HIDING OUT:

CREATIVE RESISTANCE AMONG ANONYMOUS WORKBLOGGERS

by

ABIGAIL SCHONEBOOM

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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Anonymous workbloggers – employees who write online diaries about their work – are often simultaneously productive workers and savage critics of the corporate cultures in which they toil. Writing under an assumed identity, these workers create satirical portraits of their supervisors and colleagues, rail against management gurus and corporate buzzwords, celebrate time-wasting capers, and daydream about quitting. Their irreverent and fictionalized accounts of work, which are shielded from the gaze of co-workers and supervisors, reveal how office workers critically negotiate a labor process that, increasingly, demands their hearts and minds.

This study, which comprises an overview of media and organizational responses to the phenomenon, ethnographic case study of a small group of anonymous workbloggers in the North West of England, and analysis of a broader sample of workblogs from both sides of the Atlantic, explores anonymous workblogging as a window on the nature of dissatisfaction and alienation among knowledge workers. Considering these workers *as authors*, it reveals that a small yet vocal group of cynical workers are engaged in sophisticated, creative, and networked forms of resistance, exploiting the knowledge workplace's decentralized structure to reclaim time and creative space from corporate culture’s encroachment.

Paying close attention to the artistry and craftsmanship that workers employ in writing blogs, this study draws attention to the diversion of significant creative and intellectual resources away from the labor process. Treating employee dissent as an intellectually and technologically sophisticated phenomenon that emerges from the contemporary white-collar labor process, this dissertation argues that – in concert with ecologically and ethically driven sustainability mandates -- the creative activity of a very small and disparate number of talented and disaffected workers can produce a counter-hegemonic force in the cultural realm. However, using the literati of the past as a guide, the study also highlights the intellectual thrill of unrealized dreams and foiled ambitions, which makes the postponement of the end of capitalism, and oppression itself, a source of exquisite fulfillment for those who pursue their art clandestinely.

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Chapter 1: The Worker as Author

Introduction

"Employers sense in me a denial of their values."
– Ignatius J. Reilly in *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

Anonymous workbloggers – employees who write online diaries about their work – are often simultaneously productive workers and savage critics of the corporate cultures in which they toil. Writing under an assumed identity, these workers create satirical portraits of their supervisors and colleagues, rail against management gurus and corporate buzzwords, celebrate time-wasting capers, and daydream about quitting. Their irreverent and fictionalized accounts of work, which are shielded from the gaze of co-workers and supervisors, reveal how office workers critically negotiate a labor process that, increasingly, demands their hearts and minds. As nuanced accounts of the tension between self and organization that utilize networked technologies to intersect with a wide audience, anonymous workblogs foster resistance, enabling workers to develop solid creative identities that help them to distance themselves from organizational culture. The global reach of the blogging community suggests organizing potential, sustaining broad-based networks of workers who are invested in writing carnivalesque critique of their workplaces. Yet, cynically oriented to social change and happy to contain their discontent in the noisy remove of the blogosphere, anonymous workbloggers also demonstrate the limits of a form of employee resistance that is largely individualized and passive.

For the purposes of this study, an anonymous workblog is defined as: *a public online diary kept by an individual, which chronicles workplace events as its central*

theme, and may be written either at work, on company equipment, or from home. More broadly, anonymous blogs where occasional or fleeting mention of the workplace is made are of interest to this study. Finally, the practice of blogging surreptitiously about any topic on company time, whether posting entries to one's own blog or reading other people's blogs, is also regarded as part of the practice of anonymous workblogging.

This study, which comprises an overview of media and organizational responses to the phenomenon, ethnographic case study of a small group of anonymous workbloggers in the North West of England, and analysis of a broader sample of workblogs from both sides of the Atlantic, aims to explore anonymous workblogging as a window on the nature of dissatisfaction and alienation in the 21st century workplace. It disrupts the managerial claim that, in the knowledge economy, self-fulfillment and organizational imperatives can be unproblematically aligned. It takes issue with management gurus and pro-business scholars who view cynical workers either as anomalous "bad seeds" (J. W. a. S. Welch, 2005) or as otherwise satisfied employees who use humor as a "safety valve" to vent their minor frustrations (Barsoux, 1993; Radcliffe-Brown, 1965). It also helps to fill a gap within the critical literature on worker resistance, which recognizes employee dissent as a sign of alienation but has tended to characterize it as an unsophisticated, ephemeral, and apolitical phenomenon.

Over the last two decades, there has been something of a revolution in the organization of white-collar work, related to the interconnected concepts of knowledge work, corporate culture, and the information economy, which are described later in this chapter. A powerful business ideology that emphasizes decentralization, teamwork, flattening of hierarchies, and self-motivation has transformed workplaces, impacting

workplaces as diverse as call centers and freewheeling dotcoms. Its language and rituals – as is illustrated by the common themes that emerge in anonymous blogs from a variety of organizational types – have pervaded both the public and private sectors.

There has been vigorous debate among scholars and management theorists regarding the potential for employee fulfillment that exists in today's white-collar workplaces. Corporate culturism – a management philosophy that emphasizes the develop of a strong and binding organizational culture – has been both celebrated as emancipatory and criticized as promoting Orwellian doublethink. Scholars who are interested in resistance have debated whether the new "totalizing" corporate cultures foreclose the possibility for rebellion, or whether subversive behavior continues to flourish.

In particular, Thompson and Ackroyd's landmark essay "All Quiet on the Workplace Front" (1995) acknowledges the totalizing nature of corporate cultures, but advocates increased scholarly work on the persistence of subtle and interstitial forms of resistance. Subsequent studies have broadened the concept of resistance beyond the notion of open class struggle (Fleming & Sewell, 2002; Knights & McCabe, 2000; Mulholland, 2004) and countered functionalist interpretations of workplace humor and satire, while drawing attention to the Internet as a new "contested terrain" (Collinson, 2002, p. 277).

In spite of this revived interest in misbehavior, knowledge worker dissent is still largely treated as an intellectually unsophisticated phenomenon. Studies that make the connection between joking and more organized or journalistic (S. B. Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995; Taylor & Bain, 2003a) forms of resistance tend to assume the presence

of explicit trade union involvement – whether formal or incipient – in coordinating and focusing worker-generated humor around specific labor demands. This literature is described in more detail later in this chapter.

