

COMMUNICATION OVER EXPOSURE: The Rise of Blogs as a Product of Cybervoyeurism

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Abstract

The recent, massive growth in web logs, or 'blogs', could be regarded as yet another phase in electronic communication, where events, ideas, and news are now being framed by personal commentaries, and where the motivation to discuss the often banal minutiae of an individual blogger's life is considered as an almost primal urge (see [Long 2002](#)). This tendency to reveal one's opinions, commentary and private thoughts to an immense, unknown public through the medium of the World Wide Web (hereafter 'WWW') is both exhibitionistic, and an exercise in self-discovery (see [Turkle 1995](#)), where the disreputable aspects of voyeurism are regarded by both authors and readers of blogs, as being 'overcome' by the mutually negotiated permission to engage with ideas implicit in the blog format. Nevertheless, this communication process is an even more advanced form of self-identification than the personal website, as it encourages feedback from readers, and can develop conversational characteristics when bloggers exchange ideas in response to a post. Rather than a fixed virtual presence in the style discussed by [Sandbothe \(1996\)](#), the blog is an open, yet distinctly exhibitionistic communication system, where the reader can voyeuristically engage with, or reject the ideas of a blogger, and in doing so, reveal as much about his/herself in posting a response, as the original author of a blog post.

This paper will explore the phenomenon of blogs and the protocols emerging as a result of this form of communication. [Lasch's \(1991\)](#) work on the Culture of Narcissism, focussing on changes to the American culture in the "age of diminishing expectations", provides the basis for discussion of a growing cybervoyeurism, and [Rowley's \(1997\)](#) later work investigating the role of virtual reality technologies in redefining the self, further informs this analysis. The paper will trace the development of blogs over time, and will consider the implications of these electronic public journals for the future of personal privacy.

Introduction

The evolution of blogs occurred as with most aspects of human communication as a result of convenience rather than design. Based on the reverse chronological posting of news items, often containing hyperlinks to third party sites, and an opportunity for readers to enter their own responses to articles, this otherwise unstructured format of delivering information via the World Wide Web (WWW) came to be known as 'blogging' after the publication of a 1999 essay, 'The Anatomy of a Weblog', by Cameron Barrett, maintainer of the site, Camworld ([Blood 2002](#), p 3). Now regarded as a mainstream aspect of hypermediated communications (see [Rodzvilla 2002](#)),

blogging has emerged from early email lists and instant messaging communities as a means of informing a dedicated reader base about items of interest to authors, news and personal information. But it is also a means of reaching a wider audience; an unknown mass of netizens, ready and willing to enter into the opinions and commentaries of bloggers in a manner that emulates the freedoms of talkback radio hosts. A soapbox of their own, blogs represent for maintainers an opportunity to act as an oracle of information and also rather cathartically express their (often emotive) responses to events, ideas, and experiences in their daily lives. And while for maintainers, blogs may only initially be considered as a news space, it is only a matter of time before the personal lives of the authors intervene, or are permitted to emerge in the course of writing entries and responding to feedback. But instead of alienating a readership by exposing their personal lives, the very popularity of blogs tends to increase as the theatre of interpersonal communications is played out to an undefined, virtually infinite public. This exhibitionistic behaviour is encouraged, supported and even sought by the cybervoyeurs of this theatre: readers of blogs, who post comments in reply to entries, often positively reinforcing the opinions of the blogger, but sometimes disagreeing on points of philosophy, politics or social comment, and occasionally 'flaming' the blogger for opinions expressed. The very interactive nature of blogging makes it innately supportive of both exhibitionistic and voyeuristic behaviours and ensures its continued growth at least in the immediate future.

In this paper I will explore the phenomenon of blogs, and the protocols emerging as a result of this form of communication. Lasch's work on the *Culture of Narcissism* (1979) forms the basis of discussion on blogging as the latest and most public illustration of a cult of narcissism in the information age. This will be followed by an analysis of existing literature on blogging, with particular focus on the work of Blood (2002) and the edited collection of essays, *We've Got Blog* (2002). The paper will trace the development of blogs over time, and will consider the implications of these electronic public journals for the future of personal privacy.

