

EXHIBIT 2

to

**PUBLISHER DEFENDANTS' OPPOSITION TO PLAINTIFF'S MOTION *IN LIMINE*
NO. 18 TO EXCLUDE EVIDENCE OR ARGUMENT RELATED TO DOCUMENTS
WITHHELD AS WORK PRODUCT PRIOR TO DEPOSITION OF PLAINTIFF**

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IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE
SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

Case No. 12012447CI-011

-----)
TERRY GENE BOLLEA professionally
known as HULK HOGAN,

Plaintiff,

vs.

HEATHER CLEM, GAWKER MEDIA, LLC a/k/a
GAWKER MEDIA, GAWKER MEDIA GROUP, INC.
a/k/a GAWKER MEDIA, GAWKER ENTERTAINMENT,
LLC, GAWKER TECHNOLOGY, LLC, GAWKER SALES,
LLC, NICK DENTON, A.J. DAULERIO,
KATE BENNERT and BLOGWIRE HUNGARY SZELLEMI
ALKOTAST HASZNOSITO KFT a/k/a GAWKER MEDIA,

Defendants.
-----)

VIDEOTAPED DEPOSITION OF

NICK DENTON

New York, New York

Wednesday, October 2, 2013

Reported by:
Toni Allegrucci
JOB NO. 10071

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October 2, 2013

10:01 a.m.

Videotaped Deposition of
NICK DENTON, held at the offices of
Esquire Deposition Solutions,
1384 Broadway, New York, New York 10018,
pursuant to Notice, before
Toni Allegrucci, a Notary Public of the
State of New York.

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A P P E A R A N C E S:

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ALSO PRESENT:

ANDREW RITCHIE, Videographer

HEATHER L. DIETRICK, Counsel, Gawker Media

1 N. Denton
2 just kind of take a list from adjectives from
3 a dictionary and just kind of read through,
4 it would pretty much have the same effect.

5 Q. Well, but that's the whole point.
6 I mean, one doesn't necessarily believe
7 everything one reads?

8 A. Sure.

9 Q. So my point here today is to try to
10 understand from you whether --

11 A. Which ones I agree, that's fine.

12 Q. -- whether the buzz out there is
13 true, partially true, completely untrue and
14 that's the goal of this exercise today.

15 A. I understand.

16 Q. So let me ask the reporter to mark
17 as our exhibit next in order Exhibit 40.
18 During the last two days we've accumulated 39
19 previous exhibits, that's why we're starting
20 today with No. 40. Nothing magical about it.

21 (Exhibit 40, document, marked for
22 identification, as of this date.)

23 A. Thanks.

24 Q. This is, this is an article that
25 appeared quite some time ago in 2006 in

1 N. Denton

2 A. I think I told you what I meant.

3 Q. All right. There are occasions
4 when over the course of a story's life you
5 have come to the conclusion that for one
6 reason or not there are aspects of the story
7 that should no longer appear or should be
8 corrected, correct?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. Do you have a recollection
11 of an incident involving Fred Durst,
12 D-u-r-s-t?

13 A. I remember him sending some flowers
14 to my apartment. I think that's the only
15 thing I remember about that particular,
16 particular story.

17 Q. Let me go back and ask you to take
18 a look at something that I'll ask the
19 reporter to mark as Exhibit 41.

20 (Exhibit 41, document, marked for
21 identification, as of this date.)

22 Q. I apologize for the way in which
23 the article appears on the second page. I
24 don't mean to be making this difficult for
25 you to look at, but due to the limitations of

1 N. Denton

2 Q. And who is?

3 A. John Cook.

4 Q. Okay. And you and Mr. Cook had an
5 interview earlier this year with Eriq Gardner
6 of the Hollywood Reporter?

7 A. Seems vaguely familiar.

8 Q. Okay. Let me take -- ask you to
9 take a look at a document I'll have marked as
10 Exhibit 42.

11 (Exhibit 42, document, marked for
12 identification, as of this date.)

13 Q. And ask you whether you recognize
14 Exhibit 42 as a copy of the article that
15 Mr. Gardner wrote as a result of his
16 interview with you and Mr. Cook.

17 A. It looks like it.

18 Q. So at this point I just have sort
19 of one area that I wanted to address with
20 you. If you would turn to the top of page 2,
21 the question that's asked is: What have you
22 learned along the way, and you begin by
23 responding by saying, we removed a lot of
24 obstacles to free journalism and yet, and
25 then Mr. Cook interjects the following, there

1 N. Denton

2 A. I don't think so. I think it was
3 mainly design work.

4 Q. Okay. Are you familiar with an
5 incident involving Gawker concerning a sex
6 tape in which Rebecca Gayheart and Eric Dane
7 were involved?

8 A. I am.

9 Q. Let me show you a document we'll
10 have the reporter mark as Exhibit 44.

11 (Exhibit 44, document, marked for
12 identification, as of this date.)

13 Q. This is a three-page document that
14 prints a story from CBS News' website and I'd
15 ask you to just take a look at the first
16 page of the document and just refresh your
17 recollection about the content of the story.
18 I just have a few questions about it.

19 MR. BERLIN: And for the record,
20 while you were reading that, there's a
21 box at the bottom that appears to have
22 been added by the plaintiff's law firm,
23 which does not appear to be part of the
24 CBS News story.

25 MR. MIRELL: Correct.

1 N. Denton

2 Q. Do you have any specific knowledge
3 of those?

4 A. No.

5 Q. There's one additional article I'd
6 like to direct your attention. This is a
7 multi-page document.

8 A. I haven't looked at that one for a
9 while.

10 Q. Well, we're going to --

11 A. You saved the best for last.

12 Q. I saved the best for last.

13 Exhibit 47 is a New Yorker story from
14 October 18, 2010.

15 (Exhibit 47, document, marked for
16 identification, as of this date.)

17 A. Thank you.

18 Q. I actually just have a few
19 questions about this story. And if you feel
20 like you need to read more of it than I'm
21 going to refer you to, please call that out.

22 A. Okay.

23 Q. But in the interests of time let me
24 just ask you first about one sentence or part
25 of a sentence that begins on the first

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C E R T I F I C A T E

STATE OF NEW YORK)

: ss.

COUNTY OF NEW YORK)

I, Toni Allegrucci, a Notary Public
within and for the State of New York, do
hereby certify:

That NICK DENTON, the witness whose
deposition is hereinbefore set forth,
was duly sworn by me and that such
deposition is a true record of the
testimony given by the witness.

I further certify that I am not
related to any of the parties to this
action by blood or marriage, and that I
am in no way interested in the outcome
of this matter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto
set my hand this 3rd day of October,
2013.



TONI ALLEGRUCCI

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DEPOSITION ERRATA SHEET

Assignment No. 10071
Case Caption: BOLLEA vs. GAWKER

DECLARATION UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY

I declare under penalty of perjury that I have read the entire transcript of my Deposition taken in the captioned matter or the same has been read to me, and the same is true and accurate, save and except for changes and/or corrections, if any, as indicated by me on the DEPOSITION ERRATA SHEET hereof, with the understanding that I offer these changes as if still under oath.

NICK DENTON

Subscribed and sworn to on the 8 day of
NOVEMBER, 2013 before me,

Jesse Ma
Notary Public State of New York
New York County
Reg. No.: 02MA6225360
My Comm. Exp. 7-19-14

Notary Public,
In and for the State of NEW YORK

Case Title: Bollea v. Clem, et al.
 Date of Deposition: October 2, 2013
 Witness's Name: Nick Denton


DEPOSITION ERRATA SHEET

| <u>PAGE</u> | <u>LINE(S)</u> | <u>CHANGE</u> | | <u>REASON</u> |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|---|-------------------|
| | | <u>From</u> | <u>To</u> | |
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CONFIDENTIALITY DESIGNATIONS

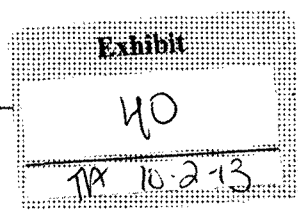
Page 19 [estimated revenue number]
Pages 33-35 [regarding sales of Moreover and First Tuesday]
Page 48-49 [regarding sale of Gridskipper and Oddjack]
Page 154-162 (already marked)
Page 133 [regarding \$15 million of Amazon transactions]
Page 264 [regarding percent ownership in GMGI]

Date: 11/8/13

Signature: 
Nick Denton

theguardian

Interview



Gawk, don't talk

The New York-based former FT journalist has made millions from launching and selling websites. He tells James Silver about readers' insatiable need for gossip and how George Clooney did his advertising for him

James Silver

The Guardian, Monday 11 December 2006

Two and a half years ago, the Observer published a list of 80 "prodigiously talented young people" who it believed would go on "to shape our lives in the early 21st century". Among them was former Financial Times reporter Nick Denton, now a New York-based internet entrepreneur. "Denton is attempting to bring some order to the chaos of the internet - and make a little money," declared the newspaper. "He could transform blogging from a pastime into an industry."

Such predictions are often the kiss of death, but in Denton's case - although he responds with an uninterested shrug when I read him his profile - the Observer's words have proved spot on. While thousands of hacks have day-dreamed of quitting the drudgery of deadlines to make millions in dotcom start-ups, Denton, 40, has gone out and done it.

He left the FT in 1998 after it had sent him to San Francisco to cover Silicon Valley and went on to found First Tuesday, a business-networking website, and Moreover Technologies, which provides news search technology to portals and corporate customers. He sold the First Tuesday four years later reportedly for \$50m, and Moreover Technologies in 2005 for \$30 million (although he stresses there were other business partners and investors).

In 2002 he started gossip-driven Gawker Media. Today the company has numerous sites, including flagship showbiz and media gossip site Gawker, Wonkette (Washington politics), Gizmodo (gadgets), Valleywag (Silicon Valley), Defamer (LA showbiz) and Deadspin (sport). Across the board Gawker Media attracted 4.2 million "unique visitors"

in the US in October (mostly drawn from the advertiser-beloved 16-34 demographic), which compares favourably to the 9.7 million who visited the website of America's leading newspaper, the New York Times. Not bad for a set of niche titles with word-of-mouth-only marketing and barely enough staff to field a softball team.

Sitting on a breakfast-stool in the kitchen of his vast Soho loft, Denton, though brilliant with a quicksilver mind, is a somewhat tricky interviewee. He dead-bats questions he does not want to address, while some of his answers stretch to no more than a sentence and are frequently accompanied by a long-suffering sigh or a shrug. He also pecks away at a laptop, monitoring traffic on his sites. "The antithesis of the schmoozer," noted a New York Times writer recently, "human beings are, at best, companion media to Denton."

A self-confessed "internet addict since the mid-1990s", Denton says he is "distrustful" of dotcom ventures set up with the primary motivation of making money. "You obviously have to make money otherwise it's no fun, but those kinds of projects lack internal energy or a driving-force." What was the driving-force behind Gawker Media? "For me, when I was at the FT, I always thought the most interesting stories were the ones journalists told each other over a drink after deadline. 'What really happened?' 'What's he really like?' The stories they can't publish because they are too sensitive or because they have been told off the record, or because they only have one source or they can't be stood up.