This study of anonymous workblogging reflects the renewed commitment to exploring interstitial forms of resistance, and locating informal collective practices in the knowledge workplace. Focusing on a relatively new and under-explored aspect of resistance – the role that Internet-based worker narratives can play in publicly critiquing the labor process – it fills a critical gap in which the *creative* sublimation of workplace experiences and their transformation into iconoclastic cultural forms has been largely ignored. Paying close attention to the artistry and craftsmanship that workers employ in writing blogs, this study highlights the diversion of significant creative and intellectual resources away from the labor process. Treating employee dissent as an intellectually and technologically sophisticated phenomenon that emerges from the contemporary white-collar labor process, this dissertation investigates whether the creative activity of a very small and disparate number of talented and disaffected workers can produce a counter-hegemonic force in the cultural realm.

Many of the bloggers in this study are – through exposure to iconoclastic subcultures, through class orientation, and through intellectual and artistic inclinations – largely predisposed against career ambition or organizational commitment. They are drawn to organizational roles that command a salary and level of responsibility that is somewhat commensurate with their college education and abilities, and they enjoy the structure and collegiality of the workplace. Yet their aim is to "hide out" in the organization, avoiding the type of responsibilities that require crossing the line and

becoming a "company man," or allowing too much of their creative identity to be centered around work.

Exploration of anonymous workblogging highlights this strategically guarded participation in the labor process, and promotes critical evaluation of the prevailing sociological view that rebellion among knowledge workers is a fleeting phenomenon that is easily co-opted and contained by the organization. Looking at how bloggers manage their creative and political lives, articulating their resistance in sophisticated and highly networked ways, this study challenges Hugh Wilmott's (1993b) claim that, lacking an organized, supportive counterculture, cynical workers vacillate between identification with the company and an ideological and social void. It draws on Gideon Kunda's (1992) ethnographic characterization of the organizational self as a "tightrope walk," fluctuating between commitment to the company and dramaturgical resistance, yet it highlights differences between Kunda's subjects, who regard their work as "intrinsically, unquestionably, and self-evidently worthwhile" (1992, p. 2), and anonymous workbloggers whose identity is substantively anchored outside the realm of paid employment and who recoil from career opportunities with such Wildean comments as, "I hate stuff that matters. It undermines my natural triviality…" (Beth, 2006b), yet devote hours to the production of a "creative legacy" that may win them acclaim in the blogosphere.

In interpreting the significance of anonymous workblogging, this study draws on several theoretical threads, posing a new theoretical synthesis that captures both the pessimistic and optimistic moments in various conceptual frameworks that offer insights into the phenomenon. As well as accommodating recent insights from the field of critical

organization studies, the intent is to employ close reading of classic texts on alienation, hegemony, and resistance. The ethnographic data presented are evaluated against Marxist notions of time and creative fulfillment, Marcuse's (1991) analysis of cultural hegemony, and Burawoy's (1979) work on the generation of consent at the point of production. Drawing on James C. Scott's (1987) insights about the linkage between everyday resistance and popular culture, bloggers' creative rebelliousness is analyzed as a vehicle for nurturing anti-corporate values among the broader workforce. And exploring the polyphonic nature of blog authorship (Bakhtin, 1984; Hevern, 2004), while drawing parallels between the lives of authors such as Franz Kafka, T.S. Eliot, and Henry Miller and today's anonymous workbloggers, the study aims to understand the intersection between knowledge work, creative writing, and cultural change, capturing the appeal of office jobs to aspiring writers and activists who pursue their emancipation clandestinely within the organization.

Considering these standpoints in the light of detailed ethnographic analysis of bloggers' writings and their participation in a virtual community, this dissertation aims to contribute to the critical understanding of knowledge workers' ambivalence toward today's office culture, and evaluate whether these maverick, usually non-unionized employees might contribute to a shift in the zeitgeist, advocating for a truly humane and fulfilling labor process that is not based on the spurious promises of management gurus. Using blogs as detailed testimony about the types of frustrations and pleasures that 21st century office workers gain from their participation in the labor process, it hopes to complicate the terrain in which resistance to organizational culture is understood. And, understanding anonymous workbloggers as descendents of a long tradition of literary

office workers, it explores whether writers, in spite of their ambivalence about the alternative, can chip away at the foundations of the prevailing capitalist world order.

How the Study is Organized

The following chapters, which incorporate broad-based investigation of media and organizational responses to blogging, and focused ethnographic study of anonymous workbloggers, critically examine the significance of the phenomenon and its impact on the contemporary white-collar labor process.

This chapter (*Chapter One*) provides an overview of the blogging phenomenon, situates anonymous workblogging in relation to the emergence of knowledge work and the information economy and, with reference to the existing critical literature and the emerging (at present very limited) literature on workblogging, lays out some of the concepts that will be used to guide this inquiry.

Chapter Two provides an empirical overview of the study, outlining the scope of the research, the research methodology employed, and situating anonymous workblogging in relation to the organizational types and technological changes that have given rise to the practice. This chapter also circumscribes the study with reference to the broader blogging terrain, which includes use of the medium by corporate interests, labor-organizers, and free speech activists.

Looking at the organizational and media response to workblogging on both sides of the Atlantic, *Chapter Three* explores how bloggers have posed a threat to organizational cultures based on self-management and open sharing of information. It illustrates how bloggers have resisted corporate attempts to co-opt their creative efforts, persisting in writing anonymously and irreverently about their work in spite of increased surveillance and the risk of being fired.

Chapter Four investigates, through ethnographic study, what motivates anonymous workbloggers to continue their practice, employing close reading of blog content, interview data, and observation to explore how workers from the public and private sector in the Greater Manchester and Lancashire area use blogging to nurture their creative aspirations and to resist organizational culture while remaining "good" employees.

Chapter Five qualitatively analyzes a broader sample of anonymous workbloggers from both sides of the Atlantic, further defining and circumscribing the concept of creative resistance by placing the blogs that we have dealt with so far within a wider context of others that are written from differing and conflicting perspectives. This chapter looks at call center blogs as a site of particularly high quality writing and strong community ties.

Chapters Six and *Seven* develop an immanent critique of late-capitalist information society, exploring how creative, electronically enabled worker resistance radically undermines the claim that full human development is possible within the framework of industrial capitalism. *Chapter Six* sets out by situating the anonymous workblogging phenomenon in relation to literary and popular cultures of workplace resistance, drawing parallels between author-clerks of the past and today's white-collar bloggers. Summarizing the findings of the previous chapters, *Chapter Seven* then speculates as to the way in which this study has modified existing theory, drawing on the New Class theory of the 1970s, critical theory, and Marxist understandings of spontaneous self-development as the key to human emancipation.