A Cult of Narcissism

Rowley (1997) argues that we presently live in a society that "prolongs the experience of dependence and stokes the fires of the 'pleasure principle'". These ideas grow from Lasch's earlier work (1979) chronicling narcissism as a metaphor of the human condition in the modern age. Lasch is critical of the notion of diluting 'narcissism' to encompass all forms of "vanity, self-admiration, self-satisfaction, self-glorification and all forms of parochialism" (p. 31), preferring the more clinical definition of narcissism as self-hatred, dependence on the "vicarious warmth provided by others, combined with the fear of dependence, a sense of inner emptiness, boundless repressed rage and unsatisfied oral cravings". He also notes the importance of what he calls the "secondary characteristics of narcissism: pseudo self insight, calculating seductiveness, nervous, self-deprecatory humour" (p. 33). Thus, instead of referring to general definitions of selfishness, Lasch's interpretation of narcissism as a metaphor for the human condition of America in the 1970s and beyond, was specifically concerned with dependence and dissatisfaction rather than arrogance and self-glorification.

Blogs may well represent one of the clearest illustrations of that culture. These spaces for personal expression and exhibition are not the embodiment of mere arrogance, but the deliberate and calculated act of expressing opinions on any nature of subjects, and seeking support through the medium of comments for that act of self-expression.

They are unlike personal websites that provide a canvass upon which to portray the self and assert some individuality, because personal websites act, as Sandbothe has noted (in Vattimo and Welsch (Eds.) 1996), as a fixed virtual presence, untainted by the number of visitations to the site, and where the actual presence of the author, to verify claims made on the site, is not needed. Indeed, even where there is an opportunity for readers to provide feedback on a website (via an email link), there is the distinct sense that the reader has little to no influence on the depiction of the author via the site. However, blogs provide the opportunity for readers to express their own interpretations on the articles of the blogger, thus rendering the blogger dependent on the responses of their loyal readership, and vulnerable to the positive or negative feedback of that readership. There is even the sense that a blog that attracts no comments is one that is effectually regarded as unworthy, and unread.

Lasch notes, even writing in the 1970s, that the increase in the number of narcissistic patients seeking treatment “does not necessarily indicate that narcissistic disorders are more common than they used to be”. He observed that it was distinctly possible that they had simply come more quickly to psychiatric attention (p. 43). Similarly, the very public nature of blogs could exaggerate the apparent prevalence of narcissistic behaviours among both maintainers and regular viewers of blogs. Rather than being indicative of a personality trait among bloggers, it could simply be the extraordinary growth and prevalence of blogging that has brought such cases to the attention of the media. However, there is no denying that the functionality and structure of blogs as a virtual space to express oneself and expose oneself to public comment, is inherently predisposed to attract narcissists to publish, and narcissistic behaviour generally.

But beyond narcissism, there is another characteristic among bloggers this is distinctly apparent; that of the construction of fluid identities in blogging contexts. Turkle has said that in a computer-mediated environment, “your identity on the computer is the sum of your distributed presence” (in Vattimo and Welsch, p. 159). She goes on to note that older, more traditional notions of psychological health being equated with a unitary sense of self are challenged by multiple window, multiple personality experiences which, whilst always a part of their identities in terms of traditional family roles (eg: daughter, lover, mother, worker), are more difficult to “cycle through” in modern communications systems. When a person engaging in digital communications constructs multiple variants of themselves and uses these variations as a testing ground for the behaviour of their *actual* self, then they are engaging in an advanced and fluid sense of identity, and this can appear chaotic and alarming to those who recognise only the unitary sense of psychological health. Nevertheless, the cybertourist has the capacity to accept and adapt to fluid and often incompatible notions of the self (ibid., p. 169).