"But there are also the stories which can't be told because they seem too trivial and therefore they don't meet the rather rigid newspaper standard for what is news. The truth is those are the stories people are really interested in, so why shouldn't those conversations be reflected in a publication? That's always been my test for what makes a story: is this something journalists would gossip with each other about?"

The appeal of Denton's sites -funded entirely through advertising - is their sense of exclusivity, of inviting readers into a members-only club. By logging on to www.gawker.com, for example, visitors are drawn into a world described by the New York Times as "the national go-to spot for keeping up with the rich and scandalous, the media elite and the pop culture trends of the moment".

Denton says: "We don't have to spend a penny on marketing because our stories spread by word of mouth or word of email and why would we want to kill that?" He adds with a smile: "Anyway why would we need to advertise when someone like George Clooney does the job so much better than we ever could?"

The rhetorical question hangs midair. He is referring to the storm whipped up over "Gawker Stalker", which hit the headlines in March last year, when Denton decided to enhance a long-running feature, on which users could post sightings of celebrities in Manhattan, by pinpointing each brush with fame on a Google Map. Because of the instantaneity of the posts - readers would email or instant-message their tip-offs to the site in real time - it was branded a stalkers' charter by several stars and their publicists. Clooney called on fans "to render these guys useless " by bombarding Gawker with erroneous sightings. "A couple of hundred conflicting sightings and this website is worthless", he wrote in an email circulated by his publicist.

Denton, a born mischief-maker, had scored a direct hit. It was just the thing to get his titles talked about in the right way. "We had a 50% increase in traffic on Gawker and Defamer for quite a long time," he says, "because the media went crazy about Clooney and his clash with this 'underground gossip website'."

Clooney's agent, Stan Rosenfield, argued that the Gawker Stalker feature was "conceptually bad" and "dangerous", while Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan's publicist, Leslie Sloane Zelnick, said "it puts these people in harm's way ... somebody's going to get hurt." But Denton, who speaks with an American twang, thinks such statements are self-serving nonsense. "Please!" he responds with an emphatic snort. Jessica Coen, a Gawker editor at the height of the Stalker furor, points out that there was a delay between a tip-off being received about a star's whereabouts and when it was posted on the site. "If you really wanted to harm a celebrity, I would suggest that Gawker Stalker would be the worst way of doing it. If a star was at the drugstore at 3pm, oh yeah I'm sure he'll still be there at 4pm," she says.

Delighted with the reaction to Gawker Stalker, Denton says he is going to go on pushing the envelope on all his sites. "So far there has been no such thing as 'too far' with our titles. We'll run live maps of celebrity sightings, we'll post photographs of star quarterbacks getting drunk at college parties, like Deadspin does, we'll 'out' politicians, we'll expose Silicon Valley blowhards. What would be the point in holding back? We're independent, we're not owned by a big media company, we don't have to abide by standards that have been set down a generation ago, we have enough advertising to pay the bills and we attract a very desirable audience which seems to like the fact that we push things too far."

In the end, though, I wonder whether Gawker Media's drip-feed of highly addictive gossip counts as journalism. And, if not, what is it? "It's not journalism, it's blogging," explains Coen. "It's putting rumour out there and seeing what sticks."

Similarly, Denton admits that the journalistic standards of his blogs are lower than those in traditional media. But, he says, that's the whole point of the venture. "We go after sacred cows. We run stories on the basis of one anonymous source, in many cases, and a bit of judgment. We put it out there. We make clear the level of confidence we have in a story. We ask for help [from site visitors], we ask for corroboration, we ask for denials. Every single story is a work in progress, it's not meant to be final. It's like a reporter's notebook."

Gawker Media's blogs differ from traditional media in another significant way. One insider reveals that its writers - who churn out a dozen items per day per site - are paid sales target-style bonuses for the volume of traffic and "page views" their stories generate. As the statistics are "live", they have instant feedback and editors quickly learn which stories do well. "We got quarterly bonuses based on traffic," says the writer, who asked not to be named, "which results in this all-day obsessive monitoring of traffic. As long as page views stay high, advertising rates stay high, which is all that matters to the company. We are paid to get traffic and that dictates what stories you do."

As a boss, Denton is considered "insane but brilliant" and "ruthless" in business terms, "but he's also the kind of guy who would give you his kidney". Despite his journalistic background, he is not viewed as excessively hands-on. "He goes through phases where he focuses obsessively on one particular site and drives you insane with emails," says one staffer, "and you have just got to weather that little storm until he moves on to another site."

Presumably he could afford to take it easy, but Denton appears driven, restless even. Is he a workaholic, I ask him? "No, I really try not to kill myself with work," he claims, "because I imagine doing what I'm doing now for a very long time."

Curriculum Vitae

Age 40

Education

University College School, London and Oxford University

Career

1990-98 Financial Times, reporter. Stringer in Bucharest and Budapest, then investment banking correspondent and San Francisco correspondent 1998 Founds First Tuesday, and Moreover Technologies. 2000 Sells First Tuesday for a reported \$50m 2002 Founds Gawker Media 2005 Sells Moreover Technologies for a reported \$30m



Today's possibilities are tomorrow's news.

- CULTURE ([HTTP://GAWKER.COM/TAG/CULTURE](http://GAWKER.COM/TAG/CULTURE)) · TRUE STORIES ([HTTP://GAWKER.COM/TAG/TRUE-STORIES](http://GAWKER.COM/TAG/TRUE-STORIES)) · JOURNALISMISM ([HTTP://GAWKER.COM/TAG/JOURNALISMISM](http://GAWKER.COM/TAG/JOURNALISMISM)) RANTS ([HTTP://GAWKER.COM/TAG/RANTS](http://GAWKER.COM/TAG/RANTS)) · VALLEYWAG ([HTTP://VALLEYWAG.GAWKER.COM](http://VALLEYWAG.GAWKER.COM)) · DEFAMER ([HTTP://DEFAMER.GAWKER.COM](http://DEFAMER.GAWKER.COM))

TOP STORIES

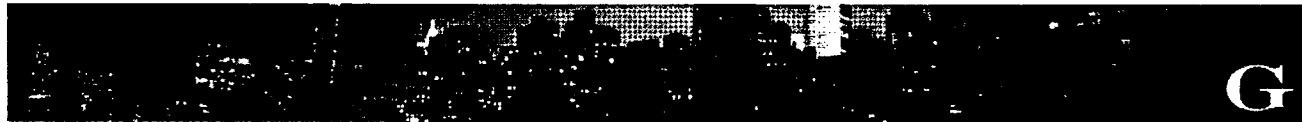
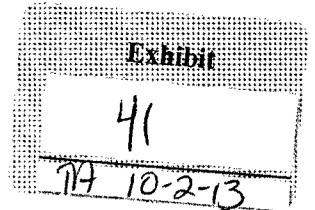
Kimmel Asks Americans to Choose: Obamacare or the Affordable Care Act (<http://gawker.com/kimmel-asks-americans-to-choose-obamacare-or-the-affor-1433866673>)

Jon Stewart to GOP: "Fuck You" (<http://gawker.com/jon-stewart-to-gop-fuck-you-1439036877>)

This Hornet Will Be the Last Thing You See Before You Die (<http://gawker.com/this-hornet-will-be-the-last-thing-you-see-before-you-d-1428724767>)

Science Shows Men and Women Are Both Awful Stereotypes on Facebook (<http://gawker.com/science-shows-men-and-women-are-both-awful-stereotypes-1435455229>)

- INTERVIEWS ([HTTP://INTERVIEWS.GAWKER.COM](http://INTERVIEWS.GAWKER.COM))
- VALLEYWAG ([HTTP://VALLEYWAG.GAWKER.COM](http://VALLEYWAG.GAWKER.COM))
- DODGE & BURN ([HTTP://DODGEANDBURN.GAWKER.COM](http://DODGEANDBURN.GAWKER.COM))
- DEFAMER ([HTTP://DEFAMER.GAWKER.COM](http://DEFAMER.GAWKER.COM))
- KINJA ([HTTP://FRONT.KINJA.COM](http://FRONT.KINJA.COM))
- DEADSPIN ([HTTP://DEADSPIN.COM](http://DEADSPIN.COM))
- GAWKER ([HTTP://GAWKER.COM](http://GAWKER.COM))
- GIZMODO ([HTTP://GIZMODO.COM](http://GIZMODO.COM))
- IO9 ([HTTP://IO9.COM](http://IO9.COM))
- JALOPNIK ([HTTP://JALOPNIK.COM](http://JALOPNIK.COM))
- JEZEBEL ([HTTP://JEZEBEL.COM](http://JEZEBEL.COM))
- KOTAKU ([HTTP://KOTAKU.COM](http://KOTAKU.COM))
- LIFEHACKER ([HTTP://LIFEHACKER.COM](http://LIFEHACKER.COM))



Jon Stewart Goes Off on GOP for Shutting Down the Government (<http://gawker.com/jon-stewart-goes-off-on-gop-for-shutting-down-the-gover-1433427444>)



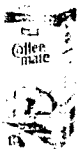
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Shutdown Day 2: Obama Cuts Trip Short, Rejects "Piecemeal" GOP Offer (<http://gawker.com/shutdown-day-2-obama-cuts-trip-short-rejects-pieceme-1440081621>)

New Story of Motorcycle Rampage Emerges as One Biker Turns Self In (<http://gawker.com/new-story-of-motorcycle-rampage-emerges-as-one-biker-tu-1436490991>)

Next Media Animation Responds to the Quit Heard 'Round the World (<http://gawker.com/next-media-animation-responds-to-the-quit-heard-round>)



Coffee-Mate Liquid Coffee Creamer Singles, Original, ...

\$6.99 Shop now

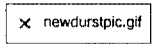


Hp 88 Black Ink Cartridge (c9365an)

\$24.99 Shop now

Jimmy Fallon's Latest Lip Sync-Off Was Actually Fair (<http://www.gawker.com/2013/10/02/jimmy-fallon-lip-sync-off-was-actually-fair/>)

Fred Durst: Touch My Balls And My Ass And Then Sue Gawker (<http://gawker.com/035041/fred-durst-touch-my-balls-and-my-ass-and-then-sue-gawker>)



Dear Fred Durst,

There's an old saying around the Gawker offices, coined by our wise Hungarian goat-herding ancestors: you're nobody until somebody hates you. But we had it wrong. It turns out that you're actually nobody until some other nobody sues you. Thank you, Fred Durst and your fabulous band of lawyers, for setting us straight.

Honestly, though, we don't know why you're so mad at us. The situation is really rather simple. Someone sent us a link to a video of your penis, we went into shock, and we shared it with the world for about 2 hours. Then we wept, found God, took a hot bath, and removed the video from our site.