Taken as a whole, these seven chapters consider whether anonymous workblogging neutralizes worker frustrations in a way that is ultimately functional for capitalism, or constitutes a sustained form of resistance that might contribute to the disruption of the capitalist production process. Drawing on blog data, interview testimony, and literary examples to highlight the existential satisfaction that bloggers obtain by "hiding out" in office jobs, this research attempts to capture the nuanced and often contradictory aspects of a mode of resistance adopted by workers who seem to be as cynical about the possibility for social change as they are about their jobs.

The significance of this study

Among the millions of blogs currently in existence, a tiny number are anonymous responses to wage labor. While many of these accounts are poorly written and very short-lived, a small but significant subset of anonymous workblogs are thoughtfully and skillfully written, and endure for a period of time long enough to garner a small readership and become part of a disparate social network. Occasionally, usually through the firing of the blog author, one of these creative works becomes relatively high profile, both in the blogosphere and in the mainstream media.

This study upholds – through theoretical analysis and blog testimony – that the totalizing corporate culture that has pervaded large and small organizations in both the private and public sector can never completely win the hearts and minds of its employees for two reasons:

1) Its capacity to allow spontaneous, free activity can never match an individual's capacity to engage in such activity; the more the organization tries to lay claim to personal creative life, the more it engenders subversive, covert intellectual activity; and

2) Organizational goals can never be more than a subset of the totality of an individual's aspirations in life; an organization's attempts to persuade its employees to act in an unnaturally cheerful and un-ironic manner cannot help but spawn surreptitious satirical responses.

As a result, subtle and interstitial forms of resistance to corporate culture persist as more than just an innocuous safety valve, and are not easily co-opted and contained by management.

Knowledge worker dissent is an intellectually sophisticated phenomenon that acts as a counter-hegemonic force in the cultural realm. It is not surprising, as Richards notes, that "only a tiny minority [of workbloggers] believed their blog to be a forum for resistance" (2007, p. 28). These bloggers are first and foremost creative writers, interested in producing work with artistic value, with a writerly mindset that manifests an aversion to soapbox-style expression.

However, the political significance of the phenomenon does not depend on any activist intention. The subversive and creative endeavors of anonymous workbloggers are, in themselves, a rejection of the system's false promises regarding human fulfillment. Furthermore, the multiplicity of these pointed critiques, by the very fact of their networked existence, contribute to the awakening of a diffuse oppositional consciousness, establishing necessary preconditions for broad-based resistance to the encroachments of corporate culture.

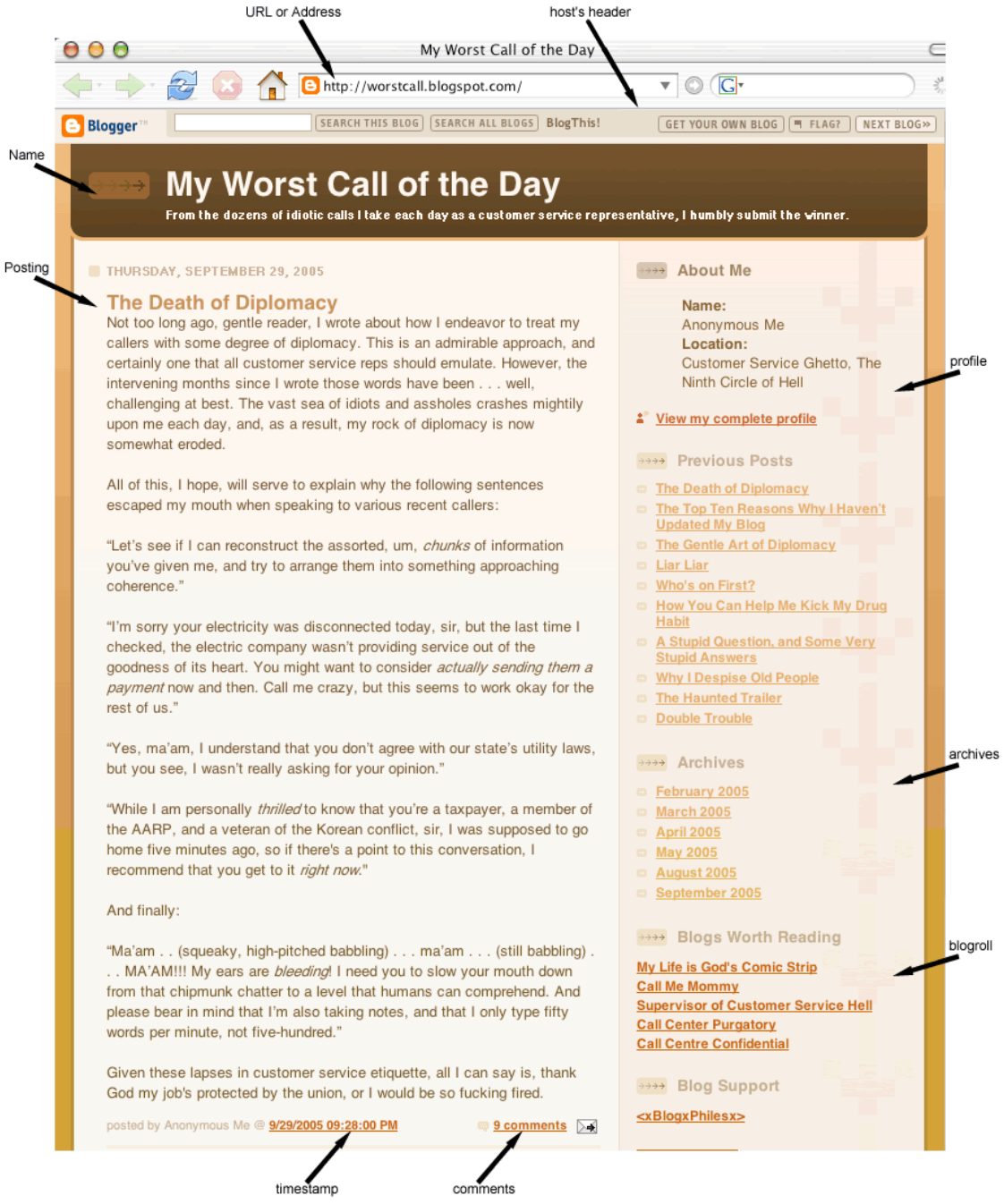
Anonymous workblogging signifies the technologically enabled emergence of a public dialogue that is deeply critical of fundamental corporate values with the potential to contribute to a profound cultural shift. This dialogue is complex and many-sided,

lauding the comforts, collegiality, and freedom of the knowledge workplace, as well as criticizing the system. However, amplified by and in concert with ecologically and ethically driven sustainability mandates, this critical dialogue is an integral part of the inevitable cultural shift towards a paradigm of less wage labor and greater genuine freedom.