Bloggers frequently mix blogging styles when presenting information online. Shifting between personal anecdotes in the open diary or journal format, the more prosaic news and annotated links format and finally the ‘notebook’, extended essay or editorial format (see Blood 2002, p. 6), bloggers can present multiple identities within the course of their posts in a single blog. Further, when a blogger expresses their

opinion on a subject and then opens the way for respondents to accept or decry their notions in a public context, the blogger experiences not merely the possibility of having their opinions widely criticised, but also glimpses the view that respondents hold of the speaker. While this is not always a positive experience, nor even an expected one, it enables the blogger to develop varying personae to deal with public critique of their ideas. And where a blogger maintains multiple personalities or voices for specific blogs without compromising or isolating the self, the blogger is effectually presenting the parallel, fluid notions of self to which Turkle refers.

For the blogger, the technology facilitates enframing of multiple identities, and dynamically negotiates an idealised sense of self, informed by the context of each unique blog post. This enframing by technology reflects Heidegger's sense of the use of modern technology as an act of revealing. According to Heidegger, modern technologies allow users to achieve the highest human aspirations, and to reveal truth. However as Rowley (drawing on the theories of Heidegger) reminds us, the act of enframing ourselves through technologies also has the effect of reinforcing old hierarchies, and reinforcing the "disintegrating self".

We challenge forth and create the technology that orders nature to lie in wait as standing reserve to be used by us. The danger in enframing is our omnipotent aim to draw the world as picture and see nature only as resources for our use and disposal. The ultimate danger is that we are ordered into the very standing-reserve of the technology we create; we become objects lying in wait to buy, to use, to consume. The road to revealing the truth is paved with yellow brick, and in the technocracy of Oz, the wizard, or idealized parent image, is a feeble fabrication of narcissistic omnipotence. (Rowley 1997)

The maintenance of multiple personalities has the effect of irrationally overestimating the capacity of the *real* personality or identity to assert itself in human communications. But for bloggers, the drive for an audience outweighs any reduction in the primacy of a *real* identity, and the basis for presentation of multiple identities is associated with techniques to drive traffic to blogs. Bloggers capitalise on the voyeurism of a loyal readership who are deemed to be attracted to blogs on the basis of the interest factor and integrity of posts, as well as the personal responses to ideas presented. Blood notes that any blog is "ultimately judged on its merits alone", and that building an audience requires significant investment of time and strategies for exposing content to a broad readership (2002, pp. 96-99). Because blogs are also a means of reputation building, it is crucial for bloggers to present themselves honestly, to reveal their personal opinions, and to respond to feedback in order to sustain blog traffic. As a result, bloggers are fulfilling the criteria of narcissism described by Lasch, in asserting their independence and giving voice to their ideas, whilst also being dependent on the loyalty and warmth of their readership, in order to build reputation.

And if, as Lasch has suggested, this culture of narcissism is a product of our age, then the prevalence of exhibitionistic and voyeuristic behaviours is likely to be sustained. Indeed, the currency of respect and positive reinforcement is formalised in the very recent literature of one of the prominent, "A-List" bloggers of the present, [Cory Doctorow](#). His first science fiction novel, *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* describes a society that has effectually abandoned legal tender, in favour of something

called “whuffie”; the respect and admiration of one’s peers. Amongst his own circle, Doctorow has managed to score real world whuffie through publication of his book in a free, fully downloadable edition, and continues to gain credit and respect in the blogging community for his efforts on [Boingboing.net](#) (a blog subtitled “A Directory of Wonderful Things”). Further, Doctorow is a self-described freedom fighter for the US-based Electronic Frontier Foundation. In his blog Doctorow satisfies his oral cravings, and – overtly or otherwise – seeks out the whuffie and vicarious warmth of others in precisely the manner described by Lasch.

Rushkoff takes another perspective, arguing that content is the social currency that provides conversation and social interaction. Most content posted online is unoriginal – a series of links to other data or remembered content read elsewhere – and is reposted or introduced into blogs and other spaces as a means of lubricating a social occasion (Rushkoff in Rodzvilla 2002, p 117). Content, he maintains, is the medium through which interaction between people can occur, and the “real measure of content’s quality is its ability to serve as a medium” (p. 118). But whether the content of a blog post or the activities of the blogger is more successful in gaining credibility, it is the blog medium through which respect can be generated. The quality (or otherwise) of blogs is secondary to the function of interaction, the shared experience, and the development of a loyal audience from which to glean “whuffie”.

