



SLATE AT 10

ONLINE MEDIA AND THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

Malcolm Gladwell, Arianna Huffington, Norm Pearlstine, Jacob Weisberg,

and Michael Kinsley, moderator

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PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber, and I'm the Director of Public Programs here at the New York Public Library, now known as LIVE from the New York Public Library. As you all know, my goal here at the Library is to make the lions *roar*. Last night with Mario Batali, Bill Buford, and Anthony Bourdain, they were *feasting*, and I hope tonight they will be debating. Tonight is the grand finale of our season, the third event cosponsored with the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, here at the New York Public Library, and its excellent director, Jean Strouse. We've done three events with them. The first

one, I had the pleasure of interviewing Edmund White, who wrote a wonderful memoir. Quite interested he is in the human anatomy, particularly in the male anatomy, particularly in a small part of the male anatomy, **(laughter)** and I had great pleasure asking Edmund White if his book is a book that one reads with one hand. **(laughter)** Afterwards—this was one of the very few moments where he seemed bashful—after that, we did an event on eavesdropping with James Risen, the head also of the NSA, Bobby Ray Inman, Jeffrey Rosen, and Patrick Keefe, the very day that Michael Hayden had been suggested for that job, and Jeffrey Rosen very aptly instigated that conversation.

And I hope in that role of instigator, hopefully not too much as a moderator, we have the excellent Michael Kinsley for this *Slate* debate, which, this evening, is cosponsored by *Slate* itself, and its excellent director—editor—Jacob Weisberg.

What a year this has been indeed. My first 504 days in New York City and here at the New York Public Library we had Maira Kalman last year and John Hope Franklin with President Clinton, and I had the pleasure of interviewing David Remnick a couple of weeks ago, Jonathan Miller and Rebecca Solnit talking about the notion of attention span, how do we have an attention span, which I think is not irrelevant for the conversation tonight. A debate about Google with the various people who now are suing each other—they were quite civil here at the Library. We had—we hosted the PEN event with Amartya Sen—several events—and Salman Rushdie, an evening on revolution moderated by Christopher Hitchens, who sometimes writes for *Slate*, and the same Hitchens has been actually very helpful to me because I had the pleasure of welcoming here Tina Brown interviewing Bernard-Henri Lévy, and as you might remember Garrison Keillor

gave Bernard-Henri Lévy what I would call a not very kind review, but the “Homer of Middle America,” as Christopher Hitchens named Garrison Keillor, came to the rescue in the pages of *Slate*. The article was wonderfully entitled “Garrison Keillor, Vulgarian.” **(laughter)**

I highly recommend that you join our e-mail list. You will then learn of the events we’re doing next year. They’re on your chair also. If you join today, you will be able to get two free tickets. I’m happy to say that our e-mail list expanded from a few hundred now to a little over ten thousand. Become a Friend of the Library, support this library, it’s one of the last beacons of democracy. Books of the first ten years of *Slate*, not every single piece written, but a few of the pieces written, will be on sale after the event. I recommend also that when you ask a question and require an answer you go to the two mikes, and I, in ten years of doing this, I’ve come to an understanding that a question is usually something that can be asked in about fifty-four to fifty-seven seconds, so I highly recommend that you ask questions rather than make statements.

So I hope for this not-too-chummy debate we will have a wonderful time here tonight debating the issue of online media and print journalism. We have Norman Pearlstine, Jacob Weisberg, Michael Kinsley, Arianna Huffington, who I know from my days in blessed Los Angeles, and Malcolm Gladwell, who has said about *Slate*, “I don’t think I’ve ever gone to *Slate* and not been fascinated, infuriated, or simply found myself laughing out loud,” so let’s see how we react tonight to this evening. Welcome.

(applause)

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Thanks, Paul. Well, we're very fortunate to have here four experts on the human anatomy to continue the Library's discussion of that topic and maybe we'll segue into Slate if we can. It was eleven years ago, actually, or approaching it, when I went out to Redmond, Washington, to talk to Microsoft about starting an online magazine and I left there with many dreams of glory, of millions of readers, of putting *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek* out of business, but I certainly never that dreamed in just ten years, we'd have a symposium at the New York Public Library, so I think this is our greatest accomplishment to date, and Jacob deserves congratulations. You all know these panelists, I'm just going to say a word or two about them, because I think I know them better than some people here.

If you'd asked anyone in the circle of *The New Republic*, say, twenty years ago, who in that crowd was most likely to become a revered and fabulously wealthy guru for businessmen all over the world, you would have obviously said Malcolm **(laughter)** and that is because, little-known, it says here that he is a staff writer with the *New Yorker* and he was a reporter for the *Washington Post*. Before that he was a reporter for the *Washington Times*, and we all assumed he must be a Moonie and now, of course, he is Reverend Moon to a large part of the American business establishment. We're very glad to have him here.

I've known Arianna since she was a liberal the last time. **(laughter)** And she has had many accomplishments, written many books, I somehow think these books might be about you, or at least I was working on that theory. *The Making of a Legend, Creator and Destroyer*, and then I looked at the others and decided that theory doesn't work. I think Arianna has done a fabulous job, miraculous, really, in establishing *The Huffington Post* as not just a major website but a

major force in the media in this country in barely a year and a small sign of that success was last week, I think, the *New York Times* had an article about some arrangement between you and the *New York Observer* and the peg was: “big powerful website helps small insignificant website,” and Arianna was the big powerful website.

Jacob is editor of *Slate*. There’s only two people who have had that job and he’s had it more recently. He had a very good idea. In the current *Slate* he has four critics of *Slate* writing and Michael Wolf says about Jacob, he accuses Jacob of being ambitious. Now, that’s not completely implausible, but I am trying to think of a comparison that does justice to this notion of Michael Wolf calling you ambitious, and the only thing I can think of is it’s like being called ambitious by Michael Wolf, **(laughter)** so congratulations for that.

Some of the publicity for this evening went out and it said, come to a very exciting evening with Malcolm Gladwell, Arianna Huffington, Jacob Weisberg, and others. So I e-mailed Norm, saying, “I guess we’re the others.” And Norm has *only* been managing editor of the *Wall Street Journal* and—what is it?—the emperor of *Time* Magazine, **(laughter)** editor-in-chief, of which there have only been three or four in the whole history, so I’m happy to be an “other” with Norm.

And I want to start with a really tough question—Paul, I don’t think this is going to be a really contentious evening, but we’ll see what we can do. The subject is the future of journalism in the online media age. I don’t think anyone is going to say, as people *did* say ten years ago, that the Internet has no future. The question I’d like to start out with is does paper have a future? And if

so, what does it look like? Ten years from now will we be reading newspapers and magazines on paper, Norm?

NORM PEARLSTINE: On paper? Ten years from now we will be reading magazines on paper and we may be reading newspapers on paper. More because tablet technology will be slower than people anticipate than because people are wonderfully enthused about paper, and the big problem is really going to be the business model for newspapers. With the clear movement of classified advertising to online, it's going to be very hard for newspapers to sustain themselves as we know them.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: My theory, which I'm not entitled to toss out so early since I'm supposed to be the moderator, is that newspapers are going to lose the classifieds because they're so profitable and they're going to lose their opinion sections because they're so unprofitable, and both of those parts are going to go online. Well, so what is the business model that's going to work for newspapers?