Features of a blog

The overall look and feel of a blog, and the way the different elements are arranged on the page, is often highly variable since bloggers usually have a lot of autonomy in customizing the color scheme and layout of their blog. However, most personal blogs (those belonging to individuals rather than organizations) have common and recognizable features, which are detailed below, and illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1: A typical anonymous workblog, belonging to an individual who works in a call center:



URL or Address: Just like a regular website, a blog has a unique address or URL, e.g., http://callcentrediary.blogspot.com. This URL may reveal information about

where and how the blog is hosted. For example, here, the part “blogspot.com” tells us that this blog is hosted by Google’s free blog-hosting service.

Blog Name: The name of a blog usually appears as a header in large type at the top of the page. There may also be a short caption underneath the name that gives a little more information or creative sparkle. Bloggers often think up catchy and imaginative blog names, such as "Faster Pussycat" or "Glitter for Brains."

Profile: Many bloggers provide a short summary statement and, often, a link to a longer profile, that contains salient data about who they are. Anonymous bloggers give a pseudonym (e.g., “Wrapstar”), and provide minimal or highly fictionalized data. Most bloggers provide a contact email address – anonymous bloggers generally use a relatively untraceable email service such as a gmail or yahoo account that gives away no clue of their location or organizational affiliation. Lenhart and Fox (2006) find that 55 per cent of bloggers blog under a pseudonym, illustrating the importance of the medium for unfettered self-expression.

Postings (or entries): These are the real meat of the blog and are situated in the main body of the page. The full text of each current posting is shown in reverse chronological order. As you read the postings from top to bottom, you are going back in time. Posts stack up on the main page and after a certain number is reached (customized by the blogger), the system automatically archives the older postings. Postings are date-stamped, and – depending on the preference of the blogger – sometimes show the exact time of day at which they were added to the system. The timestamp can be important for figuring out whether postings are made during paid working hours, and timestamps have been used as evidence of time wasting by employers in building cases against employee

bloggers (Samuel, 2007). Postings may consist of text (which may be formatted using HTML to make it look attractive and more structured), images, or audio & video files. Generally, all postings are public, but some blogs, and parts of blogs, are password protected, and open only to a limited audience controlled by the blogger.

Blogroll and Comment Features: Blogrolling and commenting are key components of community-building in the blogosphere. A blogroll (sometimes also called a "friend list," depending on the blog provider), is a list of links to other blogs that the blogger wants to recommend, usually found in the sidebar of the blog. In general, visitors to a blog may comment on the postings they have read. At the bottom of each posting is a link to a form (or just an inline form) where a visitor types her name (and often email address or webpage address) and her comment. Bloggers often read and respond to the comments they receive, and *threads* of conversation develop between the blogger and visitors to the blog. The most recent comments sometimes appear in the sidebar of the blog. Through commenting, blogrolling, and private email contact, bloggers informally promote each other, creating a vast interconnected network generated and perpetuated by common interests and affinities. Lenhart and Fox find that 87 per cent of bloggers allow comments on their blog, 41 per cent have a blogroll or friends list, and 82 per cent have posted a comment on someone else's blog (2006, p. 20).

Archive: Postings are continually archived so that it is possible to go back and read older entries even after they have dropped off the bottom of the main page. Archived material is generally archived by month in the sidebar. Many bloggers also organize their postings using "tags," putting them into different subject categories, and offering an additional subject list that directs the reader to postings on various topics.

Sitemeter (not shown in figure, found on Google-hosted blogs): Google-hosted blogs often feature a link that offers up-to-the-moment information on recent visitor count, broken down by location, referring URLs, and other criteria. Other blog hosting services provide similar statistical tools. Where available, the sitemeter has been used in this study to determine audience size and increasing or decreasing popularity for particular blogs.

Blogging as labor

This study looks at a type of self-motivated labor – anonymous workblogging – that workers undertake as a response to their wage labor. The overlap or mutual exclusivity of these two forms of activity are in many ways the crux of this dissertation, and it is helpful to define these intertwined practices in relation to Marx's notion of free spontaneous activity as the key to human development.

"What is life but activity?" asks Marx in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (2001, p. 111). In Marx's terms, labor, which includes all human activity, is our connection to nature and to the species. Labor, as he writes in *Capital*, is, "a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates, and controls the metabolism between himself and nature" (1992, p. 283). Marx excludes from the specifically human category of labor, "those first instinctive forms of labor which remain on the animal level" (1992, p. 283), emphasizing the conscious and purposeful nature of man's activity, which permits him to conceive of plans in his mind and will them into action.

According to Marx, labor enables us to share in the riches of our fellow men and of the earth, unfolding the potential of humankind. This activity implies objectification, the creation of an entity such as a satirical blog entry or a wooden table, which then confronts us as a separate existence. Our conscious interaction with the objects of our labor, and with each other through the labor process, is part of the unfolding of man's "species-being" and it contributes to human fulfillment. This unfolding, this motion toward full human development, demands that labor retains its *free and spontaneous*

character. This does not imply an atomized individual, but rather a freely associated producer whose needs and desires are deeply interconnected with those of other humans. Nor does not imply effortlessness. As Marx notes in *Capital*, the will must be subordinated to the task at hand, for the duration of the work (1992, p. 284). All labor requires a sustained effort that is not necessarily pleasurable but may, depending on the circumstances under which it is carried out, be deeply rewarding and nourishing.

So what, in relation to Marx's broad definition of labor, is anonymous workblogging? The writing and reading activity of the bloggers in this study (conducted both at home and at work), as well as the surreptitious games and rituals that they chronicle in their writings, all fit within Marx's very broad definition of labor as conscious human activity, and I treat them as such. As is detailed in Chapter Four, bloggers work hard on their blog entries, and even feel guilt for not writing often enough or obtaining the right turn of phrase, but their blog is their own spontaneous product, the satisfaction of its creation essentially belongs to them and is not mediated by a commodity relationship.

