

## Foreword

I'm a techblogger. Half or more of what I write is about technology. Mostly it's tech stuff outside the scope of my day job as Senior Editor for *Linux Journal*. Some of it is about blogging itself. Some of it is about old technology-based media like radio, TV, and publishing, which I've been around since the turn of the Seventies.

A lot of what I write is about journalism, which I am pleased to see reequipped and transformed by weblog technologies. By transforming millions of passive users into active journalists, blog tech is equipping the Huns to overrun Rome. It's a wonderful thing to watch. I hated Rome.

Amazingly, Big-J journalism hardly knows it's being sacked and taken over by all these little-j journalist because Big-J media, on the whole, hardly know what to make of the Web that's been around since 1995, much less of the latest developments there. So they trivialize blogging and dismiss it as "noise." I still haven't seen a good major media story about blogging that isn't by a blogger.

Even my favorite broadcast journalist, Scott Simon of NPR, had an essay on blogging last November that was wrong and dumb from start to finish. In the absence of knowledge he offered nothing but dismissive prejudice. It was disappointing but understandable. He's a Roman, doing what the Romans do.

It's not all the Romans' fault. Blogs can't be understood, much less explained, in terms of the conceptual metaphors we've used to describe the Web since its beginning: all that stuff about "designing," "putting up," "building," and "constructing" Web "sites" with "addresses" and "locations." There's nothing in the borrowed rhetoric of architecture, construction, and real estate that can begin to describe what Dave Winer, Glenn Reynolds, and Choire Sicha do with their blogs every day.

They crush statues with every sentence they write. They also enlarge the tapestry of civilization with every link they make, every thread they weave.

They do it by speaking in their own voices about the subjects that interest them, regardless of whatever categories others might like to impose.

They do both by reporting news faster, more accurately, and often less conclusively than what you'll read in the papers, hear on the radio or watch on TV.

Thanks to hypertext, the Web is not only a medium for writing, but for rewriting. It's perfectly suited for what Jefferson called "the fugitive fermentation of an individual brain."

Hypertext lets us move and connect our ideas in ways that transcend our individual interests. Thus the best medium ever invented for personal expression is also the best for demonstrating what Jefferson was talking about in his letter to Isaac McPherson in 1813:

*If nature has made any one thing less susceptible than all others of exclusive property, it is the action of the thinking power called an idea, which an individual may exclusively possess as long as he keeps it to himself; but the moment it is divulged, it forces itself into the possession of every one, and the receiver cannot dispossess himself of it. Its peculiar character, too, is that no one possesses the less, because every other possesses the whole of it. He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me. That ideas should freely spread from one to another over the globe, for the moral and mutual instruction of man, and improvement of his condition, seems to have been peculiarly and benevolently designed by nature, when she made them, like fire, expansible over all space, without lessening their density in any point, and like the air in which we breathe, move, and have our physical being, incapable of confinement or exclusive appropriation. Inventions then cannot, in nature, be a subject of property.*

I began writing about hypertext's subversion of big-J journalism long before I started blogging in 1999. But I didn't even think about the simultaneous subversion of big-L literature until Alan Graham sent me the selections gathered for this book. I realized for the first time that bloggers are also producing real literature at a prodigious rate, and in immeasurable quantities, all of it equally personal and connected, all of it unbent by a publisher's agenda.

When I read this new literature, I finally hear fulfilled the muscular commands and prophecies issued by Walt Whitman in "Song of Myself":

*You shall no longer take things at second or third hand...  
 nor look through the eyes of the dead,  
 nor feed on the spectres in books.  
 You shall not look through my eyes either,  
 nor take things from me.  
 You shall listen to all sides and filter them for yourself...*

...

*Long enough have you dreamed contemptible dreams.  
 Now I wash the gum from your eyes.  
 You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment  
 of your life.*

*Long have you timidly waited,  
 holding a plank by the shore.  
 Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,  
 To jump off in the midst of the sea, and rise again,  
 and nod to me and shout,  
 and laughingly dash your hair.*

*I am the teacher of athletes.  
 He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own  
 proves the width of my own.  
 He most honors my style  
 who learns under it to destroy the teacher.<sup>1</sup>*

In late 1998, Chris Locke and I found ourselves in long conversations about how wrongly the Internet was understood by just about everybody

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1. <http://searls.com/whitman.html>

who opined about it in Major Media. We were just as flummoxed by watching huge quantities of dumb money funding doomed business ideas based on the same wrong ideas—for example, that Web sites were about “capturing eyeballs” and holding them still while banner ads “penetrated” them with advertising messages. Or that the Web’s real estate was best suited for the online equivalent of suburban shopping malls.

At one point I shared with Chris the logic behind my philosophy of marketing:

Markets are conversations; and  
Conversation is fire. Therefore,  
Marketing is arson.

Chris said “Let’s test that theory.” He had been having related conversations with David Weinberger on the same subjects; so the three of us got together, recruited technologist Rick Levine and produced *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (<http://www.cluetrain.com>): ninety-five “theses” we hoped might be as combustible on the Web in 1999 as Martin Luther’s were when he nailed them to a church door in 1517.

Cluetrain caught fire. A few days after it went up in late March, the buzz reached *The Wall Street Journal*, where Tom Petzinger wrote a column about it. Within a few more days we had a book deal, and by the end of the summer we had a finished draft. The book came out in January 2000 (the same month the dot-com crash began) and immediately became a nonfiction bestseller.

*Cluetrain* still sells well, in nine languages. Today (in mid-December 2003) its Amazon sales rank is 822, out of millions. A few days ago I got the latest Chinese edition in the mail.

I can’t prove it, but I’m sure Cluetrain’s continued success is due at least in part to its authors’ weblogs, and others influenced by them. Those include democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean, whose chief Internet advisor is David Weinberger.

Whether you want to set fire to old institutions or to build whole new ones, nothing beats a good blog.

Doc Searls

Co-Author, *The Cluetrain Manifesto*