NORM PEARLSTINE: Well, if you assume that the principal strengths of newspapers traditionally have been their timeliness, their being publications of record, and their allowing for a transaction through classified ads, the net does all three of those things better than a newspaper does, so I think that the most exciting thing that could happen is that newspapers and magazines become more publications of opinion and that, not unlike the national papers in Britain, if you will, they will actually be *more* distinctive than they are right now. I think magazines may very well go back to the kinds of publications that people like Luce started with in the twenties—

much more opinionated, much more reactive to what is happening online, be it in video or in text.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Jacob, when we started *Slate* you got there about six months, about three months, after we started, so you missed some of this embarrassment. My idea, before I started, was that we were once a week going to put something up on the web and then allow people to download it and print it out and that that was going to be *Slate*, the online magazine. We've moved far beyond that. Is there—will there be printouts? I believe we—do we still put out a printed version for Bill Gates, Sr.?

JACOB WEISBERG: No, I'm afraid that he was a casualty of the move from Microsoft. But it is true that early on we did—I think, you know, you conceived of *Slate* partly as a sort of delivery system for a magazine, and you felt that we were all bedeviled by the lead time at the *New Republic* and that time between when we finished putting out the *New Republic* and when the subscribers would get it and even *then* a lot happened in those five days. And now the idea that you're commenting, that readers are reading comments that were written almost a week ago is sort of becoming untenable, but I think the other thing that happened, and this happened, started to happen even before I got to *Slate*, but certainly was in full swing by the time I got there, we discovered that the web *was* different, there were these properties of the medium.

The tone was different, the voice was different, you could do things with linking and multimedia and interacting with readers, so we may have started with the idea that we were just going to take a kind of conventional kind of weekly magazine and put it online, but we very quickly

discovered that you could all sorts of other things that were more interesting and perforce we've been doing them, and, ten years later it is really possible to talk about the *tone* of online journalism, and the language, or the syntax, of hyperlinks, and there are all of these hallmarks to online writing that I think most people sort of instantly recognize now because they've read so many—so much of it—which is different from what you get in a print publication.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: So is it just going to be another addition to the mix? You know, some people say that every new medium that's come in just gets layered on the top—movies didn't die out because of television, and so on, and so paper magazines won't die out because of online magazines. Do you buy that?

JACOB WEISBERG: I don't think they'll die out. I mean, people have always wanted to set up this sort of competition, will we kill them? I mean, I don't, you said you wanted to put the newsmagazines out of business, I don't particularly want to put anybody out of business.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: I didn't want to, but, I thought that that might be a tragic side aspect of our success. **(laughter)**

JACOB WEISBERG: But if a tragic fate like that befell us, it would still be a notch in our belt, but, um . . .

MICHAEL KINSLEY: I understand that since your offices are in with *Newsweek* you don't want to go around saying your goal is to destroy all . . .

JACOB WEISBERG: Well, there's one newsmagazine we definitely don't want to put out of business. But the point is, you know, will people still be reading newspapers that are printed on newspaper? Yes. Will people still be listening to music on stereos? Yes. But these transformational moments—you know, when the iPod came along, suddenly the way that many people we know consumed music changed, and it changed very quickly, and you used to have this line which I would quote a lot—you had said, I hope this won't embarrass you—but early on, that *Slate* would really succeed when you could read it on the john, you know, when there was a way to read it on a portable device, and I think we've had—all sorts of things have developed out of *Slate* and internet magazines and all sorts of things work, but we're still waiting for the iPod of reading, you know, we're still waiting for a device that is comfortable—that is a comfortable way for people to read books, to read magazines, to read everything they read, and that—people are managing to read them on Blackberries and on tablet PCs.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: You can get it on the iPod, in fact.

JACOB WEISBERG: Yes, in fact, Andy Bowers, who is a very tech-savvy person on our staff figured that you could download *Slate*, prompting us to realize that the iPod of reading might be the iPod but, in fact, it's still a little screen and you wouldn't want to read *War and Peace* on an iPod but sometime in the next several years there's going to be a device like that, and *that*, I think, is going to be the real threat to the printed form of all sorts of publications.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: I've been saying that now for ten years and I'm astonished it hasn't happened yet. We don't really have anyone on this panel qualified to say. . . I was wondering if Andy's here, Andy Bowers, do you have a theory, Andy? Well, I'll introduce you while you get to one. Andy Bowers is *Slate's* ambassador to NPR and multimedia editor.

ANDY BOWERS: I do, yes, we have recently introduced one of our most popular *Slate* features, "Today's Papers," as a text-cast, we're calling it, which you can download like a podcast onto your iPod and in fact I did read on a blog the other day someone saying, "You know what you can do? You can take it in the john." So maybe we have reached that point, but it is *not* ideal. I think that the iPod itself may get a larger screen, we've seen some indications of that. But the great thing about the iPod, when it comes to this, is that it has achieved the kind of market penetration that no e-book reader ever has, so if we move at it from that point of view, where we start with music, move on to text, it's conceivable, but I think it is still a few years away.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, go ahead, Malcolm.

MALCOLM GLADWELL: Suppose we reversed things and all we had were computers and iPods and we didn't have paper and I came along and I said, "I've got this really great idea, which is, we're going to print this stuff on this thing called 'paper,' and you've never heard about it, but it has some real advantages. It's incredibly cheap, it's really light, you can stick it in your bag, you can take it with you, it doesn't need any electricity, it's pretty permanent, you can manipulate it, it's tactile, you can fold it, you can do all these amazing things." What would

people say? They would say, “Oh my goodness, what an extraordinary breakthrough.”

(laughter). And there would be this whole industry that would develop overnight. **(applause)**

Masses of funding from venture capitalists on the West Coast, actually they would be venture capitalists on the East Coast, who were suddenly enthused with this extraordinary thing called paper, and we realized, you know what, oh my goodness, we can send it through the mail really quickly and cheaply. It doesn't cost that much, like seventeen cents, we can send it. . . You know, it strikes me, that we're just in this kind of—we're in love with—when I hear about these increasingly complex ways of a tablet that will weigh like, you know, 7.8 pounds, and you plug it into the wall in the bathroom so I can read it on the john. Why? I can just get a newspaper! I mean, am I crazy? **(applause)**

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Do you buy that, Arianna?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: I think Malcolm is absolutely right. I find this debate between online and print—Who is going to survive? Who's going to die?—incredibly old-fashioned, irrelevant. I don't think there is a debate. I think it's not either/or. It's like the old barroom argument, “Is it Ginger or Mary Anne?” You know, this is 2006! Let's have a three-way!

(laughter) We don't have to choose. I mean, I have a seventeen-year-old daughter who does practically everything online, including watching *Desperate Housewives* online, sure she has a perfectly good plasma TV in her room, and I asked her about it and she prefers that experience but at the same time she subscribes to six or seven magazines and when I offered her the choice of interning at *The Huffington Post* or calling my friend Jake and getting her an internship at

Slate for the summer, she said, no, Mom, I'd rather intern at *Vanity Fair*, which is where she's going to intern. So.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Does she read newspapers?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: She reads newspapers, yes.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: On paper?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: On paper.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: She's the one, huh?