Thus it may be argued, that the act of blogging could be regarded as a process of satisfying oral cravings, whilst simultaneously asserting one’s independence in a context designed to attract and sustain the support and respect of one’s peers. This is the digital embodiment of Lasch’s Culture of Narcissism. It is important to recall that it is not merely narcissistic personalities that are driven to blog, but that the cultural trend towards (seemingly incompatible) co-dependence and a general fear of dependence, is best illustrated and satisfied by the structure and format of blogs. Bloggers are orators who are reflecting the cultural communications system, rather than aberrant personalities.

Cybervoyeurism, Privacy and the Longevity of Blogs

Whilst the preponderance of blogs as a means of social communication is still fairly new, the growth of voyeurism in traditional media has been in process for the last several years.

Since the mid 1990s, the range and popularity of reality television programs has grown massively, partly because they are cheap to produce and they attract the key markets for advertisers, but also because of their focus on what would otherwise be taboo. Reality television programs have provided for audiences an opportunity to vicariously experience the suffering and triumphs of contestants and representatives on these (generally) unscripted programs, in a manner that has a closer relationship with eavesdropping than with drama. Calheiros (c. 2000) notes:

*Shows like **Survivor** are .. of interest to the student of human behavior (sic).
...The dynamics of relationships between the participants shift and change
each week, as associations are formed and bonds are strengthened.*

Doubtless, there is also prurient interest in the possibility of intimate relationships developing between the participants. The shows have enough attractive men and women that the possibility of sex is always there. ... But above all, it is the sense of what is forbidden... It is to this proclivity that TV voyeurism panders, something never before experienced in the mass media.

Prior to mass release of reality television programs there was movement in documentary film-making and interviewing techniques towards increasingly lurid subjects, as exemplified by the 1995 interview of Princess Diana, when she revealed her infidelity to the Prince of Wales. And since mass adoption of the internet has occurred, even traditional documentary, current affairs and news media have adopted aspects of computer-mediated feedback systems either through live forums to discuss issues, or through simple email messaging systems. While these more formalised systems of feedback are less voyeuristic than reality television, they still provide a level of access to material program representatives that was previously impossible.

Blogs are simply the next level of online forum. While bloggers are rarely 'celebrities' (with the exception of *Star Trek's* Wil Wheaton, who maintains wilwheaton.net), the kind of communication occurring in blogs is more direct, immediate and open than in broadcast media. And in order to maintain and grow visitation by a loyal readership, bloggers respond to the hypermediated urge to provide current information in blogs, and thus must seek out the latest news events and 'scoops' to sustain reader interest. The competitive nature of this process has even provoked a growing concern (at least among traditional media players) that blogs may displace traditional media as a vehicle for news gathering and as an arbiter of 'truth'. However, Lasica (in Rodzvilla 2002, p 171) claims that blogs will only ever supplement news sources, rather than replace them. Flynn (2002) goes further, noting that new vehicles for expressing 'truth' are not only supplemental to genuine news sources, but they are reflexive media of our time, acting as devices that question the legitimacy of traditional sources of truth. She cites Kilborn, observing that new media technologies "constitute a challenge to the purity of documentary form and (reinforce a) perhaps a Griersonian suspicion of pleasure" (Flynn 2002, p. 45). Flynn's discussion of the documentary as "real" and constructed environments as "displaced histories" culminates in her somewhat neologistic identification of *docobricolage* as a means of playing with documentary forms and techniques. Whilst she is primarily focussing on reality television programs such as *Big Brother*, and digitally constructed, emersive environments such as *The Sims*, or *Sim City*, the same could be true for the emergent phenomenon of blogs.

