, is covering Iraq in a different way at his blog (www.michaelyon.blogspot.com). His first person reporting reads like Ernie Pyle's, and he often takes photos in the midst of combat. I interviewed him, too, to see what he thinks about the new approach to news gathering.

> ***Reynolds:*** Please tell me a bit about your background, and how you decided to embark on this project.
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> ***Yon:*** I was born and raised in Florida, where I learned at a young age how to successfully hunt, kill, and eat alligators much larger than I am. I was different than the other boys in that my favorite three subjects were physics, physics, and physics. I also was very serious about sports, mainly because I was small and got beat up by my big brother a lot, and wanted to put an end to that, which I eventually did. I joined the Army for university tuition. I volunteered and was selected for Special Forces, which I enjoyed immensely, except that I hated wearing uniforms. After running several businesses, I started to write, more as a way to get perspective than as the first step toward finding out that what I most enjoy is traveling the world, exploring fascinating places, and writing about them. As for Iraq, I maintain friendships with former Special Forces teammates and other service members, most of whom are still active duty. The war is a major event for this and future generations. I had, and continue to have, complex and sometimes contradictory opinions about this war. What made me embark on this

project was the need to see things firsthand, to find out for myself what is going on, what it means, and how it is going to affect all of us for a very long time.…

Reynolds: What kind of a role does technology play in making your reporting possible? Could you have done this sort of thing twenty years ago?

Yon: The Internet makes wide and near-instantaneous reporting simple. Also, satellite and cell phones in Iraq allow for real-time reporting by nearly anyone. I do not "report" in real time—I am not actually a reporter—but am able to post dispatches that are being read all around the world. I think a generation earlier my background might have afforded access that the embedded reporter system now grants just about any reporter, journalist, or filmmaker. But the military's attitude toward the media has changed almost as dramatically as the technology around communications has developed. So I might have been able to tag along and observe and later write a book about my experiences, but I definitely couldn't have blogged it.

Reynolds: Do you see independent reporting as the future of news? What role do you think it will play? Should Big Media folks be worried, or should they see it as an opportunity?

Yon: I don't think anyone can predict the future of news. Some question whether it's even really still news in the classic Edward R. Murrow sense. Clearly we are shaking the tree where the Big Media has been perched. The "little guys" are increasingly not so little, they have grasped the power of the Web, and they have increasing credibility and exposure.

It's still a little wild in the streets in terms of what passes for credible information. Sometimes blogs seem like the transcripts for radio talk shows. But lately mainstream media is getting the story leads for Iraq from independents and bloggers. I get contacted frequently by an assortment of big players such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, FOX, and just a couple weeks ago I "scooped" a major story from the grips of CNN (quite by accident).

When I want firsthand and nitty-gritty information about an area in Iraq, I search for bloggers in that area and then decide for myself if they sound credible. For firsthand information in Iraq, the best sources definitely are not mainstream media, all of which have become fixated with counts: numbers of car bombings, numbers of dead, numbers of

> insurgents captured, etc. But for real stories, the majors have lost the battle in Iraq. There is no question that the best sources for detailed information in Iraq tend to be bloggers. Mainstream media straggles further behind every day.
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> Should they be worried? If they really care about the legacy of solid journalism, probably yes. But if they only care about the bottom line, they are probably already thinking up some "reality TV" version of the news, maybe some program where they gather bloggers from around the world, put them in a wired house, and film them finding and reporting news.…
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> ***Reynolds:*** You write in a personal voice, more like the old-time reporting of Ernie Pyle than like most modern war correspondents. Why did you decide to take that approach? Is it part of reporting in your own name?
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> ***Yon:*** This is the easiest question to answer. Firstly, I never studied journalism, so I have little frame of reference past or present. I write in first person because I am actually there at the events I write about. When I write about the bombs exploding, or the smell of blood, or the bullets snapping by, and I say "I," it's because I was there. Yesterday a sniper shot at us, and seven of my neighbors were injured by a large bomb. These are my neighbors. These are soldiers I have borrowed camera gear from (soldiers who have better photo gear than I have). These are the people who risk their lives for me. I see them bleed, I see them die, I see them cry for their friends, and then I see them go right back out there on missions, and I see them caring for Iraqi people and killing the enemy. I feel the fire from the explosions, and am lucky, very lucky, still to be alive. Everything here is first person.

Yes, it is. And that first-person character is one of the strengths of the independent journalism that the Internet and other technologies make possible. Over the coming decade, we'll see the growth of alternatives to traditional Big Media, and—if we and Big Media are lucky—we'll see the Big Media Goliath moving to ally itself with the Davids, rather than positioning itself against them.

We've seen a few signs of that. After the Indian Ocean tsunami, and again after hurricanes like Katrina and Rita, we've seen newspapers and television stations incorporate citizen journalism into their coverage via blogs, chat boards, and other mechanisms. In a crisis, the value of having thousands of potential correspondents out there with computers, digital cameras, and other technology is obvious. But in fact, the value is there all

the time. Noticing *that* may take them a bit longer, but I suspect that they will notice it in the end. Those who don't may wind up being replaced by those who do.