(laughter)

MALCOLM GLADWELL: The last reader.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: The last reader. So I really think that Malcolm has it absolutely right. There is a different experience, and we need both. It's like having, like, quick, stolen moments in a relationship and then going away for a two-week vacation, you know, you need both, and when you go on a plane with like six or seven magazines, it's a different experience that we all relish and it doesn't detract from reading *Slate* online.

NORM PEARLSTINE: Well, it's a—I used to get stories every once in a while where I'd look at them and say “interesting, if true,” and that's frankly what I feel about Malcolm's assertion, because the focus is all on the idea of and the romanticism of print but it's a very tough sell to the advertisers, and I think if you actually did the numbers on the business model the suggestion would fade away pretty quickly. It is a very expensive way to try to distribute, and the problem really isn't so much that people are tired of newspapers—there's a very large number of people who want to read them. The problem is that advertisers who thought that newspapers were a great way to reach audiences have discovered search, and database marketing is a far more efficient way to operate and I think that's what's going to kill the business model because without the advertising the newspapers are not going to be able to charge enough to maintain the kind of staffs that will make it a compelling read. And I think that's as big a problem for *Slate*, frankly, as it is for print, and that, if you will, people will be spending their time with video and not really spending that much time on either of us as far so the advertisers are concerned.

JACOB WEISBERG: I would draw a distinction among kinds of print. I mean, Malcolm, when it comes to books, I think you're absolutely right. The printed book is still appropriate technology. If you could choose one way to read a book—I mean, I like audio books, and have even played with digital books, but if you had to choose one way to read a book, it would be a book, but newspapers, no way. Would we invent newspapers if they didn't exist? No way, it's not a good way to navigate the news, you have to wade through all sorts of stuff you're not interested in. It comes off on your hands, it has to be recycled, the people under thirty years old find them sort of inconceivable objects. I mean, they'll be around for a while, and magazines are probably more like books. The best way to read *Vanity Fair*—I'll leave aside the *New Yorker*

question—the best way to read it? Magazine. But then that may change, and it's probably going to take longest for books to change, it all may change, but right now I don't think you could create the newspaper.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: But let's talk about the business model. First of all, right now, advertising dollars online are only 5 percent of all advertising dollars. I just came back this afternoon from the advertising convention in Cannes, and they're all looking at how to change the nature of advertising in every medium. How to make it more compelling, so that it doesn't feel like it interrupts the content, but it becomes part of the content, and that's exactly what they're going to be facing, whatever the medium is, because you have Tivo, because people don't have the same kind of patience with thirty-second ads on TV, so the advertising industry is changing anyway, and the online dollars are not yet where we want them to be, those of us online, and there is still a lot of resistance—I'm sure you're finding that—from advertisers who don't understand the nature of online. So it depends on how long is our view of all these things. There are still millions of people who never go online. So during our lifetime, there's no question all these media are going to exist, and the ones that thrive are the ones that integrate online technologies. I mean, look at the *New York Times*. How idiotic is it to put their best content behind walls? I mean, there is no question, that unless you are peddling porn, and especially *weird* porn, you should *not* ask people to pay for it.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, then, why are you defending Malcolm, who says that people will be happy to pay for a newspaper? That was a wall, wasn't it, and it still is.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: First of all, people have habits of buying newspapers, which they don't have when it comes to buying from Maureen Dowd online, because either they're going to read her in the newspaper or they're going to go read Jake, or read *The Huffington Post*, or read other things online. So it's different modes of getting your information and we're not going to change them overnight.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: About ten years ago, I was doing a panel like this one, and one of these millions of people who still aren't online raised her hand and said, "I love reading *Slate*, but I don't like reading on a computer screen," and that was probably the comment I got the most for the first three or four years, and I launched into a talk very much like what Norm was saying, what Jacob was saying, about how devices are going to come along and the tablet is due *any minute*, and in six months paper will be a distant memory, and it all sounded a little lame until this, I was cut off by this computer professor from Rice, I don't even know his name now, who said to this woman and me, "Your problem will be solved actuarially." **(laughter)** And I think that's pretty much come to pass. I mean, ten years later, what is the average age of a person who has sort of grown up using a computer screen? It's in their thirties now, right? And ten years from now it will be in their forties, and that's basically a majority of a population and for them, the idea of a newspaper is just going to seem very foreign, you know.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: But also those of us who are over thirty are living longer so we're still going to be around enjoying print. And I speak as somebody who wants more and more people to go online, but I don't think it's going to change the nature of print as dramatically as we think.

JACOB WEISBERG: Arianna, what, if I can ask you a question? What do you think the *New York Times* should do? They're trying to sell print subscriptions to the newspaper, which I think costs something like \$660 a year, and they're *giving* away the same product online, and in fact, or at least they were until TimesSelect, and, in fact, for most younger people what they *give* away is significantly superior to what they're trying to *sell* for all that money, and when they sit around in their meetings I think they think, "Well, how are we going to keep people paying for this?" And I guess my feeling is they've created another set of problems, partly because, as you say, the political conversation in particular has moved online, and if you're behind a subscription wall, you've cut yourself off from it. On the other hand, I think it's in all of our interests, it's in the interest of democracy, for the *New York Times* to find a way to support its business, to support its very expensive newsroom and foreign bureaus, and if they can't charge for any of their content, what are they supposed to do?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Well, they can use their online operation, through advertising, to subsidize print, if it comes to that. But at the moment, we all know the power of linking, right? I mean, that's the great thing, it's not a zero-sum game. Like, Sunday, Frank Rich had a great column taking on the Democratic Party's spinelessness on Iraq. We wanted to link to it from *The Huffington Post*, we couldn't. So the kind of linking that can drive traffic to the *New York Times*, that would increase their numbers, that would increase the amount of advertising that they can sell is the business model of the future. But do you expect Pinch Sulzberger to actually get to it? I mean, he couldn't even fire Judy Miller for a year, so it's going to take a long time before they wake up to the current realities.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: One odd thing about newspaper economics is that that \$660 you mentioned, Jacob, doesn't even cover the cost of the paper. So you're getting more than \$660 worth of newsprint, and not everyone may be as delighted about that as Malcolm is. So it does seem as if there ought to be some way you can eliminate the paper. If you could go to each reader and say, "If you'll read it online, I'll give it to you for free," and somehow or other keep the advertising. That would work.

MALCOLM GLADWELL: This is all very reminiscent of a debate that started about twenty years before the internet explosion about the paperless office. With the advent of computers, computers were supposed to replace the use of paper in the business context, and you can go back and you will find endless people writing long articles about the advent, then the advent, of the paperless office. Now the paperless office, not only does it *not* happen, the opposite happens. With the introduction of electronic tools into the workplace, the amount of paper that is consumed by the average office starts to increase, and it has gone up and up and up and up and up and up. So, clearly what's happening—there are many things that, wonderful things that happened with the advent of the computerization of, you know, intellectual activity, but clearly one of the things that is *not* happening is the replacement of paper. Paper, far from being an *opponent* of electronic media, appears to be its *friend*. And I don't pretend to understand this, but if you were an anthropologist and you went and sat in front of—in the middle of any office in the United States you would see people consuming more and more and more paper. I get more mail now than I ever did ten years ago. When I go to my office, there's a huge, I can't even get *into* my office at the *New Yorker*, there's a huge—

MICHAEL KINSLEY: You weren't Malcolm Gladwell ten years ago.

