



Witnesses to history

Technology allows us to see events as they unfold and to send aid with a click

The earthquake and tsunami that has ravaged northeastern Japan is just the latest tragedy that the world has witnessed in real time. The proliferation of digital cameras, both still and video, combined with the worldwide reach of the internet gives everyone a front row seat to history.

Not only can we watch the uprisings in the middle east on our televisions, computers and telephones, but the participants orchestrate many of their movements using the same technology. Cell phones, tweets, blogs and social media sites are being employed to stage rallies and track the response of authorities by the rebels organizing the revolts. Several of the regimes have shut down internet access and cell phone service at times in an attempt to quell the unrest.

Shared visions

The ability to virtually witness earth shaking events as they occur, and then see them repeated over and over in the media, has created indelible images in our collective memories. Who can forget the sights of the Challenger explosion, or the kid climbing out the window of the Columbine school, or the World Trade Center towers crumbling?

Warfare has become a media event, complete with catchy titles, slick logos and embedded reporters in starring roles. Cockpit videos of smart bombs destroying targets, green night vision scenes of battles, with tracer rounds streaking across the sky, and horrific images of the injured innocents, euphemistically referred to as collateral damage, are all just a mouse click away.

The videos and images coming out of Japan are both horrific and

enthralling. There are many websites where you can view them. All of the major news organizations, such as **CNN.com**, **Reuters.com** and the networks' sites (**cbsnews.com**, **abcnews.go.com**, **msnbc.msn.com**), have video and image galleries. **Youtube.com** is a good place to see a lot of the videos in one place.

The sheer power of nature and mankind's futile efforts to control it are on full display. Japan is a sophisticated, modern nation with lots of experience building in an earthquake zone. The magnitude of the earthquake and the force of the tsunami were simply too great for humanity's best efforts. There's a dramatic before and after series of satellite images on **nytimes.com** that graphically illustrates the enormity of the destruction.

In addition to bringing us images from far away places, technology brings us the words and thoughts of people from around the world. Social media sites such as **Facebook.com** or **Twitter.com**, and blogs both personal and professional, allow everyone — including victims, authorities, and raving lunatics — to comment on events. News stories from the recent earthquake in New Zealand told of survivors trapped in rubble using their cell phones to direct rescuers to their locations.

Too much tragedy

All of this exposure to tragedy can have a numbing effect. Our country is currently engaged in two wars, but for most people it's business as usual. The initial excitement of the invasions has worn off. As the media coverage gets displaced by the next big thing, the ongoing combat becomes background noise for all but those directly affected.

There is a benefit to the technology that brings us this instantaneous, raw coverage. The images and words from these tragedies are so powerful

that many people are moved to want to help. It's never been easier or faster to help the victims of man-made and natural disasters. Charitable organizations all have websites that allow you to make donations from the comfort and safety of home. Most sites have options where you can arrange to donate time or services as well. Donations to many causes can be made with a simple text from a cell phone.

The following websites are a good place to start if you want to help the people suffering in Japan:

■ **American Red Cross:** U.S. mobile phone users can text REDCROSS to 90999 to add \$10 automatically to your phone bill. Or visit www.redcross.org or call 800-RED-CROSS.

■ **International Medical Corps:** Sending relief teams and supplies to the area. Call 800-481-4462, or visit <http://internationalmedicalcorps.org>.

■ **Save the Children:** The relief effort providing food, medical care and education to children is accepting donations through mobile phones by texting JAPAN to 20222 to donate \$10. People can also call 800-728-3843 during business hours or visit www.savethechildren.org/japanquake to donate.

■ **Global Giving:** The nonprofit, which works through grass-roots efforts, says Americans can text JAPAN to 50555 to give \$10 through their phone bill. Or visit www.globalgiving.org.

■ **Interaction:** The group is the largest alliance of U.S.-based international nongovernmental organizations and lists many ways to help on its site, www.interaction.org.

■ **Network for Good:** The aggregator of charities has a list of programs and ways to donate to relief efforts. Visit www.networkforgood.org.

■ **World Vision:** The Christian humanitarian organization focuses on children. To donate, visit www.worldvision.org.

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