But nothing we do is ever good enough for you, is it? Your exotic Californian lawyers sent us a cease-and-desist order on Monday, 3 days after we had already taken the video down. You were still hurting and we understood, but now you've gone and filed suit against us.

We don't get it we complied before you even got around to wasting paper on us, and now you want to take away what few shekels we have. Today's gossip is tomorrow's news. CULTURE (HTTP://GAWKER.COM/TAG/CULTURE) · TRUE STORIES (HTTP://GAWKER.COM/TAG/TRUE-STORIES) · JOURNALISM of order, Fred? Well, this whole crazy world is out of order. You can't handle the GAWKER.COM/JOURNALISM own Congress. You own the Civil Aeronautics Board. But RANTS (HTTP://GAWKER.COM/TAG/RANTS) you do not own the sky. Fred: There was a crime, there was a victim, and there is VALLEYWAG (HTTP://VALLEYWAG.GAWKER.COM) DEFAMER (HTTP://DEFAMER.GAWKER.COM) the facts! A dingo ate my baby!

Will you see you in court. Or not, if you want to kiss and make up in the meantime. If your flowers are freshly cut, we can be rather forgiving. Kimmel Asks Americans to Choose: Obamacare or the Affordable Care Act (http://gawker.com/kimmel-asks-americans-to-choose-obamacare-or-the-affordable-1435806673)

Jon Stewart to GOP's Fuck Stolen Sex Video (http://gawker.com/jon-stewart-to-gop-fuck-you-1439036877) (http://www.kinja.com/archive/0304051durst1.html) [TSG]

This Hornet Will Be the Last Thing You See Before You Die (http://gawker.com/this-hornet-will-be-the-last-thing-you-see-before-you-d-1428724767)

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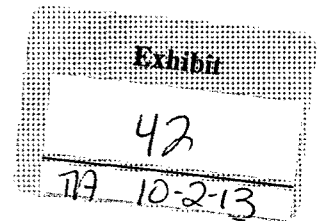
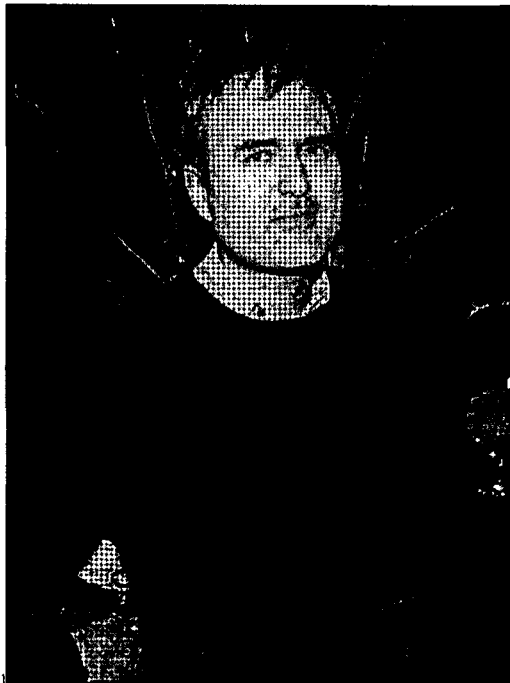
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Gawker's Nick Denton Explains Why Invasion of Privacy Is Positive for Society

8:00 AM PDT 5/22/2013 by Eriq Gardner

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After a decade of publishing scoops that have made him an outlaw to those looking to protect secrets, Denton opens up about battles with Fox News, Lena Dunham, Hulk Hogan and more.



AP
Nick Denton

Ten years ago, **Nick Denton** started Gawker with the idea of capturing the gossip that journalists tell one another privately but won't put into print. Since then, he has been at the center of several legal battles with celebrities looking to protect secrets.

The network of Gawker sites have become celebrated for its scoops, most recently uncovering **Manti Te'o's** fake girlfriend and Toronto Mayor **Rob Ford** smoking crack cocaine. Denton also has overseen many high-profile battles with stars including **John Travolta**, **Hulk Hogan** and **Sarah Palin**. His digital empire now attracts tens of millions of readers monthly.

Denton occasionally will admit to having made a judgment error. See what he has to say about a **Lena Dunham** book proposal below. But overall, Denton is unrepentant and argues an unconventional point of view on privacy that surely will keep the Hollywood legal community busy in the years to come.

We recently spoke to Denton about a decade worth of living on the edge online. Also joining the conversation was Gawker editor **John Cook**.

THR: When you started Gawker, did you have an idea that you were going to change things?

Denton: Yeah. The basic concept was two journalists in a bar telling each other a story that's much more interesting than whatever hits the papers the next day.

THR: Do you think journalists censor themselves?

Denton: Well, I used to think it had to do with legal reasons and people being too fearful of libel. But actually, now I think the larger factor is a journalist's desire for respectability – not wanting to expose themselves, not wanting to say, "Hey we've heard this, we're not completely sure whether it's true." People are talking about this. We're just going to share with you as we would share with our colleagues what we have.

THR: What have you learned along the way?

Denton: We've removed a lot of obstacles to free journalism and yet --

Cook: There is still the desire to be right. That is still important to me and to everyone we work with. We want to get it right. Our standards for getting it right are different from larger, more established institutions, and we do not just throw out every tip that we get on the site. We evaluate and report.

Denton: That is a disagreement between us. That's a disagreement between me and a lot of our journalists is that I would like more of the tips to be published. Maybe not published under John's name but published under a tipster's name or under a tipster's anonymous handle. I would like them to be published.

THR: One of the legal issues that's always coming up for Gawker again and again and again is privacy issues. Do you have a larger philosophy on privacy in this age?

Denton: I think the world is coming around to our presumption on privacy, which is that when somebody becomes the publisher, as people do at quite a young age on Facebook. To the extent that they are published and they are viewed, they become some sort of public figure. That blurs the line between public and private in a way that has never been done before.

THR: Gawker has been accused of invading people's privacy on many occasions, from George Clooney complaining about "Gawker Stalker" to the Hulk Hogan sex tape.

Denton: Just once in a while, I think it's worthwhile to take stock and recognize that the supposed invasion of privacy has incredibly positive effects on society. It has. ... Ten years ago, people maintained very different private and professional personas. Now that line has been obliterated. An employer would be a complete fool to let an image like college partying influence their hiring decisions. Because so many of those photographs have been published (in social media), it's been normalized in a way. Take attitudes towards gay sex and gay relationships. Yes, in part that's been driven by the outing of celebrities like **Anderson Cooper**, something I'm proud to say we played a part in, but more of it is just in the self-outing of people's friends through party photographs, through the random indiscretion on Facebook that makes it actually increasingly difficult for people to maintain secrets.

THR: Have there been instances where you've drawn the line, where you've seen a story that's about to come out and you say you can't go there?

Denton: Not that I want to remember. ... It still drives me crazy that we haven't broken about about _____ being gay. [ed: *celebrity name censored*]

Cook: I think it's a matter of what the opportunity is. It's just a question of do I want to wake up in the morning and be like, "Hey, how can I do a - _____ item today?" No. If it presents itself, we will do it that way. If we had photos and if we had an account of an assistant, we would do it. Am I like spending all day trying to find his ex-assistants and pay them money to say something? No.

Denton: It drives me crazy that there is something that is widely known that I hear about from friends -- basically, friends who have set him up with guys. Not everyone here agrees we should do this story. This is the primary dynamic within Gawker, but I hope the presumption is that we should get stuff out.

THR: Do you think you walk a more dangerous ground when you pay for information?

Cook: I mean, honestly, we don't generally pay for information. We pay for documentation.

Denton: The fact that a person is interested in money gives one a little pause. You probably check into their story more.

THR: You got some heat for publishing a column from the "Fox Mole."

Denton: I wish we hadn't done that story in exactly the way we did. Perhaps it would have worked better as a discussion. Like you want to know how something works there or what [Fox News president] **Roger Ailes** has on the wall. We set up the story as if he was going to give some great revelation of things at Fox News. There was nothing that was a story in a traditional journalistic sense, but there were many things that would make for great gossip in conversation.

Cook: Nick has a habit of taking whatever the most successful story that we've done and shitting on it.

THR: How do you think Fox handled the situation?

Denton: Usually they come after us.

Cook: They did come after us. Roger Ailes has had his personal attorney, **Peter Johnson**, go after us for publishing. I got police records for all of his times he called 911 for his house. His house is in Jersey, in Putnam County, and we published it, and his attorney was coming after us for invasion of privacy.

Denton: And then Fox News came out -- fortunately -- an incorrect phone number for me -- and encouraged -- people to call. They do retaliate, but antagonism is so constant [from Fox] it's very hard to know what's related to what.

Up next: Lena Dunham's book proposal, Hulk Hogan's sex tape and potentially selling Gawker ...

[pagebreak]

THR: What some of the more outrageous threats you've gotten?

Cook: I published a list of licensed handgun owners in New York after the *News Journal* published their list of them in Rockland County. And first, the NRA blasted it out, then Fox News did it. I put it up at 4:30 in the afternoon, and by the time I got home at 6, my voicemail at home was already full. People were putting my mom's address online.

Denton: I get all of the "If you don't like it here why did you give up your citizenship?" Which shows kind of the basic inability to look somebody up on Wikipedia before writing a bloody e-mail.

THR: Oftentimes, you seem to respond quickly to legal notices, like the Lena Dunham thing. You took the stuff off. Is that because you already harvested the attention it was going to get or were you really concerned about the law?

Denton: Why did we take it down? We ran too much of it. I mean I think they were sort of right on it. Sometimes I think people are right.

THR: Over the years, you guys have posted a number of celebrity sex tapes (Eric Dane/Rebecca Gayheart; Fred Durst, etc.) and later entered into settlements, but this one with Hulk Hogan is actually dragging on. Why is that?

Denton: [Hogan has] pursued every single possible avenue, and I don't really understand the logic of ... I don't understand what they want. Do you?

Cook: They'd like us to take it down. It's a very different case, I think. The circumstances around it are very different.

Denton: I find their motivations hard to follow. I don't really understand the relationship between the lawyers and Hogan. I don't understand who is getting what out of this. It must be very expensive for them, and I don't see that they have a particular prospect of some kind of mega-payday, so I don't get it. Sometimes it's hard to deal with seemingly irrational antagonists.

THR: So are you making a stand here?

Denton: We have an absolute right to comment and to discuss and to create a forum for the discussion, and that is the stand that we're making right now.

THR: Let's talk a little about the business. Some people are surprised you haven't sold the company.

Denton: Well, I mean how long do I have to not sell the company? (*Laughs.*) People who know ... potential inquiries never contact us. The last time we were ever contacted was back in 2006. No, 2006 and then there was one discussion in 2008.

THR: Is that because they assume that you're not interested?

Denton: Yeah.

THR: So you've become the Arthur Sulzberger of the digital age.