MALCOLM GLADWELL: This is not a function of me. It's a function of the world that I live in, that we all live in, people are sending us more stuff, right? This is paradoxical. We're all talking about paper as this kind of primitive, you know, nineteenth-century device, but I see more of it around now than I've ever seen before. We're all talking about these kids, who, for them the online experience is everything, but as far as I can see, to reach kids what are we doing? We're sending them pieces of paper, either in the mail, or on newsstands, or handing them pieces of paper on the street. Why isn't paper disappearing?

I don't know why I'm looking at you by the way.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: For me a kind of more interesting debate is what's going to happen to newspapers' content? How is the online experience going to change the *content* of newspapers? I think there are two things happening online, and Jake touched on one of them, that are going to gradually begin to change the content of newspapers. One is that the readers, whether they are online or are reading print, are expecting different things, they want to be more engaged. They want to be more involved. They are getting used to a more interactive experience. That's number one.

And number two, there is something about the obsessiveness of the online experience. The way we stay on stories and stay on stories until we break through the static. Which you don't get in

print. I mean, look at the number of stories that die on the front page, above the fold, of the *New York Times*. You know, they cover them, and then they abandon them. Do you remember the Philip Cooney story, who was sort of doctoring global warming research? It was above the fold in the *New York Times*, and then it was the bloggers who took it on and find out who he was, his connections with ExxonMobil, who stayed on the story until basically he had to resign. So in order to get some kind of action you have to go online. The obsessiveness—the kind of online has OCD, and print has ADD (**laughter**) and maybe together we can be crazy effective, but you need both, and more and more readers are expecting that kind of obsessiveness, and loving it. I mean, when I was writing columns, and I still am, but it's not my primary mode of living, I would get my editors constantly saying, you know, "You wrote about the drug war last month. Are you writing about it again?" It could never happen online. Readers love that you are staying on a story and staying on it again and again.

JACOB WEISBERG: One of the conventions of newspapers, and at *Slate* we pride ourselves on ignoring a lot of them, but one of the conventions is that you have to have something new to put the story in the paper again. And bloggers, of course, don't feel that way, they can incubate the story like a hen sitting on an egg, because they just keep hammering at the same information, or finding a new way to put it, or sort of ratchet up the rhetoric, but they don't need anything new to happen, they can just keep proclaiming their outrage. In fact, in a couple of key cases, I mean, Strom Thurmond—I'm sorry, Trent Lott, saying nice things about Strom Thurmond, and losing his job. They didn't bring Strom Thurmond back to life, that was impossible, and Dan Rather, they had a big effect, not primarily because they brought new information, but because they kind of kept it warm until the rest of the media would come back to it.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: But to take your metaphor, I guess it was Jacob's metaphor of the chicken sitting on the egg, the *New York Times* was the rooster. In other words, don't you need newspapers to start the thing going? The online people don't do these stories themselves. Don't you need newspapers?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Absolutely. You're making Malcolm and my point. You do need newspapers so that you can criticize them and move beyond them.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: But Norm says you're going to put them out of business.

NORM PEARLSTINE: Well, I'm saying that, I don't think, frankly, online editorial products are what's going to put newspapers out of business. I think search is going to be so appealing to advertisers that it's going to be very hard especially for timely publications to compete. Look, somebody correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that the *Washington Post* company last year got 65 percent of its net income from Kaplan Educational Services, not from the *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, or *Slate*. The *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* are basically at break-even. The *San Francisco Chronicle* has been decimated by Craigslist, which is hardly focused on maximization of profits, and those are the kinds of pressures that are really going to affect publicly held companies who own most of the large urban newspapers in this country, and *that's* where I think, if you will, the second step will be that the kind of things you're seeing at Tribune Company, which you know so well, is that the response to that is going to be to come in and hack budgets and say why do we have twenty film reviewers at twenty newspapers when we can

have one and syndicate it for all? Why can't we mush all these papers' Washington bureaus together?

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Why don't we just print the press releases from the movie companies and eliminate the reviewer altogether? **(laughter)**

NORM PEARLSTINE: Cheapest way of all. That's what I think will lead, if you will, to the degradation of print, and what will *then* make people increasingly turn to online. And I think that what you did say and it's probably appropriate for this room is that increasingly an awful lot of what passed for big important public-service stories in newspapers will end up in books first. Ron Suskind this week, it was a great excerpt for *Time*, but it began as a book.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Actually I think the reason why what Norm is describing isn't going to happen is because there are always going to be enough rich people who want to own newspapers as the ultimate kind of possession. You know, instead of spending forty million dollars to buy a Picasso, you spend a billion dollars, if you have it, to buy the *L.A. Times*. Or to buy the *New York Times* if the Sulzbergers would ever sell. Whatever it is, there will always be enough rich people, there are more and more of them for some reason, who have more and more money, and what is the ultimate thing that you can own? A newspaper, because—

MICHAEL KINSLEY: But you're living in the past if you think that.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: But it's happening! What do you mean? Look at all the numbers of people competing for the *L.A. Times* right now and it would be more than a billion dollars that they would have to spend, and yet, there they are, they are ready to buy it. And do you have any doubt that if the *New York Times* went on the block, there wouldn't be enough rich people fighting with each other to buy it? The *ultimate* status symbol, they will always be the ultimate status symbol.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, it is now, but the question is when these people get bored with it and want to sell it to the next one which is the way a magazine like the *New Republic* works, but on a much smaller scale, but is there going to be someone twenty years from now who is going to find the privilege of owning a newspaper to be the ultimate, the ultimate status symbol?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: There will always be people who think that buying a Rembrandt or a Picasso is an ultimate status symbol, that hasn't changed.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: One thing is about a Rembrandt or a Picasso is you put it on the wall and you have to pay a bit of insurance but it's not the gift that keeps on *charging*, like a newspaper.

JACOB WEISBERG: I think we all have a stake in newspapers—the newsgathering operation of newspapers surviving and thriving, in whatever form. And there's clearly a transition problem now, where the cost of the news in good newsrooms is very high, the revenues from print are shrinking, and the revenues from online are growing fast but from a smaller base, so it's hard to

see exactly how you come out through the other end and support the newsroom. But one thing I think newspapers could do better, and a reason I've been very disappointed with newspapers online, is that I think that while they've embraced the Internet as sort of a business necessity they have not, for the most part, embraced it as a creative opportunity. And when you look at most newspapers, newspaper writers, they actually have a much bigger audience online, often a national audience where they would only have a local audience, for example, *Washington Post*, *L.A. Times*, but they still focus on their print audience, and you go online, including the *New York Times*, and stories don't have hyperlinks, they're written with the same newspaper conventions, and the writers are not—sometimes there's some interaction with readers, but it still tends to be fairly perfunctory and minimal, and they're not *embracing* what you can do on the Internet, and I think they've sort of got the formula backwards. I think they should write for the web audience and then figure out how to repurpose the content for the print newspaper.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well this is a very small point, but is part of the problem geographical? I mean, they have different staffs, at the *Washington Post*, for example, and at WPNI, which runs the website, and at the *Los Angeles Times*, the web operation was sort of off in an unused wing of the old Times-Mirror building, of which there were many, and they think of them mentally as separate products, and is that a—

JACOB WEISBERG: There have been a lot of permutations of this. The *New York Times* has now reintegrated its newsroom, at the *Washington Post* they're separate, you can look at pretty much every way of doing this, but the problem is that most of the content of newspapers online is written by people who are trained as print reporters and nobody has convincingly fed to them,

“Your future as a journalist depends on how well you can write things that are going to be primarily read online, and in fact it won’t do any harm to what you do in print, but where are the links? What happened to all of the links you used when you were researching the story?”

