**TOWARD A GRAMMAR OF THE BLOGOSPHERE: RHETORIC AND ATTENTION
IN THE NETWORKED IMAGINARY**

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This dissertation explores the rhetorical imaginary of internetworked societies by examining three cases where actors in the blogosphere shaped public deliberation. In each case, I analyze a trope that emerged organically as bloggers theorized their own rhetorical interventions, and argue that these tropes signal shifts in how citizens of networked societies imagine their relations. The first case study, on the blogosphere's reaction to Trent Lott's 2002 toast to Strom Thurmond, examines how bloggers "flooded the zone" by relentlessly interpreting the event and finding evidence that eventually turned the tide of public opinion against Lott. Flooding the zone signifies the inventional possibilities of blogging through the production of copious public argument. The second case study, focusing on the 2003 blogging of the Salam Pax, an English-speaking Iraqi living in Iraq on the precipice of war, develops the idea of "ambient intimacy" which is produced through the affective economy of blogging. The ambient intimacy produced through blogging illustrates the blurring of traditional public/private distinctions in contemporary public culture. The third case study, on the group science blog *RealClimate*, identifies how blogs have become sites for translating scientific controversies into ordinary language through a process of "shallow quotation." The diffusion of expertise enabled by the interactive format of blogging provides new avenues to close the gap between public and technical reasoning. The dissertation concludes by examining the advent and implications of "hyperpublicity" produced by ubiquitous recording devices and digital modes of circulation.

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

1.1 Three (Rhetorical) Challenges for Public Deliberation

A crowd gathers for a public debate on physician-assisted suicide. The debaters, at the front of the chamber, have diligently prepared their remarks and await the conclusion of the moderator's introduction to wade into the finer points of the controversy. Finally, they get an opportunity to share their insights. Each debater, in turn, ranges over the basic points, skating around issues of consent, pain-ridden terminal illness, slippery slopes and constitutional protections. Each debater has developed carefully crafted witticisms primed to deflate their opponent's arguments. Those clever barbs are, to the chagrin of the audience, the only original part of the debate. The framing of the arguments themselves are not altogether original; they repeat the standard talking points from two polarized and predictable sides. Neither advocate has the 'magic bullet' argument that transforms the way people understand the controversy over physician-assisted suicide. There's no middle ground sought; no bridging moves to bring the two disparate points together. At times, the debate descends into nakedly partisan bickering, especially as the debaters cross-examine each other. Part of the reason for the debate's staleness is that the debaters rely primarily on evidence from sources that have just recycled the same old shopworn arguments. The audience leaves feeling unenriched, with only a sense of the circularity of this controversy and the grueling banality of public deliberation. They could have stayed home and watched the same arguments delivered by the blowhards on cable television.

A city council considers demolishing part of an old neighborhood in order to clear the way for a new shopping development. Affected citizens living in this neighborhood have banded together and, hoping to influence the city council's zoning decision, nominated a spokesperson

to voice their concerns at the next council meeting. Chief among their objections is what they perceive to be a severe alteration of the character of their neighborhood. Residents are justifiably attached to the current environs; they are reluctant to embrace new 'developments' despite the promise that new jobs will accompany these drastic changes. Given an opportunity to speak, the spokesperson explains that the residents love their community as it is, fear the monoculture that will accompany the re-zoning, and want to preserve the historical buildings that will be threatened by the new plan. The council members listen, but decide that the residents' concerns are too 'emotional.' When compared to the calculations the city economists have provided showing the increase in tax revenue accruing from the new development, the residents' objections seem too inchoate. They vote to re-zone.

An energy company decides to build a nuclear power plant in order to meet the rapidly increasing electrical power demand in the region they serve. As part of a public relations effort, they host a series of town meetings designed to dispel concerns about the safety and efficiency of nuclear power. A local environmental group mobilizes to attend the meetings. Though they know it's a long shot, they hope to persuade the energy conglomerate to pursue alternative, renewable energy sources instead of nuclear power. After a series of strategy meetings, this hardy group had been familiarized with research showing the capacity for solar, wind, and geothermal energy to meet the local community's energy needs. Paired with what they considered disturbing evidence about the dangers of nuclear power, the group feels prepared to make their case to the energy company. Their hopes are deflated, however, once the conversation gets going in the public meeting. The energy company has brought in a core group of scientists to explain nuclear power's advantages over alternative sources. The scientists shoot down each of the citizens' arguments, responding to each claim with a bevy of counter-claims and a greater command of

the technical language of energy policy. They reference obscure technical journals, make risk assessments couched in abstract terms, and use jargon that whips by so quickly that members of the environmental group—educated though they are—have difficulty keeping up. On an argumentative plane, the research of this small group is no match for the lived experience and trained expertise of the scientists. Unsurprisingly, the energy company resists the citizens' entreaties and goes nuclear.

These three allegories—plausible composites of familiar democratic activities—draw attention to a trio of challenges for public deliberation. The first example highlights the challenge of *invention*: the debaters parroted arguments known to most, doing little work to move the controversy beyond staid predictability. They each fell into well-worn grooves of argumentation, rather than inventing novel lines of argument that could set the audience off on a shared quest for illumination. The second example underscores the challenge of *emotion* in public deliberation: the neighborhood residents' concerns were dismissed because they didn't cohere with the 'rational' criteria set out by the city council. 'Preserving the character of the neighborhood' often cannot compete with replenishing the city coffers, especially for council members concerned with keeping their municipality in the black. The third example suggests the challenge in democratically incorporating *expert discourse* into decision-making. The scientists' arguments trumped citizen objections through technical reasoning. No surprise: society is complex enough that specialists tend to have their judgments privileged, often for good reason.

These challenges to public deliberation can be located in many historical and contemporary controversies. Each challenge might be refigured as a key question for public deliberation: How can original arguments be invented to advance public debate on controversial issues? How should emotion in public life be integrated into decision-making? Finally, how can

experts and non-experts jointly deliberate without specialized discourses automatically winning out? These questions are at the very heart of democratic public life, and they are especially salient now with the significant changes occurring as digital public culture settles in for the long haul. But these queries did not begin with the onset of what can appropriately be called the 'network society.' They are prompts that the study of rhetoric—the art of persuasion—has long considered. In many ways, Aristotle's basic formulation of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* was designed to help citizens think through these three challenges in the context of democratic self-governance. For Aristotle, the rhetorical process begins with invention; a search for the available means of persuasion, that *logos* that could move a persuadable audience. Humans are emotional as well as rational creatures, so an understanding of *pathos* is necessary to understand the affective dimensions of language. The rich term *ethos* identifies the role credibility plays in persuasion. Though this Aristotelian triad is often considered simplistic and formulaic, it signals that the challenges presented by invention, emotion, and expertism coincide with the genesis of democratic practice in classical Greece.

In fact, I would argue that problems related to invention, emotion, and expertism are more or less permanent features of democracy, receiving unique articulations in different cultures and different times but recognizable nonetheless for their similarities across multiple situations. These challenges identify core tensions in democratic public life. On the one hand, there is a strong need for public discourse that is grounded in institutional discourses, impartial in its assessments, and reliant on specialized knowledge to guide decision-making. These specific norms are undoubtedly necessary to manage the complexity at the heart of contemporary life; yet, they are often considered insufficient to meet standards of democratic participation. Were these norms sufficient, we would undoubtedly be more satisfied with variants of Plato's

philosopher-kings making decisions on our behalf. We aren't, and in fact, human history is a bloody trail of cautions about institutional, impartial, and expert discourses going awry. One way that democratic societies rein in the excesses of institutionalism, impartiality, and expertism is to develop methods for citizens, as lay, partial, individuals, can contribute to public decision-making through iterations of public argument. Democratic public culture requires a negotiation of these tensions between institutions and individuals, impartiality and partiality, and expert and lay knowledge claims. It is in negotiating these tensions successfully that decisions made in democratic societies receive legitimacy, or acknowledgement by citizens that decisions are fair, reasonable, and for the public good.

The promise of rhetoric has always been in satisfactorily, though contingently, balancing these tensions. Nothing can 'solve' these challenges, for they are essentially insoluble; they can only be attended to in a way that gives legitimacy to decisions that are made in the public's name. Consequently, every public culture must find ways to address inventional deficits, emotion-laden arguments, and expert claims to authority. How does a contemporary, internetworked society address these three challenges? This dissertation probes three moments in which new modes of networked advocacy through weblogs prompted "critical junctures" that rearranged communication patterns and introduced alternative ways of managing the challenges of invention, emotion, and expertism.[1] These disruptive inflection points are peppered throughout the history of communication and media technologies. Therefore, a central assumption I hold is that the contemporary, internetworked world can be better understood through comparison to

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[1] See Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Keleman, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59 (2007): 241-69 and G. Thomas Goodnight, "Counterfactual Argumentation and Rhetorical Advocacy," in *Proceedings of the 3rd Tokyo Conference on Argumentation: Argumentation, the Law, and Justice*, eds. Takeshi Sukuzi, Takayuki Kato, and Aya Kuhota (Tokyo, Japan: Japan Debate Association, 2008): 71-5.

two prior socio-political formations that grappled with new information technologies and democratization: the era of Athenian democracy in classical Greece around the time that writing emerged, and the age of the bourgeois public sphere that arose in Europe during the print revolution. In the era of classical Greece, around the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, writing supported the activities of the *agora*, where citizens conversed with each other in a space that supported many-to-many communication.[2] Later, at the onset of the modern age in the 17th and 18th centuries, the circulation of various print publications supported an extended conversation about the issues of the day. In contemporary times, the internet, with its rapidly proliferating genres and sub-genres of public discourse, is widely seen as supporting the kind of lateral communication that sustained democratic public life in earlier historical instantiations.

The rise of blogging provides an opportunity to scrutinize how networked societies accommodate the three challenges to public deliberation I have identified. Blogging is the act of publishing to a weblog, an easily updated website usually structured by 'posts' that appear in reverse chronological order (the most recent post at the top of the webpage). Blogs often feature a dedicated forum for comments from readers attached to each post. The "communicative intercast" through hyperlinks, trackbacks, comments, and other modes of cross-reference between various blogs are referred to as the 'blogosphere.'[3] Though blogs have been around in some form or another since the mid 1990s, their popularity and prevalence rapidly increased from 2001 to 2006. Blogs have sprung up to support conversations on almost every imaginable

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[2] On the material dimensions of public argument, see James Fredal, *Rhetorical Action in Ancient Athens: Persuasive Artistry from Solon to Demosthenes* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), esp. 182-201; Takis Poulakos, *Speaking for the Polis: Isocrates' Rhetorical Education* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), esp. 63-77, and Christopher Lyle Johnstone, "Greek Oratorical Setting and the Problem of the Pnyx," in *Theory, Text, Context: Issues in Greek Rhetoric and Oratory*, ed. C.L. Johnstone (New York: SUNY Press, 1996): 87-128.

[3] Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs, "Introduction," *The Uses of Blogs* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 5.

topic from electoral races, business, celebrity gossip, music, film reviews, cooking, drinking, sports, traveling (among many, many other topics) to less thematically unified meditations on everyday life. Various publics are now served by blogs that address issues in their discourse communities: lawyers have blogs dissecting Supreme Court decisions, followers of the steampunk movement have blogs showing how to make their laptops appear to have come from Victorian times, and customers who are irritated with their cable and internet service have blogs to document customer service troubles. The flexibility of blogs in form and content means their diffusion into society has been quick, with literally millions of active blogs participating in the hubbub of democratic public life.

As with the rise in usage of any new media technology, especially one that is so closely affiliated with the internet, there have been celebrations of blogging as a democratizing media form and there have been critiques of blogging as, well, a democratizing media form. Considerations of invention, emotion, and expertism, and the three tensions in democratic public culture that they mark, regularly play out in meta-reflections on blogging. Blogging has been conceptualized as a new type of personal empowerment, activating individual citizens' argumentative energies and unique competencies as they link up with fellow interlocutors. But it has also been perceived as increasing the noise-to-signal ratio in public communication, contributing nonsense, invective, and repetition to an already crowded mediasphere that is supposedly better served by the institutional broadcast media. The ease and personalization of blogging enables an unequivocal reveling in the partial, subjective, contingent self. That blogs are so often personal is what makes them interesting reading. Of course, this has a downside too, as bloggers are often perceived as being too emotional, and not committed enough to the standards of rational-critical debate institutionalized in the journalistic profession. Some bloggers

are recognized experts in their field, contributing running commentary on events that they may have studied for decades. But bloggers are also often seen as dilettantes, shallowly treating issues that they barely grasp and mangling the truth in their ham-handed postings.

Blogging is a provocative phenomenon to examine because it signals dramatic changes in how citizens build communicative networks of interdependence in ways that try to address the three challenges of public deliberation: invention, emotion, and expertism. In many ways, blogging is a proxy for the *network society*, a term that captures the increasing organization of society into a network form that constantly intercommunicates through information technologies. By studying blogging, we can detect features of a *networked imaginary*, or the way that citizens of network societies imagine their relationships to each other, to institutions, and to democratic public culture more generally. One key focal point that I will explore in identifying some characteristics of the networked imaginary is *attention*. Networked societies are inherently information-rich, with media swarming from mobile devices, computers, billboards, televisions, newspapers, books, radios, films, and more. With all these media constantly intercommunicating with each other and making demands upon individual time, citizens must design ways to focus attention. Otherwise, we are just awash in a datastream of undifferentiated fragments jostling for position in our inherently limited attention spans. While blogging can indeed distract attention from topics that deserve more public discourse, there are also some occasions when bloggers focused public attention.

This dissertation examines three such instances when blogging focused public attention. From these archetypal episodes of blogging, I explore particular metaphors that capture dynamics of public deliberation in a networked society. By critically reading these tropes, I develop a 'grammar of blogging,' a vocabulary that identifies the unique rhetorical contribution

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of blogging. This grammar of blogging illustrates how networked societies deal with the three challenges of invention, emotion, and expertism that I have pinpointed as crucial to creating democratic legitimacy. These three case studies are:

- *Senator Trent Lott's (R-MS) controversial comments at Senator Strom Thurmond's (R-SC) 100th birthday party.* In December 2002, Trent Lott made what were widely seen as remarks sympathetic to segregation in a toast to the 1948 Dixiecrat candidate for president, Strom Thurmond. The institutional media initially failed to devote much coverage to the issue, but Lott's comments roiled several prominent bloggers in the nascent blogosphere. These bloggers dug up evidence from Trent Lott's past that painted him as an unapologetic advocate for racial discrimination. The institutional media eventually picked up on this research, building hydraulic pressure for Lott's eventual resignation as Senate majority leader. One blogger at the center of the affair described his blogging as 'flooding the zone,' implying that bloggers were saturating public discourse by working the controversy from almost every imaginable angle. The metaphor of 'flooding the zone' signals the inventional capacities of the blogosphere.

- *Salam Pax's narration of life in pre-war Iraq.* In early 2003, before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, a cosmopolitan Iraqi citizen going by the 'blog-de-plume' of Salam Pax ('Peace Peace' in Arabic and Latin) detailed his experience of living on the precipice of war. The visceral, raw posts published by Salam Pax—who became the most linked-to blogger ever—gave a highly personal view of the invasion. Salam Pax's blogging produced what might be called 'ambient intimacy,' a constant cycling of affect into public life. 'Ambient intimacy'

suggests the extent to which emotion has been successfully reasserted into the traditionally rational-critical sphere of public deliberation.

- *RealClimate's intervention in public discussions about climate science.* In late 2004, a group of climate scientists formed a group blog dedicated to providing scientific context for news stories about global warming. These scientists refute editorials published by deniers of anthropogenic warming, comment on popular culture artifacts that entered into the climate debate, and translate key scientific developments related to climate change for a lay audience. The scientists at *RealClimate* participate in 'shallow quotation' to transfer highly technical scientific claims into public spheres of argumentation. Shallow quotation, perhaps best represented by the offset pull-quotes that bloggers use when citing other websites, is an apt term to understand how knowledge claims move between disparate discourse communities online.

The three case studies I identify each offer an opportunity to develop a more sophisticated vocabulary to describe the activities of citizens in a network society. The development of this 'grammar of blogging,' which includes but is certainly not limited to the tropes of flooding the zone, ambient intimacy, and shallow quotation, underlines the rhetoricity of new information technologies and presents new avenues to think about rhetorical criticism and production. In addition, this grammar identifies the norms and practices that constitute what I call the networked imaginary.

The balance of this chapter lays out the intellectual and methodological assumptions that inform my analysis of blogging's rhetorical contributions. First, I connect the central concepts of public deliberation, social imaginaries, and information technologies. I then explicate two key

concepts that receive considerable play in this project: the terms 'rhetoric' and 'network society.' Finally, I outline my method of analysis and principles of case study selection.

1.2 Public Deliberation, Social Imaginaries, and Information Technology

Jürgen Habermas' well-known study of bourgeois public culture in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* identified the practices of civil society that put newly minted democratic institutions in touch with public opinion through the press.[4] The onset of what can be loosely called 'modernity,' a series of cultural, political, and scientific shifts that problematized traditional modes of social interdependence in the 17th and 18th centuries, demanded new modes of managing increased complexity. The bourgeois public sphere attempted to meet this demand by loosely linking series of public spaces and mediated forms that fostered discussion and debate about collective public life. Coffeehouses, as one such public space, were robust sites of argumentation, contributing to and amplifying the exploding print culture consolidated by the spread of the Gutenberg press. It was through this complex process that public opinion was forged as a democratic counter-weight to traditional modes of decision-making. As public opinion congealed around some issue, responsive representatives would, theoretically, act accordingly to meet the needs of citizens. Publishers of weeklies and other print material would sit in on the rowdy coffeehouse discussions to get a sense of what public opinion

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[4] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). While *Öffentlichkeit* is more faithfully translated as "publicness" or "openness," suggesting a process whereby ideas are tested in the crucible of public argumentation, the word is often translated in English to "public sphere." John Durham Peters nicely dissects the different valences inspired by competing translations of *Öffentlichkeit* in his "Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere," *Media, Culture, and Society* 15 (1993), 542-4. I prefer the interpretation that takes *Öffentlichkeit* to be a dynamic process rather than a static space or aggregate of publics. In fact, I believe that a number of criticisms leveled at Habermas and public sphere theory lose their traction when the concept represented by *Öffentlichkeit* is de-spatialized. My tendency in this project is to recognize the utility of 'blogosphere' as an organizing concept for participants in a networked social imaginary; however, I try to avoid overusing the term as a sweeping metonymic replacement for the multiplicity of blogs and their practices.

was, and would later synthesize that opinion so that elected representatives would know citizen interests more directly. Thus, the press was born as a critical mediating layer between the *demos* and the elected, filtering through claims and counter-claims to set the agenda for public debate, process competing arguments, and, ultimately facilitate appropriate decisions by governing bodies.

Historically, this is a crucial stage in displacing the divine right of royalty, who ruled through the raw exercise of power. The monarchs that had dominated European history until the Enlightenment had engaged in 'representative publicity,' parading themselves *before* the public rather than *for* the public in order to secure legitimacy for their decisions. In contrast to this top-down approach, public opinion offered a bottom-up orientation toward managing a society's affairs. Public opinion, during the early modern-liberal age, was constructed as the key to democratic governance. Moreover, public opinion laid claim to be reasoned and self-reflexive, unlike prior guides to decision-making that privileged power or money over the many. In order to form *public* opinion, as opposed to multiple *privately-held* opinions, Habermas argues that the bourgeois developed what amounted to a new genre of public communication: rational-critical debate. For democracy to work, citizens could not simply assert ill-formed opinions in public discussions. They would have to have well-supported reasons to back them up and be willing to submit them to the public scrutiny of their peers, who were becoming increasingly well-versed in norms and standards of argumentation. In the self-conception of the bourgeois, this process of rational-critical debate would theoretically out poor reasoning and malformed opinions, producing judgments that were enlightened and well justified.

This process of debate and discussion, with attached norms of accessibility, transparency, and reason, forms the basis for what Habermas identifies as the productive kernel at the heart of

an otherwise deeply exclusionary and flawed ideology: critical publicity. Through critical publicity, citizens of a democracy could keep watch on the state and other institutions, aided by the vehicles of the print media. Newspapers and pamphlets would direct the antiseptic light of publicity's sunshine on the illegitimate exercises of raw power and support space outside the penumbra of the state for public opinion to coalesce. These early print media promised to spur argumentation practices between citizens grounded in the transcendent norms of rational-critical debate and thus sustain democratic governance.

The publication of Habermas' *Structural Transformation* authorized a round of theorizing about democratic deliberation rivaled perhaps only by Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* nearly a century before. The cottage industry of Habermasian extenders and critics (of which I am a proud bungalow renter) is incredibly far ranging; however, a particularly efficient synthesis of this diverse work is found in James Bohman's *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy*. It is to Bohman that I turn now to suss out the key features of public deliberation. Though Bohman's work is grounded in a philosophical tradition, his emphasis on argument, dialogue, and persuasion is compatible with rhetorical approaches to deliberation.

Bohman defines public deliberation as "a dialogical process of exchanging reasons for the purpose of resolving problematic situations that cannot be settled without interpersonal coordination and cooperation."[5] Scrutinizing this definition with an eye toward the rhetorical implications of the main components illustrates some key assumptions I hold in my analysis of the deliberative potential of the blogosphere:

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[5] James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 27.

- 'Dialogical process.' Deliberation is a process, not a product. While there may very well be a byproduct of deliberation (like a decision, a vote, or a record of what was said by whom), deliberation is essentially processual. This process is intrinsically dialogical, modeled on conversation between multiple interlocutors. A monological process brooks no competition, whereas a dialogical process assumes that the convergence of multiple perspectives produces a whole greater than the sum of its parts. At the very least, such a process tends to create democratic legitimacy. A presupposition of dialogue is that it expands the horizons of participants, as they see how other people reason and reflexively evolve their own beliefs. The process of argumentation thus changes the participants even as they try to change each other.[6]

- 'Exchanging reasons.' Citizens exchange reasons through all types of media: the voice is the medium most often used for face-to-face communication, but various print, broadcast, and electronic media are used to extend voice in situations when face-to-face dialogue is an impossibility. 'Reason' should not be restricted to the domain of philosophical logic, with its elegant p's and q's organized into proofs. I take an expansive view of reason as justification, which can occur through stories, songs, images, fiction, analogy, metaphor and a host of other communicative activities. A rhetorical approach to reasoning incorporates virtually any symbolic form that can possibly have persuasive impact on an audience. This isn't to say that all reasons are weighted equally; in fact, it is self-reflexivity about the quality of reasoning that makes public deliberation so dynamic, as participants argue for privileging certain views and marginalizing others. And, needless

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[6] See Wayne Brockriede, "Arguers as Lovers," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Winter 1972): 1-11.

to say, different reasons are persuasive to different audiences, who might even react to the same reason differently on two different occasions.

- 'Resolving problematic situations.' Deliberation is not usually called for where people agree. Rather, deliberation is used to resolve controversies in a fashion satisfactory to the parties involved. Controversies can close, at least temporarily, through compromise or through the transformation of the problem that opens up new avenues for resolution acceptable to all affected parties.[7]

- 'Cannot be settled without interpersonal coordination and cooperation.' Deliberation is an alternative to the raw exercise of power. In order to gain legitimacy, a decision must have the consent of those affected. The consent of the governed is the bedrock of democratic governance, and as more interlocutors are absorbed into processes of deliberation, the chances that they will recognize the results as legitimate are generally increased. While controversies are often seen as intractable and based on incommensurable differences, the fact that deliberation occurs at all presupposes certain commonalities—that differences should be worked out through talk instead of fists, that various stakeholders should have an opportunity to voice their opinions, and that there should be some good faith effort to understand alternative viewpoints.

This conception of public deliberation is rich enough to ground a framework that explains how democratic citizens participate in public life. To be clear, public deliberation is no panacea; yet, to adapt Winston Churchill's famous quote about democracy, public deliberation is probably the

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[7] As David Mathews explains, deliberation is intimately involved with revealing citizen choice and helping people find common ground to work with and through their differences; see *Politics for People: Finding a Responsible Public Voice* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

worst form of conflict resolution except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

Bohman's model of public deliberation is amenable to a rhetorical conception of argumentation. His focus on reason giving provides an opening for a richer understanding of the actually existing processes of disagreement and resolution. This conception of dialogical deliberation is an alternative to two other prominent models of public deliberation, proceduralism and precommitment.[8] In proceduralist accounts of public deliberation, certain norms are taken to be sacrosanct and deliberative processes are designed to live up to them. A proceduralist model of deliberation, for example, might insist on turn taking for interlocutors in order to guarantee that each person has an opportunity to contribute equally. While this enshrines a norm of formal equality, this model doesn't guarantee that each participant's reasoning will be equally effective. Interlocutors of superior rhetorical skill easily game proceduralist norms. Alternatively, in the precommitment model, a "binding set of rules and a defined public agenda" might guide deliberation.[9] Precommitment models might take substantive goals and design deliberation to facilitate the achievement of those goals. A society might precommit itself to living sustainably, and thus develop methods for deliberation that help meet those defined goals—perhaps by excluding corporate polluters from participating in the conversation. One significant problem with precommitment models is that complex societies have constantly evolving agendas, and the needs of one age are often not the needs of the next. Precommitment models thus constrain flexibility.

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[8] See Bohman's critique, *Public Deliberation,* 47-53.

[9] Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 24.

Dialogical deliberation, as an alternative to procedural and precommittment models, relies heavily on the critical publicity theorized by Habermas. As Bohman explains,

> publicity constitutes and governs the social space necessary for democratic deliberation: the public sphere. Publicity works on three levels: it creates the social space for deliberation, it governs processes of deliberation and the reasons produced in them, and it provides a standard by which to judge agreements.[10]

Social space is a crucial prerequisite for deliberation. Public spaces provide fora for citizens to communicate with each other, learn about collective needs and desires, and sort good arguments from bad. In the era of the classical Greeks, these publicity functions were performed primarily by the *agora*, a bustling intersection of people in the city marketplace. For much of modern history, "third places," or meeting sites between work and home like pubs, coffeehouses, and town squares, were the social spaces for public deliberation.[11] More contemporarily, the broadcast mass media, and now the internet, constitute public fora for deliberation across space and time.

This first level of publicity is necessary for the second level of publicity, which governs the quality of reason giving in deliberation. In essence, the notion of public reason suggests that an argument must be couched in terms acceptable to a general audience and be capable of withstanding critical scrutiny. Public reasoning can be seen historically as a mode of decision-making that emerged as a preferable alternative to monarchical whim. By contrast, democratically elected leaders must respond with justifications that satisfactorily entail why

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[10] Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 37-8.

[11] Sociologist Ray Oldenburg develops the idea and importance of these third places in *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day* (New York: Paragon House, 1989).

certain actions were taken. And, of course, we demand reasons in our day-to-day formation of opinions. Some reasons withstand scrutiny better than others, just as some audiences prefer certain reasons to others. A religious community could justify a certain policy by appealing to a text they consider holy. While such a justification might be persuasive to those within that religious system, that reasoning will likely struggle in pluralist societies that don't adhere universally to the same belief system.

Public reason invites critique and counter-argument. The quality of public reason must be judged on criteria that are developed by the dialogue partners themselves. This element of public reasoning is referred to as self-reflexivity. Public reason can bend back on itself, by examining whether or not certain reasons are themselves being used reasonably. The print revolution considerably aided this process of self-reflexivity, as the circulation of newspapers, for example, increased meta-communication about the reasonableness of various opinions. The digital revolution, which has similarly increased the amount of 'talk about talk,' might productively be conceptualized as adding further instruments to the toolkit of self-reflexivity about public reasoning.

Finally, the third level of publicity generates methods for open and transparent decision-making. Decisions that incorporate public debate and register votes publicly are more accountable to democratic pressures. Congress, the deliberating body in the United States, does just this by hosting floor debates and tallying votes that can then be evaluated by constituencies. The public nature of this process lends the system a legitimacy that it would not obtain were decisions to be made in private. In fact, the closest antonym to publicity is secrecy, and decisions that are made in secret—even if they are meritorious by some standards—often fail precisely

because they have no legitimacy.[12] The generic suspicion of politicians as people looking to line

their own pockets identifies the importance of public decision-making. When politicians make

decisions based on private, special interests rather than public, general interests, this suspicion is

ratified and some sanction is normally brought to bear against the offender. It is for this reason

that the mass media have traditionally been theorized as watchdogs of democratic decision-

making, for only the press has historically had the resources and capacities to publicize

undemocratic uses of private reasoning to a populace that cannot keep track of all the goings-on

of their elected leaders.

These three levels of publicity are perhaps best understood in the context of Bohman's

primary defense of public deliberation:

> the best defense of public deliberation is that it is more likely to improve the
>
> epistemic quality of the justifications for political decisions. When deliberation is
>
> carried out in an open public forum, the *quality* of reasons is likely to improve. In
>
> such a forum, public opinion is more likely to be formed on the basis of all
>
> relevant perspectives, interests, and information and less likely to exclude
>
> legitimate interests, relevant knowledge, or appropriate dissenting opinions.[13]

Robust public deliberation endeavors to draw in various competing perspectives in an effort to

make the best possible judgment given the imperfections inevitable to knowledge claims made

by deeply human actors. Public reasoning is an instrumentality specifically designed to

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[12] Gordon R. Mitchell's *Strategic Deception: Rhetoric, Science, and Politics in Missile Defense Advocacy* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2000) explores the relationship between secrecy, public deliberation, and legitimacy; especially see Chapter 5.

[13] Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, 27.

accommodate democratic practice in complex societies; it was at play in the Greek *agora*, in the bourgeois public sphere, and now in the dialogic space generated by the internet.

All of this may sound like a very idealized normative vision of democratic legitimacy that works better in theory than in practice. And in many ways it is. As the bourgeois eventually found out, their idealization of rational-critical argumentation norms was imperfect in universally generating the consensus necessary to legitimate decision-making. Habermas' critics invariably make this point: the reality of public deliberation in the bourgeois public sphere rarely, if ever, lives up to the idealization. A culture that valorized the status of one's argument rather than the status of one's standing explicitly excluded non-white and non-male participants. Rational-critical debate was probably often neither rational nor critical. Authority in the bourgeois public sphere likely crept back into public deliberation through implicit credibility assessments of fellow interlocutors. While critics of Habermas productively puncture the fantasy that the bourgeois public sphere smoothed the way for the seamless translation of public opinion into democratic decision-making, these criticisms occasionally miss the point that Habermas obliquely makes: despite the practical difficulties in institutionalizing the norms necessary to make publicity work, the very idea of these norms was an animating force in theorizing democratic governance during the modern age.[14] Charles Taylor's conceptual development of the *social imaginary* more forcefully illustrates how these useful fictions of bourgeois public culture were crucial in consolidating their political power.[15]

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[14] Following this line of argument, critics have begun undermining the claim that the blogosphere is a public sphere based on the criticism that the ideals of the public sphere, like open access and bracketing of status, are not realized through blogging. See Andrew Baioll, "Weblogs and the Public Sphere," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and the Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/weblogs_and_the_public_sphere.html.

[15] The idea of a social imaginary is a useful supplement to Habermasian theory and one that addresses a lacuna both in the original formulation of the bourgeois public sphere and in rhetorical theory. See Meili Steele,

For Taylor, the term social imaginary captures "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."[16] Taylor identifies three primary features of the modern western social imaginary activated in part by the printing revolution and the rise of the bourgeois public sphere: the market, the public sphere, and the sovereign people. The newspaper and the novel, two relatively new modes of public communication made possible by the spread of printing technology, were instrumental in the gradual development of the modern social imaginary. Newspapers spread economic information, while the novel circulated ideas about fellow citizens. Both modes of communication produced new ways to imagine inter-relating with others across time and space. With better information about, say, commodity prices, merchants might shop around for the best deal rather than barter for their neighbor's goods. Thus, the idea of a market guiding economic practice emerged to supplant traditional modes of economic interdependence. Similarly, as literary criticism grew, citizens began to cultivate skill sets applicable to debates about the public good. The concepts of the public sphere and the sovereign rule of the people would be alien to earlier generations of Europeans, habituated into believing that dynastic authority channeled divine will and that the people existed to serve the throne. Yet, the shifting social imaginary naturalized these new practices of modernity in a way that enabled a transition from premodern social arrangements. A social imaginary functions to do just this—to adapt people to changing practices of inter-relation. If, as Taylor explains, "the social imaginary is that

"Hiding from History: Habermas' Elision of Public Imagination," *Constellations* (September 2005): 409-36 and Joshua Gunn, "Refiguring Fantasy: Imagination and its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (February 2003): 41-59.

[16] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 23.

common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy,"[17] then each agent is socially embedded in a "certain matrix" that is difficult to "imagine oneself outside" of.[18] Our sense of self, and our sense of society, is both funded and constrained by these shared imaginations. The modern social imaginary, as a historical phenomenon, shifted public imagination toward innovative ways of managing new political, social, and economic relations accompanying modernity.

The idea of a social imaginary is an evocative concept because "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their surroundings…is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends."[19] I would add that the social imaginary is also captured in metaphors; Adam Smith's invisible hand, for example, entailed a bevy of assumptions and prescriptions for the burgeoning capitalist economies of modern Europe. These suppliers to the social imaginary are repositories of social knowledge and, with their circulation throughout a public, forge common ground across different segments of society.[20] While a society is always more than the sum of its stories, and stories often misrepresent, they are nonetheless inseparable from a society's sense of itself. By examining the stock that provides the basis for the more complex stew of the social imaginary, we can better understand how the norms and practices of different ages emerged.

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[17] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

[18] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 55.

[19] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 23.

[20] Thomas Farrell identifies social knowledge as an understanding of the norms and values of the lifeworld in *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 255. Shared social knowledge is the starting point for finding common ground; it becomes public knowledge through rhetoric. See Lloyd Bitzer, "Rhetoric and Public Knowledge," in *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature*, ed. Don Burks (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1978): 67-92.

It is important to note that social imaginaries are neither static nor singular. Taylor acknowledges that any culture's social imaginary is under constant revision, noting that there are often critical inflection points that dramatically revise public imagination. A particular culture's social imaginary is often destabilized through the rise of new communication practices, which in turn are partially spawned by the incorporation of new media technologies. Marshall McLuhan's declaration that "the use of any kind of medium…alters the pattern of interdependence among people" identifies how new media spur amendments, and sometimes wholesale alterations, to a culture's social imaginary.[21] This claim is not as radical as it may seem, nor does it have to be technologically determinist. Rather, it highlights how new media forms displace old intermediaries and spawn pioneering ones.[22]

How so? Political scientist Bruce Bimber's *Information and American Democracy* links four information regimes in the United States, each with their own dominant media form, to changes in patterns of deliberation and, though he doesn't use the term explicitly, the modernist social imaginary. The first information regime replaced the "weakly coupled networks" of post-

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[21] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Critical Edition)* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2003 [1964]), 127.

[22] I draw from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's definition of new media as those media that re-mediate functionalities previously provided by other media; see their *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000). A middle ground between technological determinism and social constructionist theories of technology is in the concept of 'affordances' explicated by Ian Hutchby in "Technologies, Texts and Affordances," *Sociology—the Journal of the British Sociological Association* 35 (2001): 441-456. An affordance signals the potentiality inherent in any technology—potentiality that is activated by socially-situated actors. Lucas Graves has extended the concept of affordances to the blogosphere, exploring how technological developments intertwined with sociocultural patterns to produce a complex blogging ecology that serves different, sometimes overlapping, publics. See his "The Affordances of Blogging: A Case Study in Culture and Technological Effects," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31 (October 2007): 331-46. For Graves, blogging affords participants the opportunity to apply open source methods to news (by drawing on collective knowledge to fact-check narrative accounts), fixity (through the use of archived permalinks), and juxtaposition (in connecting disparate links into a coherent narrative).

colonial America.[23] It was marked by the development of the United States' postal service and newspaper culture by the 1830s, which eventually produced national political parties.[24] Newspapers, which had been primarily focused on updating the bourgeois on mercantile issues, began to serve as instruments for national parties to communicate with citizens and mobilize feelings of national belonging.

With industrialization and urbanization at the turn of the twentieth century came the second information regime, which produced interest group pluralism.[25] As complexity and specialization increased, "neither the parties or the newspapers could continue to satisfy on their own the bulk of demands by political actors for political information and communication under these new conditions."[26] The growth of associations and lobbyists tasked with channeling constituent support into political pressure was a direct response to the specialization required to have political impact. The telephone and direct mail are two information technologies mastered by interest group politics during this time. By the 1950s, though, the second information regime was already giving way to the third, which centered on the 'mass audience' created by widely diffused broadcast media technology.[27] Television, for example, reduced the power of national political parties by dramatizing the personality-centered campaign.[28] It also gave new opportunities for interest groups to persuade groups of citizen through wide-reaching televised advertisements. Eventually, the broadcast media splintered into increasingly specialized

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[23] Bruce Bimber, *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49.

[24] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 47-61.

[25] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 62-75.

[26] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 69.

[27] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 75-88.

[28] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 76-7.

channels, a trend which gained speed with the advent of computer- and internet-mediated communication.

Bimber suggests that the co-evolution of information technology and political organization up until the advent of the internet required increasingly centralized institutions to manage communication flows. The growth of the internet as a medium of communication has, however, challenged the traditional reliance on institutions to coordinate public life. Thus, we are at the beginning stages of a fourth information regime, one driven largely by internet-related media. For Bimber, the internet's most radical contribution to public deliberation has been the creation of information-intensive environments. Information-intensiveness has five primary effects in circulating political knowledge by

- increasing the number of low-cost channels to spread information from political organizations;
- allowing elites and organizations to gain access to low cost information, creating a greater tailoring of political messages (or 'narrowcasting');
- providing fora for citizens to engage in many-to-many, lateral communication;
- accelerating the circulation of news in a massively interlinked, global circuit;
- archiving information on a scale and with accessibility never before seen.[29]

Taken alone, any one of these would be a significant development. Together, though, these five changing elements underline the dramatically different circulation of political information in a digitized, networked society. The fourth information regime, I believe, points to not a mere revision of the modernist social imaginary but to the birth of a new, networked imaginary.

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[29] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 90-1.

These changes in information regimes can be read as responses to increases in complexity. Bimber explains the shift from the first information regime to the second information regime as a natural response to changing patterns of interdependence occurring as a result of industrialization. He writes, "as human relationships grew far more complex, they required new, more complex patterns of communication to sustain them. These new patterns had to accommodate social reality: a multiplication of relationships, interdependence, and heterogeneity."[30] Industrialization further expanded the types of relationships one navigated, expanding social networks from traditionalist, rural arrangements to the heterotopias of city life. Trust relationships were necessarily renegotiated as interdependence among different parts of society increased. Encounters with different people—not just the stranger come to town— became a way of life. With even more increased complexity, interest groups, now understood more broadly as 'issue publics,' were formed to manage the exigencies of public life. A similar transformation can be seen now, as industrialization gives way to information in networked societies. The shift in complexity isn't from rural to urban living arrangements as in industrialization, but from local to global scales of interrelationship. This shift isn't from the sporadic, irregular news updates to the daily punctuation of the newspaper, but the movement from this daily punctuation to a continuous and instantaneous news cycle. And in some ways, the shift reverses the key trend of modernist societies: from centralized attention structures with layers of institutionalization to decentralized ones that rely on modes of post-publishing circulation to command publics' attention.

Now, we live in a hypercomplex society, and digital media have introduced a whole set of constantly proliferating political intermediaries—bloggers, wikipedians, social bookmarkers,

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[30] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 65.

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and video artists—as participants in public deliberation.[31] As I have already noted, increased

public deliberation is no cure-all for the body politic, and blogging produces rumor, innuendo,

and debasement in addition to what I will identify as more productive democratic practices. But,

broadly speaking, a key development in the networked imaginary is the role of bloggers as new

political intermediaries with unique skills in focusing the attention of publics in a networked

society. As Bimber writes, "a set of technological changes becomes revolutionary when new

opportunities or constraints associated with political intermediation make possible altered

distributions of power," and it is the effort of this dissertation to make the case that blogging

represents an important signifier of this power redistribution in contemporary societies.[32]

Just how dramatic is the shift to digital public culture? Are we talking about a minor

revision of the modernist social imaginary, with the internet promising to fulfill the modern

project? Or is this a dramatic alteration, one that promises to transform nearly every aspect of

human life? It is of course too early to tell, but we might start to get a sense of the gravity of

change by examining how the tacit assumptions and vocabularies underlying modernity are

giving way to new conceptualizations of public life. The signature achievement for modernity,

according to Taylor was to coin 'citizen,' 'market,' and 'popular sovereignty;' but, as political

theorist Benjamin Barber is quick to point out, modernist political theorizing adopted a

vocabulary grounded in materiality which is now surrendering to metaphors grounded in the

virtual. The Newtonian preconceptual frame of modernity, as Barber calls it, asserts that space is

limited, that individuals concatenate off each other like billiard balls, that citizens are individual

parts plugged into a greater whole, that property is a meaningful extension of the self, and that

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[31] Lars Qvortrup, *The Hypercomplex Society* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).
[32] Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, 20.

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boundaries and sanctions must be applied to leverage coordination.[33] While materiality

metaphors might be applicable for industrial conglomerates seeking to maximize profit by

competing with rivals over scarce goods, they struggle to capture realities about public goods

like democratic practice. The physicality of this vocabulary, argues Barber, means that "liberal

theory cannot be expected to give an adequate account of human interdependency, mutualism,

cooperation, fellowship, fraternity, community, and citizenship."[34] Human interaction is richer

than any material or spatial metaphor can capture. My point isn't to deny the materiality of

human relations, but to understand them as only one part of a dialectical interplay with virtual—

that is to say, imagined—processes of communication and cooperation.

Today, metaphors of the virtual rival more material metaphors in frequency and

descriptive power: virtual reality, cyberspace, and information superhighway all hint at the

alternative conceptual models now used to think about human relations.[35] If the metaphor of the

material snuck in the back door of political thought during modernity, I would suggest that

metaphors of the virtual similarly shape contemporary political theory and practice. These

metaphors ultimately have genesis in actual practices, some of which this dissertation

investigates. To explore these linkages, each of the case studies suggests how new practices

initiated by blogging illuminate a feature of the new networked imaginary. And while none of

the changes are as dramatic, perhaps, as the invention of the concepts of citizen, market, and

public sphere, they are micro-revolutions in the *rhetorical imaginary* that adumbrate broader

shifts to come. The 'rhetorical imaginary' is composed of the conceptual terms through which

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[33] Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 34-37.

[34] Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 34-5.

[35] See Ulrike Schultze and Wanda J. Orlikowski, "Metaphors of Virtuality: Shaping an Emergent Reality," *Information and Organization* (January 2001): 45-77.

citizens identify meaningful communicative activities. Taylor explains the process by which

social (and, theoretically, rhetorical) imaginaries transform:

> For the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices.
> These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the
> theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence the new
> understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before.
> It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as
> the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention.[36]

As the three case studies detail, bloggers practiced their trade under the radar for years, but

eventually made big splashes in the general media around specific news stories. These blogging

practices were ultimately theorized, as practitioners, commentators, and speculators attempted to

make sense of this new phenomenon. As blogging became routinized, blogs' capacity to flood

the zone, provide ambient intimacy, and translate technical discourses became the new common

sense of the networked social imaginary.

Patrice Flichy charts how new digital practices, and the meta-reflection on those practices

by popularizers, politicians, science fiction writers, and other opinion leaders during the 1990s

introduced a cyber-*imaginaire* that is similar in function to Taylor's social imaginary. For Flichy,

> linked to no specific project and intended for no particular public, [the cyber-
> *imaginaire*] is a complete imaginary construction encompassing all aspects of the
> new digital society: individual life, relations between mind and body, micro- and
> macrosocial management of society, and production and distribution of wealth.
> Although all these components of the cyber-*imaginaire* were never combined in a

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[36] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 29.

single discourse, a synthesis would reveal something similar to the great utopias

of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which the functioning of a different

world was described.[37]

Flichy's charting of the cyber-*imaginaire* is useful in understanding how the internet insinuated

itself into public imagination throughout the 1990's. However, Flichy's analysis does not extend

to the social networking revolution that actualized the interactive possibilities of the internet and

introduced a more dramatic shift in the social imaginary. It is this latter evolution, from 2001-

2006, that I explore in order to understand the contours of the new social imaginary. Before I

embark on this project, though, I will elaborate on two guiding concepts: rhetoric and the

network society.

1.3 Rhetoric (and Attention)

Computer-mediated communication's close association with cybernetics has occasionally

overemphasized the process of communication as an informational exchange rather than a

rhetorical one. Early in the development of cybernetics, Warren Weaver and Claude Shannon

theorized communication as the transmission of information, subject to noise and other

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[37] Patrice Flichy, *The Internet Imaginaire*, trans. Liz Carey-Libbrecht (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007 [2001]), 107. For Flichy, the "imaginaire" is similar to Taylor's conception of the social imaginary. One point of tension between Flichy and Taylor, though, is that Flichy suggests the internet imaginaire is largely driven by elite discourses that then structure the possibilities of public imagination. He suggests that ideas about what roles the internet could play in contemporary society were largely shaped by politicians, industrialists, computer scientists, and hackers, whose "discourses spawned the internet myth that was then popularized for the general public" (107). Consequently, he examines texts produced by Al Gore, Howard Rheingold, William Gibson and *Wired* magazine to see how theories of the internet migrated to popular consciousness (see especially chapters 3 and 4). As Flichy writes, "this cyber-*imaginaire* [created by internet 'prophets' and science fiction writers] also interested ordinary users. It provided them not with practical resources for entering into a new technical world…but with a general vision of cyberspace and the information society" (127). Recognizing the role of popularizers in shaping how we think about new technologies, I occasionally pull in popular press articles and books to underline the extent to which the grammar of the blogosphere I am identifying has already diffused into public grammars.

disruptions.[38] This mathematical extension of the basic sender-receiver model has a lot of allure, quite obviously for technicians trying to get binary 1's and 0's lined up, but also for theorists of computer-mediated communication hoping to improve human communication. Shannon and Weaver's informationism lives on, albeit in slightly more sophisticated form. For example, a prominent critique of blogging, that blogs only reduce the signal-to-noise ratio in public communication, is grounded in quasi-mathematical assumptions about how meaning is made and circulated. In this section, I expand upon an alternative conception of communication as not mere information exchange but as a rhetorical process involved with focusing attention.

This isn't to discount the way in which blogs perform basic informational tasks. Bloggers produce information about their own lives, about their political opinions, about their hobbies. They dissect and add to other sources of information through various hyperlinking practices. Blogs provide a source of information about other citizens, about the government, about corporations, about publics and their problems. They provide new ways of organizing and presenting information. Blogs do in fact take up a number of information tasks in contemporary democracies.

But there is a danger to this view, 'informationism,' that sees all communication as information exchange. Informationism is an ideology that suggests the circulation of information will necessarily entail alterations in the behaviors of individuals and institutions. Informationists believe that if we could just get a more ideal distribution and circulation of information, then we would make better decisions about our collective life together. There's something to informationism: when we learn new things, we do often change our behavior. But such a view of

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[38] Warren Weaver and Claude Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

blogging as merely rearranging information would be incredibly impoverished. Though the content of internetworked technologies are ultimately reducible to digital strings of 1's and 0's, the making of meaning is far more complex. Information is never 'just' information, and the circulation of raw data by itself doesn't rearrange human relationships. Interpretation is always an interlude between data and its publication. A blogger can write about an event they witnessed, but they can never do so as a neutral observer. Once they start using symbols, they are caught in a web of mixed and shaded meanings, complexities involved in naming and description, and the possibility that potential audiences will impose their own reading strategies. In other words, information is never just information because it is caught up in a web of rhetorical meaning.

An alternative to informationism emerges in rhetorician Richard Lanham's critique of what he calls the C-B-S model of communication. The C-B-S model represents what are often taken to be communicative ideals: clarity, brevity, and sincerity.[39] These three criteria are assumed as normative ideals to which individual speech acts should aspire. We should be clear, speak plainly, and articulate our ideas with an elegant simplicity. We should be brief, to the point, and not use speech merely as a way to exercise our vocal chords. We should also be sincere, by saying what we mean and meaning what we say. Clarity, brevity, and sincerity are taken to be especially important for public communication, which is often marked by obfuscation, long-windedness, and outright deception. This is the communicative model of informationism, which approaches disputes with the assumption that if participants in a controversy would only adhere to telling the truth, simply and clearly, that we might be able to resolve issues satisfactorily.

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[39] Richard Lanham, *The Electronic Word*: *Democracy, Technology, and the Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 62. Lanham utilizes the same formulation in his later book, *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Information Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 137-142.

But how well do these criteria really perform as normative ideals of public communication? To be frank, these norms hardly pass the smell-test, especially in hypercomplex, networked societies. Certainly, some level of clarity is desirable in order to encourage intelligible discourse. At the same time, standards of clarity have radically morphed for different publics. What is clear language to the specialist might not be so clear to the lay person; even different groups of lay people have varying assumptions, histories, and interpretations that make misunderstanding more the norm of communication than an aberration.[40] And while brevity is often the soul of wit, it fails to be a satisfactory normative expectation when deadly serious issues facing deliberating publics must be comprehensively explained. Most people don't want brief medical diagnoses from their doctors about what's ailing them; they demand to know as much as they can in order to make informed decisions, and similar demands for extended analysis and back-and-forth communication adhere in numerous other contexts. It's similarly difficult to imagine how sincerity could obtain as a feasible norm in societies where trust relationships have supplanted the intimate relationships of earlier times. Of course, the sincerity test is problematic to begin with—how do you gauge another's intent?—and assumes an outmoded and overly romantic vision of authenticity.

The C-B-S model doesn't provide a very good account of communication in our contemporary times (if it ever did). But there's something else problematic about that model of communication: it strips most of what is interesting about communication away. There is a subtle richness to communication that is denuded by a model that sees communication only as an efficient way of coordinating two or more people. This vibrancy is captured by rhetorical

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[40] See Jeffrey St. John, "Communication as Failure," in *Communication As…Perspectives on Theory*, eds. Gregory Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006): 249-256.

conceptions of public communication, which can serve as an alternative to the C-B-S model.

Rhetoric is, as the legendary rhetorical critic Kenneth Burke explains, the "use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols."[41] We use all sorts of symbolic means to bend each other toward particular beliefs or courses of action: printed text, images, yelps, music, poetry, and painting, through many media like letters, newspapers, television, radio, and the internet. Burke finds rhetoric such an interesting lens on the world because "rhetoric is *par excellence* the region of the Scramble, of insult and injury, bickering, squabbling, malice and the lie, cloaked malice and the subsidized lie;" yet, alongside these "malign inclinations" are "benign elements" grounded in compassion for others.[42] It is this mix of rhetoric's corruptibility and correctability, to borrow a phrase from Thomas Farrell, which makes the study of rhetoric so central to understanding the ever-present features of the human Scramble, now being partially played out on the field of blogosphere.[43]

The study of persuasion has deep roots in classical Greek thought, especially from the era of Athenian democracy that saw Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, and others record their thoughts on the democratic arts. In those times, rhetorical arts were considered crucial to participation in public life. Democratic citizens were to use persuasion rather than violence to get their way in the resolution of judicial cases and in deliberations about policy. Rhetoricians taught Athenians how to argue so that they could defend themselves in a trial, make a case in front of the Assembly, or deliver a memorable oration at a festival or commemoration. Though rhetoricians were prominent at the time, so were their critics. Most prominent amongst these was Plato, who considered rhetoric a *pharmakon*, or drug, that intoxicated the masses rather than enlightened

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[41] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969 [1950]), 43.

[42] Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 19.

[43] Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, 182-6.

them. Variations of the Platonic critique of rhetoric stretch to the present day, with rhetoric opposed to philosophy's 'real knowing' and conflated with shallow speech not backed up by deeds. Rhetoric is also associated with propaganda—see Hitler, Adolf—and deception; it is, in a word, trickery.[44]

But recent developments have set the stage for a rhetorical renaissance of sorts. Lanham argues that all the talk about the 'information economy' or 'knowledge economy' provides an opening to think about rhetoric through the lens of attention, revaluing rhetoric as a useful area of inquiry capable of equipping citizens with the necessary tools to get by in a networked society. He begins his case with an analogy:

> Economics, as we all remember from Introduction to Economics, studies the allocation of scarce resources. Normally we would think that the phrase 'information economy,' which we hear everywhere nowadays, makes some sense. It is no longer the physical stuff that is in short supply, we are told, but information about it. So, we live in an 'information economy.' But information is not in short supply in the new information economy. We're drowning in it. What we lack is the human attention needed to make sense of it all. It will be easier to find our place in the new regime if we think of it as an economics of attention. Attention is the commodity in short supply.[45]

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[44] Wayne Booth's term, "rhetrickery" is particularly revealing here. See his *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

[45] Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, xi. Herbert Simon formulated it thusly: "a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it;" see "Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World," in *Computers, Communication, and the Public Interest*, ed. Martin Greenberger (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1971), 41.

This setup allows Lanham to suggest that rhetoric is best conceived as an "economics of attention" because "it tells us how to allocate our central scarce resource, to invite people to attend to what we would like them to attend to."[46] Lanham situates the industrial age as concerned primarily with producing 'stuff,' the material products that were later sold to consumers. Anything that didn't have to do with stuff was dismissed as being 'fluff.' Rhetoric was one of those fluffy things; it was style, not substance.

But with the shifting economy in networked societies, the stuff itself isn't as valuable as the fluff used to describe the stuff. Richard Florida's *The Creative Class* marks this shift by describing a host of contemporary industries that don't *make* any material *thing*—except symbols.[47] Graphic designers, computer programmers, middle managers, and, of course, university professors are professions linked by their primary emphasis on symbolic crafting. In the United States, with the decline in agricultural and manufacturing sectors, the creative class is increasingly central. For 'fluffers,' "'capital' in this new economy [is located] in the literary and artistic imagination, the powers that take the biogrammar we inherit and spin from it new patterns for how to live and to think about how we live."[48] If there is a cinematic marker that identifies when fluff overtakes stuff in the social imaginary, it is the 1989 film *Say Anything*. In that film, John Cusack's character Lloyd, in response to a question about what he wants to do with his life, tells his girlfriend's father: "I don't want to buy anything, sell anything or process anything. I don't want to buy anything sold, bought or processed, sell anything bought, sold or

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[46] Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, xii-iii.
[47] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
[48] Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 9.

processed or process anything sold, bought or processed as a career."[49] Lloyd didn't want to deal with stuff. The sequel would have had Lloyd firmly settled in a career managing fluff.

Of course, Lanham's whole point is that fluff isn't really that fluffy. In fact, fluff is crucially important to managing the complexity of an information-saturated world. Whereas traditional economics dealt with managing scarce material resources, an economics of attention would direct study at a new scarce resource, namely attention. Why is attention so important for Lanham? Because, as he explains, "the kitchen that cooks the raw data into useful 'information' is human attention."[50] Raw data, or 'clean information' is more or less worthless without the interpretive assistance provided by human attention that makes sense of phenomena. For Lanham,

> Clean information is unnatural and unuseful. Information always comes charged with emotion of some kind, full of purpose. That is why we have acquired it. The only way to make it useful is to filter it. Filtering thus becomes central. And here is where style comes in. We keep striving for 'pure information,' but the more information we have, the more we need filters, and one of the most powerful filters we have is the filter of style … the utopia of perfect information brings with it the return of stylistic filtration, of, as it has traditionally been called in Western culture, rhetoric.[51]

Rhetoric focuses attention through style, converting 'clean information' into something like prudential knowledge. Wisdom, not just information, is necessary to make good decisions. Wisdom entails knowing how to read situations in context, seeing similarities and dissimilarities

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[49] *Say Anything*, directed by Cameron Crowe, 20th Century Fox, 1989.

[50] Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 7.

[51] Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 19.

that enable one to make an informed judgment about best actions. The Greek isomorphism

between good speaking and good thinking underlines this historical connection between rhetoric

and wisdom, and Lanham speculates that this relationship is renewed with digital culture.

A rhetorical approach to blogging is useful because it directs us to how blogging uses

symbolic inducement to focus attention and thus alter attitudes and actions. In other words,

acknowledging how rhetoric shapes realities allows us to take seriously how bloggers might

influence attention economies. If rhetoric can help illuminate features of blogging, it is at least

partially because blogging has invigorated rhetorical practice. An accidental consequence of

blogging's surge into public prominence is the parallel uptick in the prevalence of the language

of persuasion. Jerome Armstrong, the founder of the progressive strategy blog *MyDD*, argues

"the holy grail that everybody is looking for right now is 'how can you use the Internet for

persuasion.'"[52] Bloggers talk about premises and inferences, what sorts of evidence warrant what

sorts of conclusions, the credibility of various advocates, and other terms related to

argumentation. Some bloggers go so far as to suggest that blogging uniquely adds to traditional

techniques of public argumentation. Markos Moulitsas Zúniga of the blog community *dailyKos*

identifies one such addition: "when bloggers make an argument, we can add a link to support our

premises."[53] The process of hyperlinking, by which a blogger directs attention to another source

which can then be scrutinized by the reader, hints at some of the wrinkles that blogging

introduces into argumentation. A speaker at a rally might make a claim, but the proof offered in

that moment to the audience might be inadequate to persuade them. Hyperlinking introduces an

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[52] Quoted in Adam Nagourney, "Internet Injects Sweeping Change Into U.S. Politics," *New York Times*, April 2, 2006, http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10B14FF38540C718CDDAD0894DE404482. Single quotes added for readability.

[53] Quoted in Deborah Solomon, "Kos Célèbre," *New York Times Magazine*, March 19, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/19/magazine/319wwln_q4.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=kos+celebre&st=nyt&oref=slogin.

instantaneous reference to other types of proof, which often reveals more substance to the argument being made. The hyperlink is central to directing attention from one web page to another; indeed, "the hyperlinked environment can be thought of as a virtual marketplace in which the purveyors of content compete with one another for the attention of the public."[54]

In this context, the term 'blogosphere' takes on added salience. The blogosphere, as an organizing concept for bloggers, signals that blogging occupies a space in the democratic imagination previously reserved for agencies of the public sphere like pubs, coffeehouses, the town square, and municipal meetings. If the '-sphere' language has origins in Habermasian thought, 'blogo-' is deeply rooted in a rhetorical history. As one of the key popularizers of the term blogosphere writes, "the root word is *logos*, from the Greek meaning…human reasoning about the cosmos."[55] Implicitly, then, rhetoric lies at the root of how many bloggers depict their activities. One goal of this dissertation is to make this connection more explicit; to use the rhetorical tradition to illuminate features of blogging and to use blogging to reveal qualities of contemporary rhetoric. Such an approach also promises to shed light on the overlapping relationships between rhetoric, argumentation, and deliberation.

Aaron Barlow has centered argumentation as similarly important to bloggers' self-conception. He writes,

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[54] James G. Webster, "Structuring a Marketplace of Attention," in *The Hyperlinked Society: Questioning Connections in the Digital Age*, eds. Joseph Turow and Lokman Tsui (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 23. Note the shift from a marketplace of ideas to a marketplace of attention; a metaphoric shift that indicates a jump from modernist to networked sensibilities.

[55] William T. Quick, "I Propose a Name," *Daily Pundit*, Jan. 1, 2002, http://www.iw3p.com/DailyPundit/ 2001_12_30_dailypundit_archive.html#8315120. Quick takes his definition of "logos" from the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Rhetoricians will be quick to remind translators of the term *logos* that it connoted a wide variety of meanings in the ancient Greek including word, argument, proof, reasoning, and thought. See Susan Wells, "Logos," in *The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas Sloane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 456-68. The multiple meanings of logos square nicely with the wide range of communicative activity present on blogs. Quick might have popularized the term blogosphere, but credit widely goes to Bradley Graham, an early blog pioneer, for coining the term. See Bradley Graham, "It's Peter's Fault," *The Bradlands*, Sept. 10, 1999, http://www.bradlands.com/weblog/comments/september_10_1999/.

Argument (as more than a spectator sport) … wakes in people desires that lead to their direct participation in both the public sphere and political life. Without their argumentative side, the blogs would eventually sink into the mire that the commercial news media has found itself stuck in. Without their anger and passion, the blogs would be no more than another new avenue for the same old, same old of the commercial press.[56]

Since rhetoric works as a conceptual pillar for this dissertation, I explore in each case study how rhetorical theory can complement theories of public deliberation. The three challenges I identified—invention, emotion, and expertism—are figured as rhetorical challenges with which the pre-blogosphere mediascape struggled. Though the blogosphere cannot claim to have dissolved the tensions introduced by each of these challenges, there are unique features of blogging that address the rhetorical deficiencies of modernist theories of public deliberation.

1.4 The Network Society

'Network society' is a signifier—a rhetorical shortcut—for the complex social, political, and economic changes emerging from the fusion of globalization, new information technologies, and shifting norms of public culture. Alternatively represented by the terms 'information age' or 'knowledge economy,' the idea of a network society captures a more accurate sociological account of contemporary life. In many ways, the communicative process of blogging is a synecdoche for the network society; studying this representative part informs our knowledge of the whole. This project tracks the refiguration of public deliberation as the modernist social imaginary blends into a networked one. In doing so, I follow Ronald Greene's suggestion that

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[56] Barlow, *The Rise of the Blogosphere* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 179.

communication scholars must "register the ways that the network society disrupts the preferred temporality of rhetorical deliberation" in an era of "instantaneous and continuous 24/7/365 circulation of discourse."[57]

The changes from modernist societies to networked ones are obviously more complex than can be fully captured here. In fact, they are in some part unknowable, since social imaginaries are so abstract, accreted from loosely related practices, and sedimented in opaque layers that deciphering clear transition points is difficult. However, Manuel Castells' work on the network society provides a largely satisfying account. For Castells, the network society emerged from three developments.[58] First, there was the crisis in industrialism and the concomitant spread of globalization in the post-World War II years. As the manufacturing base in the successfully industrialized nation-states eroded, a service economy increasingly based in symbolic dexterity took shape. The flows of global capital and labor incidentally broadened cultural interactions between populations that had been more or less cordoned off from each other by national borders. A 'global economy' itself developed as a network of industrial firms manufacturing goods in one place, delivering them to another, with intermediaries in perhaps yet another place facilitating movement across the network.

Changes in economic relations intersected with cultural shifts emerging from new social movements. The new social movements of the 1960s and 70s could be read as outbreaks of dissatisfaction with dominant modernist sensibilities. In May of 1968, student movements in

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[57] Ronald Greene, "Rhetorical Pedagogy as a Postal System: Circulating Subjects through Michael Warner's 'Publics and Counterpublics,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (Nov. 2002), 437.

[58] Manuel Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," in *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Manuel Castells (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004), 19. See also his *Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture,* Volumes 1-3, 3rd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003).

France decided they weren't satisfied with a future defined by a grey flannel suit and life as an 'Organization (wo)Man.' Their ability to temporarily stop French society drew heightened attention to movements revaluing the norms, styles, and values of historically marginalized groups. As Castells remarks,

> these social movements were cultural; that is, oriented towards a transformation of the values of society. And the key values that were put forwards, and that ultimately created a new culture around the world, were three: the value of freedom and individual autonomy vis-à-vis the institutions of society and the power of corporations; the value of cultural diversity and the affirmation of the rights of minorities, ultimately expressed in human rights; and the value of ecological solidarity; that is, the reunification of the interest of the human species as a common good, in opposition to the industrial values of material growth and consumption at all costs.[59]

With these new social movements, the grand narratives of modernity were critiqued as dangerous constructions rather than useful fictions. It was in the wake of these movements that artistic and intellectual currents labeled 'postmodernism' flourished.[60] Postmodern critique drew attention to

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[59] Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," 19. Also see Alain Touraine, *A New Paradigm for Understanding the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

[60] Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984 [1979]) can be profitably re-read in the context of recent work on the internetworked society. In *The Postmodern Condition*, he situates what he calls postmodernism as an outgrowth of "the computerization of society" (7) which has produced subjects that are nodes in a broader network which itself is constituted by atomization of the social into an endless proliferation of language games (17). Lyotard defines modernity in the context of its Enlightenment roots as "any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of philosophy that appeals to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. For example, the rule of consensus between sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value is deemed acceptable if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds: this is the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end-universal peace" (xxiii-xxiv). Postmodernism refers to the general "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). This decline in the salience of metanarratives is directly related to "the

the inadequacies of the modernist conceptual apparatus to explain society to itself, much less

provide a normative baseline for how society should be organized.[61] The flourishing of

postmodernism in the latter third of the twentieth century signified a destabilization of the

modernist social imaginary, creating systemic flux that allowed another social imaginary to put

down roots.

Of course, one can't be 'post-' forever. At some point social organization takes on

affirmative qualities rather than just being signified with respect to prior organizational forms. I

would argue that the network society is this affirmative description, and its development was

greatly aided by the advancement of communication networks in the 1970s. This advancement

was driven by a revolution in information technology that rivaled the invention of the alphabet or

the printing press. The development of the microprocessor in 1971 miniaturized the computer

and other electronic devices. The development of the Advanced Research Projects Agency

Network (ARPANET), under the auspices of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency

(DARPA), coincided with the microprocessor. About 25 years later, the internet rapidly diffused

into everyday life, becoming a significant mode of interpersonal relationship, commercial

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effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War" (37) and "the redeployment of advanced liberal-capitalism" (38). Technology and globalization are thus implicated in the denial of any particular language game a metaprescriptive force; that is, no language game can claim to trump others, as in prior eras. Discourse communities are simply too splintered for the kinds of legitimation that occurred in prior eras to operate, leading to Lyotard's primary critique of Habermas' theories of consensus and legitimation. This splintering of discourse communities is obvious, for Lyotard, in the sciences, which have "added suburbs" to the old town through hyper-specialization (41). Consequently, the sciences (and presumably other deliberative affairs) undergo two changes: "a multiplication in methods of argumentation and a rising complexity level in the process of establishing proof" (41). Leah Lievrouw's "New Media and the 'Pluralization of Lifeworlds': A Role for Information in Social Differentiation," identifies how a similar process occurs beyond the sciences in multiplying lifeworld practices through digital media; see *New Media and Society* (February 2001): 7-28.

[61] John Thompson's *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) explains the connection between print media and the onset of the modern age and the challenge of new global communications technology to the modern system. See also David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) on the time-space compression of modernity as compared to postmodernity.

enterprise, and political organization. This new technology interacted dialectically with the public culture of the time, changing it even as the culture influenced how the internet was adopted.

As Castells acknowledges, networked forms of organization have been ever-present within human society (gossip networks, for example, have existed since time immemorial). However, "beyond a certain threshold of size, complexity, and volume of exchange, they [networks] become less efficient than vertically organized command and control structures, under the conditions of pre-electronic communication technology."[62] Modernist societies thus tended to funnel networks into structurally differentiated, vertical, and institutionalized systems of knowledge and organization. These vertical hierarchies formed effective attention structures capable of addressing many of the problems of these rapidly complexifying societies: parliamentary structures, for example, are centralized bodies of deliberation ideally designed to focus attention on problems in the lifeworld. Similarly, the tendency of firms in capitalist societies during the modern period to centralize, monopolize, and conglomerate was an efficient way for private industry to manage the informational tasks accompanying production and distribution. And for all the critiques of capitalized industry, it's hard to deny that they haven't been successful in producing and circulating their goods and services on a global scale due in part to their hierarchical organization.

But the development of sophisticated electronic communication renewed the power of networks to fulfill some of the functions previously played by modernist organizational schematics. Castells relates that, "as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the information age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social

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[62] Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," 5.

morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture."[63] But what, exactly, is a network? Castells answers:

> A network is a set of interconnected nodes. A node is the point at which the curve intersects itself. What a node is, concretely speaking, depends on the kind of concrete networks of which we speak … [nodes] are television systems, entertainment studios, computer graphics milieux, news teams, and mobile devices generating, transmitting, and receiving signals, in the global network of the new media at the roots of cultural expression and public opinion in the information age.[64]

For Castells, stock market exchanges and global political councils like the United Nations are nodes. Nodes are sites where communication is produced, circulated, and received, which means that cell phones, computers, and websites are all potentially nodes in the communicative network of society. Each node functions as a potential relay for information, obviating the need for a center. To use a simple but now familiar example, music aficionados used to have to go to places called 'record stores' in order to purchase music. In contrast to that centralized distribution structure, music fans can now download music from peer-to-peer networks. By snatching small bits from many hosts, the need for a record store is greatly diminished (to the dismay of some and the joy of others).

Not all nodes are created equally, though. Nodes become increasingly important to the extent that they can perform certain information tasks. As Castells suggests,

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[63] Castells, *Rise of the Network Society*, 469.
[64] Castells, *Rise of the Network Society*, 470.

nodes may be of varying relevance for the network. Nodes increase their

importance for the network by absorbing more relevant information, and

processing it more efficiently. The relative importance of a node does not stem

from its specific features but from its ability to contribute to the network's goals.

However, all nodes of a network are necessary for the network's performance.

When nodes become redundant or useless, networks tend to reconfigure

themselves, deleting some nodes, and adding new ones.[65]

If this sounds like a description of the blogosphere, where reputations rise and fall based on the

speed, frequency, and quality of contribution, it's because blogs self-organize into crisscrossing

networks. Castells' emphasis on nodes underlines the value of network forms of organization.

Networks have become the optimal organizational form because of their scalability,

survivability, and flexibility. These are three unique advantages of network forms enabled by

digital communication technology. Castells captures these features by highlighting what's so

new about new digital technologies: "their self-expanding processing and communicating

capacity in terms of their volume, complexity, and speed; their ability to recombine on the basis

of digitization and recurrent communication; their distributing flexibility through interactive,

digitized networking."[66]

Each of these features can be refracted through a blog-centric prism. First, digital

networks are scalable. The blogosphere has taken advantage of certain capacities—more or less

free storage space, hyperlinking, and broadband technologies—to radically expand and innovate

in ways unforeseen by early bloggers. Bloggers contribute to a greater volume of

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[65] Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," 3.
[66] Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," 9.

communication: it seems undeniable that there is now more communication about more things

than at any prior point in human history, partially because blogs enable personal publication.

Blogs also represent networks of varying complexity, from the simple, personal blog aimed at

one's immediate friends and family to more densely connected publics. In addition, the speed of

blogging enables worldwide communications in real-time, encouraging bloggers to be part of

rapid-response networks that coalesce around unfolding events.

Second, digital networks are survivable. We could call this the 'DARPA effect,' after the

original intention on the part of the Department of Defense to have a survivable communications

network after a nuclear attack. Though there's no real equivalent to a nuclear attack on the

blogosphere, blogs are able to survive and circumvent other threats, such as censorship by the

state. In China, for example, state censors block blogs that push the envelope too far. But it

doesn't take long for even lazy bloggers to reconfigure their blogs to circumvent their watchers

and there simply aren't enough censors to track every blog.[67] Here's another example of the

drastic mismatch between modernist sensibilities and networked logics: blocking information

flows is only temporarily successful in an era of survivable and adaptable networks.

Finally, digital networks are flexible. The interactivity provided by blogs offers

individuals a platform by which to contribute to the self-reflexivity of the network. Blogs are

flexible enough to meet a wide variety of needs and fulfill multiple functions for networked

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[67] For an overview of internet and control in authoritarian regimes like China, see Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor Boas, *The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian Regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001). Kalathil and Boas outline the methods that China utilizes to censor access, based on denying searches for certain terms and blocking IP addresses. Though these are undeniably effective in some ways at blocking access to homepages, the Chinese proverb "you can dam a river forever, but not the mouths of the people," hints at the problems that state censors have keeping up with technological developments that allow circumvention of state censors like proxy IP addresses. Svetlana V. Kulikova and David Perlmutter similarly explore how bloggers gain a layer of added security through their relative anonymity in "Blogging Down the Dictator? The Krgyz Revolution and *Samizdat* Websites," *International Communication Gazette* 69 (2007): 29-50.

citizens. Moreover, their flexibility is enhanced through the process of digitization, which allows all sorts of media to converge through the medium of the internet. While blogging began as primarily a text-based activity (in this way, bloggers could be considered 'throwback publics' invigorated by a refamiliarization with textuality) it is now a decidedly multimodal communication form, integrating images, audio, and videos. This flexibility in terms of rhetorical production is matched by flexibility in linking practices. Bloggers can move up and down a ladder of influence as linking and citation practices change over time. Some bloggers hit the 'A-list' because of a certain diligence, or a specific area of expertise, or simply because they are hilarious. The general point is that the blogosphere is a constantly shifting arena capable of fulfilling many evolving needs in a networked society.

These features of networks, I argue, are beginning to constitute a networked imaginary that plays a similar role to the modern social imaginary in linking citizen interactions in contemporary societies. In some ways, the idea of a network *society* or a *social* imaginary directs attention to the sociology of human relations. I want to redirect focus, instead, to networked *sensibilities*, which highlight the norms by which citizens imagine their relations with others. By sensibilities, I mean to include the habits of thinking, patterns of interaction, structures of institutions, desired norms of deliberation, acceptable grounds for critique, and circulation of ideas that are emerging in networked societies. It is these sensibilities that contribute to the development of a social imaginary, so it's worth investigating the nature of these sensibilities in different eras. Since the networked age is slowly supplanting modernist sensibilities, sketching out the basic features of what is being replaced will return conceptual dividends.

Perhaps the most drastic shift in orientation from modernist to networked sensibilities is the move from 'dichotomization' to 'relationality.' Modernist sensibilities were founded on

various dichotomies: culture/nature, reason/emotion, mind/body, public/private, and, to many a

rhetorician's dismay, action/speech. These dichotomies structured public deliberation during the

modern age, as, for example, emotion was marginalized in favor of abstract rationality, and there

is plenty of residual attachment to these strict divisions even in a network society. If modernist

sensibilities are founded on dichotomies, networked sensibilities might be said to emerge from

oscillatio, the rhetorical figure that Lanham associates most closely with the new attention

economy and digital media.[68] For Lanham, oscillatio captures the essential movement of

electronic text: one oscillates between looking *at* and *through* the text. The hyperlink

demonstrates this process. As one reads a blog post, for example, one can look *at* a hyperlinked

fragment as part of a sentence. However, one can also look *through* the hyperlink by clicking on

it and following the redirection. Rather than brusquely dichotomized, networked sensibilities are

essentially relational. The categories of nature/culture, reason/emotion, mind/body,

public/private, and action/speech are more intertwined than in modernity: sometimes in tension,

sometimes situated along a spectrum, but always connected to each other.

But what exactly constitutes a networked sensibility, and how might it be put on a

continuum of sensibilities arising in prior ages? Tom Pettitt's identification of the 'Gutenberg

Parenthesis' directs our attention to some aspects of premodernist and modernist sensibilities,

through which an understanding of networked sensibilities can be sophisticated. He suggests that

culture making can be divided into three rough eras, with the rise of the printing press and

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[68] Lanham, *Electronic Word*, 43-6 and *Economics of Attention*, 125.

modernity providing an interval, or parenthesis, with specific norms attached to creative (and I might add rhetorical) production (see Table 1).[69]

Pre-Parenthetical	Gutenberg Parenthesis	Post-Parenthetical
Re-creative	Original	Sampling
Collective	Individual	Remixing
Contextual	Autonomous	Borrowing
Unstable	Stable	Reshaping
Traditional	Canonical	Appropriating
Performance	Composition	Recontextualizing

Table 1. Pettit's 'Gutenberg Parenthesis.'

Before the Gutenberg printing press, culture was primarily invested in re-creating received canonical works through live performances. In the Athens of the rhetoricians' times, music was an integral part of religious festivals. During the summer festival Panathenaia, a "grand singing procession" wound through the city streets as a collective performance of traditional songs for the specific purpose of giving glory to the gods.[70] In contrast, the modern period offset by the Gutenberg Parenthesis wrought a system of culture-making that relied on the individually crafted, original, authentic, text: the novel was and is still considered by many to be the apogee of this cultural formation. Composing a novel is a solitary affair, but in the end one has produced a stable text that might eventually be considered canonical. According to Pettitt, digital media has produced what he calls a set of post-parenthetical norms. These norms are centered on, essentially, the manipulation of artifacts originally created by others. Blogging is a significant part of this post-parenthetical culture, since bloggers freely appropriate and borrow from multiple sources, while adding in elements that reshape and recontextualize the original

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[69] Tom Pettitt, "Before the Gutenberg Parenthesis: Elizabethan-American Compatibilities," paper presented at MIT5: Creativity, Ownership, and Collaboration in the Digital Age, April 27-9, 2007, web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit5/papers/pettitt_plenary_gutenberg.pdf. Pettitt draws from a research consortium on the Gutenberg Parenthesis at the University of Southern Denmark, online at http://www.sdu.dk/Om_SDU/ Institutter_centre/Ilkm_litteratur_kultur_og_medier/Forskning/Forskningsprojekter/Gutenberg_projekt.aspx.

[70] John G. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

artifact. All of this borrowing and appropriating smacks of stealing to the industries looking to

profit from their so-called intellectual property rights (another modernist sensibility). By

integrating news items from, say, the *New York Times* website, bloggers recontextualize the story

from their own perspective. A blogger's post might then be further 'remixed' by other bloggers,

creating a circuit of relays by which the original news item is perhaps unrecognizable, perhaps

even uncited, but certainly present as a palimpsest underneath layers of hyperlinks.

Covering the full range of modernist sensibilities would be impossible, but the work of

two rhetoricians, Michael Calvin McGee and Robert Hariman, illuminates a few key features

that draw distinctions between modernist sensibilities and networked ones. The first distinction

concerns the nature of text and context and the second distinction takes up the issue of style. By

exploring these two themes, we can start to see the discontinuities between modernist and

networked sensibilities that will be explored in the balance of the dissertation.

McGee's "Text, Context, and Fragmentation," concerns the nature of text construction

and the role of the rhetorical critic. He identifies what he sees as a major shift in the way that

rhetoricians must think about the very processes of text construction and interpretation,

suggesting that the heterogenization of American public culture makes "*interpretation* the

primary task of speakers and writers and *text construction* the primary task of audiences, readers,

and critics."[71] According to McGee,

> in the not-too-distant past, all discourses were what some social theorists call
>
> 'totalizations' … That is, all structures of a text were homogeneous. Education
>
> was restricted to a scant minority, and as a result the content of an education was

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[71] Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* (Summer 1990), 274.

so homogeneous that an orator could utter two or three lines in Latin, identified only with the words 'as Tully said,' in complete confidence that any reader/audience/critic would be able to identify the source of the words—and even recite the next several lines from Cicero's *De Oratore!* Except for everyday conversation, all discourse within a particular language community was produced from the same resources. Further, all discourse found its influence on the same small class of people who comprised the political nation. And it was the same small class that received the benefits of a homogenized education. There was little cultural diversity, no question that there was in every state a well defined dominant race, dominant class, dominant gender, dominant history, and dominant ethnicity.[72]

This homogenous public culture has virtually disappeared, and so have these textual totalizations' status as a finished artifact to be taken up by a homogenous public. In contemporary culture, we are left with "discursive fragments of context."[73] Texts have become absorbed into contexts. "We have instead," McGee theorizes, "fragments of 'information' that constitute our *context*. The unity and structural integrity we used to put in our texts as they faithfully represented nature is now presumed to be *in us ourselves*."[74]

McGee's explanation for the root causes of this shift from textual wholes to contextual fragments intersects with Castells' explanation of the rise of the network society. He suggests that in a more information-impoverished time in human history, it was possible to address comprehensively any particular problem through a well-crafted speech. But the "communication

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[72] McGee, "Fragmentation," 284.
[73] McGee, "Fragmentation," 287.
[74] McGee, "Fragmentation," 287.

revolution"

> was accompanied by a knowledge explosion. The result is that today no single
>
> finished text could possibly comprehend all perspectives on even a single human
>
> problem, let alone the complex of problems we index in the phrase 'issues of the
>
> day.' The only way to 'say it all' in our fractured culture is to provide
>
> readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue *them* to produce a
>
> finished discourse in their minds. In short, *text construction is now something*
>
> *done more by the consumers than by the producers of discourse.*[75]

McGee might as well be describing blogging. What does a blogger do if not produce dense

(hyperlinked), truncated (pithy), fragments (posts) of public discourse that are assembled in a

bricolage by their readers? Blog readers, in turn, attempt to create some sort of narrative

synthesis amongst all these different fragments as they weave these posts together in an effort to

make sense of it all.

     With McGee, we have the beginnings of an account of how production, circulation, and

reception of public communication has shifted from modernist to networked sensibilities. Robert

Hariman provides a supplemental account of modernist style and representation in *Political*

Style: The Artistry of Power, where he maps out a realist style by analyzing Machiavelli's *The*

Prince. Hariman focuses on how Machiavelli's realist style was grounded in the devaluation of

speech; instead of speech collecting and distributing power as had been the norm before the

Gutenberg parenthesis, modernist sensibilities perceive "political power [as] an autonomous

material force."[76] Machiavelli's devaluation of speech—and ornamentation specifically—

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[75] McGee, "Fragmentation," 288, emphasis in original.

[76] Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17.

interlocked with a system of thinking that assumed language could directly apprehend reality.[77]

This realist style produced an "abstract world and sovereign self" that depended on strategic

thinking and deference to authority.[78]

If realism was the dominant style of modernity, it is because it had a particular

representational consciousness. The onset of print culture begat an attitude that, through the

rigorous application of reason, humans could see clearly through their social worlds to the

seemingly transparent reality underneath. Print could objectively fix the nature of the world.

Hariman suggests that the shift from modern to postmodern culture is undergirded by "a tectonic

shift from representational to allegorical consciousness."[79] The crisis in representation that

plagues postmodern cultures is acute because "modernity's powerful development of

technologies for recording and communicating reality has caused modern norms of

representation to buckle under the pressure of the endless reproduction of signs."[80] Consequently,

representational discourses lose their persuasiveness as their self-professed ability to reflect

reality is recognized for the trick that it is. Allegorical discourses—which in some respects

characterize the fragments of context that McGee identifies as permeating postmodern culture—

take their place. Allegory, as Hariman explains, is "a figural presentation that organizes multiple

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[77] Hariman, *Political Style*, 30.

[78] Hariman, *Political Style*, 17.

[79] Robert Hariman, "Allegory and Democratic Public Culture in the Postmodern Era," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35 (2002), 270.

[80] Hariman, "Allegory," 270. Hariman speculates that allegory rises as a particular mode of public communication during times where one era's assumptions give way to another, as when oral cultures gave way to literate ones, and religious cultures were supplanted by secular attitudes. He notes "the resurgence of allegory today is occurring because it provides, in its excessiveness, a sophisticated set of operations for simultaneously deconstructing and reaffirming hierarchy. Perhaps allegorical designs equip people to make sense of their lives in a period of accelerated cultural change characterized by pluralism, fragmentation, and inevitably provisional forms of community" (288).

interpretations regarding collective experience."[81] How we now understand the social world is grounded in a series of disconnected allegorical tales: the spoiled teens on *My Super Sweet 16* stand in for class-privileged brats everywhere; a George W. Bush malapropism signifies the mistakes of his administration; a shuttle launch figures as American technological mastery. This allegorical consciousness produces a much more diverse set of reception practices. No longer do McGee's imagined audiences complete Ciceronian texts; they are too busy absorbing supplemental allegories to piece together a more rounded picture of their lifeworlds.

