

Faces of Fame

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In his book *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (a relatively moderate book, despite the title) James Fallows asks (p. 94):

Why do [journalists] want to appear [on TV], when so many reporters make fun of the shows? ... The most immediate payoff is the simple thrill of being noticed and known. Political-journalistic Washington functions much like a big high school, with cliques of the popular kids, the nerds, the rebels, the left-outs, and so on. To be on Tv is to become very quickly a cool kid. Friends call to say they've seen you. People recognize you in stores. Whether people agree or disagree with what you said (or whether they even remember), they treat you as "realer" and bigger than you were before.

I learned this weekend that I narrowly missed being on TV (CBS left me on the cutting room floor — I knew wearing that *Democracy Now!* shirt was pushing it) but I realized that as a prominent online journalist and a new (media) online magazine I should try to capitalize on my existing media power. So I've posted a photo on the sidebar, so that if any of my many millions of readers happen to notice me on the street or in the shop, they can behave as Fallows suggests:

[One] hears from friends and relatives for weeks afterward, "I saw you on TV!" [Regular commentators] have that extra, sizzling experience of seeing strangers' heads flip back, for a second look ("Is it really him?") as they walk into restaurants or through airport corridors.

Of course, TV does have one big difference:

In each case the recognition is almost entirely judgment-free ... Print forces the reader's attention past your personality to whatever your article is trying to say. TV's effect is mainly to make you bigger than life. For each hundred acquaintances who will say, "I saw you on the show," only one will say, "I agree [or disagree] with what you said."

So, uh, if you happen to see me in a movie theater, or on an airplane, or in the bathroom, or in your dorm room, don't hesitate to shout, 'HEY! It's Aaron Swartz! I saw you on the weblog.' Here, I'll help you out with another picture:

[image link broken]

Heh, I almost put a picture of Blake Ross there. You would have fallen for that wouldn't you!