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A wooden face in turbulent times

Imagine my surprise upon reading that the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, is proposing restrictions on all photography in public spaces.

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Photography/>

I had already written about such paranoia, some years ago in 2001, while visiting London, angry teachers shouted at me as I took pictures of a teen age school outing in front of the Tate Gallery. You might want to read what I wrote at that moment in [editorial no.32 \(day 9\)](#), and how the direction of present policies are nothing but a continuation of those same attitudes that were left basically unchallenged at the time.

Then more recently I stumbled upon another very disturbing event, this one in Egypt as reported by "Wired News", where an Egyptian blogger got 4 years in prison. Abdel Kareem Nabil, a 22-year-old former student at Egypt's Al-Azhar University, had been a vocal secularist and sharp critic of conservative Muslims in his blog. He often lashed out at Al-Azhar - the most prominent religious center in Sunni Islam - calling it "the university of terrorism" and accusing it of encouraging extremism.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based media rights group, said Internet writers and editors are the fastest growing segment of imprisoned journalists, with 49 behind bars as of December 2006.

As I write this, I get news from [Apple](#), about the Washingtonpost.com using all sort of interactive technologies (still pictures, video, sound, animation) to tell newsworthy stories.

The convergence of all these events as described above, tell me something we need to be quite concerned about. As we move forward with all these new tools to explore story telling in the digital age, societies in most parts of the world are moving to severely restrict their use. I am sure there is a direct correlation, as this ease of use has proven to empower the average citizen to express their own points of view, which of course escapes the traditional means of control by those in power.

The process of democratizing information, has provoked a strong backlash restricting the use of all our new found digital tools, photography among them. After the AbuGraib disaster in Iraq, the US military implemented new censorship rules, forbidding the use of digital cameras by soldiers.

Please let us know of any restrictions that you have encountered, so that we can start building a data base with such information. This will allow for a wider awareness that we need not just put up a wooden face in turbulent times. I am sure there are actions that can be taken such as the petition that is being signed in the UK, to stop the insanity of not allowing pictures to be taken on the street.

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