If broadcast technologies and early internet sub-media produced and circulated an endless stream of signs about the social world, blogging and other affiliated personal publication technologies compound this trend almost beyond comprehension. In fact, bloggers might be at the vanguard of this allegorical consciousness given their tendency to dissect specific events as they unfold, fitting them into broader trends and patterns. This shift from a representational consciousness to an allegorical one overlaps with assessments of how blogging relates to the three challenges of invention, emotion, and expertism in public deliberation. How can blogging claim to contribute to the invention of productive arguments if it has abandoned truth claims grounded in the objectivity and neutrality of representational practice? How can blogging constructively contribute to public deliberation if it is overly invested in emotional discourse grounded in personal experience rather than the representational norms of rational-critical debate? Why should non-specialists contribute their unskilled viewpoints in technical decision-making when experts are perfectly capable of making decisions for them? These questions direct this dissertation to articulate how networked sensibilities challenge current theories of public deliberation that are based in sacred modernist sensibilities.

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[81] Hariman, "Allegory," 267.

Though the term 'network society' is heuristically powerful in reconceptualizing contemporary public deliberation, it risks over-generalizing the complex phenomena reshaping political, social, and economic life. Before detailing my method and principles of case study selection, I would like to register some necessary caveats about networked societies, and their extensions into networked imaginaries and sensibilities.

Caveat #1: Networked sensibilities are situated between unifying underlying logics and multiplying cultural practices. It would be inaccurate, and potentially dangerous, to assert one unified and totalizing version of the network society. Just as there are multiple modernities, as Dilip Gaonkar notes, there are culturally specific instantiations of networked societies.[82] Yet, for all the variety that might exist amongst different cultural formations, there are also striking parallels across networked societies. While modernity had to grapple with industrialization, the secularization of value, and the spread of science as an influential discourse across cultural boundaries, so do networked societies today similarly accommodate globalization, diversity, and information technology.[83] This project is necessarily focused on a primarily American context, though I certainly do not argue for a reading of the blogosphere that privileges the American experience over others. However, I suspect, and hope that future research confirms, that the 'grammar' I develop is portable to other contexts with the usual necessary alterations.

Caveat #2: The network society does not account for much of the world that remains un- networked by information technology. Indeed, the digital divide still looms as a marker of major inequalities within and between certain nation-states. To some extent, these inequalities were

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[82] See the volume edited by Dilip Gaonkar, *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: University of Duke Press, 2001).

[83] See the essays collected in Manuel Castells, ed., *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004); also see Manuel Castells and Gustavo Cardoso, eds., *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2006).

born during the modern era, especially through the vehicles of colonization, and demand serious

redress (if it is, indeed, desirable for the entire globe to be internetworked). We should be careful

not to paper over the serious access inequities that persist into the 21st century. In fact, the

heavily networked societies have profited in part because they've been able to offload the nastier

parts of modernity like resource extraction onto less-densely networked countries. But, as the

science fiction writer William Gibson said in an oft-quoted passage, "the future is here, it's just

not evenly distributed."[84] The general trend is toward cheaper computing devices able to interact

with the internet, and, barring an apocalyptic tragedy, it seems difficult to imagine a world where

current trends are reversed. Even with a persistent digital divide, though, it's fair to refer to

network societies because, as Castells argues, "everybody is affected by the processes that take

place in the global networks of this dominant social structure. This is because the core activities

that shape and control human life in every corner of the planet are organized in these global

networks."[85] Consequently, theorizing public deliberation in networked societies is a crucial

element in understanding the very possibilities for global justice.

Caveat #3: Networked sensibilities hybridize, not supplant, modernist sensibilities. It would be

an error of the first degree to assume that networked logics would sweep away more than four

hundred years of modern history. The basic elements of the modernist social imaginary—

citizenship, the nation-state, markets, and democracy—are probably here to stay. This isn't to

say that they won't face significant challenges and have to refashion themselves in order to be

serviceable for contemporary public life. Indeed, these legacies of modernity will, and to a

certain extent already have, hybridize by incorporating networked sensibilities. The nation-

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[84] Quoted in "Books of the Year 2003," *The Economist*, December 4, 2003, http://www.economist.com/books/displaystory.cfm?story_id=E1_NNGVRJV.

[85] Manuel Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society," 22.

state's power, for example, has been radically reduced by transnational flows of capital. Ultimately, the nation-state will have to address this issue or its tax base will erode more dramatically; calls for global regulation of finance or a tax on international financial speculations represent possible hybridized futures. The current relationship between newspapers, that most modernist of media, and blogs, the exemplar of the new digitally networked media, shows another hybrid path: the traditional news article published in the morning paper is now paired with regularly updated blogs available around the clock on many major newspaper websites.

Caveat #4: There are substantial counter-trends to the networked society. The most obvious of these counter-trends are fundamentalisms of all stripes. Many fundamentalists aren't even satisfied with rolling back society to modern times, for nothing less than a total rollback to pre-modern value structures will satisfy them. While terrorist networks like al-Qaeda are often identified as prime examples of pre-modern fundamentalism, certain strands of evangelical Christianity and orthodox Judaism can also be understood as counter-trends to the network society. Fundamentalism isn't just an adjective to apply to religion, though. Market fundamentalism, as represented by the Chicago School and Milton Friedman, is similarly under threat as certain networks defy the supposedly ironclad logic of capitalism. Despite their best efforts, I suspect that fundamentalists will increasingly lose traction in contemporary public life precisely because their sensibilities no longer match up with individual senses of the lifeworld.

1.5 Method of Analysis and Case Study Selection

I have three scholarly goals for this dissertation. First, I want to make a contribution to the literature on the 'history of the internet.' Recent histories of the internet are particularly valuable because they capture dynamic changes before faded memories and broken hyperlinks frustrate documentation. In documenting the rise of new deliberative practices facilitated by

networked technologies, I hope to provide an admittedly narrow snapshot of the networked imaginary. This historical imperative is particularly important with the fast-paced, and unevenly archived, nature of the internet which begets and turns over small discourse communities at a rapidly punctuated pace. By investigating case studies in-depth, I want to provide a record of what happened, and how onlookers reacted at the time, to novel deliberation practices. Second, I want to make a theoretical contribution to understanding the basic processes of deliberation in a networked era. What kinds of continuities and discontinuities occur as digital, networked technologies overtake analog, broadcast media? What sorts of theoretical claims can be made about blogs practicing deliberative rhetoric? Finally, I want to begin making some critical overtures in thinking about blogging. One task of rhetorical scholarship is to make a society's communication patterns more transparent to itself. By doing so, we encourage self-reflexivity about the norms of communicative action. In developing a critical vocabulary for thinking about blogging, I hope to draw attention to modes of public deliberation that deserve further critical work.

My primary research question is 'how do blogs focus attention during public deliberation'? It is not a given that blogging always focuses attention. Certainly, some blogs misdirect attention. However, in at least some instances, blogs, like any media, do focus attention. I take the presence of blog-borne arguments in the general interest media as a proxy by which to measure this attention-focusing capacity. By looking at key moments in the development of the blogosphere, I try to understand processes of public argument retrospectively, in order to draw conclusions about patterns of internetworked deliberation. From my central research question flow several related queries: What are the argumentative practices that bloggers engage in to influence public deliberation? In what ways can a rhetorical

perspective illuminate the activity of blogging? Finally, how does blogging represent a shift from modernist sensibilities?

In order to answer these questions, I examine three key moments in the development of blogging: blogs active in the Trent Lott affair, Salam Pax's blog, and the climate blog *RealClimate*. These inflection points mark moments where public discourse emanating from blogs spurred on public discourse coming from other media streams. It is these junctures that have been constituted as turning points in the blogosphere's history. The three case studies I tackle here are critical discourse moments, or instances where society reconsiders traditional ways of knowing and being.[86] They are moments where publics come together to participate in the co-construction of public discourse. In that process, new practices of blogging gain higher visibility, working their way into the nascent networked sensibility. As citation in the general interest broadcast media suggests, bloggers can at certain times function as super-charged opinion leaders for various publics endlessly assembling themselves through their circulation in hypertextually mediated environments.

Media theorist Geert Lovink captures the problem of studying blogs succinctly by observing "how can you do research when your object is in a state of hyper-growth and permanent transformation? This is the case with the blogosphere."[87] Blogging admits of so many

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[86] See James Bohman, *Public Deliberation*, chapter 5. There is a risk involved with studying these critical discourse moments; namely, that emphasizing these 'great moments in blogging' at the expense of more quotidian blogging replicates the focus on 'great speeches' rather than the communicative practices of everyday life. To some degree, the real significance of blogging isn't in the meta-deliberative moments but in the regularized banality of everyday blogging. I'll admit of this possibility while maintaining that the study of these critical discourse moments is important because of the potential impact that blogging does have on circuits of public deliberation. In addition, these inflection points have invited a lot of follow-on meta-discourse which have encouraged reflection on the norms of blogging and thus impacted the networked imaginary in more detectable ways. In the end, my hope is that by looking at the 'extremes' of blogged public discourse, we might learn more about the mean.

[87] Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2007), xxiii.

uses that attempting to capture the phenomenon is like taking pictures of ghosts; what appears

there one instant is gone the next. There's no method to capture exact pathways of influence (not

that such a method exists in broadcast media). Even hyperlink analysis, which aims at

deciphering how text fragments circulate between internetworked blogs, can only claim to

generate an image of the blogosphere at a given moment.[88] Pair this with the continuing growth

of increasingly narrow genres of blogging, and the popularization of certain bloggers throughout

the last several years, and we have an object of study that is defined by flux. In fact, the very

thing that makes blogging so interesting as an object of study—flexibility—defies efforts at

categorization and generalization. How, then, to say anything about the blogosphere that isn't

immediately post-dated by another rapid evolution in blogging practices? It is with this in mind

that I pursue a research approach grounded in developing a grammar of the blogosphere, which I

hope will kindle insights into the key rhetorical practices of blogging.

Rather than trying to deduce rhetorical features of blogs from a wide variety of

deliberative outbreaks, I focus on specific episodes relatively early in the history of blogging to

reveal how blogs contribute to public argument. I examine blog-borne discourse that circulated

widely during times of public controversy and see what kinds of unique rhetorical phenomena

are happening in and between different blogs.[89] The tradition of rhetoric and public argument

informing my work sees value in examining these controversies to tease out their underlying

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[88] For an overview of hyperlink analysis, see Han Woo Park, "Hyperlink Network Analysis: A New Method for the Study of Social Structure of the Web," *Connections* 1 (2003) and Han Woo Park and Mike Thelwall, "Hyperlink Analysis of the World Wide Web: A Review," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (July 2003), http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol8/issue4/park.html; to see hyperlink analysis in action, see Han Woo Park, Chun-Sik Kim, and George Barnett, "Socio-communicational Structure among Political Actors on the Web in South Korea," *New Media and Society* 3 (2004): 403-423.

[89] This approach is a contrast to the "blogflops" approach of D. Travers Scott in his "Tempests of the Blogosphere: Presidential Campaign Stories that Failed to Ignite Mainstream Media," in *Digital Media and Democracy,* ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008): 271-300.

logics, patterns, topics, and lines of argument. From these underlying patterns emerge concepts

that aid historical, theoretical, and critical understanding. Examining public controversies

illuminates us historically, as we chart continuities and interruptions in traditional patterns of

deliberation. Theoretically, this type of study helps us understand why certain techniques

worked, and how they might be adapted to current use. Critically, we can begin to judge whether

or not certain techniques advance what we hold to be just or desirable. Thinking about blogging

and public deliberation along these lines enriches understanding of democratic theory and

practice.

In studying blogs as rhetorical phenomena, I draw heavily from the rhetorical theorist and

critic Kenneth Burke. At first blush, Burke and blogs seem to be an unlikely mix (after all, Burke

used an outhouse to the very end). But Burke's system of dramatism, which offers multiple ways

of thinking about human relations, offers powerful analytic tools by which to scrutinize the

blogosphere. My method establishes a relay between three concepts in the Burkean canon: the

concepts of *grammar*, *representative anecdote*, and *metaphor*. Essentially, I want to develop a

grammar of the blogosphere, or a vocabulary that captures the underlying logics of blogging in a

networked society and I do so by studying the dominant metaphors operating within

representative anecdotes.

In *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke outlines an answer to the question "What is

involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?"[90] I want to ask a

related question in the context of blogging: "What is involved, when we talk about blogging and

what blogging does?" For Burke, "any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind* of

answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who

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[90] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969 [1945]), xv.

did it (agent), how he [sic] did it (agency), and why (purpose)."[91] These basic elements can be used in various combinations to explain how people describe their social worlds—it is a grammar that, in certain combinations, tells us something about the *substance* of a thing. For Burke, we cannot claim to know the thing itself, but by amalgamating the fundamental units of the grammar, we can come to know different parts of the thing.

It is this interpretive play that makes language and sociality such a rewarding area of inquiry. Language contains alchemical possibilities for Burke: from a "great central moltenness, where all is merged" come various distinctions made by interlocutors. A rhetor might cast a social problem in terms of how the scene drove an actor to do one thing or another; alternatively, one might suggest that the very same actor's choice to do one thing was forged in relation to a particular purpose. For Burke, there is a plurality of ways to perceive and make sense of a situation utilizing the basic elements of the grammar. Being able to switch around ways of seeing something of substance is the cardinal virtue in the Burkean system. Language makes it easy to play with these ways of perceiving substance because, in Gottfried Benn's clever formulation, words "need only to open their wings, and millennia fall out of their flight."[92] Symbols, far from being direct representations of reality, are invested with layers of history, ideology, common sense, and feelings. In the Burkean system, these elements of a grammar—the act, scene, agency, agent and purpose—are central generating principles that "provide us with a kind of simplicity that can be developed into considerable complexity, and yet can be discovered beneath its elaborations."[93] With these five terms (later six, adding attitude), Burke develops a system he

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[91] Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, xv, emphasis in original.
[92] Quoted in Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xxvii.
[93] Burke, *Grammar of Motives,* xvi.

calls dramatism, which effectively "treats language and thought as modes of action."[94] Such an approach jibes with Lanham's description of rhetoric as an attention economy; for Lanham, rhetoric's attention focusing capacities are also modes of action.

Burke's grammar rejects the notion that human relations can be somehow reduced to unambiguous equations represented by clear and transparent symbols, as in the field of symbolic logic or the movement of logical positivism.[95] This makes Burke suspicious about strong causation claims. Such certainty belies the nature of the language-using animal in the Barnyard of Human Relations.[96] Since human motivation is opaque, and language is inherently slippery, ambiguity is the way of (describing) the world. What Burke seeks is "*not terms that avoid ambiguity,* but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise.*"[97] Ambiguity is an important element of the work of language for Burke, because "it is in the areas of ambiguity that transformations take place; in fact, without such areas, transformation would be impossible."[98] It is just this type of ambiguous language that led me to this methodological path: when beginning my study, I stumbled on the trope 'flood the zone' while researching the first case study. Not knowing immediately what it meant, I started to think about the potential implications of that term in the context of what I was tracing in my research. This terminological ambiguity drew my attention to some interesting phenomena operating in the blogosphere; and my contention is that these phenomena highlight certain 'logics' of the

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[94] Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, xxii. As Burke notes, a grammar "reduces the subject synoptically while still permitting us to appreciate its scope and complexity" (xxii). A grammar is never 'finalized' in the sense that a single description 'correctly' captures a slice of human motivation; there is an openness to interpretation attached to Burke's comic view of language use that pre-empts the ossification of a single explanation.

[95] Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, xviii.

[96] As Burke refers to the drama of human relations in *Grammar of Motives*, xvii.

[97] Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, xviii, emphasis in original.

[98] Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, xix.

blogosphere (either explicitly or implicitly). They form what I am calling a grammar of the blogosphere. This grammar is not exhaustive, nor can it be neatly applied to every blog past, present, and future. The point of developing a grammar is not to close the door on thinking about blogging but to open a conversation about it.

Burke's playful approach to language might be tricky for those seeking a firmer grounding for language, motivation, and human activity. The potential of a Burkeian approach, though, is that it elucidates the key link between ambiguity and transformation. Because of the fragility of meaning, no one interpretation can dominate within the Burkean system of dramatism. Rather, there is an openness to symbol usage that encourages criticism, reflection, and modification to fit with the needs of symbol-using animals. Burke recognizes that the concepts that equip one generation to make sense of their lives might not suffice for the next generation. Different grammars are developed to make sense of different eras; old grammars (old relationships between terms) are revised or retrofitted to bring order to the constantly refreshing scramble of the Human Barnyard.

Looking at a grammar of the blogosphere, then, helps us see where modernist sensibilities give way to networked ones in the context of public culture making. But it is often difficult to detect a grammar clearly, so Burke sketched out tools that help us see how different parts are related to each other. Burke's work is full of such devices, but one particularly useful one for my purposes is the representative anecdote. In seeking to explain social reality, rhetors

> seek for vocabularies that will be faithful *reflections* of reality. To this end, they
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> must develop vocabularies that are *selections* of reality. And any selection of
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> reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a *deflection* of reality. Insofar
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> as the vocabulary meets the needs of reflection, we can say it has the necessary

scope. In its selectivity, it is a reduction. Its scope and reduction become a deflection when the given terminology, or calculus, is not suited to the subject matter which it is designed to calculate. Dramatism suggests a procedure to be followed in the development of a given calculus, or terminology. It involves the search for a 'representative anecdote,' to be used as a form in conformity with which the vocabulary is constructed.[99]

A representative anecdote is a narration of events that captures some essential element of a phenomenon. Rhetors utilize representative anecdotes all the time when they reference stories that seem to capture a slice of life. Politicians expertly deploy representative anecdotes when they identify hard-working, average Americans in their speeches. Representative anecdotes serve an allegorical purpose—they condense a variety of social types, feelings, relationships, and more into a densely allusive but neatly packaged story. The tradition in rhetorical studies of analyzing key public speeches implicitly recognizes these addresses as representative anecdotes in order to identify controlling rhetorical figures, hidden assumptions, key arguments, and modes of proof.

Burke's example of the behaviorist demonstrates the analytic utility of the representative anecdote: ring the bell, and watch the conditioned canines come loping in for a meal. From this event, the behaviorist draws certain inferences, such as living things can be conditioned, the relationship between stimulus and response is decently obvious, and training produces desired reactions. These conclusions faithfully reflect a certain reality, and so the behaviorist takes them as a representative anecdote of 'the way things are.' They have 'scope' inasmuch as they provide a plausible account for a phenomenon. At the same time, the conclusions that have been drawn 'reduce' inasmuch as they take a complex phenomenon and turn it into a simplistic cause and

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[99] Burke, *Grammar of Motives,* 59.

effect relationship. This reduction always runs the risk of deflection, as it might miss the mark for various reasons that critics of behaviorism would be quick to point out.

The behaviorist's conclusions might be invoked in a wide array of settings. They might even receive an invitation to share their thoughts on, say, education policy. Communicating the insights of their research, the behaviorist uses the central representative anecdote of the trained dog, extrapolated to the world of human affairs. Because the explanatory power of the representative anecdote operates so cleanly for the behaviorist, its application is nearly endless. The representative anecdote becomes a way to understand the social world, and so our behaviorist prescribes a series of ringing bells to mark the beginnings, transitions, and endings of the school day in order to prepare a workforce that would also be regulated by bells and whistles. Representative anecdotes thus organize ways of knowing. These representative anecdotes are often focal points around which public argument swirls: the behaviorists' prescriptions can be challenged as inappropriate deflections, they can be countered with alternative representative anecdotes, or they can be refashioned as new information comes to light.

Representative anecdotes can operate at a micro-level, as invocations by individual arguers; but they can also operate at a macro-level, as organizing concepts for entire societies. If the behaviorist's testimony seems nonsensical, it's because our sensibilities have changed. From a critical perch, we see such explanations as hopelessly reductive. But for a while in the modernist era it seemed perfectly reasonable. Representative anecdotes that capture the modernist social imaginary often coincide with metaphors of the mechanism. The opening of the modern era is often characterized by one representative anecdote: Descartes poking some poor splayed animal, watching the 'pain-free' stimulus-response motion in the muscles ratifying his mechanistic vision of the world. With only nerve sensations, mind and body fully split, our

physical husks are but automatons awaiting proper instruction. Systemically, if we are but to

react to sensation, then complex societies must develop ways of training to facilitate the public

good. With this constellation of believable representative anecdotes in place, modern society

produced discipline at the same time it produced feelings of emancipation, as Foucault

documented in a necessary counterpoint to Habermas' defense of publicity.[100] Behaviorism, as

another representative anecdote that captures the modernist sensibility, operates as a sort of

bookend to Descartes' inauguration of modernity. Its ultimate failure to coordinate public life

could be read as the beginning of the end for modernist sensibilities.

Representative anecdotes have clear utility for the rhetor trying to invent persuasive

discourse. But for the scholar, representative anecdotes are similarly valuable, for they offer

insights into the relationships between things. In other words, representative anecdotes shed light

on certain grammars by illuminating how people perceive and interact with the social world. For

Burke, representative anecdotes are useful because they encourage the development of richer

vocabularies to describe human motivation. For the behaviorist, the representative anecdote is so

powerful because it creates a potentially complicated vocabulary of stimulus, response, training,

and so on. Other representative anecdotes function similarly. Ronald Reagan's invocation of the

'welfare queen,' or the 'missile shield,' became representative anecdotes for social policy and

Cold War defense postures. As such, they spawned a vocabulary that continues to shape

perceptions and thus public debate. Representative anecdotes contain in a nutshell "the

terminological structure that is evolved in conformity with it. Such a terminology is a

'conclusion' that follows from the selection of a given anecdote. Thus the anecdote is in a sense

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[100] See his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979 [1975]).

a *summation*, containing implicitly what the system that is developed from it contains explicitly."[101]

Representative anecdotes are often so powerful because they generate metaphors that condense the anecdote into a super-charged bundle of discourse. The behaviorists' representative anecdote functions effectively because it can be extended beyond just canine observation—it is potentially applicable to the entire social world! Rhetorical critics are especially adept at identifying rhetorical figures that sneak into our public discourse. By reading into the rhetorical figures associated with each of the case studies I identify, I hope to illuminate something essential about the grammar of blogging. Burke's persistent interest in metaphor is, again, helpful in this process. According to Burke, a metaphor can illuminate the "thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this."[102] Some metaphors work better than others—they capture, in Burkean terms, the underlying grammar of the thing they aim to describe. For internetworked societies, of course, the master metaphor to describe economic, social, and political life is the network. Increased circulation of the network metaphor signals a shift in the underlying formation of social practices. Peeling apart the metaphor, seeing how it came to be, what it signifies, why it works, who employs it, and to what ends—these are all part of metaphoric criticism.[103] Examining metaphors is particularly important, because metaphors mark elisions between the

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[101] Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, 60.

[102] Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, 503.

[103] Robert Ivie's metaphoric criticism showcases the utility of this approach. See his "The Metaphor of Force in Prowar Discourse: The Case of 1812," in *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media,* eds. William Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary Copeland (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994): 259-80 and "Cold War Motives and the Rhetorical Metaphor: A Framework of Criticism," in *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, Ideology*, eds. Martin Medhurst, Robert Ivie, Philip Wander, and Robert Scott (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1997): 71-80.

literal and figurative. "Today's metaphor," as F.C.T. Moore puts it, "is tomorrow's literal sense," naturalized in language as a new commonplace.[104]

The particular metaphors I examine in this dissertation are provocative because they expand the *rhetorical imaginary*. All social imaginaries are undergirded by rhetorical imaginaries—the conceptual terms that structure how people think about their interrelations. The idea of a 'citizen,' for example, which was so central to modernist sensibilities, is essentially a rhetorical invention. It collects a series of practices into a more congealed form and through a process of naming creates a meaningful concept that organizes social life. While the three tropes I investigate here might not punch as hard as the idea of citizen, they do add a significant element to our understanding of networked sensibilities.

By examining representative anecdotes about blogging, I want to move 'toward' a grammar of blogging that develops a vocabulary capable of capturing changes in contemporary public deliberation and culture. The idea of 'toward' animated Burke's work, from the title of his first work of fiction, *Towards a Better Life* to *Attitudes Toward History*. Following this same line of thought, this dissertation begins moving *toward* a grammar of blogging by studying the representative anecdotes about blogging. This complex grammar is represented by the tropes 'flood the zone,' 'ambient intimacy,' and 'shallow quotation,' each of which map on to specific representative anecdotes. By drawing out these metaphors in the context of each representative anecdote, I isolate the key grammar that can be used to describe the rhetorical activity of the blogosphere.

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[104] F.C.T. Moore, "On Taking Metaphor Literally," in *Metaphor: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. David Miall (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982), 3.

I take the three cases that I have sketched here to be representative anecdotes in part because they constitute a type of mythology, an origin tale of how blogging came to be. These three blogging episodes recur as representative anecdotes about the birth of the blogosphere. These days, when a particular blogger or a particular post circulates into more general media, they are often explained through recourse to these representative anecdotes. In the years immediately following the Trent Lott imbroglio, blogging was often introduced as the 'new media' that had recently unseated a major political figure. When bloggers from other countries make the news during some major tragedy, they are often associated with Salam Pax's blogging before the Iraq war. *RealClimate*, too, is prominently featured in stories about the growth of science or expert blogs.

There are a number of blog-driven episodes that are worthy of in-depth study. Instead of sweeping a large number of examples into my analysis, I am focusing on just three of the most substantive episodes where blogging captured national attention. I used three selection criteria to winnow nine critical discourse moments associated with blogs. My selection criteria are 1) crossover to general interest media, 2) proximity to the beginning of the growth of the blogosphere, and 3) significance in destabilizing norms of the modernist social imaginary:

- Did the blogging episode garner broad circulation in the general media? I am interested in public discourse that begins on blogs but is then amplified by the general interest (primarily broadcast) media. This crossover to general media extends the conversation beyond the blogosphere and can lay claim to having a bigger impact on revising the social imaginary than discourse that remains internal to the blogosphere. Despite the growth in blogging, the circulation of general interest media still retains significant influence. Moreover, the general media often serves as a proxy for public deliberation

occurring throughout society, as it reflects and shapes the agenda for conversation about public life.

- Did the blogging episode occur early in the history of the blogosphere? I focus on early episodes of blogging where the rhetorical activity of bloggers captures the public imagination by demonstrating novel ways of participating in public discourse. These early cases form part of the origin narrative of blogging and are disproportionately used as representative anecdotes by the general media to remind audiences of blogging's influence. I would assert that these early cases exposed deliberating citizens to the possibilities of blogging, expanding imaginations and encouraging new deliberation practices that took advantage of internetworked sensibilities.

- Does the blogging episode destabilize a different part of the social imaginary? Rather than focus on one genre of blogging, I include three different genres in order to produce a rounder vocabulary that hints at the changing social imaginary. While I could have focused just on, say, 'citizen journalism' blogs, my inclusion of a lifestream blog and a science blog shows how blogging impacts various elements of public culture.

Table 2 details the results of the selection criteria applied to nine blog-fueled critical discourse moments, which I detail more extensively in Chapter 2.

Blogging Episode	News Stories in US Newspapers	Date of Episode or Beginning of Blog
Juan Cole	21	April 2002
Pharyngula	12	June 2002
Trent Lott	97	December 2002
Salam Pax	206	December 2002
L.T. Smash	20	April 2003
Dean Campaign	2437[105]	Fall 2003

[105] This is obviously a huge number, but it is a case study I do not include in this dissertation. As this project unfolds in the future, I do hope to treat the Dean Campaign's use of blogging; however, it is an undertaking that, as the numbers of articles about the campaign suggest, outstrips the amount of time and space for investigation

'Rathergate'	45	September 2004
RealClimate	57	December 2004
Tsunami	343[106]	December 2004

Table 2. Case study selection criteria applied to nine blog-fueled critical discourse moments.[107]

Based on these results, the three case studies I have previewed show the most promise for analysis. The central rhetorical figures—'flood the zone,' 'ambient intimacy,' and 'shallow quotation'—anchor each of the case studies. I take these tropes to signify the essential practices of bloggers, and by teasing out the genesis of these tropes, I hope to identify these practices more clearly and implicate them in the making of a networked imaginary. Each case study, then, draws on public discourse produced by bloggers to shape an account of each controversy. My objects of study are primarily these fragments of public discourse produced by bloggers; however, I also integrate commentary provided by the general broadcast media and the popular press in order to demonstrate the (often implicit) absorption of these tropes into the networked social imaginary.[108] For each chapter, I begin with an account of the modernist social imaginary. Then, I outline a critique of the modernist social imaginary from a rhetorical perspective. I then detail the representative anecdote, focusing on bloggers' public discourse and reverberations in the broader media ecology. As I relate the details of these critical discourse moments, I explicate the

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I currently have. I should note that the vast majority of articles featuring Dean and blogging mention blogs only in passing, as one feature of the internetworked political campaigning that the campaign utilized to gain in popularity.

[106] Tsunami blogging stories replicate the 'trauma blogging' of Salam Pax; because Salam Pax was blogging in early 2002, I chose to analyze his blog rather than tsunami bloggers.

[107] This search was done using Academic LexisNexis, using the US Newspapers and Wires database, and bound by dates between January 1, 2001 and January 1, 2007. The search was last conducted on July 4, 2008. This search should be taken as a very rough proxy for representation in public deliberation, as some of the articles might only reference the search terms tangentially. In addition, this search only accounts for newspapers, and not televised reports. The search terms used were either the name of the blog, or the name of the event and (blog or weblog); for example, the Trent Lott search was done with "Lott" and (blog or weblog). LexisNexis is an admittedly crude proxy to measure general media attention; however, it is more or less representative and far more stable than other search engines like Google (see Iina Hellsten, Loet Leydesdorff, and Paul Wouters, "Multiple Presents: How Search Engines Rewrite the Past," *New Media and Society* (December 2006): 901-24.

[108] Each website and blog post has been archived using Zotero software and is available upon request. The central blog texts that I cite are also available at the Internet Archive, at www.archive.org.

controlling metaphor revealed by each case study in order to unpack the grammar of the blogosphere. I conclude each chapter by explaining how the case study sheds light on networked sensibilities. Chapter 2 provides a history of blogging and situates this project in a broader conversation about digital media and public culture. Chapter 3 surveys the Trent Lott controversy. Chapter 4 explores Salam Pax's blogging in pre-war Iraq. Chapter 5 identifies *RealClimate*'s contribution to the debate about climate science. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes with some ruminations on public deliberation in a networked society and the implications for studying digital media from a rhetorical perspective.

CHAPTER 2—BLOGGING AND DIGITAL PUBLIC CULTURE

2.1 A Short History of Blogging

As use of the internet spread throughout the 1990s, the web was populated by a series of largely static 'homepages' that were, in many ways, hybrid concoctions of television and the newspaper with a twist of a do-it-yourself ethic. While these homepages often utilized the elemental building block of the internet—the hyperlink—to connect to each other, the widespread interactivity predicted by the early proponents of the internet remained, for most of the internet-using public, more promise than practice.[1] The 1990s were the decade when chat rooms and discussion boards became fixtures in public imagination, but the actual number of participants was proportionally small relative to the entire U.S. population. Computers were expensive, dial-up internet connections slow and screechingly frustrating, and learning the highly technical computer-mediated ropes was a daunting prospect. In retrospect, computer-mediated communication throughout the 1990s seemed like a prototypical junior high school dance—not everyone knew where the party was, the connections weren't as easy as you had hoped, and there seemed to be a lot of waiting around.

It is onto this stage that blogging appeared in the late 1990s. Blogging might be roughly periodized into a 'protoblogging stage,' a 'popularization stage,' and a 'consolidation stage.' Periodization is always a rough and somewhat arbitrary procedure; nonetheless, it helps chart the blogosphere's dramatic growth. For the purposes of this dissertation, I take the popularization stage to span 2001-2006, with the protoblogging stage preceding and the consolidation stage

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[1] Joe Killoran, "Homepages, Blogs, and the Chronotopic Dimensions of Personal Civic (Dis)Engagement," in *Rhetorical Democracy: Discursive Practices of Civic Engagement*, eds. Gerard Hauser and Amy Grim (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 217.

following. The protoblogging stage covers the time when bloggers were blogging without calling

it such. In the mid-to-late 1990s, as the world wide web became more popular, people began

making webpages that served as link collections for what they had found interesting on the web.

Many of these link aggregators were extensions of online communities, or personal harvests of

the 'best of the web.' These proto-bloggers did all the work by hand-coding webpages that were

then manually uploaded to dedicated servers. According to early blogger Rebecca Blood, at the

beginning of 1999, there were 23 sites that called themselves weblogs, but the circle of blogs

shortly thereafter became so large that no one person could follow every weblog.[2] Wider

participation in blogging was limited by spotty internet access and the lack of fluency with

information technology—not many people knew how to code webpages by hand, had the

financial wherewithal and technical know-how to upload pages to the web, or could spare the

time to do so.[3]

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[2] Rebecca Blood, "Weblogs: A History and Perspective," in *We've Got Blog: How Weblogs are Changing Our Culture,* ed. John Rodzvilla (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002), 7. For more on the advent of blogging, see David Perlmutter and Misti McDaniel, "The Ascent of Blogging," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2005), http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/05-3NRfall/NR56-60Fall05.pdf.

[3] Pippa Norris provides a dramatic study in *Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2001) that gathers the empirical data on inequality of access in the early years of blogging. As the price of computers and internetworking fell, the digital divide was narrowed if persistent. However, a "second-level digital divide" emerged that could be measured as inequities surrounding "the ability to efficiently and effectively find information on the Web" (Eszter Hargittai, "Second Level Digital-Divide," *First Monday* (April 2002), http://www.firstmonday.org/Issues/issue7_4/hargittai/). In some ways, blogging became popular because it helped to close this second digital divide. Rather than having to hand-code pages, or use expensive coding software, blog software companies usually offered the basic platform for free. Though the WYSIWYG ("What You See Is What You Get") graphic user interface of blogs greatly simplified the process of publication to the web, it still requires a bit of fluency with basic computer operations. Combined with the expense of broadband connections provided by privatized telecommunications companies in the United States at least, the digital divide continues to present a problem for those that view the internet as a key gateway for civic engagement. Broadband access has increased. A 2006 study found 73% of Americans had regular internet access, with nearly half of those having broadband access (John Horrigan, "Home Broadband Adoption 2006," *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, May 28, 2006, http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband_trends2006.pdf). A later report in February 2007 fixes the number of Americans with broadband at home at 47% (John Horrigan and Aaron Smith, "Home Broadband Adoption 2007," *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, June 2007, www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband%202007.pdf). Historically marginalized groups have made in-roads, though substantial gaps continue. To really consider the inequities involved online, though, one would have to explore the "third-level digital divide" that considers the capacity of citizens to produce effective rhetoric in digitally

In the summer of 1999, Pyra Labs launched Blogger, a high-profile blogging platform that was eventually bought by Google. In the heat of the dot-com boom, a number of other internet start-ups generated easy to use blogging platforms, marking the very beginnings of the popularization stage. Blog-based discourse communities soon coalesced. Many early adopters saw the utility in blogging as a mode of self-expression, a way to form relationships, and a venue to participate in conversations about all sorts of phenomena. Like any organic, complex system, this web of blogs fractalized out into increasingly specialized discourse communities which adeptly absorbed latecomers. In these heady, early days of blogging, millions of blogs were created. Many of these blogs were soon to be defunct through negligence. But after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, many American citizens turned to the internet to learn and debate about the attacks. Blogging played a prominent role in recording eyewitness accounts and in sustaining debate about the consequences of those events.[4]

I find the dissemination stage interesting because the norms of blogging were so unsettled. What was appropriate to blog about was up for grabs, and networks of influence had not yet hardened. Innovators pushed blogging in new directions that would have been difficult to predict. Bloggers began to make rhetorical decisions about how to frame their content, what kind of persona to display, who to affiliate with through linking, and how to design their blog interface. Many bloggers used their blogs as extensions of their personal communicative networks, writing about events in their own lives and giving deeply personal opinions about the world around them. For this reason, blogs were often constructed as a public extension of diary

mediated environments. Civic engagement requires not just access to the internet, or the ability to find information efficiently, but the skill in producing public discourse that intervenes in the public life of their community by taking advantage of the unique affordances of internet sub-media.

[4] See Alex Halavais, "The Rise of Do-It-Yourself Journalism After September 11," in *One Year Later: September 11 and the Internet, A Pew Internet and American Life Report*, eds. Lee Rainee, Susannah Fox, and Mary Madden, September 5, 2002, http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_9-11_Report.pdf.

or journal writing. Many of these blogs found niche audiences who became devoted readers and commenters.

At the same time, a sub-genre of blogging that commented primarily on unfolding news items developed. While these blogs also provided a more personal approach to political issues, they served as sites for broader public discussions about the collective challenges bandied about in the public sphere. These blogs were practicing deliberative rhetoric, making arguments about how we should interpret topics salient to democratic public life. Here are some of the more significant deliberative blogging events that occurred (mostly in the United States) around the same time as the three case studies I present:

- *Juan Cole's Informed Comment*. A professor of history at the University of Michigan, and fluent in Arabic, he often commented on the Middle East policy of the United States. As a critic of the war in Iraq, he has often been cited as an authority in the general interest press.
- *P.Z. Myer's Pharyngula.* A biologist, P.Z. Myers, started blogging about the intelligent design controversy at around the same time that the high-profile *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* case that tested whether intelligent design must be taught as a competing theory in high school biology classrooms.
- *L.T. Smash and military bloggers.* During the major combat operations and ensuing occupation of Iraq, U.S. soldiers blogged about their experiences, often posting pictures and videos. L.T. Smash was a prominent milblogger who provided a very personal account of the war.
- *Howard Dean's primary campaign*. Howard Dean appeared to be a long shot for the Democratic nomination for President, but his campaign utilized the internet to

bring in small donations and, more importantly, connect with citizens through

blogs hosted by their campaign website. Observers suggested that Dean's ascent

as a legitimate candidate was fueled by the blogosphere; of course, the circulation

of the infamous 'Dean scream' that unraveled his campaign was partially aided by

bloggers as well.

- *Rathergate*. After a Dan Rather-led *60 Minutes* report on George W. Bush's
  National Guard service during the Vietnam War, which relied heavily on a series
  of memos written by Bush's supervisor, a blogger on the *Free Republic* blog
  produced evidence that the documents were likely forgeries. Eventually, CBS
  retracted the story, issued an apology, and demoted Rather.

- *Tsunami bloggers*. The effects of the August 2003 tsunami that struck several
  countries in Southeast Asia was recorded on blogs from people near the affected
  areas. Blogging software had begun to incorporate image and video capabilities,
  which produced riveting first person accounts of the damage by the tsunami.

By the end of 2004 (a little past the halfway point of the popularization stage) blogs had

become a significant part of the internet firmament. According to a Pew Internet and American

Life study,

- 8 million people had created a blog;

- 32 million people read blogs regularly;

- 12% of internet users posted comments on blogs;

- Bloggers tended to be male (57%), young (48% under 30), well-off (42% with an income higher than $50,000), and well-educated (39% with a college degree).[5]

These numbers signal that, just a few years after blogging was ushered into public discourse, the blogosphere was already a significant site for communicative exchanges, with a significant portion of the American population using blogs. By 2006, the end of the dissemination stage, The Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 12 million American adults (8 percent of Internet users) keep blogs, 57 million read them, and 175,000 new blogs were created every day.[6]

But how do people use blogs? What sorts of needs are fulfilled from participating in blog-driven conversations? Uses and gratifications media research Barbara Kaye found ten major reasons that people were attracted to writing, reading, and commenting on blogs.

- *Blogs have unique characteristics tied up with their presentation*. Blogs offer a wealth of information and commentary, studded with hyperlinks directing readers to other parts of the web. Because blogs are not limited by time, as in television programs, or space, as in newspapers, they are able to cover topics in-depth and provide commentary from a range of perspectives.

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[5] Lee Rainie, "The State of Blogging," *Pew Internet and American Life Project,* January 2005, http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_blogging_data.pdf.

[6] Amanda Lenhart and Susannah Fox, "Bloggers: A Portrait of the Internet's New Storytellers," *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, July 19, 2006, http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/ PIP%20Bloggers%20 Report%20July%2019%202006.pdf. This study found that the demographics of blogging had become somewhat more equitable: men and women blog equally and racial diversity was better represented in the blogosphere than on the internet in general. One caveat that should be registered is that not all blogs are populated by humans: the rise of "spam blogs," or "splogs," created by automated technologies can easily distort the numbers of blogs. See Dan Li & Gina Wacejko, "Splogs and Abandoned Blogs: The Perils of Sampling Bloggers and their Blogs," *Information, Communication, and Society* (April 2008): 279-96 and Charles Mann, "Spam + Blogs = Trouble," *Wired* (September 2006): 104-16.

- *Blogs are personally fulfillin*g. Blogs are often entertaining and humorous, providing a diversion from more mundane activities like work (much to the chagrin of employers everywhere).

- *Blogs allow affiliation with others*. People use blogs to stay in touch with friends, to provide accounts of their lives for distant family members, and to interact with new people. Blogs facilitate social networking, allowing people new ways to signal and build relationships.

- *Blogs assist in seeking information.* Blogs supply a cornucopia of information, often organized thematically, and direct readers to other sites with even more information. Sometimes this information is highly specialized or grounded in personal experience that would otherwise be inaccessible to a broader audience.

- *Blogs provide intellectual and aesthetic fulfillment.* Blogs often have scintillating writing that draws curious readers. Blogs are also hosts for debate and argumentation, either between multiple blogs or in the comments section on a single blog. They provide access to a wider range of opinions than might be available in a geographically restricted site of argumentative exchange.

- *Blogs provide an alternative to the traditional media.* The term 'mainstream media' quickly became a pejorative term on many blogs. Liberal critiques of media institutions often fixate on the conservative biases of publishers and advertisers; conservative critiques focus on the liberal bent of editors and journalists. Whatever one's political persuasion, people are drawn to blogging as an alternative outlet that can provide viewpoints not available, for whatever reason, in the institutional media.

- *Blogs offer guidance for opinion-formation.* Blogs offer a variety of opinions, and an opportunity to seek out competing opinions. Many users of blogs find them useful vehicles to form their own opinions and compare their reasoning with others.

- *Blogs are convenient.* Users of blogs see blogging as an effective filtering mechanism to bring some sort of organization to their hypercomplex information worlds. Reading blogs is either free or very cheap, and requires little more than an internet connection to access an abundance of knowledge. Blog posts can also be copied, emailed, and recirculated to acquaintances, making them a particularly suitable mode to pass around interesting tidbits.

- *Blogs aid in surveilling the political world.* People read blogs because it helps them keep up with political issues, including the progress of specific legislation and updates on elections. Blogs also can produce evidence of where politicians stand on an issue.

- *Blogs contribute to fact-checking.* Many people see blogs as a helpful corrective mechanism to public deliberation by publicizing errors propagated by the press or other public figures.[7]

These ten uses and gratifications of blogs intersect significantly with traditional features required to smooth the progress of public deliberation. The blogosphere is a site for social learning, for interacting with other people, for discovering information and forming opinions. The norms that

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[7] Barbara Kaye, "Blog Use Motivations: An Exploratory Study," in *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media,* ed. Mark Tremayne (New York: Routledge, 2007), 134-6. The categories I identify here are the broad categories Kaye finds; she breaks each category into several further sub-categories that provide a very rounded account of how people use blogs.

Habermas identifies—namely people's use of their reflective capacities to argue and justify their opinions—are at work to varying degrees in the blogosphere.

Of course, to say 'blogs have this use or that use' is to make gross generalizations. The flexibility of blogging as a form of publication admits of many emergent uses. In fact, as blogs became more popular from 2001 to 2006, they began internally differentiating themselves, tailoring their contributions to public discourse along particular topical themes. Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs explain how "it makes as little sense to discuss the uses of blogs as it does to discuss, say, the uses of television unless we specify clearly what genres and contexts of use we aim to address."[8] It makes as little sense to talk about 'the blogosphere' as it does to talk about 'the internet,' since both support an increasingly wide range of rhetorical activities.[9] The 'genre-ification' of blogging certainly increased the analytical precision of scholarly work on blogs; rather than taking blogging as a set of homogenized practices that 'do' this or that, current research trends aim to appreciate specific blogs in their context and particularity.[10] Yet, genre-

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[8] Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs, *Uses of Blogs*, 3.

[9] In this way, scholarship on blogging has followed trends in scholarship on the internet in general; namely, the necessity of seeing different modes of communication online as situated. For critiques of over-broad theoretical work on 'the internet,' see David Holmes, "Transformations in the Mediation of Publicness: Communicative Interaction in the Network Society," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (January 2002), http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol7/ issue2/holmes.html and David Silver, "Current Directions and Future Questions," in *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice*, eds. Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (New York: Routledge, 2004), 280-1.

[10] For justifications in applying genre theory to blogging, see Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepard, "Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and the Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/ blogosphere/blogging_as_social_action_a_genre_analysis_of_the_weblog.html; Kevin Brooks, Cindy Nichols, and Sybil Priebe, "Remediation, Genre, and Motivation: Key Concepts for Teaching with Weblogs," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and the Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/remediation_genre.html; Susan Herring, Lois Scheidt, Elijah Wright, and Sabrina Bonus, "Weblogs as a Bridging Genre," *Information Technology and People* 18 (2005): 142-71; and Lena Karlsson, "Acts of Reading Diary Weblogs," *Human IT* 8 (2006): 1-59. The connection between weblogs and genre has undergone several stages. First, as Miller and Shepard, and Brooks, Nichols and Priebe, demonstrate, blogging itself can be seen as a type of genre of online discourse with certain recurring features like reverse chronology postings, link-heavy posts, and personal interpretations of unfolding events. Second, blogging was categorized into three primary genres: the 'filter blog' which collected links from around the web, the

ification also poses a challenge to anyone trying to synthesize fairly the implications of blogging on society. These generic calcifications occasionally erode, transmogrify, or interpenetrate with other genres. Blogging is so expansive and varied that a full understanding of the phenomenon requires acknowledging how the various uses of blogs interconnect in networked societies. I don't think that it is a stretch to say that a truly comprehensive study of blogging would be impossible for precisely this reason: there are simply too many blogs doing too many things to draw conclusions about the phenomenon as a whole.

Within this broader network of blogs, though, there are blogs that take up questions central to collective public life. This focus—which comports with rhetoric's traditional emphases—necessarily privileges 'the political' while recognizing that the political is often found in the most quotidian of places.[11] For this reason, I focus on blogs that contribute to public

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'personal blog' featuring the blogger's thoughts, and the 'knowledge log' which attempted to collect tidbits of social knowledge to generate a more comprehensive understanding of some phenomenon (see Susan Herring, L.A. Scheidt, S. Bonus, and E. Wright, "Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs," *Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (Los Alamitos: IEEE Press, 2004). Finally, each of these three genres have splintered into smaller sub-genres.

[11] I am wary of Herring et al.'s warning that blog scholars have a tendency to privilege the so-called filter blogs that participate in conversations about 'politics' at the expense of more personal blogs that, while perhaps not explicitly 'political,' nonetheless engage in a type of politics worthy of study. See Susan Herring, Inna Kouper, Lois Ann Scheidt, and Elijah L. Wright, "Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and the Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women_and_children.html. In their analysis, they find that coverage of blogging in the mass media and in academic scholarship tends to overdetermine blogging as punditry rather than as, say, a community-building endeavor. They suggest that this subtle bias tends to privilege traditionally masculine topics and male bloggers at the expense of a more well-rounded view of blogging. For example, as Stella Minahan and Julie Wolfram Cox document, knitting blogs have supplied guidance for a renewed Do-It-Yourself ethic to many young women (and some men) who find social and aesthetic value in meeting together for what are called "Stitch'nBitch" sessions; see their "Stitch'nBitch: Cyberfeminism, a Third Place, and the New Materiality," *Journal of Material Culture* (March 2007): 5-21. Yet, knitting blogs are rarely represented in general academic or popular explanations of blogging. Melissa Gregg underlines this point by noting that "within blogging culture, the phenomenon of 'LiveJournal bashing'—mocking the interests of online journal writers—arises from the assumption that the personal chat of young people is trivial in comparison to the weighty political content discussed on pundit-style blogs;" see "Posting with Passion: Blogs and the Politics of Gender," in *Uses of Blogs*, eds. Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 155. In the early years of meta-commentary about blogging, deliberative blogs written by men were largely the focus of institutional media coverage; it would not be a surprise to recognize that the social imaginary thus reflects structural inequities that persist even in a networked society. Contemporary scholarship has attempted to theorize gender and blogging more explicitly than the early

discourse about our collective public life. In the scholarly literature on blogging, these

deliberative blogs are theorized to have impacted three major areas of American public life: the

press, by which I especially mean the 'institutional media' which has capitalized on broadcast

technologies; political organizing, the means by which people collaborate to influence governing

bodies; and culture flows, which broadly refer to how shared senses of culture move through a

society.

2.2 Blogging and the Press

Blogging was immediately linked to the 'citizen journalism' movement represented by

Indymedia and other (primarily internet-driven) projects.[12] The ease of publishing naturally

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years; see, for example, the special issue of *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, "Blogging Feminism: (Web)sites of Resistance," (Spring 2007), http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/blogs/; Dustin Harp and Mark Tremayne, "The Gendered Blogosphere: Examining Inequality Using Network and Feminist Theory," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 83 (Summer 2006): 247-64. It is partially for this reason that I include Salam Pax's blog in this study, as it present a hybrid model that combines the linking and analysis of 'filter blogs' with the personal narrativization of the 'lifestream blog.' I want to be careful in suggesting that my current study does not claim to represent the entirety of the blogosphere, though I do hope for some 'portability' with the conceptual work I do. Of course, blogging, and now the academic literature on blogging, is simply too big to draw in all these different types of blogs. Consequently, as a researcher, I have to make some hard choices about what to focus on, even at the risk of entrenching stereotypes about what a blog is (or can be). Acknowledging these critiques, I think it is eminently defensible to study blogs practicing deliberative rhetoric because doing so sheds light on a prominent practice in contemporary society. More importantly, I generally follow Aristotle's adage that deliberative rhetoric admits of the best arguments and so deserves special intellectual devotion. It is also my assertion, to be tested in the balance of this project, that the most interesting elements in the blogosphere are related to how knowledge, information, and opinion are circulated to shape collective public life *through* more general media. So, though knitting blogs (to take a representative example), might be culturally important, their impact on the broader social imaginary is fairly limited because more general media have not often taken them up. This might well reflect poorly on the general media, and undoubtedly there are structural biases in the general media that are objectionable. However, given the influence of the general media in shaping the networked imaginary, it is important to follow the 'crossover' blogs in order to see features of the social imaginary. Finally, I admit that my own terministic screens play into my focus on blogs practicing deliberation. As someone interested in argumentation, rhetoric, democratic theory and practice, media criticism, and new technologies, I find consideration of blogs that engage in broad conversations about collective public life to be particularly rewarding.

[12] The Independent Media Center, or Indymedia (at http://www.indymedia.org/), is a loose network of largely progressive activists intended to utilize new media tools in the service of citizen journalism. Indymedia positions itself as an alternative to the corporate institutional media, and is often compared to or seen as a predecessor to blogging because of its emphasis on interactive web access; see Victor Pickard, "Assessing the Radical Democracy of Indymedia: Discursive, Technical, and Institutional Discourses," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (March 2006): 19-38 and "United Yet Autonomous: Indymedia and the Struggle to Sustain a Radical Democratic Network," *Media, Culture, and Society* (May 2006): 315-336. According to Laura Stengrim,

extended to quasi-journalistic activities. Predictably, though, most bloggers weren't showing up

to events with a PRESS card stuck in the brim of their fedoras; many instead opted for what

might be called 'citizen punditry,' mimicking the interpretive function of pundits in the press.

The focus of these pundits could be as narrow or as broad as they desired, allowing both in-depth

analysis of issues and more surface level monitoring. As one might expect, the emergence of

these citizen voices—and new places online to gather eyeballs in that zero-sum game for

attention—justifiably made the institutional media nervous about their own long-term

sustainability. If bloggers could just poach off the reporting labors of the press, offering media

consumers a gloss on their journalistic efforts without contributing any revenue to the original

press organization, then the institutional media had a serious financial problem to manage.

Consequently, the boundary work between 'the press' and 'the bloggers' (two amorphous,

porous identities to begin with) was heated in the years that marked the popularization stage.[13]

This boundary work played out on blogs and in the popular press. Journalist Kurt Anderson

encapsulates a dominant sentiment writing for *New York* magazine about blogging:

> For now, bloggers are a second-tier journalistic species. They are remoras. The *Times*
>
> and CNN and CBS News are the whales and sharks to which Instapundit, Kausfiles,
>
> and Kos attach themselves for their free rides. (Remoras evolved special sucking
>
> disks; bloggers have modems.) If the sharks and whales were to go extinct, what

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Indymedia "rejects modernity's affinity for centralized power" in the way that the network is organized; see her "Negotiating Postmodern Democracy, Political Activism, and Knowledge Production: Indymedia's Grassroots and e-Savvy Answer to Media Oligopoly," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* (December 2005), 290.

[13] This boundary work was chronicled at multiple levels; indeed, this was probably the most central question in the early days of blogging. For representative and well-circulated blog posts on the subject, see Rebecca Blood, "A Few Thoughts on Journalism and What Blogs Can Do About It," *Rebecca's Pocket*, April 15, 2004, http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/what_is_journalism.html; Jay Rosen, "Brain Food for BloggerCon," *PressThink,* April 16, 2004, http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2004/04/16/con_prelude.html.

would the blogging remoras do? Evolve into actual reporters?[14]

The bloggers-as-remoras connection actually shows the complexity of the press-blogging relationship. Many remoras have a relationship based in commensalism, meaning that they gain something from their host, but the host gains little. Bloggers certainly gain from having institutional media resources to prompt blog posts and much of the institutional media did not perceive much value added by blogged conversations about their reporting. But there is another way to look at the bloggers-as-remoras meme. Some remoras have a relationship based in mutualism with their hosts, cleaning parasites from their hosts and thus ensuring the smooth operation of their biological system. Needless to say, that's a more uplifting spin to put on that particular metaphor from a perspective sympathetic to blogging.

John Jordan identifies rhetorics of professionalism as the key axis along which the press, with their complex system of accreditation and presumably careful editorial layers, constructed bloggers as potentially mendacious sources that contributed primarily to information overload.[15] The irony of professionalism as a demarcating criterion was not lost on bloggers who were watching the American 'paper of record,' the *New York Times*, weather the Jayson Blair scandal and its own lackluster reporting on the Iraq-weapons of mass destruction connection.[16]

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[14] Kurt Anderson, "Premodern America," *New York*, March 2, 2005, http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/columns/imperialcity/11465/.

[15] Jim Jordan, "Disciplining the Virtual Home Front: Mainstream News and the Web During the War in Iraq," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* (September 2007), 287-293.

[16] Jayson Blair was a *Times* reporter who fabricated and plagiarized numerous articles over a four year tenure; when revealed, the scandal rocked the journalism world. See the *New York Times'* own account of the Blair scandal in Dan Barry, David Barstow, Jonathan Glater, Adam Liptak, and Jacques Steinberg, "Correcting the Record: *Times* Reporter Who Resigned Leaves Long Trail of Deception," *New York Times*, May 11, 2003, http://query.nytimes. com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9403E1DB123FF932A25756C0A9659C8B63. Maggie Patterson and Steve Urbanski have investigated the implications of the Blair scandal for journalism and public trust in "What Jayson Blair and Janet Cooke Say About the Press and the Erosion of Public Trust," *Journalism Studies* (December 2006): 828-50. Elizabeth Hindman's study of how the *New York Times'* participated in 'paradigm repair' that rehabilitated certains norms of journalism is an additional resource to understand this boundary work: "Jayson Blair, *The New York Times*, and Paradigm Repair," *Journal of Communication* (June 2005): 225-41. Though the Jayson

Ostensibly, for many at the time, the difference between considering bloggers as journalists, as opposed to bloggers occasionally committing "random acts of journalism," was the key point that would legitimize or de-legitimize the blogosphere as useful.[17]

This boundary work is almost definitive of historical moments when new media systems begin to receive acclaim and rival established media formations. Aaron Barlow, in perhaps the best historical treatment of blogging to date, helpfully situates the development of the blogosphere as a response to broader changes in the American media ecology. In *The Rise of the Blogosphere*, Barlow traces the evolution of American journalism from early newspapers through blogging, showing how each of Bimber's four information regimes could be characterized as laying the groundwork for blogging. In the early American colonies, the postal system circulated news of distant events through letters; eventually, the most 'newsworthy' of

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Blair scandal suggested how one person could game a single organization, the press coverage of the link between weapons of mass destruction and Iraq suggests problems with the larger organization of newsgathering in the United States. As Michael Massing, among many, many others, explains in *Now They Tell Us: The American Press and Iraq* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004), the press coverage of the Bush Administration's claims that Iraq had or was actively pursuing weapons of mass destruction was too reliant on biased sources close to the Administration. Consequently, dissenting views were sidelined or marginalized in what many saw as a press-aided rush to war. When no signs of weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, press credibility took another hit. Oliver Boyd-Barrett applies and updates Chomsky and Hermann's propaganda model of media to illustrate how the press in 2003 marched in lockstep with the state's imperatives; in "Judith Miller, *The New York Times*, and the Propaganda Model," *Journalism Studies* (November 2004): 435-49. More generally, the press during the Iraq war fell prey to an on-message, focused Administration that had sophisticated tools for strategic political communication, as detailed by Sue Lockett John, David Domke, Kevin Coe, and Erica S. Graham, "Going Public, Crisis After Crisis: The Bush Administration and the Press from September 11 to Saddam," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* (Summer 2007): 195-220 and Deepa Kumar, "Media, War, and Propaganda: Strategies of Information Management During the 2003 Iraq War," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 (March 2006): 48-69. This catalogue (admittedly brief and partial) of press failures is not meant as a global indictment of the institutional media. Rather, I am aiming to suggest that the values of 'good journalism' are more contextually based than media-determined; in other words, the values of professionalism might or might not adhere to any particular work of journalism independent of institutional affiliation.

[17] Kaye Trammell quoted in Mark Glaser, "Scholars Discover Weblogs Pass Test as Mode of Communication," *Online Journalism Review*, May 11, 2004, http://www.ojr.org/ojr/glaser/1084325287.php. I've never been sure what to make of the title of this article; it seems difficult to imagine what blogging is if not some species of communication. It does, however, illustrate the precarious nature of blogging within the broader media ecology at the time, and the eventual acceptance as a legitimate site of inquiry and conversation. Trammell may well have been quoting J.D. Lasica, who came to the term "random acts of journalism" a year earlier; see J.D. Lasica, "Random Acts of Journalism," *JD's Blog: New Media Musings*, March 12, 2003, http://www.jdlasica.com/blog/archives/2003_03_12.html.

those letters, as determined by the postmaster, would be republished in newspapers to "form a network of information transmittal."[18] Publishers eventually became bolder, with pamphlets like Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* popularizing the sentiments that heretofore had been expressed only in private letters with small circulation.[19] This kind of advocacy journalism was crucial in polarizing the colonists against the ruling English aristocracy. In the debates over the new republic, the print media of the time received special protections that were eventually enshrined in the Bill of Rights (even as those protections were temporarily eclipsed by the Alien and Sedition Acts).[20]

A deeply partisan press emerged during Andrew Jackson's presidential tenure, but would give way around the Civil War to a professional class of journalists steeped in the coagulating values of modernity: objectivity, neutrality, and dispassion. Accompanying professionalization was commercialization, and the realization of massive press empires represented most prominently by William Randolph Hearst. These press empires were able to expand their newsgathering facilities and squeeze smaller operations out of business. National press organizations consolidated their grasp on the circulation of news with the broadcast era of radio and television. Since these chains needed to appeal to the broadest audience possible in order to secure scarce advertising revenues, they emphasized objectivity and neutrality, often in ethics codes designed for their employees that were used to demarcate their product from more 'amateur' publications.[21]

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[18] Barlow, *Rise of the Blogosphere*, 9.

[19] Barlow, *Rise of the Blogosphere*, 19-21.

[20] Barlow, *Rise of the Blogosphere*, 49.

[21] Barlow, *Rise of the Blogosphere*, 96. The role of 'ethics' or 'professional' codes is usually to provide a clear demarcation between the professional and the amateur. This process is particularly at work in medicine and the sciences; see, for example, Judy Segal's *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 2005), 32-3 but can be extended to other professional fields.

It was onto this scene that alternative forms of journalism exploded in the 1960s, with Thomas Wolfe's 'New Journalism' and Hunter Thompson's 'Gonzo Journalism,' both of which unsettled the journalism profession with their unconventional stylistic manner. Later, as the internet spread during the 1990s, bulletin boards, homepages, and then blogs served as hosts for public debate—in many cases, because the institutionalized press no longer did. Barlow's diagnosis seems about right:

> People want to talk, and they want their expression to be unfettered. But the commercial media have slowly and quietly tried to take that ability away, leaving most of the population as nothing more than passive consumers, observers of the conversations of others. This has led to frustration and feelings of powerlessness that had no outlet—until the appearance of blogs.[22]

Commercialism and professionalism had limited public debate; for Barlow, "it is the loss of the ability of the amateur to have a direct impact on the national debates that has increasingly turned people away from both the news media and national politics."[23] With the ease of blogging, the barriers to participation in broader public discourse were reduced—with all the attendant risks and rewards. Blogging, by recuperating certain norms and practices of prior journalistic traditions, provides new ways for citizens to engage with the unfolding events that shape public life.

While some bemoan boundary work as petty turf warfare, there is a slightly more positive view. Revisiting contested norms refreshes the self-reflexivity of press institutions, and bloggers that claim to practice some form of citizen journalism or punditry are probably enriched by the

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[22] Barlow, *Rise of the Blogosphere*, 177.
[23] Barlow, *Rise of the Blogosphere*, 183.

norms and traditions of journalism that they extend and modify.[24] By the end of the

popularization stage, many commentators perceived a rough symbiosis between the established

press and the blogging newcomers, though there are still occasional flare-ups that identify fault

lines.[25]

If it is true that blogging has settled into some sort of symbiosis with the press, then what

types of activities have bloggers adopted vis-à-vis the institutionalized media? Communication

scholar Stephen Cooper identifies four prominent practices in his *Watching the Watchdog:*

Bloggers as the Fifth Estate:

- *Accuracy.* Bloggers perform a number of tasks related to accuracy. They fact

  check descriptions by journalists and other bloggers. They ensure that quotations

  are accurate and contextual. They probe the authenticity of documents and other

  forms of proof. They interpret statistics and scientific studies, and they contest the

  validity of memes circulating in the media.[26]

- *Framing.* Bloggers provide differing, sometimes competing, interpretations of

  events. They might dispute a framing that is prevalent in a specific story or set of

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[24] This tentative truce is marked by publications in the popular press by articles like J.D. Lasica's "Blogs and Journalism Needs Each Other," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2003): 70-4 and Jay Rosen, "Bloggers vs. Journalists is Over," *PressThink*, January 21, 2005, http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2005/01/21/ berk_essy.html. Rosen's post might well signify the close of the 'popularization-dissemination' stage. This is definitely not to paper over continuing conflicts, especially among practitioners. One particularly good example of the flare-up that periodically inflames the journalist/blogger boundary work is when Glenn Greenwald, a blogger for Salon.com, published an email written to him by CNN reporter John King. King was responding to Greenwald's accusations that he had asked a number of softball questions to John McCain, then in a heated primary battle for the Republican nomination. King begins to conclude his email by saying "You clearly know very little about journalism. But credibility matters." See Glenn Greenwald, "CNN's John King Responds," *Salon*, January 16, 2008, http://www.salon.com/opinion/ greenwald/2008/01/16/king/.

[25] Jane B. Singer, "Journalists and News Bloggers: Complements, Contradictions, and Challenges," *Uses of Blogs*, eds. Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 29.

[26] Stephen Cooper, *Watching the Watchdogs: Bloggers as the Fifth Estate* (Marquette: Marquette Books, 2007), chapter 2. See also Shannon Bichard, "Building Blogs: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of the Distribution of Frames on the 2004 Presidential Candidate Web Sites," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (Summer 2006): 329-45.

stories, add new facts that recast the story in different light, or recontextualize that interpretation within a broader historical scope.[27]

- *Agenda-setting and gatekeeping.* Bloggers regularly question the newsworthiness of some item that appears in the press or present an issue that is not receiving enough press attention.[28]

- *Journalistic practices.* Finally, bloggers engage in criticism about the very process of journalism, from the use of anonymous sources, to personal relationships between reporters and the reported, to the use of 'rowback' processes used to make corrections, and to conflations of fact and opinion in a supposedly 'straight' news story.[29]

These four genres of media criticism cover a fair amount of ground in describing the kinds of activities in which bloggers regularly engage. These activities overlap substantially with what Axel Bruns has called 'gatewatching,' the phenomenon where citizens watch their media gatekeepers—becoming, in essence, a 'fifth estate' capable of monitoring the fourth estate of the press.[30]

2.3 Blogging and Political Organizing

The press and lobbying activities by citizens are hardly separable. Yet, because information technology now forms a critical "backbone for networking and organizing," one line of inquiry

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[27] Cooper, *Watching the Watchdogs*, chapter 3.

[28] Cooper, *Watching the Watchdogs*, chapter 4.

[29] Cooper, *Watching the Watchdogs*, chapter 5.

[30] Axel Bruns, *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). Also see his "Gatewatching, Gatecrashing: Futures for Tactical News Media," in *Digital Media and Democracy,* ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008): 247-270.

about blogging focuses squarely on the impacts of blogging on political organizing.[31] *DailyKos*, a sprawling blog community founded by Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, was invented in part to energize progressives—members of the so-called 'Democratic wing of the Democratic party.' With a host of interlinked blogs written by members, *dailyKos* has become a clearinghouse for information about specific electoral races, news events, and more general debates about the principles that should guide progressive politics in the United States. *DailyKos* is its own complex ecosystem, with a main page of blog entries, supplemented by individual 'diaries' kept by members. In addition, a complex menu of 'recent comments' and 'recommended posts' offer visitors a pastiche of commentary through which they can meander.[32] Many blog posts snip paragraphs from various press accounts, creating a collaged portal into the day's events for readers to cull through.[33] In fact, *dailyKos* could suffice as a self-contained (though outwardly linking) media universe, with text, audio, and video clips populating the site on nearly every topic that animates broader public debate. In many ways, *dailyKos* could be—and is for many people—a one-stop political bazaar, providing essential news, opinion, and conversation.

DailyKos claims direct political influence on a number of campaigns, most prominently in securing the election of Howard Dean as Democratic National Committee chair.[34] Blog communities like *dailyKos* have formed the 'netroots,' a term that signifies grassroots progressive movements coordinated through online media. The netroots have gained significant

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[31] Janni Aragon, "The 'Lady' Revolution in the Age of Technology," *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 4 (2008), 82.

[32] *DailyKos,* http://www.dailykos.com/.

[33] David Perlmutter, in *Blogwars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), identifies external political roles of bloggers as (1) compilers of political information (2) informants about the political marketplace (3) collector of information (4) reviser and extender of big media (5) investigative reporter (6) political analyst and critic (7) political watchdog and (8) political educator; in Chapter 4. This typology of roles is consistent with the types of posts available on sites like *dailyKos.*

[34] See Markos Moulitsas Zúniga and Jerome Armstrong, *Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grassroots, and the Rise of People-Powered Politics* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2006), especially chapter 5.

publicity and influence in the Democratic Party and are regularly referenced as opinion leaders

alongside more traditional party activists and interest groups. Of course, there is a conservative

analog to the *dailyKos*, and several other rival sites of all different political persuasions. Blog

sites of all types have replicated the basic format of *dailyKos*, in which readers are allowed to

create their own blogs to be hosted on the site and thus participate intimately in this discourse

community. What *dailyKos* and these other sites have effectively done is establish a space for

discussion and debate about politics, building on the models of political influence that

MoveOn.org and the Zapatistas initiated in earlier incarnations of cyber-activism.[35]

The blogs involved in *dailyKos* certainly interrelate with many other types of blogs,

constantly pulling outside posts into their centripetal system of rankings and recommendations.

But it probably won't surprise to realize that the blog posts that often become most popular, and

the bloggers that are consistently rated highly, tend to be those that cohere with the overall

progressive politics of that group. Upsetting the apple cart rarely wins one friends amongst like-

minded people; even though it's sometimes good to introduce a little epistemic turbulence into

ossified belief systems. *DailyKos* is representative of broader trends directing citizens toward

engaging with media that exclusively cohere with their pre-formed ideological tendencies.

In some ways, the potential for blogs like *dailyKos* to become an intellectually segregated

discourse community intersects with the dominant metaphor for U.S. politics during the

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[35] For a history of the Zapatistas online activism efforts, see Adrienne Russell, "The Zapatistas Online," *International Journal for Communication Studies* (October 2001): 399-414 and "Myth and the Zapatista Movement: Exploring a Network Identity," *New Media and Society* (August 2006): 559-577. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt's *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999) links the Zapatista movement to the new swarm politics of networked publics. Some years later, the web-based MoveOn.org emerged as a "hybrid mobilization movement" that combines the communicative repertoires of parties, interest groups, and social movements; see Andrew Chadwick, "Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity," *Political Communication* (July 2007): 283-301. For an exploration of how MoveOn.org has used online tools for persuasion, see Barbara Warnick, *Rhetoric Online: Persuasion and Politics on the World Wide Web* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), esp. Chapter 4.

popularization stage: the divide between 'red states' and 'blue states.' Red states were the reliably Republican conservative states, closer to the 'heartland' of America; blue states were the reliably Democratic liberal states, concentrated on the more urbanized coasts. The red state-blue state metaphor became a useful heuristic to signify key cultural cleavages around gay marriage, abortion, and national security in discussions during the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. While the metaphor obviously overstated the differences between red states and blue states, it signaled the extent to which a common public culture, with shared norms and stories held by most Americans, had eroded. No one could conclusively say why the red states and blue states seemed to have this dramatic value divergence, but nearly everyone seemed to agree that there were substantial disagreements that lent an air of incommensurability to cross-conversation. It doesn't seem too much of a stretch to suggest that part of the differentiation between red and blue states, to the extent that it existed, could have been fueled by the growth of media outlets like *dailyKos* that were increasingly polarized along political lines. Blogging, while not the only media responsible for this polarization, surely fits into the equation. *DailyKos* might be the representative blog for the blue states, and the analogous, and fittingly named, *RedState* fulfills similar functions for many citizens in the red states.[36] The discourse emanating from these different sites is often a case study in how like-minded groups go to extremes.

Legal scholar Cass Sunstein has articulated a powerful explanation of this phenomenon in his 2001 book *Republic.com*. His basic thesis is that by introducing citizens to competing viewpoints, the general broadcast media provide a democratic service in building common ground and checking extremism. This is a variation on the fear of fragmentation that often asserts itself in democracies, which are often torn between sensitivity to diversity and the political need

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[36] *Red State,* www.redstate.org.

for unity.[37] Of course, in 2001, when the first edition of *Republic.com* was published, blogs were still beneath the radar of most cultural observers, including Sunstein. However, the tendencies Sunstein identifies as prevalent in the pre-blog web are potentially accelerated by the growth of blogging. To begin his analysis, Sunstein submits that individuals in information-rich societies are on the cusp of creating filters to select the media experiences they want to have, rather than sharing similar experiences with more expansive swathes of the public. These filters sound very much like blogs that preselect information cohering with already established opinions. Sunstein points to personalized news as a harbinger of this total customization:

> [H]aving dispensed with broadcasters, you can choose your own video programming, with movies, game shows, sports, shopping, and news of your choice. You mix and match … perhaps you have no interest at all in 'news.' Maybe you find 'news' impossibly boring. If so, you need not see it at all. Maybe you select programs and stories involving only music and weather … If you are interested in politics, you may want to restrict yourself to certain points of view, by hearing only from people you like … many people restrict themselves to their own preferred points of view—liberals watching and reading mostly or only liberals; moderates, moderates; conservatives, conservatives; neo-Nazis, neo-Nazis … when the power to filter is unlimited, people can decide, in advance and with perfect accuracy, what they will and will not encounter.[38]

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[37] The fragmentation critique receives a comprehensive extension in Bill Bishop's *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2008).

[38] Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-5. Sunstein invokes the idea of the "Daily Me" to capture the idea of a fully customized newspaper that would structure daily reading. This concept is drawn from Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Random House, 1996), 153.

For Sunstein, this type of filtering undermines the conditions necessary for democratic practice. First, he argues "people should be exposed to materials that they would not have chosen in advance … to ensure against fragmentation and extremism, which are predictable outcomes of any situation in which like-minded people speak only with themselves."[39] Second, "many or most citizens should have a range of common experiences. Without shared experiences, a heterogeneous society will have a much more difficult time in addressing social problems … Common experiences, emphatically including the common experiences made possible by the media, provide a form of social glue."[40] According to this explanation, internetworked media encourage *enclaved deliberation*, a phenomenon where like-minded interlocutors deliberate outside of the purview of public critique. This proclivity to listen only to arguments one already believes in, and dismiss alternative perspectives as loony, dangerous, or worthless, threatens democratic politics that rely on a modicum of civility, a willingness to acknowledge the validity of differing perspectives, and the co-development of common ground through public argument.

Historically, in Sunstein's telling, general interest intermediaries like newspapers, magazines, radio, and television checked against fragmentation and developed social glue.[41] General interest broadcast media were productions of a twentieth century trying to accommodate massification; these organs of mass communication were widely believed to provide centripetal force in an increasingly complex world, as both Bimber and Barlow argue in their historical analyses of media and democracy.[42] Decentering these general interest intermediaries from a

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[39] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 8-9. Sunstein's meditations on group polarization receive further treatment in his "Deliberative Trouble? Why Groups Go to Extremes," *Yale Law Journal*, 110 (October 2000), 71, LexisNexis.

[40] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 9.

[41] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 11.

[42] For an explication of how mass communication was theorized as a way to accommodate massification, see Julian Sorrell Huxley, *UNESCO: Its Philosophy and Purpose* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 1947) and Louis Wirth, "Consensus and Mass Communication," *American Sociological Review* (February 1948): 1-15.

central role in public life threatens a retreat into 'balkanized,' like-minded deliberative enclaves that undermine the public commons.[43] Homophily ('birds of a feather flock together') might be a natural feature of social networks, but for Sunstein it is a threat to democratic practice.[44]

I believe that the main argument of *Republic.com* turns largely on how exactly enclaved deliberation should be nested in broader deliberative processes. A certain level of enclave deliberation is inevitable, particularly in hypercomplex, structurally differentiated societies. There is no medium of communication that can host a conversation among all citizens without suffering serious problems of scale, and in the absence of a general media form that can do so, the growth of enclaves are likely. What, then, is the appropriate role for enclaves? Sunstein begins by outlining the dangers of enclaved deliberation before offering a partial recuperation. He situates his critique of enclaved deliberation by drawing on persuasive experimental data that makes the case that enclaved deliberation pushes like-minded deliberators to extremes due to *social comparison* and *limited argument pools*.[45] Sunstein argues that deliberators' need for acceptance leads them to compare their own views with their peers, and that this form of social comparison often squeezes out divergent perspectives. Following Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's theory of the "spiral of silence," which theorizes that participants holding minority views often

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[43] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 15. For a critique of Sunstein's use of the balkanization metaphor, see Gordon R. Mitchell, Damien Pfister, Georgeta Bradatan, Dejan Colev, Tsvetelina Manolova, Gligor Mitkovski, Ivanichka Nestorova, Milena Ristic and Gentiana Sheshi, "Navigating Dangerous Deliberative Waters: Shallow Argument Pools, Group Polarization and Public Debate Pedagogy in Southeast Europe," *Controversia: An International Journal of Debate and Democratic Renewal* 4 (2006): 69-84.

[44] Duncan Watts, *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 58.

[45] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 68.

self-select out of participating in deliberation for fear of social sanction, Sunstein accounts for

the socio-cultural pressures that influence group argumentation.[46]

This socio-cultural explanation is paired with a rhetorical one. Sunstein contends "the

central factor behind group polarization is the existence of a limited argument pool, one that is

skewed (speaking purely descriptively) in a particular direction."[47] Sunstein's explanation of this

phenomenon is deceptively simple: "any individual's position on any issue is a function, at least

in part, of which arguments seem convincing."[48] A citizen's opinions, then, will be influenced in

large part by the types of arguments to which they are exposed. Without a point-counterpoint

balancing act, public communication amongst like-minded people can resemble propaganda

exercises more than debate. This is why random, unplanned encounters play such an important

role for Sunstein, because they increase the likelihood of exposure to a variety of arguments that

are not pre-screened by some sort of ideological litmus test. Sunstein's commitment to

unplanned interaction reflects a commitment to the value of *dissoi logoi*, the principle drawn

from rhetoric that each controversy has at least two sides, and that better judgments can be made

if interlocutors are familiar with the best arguments of the other side.[49]

The absence of a *dissoi logoi* process often has deleterious effects for public deliberation

because it can facilitate unjustified opinion cascades. With limited argument pools, this opinion

cascade can wreak havoc. Sunstein cites the well-known example of South African President

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[46] Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion," *Journal of Communication* 24 (1974): 43-51. Noelle-Neumann's work is one of the first to suggest that "social conventions, customs, and norms" be robustly included in theories of public opinion and deliberation (43).

[47] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 68.

[48] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 67.

[49] For a good introduction to *dissoi logoi*'s centrality to rhetoric, see Michael Billig's "Protagoras and the Origins of Rhetoric," in his *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1987]), esp 69-80.

Thabo Mbeki stumbling upon a website that questioned the link between HIV and AIDS. After

making contact with this small, yet vociferous, community of skeptics, Mbeki embarked on a

series of steps that amplified uncertainty about prevailing AIDS treatments and thereby stalled

proactive efforts to constrain the spread of the disease in South Africa.[50] These opinion cascades

are particularly dangerous when invisible 'tipping points' are crossed, and large publics start

believing something or acting in a certain way because the avalanche of public opinion entrains

individual opinions.[51] Sunstein contrasts cybercascades that are incubated and propagated from

enclaved deliberations with James Fishkin's deliberative opinion polling.[52] In a move that

mirrors Habermas' explanation of how public opinion congeals through rational-critical debate,

Sunstein approvingly notes that Fishkin's polling mechanism encourages more reasoned and

depolarized decision-making, and thus more acceptable shifts in opinion.[53]

Though the spiral of silence and limited argument pools may reduce the quality of

judgment by enclaved deliberators, the processes of argument incubation in enclaves cannot be

so easily dismissed. Sunstein's read of enclave deliberation is sensitive enough to develop the

benefits of like-minded people deliberating with each other:

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[50] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 83. For more on the rhetorical features of Mbeki's dissension on HIV/AIDS science, see the dissertation written by Marcus Paroske, "The Rhetoric of AIDS Policy in South Africa," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2006), especially 51-52.

[51] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 83. The idea of a 'tipping point' was popularized by Malcolm Gladwell's book of the same name. Gladwell draws this concept from epidemiology, which uses the term to identify when epidemics have hit critical mass. See *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2000). The idea of a tipping point itself seemed to have crossed a tipping point at about the time that blogs emerged as agents of public communication, with the concept increasingly bandied about in public discourse.

[52] Fishkin's deliberative opinion polls attempt to enact deliberative democracy by gathering citizens together and running them through structured activities where their preferences are revealed and then negotiated through group discussion. As such, it is an explicit check against echo chambers and an effort to ensure a more reasoned discussion. See his *The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

[53] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 86.

a special advantage of enclave deliberation is that it promotes the development of positions that would otherwise be invisible, silenced, or squelched in general debate. The efforts of marginalized groups to exclude outsiders, and even of political parties to limit their primaries to party members, might be justified in similar terms. Even if group polarization is at work—perhaps *because* group polarization is at work—enclaves, emphatically including those produced by new technologies, can provide a wide range of social benefits, not least because they greatly enrich the social 'argument pool.'[54]

If the spiral of silence is at work when heterogeneous publics meet rhetorically, then enclaves function as a protected space where arguments are deepened and confidences are developed prior to their public testing. As Sunstein puts it, "in light of the inevitable existence of some status-based hierarchies, it makes sense to be receptive to deliberating enclaves in which members of multiple groups may speak with one another and develop their views."[55] Sunstein thus recognizes "the civil rights movement, the antislavery movement, and the movement for sex equality" as "movements of great value" that emerged from enclaved deliberations.[56]

Sunstein's approach to enclave deliberation hones in on the capacity of enclaves to generate new information or argument formations. That approach could be broadened further to acknowledge how enclaves also incubate different rhetorical styles that might be marginalized in more general sites of public deliberation. For rhetorical theorists Margaret Zulick and Anne

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[54] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 76.

[55] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 76-7.

[56] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 75. A vivid example of how the civil rights movement was incubated in enclave deliberation is described in Robert Branham's "'I Was Gone on Debating': Malcolm X's Prison Debates and Public Confrontations," *Argumentation & Advocacy* (Winter 1995): 117-137. Branham explains how Malcolm X used prison debates to hone his rhetorical skills, including the development of stock metaphors, before he became a major civil rights leader participating in public debates.

Laffoon, enclaved publics "preserve distinct languages, forms of argument and rhetorical traditions in temporarily segregated areas of the public forum" that have the potential to "relocate and redirect always decaying representations of ever-changing material conditions, through introducing variant understandings that reconfigure a current idiom in a preferred direction."[57] Enclaves could thus be seen as pockets where unique rhetorical styles are cultivated before their rotation into wider arenas of public deliberation, where their rhetorical activities can then introduce unique criticisms that alter dominant frames. These communicative pockets incubate novel ideas and have potential to productively inform public debate.[58] Sunstein's fear, then, isn't of enclave deliberation itself, but of enclave deliberation that is more-or-less totally insulated from public follow-on conversations with interlocutors that have different opinions.[59]

While Sunstein's critique of enclaved deliberation did not originally account for blogging, his point was eventually extended to weblogs. Rebecca Blood isolates the dangers of enclave deliberation by noting that "a downside of weblogs, and the internet as a whole, is it's easy for these echo chambers to be created. We tend to agree with things we already think, so I think people tend to read weblogs that generally reflect their point of view."[60] The echo chamber phenomenon can occur on a macro scale, where interlinked blogs featuring like-minded commentary feed off each other. But it can also unfold on a micro scale, as when relatively

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[57] Margaret Zulick and Anne Laffoon, "Enclaved Publics as Inventional Resources: An Essay in Generative Rhetoric," in *Argument in Controversy: Proceedings of the Seventh SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation,* ed. Donn Parson (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1991), 251-2.