Whether these artificial or constructed realities are genuinely voyeuristic and whether the participants in reality programming or the bloggers of the internet community are exhibitionistic (in a clinical sense) is somewhat contentious, but there is a general sense that this behaviour promotes a general loss of privacy for participants. The notion of an end to personal privacy is something that may generally alarm, but this gradual loss of control over personal identity is something that bloggers are still willing to experience. While bloggers may convince themselves of maintaining a level of personal privacy through deciding not to publish detailed accounts of their personal lives, the nature of information sharing among bloggers can result in public discussion and exposure of bloggers' private lives, regardless of their wishes. Such occurred when Rebecca Mead published her critique of the activities and publishing

of Meg Hourihan, a founder of Pyra, the company that released the internet application designed for blogging, at Blogger.com. Mead's article, *You've Got Blog: How to get your business, your boyfriend and your life online*, (originally appearing in The New Yorker magazine and at http://www.rebeccamead.com/2000_11_13_art_blog.htm) discussed openly Hourihan's private relationship with an "A-List" blogger, and while refraining from being judgemental about the motives of Hourihan, the very subtitle of Mead's article is clearly registering her sense of ulterior personal motives behind Hourihan's actions both in her blogs and offline. Mead demonstrates how flimsy personal privacy has become in an age of blogging, as she questions the 'logic' of Hourihan and partner, Jason Kottke (kottke.org), in refraining from mentioning their relationship on their respective blogs, whilst also dropping clues about it. But Mead is by no means critical of the very public life of these bloggers. By reproducing her own conversations with Hourihan, Mead appears to be questioning the relevance of personal privacy for active members of the blogging community.

Chairman and CEO of Sun Microsystems, Scott McNealy, is attributed with the maxim, "Privacy is dead. Get over it". While McNealy has been widely criticised for his dismissive attitude (see Clarke 2000), communication activities and channels arising from the ecology of blogging challenge traditional concepts of personal privacy. Brin's concept of *The Transparent Society* – that the issue of the information age is not privacy, but equality of exposure (see Teitelbaum 1996) – is the predominant and motivating concern of the blogging community, rather than personal privacy.

The ambition for broader audiences and for having one's blog cited in other blogs (and most especially, A-listed blogs) is widely acknowledged as the *raison d'être* of many new bloggers (see Gilmore, Lee and Fleishman in Rodzvilla (Ed.) 2002). This aspiration for greater readership and "equality of exposure" is again illustrative of the primacy of exhibitionism, dissatisfaction and a need for personal validation, over independence and self-satisfaction. While superficially it may appear that the drive for a larger readership may be grounded in self-glorification, the manner in which blog posts attain credulity and in which bloggers attain "whuffie" is not merely through audience numbers, but through audience loyalty and citation. The "trackback" facility now popular in some blogs is an exercise in reputation-building. While it makes use of hypertextuality to link the range and breadth of discussion appearing online and arising from blog posts, it also has the effect of legitimising the original source of information, and appropriately referencing ideas. Developed by blogging code developer, Movable Type, trackback is a "framework for peer-to-peer communication and notifications between web sites" (see <http://www.movabletype.org/docs/mttrackback.html>), allowing original authors of ideas to be notified when other bloggers reference their work. Linkages from other blog sites provide the validation that bloggers seek, and are apportioned greater value than the protection of personal, private details from public consumption. To return to Rowley (1997), the "danger" of relegating one's personal life to the status of a resource for consumption and distribution is realised in the priorities of bloggers.

Davies (1996) is critical of this process of voluntary submission to a society devoid of privacy. Horrified by the rise of a new technological order and a "steady erosion of sovereignty and of human independence" (p. 2), Davies cautions that information

collection system, even crude blogging archives, can have potentially devastating effects for human subjects in the system.

Errors or failure in one part of the system may lead to a domino effect involving suspension of benefits or entitlements in other areas. Most importantly, the freedom of individuals may be compromised because of the scale and nature of information collection (Davies 1996, p 83).

As information presented in blogs (and stored in archives) is framed by personal opinion and commentary, the veracity of information is unreliable. Further, the discussion emerging from blog posts in comments systems and the propensity among bloggers to cross-link to posts and responses, whilst grounded on the notion of adding verification, effectually renders the truth of content subject to the personal, often poorly informed discussion of other bloggers. Ultimately it weakens the reliability of information presented.