Denton: Just imagine what it would be like if I was looking over my shoulder all the time and trying to deal with some board.

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Nick Denton Is in Your Head

By Steven Levy

April 16, 2013 |

6:30 am |

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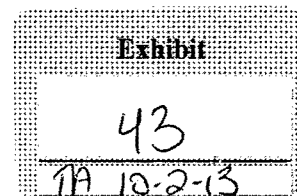


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Wired: When you started Gawker a decade ago, its colloquial tone spread throughout the media world. Was that intentional?

Nick Denton: We were following the early blogs — trying not to talk down to readers but to talk with readers. I didn't realize the extent to which it would set a certain tone for a certain kind of site. Now, of course, all media is more conversational. No one would've thought back then that Jon Stewart would be seen in the same bracket as news anchors. It's a deep cultural change, and our blogs are just part of that.

Wired: These days a lot of sites seem driven less by tone than by search optimization — to place higher on Google.

Denton: That's a betrayal of the original mission of web publishing. We hated television news because it was totally ratings-driven. It was lowest-common-denominator content, where the

intelligence was removed to make things more digestible. You could argue that as web audiences have grown larger and advertisers have demanded scale, the web has dumbbed down — like the mainstream media we so mocked.

Wired: Are there posts you've run over these 10 years that you regret?

Denton: I regret the stories we didn't do — the stories that we knew about and talked about but didn't have all of, so didn't publish. The whole idea of Gawker was to remove the barrier between the thought and the talk — and the page.

Wired: You're good at calling bullshit. What on the web gets your goat the most?

Denton: The biggest bullshit is the hijacking of social media — the effort to encourage interaction whether or not it has any meaning. What did you have for lunch today? Did your cat puke? Those kind of idiotic empty questions absolutely remind me of the worst of local television news.

Wired: How does that trend affect journalism?

Denton: Everything is a case in hyperbole: the first ever, most moving, most dramatic. The idea of harnessing the intelligence of the readership has been lost in the quest for Facebook likes. For many, readers have become synonymous with hateful commenters. It's time for a renewed push to realize some of the original dreams of the web.

See more from the first 20 years of Wired

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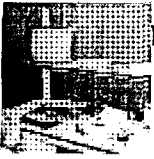
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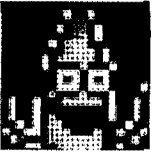
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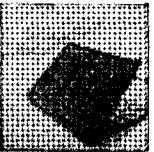
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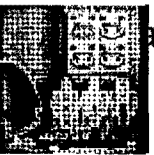
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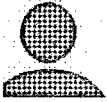


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MustBeSaid · 5 months ago

Says the guy who not so long ago was whining about how much of a mistake it was to allow readers to comment on his blogs. So much for the "vision" of talking *with* readers, not at them.

He did a quick turnaround when he saw that we lowly readers who like to comment actually matter. Too bad his response to that turnaround was to make the worst commenting system ever conceived. Kinja is pure awful.

Also, can you really take credit for being "media" when most of what you do is copy n' paste content from other sites or link to those other sites after a poorly written summary riddled with spelling, factual and grammatical errors?

Isn't that exactly the sort of lowest common denominator junk that Nick is saying is bad?

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borisovca → **MustBeSaid** · 5 months ago

Really? Because I find that GM sites are almost alone (among very large sites, anyway) in having readable comments. I admit I didn't go through the trouble of actually setting up a Kinja account and using it, but the result (i.e. the comments that do get published) is at least half-decent, wouldn't you agree? If you'd like to see an example of a total mess, just look under any online article published by a mainstream publication, especially a regional one (those seem to be just the right size to attract the most idiocy from a broad segment of readers).

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Rebecca Gayheart, "McSteamy" Eric Dane, Get Gawker Settlement Over Threesome Video

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By Edecio Martinez Topics Daily Blotter



Eric Dane and Rebecca Gayheart (AP Photo, file)

NEW YORK (CBS) The legal battle between Gawker and actors Eric Dane and Rebecca Gayheart has been settled after the website agreed to take down the couple's homemade sex tape in return for them not suing the bejeezuz out of the gossip blog.

PICTURES: "McSteamy's" Naked Anatomy Hits Web
PICTURES: Who is Kari Ann Peniche?

The Grey's Anatomy star and his wife had sued Gawker in September for copyright infringement, after their threesome web video leaked to the internet, showing Dane, Gayheart and

former beauty queen Kari Ann Peniche romping around naked and at times barely coherent.

The lawsuit claimed that Gawker "maliciously" distributed an uncensored version of the sex tape and refused to comply with a cease and desist order.

According to Reuters, Gawker and the couple agreed to private mediation, which facilitated a settlement that was filed with the Los Angeles County Superior Court last week. Sources close to the case valued the settlement in the low-six figures.

Dane and Gayheart were originally asking for more than \$1 million in damages.

"Although we are confident that our use of the video on Gawker was protected fair use -- because the posts already had been available to our readers for nearly a year, and because we already had won an important decision from the court striking large parts of the plaintiffs' damages claims - we agreed to remove the posts as part of a global settlement to avoid the burden of further litigation," Gawker chief operating officer Gaby Darbyshire said in a statement obtained by Reuters.

Dane first appeared in ABC's highly rated show, "Grey's Anatomy," in 2005, in which he played Dr. Mark Sloan, also known as McSteamy. His popularity with fans led to a regular role on the show.

Gayheart is a television and film actress known for roles in "CSI: Miami," "Nip/Tuck," and "Vanished." She also had a recurring role in the original Beverly Hills 90210 series.

Peniche is a former beauty queen who won Miss United States Teen, but was stripped of her title after appearing nude in Playboy.

At one point in the video, Gayheart, who seems to be holding the camera, says "I need to lay down too. I am very high." She then joins a naked Peniche, who was lounging on the bed.

Gawker had released a 12-minute edited version of the video in which everyone's lower private parts are blurred over. Other sites have been more revealing.

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PICTURES: "McSteamy's" Naked Anatomy Hits Web

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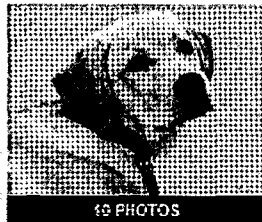
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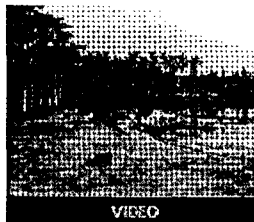
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SEARCH AND DESTROY

Nick Denton's blog empire.

BY BEN MCGRATH

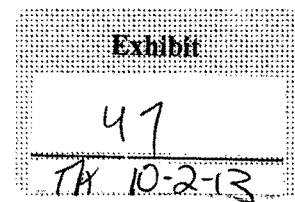
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For years after starting Gawker Media, the online publishing network, in 2002, Nick Denton ran the company out of his apartment, in SoHo. “He said, ‘If you run it out of your house, then no one expects anything,’ ” Denton’s friend Fredrik Carlström, the film producer and adman, told me. “ ‘If you have an office, people *want* stuff. They want cell phones, lunch breaks, beer on Fridays.’ ” Gawker Media was a deliberately fly-by-night operation: incorporated in Budapest, where a small team of programmers still works, and relying on elegantly jaded bloggers who considered themselves outsiders with nothing to lose. Early contributors tell stories about bounced checks, and receiving payment straight from the A.T.M. The arrangement, many assumed, was a convenient hedge against potential libel claims. (Scarcely a week passes without one or more of Denton’s nine sites receiving a cease-and-desist letter.) It



“I don’t have a huge amount of time for noble failure,” Denton says. Photograph by Max Vadukul.

also helped bolster Denton's image as a kind of digital-sweatshop operator—he initially paid his bloggers twenty-four thousand dollars a year—and cultivated a helpful sense among contributors that they were the crew of a rogue “pirate ship,” as Gawker people sometimes say, initiating stealth attacks on the ocean liners in midtown.

Nonetheless, two years ago Denton, who is forty-four, set up a permanent base for the operation in a large loft in Nolita, which he increasingly shows off, as if to demonstrate that his bloggers do not wear pajamas all day long. They now make good money, sometimes in excess of eighty thousand dollars, with 401(k)s, and, soon to come, maternity leave (not that many of them yet need it). Roughly sixty of the company's hundred and twenty staffers work on-site, sitting at three long rows of desks alongside Denton himself—who, in the fashionable mode of modern media executives, declines a corner office. There is also a roof made for hosting parties with bands and Ping-Pong tables.

Denton's receptionist sits beneath a large digital screen known as the Big Board, which lists the ten best-performing posts across the company network; these are determined by the number of new readers—as opposed to returning obsessives—in the previous hour. Denton says that the primary purpose of the Big Board is to encourage competition among his writers. A few months ago, he told the *Times*, “Sometimes one sees writers just standing before it, like early hominids in front of a monolith.” But on the day I first visited the office, in late July, there was no one standing before the board, and, in fact, there was nothing *on* the board. It had gone blank, as a result of a cyber attack on the Gawker server.

“You missed all the excitement,” Denton said, bounding over to greet me. “We were just brought down.” He was dressed in dark jeans, sneakers, and a tight-fitting polo shirt. The office seemed almost eerily quiet and untroubled, a room full of stylish people wearing headphones and instant-messaging one another. The excitement—was it virtual? The Big Board sprang to life. “Are we back up?” Denton asked his chief technology officer, Tom Plunkett, who looked to be the only other middle-aged person on the premises. They were back up, and this is what had caught the attention of Web surfers previously unfamiliar with Denton's oeuvre: “How a 17-Year-Old Craigslist-Swapped an Old Phone for a Porsche,” “How the Internet Beat Up an 11-Year-Old Girl,” “When Video Games Go Wrong,” “Clueless Secretary Prompts Hilarious Office Email Thread,” “11-Year-Old Viral Video Star Placed Under Police Protection After Death Threats,” “Incredible Physics Engine Yields Some Seriously Jaw-Dropping Dirt,” “4Chan's Sad War to Silence Gawker,” “Funny, My License Says ‘WHERE2CHRG,’ ” “Glenn Beck Is Going Blind,” and “10 Superhero Buddy Movies We'd Love to See.”

“So that ‘4Chan's Sad War to Silence Gawker’ was rather unwise,” Denton said, not unhappily, referring to the seventh-ranked post on the board, which was itself a follow-up to the second (“How the Internet Beat Up an 11-Year-Old Girl”) and the fifth (“11-Year-Old Viral

Video Star Placed Under Police Protection After Death Threats”). Gawker, Denton’s flagship title, had described 4Chan.org, an anarchic Web forum frequented by teen-agers, as “the Internet’s scariest hive mind,” and detailed its role in terrorizing and exposing the name and address of a young girl who made a YouTube video. 4Chan’s partisans had retaliated, at first unsuccessfully and then, after Gawker taunted them, with sufficient force to bring Denton’s gang offline. You might say that it marked a peculiar moment in the evolution of Gawker, which was once described to Denton at a dinner party as the place where losers talk about winners—a venue for punching upward, with hive-mind tendencies of its own. Now the site that had once been the class cutup (“Lady Gaga’s Vagina Almost Fooled Us Into Forgetting About Her Penis”) was acting the part of digital hall monitor.