[58] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 78-9.

[59] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 77. On this point, Sunstein argues, "the danger is that through the mechanisms of social influence and persuasive arguments, members will move to positions that lack merit but are predictable consequences of the particular circumstances of enclave deliberation. In the extreme case, enclave deliberation may even put social stability at risk."

[60] Quoted in L.A. Johnson, "Pittsburgh's Bloggers Have Found a Home for Rants," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 12 December 2004, A14.

homogeneous interlocutors interact with each other in the comments section of a single blog. As

prominent blogger Glenn Reynolds explains,

> bloggers can be captured by their commenters. It's immediate feedback, and
>
> it's interesting (it's about *you!*) and I can imagine it could become addictive. My
>
> impression is that often, instead of serving as a corrective to errors, comment
>
> sections tend to lure bloggers farther in the direction they already lean.[61]

This fear of echo chambers is a regular feature in press coverage and academic treatment of the

blogging phenomenon.[62]

But the relationship between blogging and enclave deliberation is not so automatic. There

is some evidence to suggest that the fragmentation thesis is over-stated, given the general overlap

between the press and blogs.[63] Based on Barbara Kaye's research, at least one reason that

individuals participate in blogging is to seek out information from news sources that are different

from their own.[64] Other observers argue that the practice of hyperlinking provides a check on

like-mindedness because when a blogger from one ideological perspective critiques a blogger

from another, they usually provide a link to the original text that offers readers an opportunity to

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[61] Glenn Reynolds, "I Got an Email the Other Day," *Instapundit*, June 28, 2004, http://instapundit.com/archives/016265.php.

[62] For representative examples, see Mark Glaser, "Echochamber.com: Is the Net Polarizing U.S. Political Dialogue?," *Online Journalism Review*, April 22, 2004, http://www.ojr.org/ojr/glaser/1082521278.php; and Kevin Wallsten, "Political Blogs and the Bloggers Who Blog Them: Is the Political Blogosphere an Echo Chamber," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., September 1-4, 2005. Visual representations of echo chambers are particularly compelling; see Stuart Luman, "Linkology," *New York Magazine*, February 12, 2006, http://nymag.com/news/media/15972/. The echo chambers criticism also received due attention on blogs, see, for example, Lindsay Beyerstein, "Echo Chambers," *Majikthise*, April 9, 2007, http://majikthise. typepad.com/majikthise_/2007/04/echo_chambers.html.

[63] See Jae Kook Lee, "The Effect of the Internet on Homogeneity of the Media Agenda: A Test of the Fragmentation Thesis," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (Winter 2007): 745-760. For a critical review of Sunstein, see Dan Hunter, "Phillipic.com," *California Law Review* (March 2002), LexisNexis.

[64] Kaye, "Blog Use Motivations," 134-6.

examine other opinions.[65] In addition, the comments sections in some blogs are unmediated, allowing diverse opinions to find some space (even if they are sequestered away from the post proper). Even if these diversity-inducing features of blogs are insufficient, there are at least some times in which the general interest media focuses on the discourse becoming public through blogs. In fact, each of the tropes I identify in this case study, flooding the zone, ambient intimacy, and shallow quotation describe practices that tend to garner this media attention; perhaps ameliorating some of the worst excesses of enclave deliberation.

Nonetheless, for Sunstein, developing structures for enclaves to oscillate between protected space and public argument is crucial for future democratic practice. In 2006, Sunstein redoubled his efforts to theorize just such a system in *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge*. In *Infotopia*, Sunstein considers how new media forms can aggregate information that is widely dispersed throughout society.[66] 'Echo chambers' are to a large degree supplanted in this later work by the term 'information cocoon,' signaling, perhaps, that Sunstein believes that in the five years that elapsed since publication of *Republic.com*, the opportunities for heterogeneous public argument had become increasingly foreclosed. In this latter work, Sunstein examines how a mix of prediction markets, wikis, open source software, and blogs can help

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[65] Legal blogger Jack Balkin argues "most bloggers who write about political subjects cannot avoid addressing (and, more importantly, linking to) arguments made by people with different views. The reason is that much of the blogosphere is devoted to criticizing what other people have to say;" see "What I Learned About Blogging in a Year," *Balkinization*, January 23, 2004, http://balkin.blogspot.com/2004/01/what-i-learned-about-blogging-in-year.html. Though blog communities might be polarized, the dynamics of online public deliberation ensure that differing views meet at more general hubs for public argument; see Mark Tremayne, Nan Zheng, Jae Kook Lee, and Jaekwan Jeong, "Issue Publics on the Web: Applying Network Theory to the War Blogosphere," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2006): 290-310. As one study has posited, experienced web users recognize that blogs excel at depth of coverage but not necessarily fairness, suggesting that enhanced digital media literacy improves self-reflexivity about blog credibility. See Thomas Johnson, Barbara Kaye, Shannon Bichard, W. Joann Wong, "Every Blog Has Its Day: Politically-interested Internet Users' Perceptions of Blog Credibility," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 100-22.

[66] Cass Sunstein, *Infotopia: How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

overcome informational and social pressures, group polarization, and hidden profiles by creating

incentives for individuals to pool their knowledge.[67]

Consequently, Sunstein acknowledges that blogs can operate as "fact-checkers and

supplemental information sources" as well as allowing "interested readers to find an astounding

range of opinions and facts."[68] Blogs can occasionally serve, then, as tranches that deepen

argument pools. However, Sunstein explains, blogs are also "pervaded by the propagation of

errors, hidden profiles, cascades, and group polarization;" especially "if people are reading blogs

that conform to their own preexisting beliefs."[69] Sunstein refers to two empirical studies of blogs

that analyzed the linking habits of bloggers in order to conclude that group polarization was

indeed occurring between 'liberal' and 'conservative' bloggers.[70]

In 2007, Sunstein published *Republic.com 2.0*, a reconsideration of *Republic.com*. In a

new chapter on blogging, Sunstein acknowledges the link made between blogging and

Habermasian-style deliberative democracy:

> Habermas has explored the idea of an 'ideal speech situation,' in which all
>
> participants attempt to seek the truth; do not behave strategically; and accept a
>
> norm of equality. Certainly, it can be said that as compared to many alternatives,
>
> the blogosphere is both 'public and inclusive,' and grants communication rights to
>
> countless participants. Perhaps the blogosphere can be said to operate, at least to

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[67] Sunstein, *Infotopia*, Chapters 2 & 3.

[68] Sunstein, *Infotopia*, 185-6.

[69] Sunstein, *Infotopia*, 186,188.

[70] Sunstein, *Infotopia*, 189-90.

some degree, in this idealized fashion, in a way that will promote the emergence of 'the better argument.'[71]

However, he follows up this hope with a more sober realization that "in view of what we know about group polarization, however, it should be clear that this happy view of the blogosphere faces a big problem."[72]

In the end, the promise of blogging for political organizing has a sharp double edge. As blog communities like *dailyKos* and *RedState* have shown, blogs can be powerful sites to activate citizens' interest in participating in public conversations and organizing support for specific programs or candidates. Blogs have become so effective in connecting individuals to politics that blogging is now standard for political campaigns.[73] Yet, the risks of a highly personalized media diet may also create some more lasting problems for the overall tenor of democratic politics.

2.4 Participatory (Deliberative?) Culture

At first blush, the very idea of 'participatory culture' sounds empowering; at the very least, it's probably more fiscally responsible than the kind of culture that makes one reach for

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[71] Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2007), 144-5.

[72] Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0*, 145. Cass Sunstein is not the only one to voice concerns of fragmentation given quickly advancing information technology. Lance Bennett and Jarol Manheim have noted that "increasing individuation in the delivery and reception of information" in a system of narrowcasting results in a one-step flow of communication rather than a two-step flow mediated by authoritative opinion leaders. See their "The One-Step Flow of Communication," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2006), 2. The two-step flow of communication theorized by Paul Lazarsfeld (with the help of many others) situated opinion leaders in fulfilling roles similar to Sunstein's general interest intermediaries, but recent advances in communications technology have allowed traditional social networks to be eclipsed by new modes of organization. This privatization of communication patterns, as Philip Howard explains, is particularly present in the use of "political hypermedia" that "tailor political communication" during electoral campaigns. Howard explains that the use of data-mining and content personalization has been particularly present in recent elections, facilitating a narrowcasting system where intermediaries are mostly elided. See his *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 92.

[73] Gracie Lawson-Borders and Rita Kirk, "Blogs in Campaign Communication," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (December 2005): 548-59.

their wallet. One needn't be a hard-core devotee of the early Frankfurt School to acknowledge that the culture industries have an outsized influence on local attention economies, as well as a preference for individuals to interact with their products in very particular (read: profitable) ways. This isn't to make any claims about the 'passivity' or 'activity' of the average media consumer; everyone slides along a scale of engagement at various times and places. But theorists of participatory culture situate new media technologies, blogging among them, as catalysts for a whole new formation of cultural activity. The iconic figure of participatory culture is the mash-up artist, who freely samples commercial music in a synthesizing process that produces a new work of art, which is then widely circulated to global patrons through blogs, peer-to-peer networks, and various other digital transmission methods. The key shift represented here is in the publicly accessible and globally circulating text; whereas past media eras might have encouraged people to talk about what they see on their television, there was a significant scaling problem. No one outside of the living room could access what an individual mumbles to their partner (or at their television set). Networked cultures give individuals the ability to 'respond' to cultural artifacts and amplify their efforts with global media that have as much or potentially greater scale than the circulation of the initial artifact. Participatory culture doesn't just return to a 'premodern' version of culture where all cultural activity was essentially 'amateur' and where virtually everyone participates in some fashion; it couples that capacity with scalable information technologies. This new cultural orientation presents intriguing implications for public deliberation.

Henry Jenkins' work on blogging in the context of participatory culture underlines a few critical features of the new participatory culture. Jenkins argues that "new knowledge communities will be voluntary, temporary, and tactical affiliations, defined through common

intellectual enterprises and emotional investments … they are held together through the mutual production and exchange of knowledge."[74] For Jenkins, online fan communities are exemplars of these new knowledge communities. Using a bevy of websites, discussion boards, blogs, and other new software, fans are "expansive self-organizing groups focused around the collective production, debate, and circulation of meanings, interpretations, and fantasies in response to various artifacts of contemporary popular culture."[75] Fans go online to co-create interpretations of the latest sitcom episode, write fan fiction starring popular characters, and trade bits of trivia to demonstrate their commitment. Fans are motivated by epistemaphilia, "not simply a pleasure in knowing but a pleasure in exchanging knowledge."[76] Fandom demonstrates the power of collective intelligence: it pools knowledge, helps in fixing and multiplying meanings, creates affiliative bonds, and appreciates multiple forms of expression.

Deliberative bloggers function much like fans. As fans, they operate within the same three trends encouraging the growth of participatory culture that Jenkins identifies:

> 1. new tools and technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content;
>
> 2. a range of subcultures promote Do-It-Yourself (DIY) media production, a discourse that shapes how consumers have deployed those technologies;

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[74] Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Inside Participatory Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 137. Jenkins draws much of his insight into participatory culture from Pierre Levy's *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

[75] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers,* 137.

[76] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 139.

3. economic trends favoring the horizontally integrated media conglomerates

encourage the flow of images, ideas, and narratives across multiple media

channels and demand more active modes of spectatorship.[77]

Jenkins suggests that, in contradistinction to culture jammers who attempt to block the flows of

commercial culture, bloggers are important intermediaries that "take knowledge in their own

hands, enabling successful navigation within and between these emerging knowledge cultures."[78]

Jenkins outlines a bi-level system of media power, where one set of messages gains

credibility because of their production by institutions and dissemination through broadcast

media. The network news, for example, has certain resources and traditions that make them an

authoritative source for many publics. The same set of messages, though, also gets re-worked

through grassroots intermediaries, prominently including "bloggers [who] will reframe those

issues for different publics and ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard."[79] In the

interaction between these two systems, meta-issues about agenda-setting, representations,

decorum, and other related tensions become thematized.[80]

Graham Lampa similarly emphasizes the participatory ethos of blogging by suggesting that

"the most striking feature of the imagined community of blogging is that it enables users to both

experience a shared base of knowledge and to contribute directly to that cultural

consciousness."[81] Yet, this type of participation is hardly frictionless, because it rapidly produces

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[77] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 135-6.

[78] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 151.

[79] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 181. The promise that bloggers will "ensure everyone will get heard" is probably over-optimistic, but as a comparative claim, it is difficult to contest that the possibility for viewpoint diversity is probably greater through blogs then through broadcast media.

[80] James Gillett, "Internet Web Logs as Cultural Resistance: A Study of the SARS Arts Project," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (January 2007): 28-43.

[81] Graham Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere: An Introduction to the Imagined Community of the Blogosphere," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and the Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S.

information glut. How, then, to make sense of so many personalized takes on topics up for deliberation? Lampa identifies two filtering systems that explain how Jenkins' grassroots intermediaries exercise media power. One set of filters operates at the micro-level of individual bloggers and another set works at the macro-level of the blogosphere. At the micro-level, filtering of memes happens "through the work of individual bloggers who point to posts and news articles they find interesting," while at the macro-level, filtering occurs "through aggregate blog indices like Blogdex, Technorati, Daypop, and Popdex."[82] As Lampa explains, micro-filtering is essentially an exercise in judgment, based on perceived value of individual blog posts and overall credibility of the author(s). Macro-filtering utilizes new search technologies to organize information based on tags, word frequencies, and search terms. There is a dual functionality to this two-tiered filtering system for small-scale intermediaries:

> Small-scale filtering engages bloggers with their readers and other community members; by pointing one's audience to other sites (both traditional media outlets and other blogs) via hyperlink, a blogger simultaneously strengthens the ties that bind the core of the blogosphere and also reinforces this dominant theme within the community. Large-scale filtering in the form of news aggregation serves a purpose more akin to traditional national print journalism—providing community members with a shared set of world events and issues that further allows individual bloggers to imagine themselves as part of a greater whole.[83]

Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/imagining_the_blogosphere.html.

[82] Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere."

[83] Lampa, "Imagining the Blogosphere."

With this dual functionality, blog communities can serve publics on a scale ranging from very

intimate, like friends and family, to global publics with shared interests.[84] Blogging thus offers

the potential to widen the net of people socially producing knowledge, as they dissect the news

through their blogging endeavors.[85]

At the same time that this bi-level media system has emerged, media technologies are

undergoing a convergence. For example, networked citizens can access newspaper content on

their mobile phone, get internet over cable lines, and check email on their television. The

convergence between old and new media forms produces a stunning array of vehicles to access

and process bits and bytes of information. For Jenkins, "convergence represents a cultural shift

as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and seek connections among dispersed

media content."[86] There is obvious coincidence between this change in cultural (re)production

and the way that bloggers have interacted with the press and political organizing, as I have

explained earlier. Yet, it's worth underlining the basic cultural processes that fund many of these

other changes. Doing so underlines the extent to which "open source politics" presents a new

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[84] Paul Hodkinson has argued that, while blogging may be more "detached, fluid, and individualized" than prior media forms, it also enables greater "intensity of their communication," in "Interactive Online Journals and Individualization," *New Media and Society* 9 (2007): 646 (625-50). Michael Stefanone and Chyng-Yang Jang identify how blogging has bolstered strong tie networks in "Writing for Friends and Family: The Interpersonal Nature of Blogs," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 123-40.

[85] See Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[86] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 3. This convergence produces what Jean Burgess calls "vernacular creativity," or the inventive remixing of mass media artifacts with traditional forms like scrapbooking or commonplace books; in her "Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity, and Digital Storytelling," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Culture Studies* (June 2006): 201-14. Also see John Quiggin, "Blogs, Wikis, and Creative Innovation," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 (2006): 481-96. Alison Piepmeier is more skeptical of blogging's ability to channel creativity into community building in her "Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community," *American Periodicals* 18 (2008): 213-38.

paradigm for the organization of public culture and deliberation.[87] The idea of open source

politics is modeled after the open source software movement, represented most prominently by

the Linux community of software developers. Open source software makes the software code

freely available to other developers, who can debug it and add additional functionalities. Most of

this labor is free, like much of the intellectual labor on blogging (especially in the early years,

when blog advertisements and jobs did not provide a reliable revenue source). Open source

models are grounded in collaboration, informal peer review, and decentralized circulation; norms

that are recognized by bloggers as essential to their mode of public communication.

Thinking about blogging as an open source movement offers a way to conceptualize the

information flows that are filtered through the blogosphere. Though it would be a mistake to

situate blogging as a utopian movement enabling frictionless communication to directly

empower participants, blogs

> offer spaces for writing that are more collaboratively constructed than other online
>
> spaces, as bloggers freely link to, comment on, and augment each other's content. In
>
> this way, blogs allow for the possibility of developing new cultural practices of
>
> online communication in relation to previously established modes of ownership,
>
> authorship, and legitimacy of content and access to information.[88]

The collaborative ethos of blogging communities "is based more on values such as immediacy,

transparency, interconnectivity, and proximity to the events. As a heterarchy, diverse bloggers

post, cross-link, blogroll, and trackback to interact in a network, pulling ideas and knowledge

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[87] Micah Sifry, "The Rise of Open Source Politics," *The Nation*, November 4, 2004, http://www.thenation.com/doc/20041122/sifry.

[88] Laura Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff, and Jessica Reyman, "Introduction: Weblogs, Rhetoric, Community, and Culture," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/introduction.html.

from the edges."[89] This intercasting of tightly linked information flows "can create an economy of generosity and gift at the expense of jealousy and possessiveness."[90] As communication scholar Jenny Edbauer explains, "because this kind of documentation is public, often open to comments and citation in other blogs and websites, the 'research' grows in social waves. The networked nature of blogs puts research into a circulation that becomes linked, put to other uses, transformed."[91] Blogging thus introduces a new mode of public communication that inverts what has become the traditional model of mass communication. Rather than a single point source disseminating information to a public, blogging de-massifies public communication by producing a network where multiple nodes feed into argument-processing systems. It is these feedback loops, grounded in recommendations, critiques, and linking practices that enhance the participatory nature of media.

Given the collaborative nature of blogging, norms surrounding participation have been revalued. Individuals in any social network gain reputation by becoming trustworthy, evocative, or interesting; becoming increasingly central to the network based on the quality of their contributions to public dialogue. Deliberative bloggers trade in a particular type of social capital: memeworthiness.[92] By generating, circulating, and amplifying certain memes, bloggers burnish

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[89] Brian Caroll, "Culture Clash: Journalism and the Communal Ethos of the Blogosphere," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/culture_clash_journalism_and_the_communal_ethos _of_the_blogosphere.html.

[90] Melissa Gregg, "Feeling Ordinary: Blogging as Conversational Scholarship," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Culture Studies* (June 2006): 154.

[91] Jenny Edbauer, "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35 (Fall 2005): 22.

[92] A meme is a unit of cultural knowledge that propagates through a community virally. Coined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), the idea of the meme is supposed to capture how ideas appear to spread through communication networks. For a broader explication of the meme, see Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). On application of the idea of the meme to rhetorical scholarship, see Davi Johnson, "Mapping the Meme: A Geographical Approach to Materialist Rhetorical Criticism," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* (March 2007): 27-50.

increasing reputations. This has created an informal system where the perception of quality

participation is rewarded by the social network. Consequently, "the ethos of personal publishing,

then, is based on values such as inclusiveness and community, participation and deliberation,

free and unfiltered expression"—all norms that encourage and draw in participation.[93] That these

are norms usually endorsed by theorists of deliberative democracy following the Habermasian

vein is one reason that blogging has excited so many scholars interested in deliberation.

2.5 Conclusion

The impacts of blogging on the press, political organizing, and participatory culture

began to take place during the popularization stage. Currently, blogging finds itself in what I

would call the consolidation stage. Blogging is no longer the province of the few. It has spread in

popularity. It has been absorbed into other media platforms, like the social networking websites

MySpace and Facebook. It has been adopted by institutions like the *New York Times* and

spawned institutions itself, like the Gawker Media complex of blogs.[94] Blogging seems to be

everywhere. Early blog theorist Clay Shirky once speculated that blogging would eventually just

blend in with the internet in general:

> weblog technology will be seen as a platform for so many forms of publishing,
>
> filtering, aggregation, and syndication that blogging will stop referring to any
>
> particularly coherent activity. The term 'blog' will fall into the middle distance, as

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[93] Caroll, "Culture Clash."

[94] *Gawker*, www.gawker.com.

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'home page' and 'portal' have, words that used to mean some concrete thing, but

which were stretched by use past the point of meaning.[95]

Blogging has probably reached that point as of 2008. There are still 'blogs' and people who

consider themselves 'bloggers,' but the activity has settled in to a comfortable if ever-changing

routine. This naturalization of blogging signals its absorption into the networked social

imaginary. The normalization of blogging did not occur overnight; it happened in fits and starts,

as I will now detail in the three case studies.

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[95] Clay Shirky, "Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality," *Clay Shirky's Writings about the Internet*, February 8, 2003, http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html.

CHAPTER 3—FLOOD THE ZONE: BLOGGERS AND THE TRENT LOTT AFFAIR

3.1 Introduction

The one-hundredth birthday of Senator Strom Thurmond was celebrated in the Dirksen

Senate Office Building on December 5, 2002. This commemorative affair featured friends,

family, and colleagues praising Thurmond's longevity as senator. Thurmond, who began his

political career as a stalwart segregationist and ran for President of the United States in 1948 on

the Dixiecrat ticket, was retiring from the Senate after a long career. As Senate Majority Leader,

Trent Lott took the stage to share some prepared remarks about Thurmond. The Senator from

Mississippi soon veered off-script, saying "I want to say this about my state: When Strom

Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country

had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years either."[1]

These spontaneous comments were met with "an audible gasp and general silence" by the

audience.[2]

Despite the audience's immediate reaction to Lott's statement, the epideictic atmosphere

of the gathering quickly regained steam and Lott's comments were, if not forgotten, then

sublimated by the effusiveness with which other speakers praised Thurmond's accomplishments

in the Senate. The occasion seemed to overwhelm the offense. The following day, December 6th,

the major metropolitan newspapers reported on the celebration of Thurmond's birthday, but

made no mention of Lott's remarks. Other news stories dominated the day: Louisiana Senator

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[1] C-SPAN, "Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC) 100th Birthday Celebration," C-SPAN web site, Real Player media file, 1:00, originally aired December 5, 2002, http://web.archive.org/web/20021207064833/www.c-span.org/politics/. On file with the author. Lott later claimed that Senator Bob Dole had, in the previous speech, taken most of his material—forcing him into ad-libbing. See his autobiography *Herding Cats: A Life in Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 246.

[2] Thomas Edsall, "Lott Decried for Part of Salute to Thurmond; GOP Senate Leader Hails Colleague's Run as Segregationist," *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2002, A6, http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A20730-2002Dec6.

Mary Landrieu was in a tight re-election race that was pivotal in determining the balance of power in the Senate, Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill was in the midst of resigning his post, and the tensions over weapons inspections in Iraq were heating up. Ed O'Keefe, a reporter for *ABC News* who attended Thurmond's birthday party the prior day, had, however, been pushing the story about Lott's comments to his editors. O'Keefe and ABC's congressional correspondent Linda Douglass had been "trolling for reaction" to Lott's statements from People for the American Way and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. They also circulated memos to producers at ABC pitching the story for the day's news cycle.[3]

ABC News did broadcast a short story as part of a brief news round-up on their *World News This Morning* program, which aired at 4:30 a.m.[4] Later that day, O'Keefe reported Lott's contentious quote on ABC's *The Note*, an online column that had run since March 2002. After quoting Lott's comments, O'Keefe reported:

> Maybe Lott was being jocular. But a plain reading of what he said did generate
> some anger: Wade Henderson of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights told
> ABCNEWS' Douglass: "This was an offensive and blatant attempt to rewrite the
> history of the last 50 years" … "Thurmond ran for president as a Dixiecrat, a
> segregationist. He gave the longest filibuster in history to try to stop passage of
> the Civil Rights Act. In his statement today, Lott also embraced those dubious
> achievements" ... "Lott betrayed his role as the Majority Leader of all

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[3] Quoted in Esther Scott, "'Big Media' Meets the 'Bloggers': Coverage of Trent Lott's Remarks at Strom Thurmond's Birthday Party," *Kennedy School of Government Case Program*, 2004, 7, http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/Research_Publications/Case_Studies/1731_0.pdf.

[4] John Berman, *World News This Morning*, ABC, December 6, 2002, LexisNexis.

Americans." Donna Brazile, the Democrats' turnout czarina in Louisiana right

now, was also said to be outraged.[5]

Later that evening, CNN's *Crossfire* and PBS' *Washington Week* briefly mentioned Lott's

comments.[6]

The balance of the weekend saw minimal coverage by established news outlets. A

notable exception was a column run on Saturday, December 7, by veteran Lott-watcher Tom

Edsall of the *Washington Post*. Edsall had, in 1998, reported on Lott's involvement with the

Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC).[7] The Council of Conservative Citizens inherited the

legacy of the segregationist Citizens' Councils of the 1950s and 60s, advancing the proposition

that "the American people and government should remain European in their composition and

character."[8] Lott's CCC connection would receive increasing amounts of attention in the coming

days. Edsall detailed the historical context for Thurmond's presidential run as a Dixiecrat,

stitching together a cohesive narrative that extensively situated Lott's comments for the first time

in the national broadcast media. The reactions that *ABC News* correspondents O'Keefe and

Douglass were looking for to turn Lott's comments into a story were present in Edsall's article,

as he cited outraged responses from former civil rights leader John Lewis and conservative editor

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[5] Ed O'Keefe, "Man Bites Dog," *The Note*, December 6, 2002, http://web.archive.org/ web/20021220094616/http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/DailyNews/TheNote_Dec6.html. At the time, *The Note* did not support comments and readers were directed to send responses to an ABC email address. This post was not time stamped, but according to Mark Halperin, ABC's political director, the post happened sometime between 9 and 11 a.m. (quoted in Esther Scott, "'Big Media' Meets the 'Bloggers': Coverage of Trent Lott's Remarks at Strom Thurmond's Birthday Party," *Kennedy School of Government Case Program*, 2004, 7, http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/ presspol/Research_Publications/Case_Studies/1731_0.pdf, 9).

[6] *Crossfire*, CNN, December 6, 2002, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0212/06/cf.00.html; *Washington Week*, PBS, December 6, 2002, http://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/transcripts/ transcript021206.html.

[7] Tom Edsall, "Lott Renounces White 'Racialist' Group He Praised in 1992," *Washington Post*, December 16, 1998, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/dec98/lott16.htm.

[8] Sam Francis, "Statement of Principles," *Council of Conservative Citizens* website, no date, http://cofcc.org/ ?page_id=60.

of *The Weekly Standard* Bill Kristol.[9] However, Edsall's story was buried on page six of the

Saturday edition of the Washington Post, reducing the attention that the story might have

garnered on the front page.

The following day, the story dropped entirely from the national print press, with

television and radio doing little in the way of follow-up. Yet, almost a week after Lott made his

comments, the story re-emerged and began to garner significant media attention. After nominal

early coverage by the standard-bearing print newspapers, the *New York Times* and the

Washington Post, both media organizations ramped up the amount of stories they were doing on

Lott. This is not a common pattern in the broadcast media. Broadcast news, especially in a cable

and internet-driven 24/7 news cycle, tends to jump on stories when they first break in order to get

scoops; waiting almost a week to digest Lott's comments before devoting substantial publicity to

them deviated from standard journalistic practice to push a story while it was still fresh.[10]

Why didn't the institutional media jump on Lott's comments earlier? Esther Scott's 2004

study of the Lott affair posits three central reasons for why established media organizations

failed to quickly take the reins on what would eventually be turned into a substantial scandal.

First, journalists covering the story might have been susceptible to 'pack journalism.' Pack

journalism refers to the tendency for news reporting to become homogenous within and across

organizations.[11] Scott quotes Ed O'Keefe, the reporter who originally posted the item on *The*

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[9] Tom Edsall, "Lott Decried For Part Of Salute to Thurmond: GOP Senate Leader Hails Colleague's Run As Segregationist," *Washington Post*, December 7, 2002, A6, http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A20730-2002Dec6. Edsall also asked Gordon Baum, CEO of the Council of Conservative Citizens for comment on Lott's remarks; Baum responded "God bless Trent Lott."

[10] See Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media Culture* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 1999).

[11] Timothy Cook, "The Future of the Institutional Media" in *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, eds. W. Lance Bennett and Robert Entman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 185-9. Cook explores the hypothesis that cable television and the internet (what he calls narrowcasting technologies)

Note, reflecting "if something is newsworthy … everyone will get it … if they didn't all get it, then it couldn't possibly be a newsworthy item."[12] In other words, sometimes consensus immediately congeals around the newsworthiness of a story, and that consensus occasionally parlays hegemonic interpretations of importance into a journalistic common sense. Pack journalism is accentuated through a sense of 'clubbiness' amongst journalists and between journalists and the official government and corporate sources on which they rely for scoops, interviews, and other types of access. A variety of groupthink, pack journalism can erode the critical faculties theorized as crucial to the monitorial role of the press.

Secondly, Scott posits that historical ignorance might have slowed uptake of the story. She relates a story about Tom Edsall, the veteran *Washington Post* reporter, who revealed that his editors failed to grasp the significance of Lott's comments. As Edsall notes, "I just think that people now see Strom Thurmond as this doddering old guy … and have no knowledge of the central role he played in southern politics."[13] Having published two books on race and politics, Edsall's specialization gave him a unique angle on Lott's comments, but many reporters likely did not know all of the intricacies of Thurmond's role in the 1948 presidential election.[14] Could this phenomenon be related to the culture of the press itself? Sociologist Michael Schudson

have fragmented the mass audience, thus enabling news organizations to cultivate niche audiences and reducing pack journalism. He concludes, "the multiplication of different news outlets has not been matched by diversification of approaches to journalism. More fully, the homogeneity of the news across different outlets, if anything, has probably been strengthened rather than weakened by recent developments" (187). Cook suggests that massive cost-cutting, the rise of service-oriented ("news you can use") journalism, and the spatial constraints of newly redesigned papers have increased reliance on wire services and major papers like the *New York Times*. Budget cuts in major news organizations have systematically reduced the capacity of the fourth estate's traditional roles; see Robert McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 79-82.

[12] Quoted in Scott, *Big Media Meets the Bloggers*, 8.

[13] Quoted in Scott, *Big Media Meets the Bloggers*, 11.

[14] See his *The New Politics of Inequality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), and, with Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

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defines a reporter as "someone faithful to sources, attuned to the conventional wisdom, serving the political culture media institutions, and committed to a narrow range of public, literary expression."[15] Schudson himself admits this is a less-than-flattering description of the news enterprise; yet, it does articulate how reporters for institutional media are incorporated into disciplinary systems that constrain what is possible to know and how to express it.

Finally, Scott obliquely suggests that the contemporary norms of news culture dampened enthusiasm for pursuing the story. The memos circulated by Douglass and O'Keefe received some interest by ABC producers, but the news programs "did not have time to include it during their broadcasts the next day."[16] Since the Lott story failed to make the cut the day after Thurmond's birthday, it was quickly considered old news. As O'Keefe disclosed, part of the problem was that there was "no on-camera reaction" that could interpret Lott's comments for a television audience.[17] Roderick Hart argues "television turns faces into arguments," so the absence of an on-camera response made it difficult to convert Lott's comments into a newsworthy controversy.[18] Moreover, as Tom Edsall explained later, "for the story to move in the press … you've got to get a new news peg on it every time."[19] News pegs, or hooks, are events deemed worthy of attention by modern news organizations.[20] 'New' news is central in the competition for advertising dollars; neither audiences nor advertisers pay for yesterday's news.

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[15] In *The Power of News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 105.

[16] Quoted in Scott, *Big Media Meets the Bloggers*, 8.

[17] Quoted in Scott, *Big Media Meets the Bloggers*, 10.

[18] See his *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Voter* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), 34.

[19] Quoted in Scott, *Big Media Meets the Bloggers*, 12.

[20] Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Champagne, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 49-50.

Scott's diagnosis points to some key structural flaws of the traditional broadcast media at this point in time in the United States. One key take-away from her explanation is that complexity is outstripping the capacity of institutional media to cover, interpret, and publicize events in the lifeworld that warrant more extensive deliberation. Pack journalism produces reporting that fails to capture the heterogeneity of various complex subsystems, instead being directed by informal networks of consensus about newsworthiness. Reporters cannot become omnicompetent distillers of every news event they cover; they are too often stretched thin, working on deadline, and concerned with the present moment to have the ability to connect all the dots on unfolding events. Broadcast media are also constrained by time, space, and the need to keep advertisers happy, which subtly slants their gatekeeping function. These three critiques of the press are exacerbated by the political economy of the commercial news media in the United States.

With these dynamics operating in the mass media, there was an opening for blogging to make a bigger splash in public deliberation. As Scott concludes, blogs were, if not the sole cause for pushing the story back into the institutional broadcast media, certainly instrumental in generating insights that moved the story forward. This chapter examines three bloggers who were active in dissecting Trent Lott's comments: Josh Marshall, of *Talking Points Memo*, Glenn Reynolds, of *Instapundit*, and Atrios, of *Eschaton*. The efforts of these three bloggers were amplified by thousands of others linking to key posts that moved the interpretation of Lott's comments along toward an eventual opinion shift that cost the Senate Majority leader his position. As bloggers began dissecting the Lott story in the days immediately following his comments, Glenn Reynolds made several posts titled FLOOD THE ZONE, which I read here as

signifying the blogosphere's inventional capacities.[21] The invention of novel arguments is historically a crucial element in meeting the needs of public deliberation, as I explore in the next section about invention and circulation in classical Greece and in Habermas' latest account of public deliberation. These inventional capacities of the blogosphere at least partially address the deficits created by the current political economy of the mass institutional media. I will then explicate the role of bloggers in the Lott controversy, before speculating on how their interventions illuminate the challenge that networked sensibilities pose to traditional theories of public deliberation. I have also added a coda to this chapter, exploring how the trope 'flood the zone' implicitly grounds critiques of 'astroturf' blogs that violate the norms of the blogosphere.

3.2 Invention in Classical Greece and Habermas' Contemporary Public Sphere

When Erasmus, the famous Renaissance philosopher, got stuck on a particular sentence while writing an essay, he would break the flow of his writing and draft one hundred variations on that particular sentence. From those hundred drafts, he was able to experiment with different stylistic approaches, different words, and different points of emphasis. This approach was all the more effective with really important sentences: it was crucial to have just the right wording in order to express his point.[22] This strategy develops copiousness, a traditional focus of rhetorical invention. When preparing for a speech, classical rhetoricians would encourage their students to

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[21] To be clear, I am not signaling that all blogging contributes to the invention of novel arguments or perspectives. Indeed, as Melissa Wall's research on war-bloggers shows, bloggers are certainly capable of reproducing dominant frames; see "Blogging Gulf War II," *Journalism Studies* 7 (2006): 111-26. Daniel Brouwer and Aaron Hess similarly have identified how military bloggers reproduced ideological articulations of sexuality, religion, and nation in their responses to the Westboro Baptist Church's protests of military funerals in "Making Sense of 'God Hates Fags' and 'Thank God for 9/11': A Thematic Analysis of Milbloggers' Responses to Reverend Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church," *Western Journal of Communication* 71 (January 2007): 69-90. At key times during public controversies, though, bloggers *can* play a role in re-setting frames through their original reporting and commenting.

[22] I am indebted to Debra Hawhee's blog post on this, "Copia=Abundance (Notes on Unofficial)," *Blogos*, Feburary 27, 2007, http://dhawhee.blogs.com/d_hawhee/2007/02/copia_abundance.html.

be exhaustive in the generation of potential arguments; with a long list of arguments, they could then be choosy about picking the best ones. This is partially what Aristotle suggested when he said that rhetoric was the search for the available means of persuasion. The task of invention is to turn this copiousness into persuasive discourse.

Invention is necessary at this micro-level, with the development of specific rhetorical artifacts by individual speakers. But copia is also important at the systemic level, as arguments and perspectives filter in from people's lived experience to shape the administrative decisions made in their names. Greek democracy uniquely facilitated the circulation of novel arguments, as Josiah Ober's work on the legacy of Athenian governance illustrates. As he explains, any organized collective needs "a culture of voluntary sharing of knowledge, effective knowledge circulation, and constant mutual instruction."[23] To form this kind of public culture, the Athenians designated 139 'demes,' or self-governing communities, which formed "public assemblies at which all the demesmen could gather to debate and decide upon issues of local concern."[24] These public assemblies were made up of 2-300 men (women were not allowed to participate publicly). The advantages of these demes were two-fold. First, it habituated citizens into patterns of participatory decision-making that accounted for the various perspectives present.[25]

Second, it brought individual competencies and knowledge to bear on a larger social body that could then be applied toward addressing extant problems. As Ober explains, the demes were subsequently organized into a master network that was institutionalized in the Council of 500. Each deme would elect members to the Council of 500, which would draw in all the knowledge that they gleaned from their smaller deme network into a broader deliberating body:

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[23] Josiah Ober, *Athenian Legacies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 36.

[24] Ober, *Athenian Legacies,* 36.

[25] Ober, *Athenian Legacies*, 37.

The Council of 500 did *not* function as a 'representative legislative body': the members of the council were not legislators (legislation was left to the Assembly) and councilors were not expected to serve the interests of their 'local constituencies.' Rather, the 500 councilors chosen each year by their fellow demesmen were the human embodiment of the *knowledge resources* of the entire Athenian polis. Their duty as councilors was to bring local knowledge to the center—to participate in open discussions, bringing to bear all the relevant information they possessed, in order to best serve the needs of Athens as an independent city-state.[26]

This created a bi-directional network with potentially substantial benefits. The "specialized knowledge resources" of each deme were in theory available to the entire *polis*, and the *polis* created a social space where demes could learn from each other. Of course, this system could work fairly well on the scale of Athenian democracy; for the classical Greeks, the foot and the voice were more or less enough to perform these network functions. The scale of Athenian democracy was such that each locality had the autonomy to make decisions based on locally-generated knowledge, "but now with the added assurance that the diverse and vastly greater resources and expertise of the entire polis were available as 'backup' in cases where local solutions proved inadequate."[27]

As Ober explains, this master network resulted in diverse technical and social knowledge being distributed throughout the entire system, enabling the management of a relatively complex form of social organization without descending into chaos. The local networks facilitated the

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[26] Ober, *Athenian Legacies*, 38, emphasis in original.

[27] Ober, *Athenian Legacies*, 37.

deepening of argument pools, to use Sunstein's term, and the master network brought those local knowledge claims into central fora where they could be scrutinized and brought to bear on immediate problems. In the relatively small-scale Athenian democracy, these knowledge claims could be mediated through competing public speechmaking. However, the social differentiation that modern societies experienced as a consequence of industrialization and the growth of administrative institutions required mechanisms to manage increasing complexity and integrate subjects into an imagined community. For the early Habermas of the *Structural Transformation* era, print news was a primary way of coordinating this social activity, consequently increasing the accountability of the system to the lifeworld.

The diversity of print publications in the bourgeois public sphere facilitated wide-ranging conversations on a variety of topics. So-called rational-critical debate occurred on the print pages themselves, but the power of the public sphere was really in how those circulated discourses received attention by interlocutors in places like coffeehouses, taverns, and public squares. Mediated communication, then, historically played a central role in activating the energies of publicity.[28] Media play an equally crucial role in Habermas' contemporary theorization of public deliberation, most extensively articulated in his 1992 book *Between Facts and Norms* (translated to English in 1996). Habermas writes this latter work before the gravity of the internet's influence on human interdependence was fully realized, making the system he outlines ripe for revision given advances in information technology like blogging. Despite this caveat, it's worthwhile to outline the 'late Habermas' requirements for public deliberation to achieve legitimacy.

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[28] John Durham Peters, "Distrust of Representation," 549, 566.

For Habermas, public deliberation succeeds to the extent that the "network for communicating information and points of view (i.e. opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes)" operates free of artificial restraint; "the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions."[29] As arguments are introduced and tested in the crucible of public debate, they ultimately gain more salience and are picked up by broadcast media capable of focusing public argument. "The public sphere," Habermas writes, "is a warning system with sensors" that twitters when citizens express felt needs.[30]

This warning system senses issues that should be put on the public's agenda and ultimately sluices public opinion from this periphery to the core parliamentary and administrative arms. Habermas draws this sluicing model from Bernard Peters, citing Peters' claim that "'the legitimacy of decisions depends on processes of opinion- and will-formation at the periphery.'"[31] This sluicing intersects neatly with Habermas' traditional concern with legitimation processes in complex democratic societies. Deliberation isn't necessarily about creating better outcomes or greater inclusivity in decision-making (though it might well do those things); it is mostly about creating circumstances where diverse collectives can learn to live with the decisions that are made, having publicly debated issues before responsive decision-makers. When sluicing of public opinion to the core happens, citizens feel like their concerns are being attended to and thus integrate into social systems rather than rebel against those systems. For Habermas, discourse

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[29] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 360.

[30] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 359.

[31] Quoted in Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 356.

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that emerges spontaneously from the periphery provides an organic warning system that outperforms 'top-down' approaches that have lost touch with the lifeworld.

One might now situate blogging as partially constituting the peripheral warning system, but *Between Facts and Norms* fixes modernity's civil society agents in that role. Habermas theorizes that the periphery can be broken into "customers" and "suppliers."[32] The customers include "business associations, labor unions, interest groups, and so on; these networks fulfill certain coordination functions in more or less opaque social sectors."[33] Habermas distinguishes these bargaining groups "from the 'supplier' groups, associations, and organizations that, before parliaments and through the courts, give voice to social problems, make broad demands, articulate public interests or needs, and thus attempt to influence the political process more from normative points of view than from the standpoint of particular interests."[34] He argues that the spontaneous communication emerging from the supplier groups on the periphery is crucial to prevent a deformation of public deliberation occurring from the technocratic impulses of the 'customer' groups. As he explains, the "settled routines" of public deliberation must "remain open to renovative impulses from the periphery."[35] As controversies unfold, increased communicative activity from the periphery

> is characterized by a consciousness of crisis, a heightened public attention, an intensified search for solutions, in short, by *problematization*. In cases in which perceptions of problems and problem situations have taken a conflictual turn, the attention span of the citizenry enlarges, indeed in such a way that controversies in

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[32] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 355.
[33] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 355.
[34] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 355.
[35] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 357.

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the broader public sphere primarily ignite around the normative aspects of the

problems most at issue.[36]

The spontaneous communication that emerges from the periphery introduces a "creative layer"

that converts unique perspectives from the lifeworld into articulated arguments taken up by the

public sphere.[37] The periphery, though, lacks the structural capacity to immediately translate their

vibrations across complex societies. Consequently, the mass media plays a central role in

condensing and circulating the problematizations of social issues that emerge from the edges of

society.

To do so, the mass media must adhere to certain normative benchmarks. Habermas draws

eight normative functions of the mass media from journalism scholars Michael Gurevitch and

Jay Blumler. These functions include (1) surveilling the lifeworld for issues that influence well-

being of citizens; (2) setting the agenda on key issues; (3) providing platforms for supplier group

advocacy; (4) hosting dialogue between diverse interlocutors; (5) enhancing accountability

mechanisms for public officials; (6) encouraging citizen involvement; (7) resisting efforts to

constrain media freedom; and (8) respecting audiences as cognitively capable agents.[38] However,

Habermas suggests that in many complex liberal societies, the mass media are not exactly up to

this task.[39] The broadcast media, in response to increasing complexity and expenses, have

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[36] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 357. Habermas is specifically referring to the eventual allocation of this communicative capital generated from crisis-consciousness to problem-solving ends through parliamentary complexes. Such sluicing of public opinion need not be exclusively focused on legislative problem-solving; as the case of Trent Lott shows, public opinion can pressure opinion leaders to resolve conflicts on issues of public value as well.

[37] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms,* 366.

[38] Habermas, B*etween Facts and Norms*, 378.

[39] Two central claims support this assertion. First, Habermas discusses television's reliance on press conferences and public relations campaigns as an exemplar of reliance on a professional class of opinion-makers that, despite their professed differences, ultimately fall within a narrow "centrist" range (*Between Facts and Norms*, 376). Second, Habermas concludes that the "kernel of truth in the theory of the culture industry" is that the mix of

centralized channels of communication.[40] This sort of streamlining reduces opportunities for

peripheral voices to break through established routines and re-set the public agenda. A paradox

thus results in actually existing public deliberation: spontaneous communication from the

periphery is needed, but is extraordinarily rare given the narrow agenda of corporate-dominated

broadcast media. To revisit terms from *Structural Transformation*, it appears that the steering

media of money and power direct disproportionate influence on contemporary news

organizations, reducing the ideal flow of public opinion.

3.3 A Rhetorical Perspective on Invention and the Political Economy of the Mass Media

The Iron Law of Oligarchy, developed by sociologist Robert Michels, posits that

organizations eventually become oligarchic, no matter what their origins, because leaders end up

having a disproportionate amount of influence.[41] As a corollary, I suggest that there is also an

Iron Law of Informational Oligarchy, which would link the institutionalization of media to a

reduction in viewpoint diversity over time. As media become more organized, and more

institutionalized, the range of viewpoints that they discuss tends to shrink, especially as

commercial pressures introduced by advertisers begin to shape news production. Esther Scott's

explanation for why the institutional media failed to pick up the Lott story exemplifies this

oligarchic tendency: pack journalism, the disciplining of reporters, and de-contextualized,

'presentist' news production could all be seem as the consequence of the oligarchization of news

coverage. Each of these factors frustrates the ability of spontaneous communication to flow

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information and entertainment, human interest stories, and episodic treatment of complex issues works to "depoliticize public communication" (377). Habermas suggests that media effects research has been inconclusive in establishing an empirical model for how mass media agenda setting works, which leaves him with a defense of a normative model of agenda-setting.

[40] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 376.

[41] Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (New York: Hearst's International, 1915 [1911]).

toward the core. This is a place where rhetorical studies and media studies profitably meet: the political economy of the mass media reduces the invention and circulation of novel arguments into public deliberation.

When Ben Bagdikian wrote *The Media Monopoly* in 1983, he warned against the 50 media firms that dominated public discourse in the United States.[42] Since then, systems of mass communication have become even more centralized in the United States, with five major media conglomerates responsible for most mass-mediated communication: Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch's News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom. Robert McChesney has chronicled the political economy of the mass media more than any other communication scholar, and it is to his work that I turn to understand how the current structure of the news media narrow the inventional possibilities of public deliberation.

McChesney identifies three duties that journalism must perform in democratic theory (serving as something of a condensation of the 8 functions Habermas identifies): "to act as a rigorous watchdog of the powerful and those who wish to be powerful; to ferret out truth from lies; and to present a wide range of informed positions on key issues."[43] Public debate can only be sustained by introducing a wide range of perspectives, yet, media "concentration accentuates the core tendencies of a profit-driven, advertising-supported media system: hyper-commercialism and denigration of journalism and public service."[44]

The conglomeration of media industries has been paired with a fundamental restructuring of journalism organizations that has reduced the capacity of the institutional media to draw in perspectives from the lifeworld. As McChesney writes, "to do effective journalism is expensive,

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[42] Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983).
[43] Robert McChesney, *Problem of the Media*, 57.
[44] McChesney, *Problem of the Media,* 426-7.

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and corporate managers realize that the surest way to fatten profits is to fire editors and reporters and fill the news hole with inexpensive syndicated material and fluff."[45] Journalist salaries are in decline, workforce cuts are increasing, foreign bureaus are shuttering their doors, and advertisers are increasingly pressuring editors.[46] According to McChesney, investigative journalism has all but disappeared from the conglomerated news firms.[47] If the situation looks dire on the domestic front, it is compounded for international affairs. Profit pressures have reduced the incentive for robust international news journalism.[48] Americans are increasingly reluctant to watch or care about international news.[49] Journalists rarely have enough knowledge of the subjects they are covering to make informed and balanced assessments.[50] The 'soft news' approach to reporting has arguably habituated the public into accepting news as infotainment, which results in shallow coverage.[51] The growth of cable and satellite television, and of course the internet, was supposed to challenge this narrowing of political dialogue. But, as McChesney argues, the instability inherent in the contemporary media ecology has perversely encouraged media organizations to get even bigger in order to deal with uncertainty.[52]

It is possible, of course, that large conglomerates could fulfill the traditional democratic functions of the mass media despite their size. In fact, their scale could direct enormous

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[45] McChesney, "The Political Economy of Global Communication," in *Capitalism and the Information Age: The Political Economy of the Global Communication Revolution*, eds. Robert McChesney, Ellen Meiksins Wood, and John Bellamy Foster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 18.

[46] McChesney, "Political Economy," 18-9.

[47] McChesney, *Problem of the Media,* 81.

[48] John Hamilton and Eric Jenner, "The New Foreign Correspondence," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (September/October 2003), 131.

[49] Danny Schecter, *Media Wars: News at a Time of Terror* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 14-15.

[50] William Kennedy, *The Military and the Media: Why the Press Cannot Be Trusted To Cover a War* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 11.

[51] Matthew Baum, *Soft News Goes to War: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy in the New Media Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 269.

[52] McChesney, *Problem of the Media,* 428.

resources toward investigation. But the norms that have emerged from the political economy of the institutional media are unusually resistant to doing so. With the evolution of the press as a commercial enterprise, rather than a specifically political one as earlier in United States' history, reporting has become 'professionalized' and thus pursues stories under the guise of objectivity and neutrality. As a consequence, journalists are often drawn to "relying on official sources" in order to "give stories legitimacy."[53] McChesney continues: "under professional standards, providing meaningful context and proper background tends to commit the journalist to a definite position and thereby generates the controversy professionalism is determined to avoid. Coverage instead barrages with facts and official statements."[54] What is produced, in the end, is a series of 'informational' reports that are often too disconnected from each other to achieve the type of narrative synthesis required for public opinion to form, much less be felt by deliberating bodies. As Christopher Lasch puts it, democracies need "public debate, not information … we do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our own ideas about the world to the test of public controversy."[55] Of course, the blogosphere might over-correct for the institutional media by privileging public debate over the production of information—it is in the contemporary synthesis of the two that the democratic promise of the media might be renewed.

Objectivity and neutrality might be good professional codes to enshrine in order to prevent a collapse into outright propaganda. The problem for the institutional media, however, is that "far from being politically neutral, journalism smuggles in values conducive to the

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[53] McChesney, *Problem of the Media,* 69.

[54] McChesney, *Problem of the Media,* 71.

[55] Christopher Lasch, "Journalism, Publicity, and the Lost Art of Argument," *Gannet Center Journal* 4 (Spring 1990), 1.

commercial aims of owners and advertisers and to the political aims of big business."[56] It is the

commercialism of the media that erodes the democratic potentiality latent in the press:

> The global commercial media are integral to this depoliticization process. Without
>
> any necessary forethought and by merely pursuing market dictates, the global
>
> commercial media are superior at serving up a depoliticized populace that
>
> privileges personal consumption over social understanding and activity, a mass
>
> more likely to take orders and less likely to make waves. Hence the global
>
> commercial media provide a serious journalism aimed at the elite and the upper
>
> middle classes and shaped to its needs and prejudices, and a tabloid news for the
>
> balance of the population.[57]

At its worst, the professional commercial media have become a megaphone that, in James

Carey's assessment, "merely ratifies the judgments of experts delivered from on high. It is,

above all, a journalism that justifies itself in the public's name but in which the public plays no

role, except as an audience; it is a receptacle to be informed by experts and an excuse for the

practice of publicity."[58]

There were some hopeful moments early in the internet's development that suggested that

this new medium of communication might present an alternative to the hyper-commercialism of

the institutional media. Indymedia was one such alternative. Yet, as McChesney notes, "the

indications are that the substantive *content* of this commercial media in the Internet, or any

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[56] McChesney, *Problem of the Media,* 72-3.

[57] Robert McChesney, "Political Economy," 17. Tiziana Terranova makes a similar claim in *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), especially chapter 5.

[58] James Carey, "The Press, Public Opinion, and Public Discourse: On the Edge of the Postmodern," *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 247.

subsequent digital communication system, will look much like what currently exists. Indeed, advertisers and commercialism arguably have more influence over Internet content than anywhere else."[59] The history of the blogosphere bears this prediction of creeping corporatism out. Though most blogs began as advertisement free zones, corporations eventually picked up on the blogosphere as a way to more precisely target desired demographics. With the growth of advertising coordinators like BlogAds and AdSense, bloggers can now make money—sometimes enough to sustain a full time role as a blogger—from their blogging. Product placement is now ubiquitous on blogs, and it is largely an unregulated process.[60] The number of bloggers able to generate income is still relatively small. However, in the beginning years of the blogosphere, these political economy questions were considerably less relevant, as advertisements and commercial pressures had not yet fully manifested themselves and blogging was hardly an economically sustainable enterprise.

One way to situate the political economy of the mass (institutional) media is to say that they construct a field, in the Bourdieuian sense, with its own internal dynamics. The journalistic field shapes news production in a way that produces a narrower ideological debate, increases the dramatization of news, and routinizes certain rules of the game and codes of conduct.[61] Though fields tend to have a powerful inertia, they are not immune to change. As Bourdieu explains, an

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[59] McChesney, "Political Economy," 24.

[60] See Josh Friedman, "Blogging for Dollars Raises Questions of Online Ethics," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 2007, http://articles.latimes.com/2007/mar/09/business/fi-bloggers9. I don't want to suggest that the exact same political economy of the mass media will eventually become transported to the internet; yet, it seems obvious that there will be considerable continuities between the growth of advertising and commercialism online and off. The political economy of digital media is increasingly a vigorous sub-field of academic inquiry; see Nicole Cohen, "The Valorization of Surveillance: Towards a Political Economy of Facebook," *Democratic Communique* (Spring 2008): 5-22.

[61] Rodney Benson, "Bringing the Sociology of Media Back In," *Political Communication* 21 (2004), 282-284. Also see his "News Media as a 'Journalistic Field': What Bourdieu Adds to New Institutionalism and Vice Versa," *Political Communication* 23 (2006): 187-202.

increase in the number of source points producing journalism, paired with an increase in readers

and spectators, will challenge received norms in the journalistic field and enable a transformation

of the field itself.[62] The blogosphere is probably the most imposing field-challenge to journalism

in its late 20th century incarnation. By introducing a supplemental source of invention to society-

wide public deliberation, blogging partially fulfills the normative agenda-setting functions of the

mass media that the contemporary political economy of media institutions has largely

surrendered.

3.4 Bloggers Flood the Zone

During the dip in news coverage from the institutional mass media, bloggers were

digging deeper and deeper into Lott's past and debating the implications of his seemingly pro-

segregationist comments on their blogs. Three bloggers played an instrumental role in shaping

this conversation on weblogs: Josh Marshall on *Talking Points Memo*, Glenn Reynolds on

Instapundit, and Atrios on *Eschaton*.[63] My account is not exhaustive—the rhetorical activity of

these bloggers far outpaces the space here to capture each minute detail. However, through my

thick description of key blogging activities by these three bloggers, I identify how bloggers

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[62] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 225, 232. Adrienne Russell has explored how bloggers reshaped the journalistic field during the 2005 riots in France; see her "Digital Communication Networks and the Journalistic Field: The 2005 French Riots," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (October 2007): 285-302.

[63] These bloggers were chosen because their contributions are regularly referenced in the meta-reflections on blogging's impact on this case. Admittedly, and as this chapter attempts to show, these bloggers were informed by many contributions from less well-known bloggers and readers. Following Clay Shirky's power law, though, requires acknowledging the disproportionate influence that these bloggers had given their overall status within the blogging community. See Clay Shirky, "Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality." A more sustained examination of less well-known bloggers would be a fruitful companion to this chapter.

generated public arguments that transformed discourse and eventually undermined public

support for Lott.[64]

To understand the significance of Lott's comments, bloggers began interrogating exactly

what 'these problems' referred to in Lott's remarks. At 1:21 p.m. on December 6th, just a few

hours after O'Keefe's report in *The Note*, the pseudonymous blogger Atrios published the first of

many missives on the unfolding Lott scandal.[65] Atrios linked to *The Note* story, posting that "the

problems Lott is referring to are the Civil and Voting Rights Acts" and then updating the same

post later with "Lott is also likely referring [to] lots of other horrible things like the *Brown*

decision as well."[66] A second update linked to a pull quote from *Slate* contributor Tim Noah,

excerpting a speech from Thurmond saying "there's not enough troops in the army to force the

southern people to break down segregation and admit the Nigra race into our theaters, into our

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[64] By identifying the time that these bloggers posted, I am also illustrating the acceleration of public argument. This shift is significant, since the overall perception of time bears upon the broader social imaginary. For modern social imaginaries, as Benedict Anderson argued, the printed date right below the masthead was the "most significant emblem" on the newspaper, providing clear punctuation for public deliberation. That timestamps, which mark the hour and minute on blog posts, are similarly important for blogs shows a differentiated cycle of public deliberation in a network society. See his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2002 [1983]), 33.

[65] 'Atrios' is actually Duncan Black, a senior fellow at Media Matters for America. His true identity was a real mystery amongst bloggers until the 2004 Democratic National Convention; he applied for a press pass to cover the event, and thus disclosed his real name. See Alex Williams, "Blogged in Boston: Politics Gets an Unruly Spin," *New York Times*, August 1, 2004, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=980DE7DE1E3DF932A3575 BC0A9629C8B63. 'Atrios' is a misspelled reference to a character in Yasmina Reza's play *Art*, who paints a white canvas white in the play. 'Eschaton' means the end of everything, related to the field of eschatology. I will refer to Atrios rather than Duncan Black to maintain the spirit of pseudonymity struck in the early days of the blog *Eschaton*.

[66] Atrios, "Trent Lott," *Eschaton*, December 6, 2002, 1:21 p.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_01_ archive.html#90022436. Blogs often notify readers of updates to the a post by capitalizing UPDATE at the bottom of the post and appending, correcting, or amplifying additional commentary to the initial post, rather than revising the post entirely.

swimming pools, into our homes, and into our churches."[67] These links display the rapid

information-gathering proclivities of bloggers.

Josh Marshall, a freelance journalist who had operated *Talking Points Memo* since the

Bush-Gore recount controversy in November 2000, learned about Lott's comments from the

National Journal's Hotline, which in turn had been cued to the story by Ed O'Keefe's previous

entry in *The Note*.[68] Marshall, in conventional reportorial mode, first posted at 3:20 p.m. on

December 6th, contextualizing Strom Thurmond's presidential run against Harry Truman in 1948

as an explicitly segregationist Dixiecrat. He then quoted Lott's remarks at Thurmond's birthday

celebration before concluding "just another example of the hubris now reigning among Capitol

Hill Republicans."[69] Marshall would eventually receive a lion's share of the credit for pushing

the story forward through his investigative reporting.

Later that day, at 6:02 p.m., Atrios posted two items that demonstrated "what Senator

Lott was proud of in 1948 Mississippi."[70] First, he posted a reproduction of a Dixiecrat ballot

from the 1948 election featuring Thurmond. The ballot tellingly says "a vote for Truman …

means the vicious FEPC—anti-poll tax—anti-lynching and anti-segregation proposals will

become the law of the land and our way of life in the South will be gone forever."[71] Atrios then

quoted the Dixiecrat platform from that election:

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[67] Tim Noah, "Blurted Out Conviction of the Week: Trent Lott; What's a little segregationism among friends?," *Slate*, December 6, 2002, 1:54 PT, http://web.archive.org/web/20021230101827/http://slate.msn.com/ ?id=2075151&device=.

[68] Scott, *Big Media Meets the Bloggers*, 13.

[69] Josh Marshall, "I've Always Thought That…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 6, 2002, 3:20 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/ archives/000451.php.

[70] Atrios, "Trent Lott," *Eschaton*, December 6, 2002, 6:02 p.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_01_ archive.html#90022436.

[71] Atrios found the ballot at "Mississippi Democratic Sample Ballot," *Mississippi History Now* from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, http://web.archive.org/web/20021225041120/mshistory.k12.ms.us/

The negro is a native of tropical climate where fruits and nuts are plentiful and

where clothing is not required for protection against the weather ... The essentials

of society in the jungle are few and do not include the production, transportation

and marketing of goods. [Thus] his racial constitution has been fashioned to

exclude any idea of voluntary cooperation on his part.[72]

The recirculation by Atrios of these two bits of historical knowledge into public deliberation in

the blogosphere demonstrates the capacity of bloggers to identify points of "specified

ignorance."[73] Specified ignorance is the Mertonian concept that one must establish what is not

known in order to figure out what kind of research must be done in order to further knowledge.[74]

In this case, in order to draw some normative conclusions from Lott's comments, Atrios needed

to establish what exactly 'these problems' that Lott referred to were.

Marshall followed up the Lott story the next morning. In that post, he reiterated the

problematic nature of Lott's comments, and then linked to a transcript from CNN's *Inside

Politics*. In what is clearly a slight directed at the priorities of what other media outlets consider

newsworthy, Marshall concludes that "on *Inside Politics* the John Kerry hair story made the cut,

not the Trent Lott segregation story."[75] Atrios, paralleling Josh Marshall, noted a bit later that the

John Kerry haircut story made CNN's *Inside Politics* while the Trent Lott story languished.[76]

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features/feature7/ ms_demo_ ballot.html. This is a small example of how early bloggers embraced a variety of different types of evidence, rather than relying solely on print text to make their points.

[72] Atrios, "Trent Lott," *Eschaton*.

[73] Alexander Halavais, "Scholarly Blogging: Moving Towards the Visible College," in *Uses of Blogs, eds.* Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 119. Or, as Pierre Levy predicts, "unanswered questions will create tension within cosmopedic space, indicating regions where invention and innovation are required," *Collective Intelligence*, 217.

[74] See Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957), 417.

[75] Josh Marshall, "Hard-hitting Coverage?," *Talking Points Memo*, December 7, 2002, 5:55 a.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/ archives/000450.php. John Kerry, a presidential contender, had recently been under

That both Atrios and Josh Marshall were fanning the flames of this story might have been unsurprising to those who viewed the two bloggers as leaning to the political left. Their posts during this time sound an explicitly anti-Republican tone. Had the criticism of Lott been limited to liberal bloggers, perhaps the story might have been dismissed as political ax grinding and consequently cordoned off from broader public discourse. However, a prominent conservative blogger also joined the conversation about Lott's reflections on Thurmond's 1948 candidacy.

Glenn Reynolds, a University of Tennessee law professor, had been publishing his blog *Instapundit* since August 2001 and was one of the most frequently updated and referred to blogs in the nascent community of online bloggers. Reynolds characterizes himself as a libertarian, but reads and links to blogs of varying political stripes, as his postings on the unfolding Trent Lott controversy show. December 6th, the same date that *The Note* first published the story and Marshall and Atrios began posting, Reynolds posted his first thoughts on Trent Lott when he wrote at 9:15 p.m. that "Trent Lott deserves the shit he's getting from Atrios and Josh Marshall."[77] Reynolds argued that the contentious remarks were proof that Lott should not be Majority Leader and implored readers to peruse the sample Dixiecrat ballot from 1948 hosted on Atrios' blog, saying that it was a "must-read," thus directing a larger audience to *Eschaton*.[78] The process of linking to other bloggers and then commenting on their posts demonstrates a bundling process: following Habermas' formulation, Reynolds' approving citation of these two opinions, while open to subsequent revision, congeals a (micro-) public opinion. What began as a fairly

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fire for spending $150 on a haircut; a regular feature of criticism on blogs over the following days would underline this point about priorities of established media organizations.

[76] Atrios, "I Love Being Right!," *Eschaton*, December 7, 2002, 11:23 a.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_01_archive.html#90025159.

[77] Glenn Reynolds, "Trent Lott Deserves the Shit," *Instapundit*, December 6, 2002, 9:15 p.m., http://www.instapundit.com/archives/005985.php#005985/.

[78] Glenn Reynolds, "Trent Lott Deserves," *Instapundit*.

weak impulse of disapproval eventually propagated across weblogs and, in this process of in-depth investigation by bloggers, gained a more distinct shape regarding the significance of Lott's comments and the proper endgame.

Later postings confirm this trend. On December 7th, at 9:50 p.m., Reynolds noted that the hubbub about Lott's comments provided a justifiable pretext for moving into a post-Lott political era. Sounding a theme he would return to in subsequent postings, he argued "Lott's a liability for the GOP anyway, and this gives them a chance to get rid of him while looking good and doing right."[79] Reynolds was articulating a view popular in some Republican circles that Lott was an ineffectual manager of the conservative agenda. Indeed, as would become apparent as this controversy unfolded, the Bush Administration preferred Tennessee Senator Bill Frist as Majority leader because of his perceived pliability and effectiveness at advancing elements of the president's agenda. Though Lott's eventual ouster might have been the product of naked political machinations orchestrated by the Bush administration, his resignation would have been unthinkable without the swirl of public arguments surrounding his recent remarks and distant past.

The blogging by Atrios on December 7th had a slightly different valence than Reynolds' blogging during this day. Whereas the posts at *Instapundit* seemed to be arguing that Lott's comments suggested poor judgment and indicated an inability to build effective conservative political coalitions, Atrios continued to plumb the segregationist depths of Lott's past in six posts scattered throughout the day. Initially, he linked to Edsall's column in that day's *Washington Post*, highlighting Lott's past relationship with the Council of Conservative Citizens and linking

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[79] Glenn Reynolds, "Daniel Drezner," *Instapundit*, December 7, 2002, 9:50 p.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006003.php.

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to the website of the Anti-Defamation League's profile of that group.[80] Atrios even tangled with Reynolds. In response to Reynolds' assertion that "it's easy to forget how things once were. Lott has, apparently," Atrios argues that this absolves Lott of personal responsibility for his bigotry.[81]

The next day, December 8th, would provide a tipping point in coverage on blogs due in part to Reynolds' activity. That day, Reynolds published *ten* separate posts that cited seventeen different websites, blogs, or reader emails he had received. In this flurry of activity, Reynolds displayed the ability—and agility—of blogging to aggregate news and opinion by relentlessly posting updates on the Trent Lott imbroglio. Linking to different websites that expressed dismay or outrage at Lott's remarks, Reynolds noted "seems the Blogosphere is way ahead on this one. Where's everybody else?"[82] One of the definitive characteristics of blogging—quick interlinking—was on full display, making Reynolds a sort of one-stop-reading portal that collated highlights from other online resources.

The quantity of output by Reynolds on this single day is indicative of the signature feature in the emerging social imaginary of a network society: the constant management and instantaneous circulation of information and interpretation. Reynolds, in the title of his very first post of that day, wrote "FLOOD THE ZONE!"[83] Without explanation, Reynolds used the same title for three other posts during the Lott controversy, with each post exploring a different facet

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[80] Atrios, "It is of Course…," *Eschaton*, December 7, 2002, 11:10 a.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/ 2002_12_01_archive.html#390025117.

[81] Atrios, ""I've Never Quite Understood…," *Eschaton*, December 7, 2002, 4:36 p.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/ 2002_12_01_archive.html#390025888.

[82] Glenn Reynolds, "The Center for the Advancement of Capitalism," *Instapundit*, December 8, 2002, 11:10 a.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006010.php.

[83] Glenn Reynolds, "Flood the Zone!," *Instapundit*, December 8, 2002, 8:41 a.m., http://instapundit.com/ archives/006007.php.

of Lott's remarks.[84] Flooding the zone amounts to the invocation of a vernacular media theory: in a network society, information dominance is crucial in swaying public and elite opinion and best achieved through a virtually uninterrupted deluge of bits and bytes. Reynolds later interpreted the term 'flood the zone' to signify "covering a story to the extent that other outlets can't ignore it."[85] According to Reynolds, "blogs are good at picking apart a story from lots of different angles at once, while big media outlets tend to be more similar in their coverage," making his use of the trope 'flood the zone' a useful signifier.[86] Reynolds' ability to link to various other blogs and websites, what Lanham calls "hypertext juxtapositions," creates inventional possibilities as he puts different interlocutors in conversation with each other.[87] These hypertext juxtapositions might be seen as the engine for flooding the zone, enabling the conversational nature of the blogosphere to turn over various claims and counter-claims.

Drawing out the genesis of the flood the zone metaphor illuminates how neatly the concept applies to blogging. Flooding the zone, as a concept, is rich enough to support a variety of invocations. The term actually has roots in sports strategy: it is one approach to defeating zone-based defenses. When an opposing team drops into a zone defense (an arrangement where defenders guard an area of the playing field rather than an individual opposing player), an efficient offense sends multiple players toward one specific area of the zone. This makes it increasingly difficult for the player covering that zone to effectively defend. As offensive players swarm the single defensive player, the playmaker can easily pick an open target because a single

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[84] See Glenn Reynolds, "Flood the Zone," *Instapundit*, December 12, 2002, 3:00 p.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006127.php; "Flood the Zone!," *Instapundit*, December 16, 2002, 3:06 p.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006183.php; and "Flood the Zone!," *Instapundit*, December 16, 2002, 11:02 p.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006190.php.

[85] Glenn Reynolds, e-mail message to author, February 14, 2008.

[86] Glenn Reynolds, e-mail message to author, February 14, 2008.

[87] Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 25.

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node can block only so many potential 'links.' Flooding the zone increases offensive opportunities, which, when translated to the field of public deliberation, might strategically enhance the capacity of rhetors to shape public debate.

Flooding the zone had a particular visibility in the context of journalism at this historical juncture. Howell Raines, then editor of the *New York Times*, was fond of quoting the University of Alabama's legendary football coach Paul 'Bear' Bryant to inspire the journalists that worked for him.[88] Flooding the zone was part of the Bear's repertoire, adapted by Raines to journalistic processes. Raines popularized the practice of flooding the zone on major news stories like the Enron collapse and the *Columbia* shuttle disaster, assigning hordes of *New York Times* reporters to cover the story from every angle.[89] According to Raines, "target selection is key … and then you have to concentrate your resources at the point of attack … If I'm in a gunfight, I don't want to die with any bullets in my pistol. I want to shoot every one."[90] Of course, the problem with generic strategies is that anyone can adopt them. Raines himself became the target of zone-flooding by Mickey Kaus, a blogger for *Slate* magazine, who on December 5, 2002—the very day of Trent Lott's inauspicious comments—titled a series of blog posts targeting the *New York*

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[88] Jack Shafer, "The Tao of Bear: The Paul 'Bear' Bryant Lessons on Leadership Howell Raines Failed to Absorb," *Slate,* May 16, 2003, http://www.slate.com/id/2083025/. Interestingly, Shafer suggests that **"**Raines' 'flood the zone' approach to covering news has burned out his staff. Bear conserved his troops: Don't overwork your squad. If you're going to make a mistake, under-work them." 'Flooding the zone' stretches finite resources for traditional media outlets that operate within a strict political economy; that certain bloggers latched on to flooding the zone is suggestive of how they were beginning to differentiate themselves from established media organizations. Without the spatial restrictions or financial considerations of the newspaper to worry about, bloggers can hone in on a story in whatever capacity they interest dictates. Storage online was essentially free, and the only cost was in opportunities lost.

[89] Alexandra Marks, "*New York Times* Resignations Signal Industry Turmoil," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 6, 2003, http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0606/p04s01-ussc.html.

[90] Quoted in Ken Auletta, "The Howell Doctrine," *The New Yorker*, June 10, 2002, available at http://www.kenauletta.com/howelldoctrine.html. In this interview, Raines attributes the phrase to then deputy managing editor John Geddes. The phrase is most intimately associated with Raines, however.

Times' editor with "Flood the Zone."[91] Reynolds, at this time, linked to *Kausfiles* regularly, so

perhaps was emulating Kaus' communication strategy by also titling several of his posts on Lott

"Flood the Zone."[92] The concept of 'flooding the zone' captures the frenzied pace at which

bloggers can 'hunker down on' a controversy, stitching together various fragments from the web

in order to create a coherent narrative.[93]

     Reynolds continued to persistently blog on the implications of Trent Lott's comments in

the ensuing days. On December 9th, the day after he first titled a post with the flood the zone

language, he kept up the pressure on Lott by refuting critics that were trying to explain away

Lott's comments and linking to other prominent conservative commentators online.[94] Josh

Marshall didn't adopt the language of 'flooding the zone,' but his approach to the Lott issue was

strikingly similar. As he later explained, the same basic strategy was implicitly at work in

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[91] Mickey Kaus, "The *NYT* Buckles: Plus *Kausfiles* Floods the Zone," *Kausfiles*, December 5, 2002, http://www.slate.com/id/2074857/.

[92] Reynolds confirmed that he drew the concept from Mickey Kaus in his e-mail message of February 14, 2008.

[93] Flooding the zone has additional salience as a strategy for public argument through the medium of the internet, since search engines often return results based on recency and frequency of links. Google, for example, relies on a system called PageRank: "PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B." See Google, "Our Search: Google Technology," http://www.google.com/ technology/. Though at the time, Google did not incorporate blogs into their search results, most general search engines *do* now incorporate results from blogs (and blog-specific search engines have also emerged). Consequently, as bloggers flood the zone, their linking practices are picked up as 'buzz' and can 'push' an issue to bigger audiences. This is the principle animating 'Blog Action Days,' when bloggers are urged to blog on a particular issue in order to increase prominence of that issue in search engines and other aggregators. See http://blogactionday.org/ for a representative example.

[94] Reynolds had eight posts on l'*affaire* Lott on December 9th. A representative post where Reynolds refutes critics from other blogs can be found in his response to Wind Rider of *Silent Runnings*, who said the Thurmond party was "reminiscent of somebody's loudmouthed used car salesman uncle." A paragraph from Wind Runner's original post was reproduced on *Instapundit*, where Reynolds responded "Assuming this is true, is that what a Senate Majority Leader ought to be like?" This struggle was indicative of the arguments that were roiling conservative commentators. See Glenn Reynolds, "Maybe I Should Rethink My Opinion," *Instapundit*, December 9, 2002, 5:12 a.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006022.php. At the same time Reynolds was resisting more charitable interpretations of Lott's comments, he was consolidating links to conservatives like Jonah Goldberg and David Frum of *National Review Online* in an effort to shape public debate. See Glenn Reynolds, "The *National Review Online* Isn't Impressed With Trent Lott," *Instapundit*, December 9, 2002, 10:46 a.m., http://instapundit.com/ archives/006036.php.

Marshall's blogging, as he "just started hitting it and basically hitting it and hitting it and hitting it."[95] The general concept of flooding the zone had traction not just amongst the blogging elite. Reynolds, soon after he published his first 'flood the zone' post, posted the feedback of a reader who emailed him: "I'm glad that you are 'flooding the zone' with this one," signaling a diffusion of this concept into the public grammar.[96]

The key here is to understand flooding the zone not as merely an explicitly named process, but as a basic operative principle underpinning blogging in general. A blogger does not have to call for flooding the zone (though in this case, one did) for it to occur; the basic elements of flooding the zone are always in operation when bloggers hone in on an issue and produce massive amounts of discourse available for public scrutiny. Flooding the zone is an apt metaphor for how the emergent blogosphere operates in collecting and parsing web resources on unfolding events—in other words, it captures the process of invention that occurs as bloggers deepen argument pools. Flooding the zone is for bloggers what rational-critical debate was for the bourgeois public sphere: a way of conceptualizing their participation in public deliberation.

Responding to lingering criticisms, Trent Lott went on conservative commentator Sean Hannity's radio show on the afternoon of December 9th. Hannity asked Lott about the emerging Thurmond entanglement, and Lott responded

> I wanted to honor Strom Thurmond, the man, who was turning 100 years old. He
>
> certainly has been a legend in the Senate both in terms of his service and the

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[95] Quoted in Scott, *Big Media Meets the Bloggers*, 13. The metaphors that redescribe 'flooding the zone' arguably betray masculinist inclinations: Raines' gun-fight metaphor and Marshall's 'hitting it' (sometimes a sexual metaphor) both participate in a complex economy of gender relations. While the relationship between masculinity and maleness is often complicated, it is not insignificant that the three bloggers here all self-identify as men. Flooding the zone as a strategy might be grounded in masculine argumentation styles that presume that overwhelming one's argumentative foes with the sheer quantity of postings is sufficient to 'win the day.'

[96] Glenn Reynolds, "Christopher Johnson at the *Midwest Conservative Journal* Thinks Trent Lott Should Step Down," *Instapundit*, December 8, 2002, 3:39 p.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006016.php.

length of his service. It was certainly not intended to endorse his segregationist

policies that he might have been advocating or was advocating 54 years ago. But

obviously, I am sorry for my words, they were poorly chosen and insensitive and I

regret the way it has been interpreted.[97]

This was, to date, the most significant apology Lott had issued. Prior calls to his office had

solicited a curt response from Lott's press secretary, Ron Bonjean; Lott would become a serial

apologizer over the following week as he tried to repair the damage his comments had done. The

apologies, unfortunately for Lott, simply became more grist for bloggers to mill.

That evening, Marshall posted an extensive interview with Trent Lott conducted by the

Southern Partisan in 1984. During this interview, Lott said "I think that a lot of the fundamental

principles that Jefferson Davis believed in are very important to people across the country, and

they apply to the Republican Party."[98] Twenty-eight minutes later, Marshall linked to Lott's first

apology as reported on *FoxNews.com*, stating that part of the pressure on Lott to apologize was

"blog-borne."[99] This is one of the first—and for Marshall, one of the only—suggestions that

blogging was having an impact on the broader public discourse.

Two more significant pieces of evidence floated down the increasingly flooded zone of

Lott coverage on December 10th and 11th. On the morning of December 10th, Marshall revealed

that he had gotten a tip earlier in the day about how Lott's words at Strom Thurmond's birthday

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[97] Quoted in "Lott Apologizes for Remark," *FoxNews.com*, December 12, 2002, http://www.foxnews.com/ story/0,2933,72598,00.html.

[98] Josh Marshall, "I Think That a…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 9, 2002, 9:59 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000485.php.

[99] Josh Marshall, "A Poor Choice of…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 9, 2002, 10:27 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/ archives/000484.php.

party had echoed comments he made in Mississippi while campaigning for Reagan in 1980.[100] He noted that he had trouble digging up the exact transcript to confirm Lott's purported remarks, but then linked to an advance story on the *New York Times* website that confirmed that Lott had said "if we had elected this man 30 years ago, we wouldn't be in the mess we are today" in November 1980.[101] Marshall follows up this story by suggesting that Lott was in serious trouble; which militated against the "conventional wisdom on the news today … that Lott had pretty much put this story to bed with his 'apology.'"[102]

The following day, December 11th, the *New York Times* ran the Lott story that had been previewed on their website the night before. But Marshall was already on to another aspect of the story: Lott's role in the 1983 Bob Jones University tax exemption case. Marshall reported at 10:55 a.m. that Trent Lott had filed an *amicus curiae* ("friend of the court") brief on behalf of Bob Jones University, who was suing the Internal Revenue Service for taking away their tax-exempt status because of the university's prohibition on interracial dating.[103] Just two hours later, Marshall followed up on the story, posting "Is TPM your source or is TPM your source? Here's the Amicus Brief which Trent Lott submitted on behalf of Bob Jones University in

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[100] Josh Marshall, "Well, There's the Other…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 10, 2002, 10:23 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000480.php.

[101] Carl Hulse, "Lott's Praise for Thurmond Echoed His Words of 1980," *New York Times*, December 11, 2002, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9500EED6143AF932A25751C1A9649C8B63. Note that Marshall jumps the traditional newspaper cycle here: the unfolding of the argument cannot be deferred until the morning when this article will be published, so Marshall links to an advance copy posted online.

[102] Josh Marshall, "Well, There's the Other…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 10, 2002, 10:23 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000480.php.

[103] Josh Marshall, "And, of Course, There's…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 11, 10:55 a.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000477.php. Marshall linked to the decision in the legal database Findlaw; directly quoting a paragraph describing Lott's filing (see http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=461&invol=574).

1981."[104] *Amicus* briefs like this would be fairly difficult for a non-specialist reader to find, but

Marshall's journalistic experience guided him to the document. The blog enabled him to publish

the primary document in full by hosting it on a server where it was available for readers to

download. In the brief, Lott writes that "racial discrimination does not always violate public

policy," a quote that would receive prominent attention in newspaper accounts in the coming

days.[105] Ironically, given the operation of the 'flood the zone' metaphor as deployed by Reynolds,

Marshall concludes this post by writing "drip, drip, drip," as though each new piece of evidence

were adding to a stream of public opinion that was inexorably leading to Lott's ouster.[106]

At 5 p.m. the same day, the Associated Press released a story that also covered Lott's

amicus briefs in the Bob Jones University case. John Solomon, the reporter of this story, wrote

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[104] Josh Marshall, "Is TPM Your Source…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 11, 2002, 10:55 a.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000476.php.

[105] Trent Lott, "Brief of Congressman Trent Lott Amicus Curiae," submitted November 27, 1981, http://web.archive.org/web/20030622044848/http://talkingpointsmemo.com/lott.bju.amicus.brief.doc. The original link from *Talking Points Memo* to Lott's brief is broken; the brief is available (as of December 3, 2007) on the Internet Archive and is also on file with the author. This specific meme circulated into the general media in the following two news cycles, receiving considerable play in the following newspaper articles: Susan Milligan, "Controversy Over Lott's Remarks Intensifies," *Boston Globe*, December 12, 2002, LexisNexis; Carl Hulse, "Lott Apologizes Again on Words About '48 Race," *New York Times*, December 12, 2002, LexisNexis; Times Wires, "As Lott Apologizes, '81 Filing Emerges," *St. Petersburg Times*, December 12, 2002, LexisNexis; Ana Radelat, "Lott Remarks Bring Scrutiny to His Ties to Segregationists," *USA Today*, December 12, 2002, LexisNexis; Dana Milbank and James Vandehei, "President Decries Lott's Comments: Bush Calls for Racial Fairness But Doesn't Call for Senator's Resignation," *Washington Post*, December 13, 2002, LexisNexis; James Kuhnhenn, "Lott's Ideology and Ties Are a Matter of Record," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 13, 2002, LexisNexis; Adam Nahourney and Carl Hulse, "Bush Rebukes Lott Over Divisive Words," *New York Times*, December 13, 2002, LexisNexis; Thomas Edsall and Darryl Fears, "Lott Has Moved Little on Civil Rights Issues: Analysts Say Remark, Record Consistent," *Washington Post*, December 13, 2002; the story also made the national magazine press, see Howard Fineman, "Ghosts of the Past," *Newsweek,* December 23, 2002, LexisNexis. The comments also received attention from the international press in Canada and Australia. This is probably the clearest example of an argument developed in the blogosphere being immediately circulated into a wide cross-section of the general interest press during the Lott controversy.