While several authors have expressed concern over this distortion of 'truth', particularly when associated with distinctly personal information (see Davies 1996, Clarke 2001, and others), there is among some commentators a sense that the very notion of privacy is changing. Dyson (1998) has observed:

As more people feel more secure in general on the Net, they will become accustomed to seeing their words recorded and replayed. They will no longer feel uncomfortable being on display, since everyone around them is on display too... Everyone has personal preferences for privacy, but they are influenced by the surrounding culture and by the surrounding economy... Nowadays, people reveal much more about themselves – for better or worse – than they used to. It's inevitable that they will simply become more comfortable with the fact that more information is known about them on the Net. The challenge is not to keep everything secret but to limit misuse of such information. That implies trust, and more knowledge of how the information is used. At the same time, we may all become more tolerant if everyone's flaws are more visible (pp 275-6).

The exhibitionism of blogs permits the generation of trust and loyalty in a readership, and possibly tolerance through commentary and discussion based systems for responses. While Barr (2000) is not so optimistic about internet applications as Dyson (1998), he too, has raised the fundamental question of "whether we are witnessing the emergence of new ways by which individuals communicate with each other, a paradigm shift in the communication process" (p 144). In an age of unmitigated blogging, privacy may remain in theory, but not in practice.

Of course, this new order of self-revelation has its limits for legal, if not for moral reasons. Blood (2002) warns against the habit of bloggers in assuming that older posts or comments made in the manner of a conversational aside, will "be spoken once and fade away" (p. 134). Whilst blogs may eventually be abandoned or even deleted, archives of posts made to blogs can be stored long after the interface for content has been removed, and citations of bloggers' comments can be copied and stored without the knowledge of the original blogger in an unbounded array of blogging mimicry. Whilst the superficial currency of a blog post is only relevant for a matter of days after posting, the longevity of any blog post is virtually infinite. Once again, this reinforces the characterisation of blogging as a symptom of a narcissistic

culture, because the repressed oral cravings given voice through blogs, have a degree of influence not attained by the spoken word. The continuing presence of blog posts either in archives or cited elsewhere, provides for the blogger an opportunity for vocal endurance, continuance and the attraction of new audiences for their commentary.

Unfortunately for bloggers, there are implications of such post longevity that may well affect the future of medium.

Power law, legal implications and conclusions

The legal implications of blog posts in terms of liability for defamatory statements, perceived invasions of personal privacy, and other grounds for litigation, are as yet untried. In most jurisdictions, it may be safe to assume that blogs will be able to claim the defence of fair comment, provided that the commentary made by bloggers is based on verifiable facts, made with no malicious intent, and referring to a matter that would generally be regarded as falling within the broad scope of the public interest (see [Notes on Defamation](#)). However, it is inevitable that libel or slander litigation will eventually be pursued in relation to a blog post (or a response to a blog post). At present bloggers who are aware or claim to be aware of such an inescapable eventuality, appear more concerned with the notion of protecting freedom of expression (a right under US law, but only implied here in Australia) than with any future liability they may be forced to assume for their blogs. Some professional blogs have gone so far as to publish extensive disclaimers indemnifying themselves against any action taken as a result of posts to bulletin boards and blogs (see Appendix 1)

In relying on disclaimers bloggers are demonstrating their preoccupation with free expression and equality of exposure, predicated on typically US-driven protection of First Amendment liberties. Nevertheless, this action is also recognition of the axiom that diversity combined with freedom of choice results in *inequality*. Observed in social network theory and occurring as a result of information overload, the paradox of plenty adheres to the imperative that the greater the number of options available and the more diverse the accessible options, the more difficult it becomes for the user to navigate content, where no hierarchy for content is present. Barr (2000) has observed the paradox, arguing that this phase of plenty in communications “provides evidence of demand, but not necessarily of satisfaction” (p 152). In the field of blogging this is problematic because it is antithetical to the objective of attracting and concentrating traffic to blog posts. However, it is natural in such circumstances for hierarchies to emerge. Social network theory and emergent power law distribution theories describe a process where network leaders emerge and these leaders provide the content which is either sourced or repeated in the work of other network players. Shirky (2003) has stated in his research on web logs that “the act of choosing, spread widely enough and freely enough, creates a power law distribution”. He notes that the paradox of plenty illustrated by power law distribution is counter intuitive because it deviates so dramatically from normal curves of options plotted against preferences. Instead of flattening the curve, increased options are affected by human behaviour in relation to choice. Positive feedback provides the basis for influencing choices and sets up an uneven distribution.