Denton acknowledged “the irony of us lecturing,” as he put it, and asked, “Is there Gawker ethics? I mean, I guess there’s Gawker ethics. It’s a dangerous thing to talk about.”

“Picking on 4Chan was genius,” Foster Kamer, a former Gawker writer who now works for the *Village Voice*, told me. “But you’re scooping the muck from the sewer and holding it up in your hand and saying, ‘Look at this. *Smell* this.’ ”

Denton used to tell people who asked what he did for a living that he was a pornographer. This was true, in a limited way: he publishes *Fleshbot*, a blog that boasts of its devotion to “Pure Filth,” and features a great many explicit anatomical images. But *Fleshbot*, which receives about a million unique domestic visitors each month, is now the worst-performing of the nine titles that Denton puts out, and you won’t find any mention of it on the mastheads of the other eight; it’s a drag on the reputable kind of advertising that Denton now covets. Denton’s best-performing site, *Gizmodo*, reaches nearly six million Americans a month. It’s a punchy consumer guide to gadgets: cell phones, camcorders, turntables. Denton is a kind of gadget fetishist, but you’d be unlikely to hear him telling a stranger that he is a technology watchdog or a trade publisher. That would be boring, and insufficiently mysterious. Also, it could be interpreted as an attempt at a whitewash, which is something that Denton scorns in others with the ferocity of Mencken and Winchell. On his Twitter feed, Denton identifies himself as a “gossip merchant.”

Like all gossip merchants, Denton fancies himself a truth-teller who relishes flouting the conventions of good taste and privilege. He grew up in London, where the Fleet Street tabloid culture is cutthroat, and he shares the Murdochian view of American journalism as effete, earnest, and uncompetitive. “The staples of old yellow journalism are the staples of the new yellow journalism: sex; crime; and, even better, sex crime,” he wrote in a memo to his staff. “Remember how Pulitzer got his start.” To that old game he brings the conviction of a futurist, someone who is engaging with the world as it must soon be, and speaking with the assured perspective of having experienced success in all its antiquated forms. He was a newspaperman.

He has written a book. He taught at Berkeley. But Denton was also an early believer in the transformative nature of the Internet, the kind of guy who, if you'd known him back then, would probably have sent you your first e-mail, and set you up with your first blog. He made his millions in a couple of dot-com-era ventures.

Gawker began as a media-gossip site devoted to "radical Manhattanism," and has since morphed into a world view for the blogging generation. (Ninety-three per cent of its audience is under the age of forty-five.) One of its early recurring features, Gawker Stalker, invited readers to participate in the modern culture of celebrity obsession by submitting personal sightings on the fly ("Ashley Olsen making her way downstairs to the Pharmacy at the 6th ave & waverly duane reade . . . one very large bodyguard in tow"). Among the implied jokes was that New Yorkers, unlike their counterparts in Los Angeles, pride themselves on being unimpressed by fame, to the point of feigning obliviousness. In this way the site could be read as offering a meta commentary on the vapidness of celebrity journalism, without ever explicitly holding itself above it. This was gossip for smart people—*discerning* people, who had seen enough "Saturday Night Live" sketches to know that the difference between a trope and a parody can be a simple matter of tone. Another item was "Where Are They Now? Douchebag Edition." Gawker was never above its genre, but it was certainly *against* things—"asshats," the *Times*, old people—because no intelligent person would deny that the impulse to gossip is fundamentally judgmental.

Through Gawker, Denton wages war on self-regard—or presumed self-regard, as his cast of mind is both abstract and deeply tribal, inclining him to sort nearly all people into one or another category that could be judged full of itself. There is a well-travelled image of Denton on the Web, in which he is wearing a tuxedo and tilting a wineglass to his lips. The image bothers him, because it suggests a level of comfort and formality in his presentation that doesn't accord with his self-image. Denton is tall and rangy, and has a famously large head that sits precariously on a thin neck and narrow shoulders, leaving the impression of an evolved brain that is perhaps a little too conscious of its pedestrian context. He looks perpetually unshaven, with gray stubble complementing his close-cropped, receding hair, which he teases casually forward. He is someone who likes and knows how to have fun—"Nick has a fairly strong hedonic streak," his friend Matt Wells, of the BBC, says—but who doesn't wish to be seen enjoying himself overly. "Hypocrisy is the only modern sin," he likes to say.

A few months ago, at a party, Denton ran into Sheila McClear, a features writer for the *New York Post* whom he had fired from Gawker. (She learned of her termination when a reporter e-mailed her.) "He went out of his way to talk to me," McClear said. "I felt kind of honored. He was, like, 'I have some gossip for you,' and told me some juicy info about one of my colleagues. Then he mentioned that he thought my job was super-easy, compared with blogging. And then the weirdest part was he claimed he knew someone I work with and said,

'You know, it's funny, when you first started, people hated you, and now they love working with you.' "

It was not an atypical exchange. Denton is good but unnerving company. He often prefers to communicate via instant message, where the self, as expressed through a keyboard, is easier to regard, and therefore to keep in check. (His employees have internalized a kind of Morse code for deciphering his moods and intentions: "Hey hey" prefigures good news, for instance, whereas a lone "Hey" means business.) In live conversation, his intelligence is evident, as is his penchant for rational contrarianism. He once announced to his dinner companions that he was in favor of gay marriage (Denton is himself gay) but against abortion, on the ground that, if you've got to draw a line somewhere, it might as well be at conception. He speaks quickly, in a soft, clipped baritone that one former colleague of his likens to "whale sonar." He also bores easily, having been proved right often enough to dismiss most attempts at debate with an insensitivity that is commonly mistaken for meanness. His smiles fade a little too quickly, and can leave you with the nagging suspicion that he views it all as a lark—the high-school-cafeteria metaphor taken too literally. The first time McClear had lunch with Denton, she returned to the office afterward and threw up. She attributed this to food poisoning, but it happened again the second time they had lunch.

This past summer, Gawker published a big "exclusive," titled "Mark Zuckerberg's Age of Privacy Is Over." It featured two dozen paparazzi images of the young Facebook C.E.O., his Mandarin tutor, his sister, and his "comely" girlfriend. They were unremarkable images, and the accompanying text said as much: "His car is nothing you'd blink at on a Bay Area freeway. . . . Zuckerberg's house is modest, even humdrum. . . . He wears nearly identical faded gray t-shirts day after day." Its winking conceit was that Zuckerberg had become a billionaire by encouraging people to share more of their private lives with one another.

"Zuckerberg is the Angelina Jolie of the Internet," Denton explained, in response to a critic who charged him with aspiring to "no higher principles whatsoever," noting with particular disapproval the exposure of the girlfriend. "His lovers, friends, and acquaintances—like those of any other celebrity—are caught up in the vortex," Denton went on. "He has to make a choice; and they have to make a choice. And none of the choices—retreat from the public eye, abandonment of friendship—are palatable."

Denton told me about an afternoon he once spent with Zuckerberg, at a News Corp. retreat in Monterey, where they served on a panel together, performing for Rupert Murdoch. "I actually like the guy," he said. "Apparently, his original idea for Facebook was this *dark* Facebook. Like, the idea was that it was going to be a place for people to bitch about each other, and then it evolved. It was interesting how agnostic he was about which approach to take."

There exists in the collective media mind a caricature of Denton as an evil, soulless, Machiavellian puppeteer: the Wizard of Blogs. It is fed in part by some of the familiar pejoratives associated with tech geekery (Denton as anti-social robot, for example), and also by his own publications, which, in the interest of his vaunted transparency, occasionally turn their pitiless gaze on the boss himself, for comic effect. From reading Gawker, I had learned that Denton is not just a terrible employer but one of "New York's worst," as well as an unapologetic liar and the kind of person who leaves his own party early in search of a better one. The caricature was not much diminished by speaking to people about their experiences with the man.

"He's not, like, a sociopath, but you kind of have to watch what you're doing around him," Ricky Van Veen, the C.E.O. of the Web site College Humor, told me.

"The villain public persona is not a hundred-per-cent true," A. J. Daulerio, the editor-in-chief of Deadspin, Gawker Media's sports blog, said. "It's probably eighty-per-cent true."

"He has fun when people say horrible things about him," the blog guru Anil Dash said.

"I can't lie to make him worse than he is, but he's pretty bad," Ian Spiegelman, a former Gawker writer, said.

"Other people's emotions are alien to him," Choire Sicha, another Gawker alumnus, said.

"He's got a strong carapace of not really thinking other people's opinions are that important," John Gapper, a columnist at the *Financial Times*, said.

"He's right," Matt Welch, the editor of the libertarian magazine *Reason*, said. "He's never right about me, of course. But people are lazy and not very good."

"He almost sees people as Legos moving around," Sheila McClear said.

"He's not a fully human person," Spiegelman said.

"I mean, maybe he thinks he's the one truly *advanced* human," Anna Holmes, the founding editor of Jezebel, a.k.a. Girlie Gawker, said.

"Does he have parents?" Daulerio asked.

"I always imagine that he came fully formed out of British finishing school," Holmes said.

"Part of getting to know Nick is accepting that there are things you'll never know," Jeff Jarvis, the new-media critic and author, said.

"What can you do with a person like that?" Spiegelman said. "He's a character out of Dr. Seuss, frankly."

"Nick is a bit of a sphinx on purpose," Joel Johnson, the longest-serving Gizmodo writer, said. "He has some of the attributes of the dork who wraps his Asperger's around him like a cloak."

"There's no point in writing about Nick if you can't get to the fundamental problem of his nihilism," Moe Tkacik, who has worked at both Gawker and Jezebel, said.

"He likes pretty things," Daulerio said.

"He takes cancer very seriously," Sicha said.

"He wants to be Warhol," McClear said.

"He's always wanted to be a magazine editor," Welch said. "He'll deny it to his grave."

"What he really wants is to be the editor of the *New York Times*," Spiegelman said.

None of these people really dislike Denton, and some of them are quite fond of him. With old friends, particularly those outside the blogging world, he is "curiously loyal," as Gapper says, even if he is also "ruthless, actually, in lots of ways." Several people mentioned that they'd sought Denton's approval before agreeing to talk about him. "Be interesting," he invariably responded. Denton once chided his boyhood friend David Galbraith for marvelling to a reporter that at the age of thirteen Nick was already reading *The Economist*. Galbraith's crime was to come off sounding "too suburban." Denton preferred that I not talk to his sister, Rebecca, because "she's going to give you empty nothings," as he put it. He also seems uncharacteristically protective of her privacy. Rebecca is three years younger than Nick, and lives in London. "She looks after her kids and writes children's books," he said. She used to call him Tricky Nicky, or so he says.