[106] Suggesting that this metaphor was a resonant depiction of the public debate over Lott, Atrios linked to this 10:55 a.m. post of Josh Marshall's and concluded with "drip, drip, drip indeed." See "Josh Marshall Discovers Trent…," *Eschaton*, December 11, 2002, 12:05 a.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_08_archive.html# 390040327.

"the old court papers surfaced on a day when Lott tried to quell criticism."[107] Solomon's choice

of the passive verb 'surfaced' to describe the appearance of Lott's brief neatly omitted the role

that Josh Marshall and *Talking Points Memo* had in helping that particular document see the light

of day. Marshall, as an experienced journalist who certainly knew the operating code of 'credit

where credit is due,' lambasted the AP later that evening:

> One other thing. Next time the AP rips off a story we broke at 11 AM and runs it
>
> as their own story at 5 PM maybe they could toss in a little attribution? I know it's
>
> their rep and all but do they have to be so slimy[?] Dow Jones Newswires caught
>
> wind of the Bob Jones Amicus Brief from the story TPM broke too. But they were
>
> classy enough to say we'd broken the story.[108]

Marshall, as a working journalist, was arguing for an expansion of the basic journalistic norm of

attribution to blogging. Blogs, of course, were keen on attribution, since the elemental unit of

blogging, the hyperlink, was so conducive to recognition; such an expansion of norms was thus

in keeping with the ethos of blogging as well as journalism.[109]

 While Marshall was widely credited with doing original investigative reporting, Atrios

was busy situating Lott's remarks in a larger social and historical context.[110] In doing so, Atrios

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[107] John Solomon, "Lott Expresses Regret for Remarks; Court Filing from 1981 Surfaces," *Associated Press*, December 11, 2002, LexisNexis.

[108] Josh Marshall, "One Other Thing…," *Talking Points Memo,* December 11, 2002, 8:47 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000473.php.

[109] See Henry Farrell, "Norms and Networks," *Crooked Timber*, May 30, 2006, http://crookedtimber.org/2006/05/30/norms-and-networks/.

[110] These related, but disparate, activities ought not be considered mutually exclusive. Atrios did investigative reporting, by finding the 1948 Dixiecrat ballot from Mississippi, and Marshall certainly situated Lott's comments in appropriate historical context. In fact, Marshall did post on the use of language in politics: "Even some of best Southern Republicans seem incapable of resisting the temptation to dabble in racial code words and appeals on the stump;" see "In Recent Day's I've…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 20, 2002, 6:34 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000495.php. However, Marshall appeared to be more focused on generating new developments to the story that would be picked up by other media outlets, and Atrios seemed to hone in on

was involved intimately with the process of framing. As Stephen Cooper writes, bloggers participate in framing by "disputing the frame of a news story, reframing the facts into a distinctly different interpretation, or contextualizing a frame in a different way."[111] One way that bloggers, and Atrios in particular, facilitate the generation of new frames is through the process of rhetorical critique. While bloggers are often lauded for their media criticism, they are also often drawn to explore the meanings of words and metaphors in specific rhetorical situations. On December 13th, this rhetorical sensitivity was on display at *Eschaton*. After a number of posts on the implications of Lott's remarks, Atrios unleashed a powerful critique of apologists who were claiming Lott was referring to Thurmond's advocacy of states' rights and limited government:

> What I hope comes out of this is the recognition and understanding that when a politician in the south goes on about 'states' rights' they are speaking in code that is well understood by a portion of the electorate -black and white. I don't mean that all supporters of federalism are objectively pro-segregation (Very big of me, no?), just that in certain contexts and from certain people the use of that phrase and related ones is nothing more than a big 'FUCK YOU' to the black population. They get it. And, enough of the whites get it too.[112]

The following day, Atrios responded to critics elsewhere in the nascent blogosphere that took issue with this post. He responds by saying that he doesn't want to abolish the phrase 'states' rights,' but instead was focusing on particular occasions in which those two words signify: "I'm just saying that from certain speakers—and to certain audiences—the phrase [states' rights] is a

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fanning the calls for Lott's resignation by exploring the social and ethical implications of Lott's remarks. Such a split is representative of the sometimes-divided nature of blogging between 'journalism' and 'activism' functions.

[111] Stephen Cooper, *Watching the Watchdogs*, 106.

[112] Atrios, "When I First Posted…," *Eschaton*, December 13, 2002, 10:16 a.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_08_archive.html#90048556.

code phrase."[113] Interpreting the meaning of 'states' rights' was a central struggle for Lott's

critics. An ahistorical defense of states' rights lent Lott some philosophical backing for his

commendation of Thurmond, whereas a more complex understanding of that term linked Lott to

an outright defense of segregationist politics.

The activities of these three bloggers—exponentially magnified by the reticulate

conversations occurring between less-trafficked blogs, through other media, and in face-to-face

contexts—had raised the profile of blogging to a level where blogs were starting to attract praise

and blame. Virtually all the *topoi* that would later structure the conflict between 'journalists' and

'bloggers' were activated in the meta-discourse surrounding the Lott controversy.[114] Already,

established media outlets were tarred with the epithet 'mainstream' and accused of being so

clubby with Trent Lott that they ignored a major story. In return, developments in the Lott story

that should have been properly credited to bloggers like Marshall were not, perhaps because

bloggers were not seen as 'legitimate' sources of news and investigation. Bloggers like Marshall

were not just ignored; they were also undermined as being hopelessly partisan hacks. Marshall

himself noted—and linked to—an attack on his objectivity by *The American Prowler*, the online

arm of the conservative *American Spectator*.[115] Wendy Pleszczynski, the editor of *The American

Prowler*, mocked Marshall's prior postings on the "conservative manipulation of mainstream

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[113] Atrios, "Some People Have Quibbled…," *Eschaton*, December 14, 2002, 7:48 a.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/ 2002_12_08_archive.html#90051916.

[114] This perceived conflict between bloggers and journalists animated a fair amount of discussion about the 'meaning of blogs' in the early years. Representative examples of how blogging was discussed in the context of traditional journalism can be found in a special section called "Weblogs and Journalism," in *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2003): 59-98, http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/03-3NRfall/V57N3.pdf and a special report "The New Alternatives," in *Columbia Journalism Review* (Sept/Oct 2003), http://cjrarchives.org/issues/2003/5/. For academic accounts that explore the complex relationship between blogging and more conventional journalism, see Wilson Lowrey, "Mapping the Journalism-Blogging Relationship," *Journalism* 7 (2006): 477-500 and David Domingo and Ari Heinonen, "Weblogs and Journalism: A Typology to Explore the Blurring Boundaries," *Nordicom Review* 29 (2008): 3-15.

[115] Josh Marshall, "A Whole Article Devoted…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 10, 2002, 3:15 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000481.php.

media" in covering the John Kerry haircut story and continued by saying that Marshall "launched

his own effort to set off a conveyor belt" to bigger media outlets on the Trent Lott story.[116]

Pleszczynski's article paints Marshall as an unapologetic servant to the Bill and Hillary Clinton

brand, pushing the Lott story as some sort of partisan payback scheme. This theme that bloggers

were not objective enough—that they published too quickly, without an editorial check, and

absent any sort of punitive threat for getting facts wrong—would be oft-echoed by future critics

of blogging.

Despite some slight tensions between bloggers and other established journalists, the

evolution of the Lott story evinced signs of symbiosis. Between Tuesday, December 10th, and

Wednesday, December 11th, Trent Lott's Senate office fielded 288 media calls.[117] By December

12th and 13th, the traditional press had caught up with blogs on covering the Trent Lott story.

Coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* is indicative of the overall treatment

of the Lott story. On December 13th, the Lott story started receiving a special section in the

Times: "Divisive Words," which centralized coverage of the fallout from Thurmond's birthday

party.[118] The *Washington Post*, which had run one front page story and three editorials on Lott

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[116] Wendy Pleszczynski, "The Conason Prize," *The American Prowler*, December 10, 2002, 12:04 a.m., http://web.archive.org/web/20031212193204/http://www.americanprowler.org/article.asp?art_id=2002_12_9_23_50 _46. The "conveyor belt" metaphor is another interesting way to capture how non-bloggers characterized the blogging phenomenon.

[117] As disclosed by Trent Lott in *Herding Cats*, 253. Lott notes that news programs from "*60 Minutes* and *20/20* to *Inside Edition* and *Extra*" had news crews headed to Mississippi by the 12th of December to investigate Lott's past.

[118] Joseph Crespino, "The Ways Republicans Talk About Race," *The New York Times,* December 13, 2002, A39, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A0DE6DE103AF930A25751C1A9649C8B63; Adam Clymer, "G.O.P.'s 40 Years of Juggling on Race," *The New York Times,* December 13, 2002, A1, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9800E3D6103AF930A25751C1A9649C8B63; Adam Nagourney & Carl Hulse, "Bush Rebukes Lott Over Remarks on Thurmond," *The New York Times,* December 13, 2002, A1, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9504E2D6103AF930A25751C1A9649C8B63; Peter Applebome, "Lott's Walk Near the Incendiary Edge of Southern History," *The New York Times,* December 13, 2002, A36, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D01E0D7103AF930A25751C1A9649C8B63.

the prior day, also picked up their coverage on the 13th with two front page stories, one editorial, and two other features on the front pages of the Metro and Style sections.[119]

The headlines of these two papers relay the essential progression of the public opinion cascade that inexorably led to Lott's ultimate resignation as Senate Majority Leader:

- "Lott Apologizes But Won't Yield Leadership Post"[120]

- "Sen. Lott Fights to Save Post As Leader; He Calls Remarks 'Grievous' Error"[121]

- "Lott Faces Continuing Resentment From Conservatives"[122]

- "Bid to Oust Lott From Leadership Considered; Some in GOP Look To Bush for Signal"[123]

- "No. 2 Republican in Senate Calls for Vote on Lott"[124]

- "Bush Won't Resist Leadership Change; President's Agenda Feared in Jeopardy"[125]

- "From High-Climbing Senate Warrior to Dangling Man"[126]

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[119] Dana Milbank & Jim VandeHei, "President Decries Lott's Comments; Bush Calls for Racial Fairness but Doesn't Suggest Senator's Resignation," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2002, A1, LexisNexis; Thomas Edsall & Darryl Fears, "Lott Has Moved Little On Civil Rights Issues; Analysts Say Remarks, Record Consistent," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2002, A1, LexisNexis; E.J. Dionne, Jr., "The Party of Lincoln -- or Lott?," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2002, A45, LexisNexis; Donna Britt, "Lott's Words Repellent but Not Surprising," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2002, B1, LexisNexis; Philip Kennicott, "A 'Sorry' Spectacle," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 2002, C1, LexisNexis.

[120] David Halbfinger, "Lott Apologizes But Won't Yield Leadership Post," *The New York Times*, December 14, 2002, A1, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B07E5D91E3AF937A25751C1A9649C8B63.

[121] Lee Hockstader & Helen Dewar, "Sen. Lott Fights to Save Post As Leader; He Calls Remarks 'Grievous' Error," *The Washington Post*, December 14, 2002, A1, LexisNexis.

[122] Thomas Edsall & Dan Balz, "Lott Faces Continuing Resentment From Conservatives," *The Washington Post*, December 14, 2002, A10, LexisNexis.

[123] Mike Allen & Jim VandeHei, "Bid to Oust Lott From Leadership Considered; Some in GOP Look To Bush for Signal," *The Washington Post*, December 15, 2002, A1, LexisNexis.

[124] Carl Hulse, "No. 2 Republican in Senate Calls for Vote on Lott," *The New York Times*, December 16, 2002, A1, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C00E2DC173DF935A25751C1A9649C8B63.

[125] Mike Allen & Dana Milbank, "Bush Won't Resist Leadership Change; President's Agenda Feared in Jeopardy," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 2002, A1, LexisNexis.

[126] David Firestone, "From High-Climbing Senate Warrior to Dangling Man," *The New York Times*, December 18, 2002, A31, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9401EFDE123DF93BA25751 C1A9649C8B63.

- "Lott Says Bush Aides Undermine Bid to Stay; More in GOP Speak Out Against Senate Leader"[127]

- "Black Conservatives Abandoning Lott; Remarks Stir Sense of Betrayal, Frustration Among GOP's African Americans"[128]

- "National G.O.P. Members Weigh Against Lott in Poll"[129]

Lott's initial reluctance to entertain the possibility of his resignation as Senate Majority Leader softened as his popularity eroded over the course of the week from December 13-20. He eventually yielded to immense public and elite pressure and stepped down on December 20th. These headlines paint a picture of the complex political wranglings at play in the debate over Lott's future. Conservatives were angling to make headway into the traditionally solid Democratic voting bloc of black voters in future elections and Lott's comments failed to frame the Republican Party as one committed to racial reconciliation. At the same time, Lott's statements had whipped up a public furor that threatened the overall Bush Administration agenda, right after mid-term elections that had given Republicans control of both houses of Congress.

Though the institutional media had picked up on the Lott story, the nascent blogosphere continued to roil with public argument on Lott's future. Reynolds, perhaps experiencing Lott-fatigue, didn't blog the Lott story on December 14th or 15th, and then only linked to other bloggers that had round-ups of the day's public debate over Lott's future. Interestingly, Marshall,

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[127] Jim VandeHei, "Lott Says Bush Aides Undermine Bid to Stay; More in GOP Speak Out Against Senate Leader," *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2002, A1, LexisNexis.

[128] Darryl Fears, "Black Conservatives Abandoning Lott; Remarks Stir Sense of Betrayal, Frustration Among GOP's African Americans," *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2002, A4, LexisNexis.

[129] Adam Nagourney & Janet Elder, "National G.O.P. Members Weigh Against Lott in Poll," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2002, A37, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B07E3D8113 DF933A15751 C1A9649C8B63.

while following the Lott story through December 20th, never posted about Lott's resignation.

Once Lott resigned, Marshall was immediately on to the next story, investigating soon-to-be

majority leader Frist's background and reporting on United States' foreign policy efforts toward

North Korea (DPRK). Atrios continued his torrid posting rate on Lott all the way to his

resignation, using the commentary as a springboard for a host of other issues like media bias at

The Washington Times and the influence of the Council on National Policy.

Lott's removal was ultimately seen as an opportunity for the Bush administration to

install Bill Frist, a White House favorite, as the new Senate Majority Leader.[130] Though Lott's

ouster might have been the product of naked political machinations orchestrated by the Bush

administration, his resignation would have been unthinkable without the swirl of public

arguments surrounding his recent remarks and distant past. As Eric MacGilvray explains, despite

the variety of nonpublic reasons political actors may retain, the ability to effectuate decision-

making is limited with "regard to the kinds of evidence and reasoning that are accepted in public

debate."[131] Thus, the expansion of the pool of arguments regarding Lott's comments, spurred

partially by bloggers' rhetorical activity, became the publicly justifiable reasons invoked to

marginalize the embroiled senator.

3.5 The Constitution of the Blogosphere

Though 'blogger' had been a meaningful identity category for practitioners before

December 2002, the communicative power of the blogosphere gained increased visibility after

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[130] Elisabeth Bumiller, "With Signals and Maneuvers, Bush Orchestrates an Ouster," *The New York Times*, December 21, 2002, A1, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9403E2D81F3DF932A15751C1A 9649C8B63.

[131] Eric MacGilvray, *Reconstructing Public Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 183.

the Trent Lott affair. As the general media started crediting bloggers with playing a role in public

deliberation, their identities were constituted for a much wider audience and within the nascent

networked imaginary. As I have shown, many of the arguments that were incubated on blogs

eventually migrated to the general interest media. While a definitive causal link between

blogging and Lott's downfall is difficult to conclusively prove, the fact that bloggers were

widely credited for developing key parts of the story was crucial in constituting the blogosphere

as a potent political force.

In the circulation of these discourses, bloggers were established as digital opinion leaders

using their critical faculties to bring new energies to public deliberation.[132] Three levels of

reflexive discourse about the impact of the blogosphere occurred. First, during the controversy,

two established syndicated columnists began attributing blogs with developing the Lott story.

Second, after Lott resigned, other actors in the general interest media attempted to make greater

sense out of the entire blogging phenomenon. Finally, bloggers themselves retrospectively

considered the influence they had on Lott's resignation.

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[132]See Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: 'The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 133-50 and "Constitutive Rhetoric," in *The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 616-9 on the connection between rhetoric and constitution. Also see James Jasinski, "A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of 'Constitution' in *The Federalist Papers,*" in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen Turner (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998); as Jasinski notes, "Texts invite their audience to experience the world in certain ways via concrete textual forms; audiences, in turn, appropriate, articulate, circulate, and/or subvert these textual forms in ways that release and transform their potential constitutive energy … Discursive constitution specifies the way textual practices structure or establish conditions of possibility, enabling *and* constraining thought and action in ways similar to the operation of rules in a game" (75). Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli underline this point when they suggest that as these identifications circulate within a global matrix of power, they take on additional meaning for participants; "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," *Public Culture* 15 (2003), 386. This is the process whereby new alterations to the social imaginary are introduced and eventually normalized.

Early Attributions in the Institutional Media

As the Lott story began to migrate to the traditional organs of mass communication,

bloggers received attention from two widely read columnists who were crediting weblogs with

shaping the Trent Lott story. The first of these was Howard Kurtz, a media critic for the

Washington Post and CNN. Glenn Reynolds regularly linked to Kurtz, and noted on December

9th that his *Media Notes* column failed to feature the Trent Lott story at all.[133] Kurtz, however,

would atone. The following day, December 10th, Kurtz wrote in *Media Notes* "until this morning,

most major newspapers hadn't done squat on the story. Which is hard to understand for this

reason: There were cameras rolling. It's on tape. It was on C-SPAN, for crying out loud … But if

the establishment press is largely yawning, the situation is very different online."[134] Kurtz went

on to quote extensively from the blogs of Andrew Sullivan, Josh Marshall, David Frum, Virginia

Postrel, and *The American Prospect* on the implications of Lott's comments. Glenn Reynolds

dutifully linked to this *Media Notes* column and appended the commentary that "Howard Kurtz

is noting the gap between online punditry and establishment media where the Trent Lott affair is

concerned."[135]

Kurtz is not the only columnist for a major metropolitan newspaper to credit blogs for

influencing the development of the Lott story during this pivotal week. Paul Krugman, a regular

columnist in the *New York Times*, wrote a series of columns that paralleled Kurtz's ruminations

in *Media Notes*. On December 10th, the same day that Kurtz first credited bloggers with

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[133] Glenn Reynolds, "Howard Kurtz's 'Media Notes' Column," *Instapundit*, December 9, 2002, 9:25 a.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006034.php.

[134] Howard Kurtz, "Why So Late on Lott?," *Media Notes*, December 10, 2002, 8: 29 a.m., http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A34186-2002Dec10?language=printer.

[135] Glenn Reynolds, "Howard Kurtz," *Instapundit*, December 10, 2002, 9:02 a.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006048.php.

animating the Lott story, Krugman's column focused on Lott's comments, contextualizing them in a pattern that loosely resembled some of the argumentative themes that had already emerged online. Initially, Krugman noted Lott's comments at Thurmond's birthday party, and then referenced his dealings with the Council of Conservative Citizens throughout the 1990s. He followed that linkage by explaining, "at first the 'liberal media' … largely ignored this story. To take the most spectacular demonstration of priorities, last week CNN's 'Inside Politics' found time to cover Matt Drudge's unconfirmed (and untrue) allegations about the price of John Kerry's haircuts."[136] This is an observation that Krugman certainly could have come to independently, but it did mirror a comment that both Josh Marshall and Atrios had made on December 7th.

In fact, Krugman was called out for lifting this sentiment from Josh Marshall without attribution by the *Wall Street Journal*'s 'Best of the Web Today.' James Taranto, the writer associated with Best of the Web Today, wrote "Krugman's column seems to owe more to the work of liberal blogger Joshua Micah Marshall, who's been banging this drum harder than anyone. In particular, this Krugman observation seems to be lifted from a three-day-old Marshall item," at which point he quoted Krugman on *Inside Politics'* coverage of John Kerry's haircut.[137] Taranto followed this long pull quote with "Does Krugman have enough class to credit Marshall, an enthusiastic Krugman admirer (go figure)? Nah."[138]

The norms here, however, were clearly unstable—does citing an 'online commentator' cheapen a column in the United States' 'paper of record,' the *New York Times*? How should

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[136] Paul Krugman, "'All These Problems,'" *New York Times*, December 10, 2002, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B01EFDE173AF933A25751C1A9649C8B63.

[137] James Taranto, "Columnist of the Year," *Wall Street Journal*'s *Best of the Web Today*, December 10, 2002, 2:54 p.m., http://www.opinionjournal.com/best/?id=110002750#enron.

[138] James Taranto, "Columnist of the Year." Taranto's comments should be seen in the context of a not insignificant rivalry between the free market orthodoxy of the *Wall Street Journal* and the more progressive economic prescriptions that Krugman favors.

Krugman have described Marshall's activity? Columnists were not in the habit of citing conversations in chat rooms, perhaps the closest parallel to blogs at the time. There was, quite simply, no clear precedent, as bloggers had rarely been cited in the context of news making before the Lott affair.

Whether or not Krugman should have more fully credited Marshall's work is less important than understanding how the meme crediting Marshall and other bloggers for driving developments in the story bounced between blogs and more traditional media. Glenn Reynolds, on the morning of December 10th, linked to Krugman's op-ed. Reynolds later updated this post by linking to Taranto's afternoon posting, explaining "Best of the Web says that Krugman was really following Josh Marshall's lead. That's really true—I first found out about Lott's statements via Josh's blog, and I think he was the first one on this story."[139] Of course, this narrative of events elides the role of ABC's *The Note* in first breaking the story, but it does centralize bloggers in the process of deepening public engagement with the implications of Lott's comments.

If Krugman sinned in not crediting Marshall and other bloggers in his December 10th column, he performed publication penance on December 13th. His column led with an extensive quote from Josh Marshall:

> 'Right now we're debating whether the Republican Senate majority leader is a
> racist who yearns for the days of segregation or just a good ole boy who says a lot
> of things that make it seem like he's a racist who yearns for the days of
> segregation.' So writes Joshua Marshall, whose talkingpointsmemo.com is must

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[139] Glenn Reynolds, "Following Instapundit's Lead," December 10, 2002, 10:25 a.m., http://instapundit.com/ archives/006052.php. Notably, Reynolds' initial posting partially credits himself for being ahead of the 'mainstream press' by arguing that Krugman was following his own lead on the story.

reading for the politically curious, and who, more than anyone else, is responsible

for making Trent Lott's offensive remarks the issue they deserve to be.[140]

This public recognition of Marshall was pivotal in further raising the profile of bloggers. James

Taranto of the *Wall Street Journal* couldn't resist taking some credit for pushing Krugman to

disclose Marshall's role in the controversy. The afternoon of December 13th, Taranto wrote

Incidentally, we get results. On Tuesday we blasted Krugman for lifting ideas

from Josh Marshall's blog and not crediting Marshall. Today's column could not

be more generous in acknowledging Krugman's debt to Marshall. In his very first

paragraph, Krugman quotes Marshall, calls his blog 'must reading for the

politically curious' and notes that Marshall, 'more than anyone else, is

responsible for making Trent Lott's offensive remarks the issue they deserve to

be.'[141]

This public recognition of Marshall was pivotal in further raising the profile of bloggers.

Marshall eventually commented on Krugman's column, noting that the attribution had caused a

traffic spike at *Talking Points Memo*.[142] Marshall, in the same post, also linked to a piece by John

Podhoretz in the *New York Post* titled "The Internet's First Scalp."[143] Podhoretz's column

breathlessly begins "there's nothing more exciting than watching a new medium mature before

your eyes … The drumbeat that turned this story into a major calamity for Lott, and led directly

to President Bush's welcome disavowal of Lott's views yesterday, was entirely driven by the

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[140] Paul Krugman, "The Other Face," *New York Times*, December 13, 2002, http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/13/opinion/13KRUG.html?ex=1194148800&en=0eb7bbe7d52d3f99&ei=5070.

[141] James Taranto, "A Political Liability," *Wall Street Journal's Best of the Web Today*, December 13, 2002, 2:57 a.m., http://www.opinionjournal.com/best/?id=110002776.

[142] Josh Marshall, "Well, It Turns Out…," *Talking Points Memo*, December 13, 2002, 5:16 p.m., http://talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/000466.php.

[143] Josh Marshall, "Well, It Turns Out…," *Talking Points Memo*. In response to the title of Podhoretz's piece, Marshall sighs "where *do* they come up with those *Post* headlines?"

Internet blogosphere."[144] Marshall goes on to explain that he believes that the web generally and weblogs in particular "kept this story in front of people and forced attention to it long enough that it became impossible to ignore."[145] This explanation resembles an agenda-setting theory extended to blogging: in the case of Lott, blogs set the agenda that opinion leaders in the professional media class amplified.[146]

On December 16th, Kurtz would reflect further on the influence of blogs, describing the Washington press corps as "largely snoozing, [while] Web writers were leading the charge.[147] While bloggers often quoted and commented on what established pundits had published, the circulatory matrix was neatly inverted in this article. Kurtz approvingly quoted Glenn Reynolds on why blogs were ahead of other news outlets: "The guy's [Trent Lott] majority leader. Reporters, as opposed to bloggers, depend on him for access. The hinterlands are full of bloggers who don't care whether Trent Lott is nice to them or not. That makes them different from the Washington press."[148] Reynolds' tidy formulation—accurate or not—does obvious boundary work delineating key features between bloggers and reporters. On the one hand, bloggers are identified as legitimate agents of communicative power, and, on the other, they distinguish themselves from other similarly situated actors to highlight their own unique capacities. This is a

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[144] John Podhoretz, "The Internet's First Scalp," *The New York Post*, December 13, 2002, LexisNexis. Podhoretz draws the parallel to another "key moment in media history": when Rush Limbaugh, in 1991, picked up the story about the no-interest bank utilized by members of the House of Representatives. Limbaugh regularly pushed the story on his radio show, eventually gaining national prominence and turning AM talk radio into a powerful force for populist communication.

[145] Josh Marshall, "Well, It Turns Out…," *Talking Points Memo*.

[146] Aaron Delwiche, "Agenda-setting, Opinion Leadership, and the World of Web Logs," *First Monday* (December 2005), http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_12/delwiche/index.html and Daniel Drezner and Henry Farrell, "Web of Influence," *Foreign Policy* (November/December 2004), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=2707&print=1.

[147] Howard Kurtz, "A Hundred Candle Story and How to Blow It," *Washington Post*, December 16, 2002, C1, LexisNexis.

[148] Howard Kurtz, "A Hundred Candle Story and How to Blow It," *Washington Post*.

classic case of identification and division, a process that constitutes collectives that can then

carry on "acting-together."[149]

Attribution in the 'Blogosphere'

Glenn Reynolds was by far the most exuberant in assessing the ability of blogs to

influence public debate. In an incident that would serve as an archetype for this type of

reflection, Reynolds linked to another Paul Krugman's editorial with the post title "More Proof

that Paul Krugman Reads Blogs."[150] Krugman had written that the "Internet commentator Atrios,

who played a key role in bringing Mr. Lott's past to light, now urges us to look into the secretive

Council for National Policy."[151] Reynolds then updated the post by proclaiming "Krugman's not

just *reading* weblogs—he's getting his marching orders from them! All power to the

blogosphere!"[152] Reynolds updates the post a second time by writing "Marc Ambinder of The

Note wrote this article on the CNP last year. Turns out that 'the council doesn't really control the

world.' Of course not. Everyone knows that the world is controlled by The Power Of The

Blogosphere."[153] While Reynolds was undeniably writing with tongue firmly planted in cheek,

the sentiment that bloggers were suddenly an argumentative force to be reckoned with was

gaining steam.

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[149] Kenneth Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 21.

[150] Glenn Reynolds, "More Proof that Paul Krugman Reads Blogs," *Instapundit*, December 17, 2002, 11:51 a.m., http://instapundit.com/archives/006207.php.

[151] Paul Krugman, "Gotta Have Faith," *New York Times*, December 17, 2002, A35, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CE0D9143DF934A25751C1A9649C8B63. As partial proof that so-called old and new media ought not be perceived in direct competition, Atrios welcomed readers from the *New York Times* who had been cued to his blog from Krugman's column. In a post on the 17th, he wrote "Welcome *New York Times* readers" and directed visitors to prior posts on the Council for National Policy and *The Washington Times*. See "Welcome *New York Times*…," *Eschaton*, December 17, 2002, 10:54 a.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_15_archive.html#90062764.

[152] Glenn Reynolds, "More Proof," emphasis in original.

[153] Glenn Reynolds, "More Proof."

One interesting thread that situated bloggers as generators of communicative power

centered on the relative anonymity of some blog proprietors. In Habermas' historical bourgeois

public sphere, speakers were supposed to bracket their identities in favor of their critical

faculties. This was a radical move at the time: in the self-conception of the bourgeois public

sphere, social ranking was not supposed to give one authority.[154] Rather, the quality of one's

arguments was supposed to be foregrounded in iterative conversations, thus yielding to "the

authority of the better argument."[155] Anonymity was seen as the paragon of this identity-

bracketing; after all, if the denizens of the coffeehouse could not tell for sure who an editorial

writer was, then they were ultimately left to debate the merits of the ideas themselves and would

likely be less swayed by non-communicative power. To be clear, anonymity does not ensure that

net speakers are unmarked by class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and a whole host of other social

axes of power.[156] Difference is encoded not just in the body and in presentation, but in choices

related to style and evidence.[157] At the same time, claims that anonymity guarantees a greater

focus on argumentation rather than identity can be a powerful factor in the *self-conception* of

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[154] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36. As Habermas notes, this self-conception of the public was not fully realized in the coffeehouses or salons, "but as an idea it had become institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realized, it was at least consequential" (36).

[155] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36. This same idea of communicative power later becomes Habermas' famous formulation of "that peculiarly forceless force with which insights assert themselves," in "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," trans. Thomas McCarthy, *Social Research* (Spring 1977), 6.

[156] Alice Crawford, "The Myth of the Unmarked Net Speaker" in *Critical Perspectives on the Internet,* ed. Greg Elmer (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 89-104. Scholars have identified how cultural norms have shaped communication along gendered and ethnic lines. See Susan Herring and John Paolillo, "Gender and Genre Variation in Weblogs," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 10 (2006): 439-59; Rahul Mitra and Radhika Gajjala, "Queer Blogging in Indian Digital Diasporas: A Dialogic Encounter," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 32 (October 2008): 400-23; and Julie Rak, "The Digital Queer: Weblogs and Internet Identity," *Biography,* 28 (2005): 166-182. Though anonymity is never outside of power relations, Eran Shalev explains how pseudonyms can function as nods to historical figures or ideas that can import added meaning to the anonymous text in "Ancient Masks, American Fathers: Classical Pseudonyms During the American Revolution and Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (2003): 151-72.

[157] Iris Marion Young, among others, has eloquently made this point in her *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 62-5.

particular communities trying to establish the value of their communicative power. And it is precisely the self-conception of bloggers that helped consolidate their identity as 'average citizens' commenting on public affairs.

Conversations about anonymity centered primarily on Atrios' identity. Atrios playfully toyed with the speculations about who he was. Reacting to a post by Mickey Kaus of *Slate* where he suggested that Atrios might be Democratic insider Sidney Blumenthal, Atrios wrote "haha, Mickey thinks Sidney Blumenthal operates the Mighty Casio. If he only knew the truth…"[158] The humorous deflection by Atrios sparked serious reflection by other bloggers that emphasized the importance of communicative power in grounding the blogosphere's self-identity. Glenn Reynolds discussed this norm implicitly in the context of anonymity: "though I think Atrios' anonymity is a barrier to his/her influence, it's obviously not that big a barrier. (S)he was posting a lot of solid stuff on Lott, and, ultimately, that's what matters. Which is the beauty of the blogosphere."[159] *The Rittenhouse Review* wrote "how shocking it must be to realize that a man with a full-time job and career aside from his weblog—i.e., Atrios—has done so much to outshine the purported 'professionals' of our punditocracy."[160] By Chris Anderson's account "one of the cardinal rules of the kool kids is that, if a major story breaks, it MUST have come from within the circle of kool kids or their political associates. The idea that just some average

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[158] Mickey Kaus, "Mickey's Assignment Desk: The Triumph of Sid," *Kausfiles*, *Slate*, December 17, 2002, 2:00 p.m., http://www.slate.com/id/2075444/; Atrios, "Haha, Mickey Thinks Sidney…," *Eschaton*, December 17, 2002, 5:27 p.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_15_archive.html#90064388.

[159] Glenn Reynolds, "Matthew Iglesias Writes," *Instapundit*, December 17, 2002, 7:00 p.m., http://instapundit.com/ archives/006219.php.

[160] James Martin Capozzola, "The Woebegotten and the Misguided," *The Rittenhouse Review*, December 17, 2002, http://rittenhouse.blogspot.com/2002/12/woebegotten-and-misguided-welcome-to.html. Capozzola claims to know that Atrios is a man with a full time job after having dinner with him and 'Mrs. Atrios.'

schmoe (that's a complement Atrios) could cause this much ruckus is just, well, inconceivable."[161]

Atrios weighed in on this debate by quoting from commenter Digby, who mockingly wrote "The avergestoopidciddizun don' unnersand no politicks an cuddnevir see that Sennadur Lott sed sumthin bad widdout gittin thuh werd frum Hillry or sumbuddy who is smart … Cuz we stooopud ciddizunz cuddent ever no sumthing a big impordant wrider like Mikkey Kaus duzzent no. He gitz pade an evrything."[162] This blistering critique of the professional pundit class (re)situated citizens as credible surveyors of the political landscape capable of making arguments about what values public figures should be held up to.[163] The revaluation of citizen participation in this representative episode presaged the swell in 'participatory media.'

While some bloggers adopted an attitude of 'blog triumphalism' after Lott's downfall, triumphalism was in fact checked by the very bloggers who had the most incentive to trumpet their influence. Reynolds theorized that, while blogs played an important role in the Lott story, the ire of black conservatives would have ultimately pushed Lott's comments to the front pages of newspapers.[164] In a column for *Tech Central Station*, Reynolds cites *Slate* and *The Guardian* on the influence of blogs in bringing down Trent Lott, but explains that the most significant

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[161] Chris Anderson, "So, Kaus Thinks Atrios…," *Interesting Times*, December 17, 2002, 11:33 p.m., http://interestingtimes.blogspot.com/2002/12/so-kaus-thinks-atrios-might-be-sid.html.

[162] Atrios, "Rittenhouse Review Helps With…," *Eschaton*, December 17, 2002, 10:03 p.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_15_archive.html#90065238.

[163] Several days later, after Lott had made his resignation official, Atrios weighed in on issues of anonymity, credibility, and blogging. He noted "Though it is amusing sometimes in the end I find any discussion of 'Who is Atrios?' rather silly—at least silly if people actually care. I mean, who is Ted Barlow? Well, he's some guy from Texas who has a weblog. Who is Oliver Willis? Some guy in Boston who runs a weblog. Who am I? Some guy in Philadelphia who runs a weblog. If this were 'Eschaton, by Bob Smith' people would say 'oh, that Bob Smith is some guy in Philadelphia who runs a weblog.' End of story." Atrios, "Though It Is Amusing Sometimes," *Eschaton*, January 1, 2003, 3:29 p.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_29_archive.html#90130933.

[164] Glenn Reynolds, "Now It's Michael Barone," *Instapundit*, December 22, 2002, 10:39 a.m., http://instapundit .com/archives/006318.php.

impact of blogging was "that the professionalization of journalism—a trend underway for most of the 20th Century—is now in full reverse gear, and the term 'correspondent' may go back to its original meaning of 'one who corresponds' rather than 'high-paid face with good hair.'"[165] Atrios, too, tempered assertions that blogs could operate independently as powerful forces because of their reliance on general interest media to amplify blog-borne stories.[166]

Later Attributions

Blogging would receive an increasing amount of attention in the press as a unique phenomenon after Trent Lott resigned. The primary influence of bloggers was often theorized as monitoring the agenda setting of the so-called mainstream media. Bloggers were essentially credited with keeping the Lott story alive long enough for other media organizations to pick up the reins. The day after Lott's resignation, Ariana Huffington, who would herself later become a blogger, noted that blogs "continued hammering away at the story, and eventually succeeded in moving it out of the shadows into the political spotlight."[167] Another commentator suggested that by "mixing vocal opinion with historical fact and context, they helped keep the Lott saga on simmer until a critical mass of people started paying attention."[168] Bloggers helped "draw attention to the remarks."[169] Others argued "outrage in the ever-growing 'blogosphere' fanned the

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[165] Glenn Reynolds, "Year of the Blog," *Tech Central Station*, December 24, 2002, http://www.tcsdaily.com/article.aspx?id=122402A.

[166] Atrios, "I'm Sure Mrs. Atrios…," *Eschaton*, January 1, 2003, 9:08 a.m., http://atrios.blogspot.com/2002_12_29_archive.html#390131769. Atrios situated his explanation in the context of right/left partisan politics, explaining that conservative blogs had a tighter relationship with conservative media outlets like *Fox News* then liberal blogs had with liberal media outlets. He explains "until the media takes its cues from liberal bloggers, as it currently does from conservative ones to some degree, we can't be very optimistic about the power of our Blogs."

[167] Ariana Huffington, "Vox Populi is Heard at Full Volume," *Cleveland Plain-Dealer*, December 22, 2002, H5, LexisNexis.

[168] Mark Jurkowitz, "The Descent of Trent Lott Brings the Rise of 'Bloggers,'" *Boston Globe*, December 26, 2002, D1, LexisNexis.

[169] Noah Shachtman, "With Incessant Postings, Pundit Stirs the Pot," *New York Times*, January 16, 2003, G1, LexisNexis.

flames until newspapers and cable news took up the story."[170] In reconsidering the role of blogs, these commentators cited communicative activity stimulated by bloggers that eventually marshaled forces of publicity that held Lott to account.

Popular press accounts regularly use Trent Lott's downfall as a cognitive short-cut to describe the multi-faceted blogging phenomenon. In the year following Lott's resignation, Lott is regularly referenced in descriptions of blogging. Some institutional media outlets even credited blogging with affecting their agenda-setting function:

> pundit blogs have been credited with keeping alive two important stories initially downplayed by mainstream media: Trent Lott's racially insensitive remarks at a birthday party, and management responsibility for the Jayson Blair scandal at the New York Times. Bloggers say the constant drumbeat in the 'blogosphere' forced Lott's ouster as Senate majority leader.[171]

Andrew Sullivan concluded in the *Washington Times* that "even in its earliest stage, the blogosphere has shown its ability to shape opinion and move the news. It turns out that the blog-induced resignation of Trent Lott was not a flash in the pan."[172] *USA Today* reports that blogs are "forcing the mainstream news media to follow the stories they're pushing, such as the scandal that took down Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott."[173]

Such accounts have even captured the global imagination, as reporters in the Anglo-American public sphere reported on blogging's influence through the Lott example. The London

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[170] Chris Mooney, "How 'Blogging' Changed Journalism—Almost," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 2, 2003, F1, LexisNexis.

[171] Beth Gillin, "Blooming Blogs," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 21, 2003, LexisNexis.

[172] Andrew Sullivan, "The Weekly Dish," *The Washington Times,* June 6, 2003, LexisNexis.

[173] Kathy Kiely, "Free-wheeling 'Bloggers' are Rewriting the Rules of Journalism," *USA Today,* December 30, 2003, LexisNexis.

Times ran a story that described the influence of blogging and explained "the clearest example of the bloggers' ability to take scalps was the forced resignation of Trent Lott."[174] The *Irish Times* similarly weighed in: "US bloggers have already helped to alert the mainstream media to Senator Trent Lott's racist comments during a birthday bash."[175] In a survey article on blogging that suggests the internet is drawing power from media elites to citizens, a reporter for *The Observer* identifies mounting evidence of influence to "pages like Instapundit, run by University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Reynolds, and Talking Points Memo, by political columnist John Marshall, [which] forced the issue onto the mainstream media and forced Lott's resignation."[176]

Books about blogging aimed at a general audience consolidated this part of blogger lore. Glenn Reynolds, in *Army of Davids* (his book about how technology reshapes individual and institutional capacities), consolidates his own legacy by noting "bloggers have accomplished a lot in independent journalism: bringing down Trent Lott and Dan Rather."[177] Cass Sunstein cites the Trent Lott affair when he writes "bloggers appear to have influenced the public stage, driving media coverage and affecting national perceptions of national questions."[178] Dan Gillmor, a well-respected journalist and theorist of grassroots media, confirms that "the Lott debacle was, by all accounts, a watershed."[179] Blog popularizer David Kline claimed Trent Lott's resignation was the

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[174] Sarah Baxter, "Editor Falls to Bloggers' Rapid Poison," *The London Times*, June 8, 2003, LexisNexis.

[175] Mike Butcher, "'Bloggers' Aim to Make an Impact in the Real World," *The Irish Times*, August 8, 2003, LexisNexis.

[176] Patrick Weever, "Power to the People as Media Sanctum Invaded by Web," *The Observer*, August 24, 2003, LexisNexis.

[177] Glenn Reynolds, *An Army of Davids: How Markets and Technology Empower Ordinary People to Beat Big Media, Big Government, and Other Goliaths* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Current, 2006), xii.

[178] Cass Sunstein, *Infotopia,* 84.

[179] Dan Gillmor, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People, For the People* (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly, 2004), 45.

"first blow for blogger reporting."[180] In his autobiography, Lott blamed blogs for whipping up the firestorm of criticism.[181] The meme that bloggers were responsible for Trent Lott's downfall was so strong that it actually jumped to the growing Iranian blogosphere! Pejman Yousefzadeh, in an article that expressed hope that the blogosphere would aid the liberalization of Iranian society, cites the Trent Lott example as a sign of the ability of blogging to effectuate change:

> The Blogosphere has already influenced politics, culture, and society immeasurably. It was the first medium to pick up and understand the importance of Trent Lott's infelicitous comments at the 100th birthday of former Senator Strom Thurmond…Let's hope the Blogosphere, and Iranian bloggers in particular, have the power to influence meaningful and effective change in Iranian culture and society.[182]

The transportation of this feeling of political agency across geographical boundaries suggests that the meta-talk about blogging and Trent Lott was having an outsized influence on the constitution of the blogosphere itself as a global medium of change. As the blogosphere continued to churn, the institutional media began to monitor blogs as barometers of public opinion, tightening the linkage between actors at the periphery of public discourse and the established mass media.[183] Yet, theorists of the public sphere like Habermas have thus far declined to incorporate blogging into their accounts of public deliberation. In identifying how the

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[180] David Kline, "Toward a More Participatory Democracy," in *Blog! How the Newest Media Revolution is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture*, eds. David Kline and Dan Burstein (New York: CDS Books, 2005), 11.

[181] In *Herding Cats*, 243-60.

[182] Quoted in Michael Keren, *Blogosphere: The New Political Arena* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 60.

[183] As Jordan explains in "Disciplining the Virtual Homefront," 296, CNN's *Situation Room* regularly scans blogs to see what is animating public conversation and often pulls bloggers into the mass media circuit as interview subjects.

Trent Lott case displays the networked sensibilities that shape deliberation, I aim to rectify this omission in contemporary scholarship on public deliberation.

3.6 Toward a Networked Sensibility: Flooding the Zone and Attention

Habermas has thus far declined to incorporate the developments in information technology into his theories of deliberative legitimation processes. As I will explain, he appears dedicated to maintaining a prominent role for face-to-face communication in associational contexts, later focused by opinion leaders in organs of mass communication. These expectations limit the possibility that blogging can contribute productively to public deliberation: the face-to-face requirement is not usually met in the blogosphere, blogs are often not rooted in civil society organizations, and bloggers' messages are not always distributed through the mass media. Yet, as this case study has shown, when bloggers flood the zone, their contributions to public discourse often do focus attention. Habermas is normally sanguine about the ability of civil society agents to effectuate change, explaining that "the signals they send out and the impulses they give are generally too weak to initiate learning processes or redirect decision making in the political system in the short run."[184] The Trent Lott case appears to be a significant counter-example that suggests arguments from the digitally-connected periphery *can* boost the otherwise weak civil society signal as they bundle opinions through linking practices. Admittedly, media of mass communication are still needed to amplify the communicative power generated by blogging, but they are no longer as central as they were even ten years ago in focusing public debate.

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[184] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 373.

Blogging would appear to be exactly the type of perpetual, public conversation that Habermas figures as central to the publicity processes that are required for legitimation. In developing reasons that stand up to public scrutiny—the disclosure of the 1948 ballot, Lott's defense of racial discrimination in the Bob Jones filing—bloggers appear to be using their unique capacities to advance public debate. Could bloggers be seen as agents of communicative power? As Habermas writes, communicative power can only supplant other types of power when two conditions are met:

> The illegitimate independence of social and administrative power vis-à-vis democratically generated communicative power is averted to the extent that the periphery has both (a) a specific set of capabilities and (b) sufficient occasion to exercise them. The first assumption, (a), refers to the capacities to ferret out, identify, and effectively thematize latent problems of social integration … The second assumption, (b) is less problematic. As we have seen, the links between decentered, increasingly autonomous social sectors loosen in the course of progressive functional differentiation. There is thus a growing need for integration that renders crises permanent, stimulates the public sphere, and makes accelerated learning processes necessary. The problematic assumption is (a). It places a good part of the normative expectations connected with deliberative politics on the peripheral networks of opinion-formation. The expectations are directed at the capacity to perceive, interpret, and present society-wide problems in a way that is both attention-catching and innovative. The periphery can satisfy these strong expectations only insofar as the networks of noninstitutionalized public communication make possible more or less *spontaneous* processes of opinion-

formation. Resonant and autonomous public spheres of this sort must in turn be

anchored in the voluntary associations of civil society and embedded in liberal

patterns of political culture and socialization.[185]

This is an interesting passage from Habermas in part because it seems to call for something like

the blogosphere: a noninstitutionalized, spontaneous layer of actors on the periphery who can

perceive and interpret problems in ways that capture attention and innovate rhetorically in order

to advance deliberative legitimation processes. Blogs certainly have unique capacities: the

resources of the internet, the juxtapositions facilitated by hyperlinks, and the ability to draw in

peripheral voices based on the quality of their contribution. These capacities often catch the

attention of opinion leaders and other media outlets, seemingly meeting the (a) criterion of

thematization outlined here.

      While Habermas argues that this thematization and bundling task is the most problematic

for integration processes, I would argue that it is his (b) criterion that actually poses more

problems. For Habermas, agents on the periphery need *occasion* to exercise their critical

faculties. The way that Habermas formulates this occasion, though, is artificially limiting. As he

claims, these "resonant and autonomous" spheres of spontaneous communication must be

anchored in civil society associations in order to better sluice their opinions into deliberative

processes. In modernist social organization, this formulation has more weight. Habermas'

supplier groups, the non-governmental organizations and other agents of civil society, have

traditionally needed the occasion provided to them by the mass media in order to have their

opinions registered. But is this the case in today's internetworked society?

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[185] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 358.

Even well after blogging received widespread critical attention in the general media and in academic circles, Habermas continues to foreground the role of the mass media, associations, and intellectuals at the expense of self-organized actors operating in new media. In a speech accepting the Bruno Kreisky prize in 2005, Habermas claims that the internet has ushered in a "welcome increase in egalitarianism ... [which] is being paid for by the decentralisation of access to unedited contributions. In this medium the contributions of intellectuals lose the power to create a focus."[186] This is a somewhat ironic formulation for a theorist famous for revaluing citizen participation. The increase in participation fueled by the internet actually, in Habermas' telling, creates information glut that makes it difficult to glean the wheat from the chaff. The presumption is that average citizens cannot focus public attention; yet, as the Trent Lott case shows, when bloggers flood the zone on an issue they have power rivaling traditional intellectuals in bringing certain issues to the forefront of the public agenda.

In a keynote address to the International Communication Association in 2006 (later published in *Communication Theory)*, Habermas continues to insist on the centrality of the organs of mass communication to focus public debate through elite proxies.[187] He outlines two conditions for mediated communication to fulfill the normative demands of public deliberation: media independence and communicative reflexivity.[188] To the extent that the media is

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[186] Quoted and translated by Axel Bruns, ""Habermas and/against the Internet," *Snurblog*, February 18, 2007, http://snurb.info/node/621.

[187] These elites are a) special interest lobbyists, b) general interest advocates, c) experts with professional or scientific knowledge, d) moral entrepreneurs, and e) intellectuals. A charitable reader might incorporate bloggers under the umbrella of one or both of the final categories, though Habermas clearly situates these elites within associational organs of civil society. The keynote address was later published as Jürgen Habermas, "Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research," *Communication Theory* (November 2006), 416.

[188] Habermas, "Political Communication," 420-423. Habermas identifies the political economy of the mass media as constraining the modes of rational-critical debate that would be more possible under conditions of greater independence. As far as communicative reflexivity goes, Habermas partially accepts what he terms the videomalaise hypothesis that greater exposure to electronic communication increases apathy and cynicism about political

increasingly dependent on political and economic imperatives, and communicative reflexivity has been limited by the infotainment orientation of the mass media, Habermas perceives slim prospects for effective legitimation processes.

But shouldn't the internet change a good deal of this, by creating more independent media forms and enhanced communicative reflexivity? In a footnote to his ICA address, Habermas explicitly limits the influence of internetworked communication:

> The Internet has certainly reactivated the grassroots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers. However, computer-mediated communication in the web can claim unequivocal democratic merits only for a special context: It can undermine the censorship of authoritarian regimes that try to control and repress public opinion. In the context of liberal regimes, the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics. Within established national public spheres, the online debates of web users only promote political communication, when news groups crystallize around the focal points of the quality press, for example, national newspapers and political magazines.[189]

In this footnote, Habermas explains that such a critical role was performed by the bloggers at *Bildblog.de*, who sent a bill for 2088 euros to *Bild.T-Online* for corrections and fact-checking services. This was a media prank designed to draw attention to the critical deficits of the

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communication. Part of this videomalaise comes from the personality driven politics and market-orientation that are prominent features of much western mass communication. In other words, the political economy of the mass media has systematically reduced the communicative reflexivity of civil society as much as it has stunted its own critical faculties.

[189] Habermas, "Political Communication," 423.

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institutional media, but it is telling that Habermas takes this as representative of what the blogosphere can contribute to public deliberation.

There are a number of limitations to Habermas' critique of the internet in public deliberation. First, the internet is, quite obviously, more than a series of chat rooms. While chat rooms were, along with email, a key element of the 1990s-era internet, the features of chat rooms do not define the entirety of what internet sub-media have to offer, as the growth of blogging, wikis, podcasting and other 'Web 2.0' tools have shown.[190] Habermas' claim that the internet's democratic merit lies in the evasion of censorship by authoritarian regimes is certainly defensible.[191] However, to limit the internet's efficacy in liberal regimes ignores the growing body of literature that suggests internetworked communication does, at least occasionally, activate change in advanced liberal democracies as well.[192] In addition, Habermas clearly

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[190] However, if chat rooms are perceived as the primary deliberative feature of the internet, it might be understandable why Habermas is frustrated by their inability to contribute to public deliberation. Harry Weger and Mark Aakhus suggest some key design flaws that frustrate public argument in chat rooms; see their "Arguing in Internet Chat Rooms: Argumentative Adaptations to Chat Room Design and Some Consequences for Public Deliberation at a Distance," *Argumentation and Advocacy* (Summer 2003): 23-38. First, they note that conversational coherence is difficult to maintain, with a scrolling transcript hosting multiple threads all on the same screen (27). Contrast this with the tendency of blogs to focus on a single theme per post. In addition, their study suggests that chat rooms limit the number of characters a contributor can post at a single time, resulting in severely under-developed arguments (29). Blogs, of course, are (virtually) unlimited in the amount of text that can be posted while also enabling images, audio, and video clips. Finally, they suggest that flaming—the use of *ad hominem* attacks—undermines the civil community needed to advance public deliberation (31). Blogging might not fare better than chat rooms on this count; though that is an issue I will leave to further empirical work.

[191] The spread of low cost, widely accessible information technology certainly threatens the information control that most authoritarian regimes require to repress citizen acquisition of information, formation of opinion, and political coordination. This connection follows Habermas' historical linkage of civil society with rich public debate conducted in part through the media. Other scholars have picked up on this thread with various information technologies that were 'new' at the time: the VCR and satellite television have been credited for undermining socialist control in Poland in Miklos Sukosd, "From Propaganda to *'Oeffentichleit'* in Eastern Europe: Four Models of Public Space Under State Socialism," *Praxis International* (April/July 1990), 50. Of course, nothing is automatic when it comes to complex relationships between communication media and democratization; Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor Boas argue that the internet will not necessarily contribute to democratizing pressures in their study of eight authoritarian countries. See their *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Regimes* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

[192] See the numerous examples in Bruce Bimber's *Information and American Democracy*, especially Chapter 4. A 'cyber-realist' paradigm, as developed by Peter Muhlberger, acknowledges that internetworked technological advances can empower individuals and groups to organize and put pressure on different institutions in

forecloses the capacity of online communication coming from blogs in developing angles on unfolding events that push public deliberation along. Instead, he suggests that internet-mediated communication only plays a role by responding to political communication that emerges from the focalizing institutional media. In other words, for Habermas, the internet can only succeed in vitalizing practices of publicity to the extent that it replicates the historical bourgeois public sphere discussing the daily newspaper. But, as the Trent Lott case shows, sometimes the flow of deliberation is reversed, with bloggers breaking stories or inventing novel arguments that are later absorbed into the institutional media.

Finally, as Axel Bruns notes in response to Habermas' fragmentation critique, "to speak of them [participants in online communities] as fragmented and isolated ignores or rejects the reality that especially online, individual publics are multiply connected both implicitly through shared membership and explicitly through a network of hyperlinks connecting postings right across the boundaries of individual fora."[193] The criticism that online communities are uniquely susceptible to fragmentation ignores the possibilities that coalitional politics, encouraged by the lateral network form of the world wide web, serve as a centripetal force during outbreaks of deliberation. That bloggers can generate argumentative enthusiasm around certain events suggests that their activity not be seen as 'mere fragmentation,' but rather as a type of differentiation within society that emerged in order to accommodate hypercomplexity. The Trent Lott case bears this point out. Though Marshall, Atrios, and Reynolds come from differing political perspectives, the intercastings *between* these dispersed discourse communities increase

society. See his "Testing Cyber-realism," *Democracy Online: The Prospects for Political Renewal Through the Internet*, ed. Peter Shane (New York: Routledge, 2004): 225-238.

[193] Axel Bruns, "Habermas and/against the Internet."

as the zone was flooded with blogged argumentation. It was this collective thematization that put

hydraulic pressure on the institutional media to eventually pick up the story.

Perhaps Habermas underestimates internetworked communication because he perceives it

as *too* mediated—that is, in Habermas' view, the internet may very well supplant face-to-face

interaction.[194] Habermas concludes that the current "lack of face-to-face interaction between

present participants in a shared practice of collective decision-making" short-circuits public

deliberation.[195] This privileging of face-to-face interaction is both impossible in large, complex

societies and inelegantly privileges dialogue over dissemination.[196] The predilection for face-to-

face interaction as the crucial constituent for communicatively generated power is perhaps a

holdover from Hannah Arendt's conception of power, from which Habermas draws much of his

own theory of communicative power.[197] For Arendt, the 'space of appearance,' in which mutual

recognition occurs between interlocutors, enables concerted activity. The space of appearance is

where 'we' become visible and recognizable to each other as interlocutors. This space of

appearance, however, "disappears not only with the dispersal of men [sic] … but with the

disappearance or arrest of the activities [of speech] themselves."[198] In the classical Greek *polis*,

and in other historical eras, this space of appearance has occurred primarily face-to-face.

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[194] Habermas' privileging of face-to-face communication is a curious predilection. In the bourgeois public sphere, print media similarly elided face-to-face communication (the reader rarely interacted with the editor). Perhaps Habermas sees the face-to-face communication that occurred in the bourgeois coffeehouses and other public spaces as recuperating a positive social functionality. In that case, then, Habermas ought to at least admit the possibility that communication over the internet spurs similar follow-on conversations with face-to-face interlocutors, an empirical question that ought not be pre-empted by uncomplicated assertions about the presence or absence of others in material space.

[195] Habermas, "Political Communication in Media Society," 414.

[196] On this latter point, see John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) in which he argues that the privileging of dialogue over dissemination has deleterious effects on how communication is theorized.

[197] See Habermas, "Communications Concept of Power," 3-24.

[198] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998 [1958]), 199.

Habermas appears wedded to this Arendtian conception of communicative power. I don't

think that it is too much of a stretch, though, to suggest that blogging has simply supplemented

this traditional space of appearance between interlocutors with a networked form of many-to-

many communication. Michael Froomkin identifies the ability of the internet in general "to

create as many 'new spaces and new institutional forms' as one desires."[199] As a new space for

deliberation, blogging establishes a space of appearance between interlocutors by publicizing a

multitude of perspectives, opinions, and arguments supported by iterations of lateral citizen-to-

citizen deliberation.

With networked communications technology, the space of appearance becomes more

permanent. The internet, an archived, searchable, 'always-on,' and interconnected medium, lends

constancy to the presence of co-deliberators. A blog post itself creates a type of presence for an

argument in the way that it records an opinion, which can then be responded to by other

interlocutors and referred to in future episodes of public deliberation.[200] Contrast the

internetworked space of appearance with the space of appearance presented by broadcast media:

the 'one-to many' model of communication doesn't make citizens' contributions visible to each

other, which often causes critics to argue that the broadcast model undermines democracy. It

isn't so much that broadcast media necessarily stupefy democratic dialogue; the vernacular

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[199] Michael Froomkin, "Technologies for Democracy," *Democracy Online: The Prospects for Political Renewal Through the Internet*, ed. Peter Shane (New York: Routledge, 2004), 8.

[200] The concept of presence is central to Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's theory of argumentation. They suggest that the task of the arguer is to "make present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what he [sic] considers important to his [sic] argument or, by making them present, to enhance the value of some of the elements of which one has actually been made conscious;" see *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 116. Their conception of presence is focused on how arguers use rhetorical strategies to fill "the whole field of consciousness with this presence" (118). While their use of presence operates at what might be seen as a micro-level of argumentation between two arguers, I would argue that the general concept of presence is easily extended to a more systems-level by acknowledging how certain rhetorical strategies make certain arguments more visible within the broader realm of public deliberation.

conversations that spin-off from these media artifacts are undeniable and can productively shape public opinion.[201] But because citizens are rarely given opportunities in the broadcast media to cultivate and refine their voices (except through letters to the editor, or the occasional 'person on the street interviews'), the space of appearance for members of a particular imagined community appears narrowed.

Put another way, blogging—and its conception as a 'blogosphere'—offers supplemental ways of imagining the space of appearance between interlocutors. At any point, internet users can 'drop in on' blog-driven conversations that are ongoing (synchronous participation) or temporarily closed (diachronic participation).[202] As participants, they gain explicit knowledge that they can invoke in immediate follow-on conversations and generate a store of tacit knowledge that can be rolled out when needed. In so doing, they act as participants in an attention economy that constitutes them as a public, even if that constitution is only momentary. As blogging increased in popularity and the numbers of bloggers increased, new ways of representing this space of appearance began to emerge. Search engines specific to blogs arose (e.g. Technorati), tag clouds that measured intensity and frequency of blogged about topics emerged, and institutional media began to identify 'blogs that link to this article' on their websites. Each of these ways of managing the output of the blogosphere is, in essence, a response to the vast quantity of published resources that result from bloggers flooding the zone on particular issues. Whereas the space of appearance has historically been limited by material co-presence of others in more-or-less concentric circles of social networking, *now* the space of

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[201] As Gerard Hauser explains in *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Public Spheres* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

[202] Robert MacDougall, in "Identity, Electronic Ethos, and Blogs: A Technologic Analysis of Symbolic Exchange on the New News Medium," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49 (2005), explains that "with blogs, we get the sense of real-time or near real-time personal accounting of local and world events but without the *in situ* embodiment we typically associate with real-time or synchronous experience" (591).

appearance can be constituted across a wide array of times and spaces in a way that preserves

lateral dialogue between citizens.[203]

This networked space of appearance, in the Lott case, allowed deliberators to generate

communicative power that ultimately dislodged Trent Lott from his perch at the top of the

Senate. But how was it able to do so given the political economy of the American press, which

prevents Habermas' criteria of media independence from being met? As journalism scholars

Lewis Friedland, Thomas Hove, and Hernando Rojas speculate, "perhaps under conditions of

systematically increased communicative reflexivity, the unattainable ideal of independence is

loosened," because "the new networked media system radically, even exponentially, increases

the possibilities for reflexivity at every level of society."[204] As they explain,

> perhaps for the first time in history, the informal public sphere has a medium that
>
> in principle allows for large-scale expression of mass opinion in forms that
>
> *systematically* affect the institutional media system. These systematic effects can
>
> occur through new networked forms of media like the following: political
>
> blogging; distributed forms of information gathering, production, and publishing
>
> (e.g. wikis, open source journalism), email lists; and individuals' store-and-
>
> forward uses of email. We might say that networked communication has begun to
>
> *surround* the traditional media system.[205]

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[203] The importance of many-to-many communication is made by Benjamin Barber, who notes that "true public voice emerges only from lateral conversation" in *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 120.

[204] Lewis Friedland, Thomas Hove, and Hernando Rojas, "The Networked Public Sphere," *Javnost-The Public* 13 (2006), 18, emphasis in original.

[205] Friedland, Hove, and Rojas, "The Networked Public Sphere," 19, emphasis in original.

The Trent Lott case illustrates a very early instantiation of this enveloping process by networked media. As blogs monitored the institutional media's agenda-setting processes and introduced original arguments into the deliberative fold, public attention eventually forced the issue back into the pages of major newspapers and other mass media. Perhaps Dewey's "shadowy and formless" public has, with a new space of appearance that supports many-to-many communication, a way to prevent its regular eclipse.[206]

The trope of flooding the zone signals how communicative ties between agents on the periphery increase the capacity of the blogosphere to focus attention of specific areas. In this case, the strong lateral ties between bloggers created a multi-layered field of argument that the institutional media eventually drew upon. Habermas misses this because his narrow conception of core-periphery actors imposes a modernist political formulation onto a network society; consequently his model of public deliberation loses explanatory power. Blogging, as representative of different networked communication technologies, increases communicative power on the periphery that traditional models fail to capture. What internetworked media do is enhance the communicative reflexivity of actors in civil society, spawning arguments that then flow along an increasingly dense set of feedback loops to other networked media, broadcast media, elites, and administrative organizations.

This new, mediated space of appearance in networked societies creates what might be called 'argument publics.' An argument public exhibits an "information-driven structure" rather than an event-driven one, meaning that bloggers parse the significance of seemingly small bits of information as it becomes public rather than waiting for a newsworthy event like the institutional

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[206] John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1954 [1927]), 142.

media.[207] This feature can occasionally correct for the inability of the mass media to set an agenda for public discussion based on thematized problems emerging from the lifeworld. If issue publics emerged with the rise of broadcast media in the mid- to late-twentieth century in part because of the technologies of direct mail, telephone calling, and advertisements (as Bimber details), then it only make sense that a more 'micro-media' would produce more 'micro-publics' dedicated to fulfilling more niche functions for public deliberation. A conception that online deliberators are isolated issue publics, as Habermas does in his ICA address, misconceives bloggers' roles. Of course they appear isolated if they are taken to be issue publics—bloggers aren't often organized enough to create the kinds of lobbying pressure that we have come to associate with issue publics. But this doesn't mean that their contributions to the deliberative process are moot. Argument publics could be theorized as picking up the deliberative slack left hanging by an institutional media system that is constrained by a particular political economy. This development suggests that scholars ought to reorient their approaches in studying networked communication to understand how bloggers develop arguments, keep track of key developments in unfolding controversies, and bundle various perspectives into public opinions that eventually are absorbed into the institutional media.

In this case study, I have tried to illustrate the operation of a very early argument public in the case of Trent Lott, but much more work could be done to draw out features of these new online argument publics. What types of controversies are networked argument publics most likely to have dramatic influence on? How have argument publics matured in the intervening years since Trent Lott's resignation? Has the new online political economy reduced the

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[207] Michael Xenos, "New Mediated Deliberation: Blog and Press Coverage of the Alito Nomination," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008), 500.

inventional capacities of argument publics in the blogosphere? What are other constraints that limit the communicative reflexivity of networked argument publics? I have only hinted at the possibilities of thinking about networked media as argument publics; future research could sketch a much broader area of inquiry that resembles the program that political science developed to study the rise and influence of issue publics. Scholars of rhetoric and argumentation, though, will be particularly suited to study argument publics because the study of persuasion, in the blogosphere and through information technologies not yet invented, is at home in the area of inquiry represented by communication.

3.7 Coda: Flooding the Zone as a Critical Resource (Response to Jodi Dean)

I have situated the trope of flooding the zone as a signifier of the blogosphere's inventional capacities, and suggested that it aids the overall communicative reflexivity of the networked public sphere. As a coda to this chapter, I will identify how this trope has been utilized as a critical tool to demarcate spontaneous communication arising at the periphery of a networked society from public relations efforts that orchestrate 'flooding the zone' operations through internetworked media. Far from suggesting that flooding the zone is a permanent and undeniable benefit flowing from the blogosphere, in this section I want to illustrate how it has occasionally been co-opted by institutional actors aiming to distort public debate. Bloggers have been quick to pounce on attempts at artificially flooding the zone, confirming Habermas' thesis of the dual orientation of public sphere actors. This dual orientation involves efforts by civil society actors to "directly influence the political system," while also being preoccupied with "enlarging civil society and the public sphere as well as with confirming their own identities and

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capacities to act."[208] It is in the criticism of so-called astroturf blogs that bloggers have identified artificial cases of flooding the zone and have thus delegitimized efforts at reintroducing non-commercial steering media into public debate. These critical interventions expose where "publicity attempts to hide itself, pretending to come from the people, for example, through what have come to be called 'astroturf' groups, that is, organizations that purport to be 'grassroots' but that are actually funded and operated by hidden organizations."[209]

I would like to situate this section as a partial response to Jodi Dean's critique of internetworked deliberation as articulated in her essay on the genesis of communicative capitalism. There is much to agree with Dean on in her assessment of utopian internet discourses and the related fantasies of participation that have gelled over the past twenty years. However, I think that she overstates the extent to which internetworked communication technologies have established a system where circulation is fetishized above all else, as bloggers' critiques of astroturf blogs illustrate. Dean writes that communicative capitalism "designates that form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies. Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation come to be realized in and through expansions, intensifications and interconnections of global telecommunications."[210] Yet, instead of creating more desirable patterns of deliberation, communicative capitalism initiates a cycle of response and counter-response, participating in a

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[208] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 370. Habermas points to Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato's theory of social movements which posits a movement between what they characterize as 'defensive' identity-consolidating and 'offensive' public-influencing functions. See their *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), especially chapter 10, "Social Movements and Civil Society."

[209] Barlow, *Rise of the Blogosphere*, 177.

[210] Jodi Dean, "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics," *Cultural Politics* 1 (2005), 55.

circulation of argumentation that becomes self-referential and ultimately divorced from politics as such.

Dean cites the Bush Administration as participating in exactly this type of circulation game. During criticism of the Administration's plan for invading Iraq, Dean argues that Bush and senior administration officials were able to excuse themselves from attending to the public debate occurring at various national and global levels by simply acknowledging that competing discourses were in fact circulating. She argues that

> today, the circulation of content in the dense, intensive networks of global communications relieves top-level actors (corporate, institutional and governmental) from the obligation to respond. Rather than responding to messages sent by activists and critics, they counter with their own contributions to the circulating flow of communications, hoping that sufficient volume (whether in terms of number of contributions or the spectacular nature of a contribution) will give their contributions dominance or stickiness. Instead of engaged debates, instead of contestations employing common terms, points of reference or demarcated frontiers, we confront a multiplication of resistances and assertions so extensive that it hinders the formation of strong counterhegemonies. The proliferation, distribution, acceleration and intensification of communicative access and opportunity, far from enhancing democratic governance or resistance, results in precisely the opposite—the post-political formation of communicative capitalism.[211]

Instead of blaming the Bush Administration's ideological rigidity or patterns of groupthink for

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[211] Dean, "Communicative Capitalism," 53.

their disengagement with critics, Dean blames communicative capitalism. The signature feature

of communicative capitalism could be characterized as flooding the zone—as she puts it, the

creation of an overwhelming volume of spectacular claims thrown up against the wall like a plate

of spaghetti, with the hope that a few noodles will stick. Rather than engaging in a line-by-line

refutation of their opponents' arguments, the Bush Administration, like all agents in

communicative capitalism, simply contributed more memes to the circulatory matrix, which in

Dean's telling overwhelmed the ability for opposition to form.

Consequently, argumentative abundance simply merges with the rest of the datastream, and

each argument becomes valued, by participants, because it is a contribution to the circulatory

matrix rather than as an aid to understanding and solidarity building. As she explains,

> the exchange value of messages overtakes their use value. So, a message is no longer
>
> primarily a message from a sender to a receiver. Uncoupled from contexts of action
>
> and application—as on the Web or in print and broadcast media—the message is
>
> simply part of a circulating data stream. Its particular content is irrelevant. Who sent
>
> it is irrelevant. Who receives it is irrelevant. That it need be responded to is
>
> irrelevant. The only thing that is relevant is circulation, the addition to the pool. Any
>
> particular contribution remains secondary to the fact of circulation.[212]

Though I think that Dean overstates the case here a bit, there is something to her critique of those

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[212] Dean, "Communicative Capitalism," 58. She explicitly contrasts her position with Habermas: "Communication in communicative capitalism, then, is not, as Habermas would suggest, action oriented toward reaching understanding (Habermas 1984). In Habermas's model of communicative action, the use value of a message depends on its orientation. In sending a message, a sender intends for it to be received and understood. Any acceptance or rejection of the message depends on this understanding. Understanding is thus a necessary part of the communicative exchange. In communicative capitalism, however, the use value of a message is less important than its exchange value, its contribution to a larger pool, flow or circulation of content. A contribution need not be understood; it need only be repeated, reproduced, forwarded. Circulation is the context, the condition for the acceptance or rejection of a contribution" (58-9).

that would defend 'mere contribution' as isomorphic with sufficient political action. As Dean explains, there is a "registration effect" that makes people believe that "their contribution to circulating content is a kind of communicative action. They believe that they are active, maybe even that they are making a difference simply by clicking on a button, adding their name to a petition or commenting on a blog."[213] Whether or not users of blogs end their political participation at the shores of the URL is a question for empirical research, and one that I think Dean makes some unsupported generalizations about. However, her general claim about how circulation has overshot understanding in networked societies bears scrutiny, especially since it appears that administrative power has caught up with the lifeworld in figuring out how to flood the zone in order to manipulate public deliberation.

The clearest example of how administrative institutions have latched onto the strategy of flooding the zone is in the military information management efforts in the wake of 9/11 and during the war in Iraq. After 9/11, the Pentagon created the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI), whose "stated purpose was simple: to flood targeted areas with information."[214] The press soon excoriated the OSI for being a propaganda machine, eventually causing the office to be shut down. Though the office was shut down, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld later noted that the same goals were being pursued under different auspices.[215] During the war in Iraq, the same strategy of flooding the zone took center stage as Department of Defense outlets produced overwhelming amounts of information designed to emphasize how well the military operations

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[213] Dean, "Communicative Capitalism," 60. Dean relies on Slavoj Zizek's term "interpassivity" here to explain how this belief replaces political activity with a fetish object, in this case, blogs and other networked communication technologies. Zizek formulates interpassivity in *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).

[214] Dennis Murphy and James White, "Propaganda: Can a Word Decide a War?," *Parameters* (Autumn 2007), 23.

[215] See "Secretary Rumsfeld Media Availability En Route to Chile," *U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript*, November 18, 2002, http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3296.

and subsequent occupation was going. As Torie Clark relates in her memoir of her years as

Pentagon communications chief, flooding the zone was a key element in the Pentagon's efforts

to influence perceptions of the war.[216] More recently, a study written for the Joint Special

Operations University contemplates Pentagon efforts to get involved in the blogosphere. As the

report's authors explain, "sometimes numbers can be effective; hiring a block of bloggers to

verbally attack a specific person or promote a specific message may be worth considering;"

alternatively, they suggest, certain branches might consider supporting home-grown blogs that

appear independent but actually funnel on-message talking points from the Pentagon.[217] Though

this report does not prove that the Pentagon is currently undertaking these specific steps to

influence public argument in the blogosphere, the Department of Defense has set up a *Bloggers*

Roundtable which provides "source material" and access to military officials in live chats.[218]

Flooding the zone has not just been taken up as a strategy to control the perception of

U.S. military operations. It is on the cusp of becoming the new networked gospel for public

relations firms working on political campaigns. In the wake of the George Allen campaign

incident, where his derisive use of the racial epithet 'macaca' was caught on tape, posted to

YouTube, and widely circulated (contributing to his electoral defeat), campaign strategists are

developing tools to flood the zone in a way that frustrates spontaneous communication

coalescing on the periphery. One campaign strategist recently recommended that the Allen

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[216] Torie Clark, *Lipstick on a Pig: Winning In the No-Spin Era By Someone Who Knows the Game* (New York: Free Press, 2006), especially chapter 2, "Flood the Zone."

[217] James Kinniburgh and Dorothy Denning, "Blogs and Military Information Strategy," *JSOU Report* (June 2006), 20. They recognize the dangers in this strategy: "Credibility is the heart and soul of influence operations. In these cases, extra care must be taken to ensure plausible deniability and nonattribution, as well as employing a well-thought-out deception operation that minimizes the risks of exposure. Because of the potential blowback effect, information strategy should avoid planting false information as much as possible" (21-2).

[218] See *DoDLive: Bloggers Roundtable*, http://www.defenselink.mil/blogger/index.aspx. See also "Pentagon to Rework Public Relations Operation," *Washington Post,* October 31, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/30/AR2006103001336.html.

campaign should have flooded the zone in order to overwhelm curious searchers looking for the 'macaca video':

> To flood the zone, upload dozens and dozens of random videos which have absolutely nothing to do with the clip you're trying to make 'disappear.' The real strength of the clips you're uploading isn't to respond directly to the video, but to confuse the YouTube user and make it impossible for them to find the video they're looking for. The one thing every campaign can count on is that any web user has a slight case of undiagnosed ADD (attention deficit disorder). If they don't find what they're looking for seconds after the search has begun, they'll tire, and give up the search.[219]

This strategy is increasingly widespread, with public relations firms like Advantage Consulting now offering services to "flood the zone" with their specially trained "blog warriors" in order to "put your talking points on the blogosphere 24/7," because "today's blog attacks can be tomorrow's news" (see Figure 1).

Some attempts at artificially inducing an opinion cascade by 'blog warriors' such as those advertised by Advantage Consultants have been ferreted out by intrepid bloggers. In contrast to Dean's claim that contributions are valued *qua* contribution as participating in the circulation of public discourse, these astroturfing efforts have been exposed as artificial and illegitimate uses of the blogosphere's communicative power. Astroturfing has a long history in American politics,

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[219] David All, "Five Essential Tips for the YouTube Campaign Trail," *David All Group Blog*, June 10th, 2007, http://www.davidallgroup.com/2007/06/10/five-essential-tips-for-the-youtube-campaign-trail/.

but it is receiving a unique wrinkle in the new media environment that makes identities easier to conceal.[220] There are a number of instances where this process has occurred on blogs:

- Wal-Mart created a blog called "Working Families for Wal-Mart," which positioned itself as a grassroots advocacy group designed to rebut critics of Wal-Mart. It was, in fact, a joint effort between Wal-Mart and their public relations firm Edelman to counter the bad press Wal-Mart had been receiving online.[221] The blog, at www.forwalmart.com, has now been taken down.

- In the 2004 election cycle, bloggers got on the payroll of a few high profile races (and probably many others). Markos Moulitsas Zuniga and Jerome Armstrong were paid by Howard Dean's campaign while writing blog posts that praised his politics. While initially they did not disclose that they were on the payroll of Dean, they eventually did and have continued consulting with various other candidates—though the suspicion of *quid pro quo* persists.[222]

- John Thune, in a heated race with Tom Daschle for a Senate seat in South Dakota, hired two bloggers to critique negative press and create positive buzz for his campaign. Neither blogger disclosed they were on the payroll of the Republican nominee, though Thune's campaign account eventually revealed that the bloggers were being paid.[223] This revelation created a tempest in the blogosphere condemning this tactic as chicanery.

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[220] See the rich examples provided in chapter 6 of Jill Rettberg's *Blogging* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

[221] "PR Firm Admits It's Behind Wal-Mart Blogs," *CNN*, October 20, 2006, http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/20/news/companies/walmart_blogs/index.htm. This case is discussed more fully in David A. Craig, "Wal-Mart Public Relations in the Blogosphere," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 22 (2007): 215-28.

[222] K. Daniel Glover, "Bloggers Proliferate on Campaign Payrolls," *MSNBC*, October 31, 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15498843/.

[223] David Paul Kuhn, "Blogs: New Medium, Old Politics," *CBS*, December 8, 2004, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/12/08/politics/main659955.shtml.

- Sockpuppeting, the phenomena where someone adopts an online identity not their own to post comments on blogs, is another instance of flooding the zone. One of the most famous instances of sockpuppeting in the blogosphere is when Lee Siegel, a writer for *The New Republic*, was caught using the alias 'sprezzatura' to post comments on his own blog that defended himself against criticism. Siegel was suspended and his blog was shut down.[224]

What do these instances reveal about the nature of circulation and communicative capitalism? Well, in at least some instances, bloggers were able to identify artificial opinion cascades and delegitimize the rhetorical efforts of astroturfing, at some expense to the credibility of the organizations that were attempting to influence public debate. Certainly, bloggers have not been able to catch all instances of astroturfing, lending some credence to Dean's claim that circulation obviates the need for response and engagement. However, when astroturf blogs *are* found out, the amount of criticism lodged against them can be seen as a process whereby bloggers attempt to protect the norms which underline the value of their participation in public deliberation in the first place: namely, as coalescers of spontaneous communication coming from peripheral nodes of society. So, contra Dean, sometimes the 'artificial' addition of public discourse *fails,* as it is outed as an attempt to manipulate the democratic process. In these cases, communicative reflexivity works to undermines the 'mere circulation' of information and reassert the priority of communication coming from the lifeworld.

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[224] Maria Aspan, "New Republic Suspends an Editor for Attacks on Blog," *New York Times*, September 4, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/04/technology/04republic.html?ex=1315022400&en=cc629c6ec5d5805d&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss. Also see Alan Wirzbicki, "Political Bloggers Fear Publicists Will Infiltrate Sites," *Boston Globe,* February 23, 2007, http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/02/23/political_bloggers_fear_publicists_will_infiltrate_sites/.

The expansion of the rhetorical imaginary with 'flood the zone,' then, captures both the potential and the threat of communication in a network society. As an addition to the vocabulary of the network society, it can be used as a normative benchmark by which to distinguish actual processes of spontaneous communication from artificial attempts by institutions to overwhelm communicative power with money. In this way, communicative capitalism's absorption of all argument into the mere circulation of competing information memes can be resisted, if imperfectly.

Figure 1. Advertisement for Advantage Consultants, http://www.advantageconsultants.org.

CHAPTER 4—AMBIENT INTIMACY: SALAM PAX AND AFFECT IN PUBLIC LIFE

4.1 Introduction

On September 8, 2004, during the heat of the presidential campaign between George W. Bush and John Kerry, the newsmagazine *60 Minutes* televised a segment that called into question Bush's service in the National Guard during the 1970s. The Killian Memos, as they came to be called, were a collection of six documents that purported to show Bush's failure to submit to a physical examination and the subsequent pressure on Bush's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Jerry Killian, to give Bush a pass because he was from a well-connected family. In an election where national security credentials were paramount, these allegations could have been incredibly damaging for Bush's re-election bid. However, the Killian memos were debunked in part by a blogger named Buckhead at the *Free Republic*, a conservative hub for commentary. Buckhead asserted:

> every single one of these memos to file is in a proportionally spaced font, probably Palatino or Times New Roman. In 1972 people used typewriters for this sort of thing, and typewriters used monospaced fonts. The use of proportionally spaced fonts did not come into common use for office memos until the introduction of laser printers, word processing software, and personal computers. They were not widespread until the mid to late 90's. Before then, you needed typesetting equipment, and that wasn't used for personal memos to file. Even the Wang systems that were dominant in the mid 80's used monospaced fonts. I am

saying these documents are forgeries, run through a copier for 15 generations to make them look old.[1]

Buckhead's claim quickly spread to other conservative blogs, like *Little Green Footballs* and *Powerline*. Eventually, other national media picked it up and CBS soon had a serious controversy on its hands about the veracity of the memos.

As the media circus about these memos began, former Vice-President of CBS News Jonathan Klein went on *The O'Reilly Factor* to defend CBS and the traditional broadcast media against the rowdy critics online. Echoing what had become a regular way to mark off the blogosphere from the institutional media, he said "you couldn't have a starker contrast between the multiple layers of check and balances [at '60 Minutes'] and a guy sitting in his living room in his pajamas writing."[2] Condensed in this one sentence is a widespread caricature of blogging as irresponsible, because there is no editorial control, and amateurish, because it can be done by anyone. This figure of the blogger, recirculated in various iterations throughout all types of media, not-so-subtly suggests that bloggers are unhinged and thus untrustworthy; unprofessional and thus unworthy. It neatly cohered with the stereotypical image of the computer geek pounding away at the keyboard out of frustration. This stereotype of the 'pajamahadeen' introducing chaos to an otherwise stable system offers an entry point to consider the ways in which public discourse has traditionally been figured as an enterprise grounded in a particular vision of

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[1] Buckhead, comment in response to "Documents Suggest Special Treatment for Bush in Guard [post 47]," *Free Republic*, September 8, 2004, 11:59 p.m., http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/fnews/1210662/posts?page=47#47.

[2] Quoted in Jonathan Last, "What Blogs Hath Wrought," *The Weekly Standard,* September 27, 2004, http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/640pgolk.asp?pg=2. The pajama/parents' basement stereotype has staying power. Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee, explained that most of the criticism of her during the campaign was fueled by "those bloggers in their parents' basement just talkin' garbage;" see Julie Bosman, "Palin Defends Herself in Fox Interview," *The Caucus (New York Times)*, November 10, 2008, http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/10/palin-defends-herself-in-fox-interview/.

rational-critical argumentation—and the ways in which blogging represents a contestation of this dominant paradigm.[3]

In this chapter, I want to try to make sense of how blogging produces identification between global strangers. If the Trent Lott affair showed how blogs activate certain faculties of critical public reason, then the case study of Salam Pax, a blogger living in Baghdad before the war in Iraq, illustrates how blogging circulates affect into public life, creating intimate relationships and imagined communities. This chapter argues that Salam Pax's rhetorical interventions contest the dominant conceptualization of citizenship as an impartial, reason-driven enterprise; in fact, it was his use of highly partial, emotionally charged rhetoric that drew attention to the complexities of life in Iraq during late 2002 and early 2003. While the structure of feeling that dominated modernist sensibilities was grounded in the objective, dispassionate, impartial norms of public reason, networked societies embrace a sensibility that features emotion much more prominently. Consequently, norms of subjectivity, passion, and partiality have been revalued in public deliberation.[4] Salam Pax provides a test case for this claim because he was an oft-cited participant in public deliberation about the 2003 war in Iraq whose argumentation style violated strict norms of rational-critical debate but was consequential nonetheless.