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, maybe that’s a problem that will be solved demographically, too.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: But it’s beyond the links, it’s also the tone. In this great piece that Jake wrote about the tenth anniversary of *Slate*, you said about how readers know the writers of *Slate* much more intimately, much better, than they know any of the writers at the *New York Times*. They know David Plotz and Jack Shafer and Mickey Kaus—all the writers of *Slate*—because of the kind of intimate tone they bring to it—they *reveal* more of themselves, that’s part of what works online, and unless you are Maureen Dowd or Frank Rich to some extent, the writers of the *New York Times*, especially their reporters, do not reveal anything of themselves, and that’s part of the tone that the *New York Times* wants, and readers like that much more personal, much more intimate tone, so if you’re going to have a real online operation, you can’t use the same people, unless they can swim in those different waters.

I was talking to Chris DeWolfe, you know, who’s the cofounder of Myspace, and he said that everybody in his operation wanted him to fire Tom, because Tom, who is the man who made Myspace, was a different kind of animal. He said, “He would walk in at ten-thirty, he didn’t have the same kind of discipline, he didn’t operate by the same rules, and I said to them, ‘I’m going to have him report to me, he can come in at midday, I don’t care. He understands something we need to understand.’” So print needs to actually start thinking like that. They need to find the

people who can swim in the new waters, who can understand the new world, and then their online operations can really thrive and even sustain print.

MALCOLM GLADWELL: When people talk about newspapers, I always think of the airline industry, because the thing about the airline industry, it's this weird thing, and someone should make up a word to describe this phenomenon, which is that the airline *itself* never makes any money, right, they always lose money. Everybody else connected with flying makes money. So Boeing makes tons of money to sell them the airplanes, the pilots make a ton of money to fly them, passengers get really, really cheap fares. Hotels make out like *bandits* with people flying to Vegas, and everyone in Vegas makes a ton of money. Everyone makes money except for the core person who actually does the work of moving people around the country, right?

This is this phenomenon where there is this hollowed-out center, the guy at the center does all the work, gets no money, and everyone else who's basically a little parasite living off the guy at the center makes tons of money. This is the newspaper business, right? Without the *New York Times*, there is no blog community, right? They don't have anything to blog about. They read the *New York Times* in the morning and then they go out to write their little thing.

(laughter/applause) Now, take away the *New York Times*. What are they going to do, right? Get jobs? **(laughter)** I don't know. I have no idea. So the solution to the problem is not to say, "Oh, I guess newspapers are dead," well, no, because the whole system crushes them. That's like saying—

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, hasn't that happened in the airlines?

MALCOLM GLADWELL: Well, if airlines can't make money, we shouldn't have airlines.

Well, I think the answer is to try to fix airlines. Airlines have got to be a little better at pricing their services appropriately, right? So should newspapers.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Arianna says the appropriate price of news is zero.

MALCOLM GLADWELL: I think that's wrong. I, like many people in this room pay, I don't know what it is, some huge amount of money to HBO every month, right? Now, the appropriate price for—and how much HBO do I watch? I watch *Entourage* on Sunday nights. **(laughter)** So for whatever it is a month, forty bucks, I don't know, one lousy show, right? Why do I do that? Not just me. Millions of Americans do this. Why do we do this? Well, because we have decided that having access to this cache of premium content is worth something. And HBO has been aggressive in saying, "You know what? I'm not giving it to you for free, I'm going to make you pay for it." It's time that people, not just newspapers, but everyone in the print game, who are providing the carcass which all of these little small animals are picking over, **(laughter)** it's time for them to sort of appropriately price their contributions.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: As a very small animal feeding off the carcass, can I kind of say that this is a completely upside-down way of looking at things? Because all that the *New York Times*, or the *Washington Post*, or any major newspaper, brings to the table is the massive resources they have to do investigative reporting, that blogs don't yet have, but we're working on it. As more and more advertising moves online, we're going to be hiring investigative reporters.

The next part of our expansion of *The Huffington Post* is hiring investigative reporters. Josh Marshall is already doing it. It's going to take a few years to get to the point where we can have bureaus or reporters everywhere, but obviously that's the future. It's not going to stop with *print* because it's only a matter of money. They have way more money than we have, and that's why we feed off them. Because they write those investigative stories that then we can analyze and take apart and take them to the next stage.

And, Jake, actually I might disagree with one thing you said. I don't think we sit on the egg. I think we actually bring new pieces to the nest and somebody else will write about the same story and bring another piece of information. What happened with the Trent Lott story was that they kept developing it. The bloggers kept finding things in his past that corroborated his racist statement at the lunch, so it was really a story that kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger because more and more people were feeding into it, and it wasn't just the reporters, not just the bloggers, it was also the readers. I mean, the community of commenters, which is absolutely amazing, because they bring their own expertise and passion into the story.

MALCOLM GLADWELL: But Arianna, sorry to jump in, you're contradicting yourself now. Five minutes ago what was unique and special, there was something particular about the sensibility of online, you're saying it's personal, there's an opinion attached to it, now you're saying, "Now that sensibility will magically morph over the next couple of years, with the addition of some dollars. And it will adopt the sensibility of the print world." Let me give you an example. I wrote a review, a short review, for the *New York Review of Books*, called *Wages of Wins*, which is this sort of controversial book about how to value basketball players, and then, I

have a blog, but I have a blog that supplements the writing I do, so I wrote a little thing about this thing and then all the people wrote.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: How much do you charge for your blog?

MALCOLM GLADWELL: Well, it's free, but bear with me. So I wrote this little thing about *Wages of Wins*, and then the blogosphere, you know, reacted to the piece that I wrote, and reacted to my little blogging about it and I would periodically conduct an experiment, which was—and everyone was—I would say that the comments ran 85 percent negative, 15 percent positive. But I conducted an experiment periodically. I'd go on Google and I would bring up all the comments about this book because I wanted to see if anyone, of the dozens—if not more than that—of people who were commenting online, had actually read the book in question. And as far as I can tell, I remain the only person who has written about this book who's actually read it. Everyone else has merely been commenting on the comments about the book, right, and it's gotten to the point where there have been huge arguments online among people and they are now four or five degrees removed from the actual book.

Now, I'll point out to you the book costs \$21.95 and the relevant chapters comprise about forty-five pages. This can be done in an hour and a half. Now there is something about the blogosphere at the present moment, and I think online to a certain extent, which is culturally resistant to spending \$21.95 for a book and reading forty-five pages. Now, maybe that will magically disappear with the advent of sprinkling of cash. I kind of doubt it, I think there's something inherent in that culture that's a problem that requires a carcass to pick on.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, maybe so, Malcolm.