What about the relationship between anonymous workblogging and wage labor? In Marx's account, labor for wages degrades the character of human activity, removing its spontaneity and reducing it to the actions and interactions necessary to perpetuate and expand capital: "In degrading spontaneous, free, activity to a means, estranged labor makes man's species life a means to his physical existence" (2001, p. 114). The object of labor, in this alienated condition, faces the worker as something hostile, which may degrade and impoverish him rather than sustaining and enriching him. Under these circumstances, the alienated character of labor emerges from the efforts of workers to

avoid the activities they are paid to do: “as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague” (2001, p. 111).

Anonymous workblogging, in this dissertation, is regarded as an avoidance of wage labor – an effort to limit wage labor’s encroachment into mental and physical space and carry out unfettered productive activity that is not allied with explicit organizational goals and practices. This effort is often desultory, contradictory, and is of course dependent on wage labor itself for its sustenance. As is detailed in the following chapters, anonymous workblogging is carried out by workers who often find their explicit job functions to be relatively fulfilling and comfortable. Many of them operate in workplaces where informal activities such as accessing *The Guardian* website on company time or chatting to workmates between business calls, are tolerated or even encouraged. Several bloggers in this study find their paid work to be relatively interesting, engaging, and even meaningful. Some also report a relatively high degree of creative freedom in organizing and executing their paid work, making the dichotomy between wage labor and free, spontaneous labor appear somewhat antiquated.

However, in spite of their willingness to engage in wage labor and frequent enjoyment of it, the workers in this study do feel the need to engage in activity during (and outside) work time that is consciously maintained as separate and distinct from the mission of the organization. Anonymous workblogging is a distinctly *covert* activity. Writing notes for an irreverent workblog entry, reading “subversive” blogs from a work computer, engaging in surreptitious rituals around the coffee vending machine, and spending time outside of work crafting these workplace anecdotes into pointed and satirical blog entries indicate the enthusiastic pursuit of free, spontaneous labor that is

oppositional to both the ideology and practice of wage labor. Anonymous workblogging's very covertness implies that it is not acceptable to the organizational ideology and the explicit terms under which wage labor has been undertaken. Whether this relationship is ultimately disruptive or stabilizing for capital is a different matter, and it is this question that is taken up throughout the rest of this chapter. Management theorists have argued that workplace misbehavior and satirical humor indicates a healthy safety valve where workers can voice occasional gripes against an otherwise satisfactory system. Within this framework, satire, pranks, and occasional time wasting become integral to the organization's healthy function. Wage labor becomes synonymous with free spontaneous activity as the organization becomes a one-stop shop for fun, security, meaningful work, and the occasional letting off of steam.

While considering the management perspective and respecting the freedoms that have been afforded by today's knowledge workplaces, this dissertation sets out from the critical view that wage labor under capital remains exploitative. Informed by sociological theory and by the empirical data of subsequent chapters, I assert that creative avoidance of wage labor signifies something more than a healthy safety valve in an otherwise optimal system. The following sections document the freedoms of the knowledge worker, and examine theoretical perspectives that point to the containment of dissent or its destabilizing power. Central to this account is the notion of worker as author, the blog as a creative product that emerges from wage labor without being itself a commodity. As the conclusion to this chapter suggests, the practice of anonymous blogging may represent a compromise between exploitation and emancipation, a sort of pleasure in alienation, where carefully managed exploitation causes art to flourish like a flower in a wasteland.

Although Marx often uses the term labor as a shorthand for wage labor, I aim to be consistent in using the terms "wage labor" and "labor" consistently to distinguish between these two types of activity, using wage labor to denote the explicit job function as prescribed by the organization, and labor as a broader category that includes surreptitious, covert activities carried out during or outside company time. When referring to the "labor process," labor under the existing capitalist societal structure is implied, unless otherwise stated. The term "work" is used to refer to both wage labor and broader labor activities using qualifying phrases, e.g., a person being "at work" in a corporate office to make the meaning easily identifiable. In keeping with Aronowitz and DiFazio's (1995) critique of Hannah Arendt, I do not make a theoretical distinction between labor and work – rather, I contend that human development is embodied in culture and discourse as much as it is located in the enduring objects that are the outcome of human activity.

The corporate vision of emancipated labor

The bloggers in this study are all "knowledge" workers – they work in white-collar office environments in the public and private sectors, and are engaged in a labor process in which their principal activity is the production and circulation of information itself (e.g., providing customer service via email and the telephone) or, in the case of the programmers and IT workers in the study, the configuration of devices and applications that facilitate the networked flow of information. This study treats anonymous workblogging and knowledge work as intertwined practices. Early workbloggers often blogged from their cubicles during the interstices of the working day, taking advantage of the layout, computer equipment, and organizational culture of their workplaces to blog on

company time. Due to increased IT surveillance, most anonymous bloggers no longer blog at work – this is reflected in Lenhart and Fox's finding that only 7 per cent of US bloggers usually blog from the workplace (2006, p. 20). However, the practice is rooted in work rhythms that permit office workers some freedom from supervision and tolerate or even encourage informal, Internet-based electronic communication as an integral part of the working day. Indicative of the connection between knowledge work and blogging is the recently compiled statistic that 38 per cent of US bloggers are knowledge-based professional workers, as compared with 13 per cent of the general US population (Lenhart & Fox, 2006, p. 23).

The term "knowledge worker" was coined by management theorist Peter Drucker, acknowledging the post-industrial shift away from manufacture of physical objects to the information economy, which generates economic growth via the circulation of information and ideas (Drucker, 1959, 1973). Drucker later hailed the era of knowledge work as the advent of an "employee society" that will put the final nail in Marx's coffin, creating worker control over the means of production in an interdependent relationship where the organization must respond to "what the knowledge worker needs, requires, and expects" (Drucker, 1994).

Drucker's pronouncements about the emancipation of labor can be seen as the culmination of a long development in management theory that evolved in response to the competitive need to optimize the production and circulation of good and, later, information, while maintaining a happy and comfortable workforce that is not given to disrupting the system. Beginning with the Hawthorne experiments of the 1920s, Mayo sought to replace the rigid command and control of Taylorism with methods that would

nurture workers to become self-motivated, committed team members. Elton Mayo's Human Relations Movement (Mayo, 1945; Trahair 1984), was followed by Maslow's doctrine of eupsychian management (1965), and McGregor's Theory Y (1960), which emphasized self-motivation, teamwork, and a sense of belonging, as key to organizational success.