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[3] This is a term coined by Jim Geraghty at the *National Review Online* in response to Klein's comments. See "A Communique to the Pajamahadeen," September 22, 2004, http://www.nationalreview.com/kerry/ kerry200409221122.asp.

[4] This claim is one way to read theorists like Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982) and Eric Havelock in *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986) who suggest that electronic expressiveness reintroduces features of speech into modes of electronic writing. See Sharmila Pixy Ferris, "Writing Electronically: The Effects of Computers on Traditional Writing," *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 8 (2002), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=jep; view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0008.104. In the context of the internet and blogging, recent scholarship has underlined the revaluation of personal testimony and emotion. See Christopher Flook, "The Emotional Revolution Through Digital Media: The Internet as a Virtual Social Reality," *The Review of Communication* (Jan.-Apr. 2006): 52-61 and Matthew Hughey, "Virtual (Br)others and (Re)sisters," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 37 (October 2008): 528-60.

Who is Salam Pax? The answer to that question is complex. We do not know his real name. Salam Pax, a pseudonym that plays on the Arabic and Latin word for 'peace,' began his blog, *Where is Raed?*, as a way to stay in touch with his friend Raed who was studying abroad.[5] Though we do not know his 'real' identity, we actually know a lot about Salam Pax because of his blogged self-revelations. At the time, he worked in an architecture design firm. He previously spent a considerable amount of time living overseas. He liked red wine. His musical tastes were eclectic. His English was impeccable, equaled by his command of popular culture and wry humor. Early blog posts focus on complaints about his job and social engagements with friends and family, but as war clouds gathered, Pax would concentrate an increasing amount of energy relating tidbits about life in pre-war Iraq.[6] *Where is Raed?* was, for a time, the only English-language blog coming from inside Iraq that narrated life under the specter of invasion.

Salam Pax's weblog became the most-linked to blog in the then brief history of the blogosphere.[7] Popularity in the blogosphere translated to mass media coverage of his blog in print media, including stories in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. Salam Pax became the "virtual personification of Iraq," contributing to his meteoric rise in the blogosphere.[8] He was famously called the Anne Frank of the war[9] and its Elvis.[10] Eventually, Salam Pax netted a book deal and a fortnightly column in *The Guardian*. The persona cultivated

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[5] Salam Pax, *Dear Raed*, http://www.dearraed.blogspot.com.

[6] Stanley Miller, "Words of War: Internet Journals Offer Glimpses From Iraq," *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, April 1, 2003, LexisNexis.

[7] As reported by Leo Hickman, "Baghdad Calling," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2003, http://lifeandhealth.guardian.co.uk/experts/leohickman/story/0,,1659959,00.html.

[8] Elizabeth Wynhausen, "Salam Pax Succumbs to Unbearable Weight of Blogging," *Australian*, May 20 2004, 17.

[9] Nick Denton, "Salam," May 30, 2003, http://www.nickdenton.org/archives/005924.html#005924.

[10] Peter Maass, "How Do I Know Baghdad's Famous Blogger Exists? He Worked For Me," *Slate*, June 2, 2003, http://slate.msn.com/id/2083847/.

by Salam's writing coincided with "a deep dissatisfaction with Big Media, a hunger for connection and community, and a yearning for political passion and for the writer's voice."[11] 'Voice,' in the meta-commentary about blogging, is an oft-used term that codes the presence of emotion. I want to briefly identify some invocations of voice and emotion in the commentary about Salam Pax to underline the distinctions between public deliberation in a networked society and the rational-critical debate preferred by Habermas' bourgeois public sphere.

Salam Pax's blogging was often put in the context of the dramatic changes that an internetworked society was having on global communication. Bloggers were now providing first-hand, immediate, and regular updates on life in a war zone to a global public. Howard Kurtz, the *Washington Post* columnist who credited blogs with pushing the Trent Lott story, wrote

> for all the saturation coverage of the invasion of Iraq, this has become the first true Internet war, with journalists, analysts, soldiers, a British lawmaker, an Iraqi exile and a Baghdad resident using the medium's lightning speed to cut through the fog of war. The result is idiosyncratic, passionate and often profane, with the sort of intimacy and attitude that are all but impossible in newspapers and on television … The strength of this new form of communication is the sheer variety of voices.[12]

What makes this assertion by Kurtz interesting is not necessarily the masses of newly awakened voices online, but the ability of those blogging voices to convey intimacy and attitude.[13] In this

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[11] Matt Welch, "The New Amateur Journalists Weigh In," *Columbia Journalism Review* (September/October 2003), http://www.cjr.org/issues/2003/5/blog-welch.asp.

[12] Howard Kurtz, "'Webloggers,' Signing on as War Correspondents," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2003, LexisNexis.

[13] Kaye Trammell and Ana Keshelashvili suggest that blogging's ability to reveal the 'backstage' of relationships and thought processes is a crucial animating element in the blogosphere; see their "Examining the New Influencers: A Self-Presentation Study of A-List blogs," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 82

passage, Salam Pax functions as a condensation point for understandings about how digital

information technology re-introduces intimate-emotional norms into public dialogue.

The salience of 'voice' became increasingly prevalent in press accounts of what was

starting to be called 'warblogging.' From January to March 2003, the drumbeat for war in Iraq

was getting increasingly loud—in part because warbloggers were advancing and dissecting

claims about the virtues and pitfalls of invading Iraq. Blogs were seen as "a forum for fresh

voices and viewpoints" that can be "powerful tools in two ways: as one-stop clearinghouses of

information and links, and—in the case of blogs emanating from a war zone—as unfiltered, up-

to-the-minute sources of firsthand observation."[14] Like new media in prior war zones, blogs were

"providing a different voice to coverage of the war against Iraq."[15] This association with voice

captured the popular imagination as well: "bloggers are often eloquent in the way that those who

are not self-consciously polished often are—raw, uncensored, and energized by the sound of

their newly awakened voices."[16] Scholars like Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn have also

employed the language of voices by noting that "the current diversification of communication

channels … is politically important because it expands the range of voices that can be heard in a

national debate, ensuring that no one voice can speak with unquestioned authority."[17]

The invocation of voice in the coverage by the press during this time often pointed to the

use of emotion-laden language or intimate communication styles that differ from the traditional

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(Winter 2005): 968-92. Janet Alexanian makes a similar point about the intersections of publicity and intimacy in her "Publicly Intimate Online: Iranian Web Logs in Southern California," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 26 (2006): 134-45.

[14] James Herbert, "Alternative Source for War News: Internet 'Blogs,'" *San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 20, 2003, LexisNexis.

[15] *Houston Chronicle*, "War Blogs," March 27, 2003, LexisNexis.

[16] David Kline, "I Blog, Therefore I Am," in *Blog! How the Newest Media Revolution is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture,* ed. David Kline and Dan Burstein (New York: CDS Books, 2005), 249.

[17] See the edited volume by Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn, *Democracy and New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003)*,* 2.

rational-critical norms of public debate. As one journalist covering the Salam Pax phenomenon noted,

> What politics there are tend to come in ironic asides or earnest explanations
> perhaps born of that most credible of youthful emotions, defeated idealism.
> 'Peace and Security. Ha,' Pax wrote in an entry dated Oct. 23, quoting a U.S.-
> British draft of a U.N. resolution. 'Bomb us already, stop pussyfooting.' (Several
> days later, after another Internet writer, from Indiana, had interpreted this remark
> as favorable to 'prospective liberation,' Pax provided a helpful link to
> dictionary.com's entry for 'sarcasm.')[18]

As this summary explanation of Salam Pax's blog signals, bloggers are often constructed as injecting passion and emotion into public writing. Salam Pax's blog offered "a personal account of the war from the Iraqi capital, unencumbered by reporting restrictions."[19] According to press accounts, **"the blog has put a personal face on the war"**[20] through Salam's "idiosyncratic personal descriptions of Baghdad."[21] Salam Pax himself, in an interview after the major combat operations, noted the intimate interpretations that are blogging's forte: "people always ask whether blogging will be the next journalism, but what's good about blogs is that they are a

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[18] Tom Drury, "Blogs Over Baghdad, or: Where is Salam Pax," *St. Petersburg Times*, March 30, 2003, LexisNexis.

[19] Peter Thal Larsen, "Bloggers Take the War on Iraq on a Journey into Cyberspace," *Financial Times*, April 2, 2003, LexisNexis.

[20] Michelle Delio, "Iraq Blog: Hubbub Over a Headlock," *Wired,* March 26, 2003, http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,58206,00.html.

[21] Matt Welch, "The New Age of Alternative Media," *Columbia Journalism Review* (September/October 2003), LexisNexis.

personal view of things. You put blogs around the news. You have news which is supposed to be impartial, and then you get different views of the same event from blogs."[22]

The association of blogging with diary writing and youth during the time of Salam Pax's blog emphasized the partiality and subjectivity of blogs. For one commentator at the time, "blogs are cyber reality shows, widely read diaries that publicly detail the social drama and fluctuating emotions of young lives. They are often scoured for personal mention, and they spare no language or feelings."[23] Early adopters of blogs used them "to do what they once did through personal diaries, phone conversations and hangout sessions: cementing friendships with classmates, seeking new friends, venting, testing social limits, getting support and getting all emo ('highly emotional' in blog-speak)."[24] Press accounts regularly noted that "the defining characteristic of blogging is its highly personal nature."[25] The press also situated blogs as highly subjective sites for self-expression: "like a journal, 'blogs' tend to be highly personal, running the gamut from short musings to angst-filled rants."[26] Consequently, "online journals have a bad reputation: emotional train wrecks and narcissistic ramblings plastered on the Web for all to see."[27]

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[22] James Norman, "International Internet Sensation Ready To Get Back To His Day Job," *The Age* (Melbourne), May 22, 2004, LexisNexis.

[23] Rachel Simmons, "Cliques, Clicks, Bullies And Blogs," *Washington Post,* September 28, 2003, LexisNexis.

[24] Janet Kornblum, "Teens Wear Their Hearts on Their Blog," *USA Today*, October 31, 2005, LexisNexis. On youth use of blogging see Amanda Lenhart, Mary Madden, Alexandra Macgill, Aaron Smith, "Teens and Social Media," *Pew Internet and American Life Project*, December 17, 2007, http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/230/report_display.asp.

[25] Antony Loewenstein, "The Blogs of War Conquer a Wider World," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 21, 2003, LexisNexis.

[26] Mark Huffman, "'Blog' Trend Provides Virtual Soapbox,'" *United Press International*, January 18, 2003, LexisNexis.

[27] David Gallagher, "A Site to Pour Out Emotions, and Just About Anything Else," *New York Times*, September 5, 2002, LexisNexis.

It should be unsurprising that young people use blogs to amplify and make sense of their emotional lives. However, the danger according to some critics of blogging is that these expressions of youthful exuberance ultimately habituate citizens into hyper-emotional patterns of public discourse. These criticisms replicate the standard bifurcation of reason and emotion that have structured modernist sensibilities. To wit, some say that "the way we argue now has been shaped by cable news and Weblogs; it's all 'gotcha' commentary and attributions of bad faith. No emotion can be too angry and no exaggeration too incredible."[28] Sometimes this sentiment is articulated in comparison to the more 'objective' modes of journalism:

> The blogs and the 'citizen journalism' are all opinion, emotion, and reaction, not news. Someone still has to tell people what is going on. It takes skills to do that. It requires the ability to quickly analyze mounds of data to figure out what is most important; to focus on an event, not one's own reaction to it; and to tell a story in a clear, concise and powerful way. In other words, it requires journalists who have honed their craft through practice and training.[29]

The self-conception of objectivity and careful crafting that animates journalism is thus constructed as a normative ideal for 'news.' Real objectivity, of course, is as impossible to sustain as it is critical to mainstream journalistic self-fashioning.[30] While objectivity is a founding value of journalism, partiality, emotion, and intimacy are more acceptable norms in the blogosphere, as the following account makes clear:

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[28] Alan Wolfe, "The New Pamphleteers," *New York Times*, July 11, 2004, LexisNexis.

[29] Kelly Toughill, "'Citizen Journalism' is Not News," *Toronto Star*, March 3, 2007, LexisNexis.

[30] This claim is something of a commonplace in critical journalism studies and one that I take up a little more in-depth later in this chapter. For a basic outline of the inadequacy and unattainability of the norm of objectivity in journalism, see Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978) and "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism," *Journalism* 2 (2001): 149-170; David Mindich, *Just the Facts: How 'Objectivity' Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

If anything, the finest bloggers are much more transparent about their biases.

Many mainstream journalists and columnists convince themselves and readers

that they are simply disinterested and objective observers of events, without

political affiliations or motives. In reality, of course, they are often political hacks

with an axe to grind. Bloggers are no different, but they will acknowledge past

associations and inherent biases. Such moves increase reader respect and

contribute to the development of a democratic media ideal. It does, of course, take

time to find blogs that you trust, whose sources are impeccable and traceable. The

violence of emotion on display in the blogosphere is sometimes akin to being

punched in the head at a World Wrestling Federation final and then going back

the next day for more. It's a blood sport with a surprisingly addictive personality.[31]

The partiality of blogging serves as a counter-point to the so-called objectivity of institutional

media. These dueling orientations of objectivity and partiality need not be pitted against each

other. In fact, each might be seen as performing a valuable democratic service. As Robert

Hariman and John Lucaites articulate, "print media virtues of disembodied assertion, systematic

organization of ideas, and dispassionate tone," while effective in performing some democratic

functions, are often "insufficient to motivate collective action."[32] The partiality and passion

present on blogs, on the other hand, might move people to participate more fully in democratic

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[31] Antony Loewenstein, "Bloggers of the World, Unite," *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 20, 2007, LexisNexis.

[32] Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 14. This isn't to say that the institutional media do not often amplify certain voices of impartiality. First-hand observers, experts, public intellectuals, opinion writers, 'persons on the street' and others all have their voices represented in news media reports. Yet, the amplification of these voices usually functions as a hook, in the lede paragraph for example, or as part of a point-counterpoint with competing voices, thus folding personal reflections back into the objective, dispassionate norms of the institutional media.

public life.[33] Kris Cohen has marked this shift from the purported objectivity of print media by noting "blogs appear to be shifting the balance of personality and impersonality in the operation of publics and in the production of public subjects—which is to suggest that blogs are shifting the grounds for selfhood tout court."[34]

What does all this invocation of voice mean? Rhetorician Eric King Watts situates voice as a trope that signifies civic agency, a process whereby citizens are able to constitute themselves and others as deliberating agents in a democratic society.[35] He explains that acknowledgements of voice are

> a particular type of speech phenomenon that pronounces the ethical problems and obligations incumbent in community building and arouses in persons and groups the frustrations, sufferings, and joys of such commitments. Rhetorical 'voice' is not a unitary *thing* that inhabits texts of persons either singly or collectively. It is itself a *happening* that is invigorated by a public awareness of the ethical and emotional concerns of discourse. Saying that persons or groups have 'voice' does not offer it as a unidirectional, primordial and autonomous projection out of the body, nor does it become a semiotic project. Rather, speakers can be endowed with 'voice' as a function of a public acknowledgement of the ethics of speaking

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[33] This coheres with Diane Mutz's conclusions in *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) that hearing multiperspectival accounts of political controversies can stunt political participation, whereas partisan communication networks motivate participation in collective action.

[34] Kris Cohen, "A Welcome for Blogs," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Culture Studies* (June 2006): 166.

[35] Michael Huspeck and Kathleen Kendall, "On Withholding Political Voice: An Analysis of the Political Vocabulary of a 'Nonpolitical' Speech Community," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (February 1991), 1.

and the emotions of others. This recognition is often intertextual and mediated.

'Voice,' then, is the *sound* of specific experiential *encounters* in civic life.[36]

This is a rich conceptualization of voice. First, it is important to note that voice is a function of

acknowledgement, not vocalization. 'Voice' "announces the value and beauty of 'otherness'"

and accretes prominence as it circulates through public culture.[37] Occasionally, a particular voice

will perform a rhetorical interruption that "prompts a reappraisal of where they are culturally,

what they are doing, and where they are going."[38] In this way, certain voices orient focus, or

following Richard Lanham, commandeer attention economies for a certain interval. Salam Pax's

voice, extended through his blogging, became a touchstone for heated public debate because his

voice represented such a unique global encounter.

Conceptualizing civic encounters through recourse to the metaphor of 'voice' is

especially appropriate given the relatively disembodied communication enabled by blogging at

the time of the military conflict in Iraq. Though we should be careful in underplaying the

material and embodied features of blog encounters, Eric King Watts and Ananda Mitra suggest

that communication scholars might profitably configure cyberspace as "a discursive space

produced by the creative work of people whose spatial locations are ambiguous and

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[36] Eric King Watts, "'Voice' and 'Voicelessness' in Rhetorical Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (May 2001), 185, emphasis in original. Watts explicitly notes the applicability of thinking about voice in the context of web-generated public discourse: "if 'voice' is to be meaningful to rhetorical studies it has to be capable of salvaging the *communal* features of discourse for the challenge to rhetoric over the horizon is to find new ways to 'keep it real' in a fast-approaching virtual reality" (192).

[37] Watts, "'Voice' and 'Voicelessness,'" 192.

[38] Thomas Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, 258. See also Michael Hyde and Kenneth Rufo, "The Call of Conscience, Rhetorical Interruptions, and the Euthanasia Controversy," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* (February 2000): 1-23. While I object to Hyde and Rufo's privileging of face-to-face communication within their theoretical rubric, their sophisticated analysis of the interplay between rhetorical interruption and acknowledgement suggests how 'voice' is operationalized in public controversies.

provisional."[39] If cyberspace is essentially a discursive realm, in which people engage in a wide-

variety of sense-making and interpretation, then online interlocutors can use "their voices … [to]

create cyberspace where speaking agents can comfortably dwell, and create their ethos or

'dwelling space,' which they inhabit and from where they can address the public sphere."[40]

Specifically, in the context of blogs, Mitra explains that "individuals are able to voice themselves

through a blog and that voice has the potential of being heard by the entire community of people

who are on the web."[41]As web-users filter through the multiplicity of voices online, one standard

of judgment used to steer attention is based on "how eloquently the voice can address the

reader's emotion and create a 'proper feeling' about the issue."[42]

This link between voice, eloquence, and emotion signals how the concept of voice is

tightly weaved within a series of emotional registers that are present in public life. When a public

recognizes a 'voice,' as Watts notes, it is often because passions are aroused. The experience of

hearing great rhetors—an Elizabeth Cady Stanton or John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King,

live or on a recording—often stimulates emotional responses in listeners. As people start to

attend to a particular voice, they are often moved (often differently!) by the affective experiences

of encounter. One reason that rhetorical studies has maintained such an interest in voice is

because doing so acknowledges the role of affect and emotion in public culture. As rhetoricians

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[39] Ananda Mitra and Eric King Watts, "Theorizing Cyberspace: The Idea of Voice Applied to the Internet Discourse," *New Media and Society* 4 (2002), 486.

[40] Mitra and Watts, "Theorizing Cyberspace," 486.

[41] Ananda Mitra, "Using Blogs to Create Cybernetic Space: Examples from People of Indian Origin," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14 (2008), 460. According to one study, blog users that detect a stronger 'voice' report increased trust and satisfaction; see Tom Kelleher and Barbara M. Miller, "Organizational Blogs and the Human Voice: Relational Strategies and Relational Outcomes," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11 (2006): 395-414. Jimmy Sanderson has explored how bloggers experiment with different voices as part of their overall self-presentation strategy in "The Blog is Serving Its Purpose: Self-Presentation Strategies on 38pitches.com," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 912-36.

[42] Mitra and Watts, "Theorizing Cyberspace," 494.

from classical Greece onwards have noted, public persuasion cannot be explained through recourse to rational-critical argument alone. Yet, a central conceit of the modernist social imaginary is the effective cordoning off of emotion from the public realm.

One way to understand the meta-talk about Salam Pax, voice, and emotion, then, is by positing a shift in the underlying structure of feeling between modernist societies and networked ones. Raymond Williams describes the structure of feeling as "the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living."[43] The idea of a structure of feeling, in other words, attempts to capture the emotional and affective investments of a time. Examining the official doctrines, institutional histories, or documents of an era cannot reveal structures of feeling.[44] A structure of feeling can be better understood by looking at 'unofficial' media forms produced in more personal contexts. As cultural studies scholars Jennifer Harding and Deirdre Pribram explain, "the constitution of feeling and its part in the creation of subjectivity within contemporary power relations can be traced through an examination of journals, diaries, and other forms of personal writing."[45] I would count blogs like *Dear Raed* amongst these forms of personal writing, and follow Trish Roberts-Miller's suggestion that one major impact of blogging is to "facilitate the expressive public sphere" that represents an evolution in the traditional role of the public sphere.[46]

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[43] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001 [1961]), 63.

[44] Jennifer Harding and E. Deirdre Pribram, "The Power of Feeling: Locating Emotions in Culture," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5 (2002), 417.

[45] Harding and Pribram, "Power of Feeling," 421.

[46] Trish Roberts-Miller, "Parody Blogging and the Call of the Real," *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Weblogs,* eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman, http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/parody_blogging.html.

I plan on analyzing blogging's challenge to the traditional rational-critical public sphere by analyzing Salam Pax's enactment of cynicism and melancholy, two affects often theorized in the popular press as indicative of blogging's emotional range. Two scholarly books on blogging have echoed this popular connection. Geert Lovink's *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture* theorizes that cynicism is the dominant affect of the blogosphere. For Lovink, a professor of new media at the University of Amsterdam and media activist, bloggers are cynics that empty out traditional meaning structures, filling public space with unmoored critique instead. Michael Keren's *Blogosphere*, on the other hand, posits that melancholy is the dominant affect of bloggers. According to Keren, a political science professor at the University of Calgary, bloggers are verbal fetishists disengaged from social structures that mediate real change and thus reinforce atomistic forms of political engagement. Lovink and Keren's critiques are perhaps necessary to balance the blog triumphalism that often accompanies theorizing blogging; moreover, they are right to direct scholarly debate to the emotional implications of this new media form. And their diagnosis is at least partially on point. Cynicism and melancholy are indeed emotions that are present on Salam Pax's blog, and are certainly present on blogs in general.

Their twin critiques, though, situate emotionally resonant blogging as debilitating for public deliberation. Lovink and Keren can profitably be read as adherents to that particular structure of feeling that obtained in modernity. But if the structure of feeling has shifted in a network society, they essentially are attempting to import norms of deliberation that were successful in one public culture into another—but those round pegs simply won't fit in to contemporary square holes. However, the characterizations made by Lovink and Keren are useful condensations of more pointed critiques that often emerge in various media and so are

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worthy of serious scrutiny to better understand how the emotions present in the blogosphere fit

into public deliberation. That blogging is driven by essentially cynical actors trying to gain fame,

attention, and possibly a living has become a commonplace in public discourse about blogging.

Likewise, the image of social isolates living in their parents' basement and experiencing life

vicariously 'online' regularly recurs as a caricature of the blogger. As I will show, Lovink's

assessment of blogging as dominated by cynicism has some merit, as does Keren's excursus on

the melancholic blogger. Yet, it seems to me, that both Lovink and Keren greatly oversimplify

the affective registers that prevail in the blogosphere. I find it hard to believe that a single affect

predominates in a single medium; rather, bloggers (like everyone else) are constantly articulating

different feeling-states, which emerge in different voices, at various points.[47] Bloggers might

well reflect the prevalent cynicism and melancholy of the dominant culture, but they never do so

exclusively because the translation of subjective human experience is simply too rich and varied.

What I intend to do, instead of merely suggesting the wide range of emotional

expressiveness available on blogs, is to recuperate both cynicism and melancholy from a

rhetorical perspective by situating them as two voices that emerge from Salam Pax's blogging.

Rather than assuming that certain emotions entail specific social and political consequence, I

argue that cynicism and melancholy ought to be seen as having specific rhetorical effects. I

recognize that cynicism and melancholy are prominent affective orientations on the blogosphere,

but I don't see them as necessarily undermining deliberation. Rather, they draw attention to

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[47] Two clever information visualization art projects illustrate the dynamic range of affects present in the blogosphere. We Feel Fine, at wefeelfine.org, culled blogs in 2005 for descriptions of feeling-states. There are thousands of bubbles in the We Feel Fine applet that shows almost every imaginable feeling; by clicking on the bubble, a snippet of blog text pops up with a fuller clipping of that emotion in context. The Dumpster, a similar project at http://artport.whitney.org/commissions/thedumpster/, scanned blogs that mentioned recent break-ups of romantic relationships and collected them in a similar fashion to demonstrate the different, swirling feelings that bloggers self-report.

problems in the lifeworld that deserve more complex thematization. Critics that see emotion-laden discourse as troubling for public deliberation often have an idealized and impossible model of deliberation that artificially splits reason off from emotion. I would rather work to think about how emotion can be drawn into the circuit of communicative rationality to reflect the richness of human experience. Instead of seeing cynicism and melancholy as complex emotion-constellations that deform public discourse, I suggest that we see them as rhetorical interventions that function to draw attention to strangers in the lifeworld. I argue that the ultimate effect of the constant cycling of affect into public life through blogs is a production of 'ambient intimacy.' Ambient intimacy adds to the grammar of the blogosphere by capturing how stranger sociability facilitates the formation and transformation of (potentially global) publics over time.

Before examining Lovink and Keren's critiques, it is important to situate voice, emotion, and intimacy in the context of the public and private distinction in classical Greece and the bourgeois public sphere. By examining the structures of feeling in these two different deliberative cultures, I hope to distill the key shifts from modernist imaginaries to networked ones. From there, I examine Lovink's critique and then Keren's. In each case, I try to recuperate emotion from a rhetorical vantage point in order to identify ways in which certain functions of public deliberation might be fulfilled. I then delve into the ways in which these tensions illuminate features of the networked imaginary and conclude with a section developing the concept of ambient intimacy.

4.2 Emotion in Classical Greece and the Bourgeois Public Sphere

Lines demarcating public life from private life have, historically, fluctuated to accommodate the broader needs of a particular society. Shifts in the relationship between public and private occur because of changing socio-cultural standards of appropriateness, alterations in

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social and economic relations, and new technologies that blur the traditional lines between public and private. What is usually at stake in the divide between public and private is nothing less than the very nature of social order.[48] Democratic public culture is highly invested in this public-private boundary work, primarily because democratic legitimacy traditionally finds purchase in an appropriate relationship between the public and private. Private concerns ought to find some public redress, though not all private concerns merit a public hearing. Moreover, private life can habituate individuals into democratic norms and serve as a practice site for later public interventions; alternatively, it can affirm authoritarian and anti-democratic practices. Publicity and privacy are also tightly coupled with reason and emotion, respectively. Publicity has traditionally been associated with the public use of reason, and privacy has traditionally protected a sphere of intimate-emotional communication.

In ancient Greece, during the heyday of Aristotle, the idealized relationship between the *oikos* and the *polis* provided one suitable-for-the-times relationship between private and public. The *oikos* was the household, a foundational unit where much of the (re)productive work took place. The three basic relationships in the *oikos* were master and slave, husband and wife, and father and children. This unapologetically patriarchal organization structured society meaningfully, despite what we now consider to be untenable orientations toward various types of servitude. The male head of the *oikos* was seen as the natural 'monarchical' head because virtues were distributed more generously in him. Women, slaves, and children had some degree of virtue, but they should "partake" in them "only in such manner and degree as is required by each

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[48] Annette Kuhn, "Public Versus Private: The Case of Indecency and Obscenity," *Leisure Studies* 3 (1984): 53-65.

for the fulfillment of his duty" (1260a.8).[49] The *oikos* was charged with habituating its members into this kind of appropriate conduct:

> inasmuch as every family is a part of a state, and these relationships are the parts
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> of a family, and the virtue of the part must have regard to the virtue of the whole,
>
> women and children must be trained by education with an eye to the constitution,
>
> if the virtues of either of them are supposed to make any difference in the virtues
>
> of the state. And they must make a difference: for the children grow up to be
>
> citizens, and half the free persons in a state are women (1260b.15-16).[50]

This is an early instantiation of the commonplace 'the children are our future': private life must prepare the future citizen for public deeds through moral training in the professed values of the time. Of course, only men could hold public office, and do public speaking, in the official zones of deliberation. As classicist Brendan Nagle describes, "*oikoi* were expected to internalize and reproduce in their own micro-environments the ideology that characterized the constitution or *politeia* of their individual cities."[51] The over-arching ideology of the Greek *polis* was, in many ways, founded on the bifurcation of reason and emotion represented by the differing views of Plato and Aristotle.

The divide between Plato and Aristotle on emotion is, of course, almost definitive of the debate about properly public and properly private uses of reasoning. These themes are so familiar they need only a sketch: Plato believed the *hoi polloi* were motivated more by unreasoned *pathe* than elegant *logos*. For this reason, poets had no place in a Republic, for they

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[49] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola, NY: Dover Press, 2000), 51.

[50] Aristotle, *Politics*, 53.

[51] D. Brendan Nagle, *The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6.

played to the emotions of the lowest common denominator. The rhetoricians fared little better,

for what they taught was sophistry rather than real knowledge. Emotional appeals cheapen both

speaker and listener and distract from more proper ways to govern. Aristotle, in contrast, tried to

recuperate emotion by linking it to cognitive processes. According to him, felt emotions direct

cognition. Feeling unsafe on a dark street at night isn't absurd—it's a feeling that signals one

should take some precautions. To move people cognitively requires capturing them emotionally.

Thus, appealing to *doxa* (public opinions, commonplaces, and shared feelings) was essential to

the activity of persuasion.[52] Reason and emotion, in Aristotle's formulation, were not necessarily

at odds, especially given rhetoric's capacity to challenge and enlarge received *doxa*. Aristotle's

teachings presume "a contoured world of emotional investments" that charge language and

identity with meaning.[53] This complementarity was both more realistic, in that it taught students

how to think about persuasion according to how people were actually moved, and richer, in that

it offered substantial resources for persuasion.

Participants in the bourgeois public sphere eventually eroded this complementarity so

central to Aristotelian teachings. Despite the early recognition of emotion in persuasion by

modernist political theorists, the norms of publicity squeezed emotion into a new world: the

intimate realm.[54] Emotion received a modernist treatment as passive states that could be analyzed

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[52] For an overview of the relationship between rhetoric and emotion, see Michael Hyde, "Emotion and Human Communication: A Rhetorical, Scientific, and Philosophical Picture," *Communication Quarterly* (Spring 1984): 120-132.

[53] Daniel Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3. See also W.W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion* (London: Duckworth Publishers, 2002 [1975]).

[54] David Hume, for example, famously argued that "Reason is, and only ought to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." Early modern thinkers often tried to harness reason to the passions—thus their interest in rhetoric as an art. Yet, as the liberal-modern worldview advanced, emotion was eventually sequestered to intimate realms. This made the emotion-reason split almost definitive of the liberal democratic governance in the modern age, and created conditions for a systematic neglect of theorizing emotion in Western civilizations. For explanations of this development, see Simon Johnson Williams,

through scientific method.[55] This intellectual development interlocked with a sociological one. As Habermas explains, it was during the modern age that the categories of public (the literary and 'political'), private (economic), and intimate (conjugal family) began to have greater traction as organizing principles for social order and, more importantly for our purposes, norms of deliberation. In the same way that the *oikos* prepared ancient Greeks to participate in the *polis*, the intimate sphere was considered to be a place where public selves might be better cultivated.[56] Yet, the intimate sphere's cultivation of feeling and emotion was not, in the self-conception of the bourgeois at the time, to spill over into rational-critical debate except as the general facilitator of humanist principles like love and freedom which would theoretically provide a *telos* for public deliberation.

Put another way, the bourgeois public sphere reconfigured the Greek *oikos-polis* legacy to fit their own needs, absorbing this "ideological template" into more specifically modern ways

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Emotions and Social Theory: Corporeal Reflections on the (Ir)Rational (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), especially chapter 2, "Modernity and Its Discontents: Reason Versus Emotion?" Pasi Falk's *The Consuming Body* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994) explores how the emotions were more openly performed in premodern times until they were supplanted by the more modernist self-control explored by Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process: History of Manners* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994 [1939]). Robert Solomon's *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday,1993 [1976]) situates the marginalization of the emotions in the complex mix of rationalist and theological influences that dominated early capitalism. Neo-Stoicism's influence on Christianity, as articulated most precisely by Augustine, contributed to modernity's division and sublimation of emotion; see Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Larry Frohman, "Neo-Stoicism and the Transition to Modernity in William Dilthey's Philosophy of History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (April 1995): 263-87. More recently, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites have argued that "modern civic order is based on muted affect – that is, on the containment of emotionality, and especially negative emotions, to private life and its institutions of family, church, clinic, and television;" see their "Dissent and Emotional Management in a Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31 (2001), 6.

[55] Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially chapter 4, "The Scottish Creation of 'The Emotions': David Hume, Thomas Brown, Thomas Chalmers." Dixon argues that 'emotion' became a more meaningful category of analysis as it was secularized and made an object of orderly inquiry. The emotions as we understand them, then, are products of the operating logic of modernity itself, whereas a more metaphysical and less tameable conceptualization of the passions had previously held sway. See the edited collection by Stephen Gaukroger, *The Soft Underbelly of Reason: The Passions in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1998) and Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[56] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 47.

of organizing self-governance.[57] As Habermas explains, the development of reason was historically necessary to legitimize self-governance:

> the bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason.[58]

The public sphere forged private opinions into public ones through layered episodes of shared discourse. This process was set in motion by an orientation toward a common humanity aided by the intimate sphere through engagement with literature and the arts, letter writing, and other literary achievements. Thus, "the literary precursor of the public sphere … provided the training ground for a critical public reflection still preoccupied with itself—a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness."[59] As Lauren Berlant interprets this process, "persons were to be prepared for their critical social function in what Habermas calls the intimate spheres of domesticity, where they would learn (say, from

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[57] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 4.

[58] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 27. Habermas identifies the uniquely German connotation that "*öffentliches Räsonnement*," translated as 'public use of reason,' implies: "simultaneously the invocation of reason and its disdainful disparagement as merely malcontent griping" (27). There is, then, a sense in which the use of 'public reason' is always doubly valenced for Habermas, as it contains the potentiality to cover many sense of public talk. In a footnote after this clarification of the doubleness of *öffentliches Räsonnement*, Habermas situates his conception of public reason in line with Hegel's sophistic understanding of reasoning instead of Kant's, who he suggests used the term 'reasoning' "naively in the Enlightenment sense" (256, footnote 1). Habermas is clearly distancing himself from simplistic assertions that rational argumentation will yield verifiably good results. It is this doubleness in Habermas that makes his overarching theory of publicity amenable to rhetorical approaches; though Habermas is oft-criticized for not leaving any space for rhetoric's play, it is important to note that his sophistic sense of reasoning invites rhetorical approaches to publicity.

[59] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 29.

novels and newspapers) to experience their internal lives theatrically, as though oriented toward an audience."[60] This audience-centeredness would play an increasingly important role as ever-more heterogeneous publics began to meet and persuade each other on a large scale.

The letter played an especially important role in this development. Through letter writing, "the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity," perceiving themselves as independent from economic activities and thus capable of "entering into 'purely human' relations" with their fellow bourgeois (the gendered pronouns underline the masculinized self-conception of autonomous, unified subjectivity).[61] The development of the letter throughout the history of the postal service marks the depth of this transformation of intimacy. At first, the postal service primarily circulated letters that conveyed basic happenings and 'goings-ons.' Later, "scholarly communication and familial courtesy" dominated letters.[62] But as the bourgeois self-conception consolidated, letter writing became a site for emotional outpourings. For the bourgeois, letters were an "'imprint of the soul,' a 'visit of the soul;' letters were to be written in the heart's blood, they practically were to be wept."[63] There is probably no better synoptic condensation of the sentimentality characteristic of this sphere of the bourgeois.

While the intimate sphere was idealized to create fellow-feeling, the public sphere demanded norms of reasoned argumentation. The modernist social imaginary thus carefully divided public from private. As a consequence, citizens toggled between two mutually reinforcing subjectivities:

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[60] Lauren Berlant, "Introduction," in *Intimacy*, ed. Lauren Berlant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

[61] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 48.

[62] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 48.

[63] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 48.

as a privatized individual, the bourgeois was two things in one: owner of goods and persons and one human being among others, i.e. *bourgeois* and *homme*. This ambivalence of the private sphere was also a feature of the public sphere, depending on whether privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings communicated through critical debate in the world of letters, about experiences of their subjectivity or whether private people in their capacity as owners of commodities communicated through rational-critical debate in the public realm, concerning the regulation of their private sphere. The circles of persons who made up the two forms of public were not even completely congruent. Women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the political public sphere, whereas female readers as well as apprentices and servants often took a more active part in the literary public sphere than the owners of private property and family heads themselves. Yet in the educated classes the one form of public sphere was considered to be identical with the other; in the self-understanding of public opinion the public sphere appeared as one and indivisible. As soon as privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings ceased to communicate merely about their subjectivity but rather in their capacity as property-owners desired to influence public power in their common interest, the humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm.[64]

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[64] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 56. Peter Sloterdijk beautifully captures the split subjectivity of the modern subject: "by day, colonizer, at night, colonized; by occupation, valorizer and administrator, during leisure time, valorized and administered; officially a cynical functionary, privately a sensitive soul; at the office a giver of orders, ideologically a discussant; outwardly a follower of the reality principle, inwardly a subject oriented toward pleasure; functionally an agent of capital, intentionally a democrat; with respect to the system a functionary

So, while the public and private self might be split in practice, in theory they were seen as interlocking. The intimate reading and writing self generated a critical consciousness concerned with norms of public reason that cohered with the public self's prurient interest in rational-critical debate. Initially, then, the significant overlap between property ownership, a status cultivated publicly, and common humanity, a status cultivated privately, converged quite nicely for the bourgeois public sphere. Securing the private self would best be done through the public acquisition of property, and a private self that practiced self-reflexive criticism bolstered the public self. This overlap, Habermas explains, is responsible for the increase in effectiveness of publicity at the time.

As this modern social imaginary was articulated in the context of the late-18th century post-revolution United States, norms of impartiality and equality were "reflected, among other places, in the phenomenal growth of newspapers and periodicals and their circulation throughout the republic. A society permeated by relations of personalized hierarchy had gone over fully to one based on impersonal equality."[65] This was equality in theory, of course, since many were excluded from participation or serious consideration in public deliberation. But the *feeling* of belonging to a new nation was greatly aided by this sense that citizens were one among equals. This particular social imaginary situated good citizens as ones that preferred abstraction over particularity; reason over passion; general interest over self-interest; objectivity over subjectivity.[66] While this preference for rational-critical debate might have increased the salience

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of reification, with respect to the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld), someone who achieves self-realization;" in *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 113.

[65] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 152.

[66] It is important to recognize that these deliberative ideals were emerging at the same time that vigorous expansion in scientific inquiry was taking place; the ideals in public deliberation were largely seen as coeval with the ideals of scientific exploration. Steven Shapin's *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994) illuminates these norms of scientific discussion within English gentle culture of the 17th century. While

of bourgeois political power at the time, it had the intended effect of marginalizing emotion to the private sphere. There, it was associated strongly with women, non-whites, and the poor, who were seen by definition as unreasonable creatures (or worse) when they attempted to participate in public deliberation.

As the era of local print circulation gave way to national broadcast media, these values of the bourgeois public sphere—abstraction, disinterestedness, objectivity—found a new instrument in public opinion polls. George Gallup and Saul Rae, in *The Pulse of Democracy*, situated public opinion polls as a logical and necessary response to the increased complexity that characterized "the speed-up of the twentieth century."[67] To those who said that democracy is unworkable given the new circumstances of social, political, and economic life, Gallup and Rae responded that new techniques were simply necessary to hear public opinion—and that this was a crucial element of democratic governance, since "we must listen to what the people themselves have to say, for public opinion can only be of service to democracy if it is heard."[68] Public opinion polls were thus a radically democratic way to keep the administrative apparatus in touch with public opinion.

New polling techniques were supposed to be the height of impartiality: a news organization would poll a representative sample of the public in order to get a feeling for the otherwise elusive 'general will.' A simple question, impartially asked, would presumably get a

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valuable for scientific inquiry, when applied to public political life these norms tend to operate as ill-executed ideals that occlude the artistry necessary for collective democratic life. That said, the convergence between the political and the scientific during the heyday of the bourgeois public sphere served a historically relevant purpose in adding weight to proto-democratic norms of deliberation; yet, as Kenneth Burke and others might point out, the over-scientization of politics reduces the richness of political life in deleterious ways. That 'political science' won out over 'political arts' in conceptualizing many academic departments in the United States suggests the extent to which there is still a conception that one can 'scientize' politics.

[67] George Gallup and Saul Rae, *The Pulse of Democracy: The Public Opinion Poll and How it Works* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968 [1940]), 11.

[68] Gallup and Rae, *Pulse of Democracy*, 15.

good sense of the cleavages in opinion that a broader public might hold. Of course, asking

impartial questions often sorely tests pollsters, and sampling approaches are certainly not perfect.

Today, public opinion polls have become something of a punching bag for scholars in rhetoric

and deliberation. They are justifiably critiqued for being non-deliberative, methodologically

flawed, and failing to account for intensity with which an opinion is held.[69] For a time, though,

they were widely seen as a usefully method to aggregate public opinion in a way that could truly

serve democratic needs (even now, there is residual attachment to this idea with the invocation of

public opinion polls.)

At this point, I should note that the particular incarnations of private and public in the

classical Greek polis and, later, the bourgeois public sphere and American contexts, served

useful functions for their societies and were, each in their own way, appropriately radical to their

times if lacking for ours. In ancient Greece, the birth of democracy involved the *demos* in

governance though it restrained public participation to the head of the *oikos*; the bourgeois public

sphere expanded the norms of participation still further, and the American experiment in self-

governance has gradually expanded the franchise and other civil rights to better fulfill the

promise of inclusivity in the modernist social imaginary. From a rhetorical perspective, though,

the rigidification of public and private, with their associated norms of reason or emotion, has had

problematic consequences. Since communication always plays out on a social field, the historical

restriction of the public use of reason to propertied white men has privileged their

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[69] James Fishkin's work on the deliberative opinion poll as an alternative to the traditional public opinion poll articulates some of these critiques in his *Voice of the People*. Susan Herbst in *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993) makes the connection between public opinion polling and modernist preferences for quantification. John Gastil catalogues the methodological and non-deliberative nature of modern public opinion polling in *By Popular Demand: Revitalizing Representative Democracy Through Deliberative Elections* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), especially Chapter 5, "Public Expression in American Politics."

communicative norms. The new social movements that swept advanced liberal capitalist societies in the 1960s and 70s represented a challenge to these communicative norms—one that would begin to reverse the historical trend of undervaluing emotion in public deliberation.

4.3 A Rhetorical Perspective on Emotion and 'Rational-Critical Debate'

There is a paradox at the center of the bourgeois public sphere that a rhetorical perspective draws out. Traditional norms of rational-critical debate require emotions be put into a cognitive frame in order to be assessed for their contribution; yet, emotion can never be fully cognized, nor can it be cordoned off from the activity of persuasion itself. Benjamin Barber puts the point eloquently: "through words we convey information, articulate interests, and pursue arguments, but it is through tone, color, volume, and inflection that we feel, affect, and touch each other … [but] in politics, noncognitive speech is less appreciated, perhaps once again because formal rationality and liberal democracy have forged so close a partnership."[70] At the very heart of persuasion is a response to feeling, yet the preferred focus of liberal political cultures on rationality provides inadequate tools to understand how publics move from one belief to another. This paradox isn't just a contradiction that collapses inward. Rather, it creates a situation that results in constant policing of the content of public deliberation. In order for the fiction of rational-critical debate to remain lionized, gatekeepers are forced to discipline emotion out of public deliberation.

In the modernist social imaginary, the norms of public reason disallow arguments grounded in emotion to hold sway—emotions are viewed as simply too partial, subjective, and undebatable to be taken up in public deliberation. Impartiality is a key part of the modernist

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[70] Barber, *Strong Democracy*, 187.

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structure of feeling. But, as Iris Marion Young argues, impartiality is a fiction that allows agents

to sneak in their emotional investments under the mantle of objectivity while excluding

difference:

> the ideal of impartiality in moral theory expresses a logic of identity that seeks to
> reduce differences to unity. The stances of detachment and dispassion that
> supposedly produce impartiality are attained only by abstracting from the
> particularities of situation, feeling, affiliation, and point of view. These
> particularities still operate, however, in the actual context of action … It is,
> moreover, an impossible ideal, because the particularities of context and
> affiliation cannot and should not be removed from moral reasoning. Finally, the
> ideal of impartiality serves ideological functions. It masks the ways in which the
> particular perspectives of dominant groups claim universality, and helps justify
> hierarchical decisionmaking structures.[71]

Young's critique of impartiality overlaps with some basic assumptions about rhetorical activity.

All rhetorical actors are situated; as Burke would say, they are in a scene, for some purpose,

acting with some agency. A central presumption of rhetoric is that one cannot de-situate oneself

because one is always ensnared in a set of influential relationships. Moreover, it is impossible to

strip oneself of all partiality because language is always imbued with emotional coloration—to

do so is to become a computer program rather than a human. Accounts of public argument that

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[71] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 97. Young lodges this critique squarely at Habermas, who she says "retains vestiges of a dichotomy between reason and affectivity. He rather firmly separates discourse about feelings from discourse about norms. His model of language itself, moreover, relies heavily on a paradigm of discursive argumentation, deemphasizing the metaphorical, rhetorical, playful, embodied aspects of speech that are an important aspect of its communicative effect" (118).

deny a role for emotion are bound to lose explanatory force, which, I argue, is exactly what is wrong with Lovink and Keren's assessment of the blogosphere.

Historically, though, this preference for impartiality and reason might well have been a needed over-correction at the time of the bourgeois public sphere; after all, they had suffered for far too long under the indecipherable whims of various monarchs and aristocratic overlords.[72] Yet, as the modernist social imaginary congealed over centuries, the split between reason and emotion impoverished rhetoric in the public sphere. How so? As Marie Fleming explains, the development of the public use of reason came at the same time that significant transformations in gender relations were occurring. Though the modernist social imaginary professed to be cultivating intimate ties based in the common humanity of all people, bourgeois intimacy was in reality "a camouflage for male domination."[73] Though women learned the norms of public reason through letter writing and literature, they were still excluded from rational-critical debate in the early bourgeois public sphere. This historical fact exposes the internal inconsistency of the

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[72] In fact, as Albert Hirschmann's *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1977]) relates, modernist political thinkers were particularly interested in constraining the passions of the powerful because they were supposedly better endowed with them—undoubtedly a holdover from the Aristotelian notion that virtues were distributed unevenly (69-70).

[73] Marie Fleming, "Women and the 'Public Use of Reason,'" *Social Theory and Practice* (Spring 1993), 42. Critics like Nancy Fraser have explained that the traditional modernist distinctions of public and private that were so central to bourgeois self-conception (as described by Habermas) were erroneously conceived. Though they might have been useful fictions, they operated as ideological screens that consolidated male/masculine power. The private, intimate realm was not, in fact, exclusively a realm of self-cultivation, interior development, cultural transmission, and social bond formation. It, like the public sphere, was rife with instrumentalities like money, power, sex, and violence. And the decisions made in the public sphere were not as objective, abstract, and impartial as they were promised to be. Too often, decisions that were framed as for the common good actually served some particular interest. And these particular interests often consolidated privilege along gendered lines (among many other possible axes.) The very idea of citizenship, Fraser argues, is built on a masculine model that had shed childrearing responsibilities and thus was capable of participating fully in a public designed with their needs in mind. See Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 119-128. Alison Jaggar explores the implications of the public/private-reason/emotion split in "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being*, eds. Susan Bordo and Alison Jaggar (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1989): 145-171.

bourgeois public sphere that was supposed to be premised on inclusivity. Cheryl Glenn extends

this analysis by noting "for the past twenty-five hundred years in Western culture, the ideal

woman has been disciplined by cultural codes that require a closed mouth (silence), a closed

body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement)."[74] Men, usually propertied and

white/European, have historically been the only ones able to participate in the *polis* and

deliberate about civic affairs. Women, on the other hand, have been confined to the domestic-

intimate sphere. This is certainly not to say that women did not participate in rhetorical activities

of various types and impacts, nor is it to assume that they never received entry into public arenas.

But the sharp lines between what was appropriate behavior in public and private served to

rationalize their exclusion and justify their regulation by more privileged actors in society.

This general historical trajectory was complicated in the American context. In the

antebellum years, the social sanction of speaking to promiscuous (that is, mixed-gender)

audiences played on the historical assumption that women were able to persuade only by

seduction rather than by rational argument.[75] This view was consolidated by religious teachings

that asserted women should serve in the intimate sphere rather than lead in the public one. After

the American Civil War, the ideological pressures of 'the cult of domesticity' and 'true

womanhood' took root. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell explains, "no 'true woman' could be a public

persuader" and women who did speak in public "entered the public sphere and thereby lost their

claim to purity and piety."[76] These ideological impulses were one way that the male professional

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[74] Cheryl Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 1.

[75] Susan Zaeske, "The 'Promiscuous Audience' Controversy and the Emergence of the Early Women's Rights Movement," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995), 197.

[76] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (New York: Greenwood, 1989), 191.

classes patrolled the rhetorical spaces to which women in the proto-feminist movement were beginning to demand access to. Nan Johnson has detailed the process by which, as women asserted their rights and desires to join in public deliberation during the post-bellum era, they were turned instead to private rhetorical activities in order to preserve public space as a domain for male voices. Instead of access to a public podium, women were sent to the parlor with an elocution manual. This preserved the cult of womanhood and traditional performances of femininity in ways that maintained most of the patriarchal social order.[77]

As a consequence of this historical development, the modernist imaginary silently equated publicity with masculinity and privacy with femininity. The norms of publicity, like impartiality, disinterestedness, and objectivity, became slowly articulated with masculine communication styles.[78] The preference for certain ways of speaking and knowing subtly but powerfully empowered those acculturated to privileged codes of speech, consolidating inequities that were supposedly bracketed by the bourgeois public sphere.[79] The rhetorical implications are serious and still reverberate today: cultural norms of publicity silence those on the periphery, and not just along axes of gendered power, but also along lines of ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexual orientation.

As I explained in Chapter 1, Manuel Castells theorizes one cause for the shift from modernity to a network society is the impact of new social movements. The gradual erosion of the strict public-private divide in the latter twentieth century is one consequence of these

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[77] Nan Johnson, *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 2002).

[78] Nathan Stormer, "Articulation: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and *Taxis*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (August 2004): 257-84.

[79] The binarization of emotion/private and reason/public was, predictably, attached to socially constructed gender roles of femininity and masculinity. See Megan Boler, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

movements. In succeeding waves of feminist activity, the norms that explicitly forbade women's

public speech were worn down by the lapping of critique on the patriarchal shoreline. In fact, a

core animating principle of feminism(s), amongst other new social movements, was a

reconsideration of the traditional norms dividing public from private.[80] The phrase 'the personal

is political' for the feminist movement(s) of the late 1960s encapsulates the dominant challenge

to the modernist social imaginary. This slogan emerged from an effort by mid-century feminists

to politicize inequities borne largely out of the public eye.[81] Consciousness-raising sessions were

efforts to recognize serial links between women suffering from inequities largely felt in private

but resulting from decisions made in public. From wage gaps to abuse issues to unfair

educational practices, what earlier generations perceived as 'private issues' were eventually

recognized as being properly 'public.' Feminist movement activists succeeded in politicizing

many of these formerly 'non-political' issues, making the public-private divide more permeable

and articulating a different relationship between the two that broadened the reach of social

justice. Along with the politicization of previously 'private' issues were a set of revaluations of

women's public communication capacities. Though it would be a stretch to say that women, or

any historically marginalized group, are on equal deliberative ground in a public arena

dominated by masculine norms and codes, the patrolling of rhetorical space that was so

indicative of the nineteenth century is far less tenable in the twenty-first. That such patrolling

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[80] In fact, one of the few central unifying themes for nearly all the new social movements is in their various recontextualizations of the public-private dichotomy. Environmentalism, for example, is premised on the assumption that private (over)consumption has deleterious impacts on the public good; similarly, the civil rights movement was grounded in an assumption that a democracy could not deny African-Americans and others a voice in political affairs because of private biases.

[81] See Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation,* eds. Shulamith Firestone and Ann Koedt (New York: Notes from the Second Year Press, 1970): 76-8.

maneuvers are quickly called out signals a loosening up of traditional norms that had previously restricted public deliberation to Reason instead of just reasons.

I have focused my critique of rational-critical debate and impartiality on the traditional Habermasian model of public deliberation. Yet, I think the central critique articulated here extends to theorists of public deliberation working outside a Habermasian vein. In fact, I read the critiques lodged by Geert Lovink and Michael Keren as following an Enlightenment tradition of cordoning emotion off from their own preferred modes of public deliberation. Though they might both be loathe to admit it, I think that their critiques rely on the assumption that the structure of feeling associated with modernity—culturally contingent feelings like objectivity, dispassion, impartiality—is preferable to the structure of feeling emerging within the network society. As I will show, their approaches are, in fact, specifically anti-rhetorical, leaving little space for non-materialist accounts of political activity. After surveying their critiques, I aim to recuperate the productivity of emotion in public deliberation by re-reading cynicism and melancholy within a rhetorical frame. This read, I believe, illustrates that emotion does not automatically deform public deliberation, but rather focuses the attention of publics as they choose amongst rival discourses.

4.4 Salam Pax and Cynicism

In popular parlance, cynicism usually connotes bitterness, negativity, and scorn. But there is a longer, more sophisticated history of cynicism that captures a philosophy and attitude toward the world that does not rely on 'mere negation.' If cynicism can be said to have a beginning as a loosely organized orientation to the world, then that beginning is in the Greece of the classical rhetoricians. Diogenes of Sinope often represents the Cynics as the itinerant philosopher who

challenged the high theory of Plato with what Peter Sloterdijk has termed "'dirty' materialism."[82] Rather than working out a complex system of the true, good, and just, Diogenes celebrated the pleasures of the body. To wit: in response to Plato's "subtle theory of eros," Diogenes masturbated in the public square.[83] In another famous anecdote, Diogenes farts in response to Platonic high theory. This kind of dirty materialism as an argument strategy was built upon a cheeky repudiation of the overly-intellectualized idealism of Plato; rather than play along with what he perceived as the rationalization of societal convention and custom, Diogenes of Sinope adopted the 'dog philosophy' of cynicism and embraced embodied pleasures.[84] Instead of following social norms and standards of decorum, Cynics would live like the animals they were: in the moment, pursuing pleasures, scrounging up food and shelter. They were, above all, to be true to themselves. Their rhetorical interventions received decidedly mixed reviews. On the one hand, there was obvious interest and excitement by Athenians in following the idiosyncratic meanderings of Diogenes: what would he say next? But the Cynics' lack of desire to speak in a manner that followed the culturally acceptable norms of speech narrowed their potential audience and their ultimate effectiveness.

Communication scholar Ted Windt found features of the Cynics in the counter-cultural protest movements of the 1960s.[85] These protest movements, like Diogenes, resisted the conformity that appeared guaranteed by the organizational culture of mid-twentieth century America. One effect of the protest movements was to (re)introduce non-traditional forms of public address into the public sphere. Highly formalized modes of speech that, say,

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[82] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 104-5.

[83] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 101.

[84] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 104.

[85] Theodore Windt, *Presidents and Protesters: Political Rhetoric in the 1960s* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

Congressional testimony relies upon, controlled the argumentative terrain too tightly; part of what protesters were saying was that their concerns about social justice and public life could not be neatly translated into a dominant idiom.[86]

Are bloggers 21st century cynics? Geert Lovink's *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture* begins unambiguously with a long epigraph that prefaces his linkage between blogging and cynicism:

> Blogging is a form of vanity publishing. You can dress it up in fancy terms, call it 'paradigm shifting' or a 'disruptive technology,' the truth is that blogs consist of senseless teenage waffle. Adopting the blogger lifestyle is the literary equivalent of attaching tinselly-sprinkles to the handlebars of your bicycle. In the world of blogging '0 Comments' is an unambiguous statistic that means absolutely nobody cares. The awful truth about blogging is that there are far more people who write blogs than actually read blogs.[87]

Now, to be fair, Lovink's argument is slightly more sophisticated then this long passage from a blogger suggests (I'll let the irony of Lovink's tendency to cite bloggers speak for itself). Lovink contests what he perceives to be the current vogue in academic scholarship about blogs to focus on genres and sub-genres; rather, he claims blogging involves "a techno-affect that cannot be reduced to the character of the individual blogger."[88] I take Lovink to mean that there is an associative web of emotional/affective investments that has accompanied the dissemination of

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[86] See Jürgen Habermas, "New Social Movements," *Telos* (Fall 1981): 33-7 and Iris Marion Young, "Social Movements and the Politics of Difference" in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 156-91.

[87] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, ix; quoting Randi Mooney, "Zero Comments," *Stodge.org*, May 5, 2005, http://blog.stodge.org/199. It is difficult to gauge how serious Mooney is being; the blog post from which this quote is drawn has Mooney drawing up plans for a business that paid people to comment on others' blogs in order to prevent the terrible feeling of '0 Comments.'

[88] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, xxiii. In Chapter 1, I detail the arguments for looking at blogging as a genre with specific sub-genres.

blogging as a mode of public communication.[89] This techno-affect, for Lovink, is strongly

influenced by cynicism.

For Lovink, the techno-affect of cynicism is produced through a combination of cultural

and technological practices. Lovink argues "the path to understanding blogs lies somewhere

between an analysis of software functionalities and the early adopter culture that invented and

shaped the blogosphere."[90] This is Lovink's way to chart a middle path between technological

determinism and technological naiveté; the interplay between technology and blogging culture

generated a series of permutations that produced discrete practices with their own complex

meanings. In general, Lovink argues that blogging is a mode of public communication that

"appeals to a wide register of emotions and affects as it mobilizes and legitimizes the personal."[91]

Presumably, here, he is picking up on blogging's different emotional norms when compared to

the twentieth century broadcast media. Specifically, though, Lovink argues that blogging

absorbed a broader cultural cynicism:

> It would be a mistake to collectively denounce bloggers as cynics. Cynicism, in
>
> this context, is not a character trait but a techno-social condition. The argument is
>
> not that bloggers are predominantly cynics by nature or conviction, or vulgar
>
> exhibitionists who lack understatement. It is the general culture that has become
>
> cynical. What is important to note is the Zeitgeist into which blogging as a mass
>
> practice emerged. Internet cynicism in this case would be a cultural spin-off from

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[89] Lovink does not define 'techno-affect' anywhere in *Zero Comments*; I believe that my interpretation of that term is faithful to his usage.

[90] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 2-3.

[91] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 3.

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blogging software, hardwired in a specific era. This techno-attitude results from

procedures such as login, link, edit, create, browse, read, submit, tag, and reply.[92]

'Internet cynicism' is thusly positioned as the most recent instantiation of cynicism in public

culture, with blogging being its 'killer app.'

What does Lovink mean when he claims that the basic procedures of blogging produce a

'techno-attitude' of cynicism? It might have something to do with the overlap between the

language of blogging and the language of critique. The basic process of blogging often involves

linking to other content and reacting to it; these reactions are often critical, registering a

disagreement with the primary source and appending additional commentary. Comments are

often structured as 'replies' that suggest a back-and-forth over an issue (contrast the language of

'reply' with a potential alternative that could have been adopted; something like 'interact' or

'extend' or 'provide feedback.') As Lovink claims, this process of critique quickly descends into

a kind of spectacular show of one-upping. Of course, claiming that critique is *all* blogs do is

obviously overstating the case. Blogs gained a foothold in today's contemporary media ecology

in part because they were able to fill in gaps in the public record and provide corrective

mechanisms to press accounts. However, despite their flexibility to move in and out of cynical

attitudes, it is not uncommon to see bloggers embrace cynicism: one blogger, in response to the

suggestion that they "'Stop Being Cynical'" responded "Do I have to? I'm a blogger, I thought it

was in the job description."[93]

Lovink identifies the orientation of bloggers to be primarily critical, not 'productive' in

the sense that they do not generate affirmative positions based on original investigations.

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[92] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 13.

[93] Adam Graham, "Stop Being Cynical: Do I Have To?," March 13, 2008, *Adam's Blog*, http://www.adamsweb.us/blog/stop-being-cynical-do-i-have-to/.

According to Lovink, "bloggers rarely add new facts to a news story. They find bugs in products and news reports, but rarely unmask spin, let alone come up with well-researched reports."[94] Later, Lovink claims "what bloggers often lack is an ability to do thorough research and investigative journalism."[95] This claim is far too sweeping, as I have attempted to show in Chapter 2 on how bloggers flooded the zone in the Trent Lott case. More tellingly, it presumes a narrow interpretation of research and investigation: can revelations of private experience ever become more than confession for Lovink? Does sharing elements of private life ever count as appropriate for consideration in public realms? For Lovink, the only real result of criticism produced by blogs is to create a "dense cloud of impressions"[96] and "broad associations, a people's hermeneutics of news events. The computable comments of the millions can be made searchable and visually displayed, for instance, as buzz clouds."[97] For Lovink, blogs are more Monet than Rembrandt.

Part of Lovink's connection of blogging to cynicism is because of the nascent political economy of new digital technologies. 'New Economy' gurus latched onto blogging as a type of micro-public relations tool that could be employed in helping businesses develop 'relationships' with customers.[98] During the dissemination stage, blogging was becoming for a select few individuals an economically viable form of employment and a site of branding and economic exchange for commercial institutions. As more attention was directed at the blogosphere, there

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[94] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 8.

[95] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 38.

[96] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 8.

[97] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 15.

[98] Examples of this include Robert Scoble and Shel Israel, *Naked Conversations: How Blogs Are Changing the Way Businesses Are Talking to Customers* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006); Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More* (New York: Hyperion, 2006); Bruce Brown, *The Secret Power of Blogging: How to Promote and Market Your Business, Organization, or Cause With Free Blogs* (Ocala, FL: Atlantic Publishing, 2007); and Duane Forrester and Gavin Powell, *How to Make Money With Your Blog: The Ultimate Reference Guide for Building, Optimizing, and Monetizing Your Blog* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

was increasing pressure on individual bloggers to distinguish themselves from the hordes of people rushing lemming-like into the new media form. The predictable result was a rash of "How to Cash in on Blogging" artifacts: books, articles, and of course entire blogs that explained that the way to gain an audience for your blog was to incorporate punchy headlines, short entries full of passion, and keyword-heavy (thus search engine-friendly) words. As Lovink puts it, "the ideal blog post is defined by zippy public relations technique."[99] Of course, making fun of the ways in which the commercial imperative dumbs down communication is grasping at pretty low hanging fruit. Lovink's critique might have been tailored to for-profit blogging rather than sweeping all blogging under the public relations rug. Yet, he elides the differences between all blogs by arguing that "instead of focusing on the quality of the content, and the culture of writing, diary keeping, and reflection, blogs have become more of a rat race for maximum attention, measured in links and friends."[100] And without a doubt, some blogs must surely be open to this criticism. At the same time, quality and quantity are not automatically opposed, and some bloggers are more than happy to blog on even with zero comments.

To retrace Lovink's steps: blogs have evolved within a general culture of cynicism, their general approach to public discourse is grounded in critique which often has a cynical edge, and they have been infected with the urge to gather eyeballs rather than cultivate the self. This is a plausible, if over-reaching, explanation of the activity of many blogs. But Lovink goes a step further in arguing that blogs have a sort of teleological purpose in dismantling old meaning structures through 'creative nihilism':

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[99] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 4.

[100] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, xxiv. Lovink is particularly pessimistic about the 'monetization' of blogging, perceiving an era of "slick self-promotion" beginning around 2004 (xxiv). His self-identified "cynical take" on blogs is "that their sole purpose has been to create a talent pool for the publishing industry" (xxiv).

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Blogs bring on decay. Each new blog is supposed to add to the fall of the media

system that once dominated the 20th century. This process is not one of sudden

explosion. The erosion of the mass media cannot be traced easily in figures of

stagnant sales and the declining readership of newspapers. In many parts of the

world television viewership is still on the rise. What is declining is the 'Belief in

the Message.' That is the nihilist moment, and blogs facilitate this culture as no

platform has ever done before. Sold by the positivists as citizen media

commentary, blogs assist users in their crossing from truth to nothingness. The

printed and broadcasted message has lost its aura. News is consumed as a

commodity with entertainment value. Instead of lamenting the ideological color

of the news, as previous generations have done, we blog as a sign of the regained

power of the spirit. As a micro-heroic, Nietzschean act of the pajama people,

blogging grows out of a nihilism of strength, not out of the weakness of

pessimism. Instead of repeatedly presenting blog entries as self-promotion, we

should interpret them as decadent artifacts that remotely dismantle the mighty and

seductive power of the broadcast media.[101]

This passage underlines the central problematic of Lovink's pan-blogosphere theorizing. While it

might be true that some blogs are created with the intention to undermine the existing media

system, it's a bit of a stretch to suggest that all blogs have this explicit purpose. If blogs are

supposed to have a teleological impulse toward dismantling Big Media, then what are we to

make of the fact that the *New York Times* now hosts numerous in-house blogs to complement

traditional reporting? To assert that bloggers do not focus on the ideological leanings of news

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[101] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 17.

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sources is similarly hasty; in fact, many blogs are fervently dedicated to exposing the 'liberal' or 'conservative' bias in the news.

More revealing is Lovink's argument that blogs undermine the 'Belief in the Message.' He argues that blogging's "creative nihilism … openly questions the hegemony of the mass media."[102] Lovink defines nihilism as "not the absence of meaning but a recognition of the plurality of meanings."[103] Since bloggers can present multiperspectival accounts, they "zero out centralized meaning structures and focus on personal experiences, not, primarily, news media."[104] And so the personal and subjective becomes opposed to the public and objective. The traditional institutional media have lost their aura of authority. "Questioning the message is no longer a subversive act of an engaged citizenry," Lovink explains, "but an *a priori* attitude, even before the TV or PC has been switched on."[105] Uh-oh: the hermeneutic of suspicion has permeated culture writ large! If we are suspicious of everything, how are we supposed to find any common ground? If the newspaper and other broadcast media can no longer forge imagined communities, where meanings are circulated in a discernable, clear fashion, how are we to imagine collectivities or coordinate collective action? Without the aura of authority, what use are newspapers at all? What is the work of the broadcast media in an age of bloggable reproduction?

I don't believe it is a stretch to argue that these 'centralized meaning structures' were largely useful fictions that, even though they might have organized increasing amounts of human life since the invention of the printing press, were never as centralized or meaningful as Lovink assumes. For Habermas' bourgeois public sphere, the development of centralized meaning

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[102] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 1.
[103] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 22.
[104] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 1.
[105] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 22.

structures like the newspaper that were essential to the self-conception of early moderns. But with the decline in the saliency of organizing grand narratives associated with the postmodern condition, it is difficult to imagine how these traditional centralized meaning structures could adequately ground public life today. Mix in the increase in complexity at every level of society, and I think there is a fairly persuasive argument for why the centralized meaning media simply can no longer serve the purpose they once did.

Now, up to this point, Lovink's analysis might be taken as a genealogical investigation of the shifting cultural grounds for deliberation. However, it is difficult to escape the normative valuations throughout his assessment of blogging. Specifically, Lovink grounds his own critique of blogging in an idealized vision of dialogue: "the pushy tone is what makes blogs so rhetorically poor. What lacks in the software architecture is the very existence of an equal dialogue partner."[106] In Lovink's assessment, blogs are so singularly focused on gathering attention that they end up favoring the spectacular over the deliberate. This postulation of an equal partner as a necessity of 'good' public discourse betrays a commitment to a particular vision of the bourgeois public sphere premised on perfectly even dialogical grounds. Lovink summarizes the shallowness of blogging discourse by noting that "knowledge" is no longer needed; "a link will do."[107] In the quick circulation of blog posts, swimming with everything else in the complex data stream, "the art of homemade rhetoric and the roughness of instant interpretation are what matter to bloggers."[108]

And here we get to the real point: the problem with blogging is that it is so … rhetorical. Blogs aren't *really* interested in sustaining conversations—they're really about pushing their

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[106] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 35.
[107] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 24.
[108] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 24-5.

own opinion on others through over-wrought bloviations. Bloggers get so invested in their 'homemade rhetoric' that they sacrifice any true knowing. Rather than engaging the real, Lovink states that the "tendency to remain on the surface, touch a topic, point to an article without giving a proper opinion about it apart from it being worth mentioning, is widespread and is foundational to blogging. How many of the postings … are Socratic questioning?"[109] Once again, dialectic is made the enemy of rhetoric. Needless to say, if the Socratic method is the gold standard, then most communication is severely lacking.

Though I disagree with some of Lovink's propositions concerning the affective nature of the blogosphere, I do agree that cynicism is one regular emotional state on display in various blogs. It is not a permanent, determined feature of blogging as much as it is a particular voice, or a related set of rhetorical features. Conceiving of cynicism as a voice offers a more subtle reading of the types of discourse that play out through the internet. I think that it might be more compelling to situate a cynical voice as something that bloggers can adopt in particular situations for particular effects. Indeed, these effects are probably not the same as might be produced by Socratic questioning, but they might still be seen as drawing on a particular stylistic resource in order to draw attention to a particular issue. In this way, the emotional content of a particular discourse serves a function in hypercomplex societies. The case of Salam Pax, and the meta-commentary that accompanied reflection on his blogging, indicates this rhetorical function of cynicism.

To draw out this rhetorical conception of cynicism, I draw on Ted Windt's work on the Cynics. Because the Cynics were so critical of social convention, they split along two rhetorical paths. The first path led to "withdrawal and silence;" whereas the second path sought to redeem

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[109] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 30.

fellow citizens through diatribes that "dramatize[d] their criticism of society."[110] For Windt, the diatribe contests some basic notions about public speech-making. Whereas conventional public speeches then and now appeal to common assumptions, beliefs, and logical forms in an attempt to forge bonds of identification with an audience, practitioners of the diatribe reject these strategies as kowtowing too much to societal norms. In contrast, "the diatribe … is moral dramaturgy intended to assault sensibilities, to turn thought upside-down, to turn social mores inside-out, to commit in language the very barbarisms one condemns in society."[111] Diatribes are often long monologues, invoke fables and fabulations, are populated with jokes and ridicule, and trade in absurdities and inversions. And they are intensely personal—diatribes often speak from personal experience in order to engage in sense-making of the world. The central *topoi* of cynicism is the opposition between nature and social convention; the *ur*-Cynic Diogenes was an "absolute humanist" who resisted the tempering of the human spirit by social customs and institutions.[112]

The diatribe finds its way, in one form or another, into virtually every medium (talk radio and cable news offer plenty of examples). It is not surprising, then, that the diatribe found a home in the blogosphere. With push-button publishing of personal pet peeves so easily available, some bloggers quickly identified with the diatribe as form. Of course, not all blogging is ranting; but bloggers do selectively engage in the genre of the diatribe. Sometimes, bloggers explicitly cue their audience that a diatribe (or a rant) is coming. Readers are, presumably, supposed to take those posts with a grain of interpretive salt.

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[110] Theodore Windt, "The Diatribe: Last Resort for Protest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (February 1972), 7.

[111] Windt, "Diatribe," 7-8.

[112] Windt, "Diatribe," 4.

On Monday, March 16, 2003—four days before military operations were to commence—Salam Pax's blog explicitly used this cueing strategy. **RANT**, capitalized and bold, begins the post. "No one inside Iraq is for war (note I said 'war,' not a 'change of regime')," begins the post.[113] In the first sentence, Salam Pax has situated himself clearly. He is no patsy of Saddam Hussein. His parenthetical explanation is a gentle rebuke to some proponents of the war who suggested that questioning the rationale for war necessarily meant an endorsement of Saddam Hussein's brutal rule. He continues:

> No human being in his right mind will ask you to give him the beating of his life—unless you are a member of Fight Club, that is—and if you *do* hear Iraqis (in Iraq, not expat) saying 'Come on, bomb us!' it is the exasperation and ten years of sanctions and hardship talking. There is no person **<u>inside</u>** Iraq who will be jumping up and down asking for the bombs to drop. We are not suicidal, you know—not all of us in any case.[114]

Three allusions operate in concert with the central point Salam is making about how no one in Iraq wants war. First, the reference to the late 1990s film *Fight Club* operates as a brutal analogy that, given the popularity of the film and the likely readership of the blog, is about as close to a global commonplace as can exist. It functions as an allegory, in Hariman's sense, that doesn't operate on an overly cognitive level. Rather, it functions as an enthymeme that relies on an audience's knowledge and emotional response to the film for its intelligibility. Second, the parenthetical aside distinguishes Iraqi expatriates from citizens living in Iraq, suggesting that

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[113] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 119. I am going to focus my analysis on this one, long blog post by Salam Pax, and add in some other examples where his cynical voice emerges in footnotes in order to illustrate that his cynicism is a regular feature of the blog.

[114] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 119, emphasis in original.

Iraqi emigrees who argue for invasion speak from a point of privilege as ones who don't have to live through the bombing. The figures of Ahmed Chalabi, the plugged-in Iraqi expat supporting intervention, and Salam Pax, billed as an 'ordinary Iraqi' on his book cover, could not be more different—and that difference, Salam argues, should shape the way readers interpret the credibility of advocates for war. He is there, on the ground, taping his windows shut so that incoming bombs don't shatter glass into his family's home while some deep-pocketed neoconservatives at a fancy Washington, D.C. fundraiser were feting Chalabi.[115] Finally, the last sentence is a not so subtle nudge to those that stereotype all 'Arabs' as 'terrorists.' These allusions provide qualifications to the central claim being advanced by Salam Pax, that humans do not want violence visited upon themselves or their community.

With this setup, Salam moves into the body of the rant, a simmering exposition of the history of Iraq and the failures of the international community after the First Gulf war in the early 1990s. He explains his judgments in very personal terms:

> I think that the coming war is not justified (and it is very near now, we hear the war drums loud and clear—if you don't, then take those earplugs off!). The excuses for it have been stretched to their limits they will almost snap. A decision has been made sometime ago that 'regime change' in Baghdad is needed and excuses for the forceful change have to be made. I do think war could have been avoided. Not by running back and forth the last two months, that's silly. But the whole issue of Iraq should have been dealt with differently since the first day after Gulf War I.[116]

[115] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 113.
[116] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 119.

Salam articulates a widely held view among opponents of the war that the pretexts for invasion were flimsy justifications for a decision that had been made immediately after the events of September 11, 2001. War was being waged not for human rights but to pursue some hidden imperative (for oil, for empire, for revenge; among many other possibilities). This paragraph begins a complex analysis of post-Gulf War Iraq, blaming the "international community" for the sanctions regime that led Hussein to consolidate power and stall democratic movements.[117] This type of historical analysis is important, and certainly relevant; yet, it is not clear what Salam Pax hopes to achieve by this excursus. After all, knowing 'how we got here' was unlikely to silence war's drumbeat. No audience has the power to turn back time and right the wrongs of the last decades. In the context of a rant, though, this decision makes perfect sense: Salam Pax is not attempting to propose a course of action, he is aiming to shock his readers and introduce perspectives that had been under-represented in public debate about the war.

This is precisely the purpose of the diatribe. As Windt explains, the primary goal of the diatribe is simply to shock in order to focus attention. This attention is not for self-aggrandizement but is "the first step towards rearranging perspectives."[118] Salam Pax highlights the hypocrisy that he perceives in an attempt to further shock:

> What is bringing on this rant is the question that has been bugging me for days now: how could 'support democracy in Iraq' come to mean 'bomb the hell out of Iraq'? Why did it end up that democracy won't happen unless we go to war?

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[117] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 120.
[118] Windt, "Diatribe," 8.

Nobody minded an un-democratic Iraq for a very long time. Now people have

decided to bomb us into democracy? Well, thank you! How thoughtful.[119]

The first question, about how 'supporting democracy' had become equated with 'bomb Iraq' in

public discourse, invokes the double-talk made famous by another famous cynic, George Orwell.

Salam draws attention to what he perceives as the ultimate in Orwellianism: democracy, a

method for sustaining peace, has been transposed into war, an agency of violence. The harm

involved in this dramatic transposition is, for Salam Pax, compounded by the international

community's hypocrisy. Salam asserts that the international community propped up Hussein for

years in order to counterbalance Iran's regional power with no concern for the internal

democracy of Iraq.[120] In his view, democracy promotion was not an actionable reason for

intervention over the past decades, so Iraqis were rightfully suspicious about why *now* was a

good time for military action to depose Hussein. If cynicism can be said to have a flashpoint,

then it is hypocrisy. A cynic cannot stand when others say one thing and do another, preferring

one to just do what one will do and, like a dog, make no apologies for it. For Salam Pax, the

invocation of human rights and democracy as rationales for war smack of double-standards; the

international community doesn't wage war on every nation-state that abuses a citizenry, so

human rights rhetoric must be a mask for other, likely more pernicious, intentions.

It's worth highlighting how Salam Pax punctures this identified hypocrisy in order to

suggest something about rhetorical style in the blogosphere. Salam wrote "now people have

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[119] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 120.

[120] In fact, Salam underlines this hypocrisy in an earlier blog post that drew parallels between the argument strategies of the Bush Administration and Hussein's regime: "What is truly ironic is that the Bush Administration is using the same argument that Saddam used to invade Kuwait for their invasion of Iraq. 'National security concerns' and 'helping the poor bastards over there to get rid of that evil government.' At least try to be original. I tell you, it is about greed and power—it always is. Me and you are only a future statistic. The question is, in which column will we be listed: DEAD or INJURED?" (*Clandestine Diary,* 14-5).

decided to bomb us into democracy? Well, thank you! How thoughtful." Bitter irony, a hint of sarcasm; the tonality of this concluding sentence cannot be described by recourse to these traditional descriptions of the sound of cynicism. This tonality, which seems to appear on blogs across a wide spectrum of genres, is best described as 'snark.' Snark, a portmanteau that collapses *snide* and *remark*, is often used to characterize quick quips that puncture an argument or offer a dismissive aside. Lovink cites the online *Urban Dictionary* for a definition of snarky language: "contains quips or comments containing sarcastic or satirical witticisms intended as blunt irony. Usually delivered in a manner that is somewhat abrupt and out of context and intended to stun and amuse."[121] The term has become particularly attached to blogging communities, as it captures the sometimes terse and pointed nature of some blog commentary.[122] The opposite of snark, Lovink argues, is emo (shorthand for 'emotional'), a style that is closely related to melancholy and which I will turn to in the next section. Snark is the specific rhetorical style enacted while blogging in a cynical voice.

This particular rant by Salam continues with an explanation of the problems that inhered in the international community's approach to post-Gulf War I Iraq. In suggesting "the situation in Iraq could have been solved in other ways," he identifies the semi-autonomous region of northern Iraq as an exemplar that could have been replicated in southern Iraq.[123] He also gives a lengthy indictment of economic sanctions as tools of foreign policy. Salam argues that "sanctions made the Iraqi people hostages in the hands of this regime; tightened an already tight noose around our necks. A whole nation, a proud and learned nation, was devastated not by war, but by

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[121] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 35. For more on snark, see Vanessa Grigoriadis, "Everybody Sucks: *Gawker* and the Rage of the Creative Underclass," *New York*, October 15, 2007, http://nymag.com/news/features/39319/.

[122] Lovink suggests that snark is the result of "the lack of time of the writer, who soon must give his or her attention to work tasks" (36).

[123] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 120.

sanctions."[124] Ostensibly, the sanctions were supposed to prevent Saddam Hussein's regime from

acquiring commercial products (like fertilizers or pesticides) that could be adapted to military

ends. To this general claim, Salam delivers the following rejoinder:

> And can anyone tell me what the sanctions really did about weapons? Get real.
>
> There are always willing nations who will help; there are always organizations
>
> which will find his money sweet. Oil-for-Food? Smart Sanctions? Get a clue.
>
> Who do you think is getting all those contracts to supply the people with 'food'?
>
> Who do you think is heaping money in bank accounts abroad? It is *his* people, *his*
>
> family, and the people who play *his* game.[125]

In this passage, another theme of cynicism becomes manifest. Institutions, for the cynic, are self-

serving creatures more interested in their own perpetuation than in cultivating individuals.[126] Any

cynic would find fertile material in dissecting institutional prerogatives and profit stakes in the

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[124] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 120.

[125] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 121.

[126] John Durham Peters prescribes cynicism thusly: "cynicism in the life world is bad, but healthy in the realm of the system," cohering with the traditional cynical impulse to approach institutions (be they formal or informal) with a degree of cheekiness (292). See his *Courting the Abyss: Free Speech and the Liberal Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. 275-9. Salam does not confine his cynicism to governmental institutions; indeed, the institutional press organs occasionally come in for critique, as in this post:

> "During the last couple of weeks in this big media festival called 'The Iraq War', the irony is that there is not a single Iraqi voice. A conversation overheard by G. while in the Meridian Hotel (the Iraqi media centre):
>
> Female Journalist 1: Oh honey, how *are* you? I haven't seen you for ages.
>
> Female Journalist 2: I think the last time was in Kabul.
>
> Female Journalist 1: Blah blah blah.
>
> Female Journalist 2: Blah blah blah.
>
> Female Journalist 1: Have to run now, see you in Pyongyang then, eh?
>
> Female Journalist 2: Absolutely.
>
> Iraq is taken out of the headlines. The search for the next conflict is on. Maybe if it turns out to be Syria the news networks won't have to pay too much in travel costs" (*Clandestine Diary,* 156).

controversial Oil-for-Food program.[127] In this case, Salam constructs the sanctions program as an

enormous shell game, which, given the scandals that had emerged with the Oil-for-Food

program, was in many ways an apt description. Though the Oil-for-Food program was set up by

the United Nations to provide some relief from economic sanctions (the program allowed Iraqi

oil to be sold in order to raise revenue that could in turn be used to ease the humanitarian crisis in

Iraq), Salam sees it as just another way that Saddam Hussein, the *he* who is not named in this

excerpt, was able to game the system. The skepticism that Salam Pax and other Iraqis had about

their impending 'liberation' is more understandable with this backdrop: past interventions by the

international community had only tightened Hussein's authoritarian grip.