Denton grew up in Hampstead, in a milieu that he described to me as "bourgeois, arch-Jewish, metropolitan, forward-looking, international." His father, Geoffrey, a product of working-class Yorkshire, is an economist who served in the nineteen-eighties and early nineties as the director of Wilton Park, a conference series not unlike the Aspen Institute. He writes serious books with serious titles: "A New Transatlantic Partnership: A European Perspective on the Transatlantic Partnership for Trade, Monetary, and Security Relations."

Denton's mother, Marika, died of cancer the year before he moved to New York and started Gawker. She was a Hungarian Jew, and a psychotherapist, an irony not lost on those who have known Denton a long time and have never thought of him as being especially in touch with his feelings. Last year, in a rare instance of familial disclosure, Denton posted to his Facebook wall a newspaper clipping about her. It was an account of a visit she made to the United States as a university student, several years after fleeing her home country, in the revolution of 1956 ("Hungarian Girl Recalls Life Under Communists"). Beneath it, he added, "For a refugee, she manages to be quite remarkably patronizing—both about the 'clean-living' families of Pennsylvania that she met and the 'emotional' American press. She preferred the 'just the facts' approach of the Brits: facts that merely get in the way of modern Fleet Street." Of his parents, he now says, "They were both probably journalistic snobs."

Denton attended the University College School, around the corner, and then, as his father had, Oxford, where he studied Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (known as P.P.E.), and became the editor of *Isis*, the university magazine, which he "glossified," in honor of the now

defunct British fashion monthly *The Face*. “My background is economics and maths,” he said. “I think one of the reasons I studied humanities at all, or even went into journalism, is because, like, science and maths wasn’t cool in England when I was growing up. No one ever talked to the engineering students at Oxford.”

His is a variation on the classic straddler’s biography: he is neither a true outsider nor fully comfortable within the establishment. It was at Oxford that Denton had his first encounters with “the antics of the upper class,” as he put it. “Sherry parties, Christ Church—it was a slight shock for me,” he said. “I realized, Oh, there’s this whole other *élite*.”

Oxford, like England as a whole, was undergoing a cultural transition in the aftermath of punk and New Wave. Denton understood himself to be one of “Thatcher’s children,” on the cusp of a new generation. “People in the year above thought we were careerists on the make,” he said. “At that point in England, it was only just becoming respectable or accepted, the idea of being ambitious.” He spent three weeks living and working on a kibbutz, in Israel, and still bears a scar on his left index finger from an accident he had with a metal brush machine while he was making furniture. But most of his extracurricular energies were more deliberately professional, like internships at *Tatler* and the *Evening Standard*.

Not all of Denton’s classmates were as eager to embrace materialism. “I certainly never regarded myself as part of a Thatcherite generation,” Tom Baldwin, a fellow P.P.E. student who is now the chief reporter for the *London Times*, told me. Baldwin thought of Denton as someone who was “quite keen to get out of his context,” and remembers him as “the slightly smug figure in the library, who was too organized,” with “three different colors of pens in a row, and his papers neatly aligned.” He and his friends referred to Denton by the nickname Floods. “He always wore very tight jeans about three inches too short, so the joke was that he was always expecting a flood,” Baldwin said. “In that sheeplike way, we slagged him behind his back.”

Denton had entered Oxford with notions of going into politics. During one summer break, he worked at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, in Washington, D.C. “I remember meeting somebody who said, ‘Come along to this party. There’ll be good networking opportunities,’ ” he told me. “This idea that you would actually socialize with people because it would help you was totally alien. I guess it must have been appealing at some level. I could understand the purpose of it. I didn’t like being quite so *obvious* about it.” He was beginning to realize that he might not be “politically viable,” as he now says. “I didn’t know whether I could get the perfect family with three kids.” So he imagined himself, for a while, becoming a political operator, a “behind-the-scenes guy.” Despite this, Denton has never voted. In 1997, the only election year of his professional life that he was living in England, he went to the wrong polling station, and was turned away. He says that he meant to vote for Blair, but that in the most recent election he’d have voted Tory.

After graduation, Denton set off to observe the transition from Communism in Eastern Europe, stringing for the *Daily Telegraph* in Romania, and later catching on with the *Financial Times* in Hungary, thereby pleasing his parents. (“I think my dad was a little bit embarrassed by me working for the *Telegraph*.”) Budapest, though a step up from Bucharest, was no Moscow or Prague—“It wasn’t an exuberant situation,” as Matt Welch, another Budapest journalist, recalls, citing rampant xenophobia and anti-Semitism—and Denton found the experience doubly dispiriting. The politics “gave one a very cynical view of world events,” he said. “You have these beautiful revolutions, and very quickly the old political, pre-Communist dividing lines reasserted themselves: ethnic.”

He was also having doubts about the efficacy of journalism. “I remember getting a letter from the foreign editor at the *F.T.*, saying that he’d done a Nexis search—he’d obviously had some *assistant* do a Nexis search—and my story count had slipped from the previous year,” Denton said. “And I think that was the only numbers-based accountability that I ever had. And then, occasionally, you’d do a story that would generate letters! I had one which had three letters.” This was, tellingly, at the more down-market *Telegraph*: a piece about a wave of childless Western couples arriving to adopt Romanian orphans. It was a revelation, in retrospect: “Oh, wow, there are actually some topics that people *do* care about. But at that point I was way too academic to respond. I would look down on them for being preoccupied by something quite so trivial as writing about children and meaning in their marriage.”

Meanwhile, at the *F.T.*, where Denton acquired the nickname Dick Nenton for his overweening ambition and aggressive networking: “I’d be surprised that these stories about the wavering of the Smallholders Party in Jozsef Antall’s coalition—that nobody really cared about that. I was indignant. Eventually, it just wears you down. You do stories that people don’t react to. At some point, I guess you can persist, and maybe you write for *newsletters*, or maybe you just don’t do very well in your career. Or you can accommodate.”

Denton requested a transfer to London, to cover the banking sector, and noticed that most financial reporters really wanted to be foreign correspondents. He was, by his own reckoning, “a good scoop-getter who struggled with features.” He enjoyed the gamesmanship involved in playing sources against one another. In 1996, Denton and John Gapper, his editor, co-authored a book, “All That Glitters,” which an early Gawker bio of Denton describes as “the definitive account of the collapse of Barings Bank.” But it was a “corrupt beat,” as Denton remembers it, voicing the truism about financial reporters secretly wishing they could be the people they were writing about. Denton wasn’t immune to the temptation of becoming a player, though by then he’d come to realize that banking was no longer the source of the real action. Silicon Valley was, so he persuaded the paper to send him to San Francisco to write about emerging

technology. "It was explicit that he was going to cover Silicon Valley just long enough until he could join it," Welch said.

"The last piece I did for the *F.T.* was a profile of a company called LinkExchange," Denton said. "It was a bunch of Harvard kids who'd done this startup in much the same way as Zuckerberg and his buddies. And they also had this monthly party called DrinkExchange. The party was very quickly very popular." From this, he got his idea for First Tuesday, a branded networking event that he founded in 1998 with some friends from London to bring nerds and investors together for a shared purpose. Attendees of First Tuesday's monthly gatherings wore color-coded lapel pins: red for dot-commers, green for venture capitalists, yellow for lurkers merely basking in the exchange of so much jargon. It caught the Nasdaq bubble just right, and expanded rapidly from England to dozens of countries. "It was accidental," Denton said. "It made me very cynical of wisdom." It also made him millions of dollars.

Gawker is one of those things which, like neighborhoods, are never as good as when you first discovered them. What it is selling, essentially, is a pose of knowing, cool detachment. Very little of what Denton publishes qualifies as gossip in the traditional sense. It's a sensibility. As the audience for that sensibility grows, and as the individual voices evolve to suit the expanded reach, the early movers and élites naturally feel some sting of betrayal. But Denton is, above all, a realist, with little patience for nostalgia. He's the hipster who turns, unapologetically, into a developer.

In the spring semester of 2002, Denton helped an old source from Budapest teach a class at the Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. The course, which Denton now describes as "a great example of contrasting journalistic approaches," was called "Freedom of the Press: Political Change and the Media in Hungary." Denton was at the time the chairman of a company called Moreover Technologies, an early news aggregator. His co-teacher, Peter Molnar, was a former member of the Hungarian parliament who had drifted away from politics and into academia as the progressive youth movement that he had founded got co-opted by populist right-wing elements. "I was brought in to provide a bit of 'Here's how it works in the real world,' " Denton said. "So he would talk in class about the plight of the Gypsy minority, and then I would say, 'Yeah, except no one's going to actually commission that piece, so, to the extent that you actually want to make a career out of journalism, which I assume you do, you'd do well to find topics of more interest to your audience.' " The course involved a weeklong field trip to Hungary. Molnar wanted the students to investigate human-rights issues relating to free speech; Denton encouraged travel-section features about spa culture. "He got quite acrimonious," Denton said.

The more Denton recalled his Berkeley experience, the more it seemed that he viewed Molnar's academic piety as an extension of his ultimate failure to gain political traction in

Hungary—responsibility as a cover for weakness, and a reluctance to grapple with humans' true appetites and desires. "People who are as inflexibly idealistic as that never pull it off," Denton said. "They never succeed. And you don't need to indoctrinate a whole other generation of people to lead frustrated lives." As for Molnar, "I find him hugely annoying," Denton said. "I don't see what the point is unless you succeed at what you're doing. I don't have a huge amount of time for noble failure."

For Molnar, who is now a senior research fellow at Central European University, the experience still smarts, eight years on. His interpretation of the root of the conflict differs from Denton's. His politics did not suffer from excessive idealism; they were undermined by the "false realism" of cynics who refuse to draw a meaningful line in the sand. "I don't want to say negative things about Nick," Molnar said, sounding less frustrated than nervous. "I don't like to say negative things about people in general."

Midway through the term, Denton packed up his belongings, rented a Ryder truck, and drove across the country. He was successful but also unhappy, if not leading a frustrated life, exactly, then surrounded by people who frustrated him: venture capitalists, hikers, moral relativists. His road-trip companion was a distinctly un-Molnarian type: Christian Bailey, whom Denton, in retelling this portion of his biography, now identifies as a "charming shyster." Bailey, as Denton likes to point out, went on to start a company, the Lincoln Group, that used millions of Pentagon dollars to plant American propaganda in Iraqi media outlets.

Denton arrived in Manhattan with a list of important people he planned to meet, and a personal mission to unsettle many of them. That summer, he abandoned the science-fiction novel he'd been working on and started what became Gawker Media. He saw in the traditional blog format—links with commentary, presented in reverse chronological order—the potential for a leaner, more accountable publishing model aimed at niche audiences, or verticals, that could be bundled together when selling advertising. Just how lean? He paid Elizabeth Spiers, the original Gawker writer, two thousand dollars a month, on the assumption that posting twelve short items a day, mostly in response to things she'd read in the *Times* or gleaned from fashion-magazine sources, was a part-time commitment. When Spiers complained, after several months, that the gig was taking over her life, he told her to relax on weekends and pro-rated her pay downward. Later, as the brand grew more established, and as the number of writers in his stable increased, he settled on a new payment scheme: twelve dollars a post, with a pool of bonus money paid out according to the number of page views generated.