As globalized, just-in-time production and the shift from goods to information as a source of profit gained momentum, this ideology was given new impetus. As Drucker has argued (1994) argued, the information economy demands free-flowing information, constant innovation, organizational transparency, continuous learning, and change – criteria that can only be met by self-motivated, self-managing employees. With this need in mind, the 1980s saw a surge in fresh thinking about workplace layout, organizational hierarchy, and management style. The inroads made in earlier decades by among other management trends, paved the way for the sweeping changes in organizational thinking that took shape during this period, as organizations struggled to develop the dynamism and flexibility necessary in the information economy.

One of the strongest developments in management ideology during this period was the new emphasis on organizational culture as a means of improving worker loyalty and encouraging hard work. This development, which is generally referred to in the literature as "corporate culturism" begins in 1982 with Terrence Deal and Allen Kennedy's claim that a company that cultivates informal bonds among its staff, "can gain as much as one or two hours of productive work per employee per day" (p. 15), encouraging managers to create opportunities for play and informal socializing on company time. In the same year, Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* noted

that values-based, relatively non-hierarchical organizations could exact "unusual effort on the part of apparently ordinary employees" (p. vxii).

A vast industry comprising organizational development consultants, business self-help books, motivational tools, and management gurus has emerged to support the new thinking about organizations, promoting a philosophy of harmonious alignment between worker's spontaneous desires and the needs of the organization, and promising new levels of employee commitment, workplace harmony, and organizational productivity. Within this literature, wage labor is regarded as granting the freedom and spontaneity that, according to Marx, could only be achieved outside of capitalism. In keeping with the pervasive philosophy that wage labor should be fun and fulfilling, as well as paying the bills, today's bookstore shelves bulge with books such as *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life*[1](S. Johnson, and Kenneth H. Blanchard, 1998) and *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 2004), which counsel employees on how to take control of their role in the labor process and help them to adopt techniques and attitudes that make self-realization possible.

Bestselling management parables like *FISH! A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results* (Lundin, 2000), which shows how a team leader uses lessons from the fishmongers at Seattle's Pike Place Market to turn her demotivated team around, are a popular ingredient of management training seminars. *FISH!* is marketed not as an isolated tool but as a "life-long philosophy," which promotes principles that emphasize "being there" emotionally for one's staff, and allowing a spirit of playfulness to pervade

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[1] By Spencer Johnson, M.D., who also co-authored *The One Minute Manager*, one of the most influential management parables of the 1980s.

the workplace. Demonstrating the reach of enlightened management philosophy, the FISH! website features testimonials from organizations as diverse as Sprint (a large corporate entity with call centers across the US), Cerritos Library (a medium-sized public institution in California), and Providence Day School (a small private school in North Carolina). The Day School reports, "Both faculty and students have embraced a common FISH! language that is used in everything from playground discipline to classroom recognition," while a Sprint representative testifies that adoption of the FISH! principles at a call center means that you can "hear the smiles in agents' voices" (Fish!, 2008).

Writings that directly mock management consultants and satirize these management self-help books and are a popular ingredient of anonymous workblogs, as is evidenced in the empirical sections of this dissertation. However, the management literature does not treat this as indicative of fundamental contradictions within the capitalist labor process. Within the ideological framework that stems from Drucker, resistance is regarded either as a healthy "safety valve" that signifies minor frustrations in an otherwise satisfying system; as a minor organizational ill, which can be cured by appropriate socialization of employees; or as an indication that certain individual workers are a bad fit, and should be eliminated from the organization. In Barsoux's (1993) account**,** which draws on Radcliffe-Brown's (1965) functionalist interpretation of humor in human society, managers are encouraged to nurture critical workplace humor, using to help ease tensions, manage change, nurture camaraderie, and facilitate difficult negotiations. In a similar vein, Kahn (1989) advocates the use of humor by consultants who need to nurture employee support for organizational changes such as downsizing or

major restructuring. The possibly exploitative consequences of such changes are not problematized.

More recently, perhaps in response to a harsher global economic climate, the notion that workers should be screened in order to eliminate sources of recalcitrance or resistance to change from the organization has also been aggressively promoted in the management literature. This harder edge is provided by Jack Welch's “Winning” sports-based business philosophy, where employees who to fail to go the extra mile and display the required level of loyalty to the company are branded as "bad seeds" or "work-life moaners." Welch counsels managers on how to eliminate these bad seeds, actively hiring employees who display, “a heartfelt, deep, and authentic excitement about work” (2005, p. 87) and firing “disrupters” and “sliders” who don’t demonstrate sufficiently wholehearted commitment to the organization. Welch is perhaps best known for his “differentiation” philosophy, which advocates “culling the weak” by ranking every employee in the organization and automatically firing the bottom 10% (2005, p. 41). Contrary to some of the “softer” treatments of workplace humor and resistance described above, Welch’s criteria for employability allow little to no tolerance for dissonance, regardless of an employee’s ability to perform his or her job well. The hostile climate that has led to the firing of bloggers in recent years and the repression of the practice can be attributed, at least tangentially, to Welch’s influence.

The promise of technology

Within the corporate vision of emancipated labor, technology has been regarded as an integral component of the transformation of work in the information economy. Access to Internet-based technologies that remove geographical and temporal constraints

and permit fluid, highly networked access to information have been treated as a positive force in making workers' personal desires and goals more central to the labor process. As such, the knowledge work ethos of self-managing, goal-driven teamwork has interplayed heavily with the distributed, non-hierarchical nature of emerging Internet technologies. Anonymous workblogging, even in the atmosphere of increased surveillance that has developed recently, is indicative of the new found freedoms that workers are experimenting with in knowledge-based work environments, where employees have often found themselves in possession of a relatively unsupervised workstation that is connected directly to the Internet.

The decentralized, unbounded flow of information in knowledge organizations owes much to the geek/hacker work ethic, which grew out of computer programmers' challenge to the IBM "priesthood" in the 1960s and 70s, emphasizing unlimited access to information, distrust of hierarchy, and employee freedom from organizational constraints[2] (Levy, 1984). These social and organizational norms have been promoted as part and parcel of the ideology of knowledge work, using vehicles such as *Wired* magazine to promote the marriage between organizational and technological thinking.