Despite Salam Pax's reasons for being doubtful about the impending U.S. invasion,

critics of military intervention were caught in a difficult rhetorical situation. Those that argued

against intervention were often painted as supporters of Hussein's regime. The onus was on these

opponents of war to suggest how to resolve the 'Hussein problem.' Salam Pax navigates this

difficult rhetorical situation by blogging "do support democracy in Iraq, but don't equate it with

war. What will happen is something that could/should have been avoided. Don't expect me to

wear a 'I ❤ Bush' T-shirt."[128] Salam pithily severs the purported tie between democracy and

military intervention, providing an opening for critics of the impending war to disaggregate their

disdain for war from support for Hussein.[129]

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[127] A few months earlier, Salam had blogged about the relationship between the Oil-for-Food program and those that profited from that system: "And we have been getting really nasty Egyptian soap. I am sure they wouldn't wash their tiled floors with it for fear of corrosion, but I guess it is good enough for Iraqis. Another bad deal made in the name of food for oil, and another well-connected trader bought an apartment in London" (*Clandestine Diary,* 79).

[128] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 121.

[129] One reason that Salam's cynical voice might have been so attractive is that it balanced critiques of the Bush Administration with equally blistering attacks on Hussein's authoritarian regime. In an earlier blog post about the elections in Iraq (Hussein regularly held election whose results were usually preordained), he wrote "First, I

Salam winds up this blog post by writing "to end this rant, a word about Islamic fundis/wahabisim/qaeda and all that."[130] He concludes:

> Do you know when the sight of women veiled from top to bottom became common in cities in Iraq? Do you know when the question of segregation between boys and girls became red hot? When tribal law replaced THE LAW? When 'Wahabi' became part of our vocabulary? It only happened *after* the Gulf War. I think it was Cheney or Albright who said they will bomb Iraq back to the Stone Age … Well, you did. Iraqis have never accepted religious extremism in their lives. They still don't. Wahabis in their short *dishdasha* are still looked upon as sheep who have strayed from the herd. But they are spreading … They call it *al hamla al imania* ('the religious campaign'). Of course, it was supported by the Government: pumping them with words like 'poor in this life, rich in heaven' kept the people quiet. Or the other side of the coin is getting paid by Wahabi organizations. Come pray and get paid—no joke, dead serious. If the government can't give you a job, run to the nearest mosque and they will pay and support you. This never happened before. It's outrageous. But what are people supposed to do? Their government is denied funds to pay proper wages and what they get is

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want to tell you that I am a happy YES voter. I didn't really read what was written on the piece of paper, but I know the answer is yes. And the whole voting centre I went to also knows I have ticked the YES box, because, you see, I had forgotten my glasses and I needed someone to show me which box to mark for the affirmative. This was asked loud enough for everyone to hear—no need for booths or secrecy" (15). The original performance here has a deadly seriousness about it, given the possible retaliation Salam might have faced had he voted 'wrongly.' Yet, when retold in the context of this blog post, the tale becomes an exemplar of the ridiculousness of the election itself; a commentary on the fraudulent excuse for democracy that Iraq had become.

[130] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 121.

funneled into their pockets. So please stop telling me about the fundis—never

knew what they are never would have seen them in my streets. **END RANT**.[131]

With those concluding words, Salam presumably clicked on the 'publish' button and circulated

his diatribe into the world. Compacted into this one blog post were a powerful mélange of

cynically valenced arguments about cultural realities, social performances, historical events, and

personal affliction.

Salam Pax's diatribe certainly creates a complex moral dramaturgy that focused global

attention. But beyond gathering attention, and opening up a space for the subsequent

rearrangement of perspectives that Windt identified as a counterpart to shock, "the diatribe

diminishes in usefulness. People demand serious remedies, seriously treated. Moral dramaturgy

must give way to conventional rhetorical forms."[132] As a genealogy of events, Salam's diatribe

might have provided helpful context, but it did little to suggest what we should do now that we

are here. From one direction, I think it is reasonable to see how Lovink's critique of cynicism

fits in here: Salam's personalized history of Iraq might be accused of being pushy, idiosyncratic,

naïve, and self-promotional. But we should also recognize how his cynicism draws attention to

hypocrisy, the inadequacies of institutional reasoning, and humanist values of nonviolence.

What, then, can be said about the effect of all this cynical rhetoric? Obviously, adducing

effect is too difficult to conclusively articulate. One consequence of the network society's

production of multiple publics, each playing their own language game and with their own

idiosyncratic reading strategies, is to problematize this kind of reception claim. However, the

traditional role of the diatribe suggests some possibilities that seem to be confirmed in the

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[131] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 121-2.
[132] Windt, "Diatribe," 8-9.

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institutional press commentary about Salam's blog. Windt argues that the diatribe functions for rhetoric much the same way that satire functions for literature,

> to reduce conventional beliefs to the ridiculous, thereby making those who support orthodoxy seem contemptible, hypocritical, or stupid. Each seeks laughter, but not for its own sake. Rather, laughter serves as a cleansing force to purge pre-conceptions about ideas, to redeem ignored causes, to deflate pomposity, to challenge conventional assumptions, to confront the human consequences of ideas and policies.[133]

Effective diatribes illuminate the ridiculousness of social convention, the absurdity of certain beliefs, and the contours of power. As Sloterdijk suggests, cynics "provoke a climate of satirical loosening up in which the powerful, together with their ideologists of domination, let go affectively—precisely under the onslaught of the critical affront."[134] Rhetorical interventions by cynics, then, produce an open affective space that enables alternative, sublimated, or under-appreciated feelings to find voice.

Indeed, if the coverage of Salam Pax's blog in the print news media is any sign, then it seems that Salam Pax was at least partially successful in loosening up the rhetorical atmosphere. His writing was lauded for the "strength of its voice, the fluency of its wit and the even-handed scabrousness of its political invective."[135] Salam Pax was "amusing, cynical, worldly and passionate, it's perhaps the best example of the power the Internet wields: in this media culture dominated by massive corporate news organizations, the reporting convention of one-to-many

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[133] Windt, "Diatribe," 8.

[134] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 103.

[135] Sam Leith, "'I Saw Both Sides of the War': A Young Iraqi's Internet Diary Became One of the Most Widely Read Sites on the Web," *The Daily Telegraph,* 10 September 2003, 17.

can be subverted by a personal, global conversation."[136] Some commentators picked up on the

fact that the blog showed "Pax didn't fit into the stereotype of the Iraqi … He seemed just like us.

He was gifted in English, wrote freely about his CD collection (including an obsession with

David Bowie and Coldplay), was as critical of Saddam's regime as he was about the US-led

invasion … [and] writes with a disarmingly jaunty campness of style."[137] Salam's accounts of the

war were "riveting"[138] and a fresh alternative to the "sanitized network TV coverage."[139] His

posts were described as "fascinating and haunting in their detail."[140] *Dear Raed*, most of all, was

described as a collection of "compelling musings" that drew an ever-increasing audience to the

blog.[141] The blog "gained a cult following before the war as increasing numbers of internet

readers turned to him for a fresh and revealing perspective of life in Baghdad."[142]

Salam Pax's cynical cheekiness apparently drew attention to the deadly realities of war.

As one commentator noted, "beneath the jokey tone … is an underlying fear that is one of the

great strengths of the diary. Pax lets us know exactly what it was like waiting for the bombs to

drop."[143] It would be too easy—and too easy to provide counter-examples—to argue that the

visceral, personal nature of Salam Pax's blogging totally transformed public discourse about the

war. Of course it didn't. What it did do was draw attention to another aspect of the war in Iraq—

not the political wranglings between the Bush Administration and the Hussein regime and the

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[136] Murray Whyte, "Where is Salam Pax?," *Toronto Star*, 4 April 2003, A10.

[137] James Norman, "International Internet Sensation Ready to Get Back to His Day Job," *The Age (Melbourne)*, May 22, 2004, LexisNexis.

[138] Bret Stevens, "A War in Three Takes," *The Jerusalem Post*, October 10, 2003, LexisNexis.

[139] Stanley Millar, "Words of War: Internet Journals Offer Glimpses From Iraq," *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, April 1, 2003, LexisNexis.

[140] Kali Pearson, "Internet is Buzzing with Pro- and Anti- War Voices," *The Gazette*, April 8, 2003, LexisNexis.

[141] Leo Hickman, "War in the Gulf," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2003, LexisNexis.

[142] Alex Massie, "Baghdad Blogger Returns to the Web," *The Scotsman*, May 8, 2003, LexisNexis.

[143] Christina Lamb, "'War Sucks Big Time," *Sunday Times (London)*, September 28, 2003, LexisNexis.

United Nations and other allies; not the military technologies and strategies; not the economic motives and oil resources potentially up for grabs. Instead, the blog represented one person's struggle to make sense out of the ongoing chaos. It was an allegory that demonstrated the costs of war.

Perhaps the cynicism displayed by Salam Pax did divest centralized meaning structures of their import; perhaps it did multiply perspectives beyond manageability (especially as a wave of Iraqi bloggers followed in his wake). But, as I hope to have shown here, if one looks at cynicism as a particularly stylized voice that emerges in specific rhetorical situations with focused rhetorical effects, one might recuperate cynicism from Lovink's critique. The cynical voice allowed Salam Pax to tack between critiques of the Bush Administration's case for war and Saddam Hussein's authoritarian rule. This even-handedness opened a space for more complex considerations about war and peace. What Salam's cynical voice did was to provide a counter-narrative to the impending war and draw attention to the daily struggles of Iraqis. While mere attention is no guarantee for the rearranging of perspectives that Windt identifies as being the ultimate effect of cynical rhetoric, it is certainly a necessary beginning to any such process.

4.5 Salam Pax and Melancholy

Lovink's claim that the blogosphere is structured by cynicism is paralleled by Michael Keren's study of the melancholic tendencies of bloggers. Like cynicism, melancholy is a contested term. It either invokes a sense of quiet self-reflection or a debilitating grief. In popular discourse, melancholy is often associated with sadness, pensiveness, gravity, and sobriety. Also like cynicism, melancholy has a long tradition that finds a unique articulation in classical Greek culture and has since moved through world cultures. Unlike cynicism, though, melancholy has been undertheorized for its rhetorical features as a voice. Little study has been done on the

purpose, form, *topoi*, styles, representative figures, and effects of melancholic rhetoric in the field of communication.[144] This section sketches a brief history of melancholy, explains Michael Keren's linkage of melancholy to the intercastings of the blogosphere, and interprets the melancholic voice emerging from Salam Pax's blog.

Melancholy, as a complex constellation of affective responses, has regularly been theorized in western culture since the Greeks of classical times. Aristotle (or a close follower of Aristotle's—precise authorship is disputed), noted in the *Problemata Physica*:

> Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile, as is said to have happened to Heracles among the heroes?[145]

'Black bile' literally translates as 'melancholia;' it was one of the four humors along with yellow bile, phlegm, and blood that dominated ancient through medieval medicine. Each humor was produced by a particular body part and the ancient ideal was to achieve balance between all four. Yet, Aristotle, in this passage, connects the excess of black bile—or melancholia—to excellence in philosophy, politics, and other arts. For the writer of the *Problemata,* melancholics appear to

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[144] A few notable exceptions do link melancholy into the rhetorical field, namely Barbara Biesecker's "No Time for Mourning: The Rhetorical Production of the Melancholic Citizen-Subject in the War on Terror," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 40, 1 (2007): 147-169. Biesecker argues that melancholic rhetoric has encouraged citizens to cede their agency to the state by invoking the specter of a phantasmagoric disaster to come. Though I find psychoanalytic approaches to melancholy provocative, I have shied away from an overly psychoanalytic read because it is not my area of expertise and would be quite an undertaking to synthesize all of the psychoanalytic scholarship in order to make some very basic claims about melancholic voice. In addition, as I note later in this section, it is difficult to strip away Freud's pathologization of melancholy from psychoanalytically-tinged accounts, though I hold open the possibility that other psychoanalytically oriented rhetorical critics might happily undertake that task. I assume that one can 'read' melancholy without resorting to psychoanalytic accounts. For examples of psychoanalytic approaches to melancholy, see Judith Butler's explanation of gender identification as a kind of melancholia in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Slavoj Zizek, "Melancholy and the Act," *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 2000): 657-681.

[145] "Brilliance and Melancholy," in ed. Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57; originally in *Problemata Physica*, 953a10-14.

be particularly adept at translating their quiet interior moments into incisive perceptions. This observation coheres with the persistent stereotype that true artists carry within them some very dark corners that are necessary requirements for their brilliance (the so-called 'Woody Allen gene').[146] While humoral theory appears awfully antiquated now, it presented a plausible explanation for different personalities and health until the advent of 'modern' medicine proved it untenable. Though humoral theory was displaced, melancholy, conceived as an occasionally helpful reflective state, continued to find prominence in texts and public thought in different historical eras and intellectual movements. Despite the presence of the lament in various literatures and social rituals throughout various cultures, however, melancholy never cultivated a collective of thinkers to do for melancholy what the Cynics did for cynicism, perhaps explaining its underappreciated history as a unique affective orientation.

In cultures impacted by classical Greek thought, melancholy was largely considered a 'necessary' emotion that, when balanced with other matured affective responses, produced a balanced person at the mean of emotional life. The regular presence of melancholic attitudes was no threat to human affairs. In fact, melancholy was largely conceived as an emotion that deepened the sense of one's self and one's social world—it functioned, as Emily Brady and Arto Haapala note, as an educative emotion because "as an emotion, melancholy's most distinctive aspect is that it involves reflection. Rather than being an immediate response to some object that is present to perception, melancholy most often involves reflection on or contemplation of a

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[146] Peter Kramer, "The Valorization of Sadness: Alienation and the Melancholic Temperament," *Hastings Center Report* (March-April 2000), 15.

memory of a person, place, event, or state of affairs."[147] It is with this spirit that Keats referred to melancholy as "the wakeful anguish of the soul" in "Ode on Melancholy" in 1819.[148]

The wakeful anguish of Keats' melancholy signals the key tension of melancholy: alertness to the world pitted against the anxiety of knowing. Social creatures want to know what's happening in the world, but knowledge is only power if it doesn't prevent one from getting out of bed. Put another way, wakeful anguish involves an oscillation between intensified perception of social realities and political quietism. "Melancholy," philosopher Max Pensky explains, "is a source of critical reflection that, in its ancient dialectic, empowers the subject with a mode of insight into the structure of the real at the same time as it consigns the subject to mournfulness, misery, and despair."[149] Melancholy thereby produces "heightening or intensification of a certain power of spiritual perception or insight into the nature of the world."[150] In this understanding of melancholy, melancholics gain more sophisticated insights to their social world by developing a more nuanced vocabulary to communicate their reflections.

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[147] Emily Brady and Arto Haapala, "Melancholy as an Aesthetic Emotion," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (December 2003), http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=214. As they explain, melancholic feelings can spur unique connections because they spur imagination: "solitude also facilitates the imaginative reflection involved in melancholy. Imagination's role in melancholy is twofold. First, imagination makes associations between a present and past experience, and in this sense it has a role in causing melancholy. It connects a quiet beach to an evening stroll with a lover, or a Scottish landscape with the sound of bagpipes. Secondly, imagination is used to embellish or fantasize around the memories of melancholy, perhaps imagining our return to some place. Through fancy, imagination extends memories in a way that deepens reflection, and in turn this deepens the feeling. In these cases it is imagination, drawing significantly on memory, which provides the narrative in which melancholy is anchored. Here it also enables us to prolong the emotion, creating new scenarios as sources of pleasure and meditation."

[148] I would also note that a healthy regard for the reflectiveness that sometimes initiates melancholy could also be seen as a precondition for the rise of the concept of interiority in Habermas' description of the bourgeois public sphere. The world of letters, with its sluggish circulatory matrix, encouraged the bourgeois to reflect (sometimes, no doubt, to a fault) on social phenomena at a remove from the happening itself. That one might retreat into solitude—in nature, in a study, in a library—was probably seen by some observers of the time as a melancholic retreat from the hustle-bustle in order to achieve some critical purchase on a quickly changing social reality.

[149] Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 19.

[150] Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 21.

This isn't to fetishize melancholy, especially as it slides down the spectrum toward depression. Rather, it is to situate melancholy as a reflection-inducing mood that, by encouraging fullness of preoccupation with an object, encourages the development of an increasingly evocative rhetorical palette.[151]

This process between interior thought and exterior publication, this "dialectical vigor" of melancholy, is characterized by

> the representation of the simultaneity of otherwise rigorous heterogenous properties of the human experience of the world, characterized above all by the combination of properly transcendental insights into a realm of ultimate reality with the most immanent and 'creaturely' preoccupations with the physical or private … The melancholic's sadness is at once private and also derived from the objective status of the cognized world; conversely, the cognized world is at once objectively present and also synthesized under the sign of infinite sadness.[152]

The melancholic faces a problem inherent in the art of rhetoric: every attempt at representation oversimplifies a rich lifeworld but is simultaneously necessary in order to generate any contingent truths to coordinate human action.[153]

Though the dialectical vigor of melancholy was historically recognized, in more contemporary times it has fallen on hard times. In the early part of the twentieth century, Freud effectively pathologized melancholy, most prominently in his 1915 essay 'Mourning and

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[151] This is similar to how Kenneth Burke theorized art: the "artist shows his respect for the subject, not by laying a wreath at its feet, but by the fullness of his [sic] preoccupation with it. The soundness of his concerns will be manifested either in exceptional variety or in exceptional accurateness." See *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968 [1931]), 170.

[152] Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 21.

[153] Pensky puts it alternatively: "Melancholia is a discourse about the necessity and impossibility of the discovery and possession of 'objective' meaning by the subjective investigator" (*Melancholy Dialectics*, 22).

Melancholia.' For Freud, melancholia was to be understood in contradistinction to mourning, a natural process characterized by "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition."[154] For Freud, mourning is work that the ego must do to detach itself from the loss in order to continue on with life; melancholy is produced when the detachment process persists beyond a reasonable time. Freud explains that

> the distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.[155]

Freud centers the phenomenon of melancholy squarely on the "disturbance of self-regard" which is absent in mourning—mourning otherwise contains these same enumerated features.[156] This Freudian interpretation set late modern public culture down a crooked path that has found a terminus in the medicalization of melancholy by mood-management pharmaceuticals.

Lost in the post-Freudian consideration of melancholy was an appreciation for its dialectical nature. Rhetoric produced from a melancholic standpoint has consequently been undervalued. Recent efforts to counter the Freudian line on melancholy have been led by

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[154] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 14 (1914-1916)*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 243.

[155] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

[156] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244; later, Freud explains that "in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (246).

performance studies scholars like José Muñoz. Muñoz has attempted to de-pathologize Freud's view of melancholy, proposing "a view of melancholia not as a pathology or as a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism, but rather as a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead into battles we must wage in their names—and in our names."[157] In this view, feelings of melancholy encourage reflection on self and collective identities, paths taken and not, and differing perspectives on social reality. Muñoz's attempt to recuperate melancholy returns to a more robust theorization of melancholy as a possible source for identification and critical memory.

Michael Keren's *Blogosphere: The New Political Arena* extends the Freudian pathologization of melancholy into the blogosphere. He begins with a series of instances when blogging apparently had "direct political impact," including the Trent Lott affair and Salam Pax's rhetorical interventions.[158] Keren is after four key questions: (1) what is the impact of virtual personas filtering through the daily news for relatively small audiences? (2) can blogs function as watchdogs given the absence of traditional journalistic standards? (3) does the blurring of public and private influence global discourse patterns and (4) how are the value structures in the blogosphere different from offline communities? The framing of the research questions guides Keren down what I think are ultimately unsupportable paths (for example, the distinction between offline/online communities is no longer a particularly tenable way to conceive of politics mediated through the internet.) Keren has a very particular model of politics

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[157] José Muñoz, "Photographies of Mourning: Melancholia and Ambivalence in Van Der Zee, Mapplethorpe, and *Looking for Langston*," in *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*, eds. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 355-6. Muñoz is writing in the context of the functioning of melancholy for communities of people of color, lesbians, and gays by reading how the play of mourning in various aesthetic forms offers opportunities for identification and community building. His critique of Freud's implicit heterosexism and overly-teleogical conception of the play of mourning/melancholy is particularly insightful.

[158] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 6.

in mind—a politics seemingly grounded, as I will show, in a structuralist vision of sociopolitical

organization that envisions something like citizens bowling together before taking to the streets

in protest. This is a narrow and historically contingent approach to politics that has been

supplemented by the modes of political participation accompanying internetworked

communication.

Despite what I perceive to be a series of wrong-headed assumptions that ground Keren's

work, his method of analysis is well-suited to the blogosphere. Keren argues that blogging can be

seen as a natural evolution of "life writing," a genre that can be subdivided into

"autobiographies, memoirs, confessions, spiritual quests, meditations, personal essays, travelogs,

autobiographical short-stories and novels; portraits, complaints, conceptual writings, works of

humor and family histories."[159] Such a wide range of generic forms effectively, if inexhaustively,

captures the plurality of writings that appear on blogs. This approach holds promise because

bloggers so often celebrate their own life writing as an emancipatory process of self-revelation

and connection with others.[160] The link between life-writing and emancipation has roots in

Habermas' conception of the bourgeois public sphere caught up in the world of letters; Keren

notes that blogs might connect individuals to the "public arena" in the same way that salons and

coffeehouses did.[161]

It is here that Keren begins to sound a cautionary note. The similarities between blogging

and the bourgeois public sphere do not necessarily flow down to the norms and practices of each:

the blogosphere is "the arena in which new political modes, norms, and forms of action and

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[159] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 7.
[160] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 8.
[161] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 10.

inaction are emerging."[162] These modes, norms, and forms, Keren suggests, are grounded in a

melancholic attitude that short-circuits what he considers to be fruitful democratic politics. Keren

writes "this new arena can be characterized by a unique combination of the fresh voice of

emancipation and a deep sense of withdrawal and rejection."[163] Rather than the kind of

enlightenment that the break with Church doctrine represented for the bourgeois public sphere,

the emancipation provided by blogging ushers in a kind of melancholy.

Melancholy, for Keren, is the "'unappeasable attachment to an ungrievable loss.'"[164]

Keren follows the Freudian tradition of melancholy theorizing, emphasizing the "fall in self-

esteem" produced by either real or imagined lacks.[165] He cites Freud's description of

melancholics as shameless talkers about their own condition:

> Shame before others, which would characterize this condition above everything,
>
> is lacking in him [sic], or at least there is little sign of it. One could almost say
>
> that the opposite trait of insistent talking about himself and pleasure in the
>
> consequent exposure of himself predominates in the melancholic.[166]

Personal disclosures, then, become signals of melancholy. Keren goes on to argue that

"melancholy is not only a psychological condition but can also be seen as a form of social

withdrawal stemming from the loss of a solid normative base, especially the solid base provided

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[162] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 10.

[163] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 11-2.

[164] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 12, quoting Rebecca Comay, "Perverse History: Fetishism and Dialectic in Walter Benjamin," *Research in Phenomenology* 29 (1999), 51.

[165] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 12.

[166] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 12, quoting Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *Collected Papers*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth, 1971), 157. I have intentionally not modified the gendered language. The Strachey translation cited earlier has the final sentence interpreted as "One might emphasize the presence in him [the melancholic] of an almost opposite trait of insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure" (247). This latter translation better captures Keren's later description of bloggers as obsessed with perpetual communication and self-revelation; it might also signify the dialectical movement within melancholy (elided by Freud and Keren) wherein the melancholic's withdrawal becomes the grounds for a resuscitated critique.

by the universalized 'I' of the enlightenment."[167] Here is the boldest articulation of a modernist sensibility by Keren: only from the position of the unified liberal subject can one begin to envision collective political action.

Though melancholy has traditionally been situated within a dialectical movement between withdrawal and insight, Keren suggests that the networked citizen severs this dialectical connection. As he explains, this "critical insight [into the real] is not, as in the case of the enlightened person, constructive and active but destructive and passive."[168] Keren implicates blogging in the peculiar downward spiral of melancholy:

> The politics of blogosphere is melancholic not because it lacks joy, triumph and exultation but because when these emotions, like any other feelings, thoughts, or activities are present, their relation to real life is incidental. Blogosphere involves journalism without journalists, affection without substance, community without social base, politics without commitment. It replaces action by talk, truth by chatter, obligation by gesture, and reality by illusion. Millions of individuals write their lives while giving up on them, if only because of the long hours they spend at their computers … Bloggers assert an individuality that gets lost in the need for approval by others, for it requires quite an effort to get one's blog posted on other bloggers' lists of favorites. They speak the truth without clear standards about

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[167] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 12. Keren's political commitments are becoming more clear: here, he identifies the unified liberal subject as the precursor to a normative political environment that activates political engagement. This is a striking formulation to so baldly assert, given the critique of the unified liberal humanist subject by Foucault and the decline in the ability of grand narratives to ground political commitments described by Lyotard.

[168] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 13.

what speaking truth on the Internet means, do good and refrain from evil in virtual

reality, and often turn into political activists without leaving home.[169]

Keren crystallizes several prominent critiques of blogging in this short passage: bloggers are

'virtual,' not 'real'; the lack of institutional structure makes blogging a token of real change;

blogs are hot air, not concerned with the tough reality of action; bloggers type away their lives

rather than living them; they are self-promotional sycophants and armchair activists.[170] Much like

Lovink's critique of blogging as not living up to Socratic norms, Keren's indictment of blogging

can also be applied to virtually every other form of human communication. Hours spent

watching television (even if it is the 'news'), talking on the phone (even if it is about 'politics'),

or listening to the radio (even if it is 'public'), may appear wasted when perceived as a strict

tradeoff with twentieth century modes of social protest. But those kinds of talk might have other

positive repercussions, say, in strengthening the social fabric of a group or in clarifying one's

own beliefs. Keren's zero-sum approach to blogging ignores the fact that social networking,

often produced through multiple layers of mediation, *sometimes does* and *sometimes does not*

trade off with other types of political engagement. Public communication emanating from the

blogosphere, like other mediated communication, produces a variety of different and complex

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[169] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 14-5.

[170] At this point, it seems appropriate to note two revealing stylistic choices made by Keren. First, the cover of *Blogosphere: The New Political Arena* is dominated by the figure of an alien: stereotypical oblong head, oval eyes, pallid skin tone, and long fingers hammering away at a keyboard. Bloggers are instantly otherized as some type of alien political figure resting outside of Keren's preferred realm of politics. Second, Keren has an oddly idiosyncratic preference to refer to the interconnected web of blogs as "blogosphere" rather than "the blogosphere." Consequently, Keren tends to write "Blogosphere may be conceptualized as…" (9) or "the public domain in blogosphere" (11). The unfortunate tendency of this approach, beyond what I perceive as excessive grammatical awkwardness, is to homogenize the highly differentiated blogosphere into a lumpy, melancholic whole. His conceptualization of 'blogosphere' directly feeds into my critique of Keren as attending to only one of many affects present on blogs.

affective and cognitive effects that engage people in a multiplicity of ways and to a variety of ends.

The type of politics that Keren prefers becomes evident as he continues:

> This notion of civil society stands in contrast to melancholic politics as it emerges in the blogosphere. The latter is filled with nicknames rather than people, a fetishism of ideas rather than a presentation of interests, solipsistic discourse rather than an orderly exchange, and a lack of clear frameworks of social obligation and political responsibility.[171]

The end result? "Political passivity," "fake communal relations," "verbal fetishism."[172] For Keren, blogging is the new false consciousness. In response to those that situate internet-fueled public discourse as a site for public deliberation, Keren writes "society is not a 'great debate' but a concrete network of relations steered by political elites, bureaucratic routines, economic interests, and cultural industries. None of these is significantly affected by online or offline discourse."[173] And so Keren finally comes clean: politics is neatly sealed off from discourse. It is a hermetically-sealed field of power relations that requires exclusive attention to materialist practice and eschews discourse as the result of some sort of superstructural epiphenomena that does not—can not—impact the structural phenomena of 'politics' itself.

While I obviously hold little sympathy for Keren's narrow interpretation of political activity, Keren's linkage of melancholy and the blogosphere can be partially recuperated through a more complex interpretation of melancholy that captures the dialectical movement within this particular emotion-formation. In many ways, Keren's diagnosis of melancholy in the

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[171] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 15-6.
[172] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 16.
[173] Keren, *Blogosphere*, 151.

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blogosphere *is* an apt analysis of Salam Pax's blog; there are certainly some melancholic moments (though if any blogger ever had a good excuse to be melancholic, it was Salam Pax). He was literally waiting for the most powerful military the world had ever seen to attack his country with the promise of 'shock and awe.' However, I read these melancholic moments as employing a particular voice, united by shared rhetorical features that function to draw attention to the grim realities of warfare as experienced by those civilians in war zones. What are the rhetorical features of a melancholic voice? If the diatribe is the natural form to express cynicism, then what is the conventional form for melancholic rhetoric? What are the central *topoi* of melancholic rhetoric? Are there recurring rhetorical techniques utilized by a melancholic voice? What is the purpose of adopting a melancholic voice? Does it have a particular style? Finally, what effect does it have on audiences?

First, the form that melancholic rhetoric most often takes is the lament. In the classical Greek tradition, ritual laments were the traditional forms of speech dedicated to gods and fallen heroes, destroyed cities, and the dead.[174] They were often formal, collective, and unified speech acts that aided mourners in their transition through the cycle of grief while solidifying a society's collective memory. Contemporary laments reflect the post-parenthetical norms of networked culture. Salam Pax's laments are comparatively informal, individually produced, and dispersed throughout his blog posts. His lamentations are not done for a necessarily ritual purpose; they are, if anything, lamentations of the everyday.[175] Despite these contrasts in form, there is some continuity in the essential *topoi* and function of the premodern and the networked lament.

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[174] Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[175] Ted Windt identifies the lamentation as a type of ideological rhetoric with three features: "first, the advocate persistently condemns the society and people as depraved and corrupt for bringing this moral corruption to pass … second, the advocate recites the moral history of critical incidents, influential ideas, and prominent figures

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Some of the most melancholic moments occur when Salam Pax describes the daily hardships endured by Iraqis. Occasionally he writes a passage that underlines the dramatic conditions in Iraq:

> For how much would you sell your kidney? Salah sold his for $250. His fiancée sold hers as well, for the same price. They've been engaged for a while and they needed the $500 (that's equivalent to a million Iraqi dinars) to build two extra rooms in his parents' house for them to live in. I know this because a relative of mine was the buyer. Breathe in. Change the subject.[176]

Though the economic and medical hardships of Iraqi citizens, caused in part by the international sanctions regime, were well documented, Salam Pax's blog reveals a particularly personal side to these affronts to human dignity. And the closer war came, the more melancholic Salam became. In November, Salam writes "my favorite headline until now is from Reuters: WORLD SEES CHANCE FOR PEACE; IRAQ MUM ON UN VOTE. Funny, the world sees peace, while I have to prepare a bomb shelter in my house. If you need me, I'm hiding under my bed until this is over."[177] Later that month, he makes his concern for the future of Iraq clearer, invoking images of a future Baghdad: "I worry about what will happen during the attacks and I worry more about what will happen afterwards. I take walks in parts of the old city and I can't stop thinking 'Will this be still there this time next year?' You are right; on an emotional level I cannot and will not accept a war on Iraq."[178] Pax makes no cognitive defense of his reaction here, he explicitly

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who have brought on this moral crisis … finally, the advocate calls for a purgation of this corruption through a confession of one's civic sins as a means of seeking civic salvation through public redemption," in *Presidents and Protesters*, 206-7.

[176] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 12.

[177] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 35.

[178] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary,* 38.

acknowledges that his affective reaction is his only justification and assumes that his audience might understand why that was enough explanation.

Like the diatribe, which is intended to shock the sensibilities of listeners in order to facilitate the rearranging of perspective, these laments are jolting. They confirm what many readers of the blog might have imagined life was like in Iraq during this time, and undoubtedly reveal to others the difficulties of preparing for invasion. One purpose of melancholic rhetoric is to provide a concrete counter-narrative to the abstract discourses that often dominate the public sphere during wartime. This was a role of the lament in ancient Greece. Ritual lamentation by women was "seen as a potential threat to the orderly functioning of the male public sphere and as undermining the heroic male code of military glory" by reminding the society of the all-to-real human costs of violence.[179] Salam Pax's blog functions as a counterpoint to the militaristic justifications for war by sharing with readers intimate details of the travails of life in Iraq. The lament thus serves a role roughly analogous to ancient laments. Contemporary broadcast news often reports war as a "clinical game" that focuses on abstract numbers and new weaponry, whereas "personal accounts insist that their readers make those painfully banal but crucial connections" about human costs of war.[180] Indeed, much individually produced web-based discourse counters the "seamless narrative carapace" constructed by governments and corporate news by introducing conflicting accounts, which force "news consumers [to] become aware of the language that is employed to construct" stories about war.[181]

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[179] Ann Suter, "Introduction," in *Lament: Studies in the Ancient Mediterranean and Beyond*, ed. Ann Suter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

[180] Jim Hall, "The First Web War: 'Bad Things Happen in Unimportant Places,'" *Journalism Studies* 1, 3 (2000), 397. Hall's study examines the use of the internet during the military operations in Kosovo, but can be extended to the world of weblogs.

[181] Jim Hall, "First Web War," 398.

One way in which Salam Pax's blog provided a counter-narrative about the impending war was by following the traditional *topoi* of the lamentation. Linda Austin has identified these *topoi* as "exclamations of ineffability and the *ubi sunt*, often together. As the *ubi sunt* catalogs the losses, the ineffability (or inexpressibility) topos inscribes our confrontation with the idea of death and absence. Both may register shock and grief through a language of trauma."[182] An exclamation of inexpressibility is a fairly intuitive *topos*, captured in the post-9/11 trope of 'words fail us,' a phrase now seemingly trotted out for every major disaster. In the passage above, when Salam concludes the story of his cousin selling a kidney on the black market with 'breathe in, change the subject,' he is performing a certain inexpressibility of injustice. In another post, he explicitly states his expressive inabilities to his friend Raed:

> Raed, I'm sorry but David Bowie's song 'I'm Afraid of Americans' is stuck in my head and I can't think of anything else to write. Actually … there is a lot to write about, but it doesn't matter … Light a candle for me will you, Raed? Keeping myself together takes effort the last two days … and do you know what else I read in the *New York Times*? The American troops they are studying how the Israeli army fought in Jenin. *Jenin*. Remember how Jenin looked like after the siege? How comforting is that? Excuse me, but I need to listen to some angry-boy-music and bang my head against a wall and bleed; it will make me feel better, I'm sure. Have I told you already that I hate the world? P.S. Raed, don't even think about coming to Baghdad the next couple of days/weeks. You might not be able to go

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[182] Linda Austin, "The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime," *Nineteenth Century Literature* (Dec. 1998), 280.

back to Jordan. Besides, I don't want you here the next couple of days. I am

planning on spending them in a drunken haze. I do not want you near me.[183]

Here, that unique melancholy which is the product of living on the precipice of war is on full

display. Inexpressibility is present at two levels. First, Salam Pax disparages his own attempts at

blogging by noting that he can't think of anything to blog about, and that writing would be

meaningless anyways. Secondly, he invokes Jenin as the apparent analog to Iraq's future,

invoking the macabre visual evidence that he and Raed likely shared after that siege. Rather than

explicitly articulating the details of Jenin, he lets the argument operate enthymematically with his

intended audience of Raed and his imagined global audience, who were only an internet search

away from understanding the unspoken premise.

The second *topoi* of the lament, the *ubi sunt*, is a term that has fallen out of fashion but

has significance in this context. The *ubi sunt* is an often-nostalgic recollection of another time,

sometimes in a series of rhetorical questions that catalog the disappearance of valued people,

artifacts, or moments. While the traditional *ubi sunt* prefaced a longer, more in–depth

lamentation, it is much more distributed in Salam Pax's blog. In fact, the entire blog could be

perceived as a running catalog of injustices, missed opportunities, and imagined alternatives.

There are, however, some blog posts that perform the *ubi sunt* in a more conventional

manner. When the comments function on his blog was still active, a commenter responded to one

of Salam Pax's posts by writing "now SHUT THE F--- UP and learn to appreciate us a

little!!!"[184] Salam responds:

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[183] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 22-3.

[184] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 49. Unfortunately, there are no longer any archived comments on Salam Pax's blog; apparently there were comments originally, but Salam Pax either disabled them or erased them after some time.

OK. Let us all have five minutes of silence to do some appreciation.

I appreciate the dropping of tons of bombs on my country.

I appreciate the depleted uranium used in those bombs.

I appreciate the whole policy of dual containment, which kept the region constantly on the boil because it was convenient for the US.

I appreciate the support the US government shows to all the oppressive governments in the region only to dump them after they have done what was needed of them.

I appreciate the US role in the sanctions committee.

I appreciate its effort in making me look for surgical gloves and anaesthetic on the black market, just to get a tooth pulled out—because these supplies are always being vetoed by the sanctions committee.

I appreciate the policies of a country which has spent a lot of time and effort to sustain economic sanctions that punished the Iraqi people, while it had no effect on Saddam and his power base, turning us into hostages in a political deadlock between the Iraqi government and the US government.

I appreciate the role these sanctions had in making a country full of riches so poor.

I appreciate watching my professors having to sell their whole personal libraries to survive, and seeing their books being bought by UN staff who take them home as souvenirs.

I have so much appreciation it is flowing out of my ears.[185]

The level of detail here is extraordinary, and comes as a fusillade of injustices experienced personally. The rhetorical effect is amplified because of the *ubi sunt* formula that piles on plaint after plaint in response to the original prod by a commenter.

A rhetorical technique undergirding the two central *topoi* of the lament is allusion. As classicist Margaret Alexiou explains, "part of the artistic economy in the language of folk tradition is the allusive method, by which a fact or idea is expressed indirectly but concretely through symbols."[186] In Greek culture, the allusions were usually to widely recognized natural phenomenon. Thus, in the ritual laments of the Greeks, there would often be references to light, trees, water, and nature's cycles as complex symbolic referents that captured the passage of life into death.[187] These allusions ground the mourning process in everyday phenomena, gaining persuasive power because they drew on common experiences of the natural world. Though allusions to these natural phenomena still abound today in melancholic rhetoric, allusion in highly mediatized societies just as often refers to the cultural artifacts of late capitalism like film, music, and virally transmitted links on the internet. In other words, contemporary melancholic rhetoric, like rhetoric in general, draws on a breathtaking array of shared media experiences to stitch together broadly allusive claims that characterize the social world. Put more simply, rhetors in a network society connect with their audiences and forge common ground by drawing on a loosely shared store of popular media. This is a strategy used to full effect by Salam Pax, who regularly references global popular culture artifacts in his blog posts.

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[185] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 49.

[186] Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 185.

[187] Alexiou, *Ritual Lament*, 187-205.

His obsession with David Bowie songs was matched only by his interest in the band

Coldplay. On October 3rd he blogs that he is "spiralling down fast. I have been listening to

Coldplay's 'Politik' non-stop since 9 a.m. Either the world is not worth commenting on or I am

just plain lazy."[188] Such a (temporary) withdrawal from even talking about the world is a

signature move of the melancholic—precisely the type of disengagement that Keren so roundly

critiques. Yet, this post presages a series of pop culture references that frame many of Salam

Pax's posts, and should not be dismissed as 'mere withdrawal' so quickly.[189] While it is

problematic to interpret Salam's choice of music as some sort of revelation about his inner

thoughts, neither is it totally appropriate to dismiss as meaningless the revelation of his obsession

with a single track. In fact, Salam will regularly interpret lyrics, explaining their significance to

him.[190] Given the revelations about Salam's working life, this blog post spurs imagination of

Salam sitting in front of an old computer at an architecture or design firm, with these lyrics

looped in a repetitive cycle:

> Look at the earth from outer space
>
> Everyone must find a place
>
> Give me time and give me space
>
> Give me real, dont give me fake

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[188] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 9. Original entry October 3, 2002.

[189] In fact, Salam's confessed obsession with music fits quite naturally with the traditional treatment for melancholy, as the author of *Problemata Physica* prescribed music as the essential cure for melancholy.

[190] In response to how Hussein was handing out cars to consolidate his support, Salam writes "I wonder how it feels getting paid $15 a month while driving a $30,000 car? I suggest the Iraqi police force start practising for a choral version of Squarepusher's 'My Red Hot Car.' OK…all together now: 'I'm gonna fuck you with my red hot car…' Don't be shy. Download the track. It's brain-twistingly, spine-tingling good, really" (*Clandestine Diary*, 42). Later, he parenthetically notes "(Unrelated FunFact: You know the band BUSH? DJs on the English-language radio station in Baghdad (voice of youth) are not allowed to say the name of the band. They have to spell it: 'Bee yu ess etch have yet another single out.' I bet all the DJs there thank God there isn't a band called Schwartzkopf—imagine having to spell that every time you play a song)" (*Clandestine Diary*, 94).

Give me strength, reserve control

Give me heart and give me soul

Give me time, give us a kiss

Tell me your own politik

And open up your eyes

Open up your eyes

Open up your eyes

Just open up your eyes.[191]

Time, space; real, fake; strength, control; heart, soul: there may not be more traditionally

animating concerns for melancholics. The chorus, 'open up your eyes,' is a wink that might

suggest the melancholics' superior perceptive capacities and others' inability to 'see' what was

going on around them. Salam Pax's lyrical obsessions underline Steven Himmer's claim that

"every weblog can be considered literary in the sense that it calls attention not only to what we

read, but also to the unique way we read it."[192] Obviously, we'll never know what these lyrics

'meant' to Salam Pax, but as a cited artifact within the blog, they do shed some insight into his

personal attention economy.

This particular passage might be characterized as 'emo,' which I noted earlier was

situated as the opposite of snark by Geert Lovink.[193] Emo stands for 'emotional' or 'emotive;'

"'I'm sad' is the most common definition associated with emo."[194] Emo represents not just being

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[191] Coldplay, "Politik," *A Rush of Blood to the Head*, Capitol Records, B000069AUI, CD, 2002.

[192] Steven Himmer, "The Labyrinth Unbound: Weblogs as Literature," in *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, eds. L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman (2004), http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/labyrinth_unbound.html.

[193] Lovink, *Zero Comments*, 36.

[194] Helen Popkin, "What Exactly is 'Emo,' Anyway?," MSNBC.com, March 26, 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11720603/.

in touch with emotions, but being in touch with the sensitive, melancholic side of one's emotional life. Emo is a style strongly associated with a particular genre of music, which is often "moody, melodic and marked by an obsession with doomed relationships."[195] The caricatures of emo overlap significantly with the caricatures of blogging: both are often ridiculed as the province of lonely, over-privileged teenagers that have nothing better to do than wallow in their own self-indulgent emotions. But emo might also be characterized as a rhetorical style that, like snark, finds a unique outlet on blogs because of the ease of publishing.

Emo style continues to contour Salam's posts as the war begins. On Friday, March 21, 2003, a news story broke from al-Jazeera claiming that nine B-52 bombers had left airfields in Britain and were apparently heading to Iraq; this was seen as the beginning of military hostilities after George W. Bush had issued an ultimatum for Hussein to leave the country four days earlier (Hussein stayed past the deadline).[196] As the bombers were flying in, Salam's family gathered around a map of Iraq, trying to "figure out what is going on in the south" of Iraq.[197] The closer the United States moved to initiating military action, Salam Pax's blog became more prominent—actually forcing Google to create a mirror site to aid visitors and prevent the site from crashing.[198] With increased attention from institutional media and the rest of the nascent blogosphere, increased queries about his identity increased. He must have started to get a series of emails asking if he was 'for real,' because three hours later, he posts "please stop sending e-mails asking if I am for real. Don't believe it? Then don't read it. I am not anybody's propaganda

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[195] Tammy La Gorce, "Finding Emo," *New York Times*, August 14, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/14/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/14njCOVER.html?pagewanted=1.

[196] George W. Bush, "President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours," *White House Office of the Press Secretary*, March 17, 2003, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html.

[197] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 129.

[198] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 133.

ploy—well, except my own. Two more hours until the B-52s get to Iraq."[199] After this post, three days passed before Salam Pax posted again—the war had begun, and his internet connection was no more.

Eventually, Salam Pax began posting again; though somewhat erratically and often with the help of an intermediary, Diana, a blogger herself who had become a friend of Salam Pax because of his blogging endeavors. His family had weathered the military storm of the first few days, and, as was reported on the blog, were safe if perpetually anxious. Trapped in the house, Salam and family watch movies:

> In the oh-the-irony-of-it-all section of my life I can add the unbelievable bad luck that when I wanted to watch a movie, because I got sick of all the news, the only movie I had which I have not seen a hundred times is *The American President*. No joke. A friend gave me that video months ago and I never watched it. I did last night. The American 'presidential palace' looks quite good. But Michael Douglas is a sad ass president.[200]

Later, he writes "I am still trying to ignore the 24-hour, non-stop TV bombardment. News just ups me level of paranoia. I'm living in my headphones or watching silly videos. *Ice Age* has become a house favourite."[201] Whiling away the time while watching movies made in America was a persistent—if ironic—pastime. Salam's retreat to the house during the heat of the military campaign is understandable since it probably wasn't safe to be outside. But a later admission seems to confirm Keren's suspicion that bloggers are apolitical melancholics:

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[199] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 129.
[200] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 135.
[201] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 142.

I confess to the sin of being an escapist. When reality hurts, I block it out—unless

it comes right up to me and knocks me cold. My mother, after going out once

after Baghdad was taken by the US army, decided she is not going out again—not

until I promise it looks kind of normal and OK. So I guess the Ostrich manoeuvre

runs in the family.[202]

The ostrich move didn't last long, as Salam ultimately joined the Campaign for Innocent Victims

in Conflict (CIVIC), trying to assess the damage on the ground. He continued to blog about his

experiences with CIVIC, as well as some translation jobs he did for journalists in the area.

Toward the end of major combat operations, *The Guardian* newspaper offered him a fortnightly

column that he began writing shortly thereafter. His blogging began to slow down, until it

stopped completely.

I have argued that Salam Pax canalized a melancholic voice that accompanied his cynical

voice. The form his melancholic rhetoric took was the lament, the *topoi* included claims of

inexpressibility and a cataloguing of injustice, a dominant rhetorical technique was allusion, and

his style could be characterized as emo. But what were the effects of this melancholic voice? Did

a melancholic tone, with its characteristic dialectical vigor, actually establish better insights into

the real? Were withdrawal and reflection aids to more penetrating observations? Of course the

answer could never be as simple as that. But the meta-commentary that emerged in the press

does seem to indicate that his popularity as a blogger was because he had captured something

compelling about the conflict. This portal into the daily life of Iraqis provided "better insight"

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[202] Salam Pax, *Clandestine Diary*, 163-4.

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than the mass media.[203] One journalist said that there is "an authority to this witness that no foreign correspondent can match."[204] His blogging "made hearts flutter with his idiosyncratic personal descriptions of Baghdad before and after the war."[205] The power of his accounts meant that "suddenly this two-finger typist was linked all over the blogging world, written up in mainstream media and used as an official information source. He was the 'insider' describing his country's descent into chaos."[206] As compared to other media accounts of the war, Salam Pax's blog provided "personal insight that bypassed the sanitizing Cuisinart of big-media news editing."[207] Blogging is an appealing medium especially during times of war because the "proximity to events, spurious or not, is very attractive to audiences trying to acquire an honest feel of the story and the sense of temporal immediacy amplifies it."[208] It was Salam Pax's proximity, paired with his melancholic voice, which drew attention to his blogging. Melancholic rhetoric might be seen as particularly attention gathering because it performs a loss of agency and voice that signals an interruption in one's normal encounter with the other. Both melancholy and cynicism, as familiar constellations of emotion, function to provide openings for identification between global strangers in a network society. It is to expanding upon that claim that I now turn.

4.6 Toward a Networked Sensibility: Affect in Public Life

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[203] Natasha Walter, "The Victor of the News Has Been the Internet," *The Independent (London)*, 10 April 2003, 13.

[204] Gareth Evans, "The Baghdad Blog," *Time Out*, October 8, 2003, LexisNexis.

[205] Matt Welch, "Blogworld and Its Gravity," *Columbia Journalism Review* (September/October 2003), LexisNexis.

[206] Samela Harris, "Salam Pax: The Voice of Baghdad," *The Advertiser*, May 22, 2004, LexisNexis.

[207] Steven Levy, "Random Access Online: Bloggers' Delight," *Newsweek,* March 28, 2003, LexisNexis.

[208] Jim Hall, "First Web War," 394.

Both Lovink and Keren pick up on how blogs amplify affect, but their respective

commitments to a modernist version of public deliberation denuded of rhetorical action limit

their ability to see the emotions of cynicism and melancholy as anything but debilitating. Their

orientation toward blogging is understandable, but it imports the residue of a particular,

historically contingent model of public deliberation that simply does not obtain in today's

network societies. Is there even a public and private sphere in networked societies?[209] If

modernist societies were organized vertically, with the private sphere providing a large

pyramidal base from which the public sphere at the top drew, how does the shift to a horizontally

organized network society challenge traditional conceptions of public and private? What is the

effect of this reorganization, and how can we theorize what appears to be a renewed presence of

emotion in democratic public life?

If metaphysical senses of passion ruled the premodern world, and presumably stable and

analyzable emotions dominated the modern one, networked sensibilities are more in tune with a

self-understanding of non-cognitive reactions through the concept of affect. Communication

scholar Eric Shouse usefully distinguishes feeling, emotion, and affect:

> A feeling is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and
>
> labelled [sic]. It is personal and biographical because every person has a distinct

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[209] This case study intersects with a number of other phenomena that indicate the public-private divide is increasingly porous. The rapid extension of the internet into homes in the early 21st century greatly increased the opportunities people had to participate in multiple publics but from the privacy of their own homes. The 'home office,' itself an indicator that the public work of the market has been partially domesticated and is now a primary workspace for many flex-time, telecommuting, or 'creative' professionals. As the public has bled into the private, so has the private realm seeped into public arenas. Public spaces are awash with what had traditionally been discourse confined to the private sphere. The ability of the internet to aggregate niche publics into networks of varying tightness enables private individuals to come together in fora that are by and large available to other publics. These networks share backstories, lend reactions, give informal advice, and participate in many of the various ways that offline communities function. Increasingly, as information technology becomes more mobile through cell phones and other transportable devices, the historical division between public and private is continuing to erode; see Mimi Sheller and John Urry, "Mobile Transformations of 'Public' and 'Private' Life," *Theory, Culture & Society* 20 (2003): 107-25.

set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling [sic] their feelings … An emotion is the projection/display of a feeling. Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned … An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential … affect is the most abstract because affect cannot be fully realised in language, and because affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness.[210]

These analytical distinctions introduce a little more crispness to thinking about 'emotion' in public deliberation. An affect is a bodily reaction to experience. A feeling is what happens when an affect begins to be cognized; it is situated in line with similar feelings. An emotion is the rhetorical expression of that feeling, based on socially constructed labels that attempt to capture a feeling-state. As Shouse explains, "affect is what makes feelings feel. It is what determines the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality), as well as the background intensity of our everyday lives (the half-sensed, ongoing hum of quantity/quality that we experience when we are not really attuned to any experience at all)."[211] Strong affective reactions thus have the effect of focusing attention on one thing instead of another.

Consider the explanation of blushing to better understand the relay between affect, feeling, and emotion. Someone says "haven't you been in graduate school forever?" and your cheeks involuntarily burn red. You realize that you feel embarrassed for your perpetual studenthood (though you might not have realized that before this exchange!). Your conversation partner notices the red cheeks, and apologizes for embarrassing you. They don't know that it's

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[210] Eric Shouse, "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," *Media/Culture* (December 2005), http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php.

[211] Shouse, "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," *Media/Culture*.

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embarrassment for sure, but because of culturally shared signs of what it means to be embarrassed, they can articulate your emotional reaction with some certitude. Traditionally, the study of affect has focused exactly on this kind of facial disclosure.[212] Yet, affect often leaks out into language in one of three ways: paralinguistically, lexically, and attitudinally. Emotions are made public paralinguistically by using gestures, expressions, or vocal tone ("Fire! Get out!" she said, waving her arms toward the door excitedly.) On blogs, paralinguistic markers of affect might include exclamation marks, all-caps, or emoticons.[213] Alternatively, affect can be lexically encoded in speech ("Now that we are reunited, I feel glee!"). Finally, rhetors have "a vast repertoire of linguistic devices to convey subtle attitudinal information to 'color' their utterances, and these can reflect emotional stance."[214] Word choices, rhetorical figuration, and other elements of style can signal affective investments.[215] I will momentarily explain how affect (and

[212] Psychology in particular has been animated by understanding the role of affect in social and political interaction; see R.J. Davidson, K.R. Scherer, and H.H. Goldsmith, *Handbook of Affective Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and E.V. Demos, *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Much of this research focuses on gestural or facial cues that signal affect, as in Paul Ekman, *What the Face Reveals* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *Emotions Revealed: Understanding Faces and Feelings* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2003).

[213] Obviously, these are partial and imperfect ways to channel affect. To wit: an episode of *The Simpsons* originally aired in 2000 saw Homer Simpson create a personal webpage for publishing rumor and innuendo under the pseudonym 'Mister X.' This parody of proto-blogging shows how personal publication had captured the public imagination at the time. In this episode, Comic Book Guy despairingly notes "there is not an emoticon for how I am feeling," perhaps suggesting the more limited affective range present in disembodied communication. See *The Simpsons*, "The Computer Wore Menace Shoes," episode 254, (originally aired December 3, 2000).

[214] This typology is drawn from Judy Reilly and Laura Seibert, "Language and Emotion," *Handbook of Affective Sciences,* eds. Richard Davidson, Klaus Scherer, H. Hill Goldsmith (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 535.

[215] In many ways, affect is a cipher for what Kenneth Burke called 'attitudes.' In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke in an 'Addendum for the Present Edition,' notes "I have sometimes added the term 'attitude' to the above list of five major terms [of the pentad]. Thus, one could also speak of a 'scene-attitude ratio,' or of an 'agent-attitude ratio,' etc. 'Agency' would more strictly designate the 'means' (*quibus auxiliis*) employed in the act. And 'attitude' would designate the manner (*quo modo*). To build something with a hammer would involve an instrument, or 'agency'; to build with diligence would involve an 'attitude,' a 'how'" (443). Earlier in the *Grammar*, Burke builds a theory of attitude with recourse to I.A. Richards conceptualization of attitude as incipient action. Richards writes in *The Principles of Literary Criticism* that "every perception probably includes a response in the form of incipient action. We constantly overlook the extent to which all the while we are making preliminary adjustments, getting ready to act in one way or another" (quoted in *Grammar*, 235-6.) Burke reads Richards to say "if we arouse in someone an attitude of sympathy towards something, we may be starting him [sic] on the road towards overtly

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emotion more generally) can be seen in the context of democratic politics generally, but for now

I would like to explain the utility of thinking affectively about blogging in particular.

How language is imbued with affect cannot simply be captured through recourse to

traditional conceptions of feeling or emotion. There is what might be called a 'tonality' that

belies such a direct connection. It's for this reason that conceptualizing Salam Pax's cynical and

melancholic voices as hardening a series of affective reactions on his part is so productive.

Cynicism and melancholy aren't just emotions, nor are they simple feelings, but rather a

constellation of related attitudes that get merged into a voice. This makes theories of affect a

productive supplement to traditional rhetorical theories. Jenny Edbauer Rice suggests "the notion

of affect poses an interesting question for rhetorical studies: is discursive deliberation sufficient

for talking about the constitution of publics? On the one hand, publics are not possible without

discourse. On the other hand, deliberation generates affects that do not conform neatly to the

signifying elements of that civic discourse;" she continues by explicitly linking the play of affect

to the constitution of online publics organized around blogging:

> Comments on these blogs do not always fall into the neat classification of
>
> 'deliberative.' Many are epideictic ('I just want to say I LOVE your honesty') or
>
> simply phatic communications ('Wow …' 'Ouch!'). Therefore, in some sense, the

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sympathetic action with regard to it—hence the rhetoric of advertisers and propagandists who would induce action in behalf of their commodities of their causes by the formation of appropriate appetites" (236). There is considerable overlap between the way Burke and Richards treated incipient action as a precursor to action-in-the-world and how affect is currently theorized as preceding and informing cognized reactions. This link is underlined more when Burke relates the idea of incipient action to Aristotelian conception of rhetoric as potentiality (242). Worth emphasizing is Burke's claim that attitudes are formed and re-formed through symbolic action: "this complexity of social attitudes comprises the 'self' (thus complexly erected atop the purely biological motives, and in particular modified by the formative effects of language, of 'vocal gesture,' which invites the individual to form himself [sic] in keeping with its social directives)" (237). For Burke, attitudes occupy a "region of ambiguous possibilities," much like affect (242). For this reason, he claims "the realm of the incipient, or attitudinal, is the realm of 'symbolic action' par excellence; for symbolic action has the same ambiguous potentialities of action" (243). It is partially for this reason that I take one's symbol usage to disclose various attitudes and affective investments.

talk itself holds together a public even when that talk does not have direct bearing on the common affairs being deliberated. Perhaps this is even more obvious in the publics oriented around national politics. The idea of being a 'news junkie' is worth considering. There is an affective investment that goes beyond the content of these conversations.[216]

To understand how publics are constituted and reconstituted over time requires an assessment not only of the signifying properties of rhetoric but of the affective dimensions that facilitate identification. Though these affective dimensions of communication have always been present, the growth of internetworked technologies introduces new avenues to develop hyper-reflexivity about affect. In other words, we can now 'see' affect in ways that we didn't in earlier social formations.

I am drawing, of course, on sociologist Anthony Giddens' famous articulation of late modernity as a reflexive project, especially as it concerns self-identity. Giddens famously described late modernity as an era in which "self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavour" that plays out on a field of complexly mediated experiences.[217] "The reflexive project of the self," Giddens explains, "consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems."[218] Late modernity, for Giddens, is characterized by an increasing pluralism in choice: in employment, in commodity consumption, in media usage.[219] Especially in contrast to

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[216] Jenny Edbauer Rice, "The New 'New': Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (May 2008), 211.

[217] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 5.

[218] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 5.

[219] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 81.

premodern societies grounded in tradition, the exponential growth in (technologically) mediated systems of communication increased awareness of differing lifestyles. Giddens notes that the globalization of media has "rendered visible" the practices that organized social life in late modernity.[220] The publication of these different lifestyle practices might be said to, among other things, facilitate the civil indifference that fuels stranger sociability in modern societies.[221] If the publication of various lifestyles through the organs of mass communication increased self-reflexivity about identity, and blogging has dramatically increased the scale of this publication, then we might conclude that self-reflexivity about identity has similarly increased.

With increased information, individuals in late modernity have magnified resources by which to analyze the self's reactions. As sociologist Nick Crossley has noted, "there are extensive networks and technologies for the inspection, confession, governance, and transformation of affect. And they are significant."[222] Indeed, a lot of communication goes into depth in understanding, explaining, and justifying our affective responses. Crossley attempts, successfully in my opinion, to draw emotion into the circuit of Habermas' communicative rationality for just this reason, because emotion can be "judged appropriate or inappropriate and argued over."[223] And, as Dana Cloud's analysis of how American culture is increasingly dominated by therapeutic rhetorics shows, those networks of communication about emotion continue to thicken.[224]

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[220] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 84.

[221] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 152.

[222] Nick Crossley, "Emotion and Communicative Action: Habermas, Linguistic Philosophy, and Existentialism," in *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*, eds. Gillian Bendelow and Simon Williams (New York: Routledge, 2004), 35.

[223] Crossley, "Emotion and Communicative Action," 19.

[224] Dana Cloud, *Control and Consolation in American Politics and Culture: Rhetorics of Therapy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

But these sociological conditions are inadequate for explaining the accentuated degrees of reflexivity currently accompanying emotion-management. Uses of information technologies also play in to how the self's affective states are understood. For Habermas' bourgeois, the letter—itself a unique mode of communication—deepened their sense of subjectivity and their relations to others. As Brent Malin has noted, the development of close-up photography created "a new capacity (or, perhaps, mandate) for emotional expressiveness," as the candid encouraged people to be shown smiling.[225] Nigel Thrift generalizes this phenomenon by arguing "through the advent of a whole series of technologies, small spaces and times, upon which affect thrives and out of which it is often constituted, have become visible and are able to be enlarged so that they can be knowingly operated upon."[226] For Thrift, new technologies take "what was formerly invisible or imperceptible," in this case, affect, and constitute it "as visible and perceptible through a new structure of attention which is increasingly likely to pay more than lip-service to those actions which go on in small spaces and times."[227]

The photograph freezes a moment in time, allowing viewers to closely examine all the captured details; a novel shares the internal thought processes of the protagonist; a film situates agents as products of their scenes; a blog post captures how one feels about an object of attention. Particular media enable specific types of expressiveness; as extensions of humans, they display different parts of our subjectivities. This isn't to say that all blog posts are affect-

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[225] Brent Malin, "Communication With Feeling: Emotion, Publicness, and Embodiment," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (May 2001), 222. Malin is extending insights from Peter Stearns' *Battleground of Desire: The Struggle for Self-Control in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Stearns observes that the emotional norms in the Victorian age required those that were to be photographed to maintain a stern expression that allowed their true character to shine through. Yet, by the 1920's the norms had shifted to a more relaxed pose that encouraged the viewers of photographs to see the photographed as friendly—thus the smile (37).

[226] Nigel Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect," *Geografiska Annaler* 86 B (2004), 66.

[227] Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling," 67.

machines, understandable strictly as emotional sites of self-expression. But it is to acknowledge that blogs now constitute a substantial network of communication ties devoted to assessing, judging, and relating ever-smaller explanations of their affective judgments. Blogs are perhaps the strongest signal that the structure of feeling has shifted from one grounded solely in objectivity and dispassion. Let me suggest that there are three basic reasons why blogging is so affect-friendly.

First, blogging is conducive to personalized micro-reactions that publish affect quickly. Contrast the emotional norms of the traditional newspaper to that of blogs: there is simply no way that a newspaper could aggregate all of the emotional reactions to a particular event. Consequently, journalists are forced to cherrypick amongst possible sites of testimony and rely on professed norms of objectivity to understand 'what really happened.' An editor helps with this process of filtering out 'feelings' for 'facts.' Blogs, in contrast, are not required to aggregate others' emotions—they tend to simply explain their own reactions (thus the 'subjective tenor' of blogs) or riff off of others' reactions. Rapidity of publication factors in, as well. The reduction in time lapse between (re)cognition of affective response and personal publication means that individuals can capture more of their original feeling. Emotions are often like dreams—the farther away one gets from the experience itself, the harder it becomes to explain exactly how and why one felt. Yet, because publishing blog posts is relatively quick, a blogger or commenter often catches their immediate affective reaction and is able to articulate them for a broader audience. Time and the translation of affect are often at odds: the more time passes, the more one's affective responses become overly-cognized, such that we often mask our initial affective investments in the drapery of *post hoc* rationalization. Because of the capacity of blogs to publish emotional reactions quickly, they have become something like the chroniclers of our affective

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lives. Paired with the apparent desire by networked citizens to see ever more 'behind-the-scenes' and craving more information about how other people live, blogging is indeed a substantial avenue by which emotional discourse gets funneled into public deliberation.[228]

To extend on this insight: a blogger, over time, constructs a persona that reveals certain affective investments. A blog is a personal reaction to events, and so we might expect affective coloration to spill over into a blogger's interpretation. Readers of blogs soon find out about what a certain blogger likes and dislikes, how they interpret their social world, and why they justify certain behaviors. In addition, regular readers of a particular blog learn about how that blogger's attention economy is partially structured. When a blogger links to another site on the internet, they are signaling that they have attended to this particular artifact, and that a reader might also want to attend to it. The vocabulary used by search engines to describe the way in which they prioritize search results is suggestive here: a link functions as a 'recommendation,' which is hardly a value-neutral way to explain a hyperlink. Patterns of hyperlinking thus reveal bloggers' attention economies and, implicitly, their affective investments. For this reason, Laura Gurak and Smiljana Antonijevic note "unlike chatting, pointed toward 'hear me out at this moment,' blogging is pointed toward 'hear me out throughout time.'"[229]

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[228] Blogging is certainly not the only new media form that indicates a new structure of feeling has taken root. Again, Lanham's figure of *oscillatio* emerges in a series of media forms for the networked society, where participants can look 'at' and 'through' the text itself. For example, when we watch a DVD, we can view the film itself ('at'), but then we can peruse the director and actor commentaries on the film ('through') to see what happened behind-the-scenes, how the film crew felt about certain scenes, how the director set up the shot. Reality television is similarly situated around this kind of *oscillatio*: we watch the little competitions ('at') and then the private interviews with the participants to hear exactly what they were thinking as they were competing ('through.') The situation comedy *The Office* uses a similar approach as they integrate interviews with the characters to get insight into their personal lives and feelings ('through') in between the unfolding of the script ('at'). This oscillation between through and at is exactly how reflexivity about affect/feeling/emotion is built into the media forms with high circulation in contemporary networked societies.

[229] Laura Gurak and Smiljana Antonijevic, "The Psychology of Blogging: You, Me, and Everyone in Between," *American Behavioral Scientist* (September 2008): 65.

The second reason blogs are so affect-friendly is because they balance richness and scale. The modernist social imaginary installed particular norms of decorum that regulated when and how public and private should intersect, but it also relied on analog communication technologies that traversed time and space slowly. The slowness of modernist media allowed a natural buffer zone between public and private.[230] With the speed up represented by contemporary information technology, the internet and blogging included, various relays between what has traditionally been considered public and private increase in richness and flexibility. New media scholar Felix Stalder explains "what makes today's networks so profoundly different from traditional social networks is that, for the first time, they scale well. The resulting relationships among the different [network] nodes are rich and specific."[231] In contrast, individuals in modern societies arranged concentric rings of social networks that were managed with increasing difficulty the further removed from the center. Stalder notes,

> affective, or informal, social relationships have traditionally been organized as networks because they rely on this richness of communication and the ability to accommodate continuous fluctuations easily. The downside of this richness in communication has been that beyond a certain level of complexity the process of interdefinition has become unmanageable. It involved just too much communication, resulting in a cacophony of voices and a lack of coordination.[232]

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[230] Celebrity culture is a perfect example of how the slowness (and spatial constraints) of old media impact the boundary between public and private. In the past several years, celebrity blogs have provided a publishing platform for amateur paparazzi; greatly expanding the range of coverage that contemporary celebrities receive. It is not unusual to see blogs devoted to particular celebrities eating meals, walking their dogs, or cuddling mates. Each activity has appreciated significance for novelty, and the quick entry of an image or story about a celebrity can whip up excitement for the interpretation and circulation of that story.

[231] Felix Stalder, *Manuel Castells: The Theory of the Network Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 181.

[232] Stalder, *Manuel Castells*, 182.

The problem of complexity, especially as it relates to scaling issues, rears its head again. While agents in modernist societies were able to manage their close friends, the further removed from common experience and common definition, the more fragile the relationships became. Richness and flexibility were often at odds: I can communicate with a lot of depth to my co-present friends, but it is more difficult to share intimate experiences with more distant family relations because, frankly, it just takes too long to explain everything that has happened to me since last we spoke. Consequently, the vicissitudes of my life are often reduced to 'everything's going ok,' a sentiment that suffices but doesn't exactly do justice to what's really happening in a life (even when things are really boring). The problems of interdefinition track down not just to diverging vocabularies, but to the felt experiences of everyday life. To address this problem, blogging produces rich discourse that explains strangers (even those strangers that are related by kinship) to each other.

Contrast the richness-scale tension in networked societies with that same tension in modernity. Stalder explains that standardized print documents were the privileged way to organize modern institutions because they "offered a reduction in communicative complexity which enabled an increase in their scale."[233] Modernist organizations must rely on documentation in order to organize and coordinate their societies.[234] And this reliance on documentation is effective—it authorizes certain people to drive, or be doctors. The documents at the Department of Motor Vehicles are simple, direct, and easy to use as long as one doesn't have any circumstance that the paperwork doesn't account for. Then, the documents become increasingly inflexible (or, as the king of modern dread Franz Kafka suggested, disturbing). The simplicity

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[233] Stalder, *Manuel Castells*, 182.

[234] A point that Robert Hariman makes in *Political Style*, Chapter 5 on bureaucratic style.

necessary to scale up then becomes an impediment to social coordination, as those who don't fit a bureaucratically defined norm are marked as deviant.

Information technology networks, though, address the scale issue in a fashion that befits the demands of a network society. Stadler continues:

> Quantitatively speaking, computer-based technologies enable the processing of more communication (purposeful flows of information), in less time, across larger distances. The traditional tradeoff between richness of communication, enabling flexibility and involvement, and reduction of communication, enabling scale and focus, has virtually vanished. What used to be the key advantage of integrated hierarchies—their ability to increase coordination through formal and rigid rules—has turned into a terminal disadvantage, because new technologies facilitate coordination without requiring rigidity. Consequently, networks are suddenly able to operate on the same scale and with the same degree of coordination as hierarchies, while preserving flexibility.[235]

What can be seen now is a richer flow of communication taking place between nodes distributed throughout all of society. The popularity of so-called social networking sites like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook shows that there is a high demand for media that balance richness and scale. A regularly updated MySpace page, for example, may list the proprietor's favorite books, movies, and music, host a blog where daily updates can be published, and show a large portion of the social network that they are embedded in. 'Friends' from around the world can monitor that page for essential updates, no matter how close they are to the person (and padding one's friend list, like padding one's blogroll, is standard practice). There is a richness of information on

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[235] Stadler, *Manuel Castells*, 183.

a standard social networking page that traditional analog culture had trouble producing at such a large scale. Thus, a friend of a friend of a friend, who you might never have met but who shares similar interests, can link into your social network (scaling up) and have access to the same quality of communication as closer nodes (maintaining richness).

Finally, blogging is conducive to the discussion and dissection of affect because it is a site where difference is often encountered, negotiated, affirmed, denied, or deferred. In January 2004, Salam Pax's blog came under fire for playing the 'Western' cultural game rather than participating in the nascent Arabic-language Iraqi blogosphere. Raed, in a rare blog post, came to the defense of his friend in a way that reveals the underlying purpose of the blog:

> what I want to say is that we seem to have lost the middle ground. When I met Ted Koppel the first time he said that he needed a cultural interpreter. And this is exactly what this blog and the rest of the blogs in the Iraqi Blogosphere, in all its variety, has been providing. The things the reviewer saw as negatives, 'irreligious, western educated, and has spent half his life outside Iraq,' are really the basis for the common things between us. You and me, we have this dialogue because of them. In a world growing apart by the day it is absolutely wonderful to find that everybody can go on about the food they like on an Iraqi blog [check out the comments] and for a moment forget all the politics. This reminds us that we *do* have things in common and not everybody is out to cut the others' throat.
> I do not feel ashamed of standing in the middle anymore; actually I am proud of it. The Iraqi Bloggers show that we *can* talk. You think some of us are too ungrateful and critical? Habibi at least we are talking about it, you really have not met the people who are really truly unhappy with the whole situation here. BUT

… we are still playing the [dominant/subordinate culture] game. We write in

English to communicate with you, we try to establish links and reference points

very much relevant to you. The respect I have for Persian Bloggers is immense;

they were able to create a dialogue among themselves which they sometimes

share with the rest of the world.[236]

This is an interesting meditation on cross-cultural communication in a globalized world; Raed

and Salam recognize the need for cultural interpreters to make sense of indigenous Iraqi attitudes

and practices. To maximize their appeal, they consciously made efforts to craft their rhetorical

strategy in a way that would appeal to English readers in the rest of the world. The rhetorical

performance of cynicism and melancholy can be seen as a part of this effort as well, since they

are well-recognized emotion-constellations shared across many differences. Blogs might well

function as the sites that James Bohman theorizes as necessary for cosmopolitan citizens to

negotiate different frames of reference.[237]

4.7 Ambient Intimacy

The term 'ambient intimacy' has emerged in the blogosphere to describe the spillover of

the private into public. I believe that it can be extended to capture the presence of affective

energies now felt in public life. This component of the networked rhetorical imaginary first

emerged in the context of theorizing Twitter, an application rolled out in the wake of blogging

that has been called "micro-blogging" or "nano-blogging."[238] Twitter allows a user to post

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[236] Raed, " Long Post Alert," *Dear Raed,* January 25, 2004, http://dear_raed.blogspot.com/2004/01/long-post-alert-you-will-not-be.html.

[237] James Bohman, "The Globalization of the Public Sphere: Cosmopolitan Publicity and the Problem of Cultural Pluralism," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 24 (1998), 214.

[238] For example, see Noam Cohen, "Campaign Reporting in Under 140 Taps," *New York Times*, January 21, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/21/technology/21link.html?scp=17&sq=twitter&st=cse; Michelle

"tweets," limited to 140 characters, from mobile devices or computers. Tweets can be followed

on one's Twitter page, or can be subscribed to through blog aggregators. It is, in fact, very

similar to blogging but constrained by a much stricter economy of expression. Twitter captured

the popular imagination as the next step in the evolution toward ever-smaller fragments of public

discourse. Clive Thompson, a contributing writer for *Wired* magazine, explains the significance

of Twitter:

> When I dropped by the main Twitter page, people had posted notes like 'Doing
>
> lunch and picking up father-in-law from senior center.' Or 'Checking out *Ghost*
>
> *Whisperer*' or simply 'Thinking I'm old.' (Most users are between 18 and 27.) It
>
> might seem like blogging taken to a supremely banal extreme … They're
>
> precisely right: Individually, most Twitter messages are stupefyingly trivial. But
>
> the true value of Twitter—and the similarly mundane Dodgeball, a tool for
>
> reporting your real-time location to friends—is cumulative. The power is in the
>
> surprising effects that come from receiving thousands of pings from your posse.
>
> And this, as it turns out, suggests where the Web is heading.[239]

Thompson goes on to suggest that Twitter is "like proprioception, your body's ability to know

where your limbs are. That subliminal sense of orientation is crucial for coordination … Twitter

and other constant-contact media create social proprioception. They give a group of people a

sense of itself, making possible weird, fascinating feats of coordination."[240] In some ways, the

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Slatalla, "If You Can't Let Go, Twitter," *New York Times*, February 14, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/14/fashion/14Cyber.html?scp=23&sq=twitter&st=cse.

[239] Clive Thompson, "How Twitter Creates a Sixth Social Sense," *Wired*, June 26, 2007, http://www.wired.com/techbiz/media/magazine/15-07/st_thompson.

[240] Thompson, "Sixth Social Sense," *Wired*.

novel and newspaper were early efforts at social proprioception, and blogs are an extension of the same tradition that accommodates the complexities of an internetworked society.

Blogger Leisa Reichelt coined the term 'ambient intimacy' in the context of Twitter, but signaled that the concept applies aptly to many forms of social networking software. She writes:

> I've been using a term to describe my experience of Twitter (and also Flickr and reading blog posts and Upcoming). I call it Ambient Intimacy. Ambient intimacy is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn't usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible. Flickr lets me see what friends are eating for lunch, how they've redecorated their bedroom, their latest haircut. Twitter tells me when they're hungry, what technology is currently frustrating them, who they're having drinks with tonight.[241]

For those participating in blogging and other social networking sites, intimacy is shared almost semi-permanently. What makes the intimacy that occurs through blogging ambient is that it can be experienced both synchronically and diachronically. For example, by participating in an unfolding conversation between blogs, either as a blogger, commentator, or reader, one can engage in a near-simultaneous back and forth about whatever issue is animating the conversation. This synchronic exchange might sharpen one's own personal beliefs at the same time that it reveals the private thoughts of others. Diachronically, one can work backwards through a series of blog posts to get a sense of how a particular blogger has 'evolved.' The process of linking to prior posts emphasizes this diachronic element of intimacy. When a blogger

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[241] Leisa Reichelt, "Ambient Intimacy," *Disambiguity*, March 1, 2007, http://www.disambiguity.com/ambient-intimacy/. Her later reflection on ambient intimacy are collected at "Ambient Exposure," *Disambiguity*, April 5, 2008, http://www.disambiguity.com/ambient-exposure/.

links to a prior post that they have written, elucidating their opinions on some matter or another, they are making a diachronic link for their readers. With something like a public record of one's thoughts, beliefs, and activities, bloggers can often build complicated intimate relationships with their readership.[242]

Have we seen a similar process before? Arguably. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* identifies the ways in which a "consciousness of connectedness" produced strong feelings of nation-hood at the dawn of the nation-state.[243] This feeling of connectedness resulted from representations of the other appearing in the emerging media of the time, newspapers and the novel. The increased circulation of newspapers and novels created a sense of belonging for groups of national peoples with strong common experiences that were made stronger by continual reference to their collective past. The experience of newspaper readers seeing the same newspaper which *they* had just read also being read by fellow citizens at various social gathering spots throughout the day "continually reassured [the reader] that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life."[244] This useful fiction was paramount for the bourgeois public sphere's self-conception as a public that knew about itself. Being able to see others read the newspaper, or a novel, and thus participate in a broader collective conversation, deepened the sense in which the bourgeois conceived of their argumentative interventions as strengthening the democratic bonds of collective life.

An analogous movement is now taking place to accommodate the expansion of social life to a global plane. With the increasing decline of the nation-state's regulatory power and the

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[242] This is not necessarily a good thing, as the cringing reply 'too much information' is often the immediate response to certain personal disclosures.

[243] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 56.

[244] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35-6.

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spread of global information technologies, the internet has emerged as a medium through which

global publics can intercommunicate. I want to avoid suggesting that there is a 'global public

sphere;' perhaps what can be said now is that there are global publicity practices.[245] Salam Pax is

a key figure in this movement—he might be considered the first real cosmopolitan citizen. Just

as the novel gave a glimpse into the intimate lives of others in the nation, and thus created a

sense of social belonging, blogs crack open the intimate lives of others. This sense of intimacy is

not isomorphic with the intimacy created through the novel. It is not episodic in the same sense

as the novel, which dispenses intimate moments in clear narrative thrusts. Rather, the intimacy

created by blogs is ambient, ever present as background noise.

This, I believe, is the way to understand Salam Pax's cynical and melancholic rhetoric.

The presence of so much affective energies on a blog gives readers a sense of one's intimate

emotional investments. This sense of intimacy is not necessarily developed in a clear narrative

arc; rather, it is a cumulation of feelings built up over time. Over the course of about a year,

Salam Pax revealed personal preferences for artifacts, values, histories, policies; he ranted about

policies and lamented about an imagined Iraq. His vivid descriptions of life in pre-war Iraq,

paired with his account of the bombing of Baghdad and his tours with CIVIC of the war-torn

areas in Iraq gave an immediate, visceral, sense of what had happened. We might situate the

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[245] The absence of a global institution with binding decision-making power makes the development of a 'public sphere' aimed at influencing it difficult to conceptualize. Yet, global public opinion has manifested itself on a number of occasions, most prominently during the February 2003 global anti-war protests targeted at the Bush Administration. Internetworked communication was instrumental in coordinating these protests; see Peter Stearns, *Global Outrage: The Impact of World Opinion on Contemporary History* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2005), 176-8.

ambient intimacy created by blogging as the unique type of social presence generated by this mode of public address.[246]

This type of social presence might be seen as the harbinger of ever-more sophisticated control, as the modulation of affect is used to keep populations in check.[247] Yet, there might also be a productive element to this ambient intimacy that can be found in the work of political scientist George Marcus. Marcus has tried to reconcile emotion and reason in democratic cultures, and his efforts are worth recounting here as a partial explanation of the impact of affect in democratic public life. Marcus does not privilege either emotion or reason as independent processes, but sees them as interlocking counterparts. As he explains, "emotion processes, processes that precede conscious awareness, shape what we pay attention to and how we pay attention."[248] If people didn't have affective reactions, it would be difficult to direct attention: everything would be equally 'weighted' and we would have considerable problems sorting through phenomena to address. It is the experience of affect that guides how we interpret the social world. "Affective reactions," psychologist Joseph Forgas suggests, "such as feelings of anxiety, confidence, intimacy, pleasure, or discomfort seem to be critical in defining the implicit

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[246] Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton,"At the Heart of it All: The Concept of Presence," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* (September 1997), http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue2/lombard.html. That the internet has introduced new forms of parasocial interaction, which Bruce Gronbeck and Danielle Wiese call the repersonalization of politics, underlines the claims I am making about new forms of intimacy in a networked public sphere; see their "The Repersonalization of Presidential Campaigning in 2004," *American Behavioral Scientist* (December 2005), 520-34.

[247] As Patricia Ticineto Clough claims in her "Introduction," in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social,* eds. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007): 1-33.

[248] George Marcus, *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 60. Marcus has been working out a theory of affect and democratic politics for some time; see W. Russell Neuman, George Marcus, Ann Crigler, and Michael MacKuen, eds., *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); George Marcus, W. Russell Neuman, and Michael MacKuen, *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). See also David Redlawsk, ed., *Feeling Politics: Emotion in Political Information Processing* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

structure and complexity of people's cognitive representations about social encounters."[249]

Emotion and reason are not set in an intractable polar opposition, then; instead, they are entwined with each other in a symbiotic double helix. Affective reactions, in a nod to the Aristotelian tradition, direct cognitive attention.

One way that affect directs cognitive attention is through disrupting stereotypes. Walter Lippmann's canonical effort to understand modern societies and their broadcast media relied on the role of the stereotype in organizing interactions with others.[250] According to Lippmann, stereotypes make the world somewhat predictable by giving individuals scripts and routines that enabled negotiating daily modern life. Yet, these stereotypes sometimes serve us poorly; certain habits of mind congeal in ways that disservice the richness of the social world. This is where emotion works a disruptive magic. Outpourings of emotion are picked up by individual's neural surveillance system, shifting attention to the "intrusive stimuli" and inhibiting prior habits of mind in order to activate a process of cognition that accounts for the new phenomenon.[251] This is a clinical way to describe Salam Pax's meteoric rise in the blogosphere: the outpouring of cynical and melancholic (among other) affects on his blog pivoted a global public that traditionally received its news about the war from broadcast media toward a new voice. By producing anxiety, cynicism and melancholy shift our cognitive efforts from reliance on habit to "open consideration of new alternatives."[252] This disruption of traditional attention patterns introduced another mode of communicative interdependence between a global public.

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[249] Joseph Forgas, "Affective Influence on Attitudes and Judgments," *Handbook of Affective Sciences,* eds. Richard Davidson, Klaus Scherer, H. Hill Goldsmith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 598. See also E. Virginia Demos, "An Affect Revolution: Silvan Tomkin's Affect Theory," in *Exploring Affect*, 19.

[250] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), especially Part 3, "Stereotypes."

[251] Marcus, *Sentimental Citizen*, 101.

[252] Marcus, *Sentimental Citizen*, 116.