Paying bonuses for traffic meant not only keeping statistics about what readers did and didn't like but sharing that information with writers—a supreme journalistic taboo, as it could easily lead to pandering. Pandering was precisely Denton's aim, and he took it one step further when he started publishing his traffic data alongside the stories themselves. It almost felt like a

sociological experiment designed to prove the obvious: that readers are herd animals, that heat begets heat. A photograph of an unidentifiable mammalian carcass on a beach, cleverly dubbed the Montauk Monster, is viewed two million times: go figure. "I think people are sort of waking up to it now, how probably the biggest change in Internet media isn't the immediacy of it, or the low costs, but the measurability," Denton told me. "Which is actually terrifying if you're a traditional journalist, and used to pushing what people ought to like, or what you *think* they ought to like."

He is fond of suggesting that newspapers would be shamed into shuttering their Albany bureaus if they acknowledged the full breadth of their readers' habits, beyond the "ten most e-mailed" lists. No "traditional" journalistic outfit has yet copied this particular innovation of Denton's, although Jacob Weisberg, the editor of the Slate Group and a wary admirer, admitted to me that he has lately "sort of wanted to," adding that "people are afraid it has implications that will be followed."

In Denton's case, the implications were outright expectations. He expanded the network outward from Gizmodo and Gawker and then Fleshbot, in 2003, to include Wonkette, a political blog whose portrayal of Washington, D.C., often made it sound more like Las Vegas or Reno, and Defamer, a withering Hollywood digest, along with Oddjack, "a sneak peek at the future of gambling." By 2005, he was earning a small profit on a few of the sites, but he was also beginning to conclude that nano-publishing, as his business plan was sometimes called, doesn't really work. At the outset, he had assumed that, in order to be viable, each individual site would need to achieve a million monthly page views; that threshold, he believes, is now twenty million. He has since sold Wonkette, shut down Oddjack, and folded Defamer into Gawker proper, as a kind of Letter from Los Angeles.

The network's nine sites, in order of over-all domestic readership, are Gizmodo, Gawker, Lifehacker (a sort of Idiot's Guide to the digital world), Kotaku (video games), Deadspin, Jezebel, io9 (science fiction), Jalopnik (cars), and Fleshbot. Together, they generate more than four hundred and fifty million page views a month, from roughly seventeen million unique visitors, which, as Denton boasted a few weeks ago, is better than the Web sites of the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*. Neither paper is in the porn or the science-fiction business, of course, and Gawker itself has an audience about equivalent to that of PBS.org. The "geek" sites, as Gizmodo, Lifehacker, Kotaku, io9, and Jalopnik are known internally, bring in twice the traffic of the "gossip" sites, suggesting that British-inflected class angst may not be a long-term-growth model.

"To what extent is it good or damaging?" Peter Molnar mused recently of Denton's publishing career. "Of course, he's free to do it. Only in a dictatorship would you consider stopping him."

Denton sometimes encounters people who are unhappy with what he is doing. “This publishing woman,” he began. “There was this comment saying that she looked as wrinkled as Yoda. And I was having dinner at the Waverly, which I don’t usually do, but she came over and started berating me, saying, do I take responsibility?” He did not evince any wounding; he has acquired the skin, he once said, of a rhinoceros. “Don’t you think most people more or less just accept this as part of the scenery now?” The example he gave is instructive on several levels. First, there’s the lack of a name, which is not a matter of discretion—Denton opposes discretion on principle—but a function of his and Gawker’s essential tribalism. (The woman was merely a stand-in for the decline of old-line publishing.) Also, the emphasis on physical appearance: Denton is a staunch believer in the primacy of vanity, and holds that calling someone ugly will always trump calling him incompetent or a thief. (His own first Internet humbling occurred in 2003, when he read a blog post about the size of his head: “I was cut to my core.”) Next, notice that the apparent offense resulted from “a comment,” something posted in reaction to a story he published, not the paid labor. Gawker’s writers will hint at your incompetent thievery with parenthetical wit, or by employing an exclamation point or a question mark where a period would suffice, but the real insults come from an extremely dedicated clique of anonymous readers, after the fact.

And then there’s the casual referencing of, and simultaneous distancing from, “the Waverly,” as in the Waverly Inn, a restaurant in Greenwich Village that you would know, from reading Gawker, to be exceedingly difficult to score a reservation at. We were having this conversation at Balthazar, another sceney downtown restaurant, which serves as Denton’s second office—a place to be seen, as Michael’s, in midtown, and Elaine’s, on the Upper East Side, have been for earlier generations of media heavies. One of the owners of the Waverly is Graydon Carter, the editor of *Vanity Fair* and a founding editor of *Spy*, the satirical monthly that, along with England’s cheeky *Private Eye*, served as Gawker’s tonal blueprint. Carter is a long-standing personal fixation of Denton’s, as are Kurt Andersen, the co-founder of *Spy*, and Tina Brown, the former editor of both this magazine and *Vanity Fair*. “This needs to be the site that Kurt Andersen, former editor of *Spy* and *New York*, checks several times a day,” Denton wrote in his founding manifesto. “As one observer has joked, we might as well call the publication this: ‘Dear Kurt.’ ”

Denton went to elaborate lengths to get the attention of these people, buying Google keyword ads in their names, in the expectation that they would “ego surf,” and, of course, provoking them with mocking coverage. Brown, who now edits *The Daily Beast*, a Gawker rival of sorts, professes not to pay him much attention. Carter once requested that a video made by his son be removed from the site. (Denton, who likes to be perceived as unswayable, briefly de-listed the post from search engines.) Denton occasionally has drinks with Andersen, who is

now a novelist and radio host, and once personally invited him to become a Gawker commenter—under his own name. Denton's initial vision was of a curated conversation among élites. "For a guy who is so hard-bitten and cynical, there is something kind of naïve and clueless that's charming about that," Andersen told me. "In terms of the *Spy* / Gawker connection, I think of when I was writing a lot about architecture. Postmodernism was the flavor of the decade, and I remember talking to Robert Venturi, who was kind of the godfather of postmodernism, and he hated practically everything called postmodern architecture and was uneasy with all that he had wrought. I feel some understanding of that position."

At least Andersen admits to reading it. For a long time, well after Denton's venture had entered the mainstream, it was routine within the so-called established media to preface a discussion of something amusing on Gawker with a contorted apology or an implausible disclaimer about having somehow happened upon it indirectly. (Recently, Chris Anderson, the editor of *Wired*, told an interviewer, "I'm not proud of this, but I do check Gawker every morning.") This was not simple pretension. The same dissembling does not occur with the *New York Post* and its gossip column Page Six. The difference was that Gawker's implicit mission seemed to be to destroy the established media, both by cannibalizing its content and by obliterating the reputation of everyone who produced it, without any apparent conviction about what ought to follow. There was something apocalyptic in its futurism and something intimidating in its certainty. The guilt in this guilty pleasure came from suspecting, in part, that you were clicking your way to your own obsolescence.

Yet Gawker has become, as much as the *Times* and the Drudge Report, a portal to the world of information that I consume, and a filter for interpreting it—an endlessly updating book of urban manners. Almost as often as not, I now follow up my semi-regular scan of ESPN.com with a visit to Deadspin, for counterprogramming: the news and the dish. Which is not to say that I approached this subject without some apprehension. Seeing one's own name, or the name of a relative, a friend, or a colleague, turn up on a Gawker Media site, as I have done, is an instant stress test. The heartbeat quickens and the stomach knots. The specific context of such an appearance seldom matters, because the assumed larger context—of chronicling foolishness and stoking outrage—is so ingrained and powerful. "I saw you mentioned on Gawker"—this is, at best, an underhanded compliment.

"It's almost more feedback than humans are designed for," Denton said of the effect his sites' commenters can have on writers. "It can actually burn out your circuits. And we're extremely sensitive to what people think of us. So you take those monkey instincts and you plug in all these wires: you're going to end up with some creatures, like in an animal laboratory." Gawker's form of anti-establishmentarianism is not the sort that frees the animals from the lab

in the dark of night. It sets up a concession stand outside and invites everyone to come and stare.

Denton is often said to believe that his blogs' targets secretly like the attention, given the evidence of subjects who have settled into masochistic cycles of lashing out, further provoking the provokers. "I actually think Gawker's fairer now than it used to be," he told me, and quickly added that this had not come about through "any great moral reexamination" but because the numbers are inherently self-correcting. There aren't enough potential readers in Manhattan to justify radical Manhattanism as a premise. The print media that he set out to embarrass have, for his purposes, already succumbed to the point of irrelevance. "I always refer to Zuckerberg and Zuckerman," he said, introducing a generational parable, involving the Facebook C.E.O. and Mortimer Zuckerman, the real-estate mogul and owner of the *Daily News*. "We did a story about Zuckerman, and how he has a kid who had a surrogate mother. It was a good story, about as juicy a story about Zuckerman as you're ever likely to get." The item in question, titled "Mort Zuckerman Is Proud New Daddy, But Who's the Mother?," was a model of the form, striking a disingenuous note at the top ("Mazel tov to *Daily News* publisher Mort Zuckerman who at the spry age of 71 welcomed his second daughter") and then artfully undermining that good will with subtle insinuations about Zuckerman's "bachelor reputation" and his "'dating' life," without introducing any new information. That challenge was left to the readers. "It died," Denton sighed. "Old white man." It has been viewed about six thousand times, and those readers who bothered to comment appeared interested—typically, and to Denton's ongoing dismay—only in the pursuit of cleverness, not actionable intelligence. ("He just did it for the stem cells," e.g.) The Zuckerberg paparazzi stunt, by contrast, has received three hundred thousand views.

What traditional journalists ought to fear, Denton suggested, is not Gawker but so-called content farms, like Demand Media, which dispense altogether with professional storytelling, in favor of search-engine-optimized information packaging. Even Denton's own writers live in constant dread of diminishing word counts and the inevitable dumbing down of the culture. (One of them confessed his fear to me about "the robots" taking over.) "How things show up on Twitter, these days, matters more than the full text," Denton told me. "There's no room for nuance in headlines anymore." He offered a couple of suggestions for this account: "Ten Things You Need to Know about Nick Denton," "Why Nick Denton Is an Asshole."

"I think of us as being a little like the friendly barbarians," Denton said. "You know, like, when the Roman Empire fell, there were the tribes that had come out of Mongolia, and each one that came was fleeing some other yet more barbarian group of barbarians. We're the barbarians who can actually—probably—be hired to defend your gates."