(applause)

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: You see, again, we are more than this Cartesian either/or thing. We are not going to lose our intimate, personal way of writing about things, we are just going to *add* investigative reporting. We are just going to *add* people who are reading the entire book and commenting on it, because don't tell me that every reviewer in the *New York Times Review of Books* reads every book from beginning to end. Are you going to tell me that, are you going to claim that everybody who reviews books in print has actually read them from beginning to end?

MALCOLM GLADWELL: Sure, I mean, it's not that hard. Have you read a book recently? I mean, it can be done. **(laughter)** I think I read one early this week, I'm still here. I had time to get a full night's sleep. You make it sound like it's climbing Mount Everest.

(laughter)

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Twenty-five years ago I conducted an experiment a little bit like yours and this was on people on paper and I just got someone to stick a little Post-it note two-thirds of the way through books, at on-sale booksellers at a local bookstore in Washington, saying, "If you read this note, call this number and I'll give you five bucks," and I didn't get a single call.

(laughter)

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Exactly.

MALCOLM GLADWELL: You've always had it in for paper.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Michael is absolutely confirming my point, which is that it's not the advent of online or the people who are online who don't read books always from beginning to end, it's people *reviewing* them. I've had many of my books reviewed by people who hadn't read them. I'm sure you have too, Malcolm. That's a problem that is about human nature, it's not about online.

JACOB WEISBERG: But also, Arianna, I mean, you're a champion of blogging now, which I support, I mean, I think it's a wonderful democratic activity. It's drawn all sorts of people in the political process. It has, you will acknowledge, a lot of annoying characteristics. There is a lot online that's not blogging and there are many areas where what you can get online draw neither particularly from blogs nor particularly from traditional newspapers, is the richest source of information. Particularly in certain subject areas. I mean, if you want to know what's really going on in Syria, or probably a lot of other countries. There are a couple of websites, you'll call them blogs, not really blogs, run by American academics, academics in other countries, that manage to *aggregate* all sorts of things. I mean, certainly blogs and newspaper stories from around the world, but leaked documents, you know, sort of reports, institutional reports about things. I mean, if you really want to be on top of something, there's a place you find it on the Internet now, but it doesn't really . . .

MALCOLM GLADWELL: As you say this, of course, you are, you the irony, you are sitting inside of a library, a place that has managed to magically aggregate documents. **(laughter)** I love—when you use that word “aggregate,” you pause as if it was this concept that’s just been invented with Google. “Magically they have found a way to gather information from a variety of sources,” and here you are sitting in the *New York Public Library*!

(laughter/applause)

JACOB WEISBERG: Point taken, and the New York Public Library is a wonderful place. But not everybody has access to it. Not everybody is in New York, not everybody in the middle of the day can come over here and browse through or call things from the stacks. You can’t borrow books from the New York Public Library, sometimes it’s easier to order them from Amazon. You know, it’s not—I mean, to Arianna’s point, there’s a multiplicity of ways to obtain information and positing, you know, a direct opposition where one is going to *kill* the other versus supplementing the other. Someday before too long, the New York Public Library, like the Bodleian Library at Oxford, may be entirely online. I mean, won’t that be amazing? That will be a bit of a problem for the New York Public Library, maybe, because not as many people will need to be actually physically present to get what’s here, but it will be a wonderful thing because the richness of the resources here will be open to billions of people around the world.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Do you want to say something?

NORM PEARLSTINE: I was just going to say, I think the more critical issue, and it is heretical to mention it here, is that readers are a niche audience, whether they're online or in print, and what I think the real promise of online is going to be is video on demand and that that will have major consequences for all the things that we're talking about now. I don't think that there's a shortage of people who want to do great journalism who are actually doing it right now. You're absolutely right about the sites that you can find specialized information on. What the *New Yorker* did a couple weeks ago with its "Dispatches from Iraq" is actually available online every day for people who want to, for instance, know what is coming out of Iraq, from the military, from the soldiers who are fighting it. I think the bigger question is really just going to be the allocation of resources and the allocation of time.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, if I understand your theory right, Norm, your theory is that rationalization is basically cutting out all sorts of cost subsidies for information and reporting and journalism in any form, because, basically, even online you're supported by something else. And so, ultimately, are we going to face the choice of either, as Malcolm says, paying for the information we get, us niche people who still want it, or going without it?

NORM PEARLSTINE: Well, I just think the business models are under extraordinary stress. I got an advertisement last week inviting me to subscribe to *Vanity Fair* for twelve dollars for a year. That—it probably costs something pretty close to that just to do the marketing, let alone the costs for it, so that's not a long-term business plan. Because it's totally dependent on, if you will, advertisers' continued desire to be in that publication rather than doing database marketing.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, the reason they charge the twelve dollars at all is so that they can claim to advertisers that people got this magazine and read it, but online, of course, you don't have to prove that, because you're only charging for people who actually read it.

NORM PEARLSTINE: The theories that you engaged in when you went to *Slate* ten years ago, and I remember your business plan very well, it talked about the fact that you wouldn't have to pay postage, you wouldn't have to pay for paper, and I just think you were early, but that that's inevitably true. The only question in my mind is whether things like RSS and the ability if you will through the kind of interaction among your bloggers is that, if you will, has information bubbling up doesn't really take away from, if you will, the kind of reporting you're talking about. I just think it's very hard to sustain.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: We're going to start taking questions in a couple of minutes and if you have one just get, stand in front of one of these microphones here. I wonder if the lady there in the first row could give me a signal when we're approaching our time out at eight o'clock.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Incidentally, the lady in the front row is one of the best things that has happened out of *Slate*. Because it is Michael's wife, Patty, and they met, as I understand, on the first day when you went up to Seattle to deal with your project.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: She was, I should have said, that *one* thing I never dreamed of was of being in a symposium at the New York Library and the *other* was that I would have met that day the person who became my wife, although if I'd been told that that was happening, I would have

been able to say which one it was. Is there someone at *that* microphone? There's someone at *this* one. Go ahead.

Q: My name is Alice LaBrie, and I'm a Times-Warner shareholder, hi Mr. Pearlstine, and I think you all are being a little bit elitist here, because I want to know what your comments are about *AM New York* and *Metro New York*, which is, I think, enjoying a boom, they're a free paper, they're now finally getting advertisement, so what's the future of that kind of paper?

MICHAEL KINSLEY: That's a good point. The biggest and most immediate threat to major papers has turned out to be other papers, sometimes published by the same company.

JACOB WEISBERG: Those papers are a threat to me personally because the subway entrance is narrow and the guy at mine manages to block it almost completely and if you don't take a paper he kind of shifts with you a little bit and you pretty much have to take one. I mean, in seriousness, it is actually it is a very good point because I think a lot of metropolitan dailies are much more worried about the competition from free newspapers, and a lot of people seem quite satisfied with any newspaper, and one that's presented to them by hand for free, it's very hard to compete with even if your newspaper is a hundred times better.

NORM PEARLSTINE: I think that the model of an *AM*, of the kind of free sheets that you're seeing, works in urban areas with large public-transportation systems. It's not particularly good in most American cities, where people drive to work. It does work in Europe, and it certainly has

potential in Asia as well. But the *New York Post* costs a quarter and its circulation has held up quite well against the free sheets. The *News* has struggled a bit more at fifty cents.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: How many people here read a newspaper on paper every day or just about every day? Anyone here who doesn't? We're still a pretty good stronghold.