Emotion is consequently what ignites stranger sociability, that particular form of intimacy that defines democratic public culture.[253] As citizens in democratic public cultures encounter each other, their affective ties emerge from the circulation of commodities and texts, bodies and personae.[254] This circulation generates patterns of identification that strengthen collective public life. Here, again, affect expands attention economies toward specific issues:

> Getting people to share in the concerns of others, to take an interest in a problem, crisis, or issue that is not part of their intimate lives, depends on making a specific connection between the observed grievance and one's emotional response. Seeing a spectacle and making sense of it, however important that understanding is, are not by themselves sufficient to recruit people to a cause. They must feel a connection.[255]

If this is true in a domestic context, it is doubly true in the context of international relations. Digital media offer more variety in form and content which in turn hold out the potential to invite more non-elite interest in public, and especially foreign, affairs.[256] Salam Pax's recent book tour led him to theorize that the role of blogs in producing global intimacy was unparalleled: "With blogging in the developing world, you get to feel people are listening to you, you can discuss things in a way you otherwise cannot. I mean, look at Chinese and Iranian weblogs. Where else could you get such insight into daily life in those countries?"[257] Indeed, it is

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[253] As Michael Warner explains in *Public and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 74-76.

[254] This underlines Craig Calhoun's point that publicity is not just about processing arguments about generating social solidarity; in "Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 14 (2002), 148.

[255] Marcus, *Sentimental Citizen*, 86.

[256] Hamilton and Jenner, "New Foreign Correspondence,"137-138.

[257] James Norman, "International Internet Sensation Ready To Get Back To His Day Job," *The Age (Melbourne)*, 22 May 2004, p. 2.

the ambient intimacy that is produced by the relation of everyday life that makes blogging part of

the contemporary deliberative legitimation processes in a networked public culture.

CHAPTER 5—SHALLOW QUOTATION: REALCLIMATE.ORG AS A TRANSLATION STATION

5.1 Introduction

With the rapid growth in the blogosphere during the popularization stage came inevitable specialization. Each professional field, for example, has sprouted overlapping blogging communities that pursue their own disciplinary interests. Scientific communities were no exception, as blogs emerged to create an informal peer review process, build social capital, and provide an entry point for scientific discussions between scientists and lay publics. In an early episode that demonstrates the potential of science blogging, Tim Lambert, a computer scientist at the University of New South Wales and blogger at *Deltoid*, dissected the research of Ross McKitrick, a skeptic of human-caused global warming. McKitrick had recently authored a paper in the journal *Climate Research* that purported to show that human economic activity was responsible for a minimal amount of climate change; the paper was being touted as a bombshell by fellow skeptic Patrick Michaels.[1] Lambert, though, had this to say:

> There seems to be some problems with their work. To understand them you need to understand the two different ways of measuring angles.

| This angle is one degree. | This angle is one radian. |

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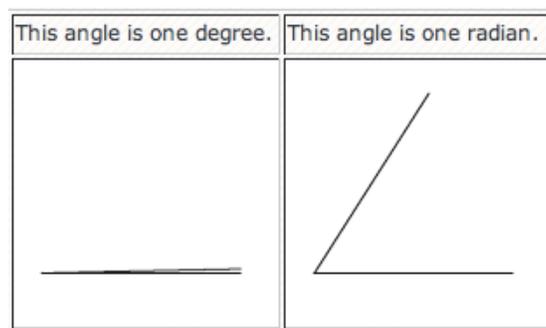
[1] Patrick Michaels, Fred Singer, and David Douglass, "Settling Global Warming Science," *Tech Central Station*, August 12, 2004, http://web.archive.org/web/20040814021214/http://www.techcentralstation.com/081204D.html.

Can you spot the difference? If you do calculations and get degrees and radians

mixed up, you get the wrong answer. Which is what McKitrick did.[2]

The difference between degrees and radians, as Lambert points out, is as crucial as the difference

between measuring temperature in Fahrenheit versus Celsius. This point was made elegantly

through visual proof supplied by Lambert, and sparked follow on conversation in comments by

practicing scientists and other blog readers.

In this one episode can be seen the promise of blogging about science from a deliberative

standpoint: a scientist with specialized knowledge explains the shortfall of a research paper in

clear language, with obvious visual proof. Though the implications are surely more complicated

then this, I take Lambert's post as one example of how blogging translates scientific language

into a more public idiom that can then be absorbed into broader arenas of public deliberation.

Lambert's blog is one science blog, ranging over a number of topics all loosely related to

mathematical issues. In contrast, the group blog *RealClimate*, sustained by a network of

scientists in different fields, focuses exclusively on the science behind climate change. Why start

a blog on climate science? The scientists who started *RealClimate* were frustrated by what they

perceived as "agenda-driven 'commentary' on the Internet and in the opinion columns of

newspapers crowding out careful analysis," and their first post identifies their goals:

> Journalists with deadlines and scant knowledge of the field quite often do not
>
> know where to go for this context on papers that are being pushed by some of the
>
> partisan think-tanks or other interested parties. This can lead to some quite
>
> mainstream outlets inadvertently publishing some very dubious and misleading

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[2] Tim Lambert, "McKitrick Screws Up Again," *Deltoid*, August 26th, 2004, http://timlambert.org/2004/08/mckitrick6/.

ideas. *RealClimate* is a commentary site on climate science by working climate

scientists for the interested public and journalists. We aim to provide a quick

response to developing stories and provide the context sometimes missing in

mainstream commentary.[3]

RealClimate originally focused attention on gatekeepers in the institutional media like journalists

and editors, because "communication efforts are much more likely to succeed if they target the

people who communicate for a living, rather than the general public directly."[4] Though the blog

was initially directed more toward practicing journalists, it has become increasingly used as a

space for citizens to discuss climate science with an occasionally rotating cast of climate

scientists.

The blog purports to be concerned with just the 'science,' leaving the 'politics' to others.

RealClimate does avoid endorsing specific policies, like the Kyoto Protocol, or pushing for a

particular alternative energy, like solar power. A moderated comments system allows the

scientists to weed out what they deem to be overly political or agonistic posts (a system which

they concede is sometimes problematic).[5] The comments section allows members of the general

public and fellow scientists to ask questions, indicates spaces where clarifications are needed,

and provides opportunities to challenge assertions. Despite their avowedly apolitical intentions,

the blog often gets drawn into public controversies. *RealClimate* posts migrate into wider spheres

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[3] Group, "Welcome to RealClimate," *RealClimate,* December 9, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=1.

[4] Gavin Schmidt, "A Tale of Three Interviews," *RealClimate*, April 9, 2007, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2007/04/a-tale-of-three-interviews/.

[5] Group, "One Year On …," *RealClimate*, December 28, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/12/one-year-on/. The *RealClimate* bloggers explain that the tendency for comments discussions to devolve into name-calling and off-topic issues requires a strong moderating hand. Their preferred style is sobriety, which they couch as necessary to counter the instantaneity and permanence of the blogosphere: "It is difficult at times to remember that although blogosphere conversations happen very quickly, they stay around forever, and so a sober style is most appropriate."

of discourse because they deliver rebuttals to climate change deniers of all stripes, from novelist

Michael Crichton to the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*. However, posts usually focus

on issues like "Climate Sensitivity and Aerosol Forcing," "The Acid Ocean—The Other Problem

with CO2 Emission," and "How Much of the Recent CO2 Increase is Due to Human

Activities?"[6] Each post includes numerous links to available scientific literature on the web—

causing one media reviewer of the site to give it the "footnote frenzy" award.[7] *RealClimate* has

landed on the blogrolls of 'A-list' bloggers and received prominent mass media coverage.

One reason that *RealClimate* has received so much attention is because one of the

bloggers, paleoclimatologist Michael Mann, was at the center of a controversy concerning a

paper that he co-authored in 1998. Mann and his co-authors generated a reconstruction of mean

temperatures for the North American hemisphere in the last millennium. The results were

visually arresting: they produced a graph, later called the 'hockey stick' for the way that post-

1900 temperatures increase dramatically, establishing a relationship between global warming and

burning fossil fuels.

I detail this controversy in some more depth later in this chapter, but for now, I simply

want to identify how blogging was situated as detracting from the quality of scientific discourse

during this controversy. Congressman Joseph Barton (R-TX) subpoenaed Mann's data in 2005

and in turn formed a committee of supposedly neutral scientists led by Edward Wegman to make

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[6] Gavin Schmidt, "Climate Sensitivity and Aerosol Forcings," *RealClimate*, July 6, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/07/climate-sensitivity-and-aerosol-forcings/; David Archer, "The Acid Ocean—The Other Problem with CO2 Emission," *RealClimate*, July 2, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/07/the-acid-ocean-the-other-problem-with-cosub2sub-emission/; Group, "How Much of the Recent CO2 Increase is Due to Human Activities?," *RealClimate*, June 7, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/how-much-of-the-recent-cosub2sub-increase-is-due-to-human-activities/.

[7] Ben Rooney, "Footnote Frenzy," *Daily Telegraph*, June 9, 2005, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2005/06/09/do0905.xml.

a judgment about the soundness of Mann's science. The Wegman Report, in addition to a

number of critiques about Mann's scientific process, included this barb:

> much of the discussion on the 'hockey stick' issue has taken place on competing
>
> web blogs. Our committee believes that web blogs are not an appropriate way to
>
> conduct science and thus the blogs give credence to the fact that these global
>
> warming issues are have [sic] migrated from the realm of rational scientific
>
> discourse. Unfortunately, the factions involved have become highly and
>
> passionately polarized.[8]

Read one way, the Wegman Report's dig at science blogs is understandable. Science blogging

doesn't adhere to the blind peer review process usually posited as central to scientific validity

claims. What the Wegman Report misses, though, is that blogs are usually not used to 'conduct'

science but rather to provide a platform for public debate and dissection of scientific claims. The

logic of this report, however, sticks closely to the modernist normative divide between 'rational

scientific discourse' conducted by experts and 'passionate' but partisan discussion by everyone

else.

RealClimate is a provocative case study because it grapples with this central tension in

democratic public life: the negotiation of expert and lay knowledge claims. A common critique

of modern political liberalism is that it relies too heavily on expert competence at the expense of

the collective wisdom of the governed. This problem is compounded in a network society

defined by hypercomplexity. 'Experts' become increasingly specialized while 'citizens' are

challenged to familiarize themselves with more complex norms of technical reasoning. This

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[8] Edward Wegman, David Scott, and Yasmin Said, "Ad Hoc Committee Report on the 'Hockey Stick'
Global Climate Reconstruction," July 14, 2006, http://republicans.energycommerce.house.gov/108/home/
07142006_Wegman_Report.pdf, 49.

creates a significant challenge, as I shall show in the next section, for democratic politics. While

science blogs like *RealClimate* are no panacea, they do provide one space where expert

discourses get translated into more generic language that is intelligible in the public sphere. As

an alternative to the 'deficit model' or 'engagement model' of science communication,

RealClimate presents what I call a 'light green public sphere' model.[9] The translation metaphors

that are often invoked in discussions about *RealClimate* lead me to posit one additional element

in the vocabulary of the networked imaginary that I have developed in this dissertation: shallow

quotation. I draw this term from Charles Willard's *Liberalism and the Problem of Knowledge*

because it signifies how claims cross boundaries like those that have emerged between the public

and the technical sphere. My analysis of the blog *RealClimate* is an example of what G. Thomas

Goodnight calls science and technology controversy studies.[10] Like previous chapters, the

following section lays out the 'problem of science' in late modern political thought, and then the

rhetorical effects of these modernist sensibilities. Following that, I detail how *RealClimate*

shallowly quotes science to make it intelligible to non-specialist audiences, and then unpack

what this means for a networked imaginary.

5.2 Science and Expertise in Late Modernity

Though the classical Greek and bourgeois public sphere have provided some helpful

historical analogs in the previous two chapters, they provide slightly less guidance for

incorporating contemporary forms of expertise into public deliberation. This is because one of

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[9] For an overview of the deficit model and engagement model of public communication of science, see Bernard Schiele, "On and About the Deficit Model in an Age of Free Flow," in *Communicating Science in Social Contexts: New Models, New Practices*, eds. Donghong Cheng, Michael Claessens, Toss Gascoigne, Jenni Metcalfe, Bernard Schiele, and Shunke Shi (Amsterdam: Springerlink, 2008): 93-117.

[10] G. Thomas Goodnight, "Science and Technology Controversy: A Rationale for Inquiry," *Argumentation and Advocacy* (Summer 2005): 26-9.

the defining features of late modernity is the growth of the technical expertise required to manage the complex subsystems that have arisen. The Greek and European bourgeois encouragement of the sciences did, of course, play a crucial role in establishing scientific inquiry. As classicist Maurice Clagett explains, Greek public culture grounded the norms of Western science by developing the logical forms that were the basis for scientific proof and also by initiating the institutional support that birthed sustained scientific inquiry.[11] Similarly, Steven Shapin has documented how bourgeois conversation norms in seventeenth century English gentle culture were instrumental in aiding the dispassionate analysis of early scientific experiments.[12] These two eras had an intimate relationship with science in part because media new to those times expanded the participants in scientific inquiry. Alphabetic writing moved science beyond the scribal-priestly class in classical Greece, and print culture circulated scientific conversation even further throughout textually-mediated social networks in the bourgeois public sphere.

Yet, neither of these cultures really provides a normative model to fit the unique space that scientific discourses came to occupy in late modern public culture. Decisions now made by technical experts are operating on a much different scale. Contemporary experiments don't exactly work through the abstract questions that required Newton to lounge under the apple tree and Boyle to stick balloons on boiling beakers. Scientists are now employed by states and corporations to develop pharmaceutical drugs, sources of energy, and military weapons; they are called on to address the healthfulness of food, the pollution of rivers, and climatic changes. These instrumental applications of science have increased the centrality of experts in managing

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[11] Maurice Clagett, *Greek Science in Antiquity* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001 [1955]), 24-31.
[12] Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, especially chapters 2 and 3.

risks produced, ironically, from some of modernity's excesses.[13] Environmental pollution is the

most obvious of these excesses, with carbon dioxide-fueled climate change looming as a

particularly daunting challenge. Scientists are central in the struggle over climate science—but

even the 'experts' aren't really experts, because "climate science is such a vast undertaking that

no single scientist, nor any group of scientists can master anything but a small part of it."[14]

Climate science is indicative of the complexities of modern day science: the (modernist)

disciplinarity of knowledge production is incapable of capturing the full dynamic of climate

change. Rather, the scientific study of climate links fields across traditional disciplines, making it

increasingly difficult for both experts and more general publics to make sense of the state of the

science when it gets called into question.[15]

Despite the inability of Greek and bourgeois public culture to firmly ground a normative

ideal of 'science in society' with enough portability to organize contemporary public life,

Habermas' essential insights about democratic deliberation inform contemporary efforts to

reconcile expert and lay knowledge. Even in complex scientific controversies like climate

science, Habermas has maintained that there must be some linkage between expert and lay

discourses in order to facilitate deliberative legitimation processes. Science cannot stand outside

of democratic politics. This orientation coheres with his decades long project of theorizing the

debilitating effects of technocracy, which I will partially recount here. In *Towards a Rational

Society*, Habermas extends a Deweyan-pragmatist vision of the relationship between science and

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[13] See Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), 19-20 and *Nuclear Legacies: Communication, Controversy, and the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Complex,* ed. Bryan C. Taylor, William J. Kinsella, Stephen P. Depoe and Maribeth S. Metzler (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

[14] Aynsley Kellow, *Science and Public Policy: The Virtuous Corruption of Virtual Environmental Science* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2007), 47.

[15] See Clark Miller and Paul Edwards, "Introduction," in *Changing the Atmosphere: Expert Knowledge and Environmental Governance*, eds. Clark Miller and Paul Edwards (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 8-15.

the lifeworld.[16] John Dewey theorized the interplay of science and deliberation as a two-way street: "the subject matter of science is stated in symbol-constellations that are radically unlike those familiar to common sense: in what, in effect, is a different language … science takes its departure from common sense, but the return road into common sense is devious and blocked by existing social conditions."[17] These one-way roads put democratic governance on a path to technocratic decision-making uncoupled from the practical needs of a public. Absent public input through democratic channels, advancements in science and technology will likely not be bent toward the common good. Or worse: it was, after all, technocrats who made the trains run on time in Nazi Germany and who built atomic bombs in the United States.[18]

Technocratic decision-making might be said to refigure representative publicity.[19] In late modern culture, scientists have supplanted the king in being trotted out before a public, where their claims take on a kind of modernist holiness privileged over other ways of knowing.[20] When institutions like Congress host debates about science, competing stakeholders march their own scientists out in a spectacle amplified by the mass media.[21] This spectacle replaces the earlier norm by which the individual scientist had "automatic contact" with a broader public through the

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[16] Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970 [1968]), 66-9.

[17] John Dewey, "On Common Sense and Science," in *John Dewey Later Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1990), 12:83.

[18] See Frank Fischer's critique of technocratic reasoning in *Citizens, Experts, and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), especially 10-28 and Gordon R. Mitchell, "Did Habermas Cede Nature to the Positivists?" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 36 (Fall 2003): 1-21.

[19] Or, following Thomas M. Lessl's configuration, scientific discourse uses a 'priestly voice' that speaks authoritatively for an elite substratum of society; in "The Priestly Voice," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (May 1989): 183-97.

[20] Habermas, *Rational Society*, 67.

[21] Habermas, *Rational Society*, 75.

scientific societies of the bourgeois public sphere.[22] Sometimes this spectacle wins consent, but other times it simply erodes scientific authority, as "each side presents its own scientists, making it hard to maintain the appearance of scientific neutrality."[23] Though scientific experts might be able to address some scientific problems, technocratic solutions don't benefit from the same strength of legitimacy that more robust expert-public dialogues lend to the resolution of science controversies.

The later Habermas echoes many of the same themes originally articulated in *Toward a Rational Society*. In *Between Facts and Norms*, he claims, "if the discourse of experts is not coupled with democratic opinion- and will-formation, then the experts' perceptions of problems will prevail at the citizens' expense."[24] Only by taking into account citizen discourses can the political public sphere successfully thematize those problems in the lifeworld that demand redress.[25] The absence of this interface between scientists and citizens results in "a technocratic incapacitation of the public sphere" because there is no effective check on the technocrats who would otherwise rule unbound.[26]

How, then, can decisions about technical controversies gain legitimacy but maintain fidelity to science's best predictions? Habermas poses two related questions that more

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[22] As Habermas writes, "the bureaucratic encapsulation that arises from the organization of the modern research process" presents an additional barrier between science and public deliberation, "for the client at the gates of organized research, to whom scientific information is addressed, is now no longer (at least immediately) a public engaged in learning or discussion. It is instead a contracting agency interested in the outcome of the research process for the sake of its technical application. Formerly the task of literary presentation belonged to scientific reflection itself. In the system of large-scale research it is replaced by the memorandum formulated in relation to the contract and the research report aimed at technical recommendations" (*Rational Society*, 76).

[23] John Dryzek, David Downes, Christian Hunold, David Schlosberg, and Hans-Kristian Hernes, *Green States and Social Movements: Environmentalism in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Norway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 178-9.

[24] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 351.

[25] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 365.

[26] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 373.

specifically broach this problem: "How is it possible to translate technically exploitable knowledge into the practical consciousness of the social life-world?" and "How can the power of technical control be brought within the range of the consensus of acting and transacting citizens?"[27] The latter question is answered with a little more ease for Habermas. Technocrats must be answerable to citizen needs and critiques—it is this normative orientation that legitimized Congressman Barton's request of Mann's hockey stick data. In this view, citizens should be able to have the opportunity to set the agenda for scientific inquiry by, for example, identifying polluted rivers and lobbying for research into potential source points. Citizens and their representatives should be able to have oversight powers so that scientific decision-making doesn't run amuck.

These kinds of democratic constraints on scientific knowledge production have some value. But can models of public deliberation that simply give everyone a seat at the table sufficiently ground deliberative legitimation processes? It's true that lay citizens might well be better situated to make risk calculations than technocrats working through narrow cost-benefit algorithms. However, some scientific controversies frustrate the capacity of citizens to detect and understand them, and so their agenda-setting and oversight functions are considerably weakened. The controversy over climate change is a textbook example of this problem. Climate science relies on data spanning thousands of years, charting apparently imperceptible yet significant shifts in the overall climate patterns of the earth. The consequences of climate change are similarly fuzzy to detect. Sure, citizens can perceive an increase in hurricanes, the threat of rising oceans, or the long-term shifts in the zones of agricultural production; but can they connect those phenomena to driving cars and building factories? As skeptics of anthropogenic climate change

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[27] Habermas, *Rational Society*, 52, 57.

successfully argued for years, these are all long-term effects with many alternate causes, and easy cause and effect relationships are elusive.

Opportunities for agenda setting must consequently be paired with what might be called the interpretive function of experts, which addresses Habermas' first question concerning the translation of specialized knowledge into the practical consciousness of the lifeworld. How is this possible? Habermas posits, "conflicts must be decided, interests realized, interpretations found—through both action and transaction structured by ordinary language."[28] He thus puts the burden on experts to shift from highly technical, specialized language to a more public idiom. We might call the spaces where technical language is negotiated into ordinary language 'translation stations.'[29] There, science and common sense meet (perhaps shaking hands, even as they look warily at each others' tickets). 'Translation' ought not be thought of simplistically. As anyone who has ever attempted translation can attest, the process of moving from one language game to another is fraught with stops and starts, words that shade into each other, culturally weighted meanings, inside jokes and cognitive shortcuts. Translation is not smooth and errorless; in fact, the intrinsic roughness of any translation often productively sparks continuing conversation about the accuracy, appropriateness, and effectiveness of various renditions.

Can scientific claims make the jump from technical modes of reasoning to more public-friendly approaches? Habermas says they can, and the institutional mass media has traditionally

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[28] Habermas, *Rational Society*, 56.

[29] Habermas, *Rational Society*, 70. There are echoes of Dewey here as well: "the paths of communication between common sense and science are as yet largely one-way lanes" (83) and, in what might be an early instantiation of the translation station metaphor, that the "present need is for a unified logic that takes account of a two-way movement between common sense" ("Common Sense," 101). The diagnosis made by Habermas years later suggests that there has been little evolution in merging the one-way lanes: "[the pragmatistic model] neglects the specific logical characteristics and the social preconditions for the reliable translation of scientific information into the ordinary language of practice and inversely for a translation from the context of practical questions back into the specialized language of technical and strategic recommendations" (*Rational Society*, 70).

served as a key translation station for science as it filters into public debate. Yet, many experts resist translating their findings into ordinary language; part of what makes them experts is a mastery of the jargon, specialized literature, and complex methodology that defines their area of expertise. A quick glimpse at most any peer-reviewed technical journal confirms that "semantically closed systems cannot be induced to invent on their own the common language necessary for the perception and articulation of the relevant issues and standards of evaluation that apply to society as a whole."[30] At the same time, professional journals and conferences *are* translation stations for scientists, who often must read scientific accounts in more ordinary language than the technical language of practitioners in a parallel sub-field. Scientists themselves need interpreters, especially given the "rising flood of information that the scientific community has to deal with."[31]

In fact, ordinary language is the *lingua franca* required for scientists to communicate with each other. As Habermas claims, "given a high degree of division of labor, the lay public often provides the shortest path of internal understanding between mutually estranged specialists."[32] Ordinary language is the "'ultimate metalanguage'" that "circulates throughout society and can be translated into and from every specialized code."[33] Habermas posits that "an ordinary language is available" and already in use by the networks of civil society and the state's deliberating bodies.[34] While scientists (and philosophers of science) often claim that technical language cannot be converted neatly into ordinary language without the massive loss of data, the presence of interfield communication conducted in ordinary language between scientists partially

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[30] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 352.
[31] Habermas, *Rational Society*, 77.
[32] Habermas, *Rational Society*, 77.
[33] Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 56.
[34] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 352.

belies this critique.[35] It is my contention that science blogs have established themselves as supplemental translation stations, which, in their own way, deal with the increasingly rising tide of science and technology controversies by providing both panoramic and detailed overviews in ordinary language.

G. Thomas Goodnight's formulation of the private, public, and technical spheres of argument is a relevant addition that extends Habermasian insights into the realm of argumentation. Goodnight argues that these three spheres ground arguments differently, with norms of evidence, reasoning, and presentation wildly divergent.[36] According to Goodnight, deliberative rhetoric in the public sphere is being squeezed out by private and technical modes of reasoning. Either individual citizens assert their own tendentious interpretations or experts' opinions prevail because of their greater authority. The spaces for controversies to be assessed in ordinary language are disappearing because, as Goodnight catalogs, mass communication strategists have encouraged politicians to dumb down their political rhetoric at the same time that the celebration of the personal appears to have triumphed over discussion of the common good.[37]

Goodnight is sanguine about the newest communication revolution in reversing this trend. "Improvements in broadcast techniques, satellite transmission, and computer processing," he writes, "… seem to be geared to producing either refined information or compelling fantasy … What could be a way of sharing in the creation of a future is supplanted by a perpetual swirl

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[35] See the volume edited by Randy Allen Harris, *Rhetoric and Incommensurability* (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2005).

[36] G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A Speculative Inquiry into the Art of Public Deliberation," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, eds. John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Sally Caudhill (New York: Guilford Press, 1999): 251-264; originally published in *Argumentation and Advocacy* 18 (1982): 214-227.

[37] Goodnight, "Personal, Technical, and Public," 259.

of exciting stimuli. Thus is deliberation replaced by consumption."[38] There's a lot not to like in that assessment—namely, that new media forms invariably squeeze out public deliberation rather than reconfiguring how publics deliberate. There is an additional critique I would add: the theory of public, private, and technical spheres tends to obscure the interpenetration of these different fields of argument. *RealClimate*, and similar science blogs, might be usefully conceived as systematically creating an interstitial 'public-technical' sphere that negotiates knowledge claims made by publics and experts. As such, science blogs represent a different kind of translation station from that provided by the institutional mass media, which fall squarely in the 'public' field of argument. Examined from a rhetorical perspective, the mass-mediated 'translation stations,' like newspapers and television, have significant problems that may well prevent a renewed appreciation for deliberative rhetoric. It is to these critiques that I turn before explaining *RealClimate*'s potential as a translation station appropriate for a network society.

5.3 A Rhetorical Perspective on Expertism and the Problem of Authority

I have set up the need, as far as deliberative legitimacy is concerned, for translation between scientific and lay publics. Habermas' calls for more science-public intercommunication has not gone unheeded, especially as scientific and technological controversies have increasingly spun into public view. And, in fact, the demands that scientific knowledge be translated into ordinary language have occasionally been met. Two regularized sites of public-science interaction have been institutionalized utilizing the medium of ordinary language, yet both produce certain problems visible from a rhetorical perspective. The first site of this interaction is found in authorized venues for public participation in scientific decision-making by democratic

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[38] Goodnight, "Personal, Technical, and Public," 260.

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institutions. The second site of this interaction is through the institutional mass media in the form of news stories about scientific issues. Though each of these efforts to spread scientific discussion in an intelligible fashion occasionally contributes to more robust dialogues about science in society, a rhetorical perspective on communication draws out their imperfections as sites of translation.

Rituals of Participation in Public Hearings

Given the increasing centrality of scientific and technological controversies in late modernity, democratic institutions have begun to accommodate demands for enhanced avenues incorporating public deliberation. Administrative agencies in the United States often open their rulemaking to public comment, in addition to meeting with community members. The results of these attempts at incorporating public participation in scientific decision-making have been mixed. The inescapable problem of scientific authority in these situations creates a disparity in *ethos* between the scientists, who are often positioned as knowers, and citizens, who are regularly situated as learners. Though the medium of conversation between these two stakeholders is often ordinary language, asymmetries still persist. As Stephen Turner explains,

> The standard models imply that experts can persuade one another, and can persuade non-experts, while non-experts cannot persuade experts. The non-expert can at most supply information, which becomes meaningful for the expert only when translated into expert terms, which the non-expert cannot do, but the expert can. There is, in short, a 'discursive asymmetry.' Experts possess the grounds and

means of mutual persuasion; non-experts do not. A non-expert can at best

apprehend, as a consumer expert opinion, that others possess expertise.[39]

This discursive asymmetry is bound up in authority. As Turner continues,

> Scientists themselves, presumably, speak both the 'languages' of science and
> common sense, and can translate from one to the other as bilinguals. But the
> results of translation, such as 'this table is composed mostly of empty space,' do
> not have common sense *credibility*, because the grounds for the claim cannot be
> expressed in common terms. So translation is not enough. Something more is
> needed, and the usual solution is to characterize these utterances in terms of the
> notion of 'authority,' making the problem one of expert authority.[40]

Turner has captured the essential problem with translation: when scientific language is translated

into ordinary language, it loses some of its special claim to authority. In institutional contexts

where publics and specialists intersect, a non-specialist must trust that a scientist's claims do in

fact faithfully reflect scientifically valid results.

These translation stations can, indeed, orient scientists toward the needs of the public and

better acquaint the public with the state of scientific inquiry. However, more likely, traditional

public participation processes are "ritualistic endeavors"[41] that are "designed [or are perceived] to

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[39] Stephen Turner, *Liberal Democracy 3.0*: *Civil Society in an Age of Experts* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 48.

[40] Turner, *Liberal Democracy 3.0*, 50.

[41] Susan Senecah, "The Trinity of Voice: The Role of Practical Theory in Planning and Evaluating the Effectiveness of Environmental Participatory Processes," in *Communication and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making*, eds. Stephen Depoe, John Delicath, and Marie-France Aepli Elsenbeer (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 18.

shroud an elitist policy making process in the cloak of democracy."[42] In other words, when the

Environmental Protection Agency invites the public to a hearing, the meeting often functions as

a rubber stamp for decisions that have already been made. Experts are able to corral public

opinion and herd it into more controllable avenues. As Walter Fisher argues, field experts tend to

dominate these contexts "by the rational superiority of their arguments … The presence of

'experts' in *public* moral arguments makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the public of

'untrained thinkers' to win an argument or even to judge arguments well."[43] Discursive

asymmetries aren't automatic, and systemic tweaks might well reduce the ritualistic elements of

public hearings while increasing deliberative legitimacy. Yet, as Carol Hager argues, "even in

the absence of domination by one group or faction, the search for the better argument can

become a technical search that cuts off political interaction."[44]

As a translation station, this institutional response to the problem of public-science

communication cannot avoid the problem of authority in technical communication. Some critics

of these weak fora have thus suggested 'meta-institutional' efforts that rely not on localized

participation by a public with particular scientists but on efforts by supposedly neutral third

parties to make judgments about sound science. Stephen Schneider has recommended the

development of "science courts" that could make more impartial judgments about science.[45]

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[42] G.A. Persons, "Defining the Public Interest: Citizen Participation in Metropolitan and State Policy Making," *National Civic Review* (February 2007), 121; also John Gastil and Laura Black, "Public Deliberation as the Organizing Principle of Political Communication Research," *Journal of Public Deliberation* 4 (2008), 24.

[43] Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 71, emphasis in original.

[44] Carol Hager, *Technological Democracy: Bureaucracy and Citizenry in the German Energy Debate* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 217.

[45] Stephen Schneider, "Is the 'Citizen-Scientist' an Oxymoron?," in *Science, Technology, and Democracy*, ed. Daniel Lee Kleinman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 112-4. Arthur Kantrowitz is widely credited with generating the original enthusiasm for a science court-like institution in "Proposal for an Institution for Scientific Judgment," *Science* (May 12, 1967): 763-4.

These courts would theoretically toss out the 'junk science,' make careful comparisons of competing scientific claims, and issue judgments that could better inform policy decisions. However, this meta-institutional effort to make judgments about science replicates traditional patterns of scientific decision-making by an elite cadre rather than through deliberative means. As a top-down approach, meta-institutional solutions cannot capture the legitimacy that accrues through dialogical translation stations.

'Balance' and the Institutional Media

If public fora are one opportunity for publics and scientists to meet in the medium of ordinary language, the mass media have traditionally been another site. The broadcast media that consolidated during the twentieth century tasked themselves with reporting on the unfolding scientific and technology controversies of the day. However, the journalistic norm of objectivity and balance, represented by the convention of reporting on 'both sides' of a controversy, has a perverse effect when it comes to scientific issues. Some apparent absurdities can result from this norm: does balance require journalists to interview card-carrying members of the Flat Earth Society whenever they cover geological issues? Must they interview advocates who deny the connection between HIV and AIDS when they report on new developments of an AIDS vaccine? Indeed, showing 'both sides' potentially results in some strange reporting; yet, reporters are advised to hedge their bets because the history of science is littered with examples where the 'consensus' position was eventually overturned by what had been a minority perspective. Showing both sides, then, serves as a check against 'false consensus' and the premature closure of scientific controversy.

The root of this tension is in the modeling of the mass media after the format of public

debate. For a public debate, both (or multiple) sides are supposed to be given equal time in

advancing their claims. In this way, norms of the bourgeois public sphere about turn-taking

became institutionalized in the broadcast media. This model of public debate "has the potential

to allow smaller, less recognized or less powerful groups to compete on an equal footing with

larger, more familiar, or more powerful groups."[46] One side effect of this norm is to reduce

political debate from a rich field of subtly differentiated opinions into two polarized sides, which

in the United States often map directly onto the two dominant political parties. Deborah Tannen

has amplified this criticism in her assessment of the public debate template. Using the dramatic

example of Holocaust deniers to prove her point, Tannen maintains that the use of adversarial,

'show both sides' formats has given minority viewpoints unjustifiable publicity.[47] This argument

culture encourages a rush to extreme, polarizing argumentation that exacts an opportunity cost

for public deliberation.

The adversarial format, preserved through the institutional media's focus on 'balance' by

getting perspectives from 'both sides,' is particularly problematic for science controversies

because it imports norms very different from scientific argumentation. As John Ziman explains,

scientific evidence is argued over for years through iterations of written argument, a far cry from

the daily punctuation of the broadcast media.[48] Moreover, scientific argument proceeds by

establishing loose "complexes of evidence" that resist reduction to polarized propositions like 'is

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[46] Ken Broda-Bahm, Daniela Kempf, and William Driscoll. *Argument and Audience: Presenting Debates in Public Settings*. (New York: The International Debate Education Association, 2004), 25-26.

[47] Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue* (New York: Random House, 1998), 37-8.

[48] John Ziman, "Are Debatable Scientific Questions Debatable?," *Social Epistemology* 14 (2000), 190.

anthropogenic global warming happening?'[49] Scientists often perceive public debate on issues where there is a lopsided consensus—in face-to-face exchanges or through the mass media—"as an attempt to publicize the heresy and keep it alive scientifically rather than as a serious procedure for arriving collectively at the truth."[50]

The norms of 'balance' claimed by the institutional media create two additional perverse consequences when it comes to reporting on climate science.[51] First, journalists that report on climate science often underplay the significant overlaps in scientific consensus that link industrial emissions of carbon dioxide with artificial climate shifts. If few scientists have a panoramic view of climate science because of its complexity as an area of inquiry, then journalists with multiple beats to cover are even more unlikely to have developed the ability to accurately synthesize cutting edge developments across a number of fields.[52] This failure in discretion often leads journalists to give more credence to lobbyists, front-groups, and fringe views than they deserve.[53] A standard newspaper article, for example, might relate findings from two different sources, without identifying one of the sources as being funded primarily by oil and coal industries. The effect of this is to perpetuate the assumption that climate science has failed to produce any actionable findings and thus delay meaningful action to address the impending crisis. As journalist and climate activist Ross Gelbspan argues, a proportionalizing approach

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[49] Ziman, "Debatable Scientific Questions," 194.

[50] Ziman, "Debatable Scientific Questions," 195.

[51] Robert Patterson and Ronald Lee have critiqued the notion of balance as it appears in regulatory decision-making as a move that inherently privileges technical discourse; see their "The Environmental Rhetoric of 'Balance': A Case Study of Regulatory Discourse and the Colonization of the Public," *Technical Communication Quarterly* (Winter 1997): 25-40.

[52] Julia Corbett and Jessica Durfee, "Testing (Un)Certainty of Science: Media Representations of Global Warming," *Science Communication* (December 2004), 133; Kris Wilson, "Drought, Debate, and Uncertainty: Measuring Reporters' Knowledge and Ignorance about Climate Change," *Public Understanding of Science* 9 (2000): 1-13.

[53] Julia Corbett, *Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2006), 217.

might be more appropriate than the current model: journalists might focus on new research

findings for 95% of the article, "with the skeptics getting a paragraph at the end."[54]

The second problem involved with reporting 'both sides' of the climate science

controversy is the debilitating phenomenon of the "dueling scientists."[55] As Environmental and

Resource Studies scholar Stephen Bocking argues, "the spectacle of different experts interpreting

the same thing differently contradicts assumptions about their objectivity."[56] Dueling scientists

unnecessarily polarize technical issues, creating a "false dichotomy" that erodes more

sophisticated assessment of possible points of agreement.[57] When competing experts are trotted

out, public consideration often turns toward comparisons of authority. Who is more qualified to

speak? Who is being funded by what special interests? What is the track record of each expert?

While these are often useful, and necessary, questions to ask, they often produces "whiplash

journalism," where differing, contradictory scientific reports result in public confusion.[58]

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[54] Ross Gelbspan, *Boiling Point: How Politicians, Big Oil and Coal, Journalists and Activists Are Fueling the Climate Crisis--And What We Can Do to Avert Disaster* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 73-4.

[55] Schneider, "'Citizen-Scientist,'" 106.

[56] Stephen Bocking, *Nature's Experts: Science, Politics, and the Environment* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 30. Bocking suggests that the phenomenon of the dueling experts might have some positive consequences as well in demystifying the supposed objectivity of science: "The perception that experts can disagree—inevitably disagree, when they become involved in controversies—highlights how doing science always involves some judgment, and how these judgments can be shaped by values, as well as by professional, economic, and political factors. The realization that experts are not infallible, and do not have access to some unique, objective methods or perceptions, has resulted in an opening up of science beyond the scientific community" (31). Thomas Farrell and G. Thomas Goodnight similarly explore how disagreeing scientists during the Three Mile Island catastrophe hurt technical credibility during the crisis in "Accidental Rhetoric: The Root Metaphors of Three Mile Island," *Communication Monographs* 48 (1981): 271-300.

[57] Stephen Schneider, *Global Warming: Are We Entering the Greenhouse Century?* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1989), 203-4.

[58] See Andrew Revkin, "The Daily Planet: Why The Media Stumble Over the Environment," in *A Field Guide for Science Writers*, eds. Deborah Blum, Mary Knudson, and Robin Marantz Henig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 222-8; "Media Mania for a 'Front-Page Thought' on Climate," *Dot Earth*, December 14, 2007, http://dotearth.blogs. nytimes.com/2007/12/14/the-mania-for-a-front-page-thought-on-climate/; and "Climate Experts Tussle Over Details. Public Gets Whiplash," *New York Times*, July 29, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/ 2008/07/29/science/earth/29clim.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&adxnnlx=1219165225MmvSFWEJVtEQCkpz ZnNtJg.

To recap: according to late Habermas, public and technical communication must find

translation stations where interchanges can be conducted in ordinary language. Yet, two of the

most prominent translation stations, the state's institutionalized space reserved for public

comment and the institutional mass media, have trouble facilitating the conversation in a way

that doesn't just defer to the spectacular collision of expert discourses. It would be a mistake to

assume that the twentieth century translation stations are doomed to failure. Surely they are not.

Yet, on a rhetorical level, the norms that govern these translation stations are increasingly

problematic. I will argue in the next section that science blogs like *RealClimate* offer an

alternative to traditional translation stations in a way that might assist in cultivating public

expertise on science controversies.

5.4   *RealClimate* as a Translation Station

What kinds of *topoi* do the bloggers at *RealClimate* cover? What sorts of technical issues

do they attempt to translate into ordinary language? *RealClimate* bloggers utilize categories and

tags to organize their posts into themes, making for convenient access to similar posts.[59] There

are three significant divisions, based on the index page of *RealClimate*.[60] The first category deals

with specifically scientific issues regarding the state of climate science: aerosols, climate

modeling, extreme events, paleo-climate, and so on. The second category addresses how climate

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[59] The rise of categories and tagging has reintroduced the regular blogger to the concept of *topoi*. *Topoi* is
the classical theory of invention that asked a rhetor to consider traditional, familiar lines of argument. The
categories that the *RealClimate* bloggers have organized are designed to sort the repeated themes that they regularly
touch on. These categories function like *topoi*—they are the types of things one would need to know in order to be
able to argue convincingly in favor of the climate science. Political blogs function similarly as catalogs of possible
topoi, from very broad to very focused topics. Categories in more personal, 'lifecasting' blogs similarly function as a
sort of ongoing, reflexive thematization of the topoi of everday life. As these thematizations arise, and become
recurring features in their blogging, they reveal more information about social types and processes.

[60] Group, "Index," *RealClimate*, December 1, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2004/
12/index/.

science is discussed in the media, with a special focus on 'responses to common contrarian arguments.' The final category considers scientific practice and delves into meta-issues like the significance of peer review, the meaning of consensus, and issues involved with communicating science. These three broad categories indicate three different areas where *RealClimate* performs a translation function, and I will explicate each in turn.

Category 1: The Science Itself, In Which 'Dummies Guide' Becomes the Universal Hermeneutic

One of the key developments in the last decade regarding climate science and policy is the visual depiction of an artificial warming spike. Dubbed the 'hockey stick,' the upward tick at the end of the twentieth century corresponds with intensified human industrial activity and carbon dioxide production. It is a powerful visual enthymeme that dispels the skeptics' criticisms as minor quibbles that simply don't undermine the fundamental linkage between excess carbon dioxide and climate change.[61] One of the scientists who founded *RealClimate*, Michael Mann, was lead author on the original paper published in the influential journal *Nature* in 1998.[62] Stephen McIntyre and Ross McKitrick criticized that piece in 2003 with an article published in *Energy and Environment*.[63] The gist of their objection was that certain proxy data should be weighted differently, and with a more appropriate weighting system the blade of the hockey stick does not appear. In 2005, Representative Joe Barton, a prominent skeptic of climate change,

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[61] This visual depiction might be seen as an extension of what Cara Finnegan calls the "naturalistic enthymeme" that asserts its own realism; see her "The Naturalistic Enthymeme and Visual Argument: Photographic Representation in the Skull Controversy," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37 (Winter 2001): 133-49. Michelle Gibbons has extended Finnegan's insights about the naturalistic enthymeme in the context of how technical images are reframed in popular news stories in "Seeing the Mind in the Matter: Functional Brain Imaging as Framed Visual Argument," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 43 (Winter and Spring 2007): 175-88.

[62] Michael Mann, Raymond Bradley, and Malcolm Hughes, "Global-scale Temperature Patterns and Climate Forcing over the Past Six Centuries," *Nature* 392 (April 1998): 779-787.

[63] See their "Corrections to the Mann et al (1998) Proxy Data Base and Northern Hemisphere Average Temperature Series" in *Energy and Environment* 14 (2003): 751-772.

called Mann to testify in Congress about his data collection and method of analysis. Two

different commissions studied Mann's data, resulting in two drastically differing reports.

Scientists in the consensus position signaled reaffirmation of the hockey stick, whereas skeptics,

and others in the global-warming-industrial-skepticism complex, read validation into the

continuing question marks concerning Mann et al.'s methodology.[64] Most of the peer-reviewed

literature concluded that Mann et al.'s initial climate reconstruction was essentially vindicated

and independent reconstructions using various data sets have confirmed the initial hockey stick,

creating what some call a 'hockey team.'[65] This is a microcosm of numerous scientific

controversies today: seemingly credible, yet competing, scientific claims receive multiple so-

called 'independent' reviews that came to differing conclusions. What follows is an example of

how *RealClimate* bloggers interpreted this controversy in order to provide non-specialists with a

broader sense of the scientific justification for the validity of the hockey stick.

On December 4, 2004, Michael Mann wrote "Myth vs. Fact Regarding the 'Hockey

Stick.'[66] This post identified 4 (later updated to 5) myths regarding the recent hockey stick

controversy.[67] Mann dissects some of the claims that had been repeated by various critics. In the

traditional 'myth vs. fact' model, Mann responds like this:

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[64] For example, Steve McIntyre's blog *Climate Audit* claimed vindication of their original critique in "Wegman Report Released," *Climate Audit*, July 14, 2006, http://www.climateaudit.org/?p=750.

[65] A term coined by *RealClimate* bloggers. See Group, "Peer Review: A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition II," *RealClimate*, January 27, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=111; see also Geoff Brumfiel, "Academy Affirms Hockey Stick Graph," *Nature,* 441 (June 29, 2006): 1032-3.

[66] Michael Mann, "Myth vs. Fact Regarding the 'Hockey Stick,' *RealClimate*, December 4, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=11, emphasis in original.

[67] This updating was announced in comments; Michael Mann, comment on "Myth vs. Fact Regarding the 'Hockey Stick,' *RealClimate*, 11:58 a.m., December 4, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/ index.php?p=11 #comment-389. The ability of bloggers to go back and update posts demonstrates the 'dynamic updating' possibilities inherent in blogging as new understandings and interests are discovered; see Christopher Karpowitz and Jane Mansbridge, "Disagreement and Consensus: The Importance of Dynamic Updating in Public Deliberation," in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. John Gastil and Peter Levine (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2005): 237-53. The dynamic updating on

MYTH #1: The 'Hockey Stick' Reconstruction is based solely on two publications by climate scientist Michael Mann and colleagues (Mann et al, 1998; 1999). This is patently false. Nearly a dozen model-based and proxy-based reconstructions of Northern Hemisphere mean temperature by different groups all suggest that late 20th century warmth is anomalous in a long-term (multi-century to millennial) context (see Figures 1 and 2 in "Temperature Variations in Past Centuries and The So-Called 'Hockey Stick'").[68]

Mann relies on scientific consensus on this issue to back up his claim. By citing other scholarship confirming the hockey stick, and providing links to two figures, he adds credibility to his model by citing research that duplicates the hockey stick reconstruction.

Later in the same post, Mann debunks 'Myth #4,' that "Errors in the 'Hockey Stick' undermine the conclusion that late 20th century hemispheric warmth is anomalous."[69] He goes into detail with responses to McKitrick and McIntyre's objections, emphasizing how their criticisms failed to pass peer review at *Nature* and had been rebutted by an article in the *Journal of Climate*. Mann mostly skirts the scientific thrust of their criticism, relying on the power of peer-reviewed science pitted against un-peer-reviewed research to do the persuasive work. In one way, this replicates the authority battles so often waged over 'good' and 'bad' science. Within that paradigm, the norms of science—i.e. peer review—are the key test for what kinds of scientific claims ought to be accepted. It might be problematic to assume that peer review carries as much weight in public realms as it does in technical spheres, though there is probably some

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blogs can be a double-edged sword: while it allows additions, useful modifications, and clarifications, it also enables erasure.

[68] Mann, "Myth vs. Fact," *RealClimate.*
[69] Mann, "Myth vs. Fact," *RealClimate*.

significant common sense recognition that peer reviewed science is preferable. Mann's knowledge of why *Nature* declined to publish McIntyre and McKitrick's comment skeptical of the hockey stick data reveals critical insider information to a wider audience. The footnotes to published scientific papers, with live hyperlinks where available, lend added authority to Mann's post.

Yet, in the end, this post might defer too much to authority in trying to persuade the audience about the accuracy of the hockey stick research. Admittedly, it constructs a particularly compelling model of authority that is grounded in the norms of peer review and seemingly super-majoritarian consensus. But the bloggers at *RealClimate*, in their explanation of the hockey stick research, move beyond authority claims in their descriptions of climate science. In February of 2005, Gavin Schmidt and Caspar Amman produced a "Dummies Guide to the Latest 'Hockey Stick' Controversy."[70] The 'dummies guide,' a reference to the popular line of books that purport to simplify complex subjects, has become code for the process of turning technical language into more accessible and intelligible vernacular modes of communication.

Ironically, this post succeeds *and* fails as a dummies guide. Schmidt and Amman attempt to explain McIntyre and McKitrick's critique of Mann et al.'s 1998 paper, with an in-depth explanation of the original methodology and the following critique. They begin by writing "due to popular demand, we have put together a 'dummies guide' that tries to describe what the actual issues are in the latest controversy, in language even our parents might understand."[71] After this introductory explanation, they offer two links to more technical descriptions of the material they

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[70] Gavin Schmidt and Caspar Amman, "Dummies Guide to the Latest 'Hockey Stick' Controversy," *RealClimate*, February 18, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/.

[71] Schmidt and Amman, "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate*.

cover.[72] They then provide two more links to other *RealClimate* posts on "the wider climate

science context" and the "relationship to other recent reconstructions (the 'Hockey Team')."[73]

This preface by the *RealClimate* bloggers offers links to a buffet of topical posts, along a sliding

scale of difficulty and specialization. The dummies guide itself is presented in a question and

answer format, split into two parts. In 'Technical Issues,' Schmidt and Amman explain the

method used by Mann et al., going into detail about Primary Component Analysis (PCA) and the

significance of that method of statistical inquiry. The second part of the post deals with the

application of that method to Mann et al.'s 1998 hockey stick paper and the critique by McIntyre

and McKitrick.

The main point of this second part is that Mann et al.'s choice of PCA analysis was (a)

appropriate given their object of study and (b) correctly applied. In order to prove that Mann et

al. conducted the analysis correctly, Schmidt and Amman produce a series of graphs that show

how McIntyre and McKitrick's modified study has poorer "validation statistics," or "skill."[74]

Their analysis shades toward more technical language in this part, which is mostly, but definitely

not entirely, intelligible to non-specialists. The graphical depictions of the hockey stick using

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[72] The first link is to Michael Mann, "False Claims by McIntyre and McKitrick Regarding the Mann et al. (1998) Reconstruction," *RealClimate*, December 4, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p= 8&lp_lang_view=fr. This post begins with links from ExxonSecrets.org and the Environmental Defense Fund to pages documenting McIntyre and McKitrick's affiliation with a coordinated effort by oil companies looking to stall action on climate change. It then notes that their criticism was rejected from the journal *Nature*. After this framing maneuver, the post offers a detailed explanation of the Principal Components Analysis methodology, and then goes into depth in explaining the inaccuracies of the McIntyre and McKitrick critique. This critique is greatly aided by graphical depictions that clearly lay out the methodological problems in the McIntyre and McKitrick paper. The second post, Michael Mann, "On Yet Another False Claim by McIntyre and McKitrick," *RealClimate*, January 6, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=98lp_lang_view=fr, covers similar terrain in extending defenses of the methodology used in the original hockey stick data. One addendum to this latter post that is included is a link-heavy paragraph that explores how the McIntyre and McKitrick critique was amplified in non-peer reviewed literature—illustrating how the norms of different discourse communities operate.

[73] Stefan Rahmstorf, "What If … The 'Hockey Stick' Were Wrong?," *RealClimate*, January 27, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=114 and William Connolley, "Moberg et al: Highly Variable Northern Hemisphere Temperatures?", *RealClimate*, February 15, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php?p=122.

[74] Schmidt and Amman, "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate*.

these different methods of analysis certainly assist in comparing and contrasting competing interpretations of the data, and the explanations do make some sense out of the disparity between the two competing groups of scientists. After this detailed explanation, though, Schmidt and Amman summarize their dummies guide by writing

> So does this all matter? No. If you use the MM05 convention and include all the significant PCs, you get the same answer. If you don't use any PCA at all, you get the same answer. If you use a completely different methodology (i.e. Rutherford et al, 2005), you get basically the same answer. Only if you remove significant portions of the data do you get a different (and worse) answer.

The post concludes by noting with a graphical representation that puts Mann et al's 1998 reconstruction together with numerous other separate reconstructions, each using different methods of analysis. The graph, with multiple temperature reconstructions overlapping each other looks like this:
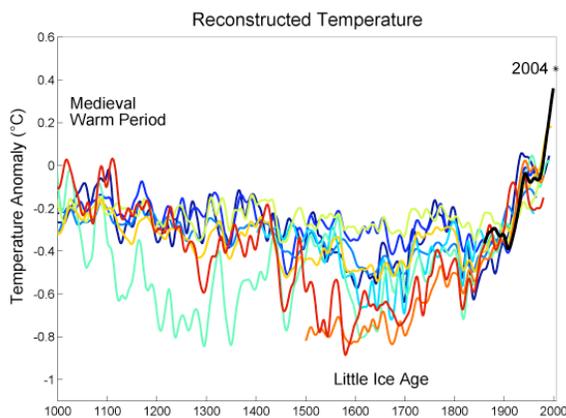

Figure 2. 'Hockey Team' reconstruction.

The hockey stick figure again emerges, as a spike begins around 1900. In the end, Schmidt and Amman argue that, despite the critique of McIntyre and McKitrick, the preponderance of evidence indicates that the hockey stick was an accurate depiction.

How did Schmidt and Amman fare as translators of highly technical material? Were they able to convert their modes of scientific proof to ordinary language? The comments on this post offer differing opinions. Several comments underlined the successful translation of the methodological issues. Commenter Gary Culhane writes

> Congratulations. Now you can break out a bottle of the good stuff. You are actually beginning to sound like Tim Lambert, the Australian math and computer science guy who can count and explain in a very basic way. Of course, it is still a little on the high end, but I can see it is very difficult to condense and digest to such a point that material can be thrown up in sports page language. But this piece really is a big jump forward in expository style and content.[75]

John S. comments "I must congratulate you on a much clearer presentation of the current issues than has previously been set out."[76] Eli Rabett proclaims in comments "well, finally I understand. It is another case of confusing radians and degrees on the part of McKitrick. It would be interesting to look at the package he used for his analysis to see what the warnings are for use of the algorithm."[77] Rabett, in referencing the well-known mathematical mistake by MicKitrick that I recounted in the introduction to this chapter, further casts doubt on McKitrick's credibility by linking him to another of his serious errors. Some commenters even aid the translation effort, explaining the post in an even more condensed form, as Lynn Vincentnathan does:

[75] Garry Culhane, comment on "Dummies Guide," 3:22 p.m., February 18, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1320.

[76] John S., comment on "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate*, 4:44 p.m., February 18, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1321.

[77] Eli Rabett, comment on "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate*, 9:45 p.m., February 19, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1338.

I probably need the Complete Idiot's Guide, but what I get out of this is, using the

mean of the whole data set (if it does have an actual hockey stick shape) as zero

creates a higher horizontal line from which all the data vary in various amounts &

it tends to 'pull up' the negative differences & makes the positive differences look

not so big (or it makes all the data look on average equally large in distance from

the mean, both in pos & neg directions), making the whole thing look like nothing

much is happening, aside from cyclical changes. Whereas, using the past (lower)

data to establish a mean gives us a lower horizontal line from which data vary —

making the past data look fairly cyclical (except for that mini-ice age), and the

recent data look like it's going into new and higher territory.[78]

But Schmidt and Amman did not please all readers with their translation. Commenter

Florens de Wit submitted "I agree that this presentation is quite a good read, even for someone

who has no prior knowledge of PCA; I doubt if my mother would understand it however."[79] Greg

Johnson wrote "Ugh. This is so horribly written as to require a dummies guide to your dummies

guide. I'm speaking as someone who was somewhat well-read as to the state of the science circa

1993, who's trying to brush back up on the subject."[80] Steven Corneliussen commented

I don't blame the *RealClimate* scientists for their often-stated preference simply to

report scientific facts and to leave actual political debating to others. And I too use

[78] Lynn Vincentnathan, comment on "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate*, 3:15 p.m., February 18, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1319.

[79] Florens de Wit, comment on "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate*, 6:09 p.m., February 18, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1325.

[80] Greg M. Johnson, comment on "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate,* 10:31 p.m., March 15, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1583.

my mom as a calibration for keeping technical readability at the right level. But I have to say, it would heavily stretch my mom's and my capacities to apply this dummies' guide to what's been asserted this morning in what may be the world's most influential newspaper for denying *RealClimate*'s scientific facts.[81]

The differing opinions about the satisfactory nature of the dummies guide perhaps reveals the varying levels of scientific literacy amongst the readers of *RealClimate*. Differing familiarity with scientific concepts makes translating key concepts challenging, for how can experts know when they have succeeded in translating their technical claims into ordinary language?

The interactive format of the science blog is here a boon to translation efforts. Concepts that are poorly explained, or simply need more amplification, receive treatment in the comments section. Comment number 29 on the dummies guide post illustrates the process whereby citizens challenge the *RealClimate* bloggers' foothold in common sense. In this comment, Mat McLean pushes the *RealClimate* bloggers to clarify some fuzzy concepts. I quote this comment in full to show how multiple areas of confusion received clarification through inline responses (in square brackets, preceded with 'Response') by Gavin Schmidt:

> Your dummies guide has confused me in an exponential sense even before I achieved a satisfactory base understanding of your theorem. In the first section, you use the ambiguous term 'noisy records.' Can you define 'noisy records' for my mom?
>
> [Response: A data record that has a signal (that you are interested in), and 'noise' that you aren't. Like listening to a static-filled radio station.]

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[81] Steven T. Corneliussen, comment on "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate*, 12:48 p.m., February 18, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1316.

From the second section please explain the following: Please explain in a geo-metaphysical sense, the relationship between 'climate data applications' and 'the physics' of a given algorithmic situation. Please explain this so my mother could understand it.

[Response: Think of a swing in a kid's playground. It can move in a number of ways (or modes) (back and forwards, twisting, side to side) that can be predicted based on the physics (the length of the ropes, how far apart they are, the weight of the seat etc.). Now take a time series of the motion of a random swing. Numerically I can try and see what the most important patterns of movement are by doing a PC analysis. It's likely (but not certain) that the first few individual PCs will resemble the modes I would have predicted based on the physics. But sometimes they won't (if for instance someone was pushing the swing in a particular way). Thus the answers from the PC analysis may have a distinct physical meaning, but they don't necessarily. When looking at climate data, the PCs may each have a distinct physical meaning, but not necessarily.]

From Section 3: Explain the 'Monte Carlo' simulation for us 'dummies' before you apply it to your empirical position. Please do it in a way that my mom could understand.

[Response: Monte Carlo is famous for it's casinos. There, many games of chance are played that depend on random numbers (i.e. the sequence of roulette plays). Many methods in mathematics or statistics that use large amounts of random numbers to estimate whether something is coincidental or significant are therefore called Monte Carlo methods. For example, from many, many Monte Carlo

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simulations we know that rolling a normal die gives a 6 about 1/6th of the time. If

instead, a die gave you a 6 a third of the time (over a long enough period) you

would judge that significant and might therefore suspect it was loaded.]

From Section 4: If your methods are objectively scientific, explain your 'a priori'

parameters so my mom could understand them.

[Response: The question really is do any 'a priori' assumptions affect the final

result? The answer is no.]

This should keep your plate full. I will wait with baited [sic] breath for your

response that will, no doubt, assimilate nicely with invective for the truth, and the

scientific method.

[Response: Let me know how your mom gets on. -gavin][82]

Frankly, it's difficult to determine whether or not this is a serious query on the part of McClain,

or if it's a cheeky troll aiming for attention. Regardless, Schmidt is able to clarify elements of the

blog post that remained obscure, primarily through recourse to metaphor ("static-filled radio

station," "swing in a kid's playground," "Monte Carlo methods"). Metaphor has a central role in

the conversion process between technical and ordinary language. As Schmidt's response reveals,

the bloggers at *RealClimate* often rely on metaphors to explain the basics of their technical

claims. This coheres with Stephen Schneider's claim that "if scientists do not find the metaphors

to communicate, most citizens simply will not hear them."[83] Presumably, given Schmidt's

penchant for monitoring and responding to comments, this interaction could have unfolded in a

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[82] Mat McClain, comment on "Dummies Guide," *RealClimate,* 4:28 p.m., March 3, 2005,
http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-
controversy/#comment-1583. I have cleaned up minor typos in this comment for readability.
[83] Schneider, "Citizen-Scientist," 117.

few more iterations, doing further translating work in explaining the method used to generate the hockey stick. Despite McClain's lack of follow-up, the back-and-forth within this comment elucidates potentially obscure spots for other readers of this post.

This process whereby scientists and members of lay publics dialogue back and forth is a demonstration of what John Lyne and Henry Howe call the extra-disciplinary discourse frame of scientific communication.[84] In these rhetorical situations, the expert's role is to teach or advocate to an audience of non-disciplinary readers. We must, of course, be careful about how this role is theorized, since it can easily replicate power differentials that position the scientist as knower and the lay public as mere learners. If there can be said to be a check on this tendency, it is the dialogic nature of comments. The *RealClimate* bloggers are often pressed on their claims, and comments solicit increasingly specific levels of clarification. This clarification takes place, as McClain's comment shows, in iterated episodes of public argument conducted through ordinary language.

If commenters can be seen as a kind of proxy for broader patterns of public deliberation, the rehabilitation of the hockey stick metaphor was useful for interlocutors aiming to make sound public arguments. Take commenter Raymond Pierrehumbert, who claims

> there is a legitimate reason for putting so much energy into defending it. The 'hockey stick' is an excellent educational tool. Much of the evidence and theory is complex and hard to explain. We are short on scientifically respectable arguments that can be immediately grasped by the public. I know from my own use of Mann et al when it first came out that it was a very good aid to public education about

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[84] John Lyne and Henry Howe, "The Rhetoric of Expertise: E.O. Wilson and Sociobiology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 76 (1990), 140.

the nature of the problem. This is what it means to be an 'icon.' The downside of

an icon is that if it turns out to be wrong, or vulnerable, then skeptics can just try

to pull down your icon and imply that everything else comes down with it.[85]

Because the comments unfold a dialogic space, conversation is not limited to a strict citizen-

scientist interface; indeed, the comments provide opportunities for citizens to interact with and

learn from each other. Joseph O'Sullivan notes "Raymond Pierrehumbert has provided some

crucial information. I wondered why the 'hockey stick' was being singled out, and his comment

explains alot. This removes much of the uncertainty about the attacks on the hockey stick. The

attacks are political hits on the science."[86] The dialogic space in comments offers occasions for

fellow lay citizens to give 'real-world' deliberative advice about the import of particular

scientific arguments.

Category 2: Climate in the Media, in Which Contrarians Get Taken to Task

Since one of the stated goals of *RealClimate* is to critique misrepresentations or poor

interpretations of climate science in the institutional media, the blog's authors regularly feature

responses to various artifacts of popular culture. I will cover two such critiques here: their review

of Michael Crichton's novel *State of Fear* and line-by-line analysis of a *Wall Street Journal*

editorial.

Michael Crichton's novel *State of Fear* was exceptional because it produced a bibliography

of 'scientific' sources skeptical about anthropogenic global warming. This bibliography, paired

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[85] Raymond T. Pierrehumbert, comment on "Dummies Guide," 6:32 p.m., March 1, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1448.

[86] Joseph O'Sullivan, comment on "Dummies Guide," 9:29 a.m., March 2, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/02/dummies-guide-to-the-latest-hockey-stick-controversy/#comment-1452

with an 'Author's Message' that claimed the extent of climate change is indeterminate (and indeterminable), received a significant amount of press coverage as an unusual addition to the genre of science fiction.[87] Crichton, a well-known contrarian when it comes to anthropogenic climate science, received far more press attention for his citation of scientific literature than for the narrative pacing of the novel, which basically details the efforts of a wily band of do-gooders to thwart eco-terrorist plots designed to draw attention to global warming. Throughout the novel, characters digress into long explanations of climate science. Scientific graphs pepper the text. The list of citations at the end of the book is supposed to lend the argument made in the text a patina of credibility. *State of Fear* could well have gained traction in public discourse because of the popularity of Michael Crichton and the apparent authority of his sources. However, reviews of the book generally panned the scientific evidence Crichton cited, limiting the influence of the novel.[88]

Gavin Schmidt's initial review focuses on identifying places in the novel where Crichton takes liberties in cherry-picking evidence to support his claim about the scientific uncertainty related to anthropogenic global warming.[89] Schmidt's catalog of Crichton's errors shows an advantage of having scientists involve themselves with the artifacts of popular culture: they often know where the soft spots of an argument lie, and blogs now give a venue where these areas can be vigorously probed. Schmidt's post is generative of lines of argument that can be used to discredit Crichton's novel. In classical rhetorical terms, Schmidt is identifying points of *stasis*,

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[87] Michael Crichton, *State of Fear* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

[88] For example, see Michiko Kakutani, "Beware! Tree Huggers Plot Evil to Save World," *New York Times*, December 13, 2004, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9802E3DA1F31F930A25751C1A9629C8B63 &sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1 and David Kipen, "Crichton's Evil Greens Can't Scare Us," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 21, 2004, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/12/21/DDGU6ADRVI1.DTL.

[89] Schmidt later published a revised review in *Grist*, an environmental magazine. This marks a trend in blogging, whereby a blog post serves as a first draft for other kinds of writing.

where competing claims meet. As Schmidt thematizes the arguments, he adds hyperlink extensions to more conclusive summaries of specific issues. Schmidt does this by identifying three key lines of argument where Crichton misrepresents the scientific evidence:

- *Crichton identifies times and places where cooling trends are present, a phenomenon that undercuts the assumption that the globe is warming.* Schmidt responds by noting that localized cooling in the Northern Hemisphere between 1940 and 1970 is explained by alternate causes, which, when controlled for, still indicate a warming trend. He goes on to note "global warming is defined by the global mean surface temperature. It does not imply that the whole globe is warming uniformly (which of course it isn't). (But that doesn't stop one character later on (p381) declaring that '… it's effect is presumably the same everywhere in the world. That's why it's called global warming')."[90] Crichton has a character declare that the cooling of Antarctica proves global warming isn't happening; Schmidt responds by linking to a prior *RealClimate* post titled "Antarctica Cooling, Global Warming?" that explains how climate change produces not just overall warming but climate oscillations.

- *Crichton uncharitably and selectively reads testimony by prominent climate scientist James Hansen.* A character in Crichton's novel claims that "Dr. Hansen overestimated [global warming] by 300 percent."[91] And so fact and fiction blur: James Hansen is probably the foremost citizen-scientist at the vanguard of the public debate over the certainty of climate science. His role in *State of Fear* is essentially to play the hyperventilating and erroneous scientist. Schmidt's explanation of the genesis of the

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[90] Schmidt, "State of Confusion," *RealClimate.*
[91] Michael Crichton, *State of Fear*, 247.

300% figure usefully connects some dots for those unfamiliar with the backstory of

James Hansen. Schmidt links to the paper in question by Hansen et al. in 1988 that

posited three future scenarios for global warming, one with significantly more CO2, one

that stays on the same course, and one that presumes no more CO2 emissions after 2000.

After explaining that Hansen's predictive model accurately accounted for the following

ten years of global warming, Schmidt then defuses the 300% meme by claiming "The

'300 percent' error claim comes from noted climate skeptic Patrick Michaels who in

testimony to Congress in 1998 deleted the bottom two curves in order to give the

impression that the models were unreliable."[92] Schmidt's knowledge of the history of this

debate, with a link to a NASA webpage that explains Michaels' error, provides a

panoramic perspective on the origin of this particular meme.

- *Crichton hones in on the Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE) and ineffectiveness of*

satellite data as significant impediments to scientific certainty about climate change.

Those who deny anthropogenic climate change often try to problematize the instruments

of measurement for temperature or sea level rise. In this case, Crichton asserts that the

Urban Heat Island Effect, a phenomenon whereby temperature increases are attributed to

urbanization, is the real case of global warming. In response, Schmidt links to a

RealClimate post that addresses the UHIE issue, and explains that recent scholarly papers

have further corrected for the issue, which should increase confidence in temperature

assessments. Similarly, Crichton questions the satellite data about rising sea levels in a

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[92] Schmidt, "State of Confusion," *RealClimate.* This move by Patrick Michaels was identified by James Hansen at a public debate hosted by the American Association for the Rhetoric of Science and Technology in 1997. The transcript was later published as James Hansen and Patrick Michaels, "Full Transcript of Inaugural AARST Science Policy Forum," *Social Epistemology* 14 (2000): 131-80; the exchange is located at 160.

dialogue between two characters: "[Sea level is] rising faster, satellites prove it";

"Actually they don't."[93] Schmidt admits that satellite data can be problematic, but that

Crichton's conclusion overstates the degree of uncertainty on this point.

There is, of course, more to the review of *State of Fear*, but these are the essential points of

stasis that Schmidt articulates and refutes. Based on the commenters' reactions, the pedagogical

implications of this post are tremendous. One reader wrote "Fascinating. So glad that now I

won't have to read Crichton's loopy book. Many thanks for putting up this blog, it's a

tremendous resource."[94] Joseph Steig underlines the pedagogical value by noting "this is exactly

the sort of analysis to which I will be so happy to point the readers of Crichton's work that I will

inevitably meet over the coming months."[95] *RealClimate*'s review was linked to by numerous

other websites, including the well-known science blog *Pharyngula*,[96] the Union of Concerned

Scientists,[97] and the Natural Resources Defense Council.[98] Even *Time* magazine weighed in by

reporting

> the Internet wasn't invented for *RealClimate* specifically, but it's hard to imagine a
>
> site more in line with the Web's original purpose: scientific communication. An
>
> assembly of climate researchers gives readers what's lacking virtually everywhere

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[93] Crichton, *State of Fear*, 424.

[94] Chicago Jason, comment on "Michael Crichton's State of Confusion," *RealClimate*, 11:36 p.m., December 13, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2004/12/michael-crichtons-state-of-confusion/#comment-97.

[95] Joseph Steig, comment on "Michael Crichton's State of Confusion," *RealClimate*, 5:58 a.m., December 14, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2004/12/michael-crichtons-state-of-confusion/#comment-104.

[96] PZ Myers, "Crichton as He Deserves," *Pharyngula*, December 14, 2004, http://pharyngula.org/index/weblog/crichton_as_he_deserves/.

[97] Union of Concerned Scientists, "Crichton Thriller State of Fear," no date, http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/global_warming_contrarians/crichton-thriller-state-of.html.

[98] Natural Resources Defense Council, "They Don't Call it Science *Fiction* For Nothing," December 16, 2004, http://www.nrdc.org/globalwarming/fcrichton.asp

else — straightforward presentation of the physical evidence for global warming,

discussed with patience, precision and rigor, and, quite often, length, such as in a

2,300-word evisceration of Michael Crichton's work of fiction, State of Fear.[99]

Not everyone was convinced of Schmidt's analysis. One commenter explains that a "point that

comes across in the book is that these models shouldn't be trusted without significant empirical

evidence, particularly when policy is being based on them. And I tend to take the book's side on

this perspective;" the comment received an inline response that directed further queries about

modeling to chapter 8 of the IPCC report on climate.[100] The discussion that followed on the post

tended to adhere to these kinds of quizzical reactions that were supplemented by inline responses

directing interested readers to other sources that supported the general claims made in the

review.

Michael Crichton isn't the only significant contrarian taken to task on *RealClimate*. The

bloggers at *RealClimate* regularly take on the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*, a

famously skeptical band of climate contrarians that has used their disproportionate influence on

public debate to delay any action on climate change. Though *RealClimate* regularly features

posts critiquing the *Wall Street Journal*'s use of science, one particular episode demonstrates the

power of blogging to host in-depth dissections of arguments.[101] "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The

Scientific Consensus," published June 22, 2005, was written collaboratively in response to an

[99] Eric Roston, "RealClimate," *Time.com*, no date, http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/environment/ article/0,28804,1730759_1731034_1732032,00.html.

[100] Sanjong, comment on "Michael Crichton's State of Confusion," *RealClimate*, 9:50 p.m., December 20, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2004/12/michael-crichtons-state-of-confusion/#comment-327.

[101] For other examples of critiques, see Group, "*WSJ* Editorial Board: Head Still Buried in the Sand," *RealClimate*, February 7, 2007, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2007/02/wsj-editorial-board-head-still-buried-in-the-sand/; David Archer, "Global Warming Delusions at the *Wall Street Journal*," *RealClimate*, October 18, 2007, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2007/10/global-warming-delusions-at-the-wall-street-journal/.

editorial, "Kyoto by Degree," printed in the *Wall Street Journal* a day earlier.[102] In particular, this post demonstrates the capacity of blogs to perform line-by-line refutation, an argumentative process that has roots in formal debate.[103] In a formal debate, interlocutors aim to refute each argument of their opponent in turn through a rigorous attention to each specific claim they make. The norms of the institutional media are generally not as detailed—competing views regularly talk past one another rather than directly refuting each other's points. Blogging's elevated place in the digital ecology is deserved partially because bloggers can so easily snag digital text and then interpose their own thoughts and refutations, rinsing and repeating as often as necessary.

The post begins by noting that the *Wall Street Journal* is virtually alone in believing that the case for anthropogenic warming is getting weaker. The *RealClimate* bloggers begin their critique by claiming to focus on the scientific controversy rather than the policy controversy:

> While we resist commenting on policy matters (e.g. the relative merits of the Kyoto Protocol or the various bills before the US Senate), we will staunchly defend the science against distortions and misrepresentations, be they intentional or not. In this spirit, we respond here to the scientifically inaccurate or incorrect assertions made in the editorial.

RealClimate's refutation of the editorial shows how the accumulative nature of their previous science blogging works to deepen their arguments—and how shallow quotation is the method the bloggers use to piece new arguments together. For every misrepresentation in the *Wall Street*

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[102] Group, "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The Scientific Consensus," *RealClimate*, June 22, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/the-wall-street-journal-vs-the-consensus-of-the-scientific-community/. The tendency of bloggers to collaboratively author extends a tradition of social authorship that began with print culture; see Margaret Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[103] Gordon R. Mitchell and Takeshi Suzuki, "Beyond the *'Daily Me'*: Argumentation in an Age of Enclave Deliberation," in *Argumentation and Social Cognition*, eds. Takeshi Suzuki, Yoshiro Yano & Takayuki Kato (Tokyo, Japan Debate Association, 2004): 163-4.

Journal editorial, the bloggers link to past *RealClimate* articles that more thoroughly explain the

controversy. Figure 3 is two screenshots from the middle of this post. Though just a small

portion of the entire post, it shows how bloggers can respond on-point to specific claims and add

hyperlinks to buttress their detailed analysis:

The editorial then returns to the issue of paleoclimate reconstructions and the so-called "Hockey Stick", repeating literally each of RealClimate's documented "Hockey Stick" myths:

> Then there's the famous "hockey stick" data from American geoscientist Michael Mann. Prior to publication of Mr. Mann's data in 1998, all climate scientists accepted that the Earth had undergone large temperature variations within recorded human history.

The actual prevailing view of the paleoclimate research community that emerged during the early 1990s, when long-term proxy data became more widely available and it was possible to synthesize them into estimates of large-scale temperature changes in past centuries, was that the average temperature over the Northern Hemisphere varied by significantly less than 1 degree C in previous centuries (i.e., the variations in past centuries were small compared to the observed 20th century warming). This conclusion was common to numerous studies from the early and mid 1990s that preceeded Mann et al (1998). The Mann et al (1998) estimates of Northern Hemisphere average temperature change were, in fact, quite similar to those from these previous studies (e.g. Bradley and Jones, 1993; Overpeck et al, 1997), but simply extended the estimates a bit further back (from AD 1500 to AD 1400). In reality, the primary contribution of Mann et al (1998) was that it reconstructed the actual *spatial patterns of past temperature variations*, allowing insights into the complex patterns of cooling and warming in past centuries. In fact, regional temperatures changes (e.g. in Europe) appear to have been significantly larger, and quite different, from those for the Northern Hemisphere on the whole. Neglecting the significance of the large regional differences in past temperature changes is another classic pitfall in the arguments put forward by many climate change contrarians (see Myth #2 here).

The WSJ editorial continues,

> This included a Medieval warm period when the Vikings farmed Greenland and a "little ice age" more recently when the Thames River often froze solid.

The sentence, first of all, perpetuates two well-known fallacies regarding the so-called "Medieval Warm Period" and "Little Ice Age". See the RealClimate discussions of the Little Ice Age and Medieval Warm Period for explanations of why both the Viking

colonization of Greenland and the freezing of the River Thames actually tells us relatively little about past climate change.

The actual large-scale climate changes during these intervals were complicated, and not easily summarized by simple labels and cherry-picked anecdotes. Climate changes in past centuries were significant in some parts of the world, but they were often opposite (e.g. warm vs. cold) in different regions at any given time, in sharp contrast with the global synchrony of 20th century warming.

The WSJ then continue with a statement that is problematic on several levels,

> Seen in that perspective, the slight warming believed to have occurred in the past century could well be no more than a natural rebound, especially since most of that warming occurred before 1940.

Firstly, the overall warming of the globe of nearly 1 degree C since 1900 is hardly "slight". That warming is about 1/5 of the total warming of the globe from the depths of the last Major Ice Age (about 20,000 years ago) to present.

Secondly, the argument that the climate should have naturally "rebounded" with warming during the 20th century defies the actual peer-reviewed scientific studies which, as discussed earlier, suggest that the climate should have actually *cooled* during the 20th century, not warmed, if natural factors were primarily at play. Anthropogenic greenhouse gases are required to explain the observed warming. Also, it is incorrect that most of the warming occurred before 1940; in contrast, the warming since 1970 is larger than that up to 1940.

The WSJ proceeds with the claim that key scientific findings that are common to numerous independent studies (specifically that late 20th century hemispheric warmth is anomalous in the context of past centuries) can somehow be pinned on one particular research group or even individual (see Hockey Stick Myth #1 here):

> Enter Mr. Mann, who suggested that both the history books and other historical temperature data were wrong. His temperature graph for the past millennium was essentially flat until the 20th century, when a sharp upward spike occurs — i.e., it looks like a hockey stick. The graph was embraced by the global warming lobby as proof that we are in a crisis, and that radical solutions are called for

Figure 3. Screenshot of *RealClimate* blog post.[104]

The *RealClimate* post goes on like this for some length, creating a 2100 word response to a 500-word editorial. Some of these refutations are particularly compelling, as when they respond to the *Wall Street Journal*'s citation of a 2003 Soon and Baliunas study. This study, the *RealClimate* bloggers pointed out, had been recently discredited in the news section of the *Wall*

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[104] Group, "*Wall Street Journal*," *RealClimate*.

Street Journal itself! This phenomenon might be called 'expandable refutation' because each hyperlink acts as an information rabbit hole leading to increasingly fine levels of detail. The underlying hyperlink technology offers a sort of reverse enthymeme: the audience doesn't supply the premises from commonplaces forged through shared culture but is instead offered links from which to assemble the background knowledge needed to be fluent in talking about an issue like climate science.

If the blog post more or less successfully focuses on issues of scientific controversy, the comments section shows how quickly science and politics interpenetrate. A number of commenters emerged with contrarian evidence, which was rebutted by other commenters and occasionally the *RealClimate* bloggers. Again, the commenters show an appreciation for the translation function being performed. Edward Meyer writes

> thank you for the piece by piece rebuttal of the WSJ op-ed. This is one for sons, friends who don't normally concern themselves with these matters, and my brother. But the detailed rebuttal is more: it characterizes as nothing else could have done the depth of anti-science ideology that is at work behind the scenes in government policy setting today.[105]

Numerous commenters offered congratulations and noted they had linked this post to their own websites. John Monro wrote "as usual, a lucid, concise and unarguable (for those who care to listen) debunking of the standard global warming sceptics' arguments. I have already linked your

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[105] Edward Meyer, comment on "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The Scientific Consensus," *RealClimate*, 8:22 p.m., June 22, 2005, "http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/the-wall-street-journal-vs-the-consensus-of-the-scientific-community/#comment-2632.

site to my homepage."[106] "Great work. I'm proud to cite it," added Mark York.[107] "Bravo for Real

Climate," began Wayne Davidson, "much needed in responding to ignorance like this WSJ

article which seem to thrive on apathy and a low sense of esteem for the scientific

community."[108] Some commenters even urged readers to take action by writing civil society

organizations to share a link to this *RealClimate* post.[109] Other commenters noted that this sort of

detailed rebuttal presents a challenge to traditional modes of manufacturing consent. Regular

commenter Dano explains

> the Internets has grown enormously since the strategy [of marginalizing the hockey
>
> stick research] began, which is starting to negate the whole disinformation campaign.
>
> Information moves both horizontally (out to you and me) and vertically (up to policy-
>
> makers). Ideas are shared on the Internets, and as a result scientists are becoming
>
> more effective at distributing useful information upwards. This site is on the cusp of
>
> this information movement, and can be said to be both emergent and adaptive; both
>
> of these terms we should become more familiar with, BTW.[110]

Dano's comment captures the more continuous flow of information, and its seepage horizontally

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[106] John Monro, comment on "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The Scientific Consensus," *RealClimate*, 11:57 p.m., June 22, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/the-wall-street-journal-vs-the-consensus-of-the-scientific-community/#comment-2642.

[107] Mark A. York, comment on "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The Scientific Consensus," *RealClimate*, 3:05 p.m., June 26, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/the-wall-street-journal-vs-the-consensus-of-the-scientific-community/#comment-2724.

[108] Wayne Davidson, comment on "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The Scientific Consensus," *RealClimate*, 1:31 p.m., June 29, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/the-wall-street-journal-vs-the-consensus-of-the-scientific-community/#comment-2797.

[109] Lynn Vincentnathan, comment on "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The Scientific Consensus," *RealClimate*, 9:13 a.m., June 28, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/the-wall-street-journal-vs-the-consensus-of-the-scientific-community/#comment-2767.

[110] Dano, comment on "The *Wall Street Journal* vs. The Scientific Consensus," *RealClimate*, 12:05 p.m., June 23, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/06/the-wall-street-journal-vs-the-consensus-of-the-scientific-community/#comment-2656.

into areas of society that had previously been more cordoned off from an interface with science. Perhaps commenters like Dano feel impelled to add their own vernacular theorizations of *RealClimate*'s function because they detect an underlying disturbance in the social imaginary. In other words, the presence of a new circulatory matrix distributing and discussing scientific controversies is a type of exigency that calls for sense-making of new deliberative practices by participants.

Category 3: In Which the Importance of 'Going Meta-' Becomes Apparent

In response to the *RealClimate* review of Michael Crichton's *State of Fear*, one commenter suggested that the current public debate about climate change was stale. This commenter identified Crichton's book as the epiphenomenon; when in fact

> The real problem is a lack of understanding about science and its process. A superficial understanding of 'science' and the use of science in contexts like political science and social science, leads far too many people to the conclusion that if you present charts and graphs based on the past, the future can be predicted. Yet, the nature of charts and graphs is such that prediction seems to be magic.[111]

On the one hand, this kind of comment clearly fetishizes science too much for those skeptical of science's status as a grand narrative or wary about subscribing to a deficit model of science communication. But this comment does point to the contemporary dearth of discussion over meta-issues within science in traditionally public spaces or media. Much debate over the norms of science has become insular, taking place primarily in disciplinary journals and intimate

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[111] Michael Pettengill, comment on "Michael Crichton's State of Confusion," *RealClimate*, 3:08 p.m., December 28, 2004, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2004/12/michael-crichtons-state-of-confusion/#comment-461.

contexts like conferences. It's a bit of a change from the earlier, thicker interpenetration of science and society in modernity. In the 18th century, the norms of science were generated, reviewed, revised and affirmed in active science societies. *RealClimate* fulfills a similar function for networked societies. This science blog offers not only translation of the latest scientific developments and rapid refutation of what they perceive as poor uses of science in society, but functions as a site where the norms of science are discussed and reviewed through lateral iterations of public argument between citizens and scientists. From the standpoint of the broader controversy, debates about scientific norms like peer review, consensus, and communicating scientific findings are needed because the climate controversy often seems log-jammed over determining the value of peer review, the extent and worth of scientific consensus, and the tendency for alarmism to dominate climate discussions.