Think of this positive feedback as a preference premium. The system assumes that later users come into an environment shaped by earlier users; the thousand-and-first user will not be selecting blogs at random, but will rather be affected, even if unconsciously, by the preference premiums built up in the system previously (http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html)

Shirky's findings are not new in this regard; power law distributions have been observed in social network theory for some time, but in relation to blogs they hold particular value. They reinforce the premise that blog popularity is based on a complex hierarchy of respect, and that this hierarchy emerges primarily as a result of a loyal, distinctly voyeuristic readership of fellow bloggers, cross-linking to materials published by industry pundits who otherwise have no outlet for their "oral cravings".

There is an increasing body of literature being released on the phenomenon of an emerging A-List of bloggers (see particularly Clarke in Rodzvilla 2002). With the rise in trackback facilities and deference to the source of original data – a staunchly anti-plagiarist sentiment that is almost peculiar to the online world – there is a growing series of technologies designed to develop internal hierarchies which ultimately produce such an A-List. The social dynamic of blogging is also changing, with an apparent reduction in the extended-entry notebook style and growth in the news-oriented, annotated series of links style of blog. This is, of course, to be expected. As blogs become more mainstream, it is logical that some adjustment in the nature of blogs and blogging should occur. And as the annotated-links format increases, it is also logical that an A-List of bloggers should emerge. This is a theory explored variously in Monge and Contractor (1998) in *The Emergence of Communication Networks*, and in Actor-Network Theory as posited by Callon (1991) and Latour (1992). One of the key social effects of this open communication system is to seek out 'network stars' such that the blogger can filter down information to his/her ready audience base. The behaviour can be traced to virtually every industry, but is particularly prevalent in industries focused on entrepreneurship or innovation.

However, the emergence of an A-List or hierarchy of blogs is also likely to produce a divergence of the blogging sector into varying and specific social interest groups. In the manner described by Parthasarathy et al (1997), varying pressures – social, individual, product and subcultural – are likely to influence both new technology adoption and content specialisation (see Dann & Dann 2001, p 74). Thus within the overall hierarchy of blogging, distinct hierarchies will emerge, allowing even early majority bloggers to secure power law supremacy over their peers through the development of increasingly specific audience targeting. Further, through capitalisation on audience voyeurism (behaviours learned through mainstream media and applied in public feedback systems online), blogs provide for blogger and reader alike, a forum for exploring the "politics of the self to keep us ideologically warm" (Dovey 2000, p. 26). As contrived as the blogging environment may appear, blogs represent the holy grail in the search for an "underlying level of social life that is still real ... free of representation" (Couldry 2000, p 28).

The growth of blogs is likely to continue. As more user-friendly tools become available, this transparent and public, web-based soapbox and feedback system will be adopted by an increasingly mainstream audience. How this will affect broadly held and traditional conceptions of privacy is still unclear, but certainly the drive for audiences is likely to pander to the voyeuristic behaviours of blog readers, as bloggers

differentiate themselves from formal media channels and from other bloggers, focusing on personal responses to ideas, personal rage and personal respect. Replacing somewhat outdated email lists and personal websites as a vehicle for exchanging information and presenting the self, blogs represent for authors, an opportunity to reach out and connect with an audience never before accessible to them. Bloggers have the chance to question their understanding of issues, engage in discussion, seek out approval for their notions, and grasp some sense of relevance and hope in this “age of diminishing expectations” (Lasch 1979). The communications platform has changed, and bloggers and their audiences have the power to influence others’ opinions and perhaps traditionally held ideals for privacy and equity of access to information. And while new players on the sphere of blogging may face an uphill battle against an A-list of early adopters there is always the hope that some unknown, distant reader will covertly enter their publicly private lives, link back and reward the blogger with “whuffie” for their words.

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Appendix 1

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