Founded in 1993, the San Francisco-based *Wired* magazine was marketed to the business community, rapidly becoming the central reference point for developments in the emerging dotcom world among entrepreneurs, graphic designers, web developers, and

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[2] Levy's book also emphasizes hacker culture's exploitative side in which obsessive overwork became endemic as programmers vied for "winner" status. Levy notes the truth in Weizenbaum's: *Computer Power and Human Reason (1976)*, who argues that computerization promote compulsive overwork, and describes disheveled programmers with "sunken glowing eyes" who "work until they nearly drop, twenty, thirty hours at a time" (Levy, 1984, p. 133)

organization development consultants. Ideologically, the publication drew on McLuhan's (1964) vision of a technologically enabled global village. The first issue featured soundbites from McLuhan's *Understanding Media* emblazoned across the inner pages in metallic inks. The critical dimension of McLuhan's work, which highlighted the numbness and docility induced by the technological extension of man's sensory apparatus was conveniently ignored.

Since its inception, *Wired* has celebrated the potential of Internet-based technologies such as email, virtual conferencing, and wireless, to transform workspaces and revolutionize how people work together. In the spirit of completely reinventing work, *Wired* lauded "officing" breakthroughs such as the 1994 Chiat/Day workplace redesign, which eliminated all hierarchical and private elements from the office space as well as removing time constraints and job titles. As Chiat/Day's founder Jay Chiat explained: "What you get when you come in to work is a locker – and a computer and phone you can check out for the day…. No one gets a corner office to put pictures of their family and their dog in (Dix, 1994).

While few workplaces went as far as the Chiat/Day experiment, the ideology of the non-hierarchical, culture-driven, "fun" workplace has pervaded all manner of organizations, transmitted by publications such as *Wired*, as well as organization development seminars, management schools, and the bestselling "self-help" books described above. Heterogeneous workplaces in the public and private sector now share language, rituals, and practices that are rooted in Drucker's ideas about the knowledge worker, and practices that emerged from the freewheeling hi-tech firms of the 1990s (Ross, 2002) are now often superimposed on more conventional and tightly controlled

work environments, such as call centers (Fleming, 2005). The blogosphere transcends organizational boundaries, creating associations among workers in heterogeneous work environments in both the public and private sector. As the empirical data in this study illustrate, in spite of their highly varying levels of skill, remuneration, and autonomy, these workers possess shared vocabulary, rituals, and working environments that are the legacy of Drucker and his descendents.

Anonymous Workblogging as a Safety Valve

The anonymous workbloggers in this study benefit from the flexibility of the modern knowledge workplace, echoing yet possibly subverting some of the bold emancipatory claims of Drucker and his ilk. Their writings, which detail their manipulation of unsupervised self-management and networked technologies to make room for games, socializing, and personal creative projects, are in some sense a celebration of the freedoms which Drucker's "employee society" promised. Recently, emerging research on workblogging has supported the notion that their complaints could perhaps be the venting of minor gripes against a system that is otherwise serving them well.

In this vein, James Richards' (2007) study of workbloggers, concludes that workblogging is only minimally related to the concept of resistance. Between 2005 and 2007, Richards' identified 744 work-related blogs, which are listed and categorized by occupational theme on his blog, http://workblogging.blogspot.com. Richards conducted content analysis of all the blogs and interviewed 207 workbloggers via an online questionnaire, coding his findings using a grounded theory approach. Richards focuses on bloggers' self-perception, asserting that intermediaries (such as scholars and

journalists) have falsely interpreted blogging as an act of resistance, whereas among the bloggers studied, "only a tiny minority believed their blog to be a forum for resistance" (2007, p. 28). Asked why they blog specifically about work, 28 per cent of Richards' bloggers indicate that they use their blog to "let off steam/vent/cope/stay in control," and approximately 20 per cent report that work is a "natural theme for creative writing," but only 1 per cent write about work as "resistance/defiant act."

A recently published Pew/Internet publication (Lenhart & Fox, 2006) that reports on in-depth telephone surveys of United States bloggers conducted between July 2005 and February 2006 confirms the centrality of creative self-expression in motivating people to blog and downplays the journalistic and activist-oriented interpretations of the phenomenon. The main reason for blogging, among those bloggers interviewed as part of the Pew study, was creative expression (52 per cent list this as a major reason) and to document personal experiences (50 per cent cite as a major reason). Most bloggers (52 per cent) report that they blog largely for themselves, not for an audience, but Lenhart and Fox note that this claim is complicated by the inherently public nature of the medium.

Elsewhere in the broader literature on blogging, cautious sentiments are expressed about the social change potential of the medium. Lenhart (2005) emphasizes that blogging's "social and political location outside of institutions is part of both its power and its problems" (p. 3) Bloggers' tend to relish their extra-institutional status – a factor that both supports the possibility of oppositional dialogue but also militates against cohesion into or attachment to any kind of organized group whose instinct is to regulate self-expression according to shared norms and ideals. Hoel and Hollins (2006) point out

that this resilience to alignment with organizational values creates an inherent tension that prevents the unproblematic absorption of blogging into knowledge organizations that have tried to embrace it, but this resilience must also be considered as a factor that makes bloggers less keen to align their creative output to organized labor.

Drawing both on theory and on the empirical data that is represented in the following chapters, this dissertation challenges Richards' assessment of blog-based resistance and advances a critical perspective that takes issue with the management notion that wage labor can become synonymous with human fulfillment. The following sections examine the critical literature that exposes continued exploitation in the knowledge economy, analyzing this exploitation via the logic of containment (where resistance is absorbed) and the logic of separation and transcendence (where resistance contributes to more radical outcomes such as labor organizing). The resulting theoretical synthesis, incorporates the uniqueness of this emerging medium, drawing on an analogy between today's bloggers and the literati of previous eras to challenge Richard's dismissal of workblogging's social change agenda while respecting the individualistic and apolitical tendencies of the bloggers in my study.

Critical perspectives on corporate culturism and knowledge work

The corporate culturist emphasis on increasing the amount of useful labor that can be extracted from "ordinary" employees is eerily reminiscent of Marx's theory of surplus value extraction through "small thefts of capital from the workers' meal-times and recreation times" (Marx, 1992, p. 352), a point not lost on critics of contemporary work culture who have found the exploitative logic of capital to be alive and well in the supposedly liberating and empowering workplaces of the new information economy. Arlie Hochschild, in her study of a US corporation with "family friendly" policies, shows

how employees become seduced by the workplace community and feel subtle pressure to put in more time at work, neglecting their home lives and becoming locked in a vicious cycle where they come to the office in order to escape the broken marriages, unruly children and dysfunctional friendships generated by the long hours they put in at work (Hochschild, 1997).