Though it would be hard to prove, I suspect that the *RealClimate* bloggers realized that many of their arguments were heavily reliant on claims about consensus, peer review, media framing and other issues that shaded into more obviously politicized talk. Consequently, they often have posts that spark conversation about these issues. Two examples should suffice to illustrate how *RealClimate* opens dialogical space for discussion about meta-contextual issues in science.

On January 20, 2005, Michael Mann and Gavin Schmidt wrote "Peer Review: A Necessary But *Not* Sufficient Condition."[112] The post begins by recognizing that the scientists privilege peer-reviewed science on *RealClimate*, and link to an explanation of peer review by science journalist Chris Mooney. Mann and Schmidt confirm peer review's utility, but then underline

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[112] Michael Mann and Gavin Schmidt, "Peer Review: A Necessary But *Not* Sufficient Condition," *RealClimate*, January 20, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/01/peer-review-a-necessary-but-not-sufficient-condition/.

potential problems:

> Put simply, peer review is supposed to weed out poor science. However, it is not foolproof — a deeply flawed paper can end up being published under a number of different potential circumstances: (i) the work is submitted to a journal outside the relevant field (e.g. a paper on paleoclimate submitted to a social science journal) where the reviewers are likely to be chosen from a pool of individuals lacking the expertise to properly review the paper, (ii) too few or too unqualified a set of reviewers are chosen by the editor, (iii) the reviewers or editor (or both) have agendas, and overlook flaws that invalidate the paper's conclusions, and (iv) the journal may process and publish so many papers that individual manuscripts occasionally do not get the editorial attention they deserve.

The blogger's nuanced read of peer review's uses and limitations previews the direction they will be taking the argument. Given the ability of both sides to invoke peer-reviewed science, advocates on each side must develop distinctions that give opinion leaders a way to determine which peer-reviewed science should receive more credence. While contrarian climate scientists claim to have peer-reviewed results, much of the research that claims the biggest bang tends to be in journals with lower standards of peer review, as identified by the *RealClimate* bloggers. This post relates a few representative anecdotes where peer review failed in ways beneficial to the contrarians' cause.

One of these accounts of peer review underperforming at weeding out bad science considers a paper that Willie Soon and co-authors published in the journal *Climate Research* that purported to show a warming period in the Medieval Ages (theoretically proving that warming

cycles were unlinked to human carbon emissions.) Mann and Schmidt recount the process that

led to the discrediting of Soon's research:

> The study was summarily discredited in articles by teams of climate scientists
> (including several of the scientists here at RealClimate), in the American
> Geophysical Union (AGU) journal Eos and in Science. However, it took some time
> [for] the rebuttals to work their way through the slow process of the scientific peer
> review. In the meantime the study was quickly seized upon by those seeking to sow
> doubt in the validity behind the scientific consensus concerning the evidence for
> human-induced climate change (see news articles in the New York Times, and Wall
> Street Journal).[113]

The varying punctuations of the daily press and the scientific peer-review process allowed the

Soon paper to seep into public discourse, even though it was fundamentally erroneous. (Partially

for this reason, science blogs like *RealClimate* are often theorized as supplementing traditional

peer review processes in a faster paced media environment.)[114] Mann and Schmidt identify three

specific flaws in the very human process of peer review. They begin by noting the controversial

history of *Climate Research* editor Chris de Frietas, then noting that the chief editor and three

additional editors resigned over the way the Soon paper was handled, and concluding with a

quote from the publisher of *Climate Research* that the conclusions of the Soon paper could not

be derived from the data.[115]

    Mann and Schmidt continue by explaining how the Soon paper continued to make an

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[113] Mann and Schmidt, "Peer Review,"' *RealClimate*.

[114] See "The Web Gets Social," *Nature* (June 2005), 419.

[115] See David Appell, "Politics in Peer Review?," *Scientific American*, June 24, 2003,
http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=politics-in-peer-review.

impression in various journals. They write "another journal which (quite oddly) also published the Soon et al study, 'Energy and Environment,' is not actually a scientific journal at all but a social science journal."[116] Now, to many a reader, this kind of line drawing might smack of disciplinary turf battles and the historical marginalization of the social sciences in favor of the so-called 'hard sciences' (let's not imagine where the humanities lie in this formulation!) Fair enough; however, Mann and Schmidt follow up by noting that the editor of *Energy and Environment,* Sonja Boehmer-Christensen, admitted to a science journalist in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* "I'm following my political agenda — a bit, anyway. But isn't that the right of the editor?"[117] Mann and Schmidt go on like this for numerous other outlets that have regularly published the research of skeptics, detailing with a litany of links the way that what had been claimed as peer reviewed science by contrarians was later discredited. They conclude by advocating for judiciousness when so-called 'bombshell' papers that 'disprove' anthropogenic warming are trumpeted in institutional media accounts.

They consequently nest their theory of peer review in an incrementalist view of science. With no apologies to Thomas Kuhn, Mann and Schmidt argue

> The current thinking of scientists on climate change is based on thousands of studies (Google Scholar gives 19,000 scientific articles for the full search phrase 'global climate change'). Any new study will be one small grain of evidence that adds to this big pile, and it will shift the thinking of scientists slightly. Science proceeds like this in a slow, incremental way. It is extremely unlikely that any new study will immediately overthrow all the past knowledge…Yet, one often

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[116] Mann and Schmidt, "Peer Review,"' *RealClimate.*
[117] Mann and Schmidt, "Peer Review," *RealClimate*.

gets the impression that scientific progress consists of a series of revolutions

where scientists discard all their past thinking each time a new result gets

published. This is often because only a small handful of high-profile studies in a

given field are known by the wider public and media, and thus unrealistic weight

is attached to those studies. New results are often over-emphasized (sometimes by

the authors, sometimes by lobby groups) to make them sound important enough to

have news value. Thus 'bombshells' usually end up being duds.[118]

This might be an erroneous view of science in the longer view, if one follows the Kuhnian

revolutions line; yet, for practitioners, it's a perfectly suitable worldview because it gives them

something to do next. Is this the last word on peer review? Of course not. But in thematizing peer

review, the scientists at *RealClimate* at least provide openings for critics to introduce their

objections dialogically.

Commenters at *RealClimate* appreciated this explanation of peer review. Repeat

commenter Dano observed "this essay demonstrates the value of *RealClimate*. It has been

realized on this entry. Well done."[119] Steven Corneliussen wrote "thanks for this discussion and

for its important applicability to all the rest of science."[120] Brian C self-consciously explained "at

the risk of sounding like a fan-boi, this is a great piece of writing for people like me who have

some knowledge of climate science, but don't always fully understand how seriously to take the

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[118] Mann and Schmidt, "Peer Review," *RealClimate*.

[119] Dano, comment on "Peer Review: A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition," *RealClimate*, 1:23 p.m., January 20, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/01/peer-review-a-necessary-but-not-sufficient-condition/#comment-895.

[120] Steven Corneliussen, comment on "Peer Review: A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition," *RealClimate*, 3:00 p.m., January 20, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/01/peer-review-a-necessary-but-not-sufficient-condition/#comment-900.

contrarians."[121] Peter Wetzel, who identified himself as a scientist working on climate prediction

models, remarked "this post provides excellent insight into the realities (imperfections) of the

checks and balances that the scientific peer review system intends to impose on papers which

reach the public. It is the best system yet devised to assure credibility in the discourse among

scientists."[122] Commenter John Hunter magnified the claims made by Mann and Schmidt about

his recent engagements with Boehmer-Christensen at *Energy and Environment* that confirmed

the lax peer review standards operating at that journal.[123] The openness of comments (even

accounting for the practice of moderating comments) produced some bizarre contributions. For

example, in a comment on this post, someone wrote that they had written a paper for a

conference, but it had not been peer reviewed; they subsequently asked the *RealClimate*

scientists to review it if they had any extra time.[124]

    RealClimate bloggers have theorized issues close to the heart of scientific inquiry, like peer

review, but they have also introduced posts about communicating scientific claims to non-

specialist audiences. In taking up these issues of communicating climate science, the bloggers

show a high level of self-reflexivity regarding the public-technical interface. In one post, "How

Not to Write a Press Release," Gavin Schmidt opines about how a recent paper was cited in press

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[121] Brian C, comment on "Peer Review: A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition," *RealClimate*, 11:55 p.m., January 20, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/01/peer-review-a-necessary-but-not-sufficient-condition/#comment-913.

[122] Peter Wetzel, comment on "Peer Review: A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition," *RealClimate*, 5:50 p.m., January 22, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/01/peer-review-a-necessary-but-not-sufficient-condition/#comment-930.

[123] John Hunter, comment on ""Peer Review: A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition," *RealClimate*, 10:33 p.m., January 20, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/01/peer-review-a-necessary-but-not-sufficient-condition/#comment-910.

[124] Pat N: Self-only, comment on "Peer Review: A Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition," *RealClimate*, 1:31 a.m., January 21, 2005, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2005/01/peer-review-a-necessary-but-not-sufficient-condition/#comment-914.

coverage as predicting global warming as high as 11 degrees in the coming decades.[125] In reality,

the paper in question produced a range of possible results, with 11 degree warming being a very

low likelihood. Yet, the press release that accompanied the paper included this low likelihood

number, which the press predictably ran with ("Mega-warming coming, scientists say!") Schmidt

suggests that this kind of alarmism unhelpfully sensationalizes the climate science, and wonders

> Why did this happen? Is it because the scientists were being 'alarmist', or was it more
>
> related to a certain naivety in how public relations and the media work? And more
>
> importantly, what can scientists do to help ensure that media coverage is a fair
>
> reflection of their work?[126]

In this post, Schmidt identifies three rough spots in translation efforts. First, the institutional

media "like a dramatic statement, and stories that say something is going to be worse than

previously thought get more coverage than those which say it's not going to be as bad."[127]

Second, most journalists will read the press release instead of the paper, which reduces whatever

caveats and calibrations that might temper sensationalist headlines. Finally, media frames funnel

science stories into predetermined sluices. Schmidt argues that members of the press

> have a small number of preconceived frames into which they will place the story—
>
> common ones involve forecasts of possible disasters, conflict within the community
>
> (the more personal the better), plucky Galileos fighting the establishment, and of
>
> course anything that interacts directly with politics, or political interference with
>
> science. This can be helpful if the scientific story fits neatly into one [of] the boxes,

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[125] Gavin Schmidt, "How Not to Write a Press Release," *RealClimate*, April 21, 2006, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/04/how-not-to-write-a-press-release/.

[126] Schmidt, "Press Release," *RealClimate*.

[127] Schmidt, "Press Release," *RealClimate*.

but can cause big problems if the story is either more complex or orthogonal to the obvious frames.[128]

The theory of framing, which had been popularized by the linguistics scholar George Lakoff, is treated here in order to identify how pre-existing frames impact novel science stories.[129] Schmidt concludes that the paper abdicated a responsibility to good science communication by allowing the press release to run with the sensationalist but low likelihood 11 degree figure.

This post sparked 258 comments. Remarkably, the scientists and press officers involved with the sensationalized press release actually posted a comment that rebutted the suggestion that they sensationalized their findings in the press conference.[130] Posted by Myles Allen, the comment contains emails that had asked members of the press who were at the original press conference if the scientists had sensationalized their findings, or if they had been appropriately cautious in explaining that runaway warming of 11 degrees was a low likelihood. This parallel account provided by Allen suggested that the fault lay not with the scientists, but with sloppy journalists somewhere down the publication line. Whether or not the press release and the subsequent criticism by Schmidt was on point or not is, of course, less relevant than the fact that a tight feedback loop had formed where the scientists involved in this episode could quickly respond with a behind the scenes account from their perspective.

Under the category "Communicating Climate" are a number of similar postings concerning

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[128] Schmidt, "Press Release," *RealClimate*.

[129] George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004); see also Matthew Nisbet and Chris Mooney, "Framing Science," *Science*, April 6, 2007, 56.

[130] Myles Allen, comment on "How Not to Write a Press Release," 9:23 a.m., April 22, 2006, *RealClimate*, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/04/how-not-to-write-a-press-release/#comment-12122.

the rhetorical challenges in articulating technical claims.[131] Gathered here are posts on

journalistic convention, framing scientific issues, public understanding of science, and various

other issues arising in expert-lay discourse. These posts invite a number of different themes.

RealClimate blogger Rasmus Benestad shared some links to a conference he had attended on

Communicating Science and Technology.[132] Benestad's post received a flurry of comments over

the coming days. One of the most interesting sets of comments on this post involves the

relationship between the deficit model and engagement model of communicating science, a topic

that has animated science and technology studies and rhetoricians of science over the past

decades. In this comment, *RealClimate* is situated as a third model that synthesizes both the

deficit and engagement approach. Regular commenter Steve Corneliussen:

> To what extent did your conference engage the important contrast between the
>
> deficit model and the engagement model? In my experience too many scientists
>
> assume, without even realizing it, that science communication must be improved
>
> only under what some people call the 'deficit model'—the name refers to the
>
> deficit in public knowledge about science—to the exclusion of what's been called
>
> the 'engagement model.' (Maybe this contrast has been talked about in RC
>
> threads that I missed.) In fact, it's my impression that many scientists aren't even
>
> remotely aware of the contrasting approaches. But maybe that problem is
>
> diminishing. It seems to me, for example, that *RealClimate*.org itself represents a
>
> breakthrough in the relation of science and society precisely because *RC* balances

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[131] "Communicating Climate," *RealClimate*, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/category/communicating-climate/reporting-on-climate/

[132] Rasmus Benestad, "Communicating Science and Technology," *RealClimate*, June 23, 2006, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/06/communicating-science-technology/.

engagement-model benefits with deficit-model necessities.[133]

Some comments later, Corneliussen adds in another comment: "A problem, though, is that deficit-model communication tactics—useful and important as they are—don't account for all the dimensions of the communications challenge. Consider a particularly virulent dimension, a tactic that I believe I'm seeing increasingly employed against climate science: sarcasm."[134] He then provides an extended rhetorical analysis of the use of sarcasm in argument over climate science, with the conclusion that scientists need a richer view of communication to account for how scientific argument is conducted outside of field-specific sites. Corneliussen's view captures a rhetorical perspective on language and argumentation that is often under-represented in scientific fora. Just as importantly, he identifies *RealClimate* as a site that can probe this rhetoricity by drawing public participation to the interactive back-and-forth of the blogosphere.

The bloggers at *RealClimate* adopt a remarkably self-reflexive attitude about their own orientation toward communicating climate science. In a post called "The Missing Repertoire," Gavin Schmidt linked to a report published by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), a think thank based in the UK, called "Warm Words: How Are We Telling the Climate Story and How Can We Tell it Better."[135] As Schmidt describes, the "basic point of the report was to present a textual analysis of the kinds of language ('repertoires') used in the media when discussing climate and to associate the different repertoire with the advocacy position of the

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[133] Steve Corneliussen, comment on "Communicating Science and Technology," *RealClimate*, 9:39 a.m., June 23, 2006, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/06/communicating-science-technology/#comment-14879.

[134] Steve Corneliussen, comment on "Communicating Science and Technology," *RealClimate*, 8:44 a.m., June 24, 2006, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/06/communicating-science-technology/#comment-14926.

[135] Gavin Schmidt, "The Missing Repertoire," *RealClimate*, August 10, 2006, http://www.realclimate.org/index.php/archives/2006/08/the-missing-repertoire/. See also the IPPR Report, by Gil Ereaut and Nat Segnit, "Warm Words: How Are We Telling the Climate Story and Can We Tell it Better?," (August 2006), http://www.ippr.org/members/download.asp?f=/ecomm/files/warm_words.pdf&a=skip.

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users and the likely effectiveness of that language in swaying opinion."[136] 'Repertoire' is an intriguing way to characterize competing ways of communicating climate science because it suggests a broad array of argumentative styles, modes of proof, and types of aesthetic performance. The IPPR report identifies three distinct repertoires that accept the basic presumptions of contemporary climate science: alarmism, techno-optimism, and small actions will save the world. There are considerably more denialist repertoires: "It'll be alright"-ism, comic nihilism, rhetorical skepticism, free marketism, expert denialism, and warming is good. Each of these orientations has familiar arguments, unique commonplaces, and peculiar stylistic conventions.

But Gavin Schmidt identified *RealClimate* as participating in a repertoire that was missing from the IPPR report:

> In reading this list, I can find many examples of pieces that fall neatly into the boxes. But it strikes me that there is a huge missing category—and indeed one in which I think *RealClimate* might fall (along with some of the best reporting on the issue—Andy Revkin's [environment writer for the *New York Times*] pieces for instance). That category is the straight 'It's serious (and interesting) but don't panic' repertoire. This is the language most often heard at scientific conferences and it surprises me that the IPPR authors didn't find enough examples to give it a description all it's own.[137]

Schmidt's description of these rival repertoires underlines the stylistic gap between scientific communities and public spheres. Of course, it's easy to be dubious about Schmidt's

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[136] Schmidt, "Missing Repertoire," *RealClimate*.
[137] Schmidt, "Missing Repertoire," *RealClimate*.

identification of *RealClimate*'s repertoire as 'it's serious (and interesting) but don't panic' against the clearly lacking 'alarmism' and 'denialism' repertoires. But *RealClimate's* rigorous, sober scrutiny does, as I have shown in my textual analysis here, display cool but engaged expertise that presents an alternative to the more "excited style of journalism" which often results in public cynicism.[138] The genesis of this collective persona of sobriety is probably due in part to the demands of forging a credible style when one lies at the intersection of technical and public spheres. In serving as a translation station where expert and lay publics meet, *RealClimate* bloggers have to bridge two very different discourse communities. This bridging requires a high-level of self-reflexivity about style, proof, and jargon. Consequently, the sensationalist excesses of the mass-mediated public sphere and the excesses of insularity familiar to the technical sphere are both reduced because the claims made by each field are potentially open to critique from the other field. Consequently, *RealClimate* bloggers can critique sensationalist press coverage *and* overly technical language; moreover, their commenters can introduce critiques from anywhere along the spectrum of public to technical objections. That such criticisms can be introduced at any time requires *RealClimate* bloggers to keep these two audiences in mind while posting, for their posts must meet the norms of each audience. This permanent rhetorical situation induces a 'bridging rhetoric' whereby scientists must account for technical and public audiences and communicate in a fashion intelligible to both. 'Bridging rhetoric' identifies a new form of power in a network society, a claim to which I now turn.

5.5 Toward a Networked Sensibility: Blogging, Shallow Quotation, and Light Green Public Spheres

"In a world of networks," Manuel Castells claims, "the ability to exercise control over

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[138] Schmidt, "Missing Repertoire," *RealClimate*.

others depends on two basic mechanisms: the ability to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and the ability to connect different networks to ensure their cooperation by sharing common goals and increasing resources."[139] Programming power sets the basic conditions for persuasion: "control of, or influence on, the apparatuses of communication, the ability to create an effective process of communication and persuasion along lines that favor the projects of the would-be programmers, is the key asset in the ability to program each network."[140] Programmers have magnified power to control in an arena where, as Lawrence Lessig famously noted, "code is law."[141] Bloggers accrue programming power by designing their blog's deliberative space to accept, for example, moderated or unmoderated comments. But bloggers are probably more famous for their roles as what Castells calls switchers. Switchers connect two or more networks together, stimulating or deactivating circuits of communication flows. Bloggers are switchers because they can direct the limited attention of readers through linking different communication networks together. At a micro-scale, that power is small. But aggregated over the entire blogosphere, that power is consequential in elevating certain posts or blogs over others. These are uniquely networked forms of power, not present in the modern age when switching and programming digital bytes were faint glimmers in a distant digital future.

The emergence of *RealClimate* as a translation station where public and technical discourses meet suggests a third type of power: the power to bridge different discourse communities (or language games). Bridgers, or those that attempt to translate the norms, claims,

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[139] Castells, "Informationalism and the Network Society," 32.

[140] Castells, "Informationalism and the Network Society," 33.

[141] Lawrence Lessig, *Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 6. On how control over circulation can be traced as a form of power, see Christopher Paul, "Re-imagining Web Analysis as Circulation," *First Monday* 10 (2005), http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_11/paul/.

and implicit understandings of one discourse community to another, have a new saliency in a internetworked world. I cannot claim that bridging discourses are entirely new—the genre of popular science writing suggests that 'bridging' has a long history. Yet, as a consequence of the multiplication of language games—partially supported by new digital media that supports increasingly niche discourse communities—this type of power has a more ubiquitous, and systematic, presence. Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* obliquely predicted this form of power:

> in games of perfect information, the best performativity cannot consist in obtaining additional information … it comes rather from arranging the data in a new way, which is what constitutes a 'move' properly speaking. This new arrangement is usually achieved by connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent. This capacity to articulate what used to be separate can be called imagination. Speed is one of its properties. It is possible to conceive the world of postmodern knowledge as governed by a game of perfect information, in the sense that the data is in principle accessible to any expert: there is no scientific secret.[142]

This diagnosis brilliantly describes the features of bridging rhetoric. First, it is important to recognize the relationship Lyotard draws between perfect information and performativity.[143]

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[142] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 51-2.

[143] Lyotard's claim that the spread of information technology results in a world of 'perfect information' can be productively read with Peter Walsh's explanation of the shifting paradigms of expertise. Walsh suggests that the received expert paradigm has five characteristics: (1) a discrete body of knowledge, (2) an insider/outsider dynamic, (3) rules for access to and use of disciplinary knowledge, (4) rituals to demarcate experts from lay people, and (5) inherent instability from internal factionalization and external skepticism; see his "That Withered Paradigm: The Web, the Expert, and the Information Hegemony," in *Democracy and New Media*, ed. Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 366-7. 'That Withered Paradigm' refers to the traditional paradigm of expertise that is now being challenged in networked societies. *RealClimate* demonstrates how information

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Lyotard suggests that in societies with no dearth of information, competing interlocutors in public deliberation can equip themselves with a dizzying array of competing arguments that often result in epistemic deadlock. Such an argumentative impasse certainly characterized the climate science debate through the 1980s and 90s. What is required for persuasive success, or the 'best performativity,' is the capacity to *arrange* the data in imaginative new ways.[144] *RealClimate* posts assemble claims imaginatively through the use of hyperlinks and line-by-line refutation. Second, this arrangement occurs in a way that brings together formerly disparate language games. On this point, too, *RealClimate* meets Lyotard's expectations by connecting public and technical language games through the medium of ordinary language. Finally, Lyotard suggests that the speed of this imaginative re-arrangement drives the process, which might explain part of *RealClimate*'s success. The ability of *RealClimate* bloggers to present a rapid-response analysis of breaking developments in climate science feeds the churning, citational economy of the internet and networked media.

Bridging power is activated by one of the signature elements of blogging: the offset pull quote. When bloggers respond to items from other websites, they often excerpt quotes and then provide commentary on that quote. Sometimes, bloggers cherry-pick quotes that don't do justice to the larger piece; this often sparks recriminations and clarifications throughout the blogosphere. This process should be understood as shallow quotation, which argumentation scholar Charles Willard has identified as the key way that claims are translated between different argument fields. Willard develops the idea of shallow quotation as a way to evade the incommensurability

technologies shift some of the norms of the traditional expert paradigm, by, for example, reducing the insider-outsider dynamic and by publicizing freely some of the developments in the previously insular field of climate science. 'Perfect information' refers to the capacity of virtually any citizen to circumvent the traditional paradigm of expertise by accessing information on the web.

[144] The rhetorical implications of this are obvious: arrangement is one of the canons of rhetoric, and imagination is often considered to be within the domain of rhetorical study.

thesis that maintained different fields of knowledge could not converse smoothly with each

other. For Willard, critics and theorists need not worry about accepting certain positions or ideas

wholesale, for "the depthless quotation of positions and theories might help ideas across field

boundaries."[145] Willard is focused on how academic fields can develop more satisfying

interdisciplinary projects, and shallow quotation is the method that his broader program of

epistemics requires to get such a project going. Fortunately, this model can also assist us in

theorizing the types of shallow quotation that allow technical and public discourses to

interpenetrate on blogs like *RealClimate*.

As a practice, shallow quotation invites reflexivity about the depth and faithfulness of its

product: specific clips of prose. A shallow quotation, in a way, is an invitation to toggle between

surface and depth reads of mediated artifacts. As Willard explains: "'Shallow' alerts us to the

fact that we are doing something risky—something, indeed, that we often encounter in mistakes

… The risk, then, is the incompetence of the non-native: One borrows an idea without

understanding its context and thus misuses it."[146] This is the critique of the non-expert journalist

writing on science issues: they shallowly quote incompetently. Print media is limited by material

conditions, namely column space, that limits the capacity to argue over the shallowness or depth

of any particular quotation. Internetworked digital media has considerably less such constraint,

untethering analytical prowess from space limitations. These reduced space and time pressures

allow expert blogs to develop arguments with as much sophistication as the situation or audience

warrants. In each case, shallow quotation invents novel perspectives that can facilitate

deliberation: "Whether shallow quotation is advisable depends on the purposes at hand, the

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[145] Charles Willard, *Liberalism and the Problem of Knowledge: A New Rhetoric for Modern Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 201.

[146] Willard, *Liberalism and the Problem of Knowledge*, 201.

borders being crossed, and the realization that shallow quotation is a creation, not a distortion of reality."[147] In the case of *RealClimate*, the shallow quotes from scientific studies help to convert technical knowledge claims into publicly debatable propositions. As I have shown here, the web of posts on climate science that constitute *RealClimate*'s archive can also be shallowly quoted in more recent posts, as when the bloggers identify prior posts where they have covered certain issues.

RealClimate is a site where the interpenetration of the public and technical spheres occurs, blurring the bloggers' prior roles as private citizens and technical scientists into, as Steven Schneider hypothesizes, the "citizen-scientist."[148] The efforts at translation expand what William Kinsella calls "public expertise," which has the potential to "counter monolithic technocratic decision making, or better yet, to engage in productive collaboration with technical specialists."[149] Kinsella argues that the

> ideal form of public expertise is technical competency acquired and used directly by
>
> affected citizens. Such competency need not, and cannot, replace the more
>
> specialized knowledge of technical or policy professionals, but it can provide
>
> members of the public with an adequate foundation for genuine dialogue with these

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[147] Willard, *Liberalism and the Problem of Knowledge*, 203.

[148] Steve Schneider, "Citizen-Scientist." This case study adds to the increasing scholarship on the interpenetration of public and technical spheres in networked societies dominated by science and technology controversies; see Michael J. Wallinger, "Regulatory Rhetoric: Argument in the Nexus of Public and Technical Spheres," in *Spheres of Argument: Proceedings of the Sixth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, ed. Bruce Gronbeck (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1989): 66-70, Valeria Fabj and Matthew J. Sobnosky, "AIDS Activism and the Rejuvenation of the Public Sphere," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 31 (1995): 163-84, Josh Boyd, "Public and Technical Interdependence: Regulatory Controversy, Outlaw Discourse, and the Messy Case of Olestra," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 39 (2002): 91-110, and Lisa Keränen, "Mapping Misconduct: Demarcating Legitimate Science from 'Fraud' in the B-06 Lumpectomy Controversy," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 42 (2005): 94-113.

[149] William Kinsella, "Public Expertise: A Foundation for Citizen Participation in Energy and Environment Decisions," in *Communication and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making*, eds. Stephen Depoe, John Delicath, and Marie-France Aepli Elsenbeer (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 85.

specialists. When this ideal is unreachable, public expertise can also take the form of

technical knowledge made available to the public by supportive specialists through

consultation, advising, education, or facilitation of citizen-directed research.[150]

Kinsella maintains that public expertise can be cultivated by increasing the availability of

intelligible technical discourse and by modeling some components of technical reasoning.[151] As

bloggers engage in this process, they become "knowledge brokers" capable of bridging different

argument fields.[152]

RealClimate bloggers, as developers of public expertise, replicate the counselor role that

Kinsella identifies as crucial in developing public expertise:

> As consultants, facilitators, educators, or sages, specialists place their expertise
>
> into a larger civic conversation where it becomes a resource for public decision-
>
> making. For that resource to be useful, it must include not only technical data and
>
> analyses but also guidance on how to understand and evaluate those technical
>
> products. These contributions can be viewed as the local knowledge of specialists,
>
> that is, their specific contributions to the large dialogue. Viewed this way,
>
> specialists and nonspecialists assume parallel and complementary roles in the
>
> production of public expertise.[153]

Nurturing public expertise activates a virtuous deliberative cycle, because "as people's

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[150] William Kinsella, "Public Expertise," 85.

[151] Kinsella, "Public Expertise," 85-93

[152] Bocking, *Nature's Experts*, 185.

[153] Kinsella, "Public Expertise," 94. Walter Fisher adopts the sage metaphor as well: "From the narrative perspective, the proper role of an expert in public moral argument is that of a counselor, which is, as Walter Benjamin notes, the true function of the storyteller. His or her contribution to public dialogue is to impart knowledge, like a teacher, or wisdom, like a sage. It is not to pronounce a story that ends all storytelling." In *Human Communication as Narration*, 75.

competence to participate in environmental decisions has become more apparent, the consensus

has developed that they have a right to opportunities to exercise these capabilities."[154] This

positive spillover from facilitating public expertise might well counter the placebo effect of ritual

participation in science and technology controversies.

RealClimate's ability to serve as a translation station, bridging technical and public

argument fields, has been detected by the institutional media. Some commentators like Henry

Farrell situated *RealClimate* in the context of science blogging in general:

> Scientists who are dismayed at the sloppy treatment of science in the media have
>
> set up group blogs including the *Panda's Thumb* (evolution), *RealClimate* (global
>
> warming and climate science), and *Cosmic Variance* (physics). Other disciplinary
>
> group blogs include *Savage Minds* for anthropologists; the *Volokh Conspiracy*,
>
> *Balkinization*, and *Prawfsblawg* for legal scholars; the *Duck of Minerva* for
>
> international-relations theorists; and *Cliopatria* for historians. All of those blogs
>
> weave back and forth between the specialized languages of academe and the
>
> vernacular of public debate. They are creating a space for dialogue between the
>
> two, connecting them together, and succeeding, to a greater or lesser degree, in
>
> changing both.[155]

On a *New Republic* blog, Bradford Plummer wrote "for a more thorough look at the IPCC's sea-

rise predictions, and why they're likely underestimates, this RealClimate post is a good place to

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[154] Bocking, *Nature's Experts*, 205.

[155] Henry Farrell, "The Blogosphere as a Carnival of Ideas," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 7, 2005, http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i07/07b01401.htm.

start. (It's readable, even for non-experts.)"[156] A *Salon* article references *RealClimate* by arguing "there are few things the blogosphere excels more at than debunking revisionist lies about global warming."[157] The site "nail[s] the myth that scientists struggle to communicate their work."[158] *RealClimate* bloggers "get into the nitty-gritty of climate research, interacting earnestly with fans as well as foes in long strings of reference-rich commentary."[159] These meta-reflections confirm *RealClimate*'s success at creating a dialogical space for a hybrid of public-technical argumentation.

RealClimate also has entered into the citational economy of blogs, letters to the editor, and press features as a trusted source for intelligible commentary on climate science. Bloggers link to *RealClimate* with their own shallow quotation of *RealClimate* posts, as in this post: "As usual, you can get most of what you need at Real Climate. Here's the most pertinent piece. The short version is that a combination of changes to ocean currents and airflow around Antarctica mean that warming there was always expected to lag far behind the rest of the planet."[160] Those who deny anthropogenic climate change are referred to "accessible blogs on climate change, such as www.celsias.com or www.realclimate.org."[161] The scientific ethos of the *RealClimate* bloggers is used as a credibility booster for *RealClimate* posts. In a letter to the editor, citizen Sam White writes "if you want to read what scientists, who have no connection to King Coal and

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[156] Bradford Plummer, "How High Will the Seas Go?," *The Vine (New Republic)*, April 16, 2008, http://blogs.tnr.com/tnr/blogs/environmentandenergy/archive/2008/04/16/how-high-will-the-seas-go.aspx.

[157] Andrew Leonard, "Climate Change, the North Pole, and an Imaginary Chinese Navy," *Salon*, February 7, 2007, http://www.salon.com/tech/htww/2007/02/07/imaginary_chinese_navy.

[158] John Vidal, et al, "50 People Who Could Save the Planet," *The Guardian*, January 5, 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jan/05/activists.ethicalliving.

[159] Alan Boyle, "Science Ran Headlong into Society in 2005," *MSNBC*, December 12, 2005, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10372243/.

[160] Stephen Luntz, "Comments, Corrections, Clarifications, and C*ckups," *Crikey*, July 16, 2008, http://www.crikey.com.au/Your-Say/20080716-Comments-corrections-clarifications-and-cckups.html.

[161] Chris Turney, "We Must Acknowledge Global Warming, and Act," letter to the editor in *The Times*, December 21, 2007, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/letters/article3079805.ece.

Big Oil, have to say, go to www.realclimate.org or www.ucsusa.org/global_warming."[162]

Another letter to the editor opines "where do these hopeful skeptics get the idea that they are the

only ones trying to find chinks in the body of climate change evidence? The real climate

scientists make a living looking for alternative explanations (www.realclimate.org)."[163] In

addition, a *Newsweek* article concludes "it is wrong to think that the 'skeptics' arguments have

gone unanswered. One group of climate researchers does this very well, at

http://www.realclimate.org/."[164] These comments indicate that *RealClimate* is at the center of a

robust debate about climate science in the public sphere.

In fact, *RealClimate* might best be understood as part of an emerging 'green public

sphere,' though some might want to call this communicative network a 'light green public

sphere.'[165] For Robyn Eckersley, a green public sphere exists

> by providing fulsome environmental information and the mechanisms for
>
> contestation, participation, and access to environmental justice—especially from
>
> those groups that have hitherto been excluded from, or under-represented in,
>
> policy-making and legislative processes. Such mechanisms are not only ends in
>
> themselves but also means to enhance the reflexive learning potential of both the

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[162] Sam White, "Burning of Coal and Oil Surely Warming Planet," letter to the editor in *Cumberland Times-News*, May 12, 2008, http://www.times-news.com/opinion/local_story_133102752.html.

[163] Denis Bubay, "The Peril to Come," letter to the editor in *The News and Observer,* June 9, 2008, http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/letters/story/1101214.html.

[164] Sharon Begley, "Resisting Change: Global Warming Deniers," *Newsweek*, August 8, 2008, http://www.newsweek.com/id/32268/page/6.

[165] The idea of a green public sphere is increasingly prominent in the work of political ecologists. Douglas Torgerson, for example, identifies the facilitation of debate as the key enterprise of the green public sphere in *The Promise of Green Politics: Environmentalism and the Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 161. Similar work, though without the green public sphere rubric, is available in John Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Mathew Humphrey's *Ecological Politics and Democratic Theory: The Challenge to the Deliberative Ideal* (New York: Routledge, 2007) critiques the recent 'deliberative turn' in ecological theory.

state and civil society.[166]

Seen in light of this description of the green public sphere, *RealClimate*'s blogging activities can be understood as a hybridization of the deficit and engagement model of science communication. The task of the green public sphere is to sustain and expand opportunities for informed public participation. *RealClimate* might be 'light green' because the bloggers limit themselves to what they perceive as purely 'scientific' claims, rather than advocating vehemently for one particular policy approach. In all likelihood, the green public sphere will need to accommodate all shades of green if the major environmental challenges of the network society are to be met. In any case, *RealClimate*'s ability to shallowly quote science into public spheres of deliberation demonstrates one central characteristic of any kind of green public sphere.

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[166] Robyn Eckersley, *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 140.

CHAPTER 6—CONCLUSION

6.1 Welcome to the Noosphere

I began this dissertation with the claim that the blogosphere can be seen as a proxy for the broader developments toward the network society. By better understanding the blogosphere, we can better understand networked sensibilities—in particular, how networked societies organize attention. I have marked three tropes as elements of this networked imaginary: flood the zone, ambient intimacy, and shallow quotation. These three tropes capture novel practices of publicity, solidarity, and translation in networked societies. In explicating these three tropes within my analysis of the case studies, I have attempted to show how the rhetorical challenges of invention, emotion, and expertism are negotiated in an increasingly hypercomplex, digitally mediated, global information environment. These tropes give critics and theorists of digital public culture a grammar to talk about the rhetorical activities occurring in the blogosphere and a more complete account of the networked imaginary.

The networked imaginary comes into sharper focus with historical comparison. In the classical imaginary, inquiry was guided by a love of wisdom and conducted in the marketplace constituted primarily by the *agora.* In the modern imaginary, inquiry was directed by the assumption that knowledge is power and the marketplace of ideas would filter out bad from good. In the networked world, inquiry is motivated by the assumption that information is control and that the marketplace of attention is the starting point for public deliberation. Networked practitioners of public argument—bloggers foremost amongst them—have thus designed new ways of concentrating this attention as a spur to deliberation.

In many ways, theorizing public deliberation in a networked society evokes themes that animated the spirited dialogue between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann in the 1920s and

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1930s, another time of dramatic socio-cultural and economic change that coincided with the

introduction of new media. In that era, it was the broadcast media that introduced new

information and deliberation practices into formerly print based social networks. Each case study

has tapped into an element of the wide-ranging Dewey-Lippmann debate. Chapter 3, Flood the

Zone, makes the case that the practice of flooding the zone stabilizes the space of appearance

between interlocutors, especially since blogs support many-to-many communication. In that

chapter, I follow Dewey in arguing that an expanded space of appearance might prevent the

public's perpetual problem of eclipse. Chapter 4, Ambient Intimacy, argues that the circulation

of affect into public deliberation disrupts the stereotypes that Lippmann believed organized our

social world. On this point, too, I side with Dewey in suggesting that novel modes of

communication can transform these stereotypes. Chapter 5, Shallow Quotation, also echoes some

Deweyan themes in advocating for a translation between science and common sense rather than

the technocratic decision-making defended by Lippmann.[1]

Complementing the Burkean and Habermasian forces animating this dissertation is a

certain Deweyan spirit. Dewey's claim that the public needs better methods of debate and

discussion is in line with the case I've made for the unique contribution of blogging to public

deliberation. Lippmann's preference was for technocratic decision-making to pick up the

deliberative slack in complex societies—only the experts could take into account all the data and

judge it credibly. This dissertation has suggested that internetworked blogs provide an alternative

to purely technocratic decision-making insofar as they encourage deliberative legitimation

processes that draw in citizen participation. In each case study, I have identified the deliberative

'traps' that have stunted public conversation and democratic decision-making: the corporate

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[1] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion,* especially Part VIII, Organized Intelligence.

political economy of the institutional mass media with its narrowed range of discourse, the strict

public-private distinction with its associated rhetorical norms, and the insularity of scientific

discussion with its disengaged practitioners.[2] The Habermasian account of public deliberation

fails in accounting for these deliberative traps precisely because he adopts an arhetorical

perspective on communication and deliberation. A rhetorical approach to blogging shows how

the introduction of a new digital mode of communication reconfigured each of these traps during

the popularization phase of blogosphere growth from 2001 to 2006. In contradistinction to the

technocracy that shaped so much of modernist public deliberation, digital public culture is

increasingly influenced by what might be called the 'noocracy.' I develop this term as a secular

extension of what Teilhard de Chardin called the noosphere.

The mid-twentieth century paleontologist and Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin perceived

three distinct developments in the evolution of life in his 1955 book *The Phenomenon of Man*.[3]

During geogenesis, the earth was formed out of the bits and specks of the universe, laying the

groundwork for the second evolutionary stage, biogenesis—the birth of life. Biogenetic

evolution eventually shaded into psychogenesis, or the development of human personality and

communicative complexity. He explains that the first time a sentient creature "perceived itself in

its own mirror, the whole world took a pace forward."[4] De Chardin identified a third phase yet to

come: noogenesis, (from the Greek *noos*, meaning mind) the stage of self-reflexive mindfulness.

The ever-increasing reflective powers of humanity open up new horizons in noogenetic

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[2] Ken White, "The Dead Hand of Modern Democracy: Lessons for Emergent Post-modern Democrats," in *Extreme Democracy,* eds. Mitch Ratcliffe and Jon Lebkowsky (2005), http://extremedemocracy.com/chapters/Chapter%20Eight-White.pdf

[3] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Harper & Row, 1959 [1955]).

[4] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 181.

development, promising to usher in what de Chardin calls the *noosphere.* De Chardin theorizes the noosphere as a sparking forth of interconnected reflection:

> The recognition and isolation of a new era in evolution, the era of noogenesis, obliges us to distinguish correlatively a support proportionate to the operation— that is to say yet another membrane in the majestic assembly of telluric layers. A glow ripples outward from the first spark of conscious reflection. The point of ignition grows larger. The fire spreads in ever widening circles till finally the whole planet is covered with incandescence. Only one interpretation, only one name can be found worthy of this grand phenomenon. Much more coherent and just as extensive as any preceding layer, it is really a new layer, the 'thinking' layer.[5]

The noosphere, in this telling, is as significant as the stages of geogenesis and biogenesis; it is the conceptualization of this thinking layer that might be the most dramatic addition to the networked social imaginary. For de Chardin, this new thinking layer will produce ever more sophisticated states of consciousness, resulting in a convergence of the personal and universal in the Omega Point, a version of the singularity.[6] A contemporary reader may find much to disagree with de Chardin about, including his progressive evolutionary teleology, his religious metaphysic, and his defense of a "nobly human form of eugenics."[7] These substantial objections aside, de Chardin's theorization of the noosphere provides some perspective—however incongruous—to current theory about digital media and human intercommunication. Three

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[5] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 181-2.
[6] Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking Press, 2005).
[7] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 282.

features of the noosphere bear directly on this study of the blogosphere and the networked imaginary: (1) hominisation, (2) complexity, and (3) emergence.

The noosphere is characterized above all by increasing hominisation, or enhanced reflection and consciousness. De Chardin's narrative of hominisation goes from instinct to thought, and from basic thought to abstract thought epitomized by the growth of logic, art, and the sciences.[8] Foreshadowing the middle Habermas of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, de Chardin argues that the basic engine driving hominisation is interaction.[9] The fibers of the noosphere thicken with increasing commercial and intellectual contact between people, since these patterns of interaction organize society and establish collective memory and common ground.[10] "Psychic inter-activity" energizes the noosphere.[11] Julian Huxley, in his introduction to *Phenomenon of Man*, suggests that "higher levels of hominisation" inevitably occur because "idea will encounter idea, and the result will be an organized web of thought, a noetic system operating under high tension, a piece of evolutionary machinery capable of generating high psychosocial energy."[12] Huxley might as well have been referring to the internet.

Hominisation is intimately related to complexity. Huxley identifies the increase in knowledge and "psychosocial pressures" as the key elements responsible for producing the complexification of the noosphere.[13] For de Chardin, humans become "more vitalized as they

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[8] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 165.

[9] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

[10] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 205.

[11] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 263.

[12] Julian Huxley, "Introduction," in *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Harper & Row, 1959 [1955]), 17.

[13] Huxley, "Introduction,"18. Huxley identifies the process of 'complexification' as overlapping with *convergent integration*, a term that might have some resonance with the Habermasian tradition.

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become increasingly complex."[14] Rising complexity requires humans to push their adaptive

capacities, encouraging them to generate new modes of interconnection able to account for the

tension between the plurality of life and the common good. Knowledge of self and other, and the

potential web of relationships between the two, is increasingly the product of complex societies.

But even de Chardin cannot fathom the extent to which some future version of the noosphere

will exert influence. Noting the millions (now billions) of "human vibrations," he asks "have we

ever tried to form an idea of what such magnitudes represent?"[15] As Huxley summarizes, "we

should consider inter-thinking humanity as a new type of organism, whose destiny is to realize

new possibilities for evolving life on this planet."[16]

In his discussion of the noosphere, De Chardin foreshadows the field of complexity

studies, especially as it relates to the concept of emergence. As he explains, the "very act by

which the fine edge of our minds penetrates the absolute is a phenomenon, as it were, of

emergence."[17] Here, de Chardin's religious metaphysic starts to guide his theory in a direction I

would shy away from; luckily, secular versions of emergence can take the reins from here.

Emergence, or the self-organization of collective intelligence, is found in everything from ant

colonies to the open source software movement.[18] The very process of persuasion is perhaps

more akin to emergence than to anything else; for what else is the process of persuasion but a

gradual accretion of experiences and ideas brought together in a specific rhetorical moment?

Such a perspective on persuasion is an alternative to intentionalist models and recognizes that, as

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[14] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 300.

[15] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 285.

[16] Huxley, "Introduction," 20.

[17] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 219.

[18] Steven Johnson, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (New York: Scribner, 2001).

de Chardin claims, the *additivity* of human experiences is central to the character of the noosphere.[19] The noosphere is that layer of human activity that processes this additivity of experience, storing it for future generations even as actors in the noosphere recontextualize social knowledge to gain legitimation in concurrent episodes of public interactions. The noosphere might best be thought of as the element of the networked imaginary that coordinates hominisation, hypercomplexity, and emergence; that layer which manages surplus information flows.

The linkages to internetworked forms of communication, especially blogging, should be apparent. Might we see blogging as contributing to hominisation in the process of a weaving an organized web of thought? Can blogging be seen as a way to amplify billions of human vibrations in an effort to accommodate complexification? Is blogging best understood through the metaphor of emergence? Even lukewarm acceptance of de Chardin's conceptual scheme makes it reasonable to view internetworked technologies as constituting a meta-critical thinking layer facilitating a multilogue of digitally connected citizens. This secularized version of the noosphere is not a public sphere proper, but rather a "public of publics."[20] One might push this even further by situating the noosphere with respect to two key terms in the Habermasian system: lifeworld and system. For Habermas, the lifeworld is produced in the social context of the everyday circulation of people in their face-to-face communities.[21] At risk of simplification, I would argue that the lifeworld is primarily produced and sustained by embodied speech acts that teach each about the other, the foundation of democratic practice. With the onset of the modern

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[19] De Chardin, *Phenomenon of Man*, 224.

[20] See James Bohman, "Expanding Dialogue: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Prospects for Transnational Democracy," in *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, eds. Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 140.

[21] Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*.

age came what Habermas calls the system, or the administrative apparatus required to manage complex democratic governments. The genius of modernity was the concept of publicity, which was seen as an essential check on the abuse of power. Publicity was tied directly to the print media of the time, and later to broadcast media like radio and the television, all of which could focus resources on the state in order to ensure that decisions were being made based on defendable reasons rather than mere will or whim. The networked world has actualized the noosphere, that thinking layer emerging from material practices but taking shape in the dematerialized zone previously referred to as 'cyberspace.' While the noosphere might have been born with the self-reflexivity that began with the first look in a mirror, its potential could not be realized without its own unique medium: the internet.[22]

The lifeworld socializes, the system administers, the noosphere focuses attention. The noosphere's primary function *must* be to focus attention in an information-rich world; neither the lifeworld nor the system is equipped to manage the proliferation of information in media-rich environments. The concept of the noosphere not only captures the information-processing requirements of networked societies but also the information-structuring capacities attached to internet-driven modes of communication.[23] Flooding the zone, creating ambient intimacy, and

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[22] It is for this reason that theorists of networks and governance have begun to speak of 'post-bureaucratic' governance; see Bimber, *Information and American Democracy*, chapter 6 and Jodi Dean, Jon Anderson, and Geert Lovink, "Introduction: The Postdemocratic Governmentality of Networked Societies," in *Reformatting Politics: Information Technology and Global Civil Society*, eds. Jon Anderson, Jodi Dean, and Geert Lovink (New York: Routledge, 2006): xv-xxix.

[23] David Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "The Promise of Noopolitik," *First Monday* (August 2007), http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue12_8/ronfeldt/index.html. They clarify this distinction by noting "The noosphere, like the mind, is an information–processing *and* an information–structuring system — and this is an important distinction. The processing view focuses on the transmission of messages as the inputs and outputs of a system. In contrast, the structural view illuminates the goals, values, and practices that an organization or system may embody — what matters to its members from the standpoint of identity, meaning, and purpose, apart from whether any information is really being processed at the time. While the processing view tends to illuminate technology as a critical factor, the structural view is more likely to uphold human and ideational capital." See also eds. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *In Athena's Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age* (Santa Monica, Calif.:

shallow quotation are three ways that the blogosphere excels in structuring information in attention-gathering ways. The primary contribution of the noosphere is thus to structure information in a way that focuses attention, and, as I covered in Chapter 1 with recourse to Richard Lanham, such a process is intrinsically rhetorical.

Adding the noosphere into the conceptual apparatus of rhetoricians provides an additional way to initiate theoretical development of the networked imaginary in a rhetorical register. The idea of the noosphere orients scholars to the communicative dimensions of the networked society. Consequently, what separates this study from other work on the economy and sociology of the network society is a focus on the rhetorical imaginary that has emerged with blogging. As I have explored here, the tropes *flood the zone*, *ambient intimacy*, and *shallow quotation* explain three functions of the noosphere in inventing arguments, creating stranger sociability, and translating interfield claims. These tropes signal new practices in the networked imaginary that facilitate deliberative legitimation processes.

6.2 The Birth of Hyperpublicity

Consider the following three examples made possible by the noosphere:

(1) A few years ago, I unfortunately joined a social networking site which promptly raided the address book in my email account and sent an invite to join the site to literally everyone I had emailed in the past two years. This event was, needless to say, professionally embarrassing and personally mortifying.

RAND, 1997), http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR880/index.html and John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "Preparing for Information–Age Conflict, Part I: Conceptual and Organizational Dimensions," *Information, Communication, and Society* (Spring 1998): 1–22.

(2) A student of mine, in a class conversation about social networking sites, confessed that

she had recently discarded several job applications at her place of employment because,

upon googling the candidates, she could not find their Facebook page. "If you don't have

Facebook in this day and age," she said, "it's like you don't exist."

(3) Political operatives are increasingly wary of being 'caught on tape.' When Karl Rove

visited a class at the University of Pittsburgh in 2007 to give a talk, he was insistent that

no recording devices or cameras be present, going so far as to have one of his aides

ensure that short video clips shot from a digital camera be erased prior to his departure

from the venue.

The strengthening of the noosphere's fibers through internetworked technology is a mixed

blessing.[24] From the vantage point of late 2008, there are two related propositions I would

advance: (1) all discourse is a blogger away from being public and (2) the chance of

narrowcasted communicative acts crossing over into the broadcast media is greatly increased.[25]

These two propositions should, in many ways, be heartening for advocates of public deliberation.

New actors are self-organizing at the periphery of communication and influence networks,

forming critical bonds of solidarity and generating novel modes of perceiving and interacting

with the social world. The case studies here suggest some constructive uses of this new digital

technology, with blogging as the synecdoche that represents internetworked communication.

Yet, I would like to pause in this conclusion by considering how the twinned forces of publicity

and discipline intertwine again around digital technologies, with some serious implications for

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[24] James Carey elegantly articulated a pragmatic theory of digital media study by suggesting that "every gain is simultaneously a loss" in "Historical Pragmatism and the Internet," *New Media and Society* 7 (2005), 447

[25] As Aaron Barlow writes, "the combined postings of people (and the press) from every corner of the world are beginning to make it possible to find out what is happening anywhere, anytime" (*Rise of the Blogosphere* 153); "one day, no major event will occur anywhere in the world without people recording it on cell phones and broadcasting it on a blog" (162).

the practice of rhetoric and argumentation. I suggest that the term *hyperpublicity* captures the

potential constraints of a digital media-rich noosphere produced and propagated by global

citizens. Hyperpublicity denotes a massive expansion in the capacity of personal media to record,

archive, and make searchable thoughts, events, and interactions in publicly accessible databases.

If broadcast media spurred publicity during the time of the bourgeois public sphere, then it seems

a logical step to conclude that more freely available digital media kinetically amplifies publicity.

Because of this surplus publicity, new digital tools like blogging are all the more necessary to

focus attention. But, like Foucault, who acknowledged the democratic potential but also new

disciplinary techniques in the rise of publicity during the 18th and 19th centuries, I see

hyperpublicity as a phenomenon with double potential to enrich and threaten public life in the

21st century world.

An example from the 2008 presidential primary campaign illustrates how public

deliberation changes in an era of hyperpublicity. A heated primary campaign for the Democratic

presidential nomination between Senator Barack Obama of Illinois and Senator Hillary Clinton

of New York was playing out in the intercastings of a matured blogosphere. Part of the ripening

of blogging has been the creation of advertisement and donation funded hubs that function as

clearinghouses for politically interested citizens. *The Huffington Post* is one such hub. It is a

politically left online news/politics site that incorporates numerous blogs as part of a running

daily commentary on breaking stories. Founded by political commentator Ariana Huffington, the

site has become one of the most popular on the web. As part of their coverage of campaign 2008,

The Huffington Post set up a series called 'Off the Bus,' which was a separate area of the website

featuring commentary from citizens (as opposed to the press corps and pundits, who often ride

'on the bus' with the candidates.)

On April 11, 2008, Mayhill Fowler, a retiree who had taken up citizen journalism, posted

an extensive report in *The Huffington Post's* Off the Bus section about a speech presidential

candidate Barack Obama had recently made to a group of fundraisers in San Francisco. Fowler, a

regular blogger at *The Huffington Post*, was following the Obama campaign as the Democratic

primary race was finishing up with voting in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and North Carolina. Fowler

had been in attendance at the fundraising speech with an audio recorder. In her blog post, she

quoted Obama extensively:

> 'You go into some of these small towns in Pennsylvania, and like a lot of small
>
> towns in the Midwest, the jobs have been gone now for 25 years and nothing's
>
> replaced them,' Obama said. 'And they fell through the Clinton Administration,
>
> and the Bush Administration, and each successive administration has said that
>
> somehow these communities are gonna regenerate and they have not. And it's not
>
> surprising then they get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people
>
> who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way
>
> to explain their frustrations.' Obama made a problematic judgment call in trying
>
> to explain working class culture to a much wealthier audience. He described blue
>
> collar Pennsylvanians with a series of what in the eyes of Californians might be
>
> considered pure negatives: guns, clinging to religion, antipathy, xenophobia.[26]

As one might expect, this launched a flurry of conversation about the implications of Obama's

comments. From one perspective, this confirmed the perception that Obama was, in the words of

a famous 2004 political advertisement, a Volvo-driving, latte-drinking, East coast liberal elitist

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[26] Mayhill Fowler, "No Surprise that Hard-Pressed Pennsylvanians Turn Bitter," *The Huffington Post*, April 11, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mayhill-fowler/obama-no-surprise-that-ha_b_96188.html.

who was condemning conservative lifestyle choices to a group of wealthy San Francisco elites. From another perspective, Obama's comments reflected what had become a sort of common sense for Democratic strategists: that Republicans had mastered the ability to get citizens to vote against their economic interests by playing up culture war wedge issues.[27] Either way, the story presented a significant challenge to the Obama campaign. The course of this story reveals the extent to which blogging has become incorporated into public life.

After splashing down on *The Huffington Post*, Fowler's story was picked up by the institutional media. "*The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, CNN.com,* the *Associated Press, Fox News, Reuters, Politico,* the *Lou Dobbs Show, Hardball, Olbermann's Countdown, The Atlantic.com, The DailyKos, TalkingPointsMemo* and myriad other outlets" all covered the story.[28] Cable television news latched on, as did talk radio. The original story at *The Huffington Post* quickly collected over 5000 comments. Parallel sites like the left-leaning *DailyKos* and the right-leaning *RedState* picked up the comments and debated their implications. The scale and depth of frenzy over Obama's comments—dubbed 'Bittergate'—was magnified by the millions of new voices on blogs, social networking sites, video portals, and other web-based sub-media.

Some argued that Fowler had violated traditional press norms that kept fundraisers off the record (which she confessed to not realizing.)[29] Others defended Fowler's approach as useful precisely because it did violate the staid norms of the press corps. Fowler "violates almost all of

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[27] This sort of common sense is best articulated in Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

[28] Marc Cooper, "Inside the Obama-Guns-God-Bitterness Storm," *MarcCooper.com,* April 11, 2008, http://marccooper.com/inside-the-obama-guns-god-bitterness-storm/.

[29] Katherine Seeyli, "Blogger is Surprised by Uproar Over Obama Story, but Not Bitter," *New York Times*, April 14, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/14/us/politics/14web-seelye.html?scp=3&sq=bitter&st=nyt.

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the conventions of traditional reporting (though not its ethical code) and that's what makes it all so damn interesting … It's also quite a bit of fun to see how a report like hers can actually set the agenda for the entire national press."[30] Fowler was both credited and elided as breaking the story in various outlets, showing how bloggers' reporting contributions are still often marginalized even as they have gained prominence as facilitators of public deliberation.[31]

Should Fowler, an avowed Obama supporter, have published these comments, knowing the firestorm they were likely to ignite? Should she have respected the semi-public nature of the fundraiser? Should she have been allowed to bring an audio recorder to the talk? The logic of blogging almost mandates that she do exactly what she did. From her perspective, a statement articulated in private by Obama betrayed some unwarrantable assertions about small-town America and she used her blog megaphone to put those issues on the public agenda. She was able to activate the hyperpublic realm (and the hyper publics of the blogosphere!) much in the way that proponents of Habermasian-style public deliberation advocate. And perhaps Obama should have been called to task for his comments, since they were arguably the kinds of 'private reasoning' that norms of publicity were designed to hinder.

That the Fowler-Bittergate story shows how (hyper)publicity serves democratic ends is too simple a conclusion to draw from the episode. The comments of some fundraiser observers, and Obama himself, suggest the dangers of hyperpublicity. David Coleman, a *Huffington Post* blogger who also attended the San Francisco event with Fowler, added more context worth quoting from at length:

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[30] Cooper, "Inside the Obama."

[31] Jay Rosen, "The Uncharted From Off the Bus to *Meet the Press*," *The Huffington Post*, April 14, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-rosen/the-uncharted-from-off-th_b_96575.html?view=print.

Rather than his seizing the opportunity to recite stump-worn talking points at that

time to the audience—as I believe Senator Clinton, Senator McCain and most

other more conventional (or more disciplined) politicians at such an appearance

might do—Senator Obama took a different political course in that moment, one

that symbolizes important differences about his candidacy. The response that

followed sounded unscripted, in the moment, as if he were really trying to answer

a question with intelligent conversation that explained more about what was going

on in the Pennsylvania communities than what was germane to his political

agenda. I had never heard him or any politician ever give such insightful,

analytical responses. The statements were neither didactic nor contrived to

convince. They were simply hypotheses (not unlike the kind made by de

Tocqueville three centuries ago) offered by an observer familiar with American

communities. And that kind of thoughtfulness was quite unexpected in the middle

of a political event. In my view, the way he answered the question was more

important than the sociological accuracy or the cause and effect hypotheses

contained in the answer. It was a moment of authenticity demonstrating informed

intelligence, and the speaker's desire to have the audience join him in a deeper

understanding of American politics.[32]

Coleman's account might be explained away as a partisan defense of Obama. But I think that his

explanation deserves more credit. He explains that Obama's comments were essentially

unscripted, veering away from talking points and stump speeches—and that was what made

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[32]David Coleman, "I Was There: What Obama Really Said About Pennsylvania," *The Huffington Post*, April 14, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-coleman/i-was-there-what-obama-re_b_96553.html.

Obama an interesting candidate. Rather than sticking to the tightly disciplined framework of most campaigns, Obama's comments were delivered in the spirit of genuine inquiry. While we might question these feelings of authenticity (or at least the ultimate value of such a gooey concept), what I think this episode demonstrates is the tension between spontaneity and recordability.

Obama felt more comfortable in speaking off the script because he apparently felt confident that the people he was speaking with were allies, and that what was said in the room would more or less stay in the room. Marc Cooper, one of the editors of Off the Bus, confirmed this unscriptedness by noting "Obama was indeed more loose-lipped than usual;" but he followed up with what is now the *sine qua non* of political campaigning: "He should be more careful in his choice of words when he is staring into so many video cams, no matter who is holding them."[33] Obama's explanation was

> that I just mangled it, which, you know happens sometimes. The point that I was making was actually two separate points that got conflated. Number One, that people who had felt abandoned by Washington and political leaders when it comes to an economy that's falling apart, they find stability in those things that they count on—their faith, the traditions that have been passed down generation to generation and in many rural communities that includes hunting, their family, their community—those are positive things.[34]

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[33] Seeyli, "Blogger is Surprised."

[34] Will Bunch, "Obama Says He 'Misspoke But Didn't Lie' About Smalltown Pa.," *Attytood* (*Philadelphia Enquirer*), April 14, 2008, http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/attytood/Exclusive_Obama_says_he_misspoke_but_didnt_lie_about_smalltown_Pa.html.

One can see this maneuvering as just that: an able politician playing the cynical game of word-parsing in order to wiggle out of a tough spot. However, I think it is just as likely that Obama is being honest in confessing that he made a mistake of poorly choosing words, but that, in the twenty-first century, he's stuck with the life he makes, mistake or not.

Obama's fate, justified or not, is not a singular example of being tripped up by the ubiquitous presence of recording devices. In August 2006, Virginia's George Allen was in the midst of a re-election campaign for his Senate seat. Allen was in a tough fight against Democrat Jim Webb in a contest that was widely seen as a bellwether for Republican fates in Congress. One of Webb's aides, S.R. Sidarth, followed Allen around to each campaign stop in what has become standard operating procedure for campaigns keeping tabs on each other. On a sunny day in Breaks, Virginia, Allen singled out this aide, who happened to be filming every minute of Allen's actions for opposition research, by referring to Sidarth, who is Indian, as a 'macaca.' 'Macaca' is a slur widely used in francophone Africa that means 'monkey.' A whirlwind of controversy soon followed, with allegations of wider racism sticking to Allen much more credibly after his well-documented 'macaca moment.' The video almost immediately went viral on video sharing websites like YouTube, and was circulated through blogs, emails, and social networking sites. Allen eventually lost the election, in part because of the negative publicity from this videotaped moment. While this one instance ought not be overplayed as causing Allen's loss, "there was no question in anyone's mind that the YouTube culture—in which every public moment can be clipped, cropped and distributed instantly across the globe by anyone at any time—had changed the rules of the game."[35]

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[35] Tom Zeller, "In Politics, the Camera Never Blinks (or Nods)," *New York Times*, January 29, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/technology/29link.html?ex=1176696000&en=bf404711a062985e&ei=5070.

The George Allen-'macaca' incident generated intense speculation about the effects of new information technology on public deliberation. In a review of the implications of this 'YouTube Election,' *New York Times* reporter Ryan Lizza wondered

> If campaigns resemble reality television, where any moment of a candidate's life can be captured on film and posted on the Web, will the last shreds of authenticity be stripped from our public officials? Will candidates be pushed further into a scripted bubble? ... [Critics] see a future where politicians are more vapid and risk averse than ever. Matthew Dowd, a longtime strategist for President Bush who is now a partner in a social networking Internet venture, Hot Soup, looks at the YouTube-ization of politics, and sees the death of spontaneity. 'Politicians can't experiment with messages,' Mr. Dowd said. 'They can't get voter response. Seventy or 80 years ago, a politician could go give a speech in Des Moines and road-test some ideas and then refine it and then test it again in Milwaukee.' He sees a future where candidates must be camera-ready before they hit the road, rather than be a work in progress. 'What's happened is that politicians now have to be perfect from Day 1,' he said. 'It's taken some richness out of the political discourse.'[36]

Dowd's diagnosis of contemporary political campaigning is provocative. Candidates, in his telling, are becoming risk-averse because of the ubiquitous presence of recording devices on the campaign trail. Any slip up immediately becomes the gaffe-of-the-moment, parsed by bloggers and amplified through the institutional broadcast media. A candidate's ideological evolution on

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[36] Ryan Lizza, "The YouTube Election," *New York Times*, August 20, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/20/weekinreview/20lizza.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&adxnnlx=1156100495-cWPdbzgoT13n3STh6TPbpQ.

issues becomes evidence of flip-flopping, with 'before' and 'after' video clips spliced together in damning juxtaposition. No longer can a candidate successfully narrowcast any more without risk of being called out for saying one thing to a particular audience and another thing to another audience. To be clear, this situation is not entirely bad; catching politicians in contradictions, or publicizing occasions where craven politicians over-pander to an audience in private, are still useful exercises in a democratic system that depends on citizen oversight.

However, hyperpublicity is a double-edged sword, and Dowd's concern that politicians must now become more scripted and take less risks on the campaign trail threatens the vibrancy of political dialogue. Why are spontaneity and experimentation to be valued in democratic politics? Why is risk-taking important in the democratic process? Though these might not appear to be the paramount values of democracy, scholarship emerging from late twentieth century argumentation studies underlines the importance of risk-taking in the process of disagreement. In fact, Wayne Brockriede's pivotal "Arguers as Lovers" locates self-risking as a central feature of argumentation.[37] Because humans so closely associate their beliefs with their selfhood, it is understandable why the self *feels* put on the line when beliefs are challenged through argument. Arguments so often become quarrels because arguers are not willing to undergo mutual transformation that might occur as a result of risk-taking exchange. Indeed, for argumentation to be fruitful, interlocutors must be open to changing their own opinions on an issue, or be open to the possibility that the disagreement might be transformed through the process of argumentation. In Brockriede's formulation, arguers must think of themselves as loving their co-arguers, and

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[37] Wayne Brockriede, "Arguers as Lovers," 7. Brockriede draws on Maurice Natanson's assessment of rhetoric, argumentation, and risk, in "The Claims of Immediacy," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation,* eds. Maurice Natanson and Henry Johnstone, Jr. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965): 10-19. Natanson claims that for argument to succeed as a philosophical or rhetorical proposition necessarily requires one to risk themselves.

being open to change even as they seek to change their interlocutor. Even on the presidential

campaign trail, candidates must be willing to listen and engage citizens through arguments that

change according to the dictates of the rhetorical situation. Yet, if candidates are unwilling to do

so because of the potential that their attempts at engaging citizens will backfire in wider spheres

of public deliberation, then they have every incentive to resort to canned stump speeches.[38] The

predictable result is that political dialogue might become increasingly scripted, with candidates

reticent to wander beyond safe zones marked off by narrow and bland talking points.

Though presidential politics are surely an extreme example, the potential for

hyperpublicity to reduce risk-taking and experimentation in other arenas of human life are

certainly possible. Take the classroom, for example. Instructors are increasingly wary that what

they say, or wear, or assign will end up on RateMyProfessor.com, or student blogs, or Facebook

pages. Consequently, instructors must be exceedingly careful about decisions made and actions

taken in the classroom. In many cases this is all to the good. However, teaching is by design full

of failed experiments, spontaneous remarks, and accommodations to specific situations. The

semi-public nature of the classroom can easily become a site that attracts the attention of publics

from the outside. Can teaching thrive in a space where public scrutiny can be directed at every

thing said and done in the classroom? Is it possible to encourage open thinking when broader

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[38] The rise of 'Joe the Plumber' on the political scene is another topical example emerging from the 2008 presidential campaign. Joe Wurzelbacher, a plumber from Ohio, approached Barack Obama while Obama was campaigning in his neighborhood in Toledo. Wurzelbacher asked if Obama's tax policy would increase his own taxes; Obama gave an extended answer that was caught on tape and posted to YouTube. In the final presidential debate between Obama and John McCain, McCain mentioned this exchange between Obama and Joe the Plumber 21 times! McCain picked up on a line Obama used in his discussion with Joe the Plumber (that the United States should "spread the wealth") in subsequent attacks on Obama's economic policy. See Larry Rohter, "Plumber from Ohio is Thrust Into Spotlight," *New York Times*, October 15, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/16/us/politics/16plumber.html?_r=1&scp=6&sq=joe%20the%20plumber&st=cse&oref=slogin.

publics have a tendency to immediately judge what is happening in a situation that they are not themselves a part of?

More of life and culture is becoming *public* life and *public* culture. From individual blogs to MySpace and Facebook pages to video-sharing portals, an increasing amount of deliberation and conversation is occurring in potentially public contexts. These various modes of online discourse often float under the signifier 'social networking' sites. But social networking isn't the novelty here—publicity is.[39] After all, people have been socially networking since the dawn of sociality. Only recently have corporations tapped into the phenomenon as a marketable concept (selling what we already do back to us under the guise of something radically new). At first blush, it is difficult to anchor a legitimate criticism of the novel uses of publicity I have outlined here—there is strong social consensus, for example, in supporting the chastisement of public figures for their use of racial epithets or sweeping generalizations. But do these changing conditions of public culture suggest a sea change in practices of human interdependence?

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[39] For an account of how social networking sites expand the functions of publicity, see S.B. Barnes, "A Privacy Paradox: Social Networking in the United States," *First Monday* 1 (2006), http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue11_9/barnes/index.html; danah boyd, "Social Network Sites: Public, Private or What," *Knowledge Tree*, 13 (May 2007), http://kt.flexiblelearning.net.au/ tkt2007/?age_id=28; danah boyd and B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 13 (2007), http://jcmc.indiana.edu/ vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html; R. Gross and A. Acquisti, "Information Revelation and Privacy in Online Social Networks," *Workshop on Privacy in the Electronic Society* (2005), http://privacy.cs.cmu.edu/dataprivacy/projects/ facebook/facebook1.html; P.G. Lange, "Publicly Private and Privately Public: Social Networking on YouTube," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 13 (2007), http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/lange.html. One blogger has coined 'publicy' as a way to capture how new digital technologies blur the public and private; see Mark Federman, "Blogging and Publicy," *What is the Message?*, December 19, 2003, http://web.archive.org/web/20040808133711/http://www.mcluhan.utoronto.ca/blogger/2003_12_01_blogarchive.html#107184093362428431. As a consequence of new exposure to publicity, bloggers and other online actors have exposed themselves to a new field of risks; see Yasmin Ibrahim, "The New Risk Communities: Social Networking Sites and Risk," *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 4 (2008): 245-53. Though advocates of social networking sites remind privacy critics that users can determine their own privacy settings, Adam Tyna has persuasively made the case that the 'value of belonging' outweighs the 'value of privacy' in "Rules of Interchange: Privacy in Online Social Communities—A Rhetorical Critique of MySpace.com," *Journal of the Communication, Speech & Theatre Association of North Dakota* 20 (2007): 31-39.

In order to theorize the effects of hyperpublicity, I would like to spotlight an underappreciated element of Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere. Especially at the beginning stages of the development of bourgeois publicity practices, deliberation was rehearsed in semi-public places. Such an unsettling rearrangement of political power could not have arrived on the public stage too quickly for fear of being quashed before reaching a critical mass. Semi-publicity, I argue, was a historical precursor to a wider array of publicity practices. As Habermas writes:

> The coming together of private people into a public was therefore anticipated in secret, as a public sphere still existing largely behind closed doors. The secret promulgation of enlightenment typical of the lodges but also widely practiced by other associations and *Tischgesellschaften* has a dialectical character. Reason, which through public use of the rational faculty was to be realized in the rational communication of a public consisting of cultivated human beings, itself needed to be protected from becoming public because it was a threat to any and all relations of domination. As long as publicity had its seat in the secret chanceries of the prince, reason could not reveal itself directly. Its sphere of publicity had still to rely on secrecy; its public, even as a public, remained internal.[40]

One strange paradox of critical publicity, then, is its incubation in semi-public places.[41] Publicity and secrecy were symbiotically linked, not diametrically opposed. This secret incubation

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[40] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 35.

[41] The coffeehouses at the time of the bourgeois public sphere provided semipublic space for discussion to flow over a number of issues that would later be written up and circulated to non-present others by print. Coffeehouses and biergartens of Europe are often thought of as constituting the 'public sphere,' though as I am theorizing them, I take them more as precursor, semi-public places. As John Durham Peters has written, there is no real publicity without media, which extends the voices of participants in semi-public places ("Distrust of Representation," 549, 566.) Only mass-mediated discourse can meet the demands of publicity capable of organizing

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occurred because of the presence of old forms of authority, namely, the complex relations of power wielded by aristocracy. Would such incubation be necessary today, with the formal decline of aristocratic power? Perhaps not, though I will suggest that there is still a benefit to semi-public deliberation.

Semi-publicity licenses experimentation in form and content, an important stage in stimulating non-instrumental public reasoning. In the context of the bourgeois, literary public spheres were designed to facilitate "purely 'human relations'" outside of the circumference of dominant power relations.[42] As the modality of letter writing developed, the banality of everyday life was paired with a glimpse into the extraordinary meaning-making conducted by individuals. The individual experience of the world was fetishized in bourgeois practice of the time, enabling circles of comrades to test ideas that they might not otherwise introduce into conversation. Since understanding was the dominant goal, judgment was temporarily suspended. Would the converse be true? Do spaces of perpetual judgment undermine understanding? Are people willing to risk themselves and experiment as much if they realize that their rhetorical production might be circulated to virtually any audience? In a way, modernity's true gift was to spawn a series of semi-public institutions that were dedicated to cultivating different ways of thinking and speaking. One such semi-public space is found in the conceptualization of the classroom as a 'safe space' where students are encouraged to experiment with ideas before engaging broader publics.[43]

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political identities and coordinating socio-political activity: namely wide circulation and in-theory availability to interested and affected parties. Inasmuch as the coffeehouses and other public places drew from and contributed to print media of the time, they participated in the publicness Habermas requires for democratic practice.

[42] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 49.

[43] This pedagogical insight has been developed most extensively by Rosa Eberly in *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000) and Gordon R. Mitchell, "Simulated Public Argument as a Pedagogical Play on Worlds," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36 (Winter 2000): 134-50. Eberly

Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede apply this pedagogical insight to the larger sphere of public deliberation. They note that "discussion [is] an intelligent, purposeful interchange of ideas carried on in a conversational pattern. The atmosphere is informal and permissive."[44] In their telling, and in deliberation scholarship more generally, discussion is theorized as a useful activity that draws strength from informality and permissiveness (especially as it is contrasted to the more formal practice of debate, in which an arbitrator makes a judgment after hearing competing cases.) As interlocutors argue, they engage in risk-taking by remaining open to the possibility that the process of argumentation will change themselves as much as their partners. Informal, semi-public atmospheres facilitate this type of risk-taking; though I do not mean to foreclose the possibility that even in hyperpublic situations co-arguers do occasionally take risks. The empirical question for future research is to gauge whether, and how much, risk-taking is reduced in hyperpublic deliberation. I speculate that there are two key reasons why hyperpublicity might reduce risk-taking.

First, in an era of hyperpublicity, the appreciation for the situatedness of discourse might well decline. The fixity of one's words in searchable archives is at odds with the flexibility necessary to compromise without being labeled as an opportunistic flip-flopper.[45] While there has always been a 'compare and contrast' approach to a political candidate's record, the noosphere's tools for recording, archiving, and searching enhances the ability of critics to

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argues that the classroom can function as a proto-public space where students generate *topoi* from texts that can then inform other public practices (170). Mitchell's work suggests that the insulated academic tournament debate competition provides a similarly safe space for students to experiment with ideas and thus facilitate their opinion-formation before they are thrust into public deliberations with more at stake than tournament victory.

[44] Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, *Decision By Debate* (Dodd, Mead, & Company: New York, 1969), 9.

[45] Ekaterina Haskins explores how digital media have exponentially expanded the archive function in "Between Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37 (2007): 401-22.

identify contradictions or tensions within one's public record. The situatedness of Obama's speech was lost on Fowler and other press critics, and Obama undoubtedly learned a lesson about going off-script as a result.

Second, hyperpublicity interacts with the condensation of time and space caused by information-technology to privilege efficiencies in public deliberation. As Ron Greene has noted, "the temporality of rhetorical deliberation attempts to arrest the speed of discourse so a judgment can be made about a particular event."[46] With the quick addition and circulation of information, and the enfolding of more stakeholders in the deliberative process, rhetorical deliberation can become more 'efficient' (because information can be spread quickly and widely to aid dispute resolution). At the same time, though, public deliberation *requires* certain inefficiencies in order to facilitate social adjustments. As Kenneth Burke wrote in a defense of inefficiency that could be extended to public deliberation,

> efficiency breeds but the necessity of more efficiency. It requires not only a mounting expenditure of eternal vigilance, but a nicety of adjustment whereby the eternally vigilant are also the authoritative … 'Efficiency' was required to develop the machine. 'Inefficiency' is required as the counter-principle to prevent the machine from becoming too imperious and forcing us into social complexities which require exceptional delicacy of adjustment.[47]

The internet has been lauded for rapidly smoothing commercial efforts through improved efficiency. Yet, those same efficiencies might not work well in public deliberation, which often requires longer waves of time to make informed decisions. Democratic deliberation, with its

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[46] Greene, "Rhetorical Pedagogy," 437.

[47] Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 120-1.

inherent inefficiencies, might well be in tension with media that accelerate the decision-making cycle faster than its historical pace.

Thinking through the effects of hyperpublicity doubtlessly requires a more robust research program; however, I hope to have outlined some tentative directions by suggesting how hyperpublic reasoning might erode the conditions that energize liberal public argument. In the end, the biggest challenge that hyperpublicity poses to traditional public deliberation is in partially foreclosing the dissipation of speech. The dissipation of speech refers to the ephemerality that inheres in the speaking situation. That speech dissipates after utterance, receding into listeners' memories, means that historically there has been no perfect account of communication. Speech, as a medium, is almost designed to facilitate misrememberings, partial hearings, and imperfect accounts. Yet, with the archivability and searchability of massive databases, the memory function of rhetorical activity now has a more central role in public discourse. While there are undoubtedly benefits to having a crisper public record of what was said by whom and when, there may be times when deliberating citizens would prefer to have a fuzzier accounting of what has happened in the past in order to make it easier to work out what should be done in the future.

6.3 Rhetoric, Argumentation, and Deliberation in Digital Public Culture

What do the insights generated from this dissertation mean for the study of rhetoric, argument, and public deliberation? Public discourse emerging from the blogosphere suggests a series of continuities and discontinuities with prior analog modes of public communication. In a way, blogging illustrates a dramatic evolution in public address. Traditionally, scholars of rhetoric focused on the 'stand-up podium speech' that marked public discourse through most of human history. It should be apparent that while such a focus is still useful in understanding how

meanings are made and circulated, it is wholly inadequate to capture the variegated ways that people now participate in public deliberation. Bloggers both address publics and critique the public address of others. Scholars in rhetorical/communication studies will increasingly find rich texts to analyze in the form of blogs that relate features of everyday life and even reflexively interrogate communication practices. The missives from the blogosphere are unparalleled as glimpses into the sense-making of deliberating citizens. Research in this area must continue in order to understand the dramatic revisions occurring as the modernist social imaginary gives way to a networked one.

This area of research into digital media and networked public culture can benefit from an engagement with that oldest of democratic arts, rhetoric. My research has modeled an attempt to use rhetorical insights to perform a systems-level analysis and critique of public deliberation as mediated through the blogosphere. The three challenges that I articulated in the introduction— invention, emotion, and expertism—are examples of how such a systems-level approach to studying public deliberation can benefit from rhetorical theory. Many of the challenges for public deliberation (and for public deliberation scholars) are rhetorical ones, and properly so if the information age offers, as I explained in the introduction, an opportunity for renewed appreciation of the persuasive arts. Such an approach is not without risks; namely, that fixating on the 'macro' necessarily elides important differences in various 'micro' situations. I am wary of this tendency, especially given my tendency to draw on terms like 'modernist sensibilities' and 'network society' that necessarily over-generalize about specific practices. I have attempted to ameliorate this tension with a close focus on the circulation of textual artifacts, but future research would do well to probe this sustaining tension between systems-level deliberative deficiencies and specific practices of digital media users.

Though rhetoric plays a central role in this project, so does the term argumentation. The relationship between rhetoric and argumentation is a complex one. One might think of argumentation as a subset of rhetoric, acknowledging that the means of persuasion expand beyond the narrow rational-critical norms of argument. The ascendance of 'visual rhetoric' as a subfield of inquiry illustrates that rhetoric's purview is broad enough to accommodate a variety of different communicative acts. Yet, one might also theorize rhetoric as just a subset of argumentation by emphasizing rhetoric's traditional focus on stylizing arguments. The philosophical study of argumentation certainly prefers to sublimate the rhetorical to the dialectical. There is, of course, considerable overlap between the two terms: both rhetoric and argumentation are interested in proof, audience, reasoning, ethical norms, and reflexivity.

In fact, scholars of rhetoric and argumentation often turn this overlap into a symbiotic relationship. In one sense, the study of argumentation needs a strong sense of rhetoric in order to accommodate the situatedness of argument. The study of argumentation without a rhetorical foundation can quickly slide into abstract analysis of form and validity at the expense of the particulars of a situation. Rather than going in the direction of abstract analysis of blog-borne argumentation, I have underlined the significance of digital public culture in shaping the circulation of arguments. Likewise, rhetorical scholarship that draws on insights from argumentation theory partially inoculates rhetoric against the charge of 'mere style,' for the language of justification that accompanies the analysis of argument draws attention to how form and content blur in persuasive contexts. Argument emerging from networked publics has profound presentational differences from analog technology which must be accounted for; yet, an appreciation for the fundamentals of argumentation theory can check the wilder speculations about frictionless communication in a digital world.

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My sensitivity to rhetoric and argumentation as modes of inquiry also emerges in the identification and explication of the tropes that lie at the center of this dissertation. 'Flood the zone,' 'ambient intimacy,' and 'shallow quotation' are metaphors—rhetorical figures—that identify novel practices of public argument through digital media. I argued in the Introduction that metaphors were key sites where social imaginaries are formed, consolidated, and revised; in the case of the blogosphere, these tropes emerged organically from vernacular theorization about the impact of blogging and have now receded into the background as participants carry on with the common sense understanding derived from the networked imaginary.

The study of rhetoric and argumentation also meet in the interplay that occurs between criticism and production.[48] Both rhetoric and argumentation identify the criticism of public discourse as a key way to improve one's own understanding of what makes 'good rhetoric' or 'good argument.' By criticizing strong exemplars alongside poor examples, citizens looking to practice deliberative rhetoric can develop more sophisticated tools by which to intervene in ongoing controversies. My critical approach to blogging similarly adds an important dimension to theorizing rhetorical production in digitally mediated environments. Advocates looking to produce public discourse through the blogosphere may well find some guidance in the themes that I have drawn through my discussion of flooding the zone, ambient intimacy, and shallow quotation. In this way, citizens might engage in public discourse with the reflexivity needed to craft compelling messages in digitally networked contexts.

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[48] A point made also by Wayne Brockriede in "Rhetorical Criticism as Argument," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 165-74.

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