NORM PEARLSTINE: The choice of city and venue have a lot to do with it.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: You don't come to a library if you're not into paper to some extent. Ma'am.

Q: I'm a reporter and I'd like to know within five years who is going to pay for my expense, like if I want to go to New Orleans and report what's going on after Katrina, or something like that, who is going to pay for my plane tickets, or. . . .

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, Arianna's gonna pay.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: I think that more and more online websites, publications, whatever you want to call them, are going to be paying for investigative reporting. I mean, look at what happened to *Slate*. After all, we *are* here to celebrate the tenth anniversary of *Slate* becoming, and it's part of the establishment media, I mean, I don't know what to call you, I don't know if you are new old media or old new media or medium media but you are basically definitely part of the establishment. You now have actually produced an editor of a magazine,

who was a staffer at *Slate*, the editor of the *New Republic* came from *Slate*. You are hiring people like John Dickerson, who is coming from *Time Magazine*, so you are right completely in the mix. And that's what's going to be happening more and more.

I mean, we're just a little upstart, we're just a year old, and people are still amazed that we can walk and we are potty-trained, but it's all happening very fast, that's the other thing that's remarkable. It used to take thirty years to create a brand, then twenty years, ten years, now you can create a brand in this online world in a year, and that means advertising comes to you much faster. I mean, we thought there was going to be a year before we could take advertising, we started taking advertising after three months and became profitable after one year. These things would not have happened ten years ago so it's all accelerating.

NORM PEARLSTINE: I think that that's absolutely true, but I think in answer to your question you're going to pay yourself to go to New Orleans, but fortunately, because of Malcolm's analogy, it would not be an expensive flight. **(laughter)** What will happen five years from now is that extraordinary dispatches from the hurricane site will come from people who are there who are uploading photos on Flickr, who are, if you will, aggregating content on a local blog and with the help of Google Earth, you're really be able to know an awful lot without even having to make that trip, and you could probably write your column just sitting at home.

Q: Going back to what Malcolm and Jacob were talking about, versus finding websites that can aggregate a lot of information and the irony of being a library, I'd remind Malcolm that they still have pneumatic tubes in the Library to pass information and that's a non-lending library, you

can't take the books out, and the hours have been cut back because of New York City budgets, so where Jacob can read that aggregate information anywhere in the world any time at any moment, libraries don't do that, and going back to what Norman's talking about, which I think was the point of the panel discussion, is planes might be a losing industry, but I think that people take planes because they get to places faster, just like there are many—people would probably still prefer to take horse-drawn carriages across the country, but it takes a little bit too long so my question is these carrier systems that allow us to get things more easily, more readily, as the cycle of the information has changed, that as much as we'd like newspapers to exist in the future, that the economic models that Norm keeps coming back to and the way that we all intake our information, isn't it just quaint to think that they will be here fifty years from today, are those two pressures too great to withstand that?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: I think that the newspapers that learn to adopt, and the magazines that learn to adopt, and incorporate the new technology, the new way of doing content, are going to survive and thrive. Let me give you an example that brought this whole thing home to me. Last July—you remember?—there were two events that happened in London, within the space of forty-eight hours. One is that London got the Olympics for 2012 and the other is the bombing in the subway. And I remember waking up and reading my *New York Times* and seeing on the cover a picture of jubilant Londoners celebrating the awarding of the Olympics, while on CNN we have scenes from the devastation in the subway. And while on *The Huffington Post* we had some of our London bloggers blogging about just what happened, who had pictures of what was happening, and these were like the three ways to get information. And if the *New York Times* doesn't have a really thriving online operation to update what's happening in print, then it's not

going to survive, but it's not difficult to have that online operation if you can get people with the right mindset to produce the right content and drive massive advertising to it.

JACOB WEISBERG: I hope to be around to be proven wrong, but fifty years from now, I don't think the print version of the *New York Times* is going to be a big deal. I hope and would predict that the *New York Times* will be a thriving institution, but I don't think there are going to be a lot of people turning the pages. The question that Mike asked, whenever I'm around a group of college students, I do the same survey, and I say, "How many of you read the *New York Times* online?" and if it's a group of journalism students or a group in New York, just about every hand goes up, and then I say, "How many of you read the print newspaper?" and either zero hands go up out of a group of twenty or thirty or forty or maybe one or two. And surveys that are done say that not only do these people this age, who are very politically engaged and involved, do not read a print newspaper, they do not expect to *ever* read a print newspaper. They are very comfortable reading things on a screen, maybe they print things out from time to time, but they are just not going to become print newspaper readers. But it doesn't *matter*, I mean what matters is that what the *New York Times* does is a service to everyone, bloggers, people who are citizens of the country.

NORM PEARLSTINE: And the *Washington Post*.

JACOB WEISBERG: I didn't want to favor the home team. But the *New York Times* is a proxy for a high-quality national newspaper and one that happens to be read fairly heavily in this room, I would wager. *That* has to survive, but the print form, it doesn't really matter.

Q: Paul has given me a dispensation as a library employee to offer a rebuttal in defense of libraries, both to Jacob Weisberg and also to the man who asked the previous question. First of all, I'd like to remind everybody that you can visit www.nypl.org twenty-four hours a day, we have a myriad of online resources available free, which, last I checked, was not the case at Amazon, we're digitizing an enormous quantity of our books with Google, as many of you know from having come to a program here about it. We also, and this, I think, is really key, aside from reaching eighteen million people yearly, our branch library system, which *is* a lending system, offers Internet access to people who might want to read *Slate* who actually may not have other ways to do so. That's one thing you all haven't talked about, which is that a lot of people don't have computers (**applause**) and I think Internet access, both in this very building and at a network of more than eighty branches across the city and then the Bronx, the Brooklyn system, and Queens, reaching only the five boroughs, without us, I think your readership might be really diminished. So thank you.

(applause)

MICHAEL KINSLEY: On that note I think we have to stop. All right, go ahead, Ma'am.

Q: I have a question for Arianna. You're going to, you said, you're going to hire investigative journalists. The *New York Times* has actually twelve hundred editors, not all of them investigative, but quite a few, it has a bureau in Baghdad with, I think, two dozen people which

costs five million dollars a month, at least, when are you going to reach that? And up to this point, aren't you kind of a parasite on the body of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*?

MICHAEL KINSLEY: We got back to anatomy after all.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Actually what is very interesting is that, in spite of the phenomenal resources the *New York Times* has, it got the lead-up to the war completely wrong and it is partly responsible for the fact that we are in an unnecessary war. **(applause)** It bears a huge responsibility. This is very important because there it is—it has all these massive resources and it allowed stories like the aluminum tube story that Judy Miller wrote to appear on the front page, above the fold, on a Sunday, when there was an enormous amount of information contradicting her research and her sources, and it was not published, and that's the problem fundamentally with newspapers like that where basically in order to gain access, journalists sell their journalistic soul, and at *Huff* we do a much better job online.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: But Arianna, as a citizen in a democracy, considering going to war, would you really want to depend on bloggers to supply the information that you needed to reach an intelligent conclusion?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Do you really seriously think that the *New York Times* did a better job than bloggers would have done?