On the day I first visited the Gawker Media headquarters, Denton hadn't yet eaten lunch, so we stepped outside to a nearby sandwich shop. Standing in line to pay, he was spotted by an old acquaintance from his San Francisco days. "Do you know Jai Singh?" Denton asked me, introducing us. "Jai just started at the Huffington Post." Then, turning to Singh, he said, "I heard Arianna's moving to New York—she's got a house on Tenth Street. It's been kept hush-hush, discreet."

Singh seemed to flinch. "Well, she hasn't really moved, uh, so—"

"Does she have a boyfriend here?"

"Oh, boy, I don't know." Singh looked at me. "Oh, my God, Nick has already got his reportorial hat on, or what?"

Denton made no attempt to set Singh at ease. "You guys still have, like, a no-link policy to us, yeah?"

Singh stammered somewhat. "I really don't know," he said.

"We were actually very friendly," Denton explained, referring to Huffington. "We threw each other parties." In 2005, when Huffington launched her site, which has, arguably, become Denton's biggest competitor, Denton played the role of New York's new-media ambassador, hosting a welcome celebration for her at his apartment. Two months later, she returned the favor, inviting him out to Los Angeles. "And then," he continued, "after Tim Russert died, and we started doing stories about why she had been so hostile to him, which was all to do with the *Vanity Fair* piece"—a critical feature about Huffington and her ex-husband, written long ago by Russert's wife—"and her having hired a private investigator to go after his wife . . ." (Huffington has always denied this, and says that she does not have a house on Tenth Street.)

"I didn't know this, that you guys had a relationship and a falling out," Singh said.

"It's not personal," Denton said, and brought up his former editorial director Gabriel Snyder, whom Denton fired last February, surprising most staffers and industry insiders, in another move that was not personal. "I think Gabriel once called her up about some story, and she said, 'Gabriel'—I always do a Hungarian accent instead of a Greek accent, but she said, 'Gabriel, why do you work at that place? I like you.' "

Two days after the Singh encounter, Gawker published a story, "Arianna Huffington Is Moving to New York," which included links to seven previous Huffington-tweaking items. "We asked Huffington for comment Wednesday and have yet to hear back," it said. "In the meantime: Welcome back to New York, Arianna." The post has earned five thousand views, making it, by Denton's standards, a failure on the level of the fishing expedition surrounding Mort Zuckerman's child. ("File this one under who the fuck cares," one commenter wrote.) "I've created this monster," Denton once told me. "Neither the stories that I like nor the writers that I like are rewarded." It's not personal, except when it is. The next time I saw Denton, he

mentioned to me that Jai Singh had since friended him on Facebook. (Singh says that Denton initiated the approach.) "I thought it was bold of him," Denton said, flashing a grin.

Denton's greatest publishing feat, objectively speaking, occurred about six months ago. "It was the ultimate story," he told me. "There is no comparison. 'Obama Caught on Camera with Tranny,' maybe. Or 'Global Nuclear War.'" The story, which appeared on Gizmodo, was about a guy who lost his cell phone in a bar. The phone in question was a prototype of the iPhone 4G, which had not yet been released, and the guy was a software engineer at Apple who was out celebrating his twenty-seventh birthday. Another bar patron found the phone, and, instead of returning it to Apple, attempted to recover his beer money by selling it to the media. Denton, ever eager to scandalize the J-school puritans by indulging in checkbook journalism, offered five grand—and was rewarded with roughly twenty million page views. (His rule on "bounties," as he calls them, is that you should be willing to pay ten dollars for every thousand new visitors you hope to attract.) Thirteen million of these came from the initial post, "This Is Apple's Next iPhone," which was straightforward gadget porn, featuring photographs of the device from every possible angle. A few million more views were captured when Gizmodo posted a gloating play-by-play account of the transaction, in the process outing the unlucky birthday boy ("Those beers may have turned out to be the bitterest of his life").

"It was like snatching defeat from the jaws of victory," Joel Johnson told me. "In the morning, we're outlaw journalists, taking on Apple, and by the afternoon we were the assholes who made fun of a helpless engineer. It does really typify what it's like working for Nick. You're always going to push it a little too far."

From Apple's perspective, Gizmodo had gone too far the minute it offered money for the phone, which Apple viewed as a form of dealing in stolen goods. Jason Chen, the author of the original post, returned home from dinner in Fremont, California, a few days later, to find that his door had been busted open. The police were inside, taking possession of his computers.

Gawker Media objected to the police raid, arguing that Chen's home deserved protection as a kind of satellite newsroom under the California shield law protecting journalists. Denton seemed to relish the opportunity to recast the debate over whether the phone was illegally obtained in terms of, essentially, snobbery. "Are bloggers journalists?" he wrote the Associated Press. "I guess we'll find out." No charges have yet been filed.

At the time of his public posturing, however, Denton was conceiving a comprehensive redesign of his blog network that signalled his steady march toward mainstream respectability. (Gawker recently published a series of Fall Previews of books, music, television, and movies, such as you might find in your weekend Arts & Leisure section.) The redesign, he told me, would "probably be seen as the end of the blog." It was, in a way, the inevitable result of his original insight about transparency and objectivity. The problem with publishing some stories

that are two thousand times as important as others is that it no longer makes sense to display them in reverse chronological order. His sites will soon abandon the scrolling layout in favor of a more conventional front page that is dominated by images and headlines. The only difference is that his story placement will be determined by algorithm—and that his standards are defiantly low-brow. Two weeks ago, Jezebel published the sex diary, written in the form of a thesis, of a recent Duke graduate. And last week Denton e-mailed to alert me to a coming scoop on Deadspin that I wouldn't want to miss. It was about the quarterback Brett Favre's penis.

"If you're running *Spy*, at some point you have a choice: do you want to be the cute, unprofitable, ultimately doomed niche publication, or do you want to create something that's viable and lasting?" Denton said. "I didn't like the story of *Spy*. They failed."

In the interest of corporate success, the company even held a retreat, shortly after the iPhone fallout. "You know, it's semantics," Gaby Darbyshire, Gawker's chief operating officer, said, sounding defensive. "We had a meeting for a bunch of senior editors." The meeting stretched into the weekend: Friday at Norwood, a private social club on Fourteenth Street, and Saturday in Hastings-on-Hudson, where the gang of onetime pirates and outlaws posed for pictures on a jungle gym. ("Remember, you're not selling out," Jonah Peretti, a co-founder of the Huffington Post, told Denton. "You're blowing up. Think in terms of hip-hop, not indie rock.")

"It could have been a Timex-watch convention," A. J. Daulerio said. Daulerio led a panel whose title was "How We Relate to Nick." It involved him asking questions of Denton, on a stage. The subtext, he said, was: "How do we not turn into Gabriel Snyder?"

Denton recently split up with his boyfriend of four years, an African-American conceptual artist who made a show of hating bloggers and blogging, and who was, in turn, generally beloved by Denton's friends and colleagues. The mere existence of the relationship, and Denton's evident vulnerability in the wake of its demise, served to humanize the Gawker chief, whose public presentation had allowed no room for romanticism. "He didn't understand my frenzy when I would get excited about a scoop," Denton told me. "He'd say, 'I can't stand you like this.' You know how journalists, or *former* journalists, turn into monsters when confronted by a big story? The adrenaline surges through your body, and you're gleeful and unconcerned about civilian casualties, like a warrior going into battle." A couple of Denton's friends speculated to me that the breakup had been a contributing factor in his decision to cooperate with this profile, in the interest of projecting emotional availability. A certain person advised me, off the record, not to name the ex, out of respect for his parents, who may not be entirely comfortable with the possibility of their son's being "caught up in the vortex," as it were, of Internet celebrity. When I assented to this advice, and said, "Who cares what his name is, anyway?," meaning *New Yorker* readers, this person looked hurt, and said, "That's mean."

Not long ago, Denton, over dinner with some of his editors, mentioned that we were in the midst of a “funny time” in the media business. “There are no titans,” he said, and some of them wondered if he was dreaming aloud. Denton devours biographies and autobiographies and articles about figures like Murdoch, Zuckerman, Huffington, and Barry Diller, and has styled himself, at times, a twenty-first-century saloniste, opening his SoHo loft, which is directly beneath Harvey Weinstein’s old home, to carefully selected crowds of people, as if trying to crack the perfect social formula. He excels, in his awkward and restless way, at glad-handing. “I’ve never really understood people who climb socially by sucking up,” Denton told me. “It seems like the least efficient way to climb, and also the most psychologically debilitating.”

Yet Denton doesn’t really seem to want the lives of his predecessors. He shops at the Container Store and prefers couch-surfing to staying in hotels. He publishes a popular blog about cars, but doesn’t own one; he rides a bike instead. Denton likes chess and moderately priced sushi. He shuns the Hamptons, and is dismissive of the Upper East Side charity scene. (He sees charity as little more than a ritualistic bequeathing of good will in the interest of preserving the existing power structure.) His loft is sparsely decorated with framed images of outer space and dystopic cityscapes, and he keeps a red box full of press clips and other dead-tree mementos stowed away in a file cabinet, as though unsure whether they amount to any real validation by his New Age standards. Last week, he gave a revealing quote to the *Times* about an apparent generational divide in reaction to “The Social Network,” the movie about Facebook. Referring to moguls, he said, “What may be different is that in the past those people have been far more colorful and charismatic. They have embraced that side of themselves. But for people like Zuckerberg it’s more like Asperger’s, that they lack something essential and don’t have an instinctual understanding of human behavior. That’s why he ended up creating algorithms to explain it.”

Denton also is not nearly so rich as his forebears, which is one reason that people have long speculated about whether he will cash out of Gawker Media, assuming that a nine-figure payday would serve as the ultimate rejoinder to his doubters and condescenders. As it is, given the thin margins of online publishing, Denton’s cultural impact greatly exceeds his revenues, which are somewhere on the order of fifteen to twenty million dollars a year. His ownership stake in the company is around sixty to seventy per cent, and every so often he attempts to consolidate by buying back shares that he has given to current and former employees. The rate he offered earlier this year would have put the company’s value at only thirty million dollars, or a fraction of what most analysts have estimated. (“Owning Gawker stock is like having an undiversified portfolio,” one shareholder said, explaining the potential appeal of such a lowball offer.)

It’s a sustainable business, predicated, in part, on the endlessly renewable resource of young misfits seeking the exposure and excitement afforded by “reporting live, from the center of the

universe,” as an old Gawker tag line put it. But can it be *big* business? “Maybe this is like Craigslist, where billions of dollars of value is destroyed, and only a tiny fraction of that is actually captured by the new winners,” Denton said, giving me what he called the “pessimistic view” of new media. “Or you could look at it like this is the early days of cable. You know, cable took a long time to get off the ground. But then, once you’ve got the franchise established, if you own MTV or the sci-fi channel, at some point it really starts to kick in.”

“The only stunt left would be saying he wants to sell and not doing it,” Anil Dash said.

“Who has more freedom in the media world than Nick Denton?” ♦

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