MICHAEL KINSLEY: What do you mean would have done? Bloggers were there—

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: I'm talking about looking forward. If we had these resources and if there were multiple sources of information as opposed to a newspaper of record that people relied on that this administration used and manipulated—on that same Sunday you had Dick Cheney and Rumsfeld and Condi Rice out there on all the Sunday shows saying that “The *New York Times* is saying . . .” and this is the same information that they had fed to the *New York Times*. This is an absolute atrocity. When the history of this war is written the *New York Times* will have a huge responsibility for what happened and so remember that when you praise the enormous resources of this huge institution that let this country and the public down when it came to a matter of war and peace and that's exactly what it was.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: So you've stopped reading the *New York Times* now.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Of course I haven't stopped reading it, you know better than that.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well you can't trust it.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: That's why I trust a lot of people who are criticizing what appears in the *New York Times*, as it appears, again and again and holding the mainstream media's feet to the fire is one of the great jobs the blogosphere is doing, not just the *New York Times* and Judy Miller and—Jack Shafer of *Slate* did a terrific job of analyzing exactly all the ways in which this reporting was absolutely atrocious and should never have been allowed, infinitely worse than

what Jayson Blair did. What Jayson Blair did is *nothing* compared to what they did, and so that's something to remember and to weigh against what the online community is doing. **(applause)**

Q: The weapons of mass destruction story was basically not debunked by the blogosphere. It was debunked by daily British papers, by the BBC and by the *Guardian*, and the blogosphere in the United States came after these people.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Norm gets the last word.

NORM PEARLSTINE: Well, I was just going to say that the issue really about the walkup to the war in Iraq wasn't so much what the *New York Times* was doing, is that you hadn't started business yet.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: And none of this would have happened if *The Huffington Post*—

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: We would not be in Iraq.

NORM PEARLSTINE: If the *Huffington Post* had been in business we would not be in Iraq right now.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: All right, we'll take another two questions. Sir.

Q: You guys have talked a lot about the future of institutions and I'm kind of wondering about the future of content a little bit. You've touched on how different its tone of political writing or dialogue is on your blog media versus the old broadsheet media and I'm kind of wondering now that that you guys are all becoming—Arianna and Kinsley and *Slate* are all becoming more mainstream, what is the future of the conversation going to be? Is it going to be the kind of *Slate*, slightly *New Yorker* tone of kind of snarkiness and humor and personality? Or is it going to be more of a broadsheet and more of Ms. Huffington's style of very poised and informative and kind of a little more furrowed-brow content? I'm just kind of wondering what do you think the place of humor and personality is in a proper political dialogue or in a proper information dialogue?

JACOB WEISBERG: It's very necessary for us. It's sort of what makes the medicine go down. It's kind of built in. I mean, I think it's—you know, in *Slate* we don't run a lot of humor pieces labeled as humor pieces. We run some, but we like a certain tone of humor to infuse almost everything we do. It's one of the lessons we learned from our founder Michael Kinsley that you can write about, you know, pretty dry policy, but if you write about it in the right way and are entertaining, you can get people to read it. And this draws together your point a little bit, and what was being talked about a minute ago.

We're in a funny position because from the point of view of bloggers we're the mainstream media and from the point of view of the mainstream media we're a bit of a blog but one of the wonderful things about what's happened on the Internet, from my point of view, is that it's broken down the barriers to entry in journalism. And that is threatening to a lot of traditional

journalists who think well, weren't we a real profession? How can anybody do it? But it does create this kind of rough meritocracy. *Slate* has hired people who wrote blogs that we saw. People have emerged out of the Fray, which is our reader bulletin board, as writers for different publications, and what it means is that in the old days when I went into journalism, it was sort of hard to get into journalism. If you didn't go to the right school, or you didn't have good connections, or you couldn't get a first a good first job, you know, having talent, being a talented writer, having an eye, being a good reporter, wasn't necessarily enough, and because of the Internet, sort of anybody can do it. If you're good, you can do it on your own. You do have to find some way to support yourself, or pay for it, but if you do it and attract a little audience and attract a little attention, suddenly you can be a journalist too.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: It's a little easier to do it when you've got Microsoft behind you, we should concede.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: But also this year we had something very interesting that we were all part of, which is what happened to Bob Woodward, I mean, there was the ultimate, the gold standard of journalism, being exposed for the way he handled Plamegate, for the fact that when he had this unlimited access in the lead-up to the war, he wrote books that were full of little details but missed the big story. Who are we holding up as the ultimate in journalism—I mean, the people who gave us Watergate, the people who exposed the corruption of power, who are now becoming corrupted themselves because of they access that they were gaining, the huge book contracts they were getting? So there was a tremendous need for alternative sources of information, for ways to hold them accountable, and it's not again either/or, we're not going to

displace anybody, but at *Huff* we're going to make the mainstream media better and we're going to keep getting better and better ourselves in the way . . .

MICHAEL KINSLEY: But now the bloggers are getting the fat book contracts and going on TV and everything and is that going to corrupt *you*?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Absolutely, and that's always going to be a problem. I was at the blogger convention in Las Vegas and you had presidential contenders for 2008 seducing bloggers, not literally, **(laughter)** but Mark Warner was throwing a party that cost ninety thousand dollars and I said to him, "Wow, a lot of these people never get out of the house **(laughter)** and you are throwing this huge party," and he said to me, "Well I wouldn't have hesitated throwing a party like that for elected officials or big donors, well, bloggers are now becoming more and more influential in the political process," so sure, could they be courted? Absolutely, we have to guard against that all the time.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Last question, sir.

Q: It's actually a question for Arianna.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Hi, Nick. This is Nick Denton, the Rupert Murdoch of the blogosphere.

Q: I was actually going to say that you do a great, great job of touting the virtues of the blogosphere, but isn't it maybe a little bit time, given the success, for a bit of self-criticism? One of the things I remarked upon when you were talking, you were talking about the value, the importance, of links, how TimesSelect was such a disaster in that regard. Sometimes when I look at what *we* do—we look at stats the whole time. I think, Jacob, we've talked about this before. We look at stats the whole time, which stories are the most popular. You probably look at *The Huffington Post* to see which things get commented upon most. Don't you think that sometimes puts us in the position of whoring for cliques, of being, going for the easy story the whole time, going for what's going to get the biggest response from our more rabid readers?

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON: Well, Nick, you're absolutely right. We do have to guard against that. We all get the reports every night of which blogs got the most traffic, which were emailed the most and to write about the things that we care about that we are passionate about is ultimately the best way to succeed, I have no doubt about that. There is something about the online community that really recognizes authenticity, passion, and real engagement in what you are writing, and if you are not really engaged, it shows and you may get cliques in the beginning but it's not long-lasting, and you know that, that's why you have so many great properties online, and more and more to come, I have no doubt.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: Well, on that noncommercial note. **(laughter)** We'll reassemble in ten years. Possibly not in—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: We'll invite you back before ten years.

MICHAEL KINSLEY: We may not need you in ten years.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The story tonight about who reads books before reviewing them reminds me of a moment in time when I teaching at a very famed institution with some pusillanimous students, but still good students, at Williams College, and I had a student there who always said very interesting things, but mostly wrong, and one day we were reading “Bartleby the Scrivener,” and Michael talked, and I said, “That’s really interesting, but, Michael, tell me something, have you in fact read ‘Bartleby the Scrivener’?” and he said, “Not personally.” **(laughter)** Anyway, thank you very much.

(applause)