In a similar vein, Andrew Ross, looking at the maverick dotcoms in New York's Silicon Alley in the 1990s, warns of the seductiveness of the humane workplace, which harnesses workers' private and creative impulses in the service of capital, removing the traditional boundaries between work and non-work. Charting the frenetic work lives of dotcom employees who believe they are humanizing capitalism by infusing it with artistic and bohemian ideals, he notes that, "Perhaps the most insidious occupational hazard of no-collar work is that it can enlist employees' freest thoughts and impulses in the service of salaried time" (2002, p. 19). And in the UK, *Guardian* journalist Madeleine Bunting (2004) documents the impact of US-influenced "enlightened" management philosophy on Microsoft's UK workers. Bunting chronicles employees' struggles to achieve work-life balance in a seductive employment climate that demands intense commitment displayed through "presenteeism" – spending more time at the office as well as taking work home or remaining digitally connected outside of regular work hours.

As is detailed in subsequent chapters, anonymous workbloggers' writing and interview testimony frequently reveal anxiety over the long-hours, total commitment culture; and their postings convey a distrust of the rhetoric used by management consultants at workplace training events and retreats. In addition, several of the featured bloggers question the larger meaning and impact of their labor, protesting the banality of consumerism and the neglect of ecological and ethical considerations, and conveying a

sense of longing to spend much more of their time engaged in personal creative projects, community and family activities, or travel. These concerns resonate with the critical literature above, bolstering the claim that a sense of discontent is alive and well in the contemporary knowledge workplace. However, the empirical data also reveal that this critical stance is often counterbalanced by positive statements that bloggers make about their employers, their work environment, and their belief in type of work they do. Their wage labor, as several report, offers a much needed sense of security, collegiality and structure. For some, surreptitiousness itself – the act of hiding out in the organization while pursuing personal creative projects – is highly thrilling and rewarding.

The bloggers featured in Chapters Three and Four are somewhat ambivalent about social change and often positively squeamish about the idea of labor organizing, but their progressive convictions are solid and enduring. The goal of the following sections is to examine the critical literature and attempt a theoretical synthesis that might help to understand these quirky employees who are both principled, progressive, and vocal, yet also diffident and averse to attaching themselves to any kind of organized cause.

The Logic of Containment

A rich theoretical tradition has grown up around the critical analysis of emerging forms of managerial control, illuminating the dark side of organizations that attempt to extend instrumental rationality into the affective domain, and emphasizing the ephemeral and individualized nature of white-collar worker resistance. Within this tradition, containment, through the creation of a contented, unquestioning, and comfortable workforce, becomes as central to capital's perpetuation as the extraction of surplus labor itself. As such, the system tolerates and even encourages a certain degree of subversive time wasting, strategically tolerating and absorbing discontent in order to ensure its own

survival. This pessimistic orientation is underpinned by Weber's (1968) argument that the bureaucratic organizational framework of capitalist society promotes instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*), precluding conscious striving to decide a course of action between competing values, and leading to indifference and apathy. Whereas Weber characterizes bureaucracy as the *removal* of affect, critics of Human Relations and, later, corporate culturism, argue that the "re-enchantment" of organizations deeply subjects workers to instrumental rationality by aligning their innermost feelings and desires with the objectives of the organization. [3]

Following Weber's analysis of bureaucracy (Weber, 1946), this dissertation treats the bureaucratic form of social organization as necessary to capital's smooth-functioning. Weber argues that bureaucracy is technically superior to all preceding forms in terms of, "precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs" (p. 214). Capitalism's efficiency, for Weber, demands a bureaucratic system that eliminates from official business "love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation" (p. 216).[4]

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[3] This framing of the clash between instrumental rationality and affect that emerges as a result of corporate culturism is paraphrased here from Wilmott (1993b) and also Fleming (2005).

[4] Alvin Gouldner's (1954) study of industrial bureaucracy in the General Gypsum Company offers a subtle appreciation of the relationship between bureaucracy and capitalism, showing how rule-breaking and informality are accommodated by a degree of "mock bureaucracy" that tolerates a certain amount of insubordination. Gouldner's arguments are later critically developed by Burawoy, whose work is discussed later in this dissertation.

The critique leveled by the bloggers in this study is a response to contemporary post-industrial capitalism and its attendant bureaucratic structures as administered by the entire apparatus of private, governmental, and non-profit organizations in which these workers are embedded. However, as evidenced by blogger testimony, the problems of capitalism outlined in this dissertation are also problems of bureaucracy. An alternative social system that merely reproduces bureaucracy's disdain for the sensual, and its disregard for ethical and ecological imperatives, might be considered to be as undesirable to these workers as capitalism in its current form. This dissertation therefore focuses on critiquing the current capitalist system, acknowledging but not attempting to disentangle problems of bureaucracy that would remain for a post-capitalist society to solve.

Informed by Weber[5], Lukács develops Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, arguing that the introjection of instrumental rationality effectively forecloses the development of class consciousness. He highlights the intensity of reification in white-collar labor, contending that it is most insidious in the creative professions: "The more deeply reification penetrates into the soul of the man who sells his achievement as a commodity the more deceptive appearances are (as in the case of journalism)." The reduction of mental labor to the commodity form, robs the white collar worker of "the only faculties that might enable him to rebel against reification" (p. 172). Supporting the reification thesis, Horkheimer and Adorno examine how capitalism supports controlled yet "realistic" dissidence in order to sustain the myth of freedom (2001, p. 132), while

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[5] In the preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács writes that he originally read *Capital,* "through spectacles tinged by Simmel and Weber" (2000, p. ix). He implies that subsequent readings were less "Weberian" in nature, but Weber's influence on Lukács is nevertheless widely accepted (see, for example, Tarr (1989)).

Marcuse proposes that the culture industry has generated a "mechanics of conformity" (1991, p. xix), which precludes abstract, critical reasoning.

Drawing on the insights of the Frankfurt School, C.Wright Mills (1951) launches a critique of the Human Relations Movement (HRM), noting that the direct authority of Taylorism has been replaced by subtle psychological manipulation, producing "cheerful robots" whose loyalties were up for grabs. Mills observes that the worker's self is characterized by ambivalence, and he has become apathetic, fickle, and self-interested. His labor robbed of intrinsic meaning, the worker, "as his self fluctuates, is under strain and full of anxiety" (p. 240), yet he is incapable of organized defiance against the system that controls him. In another landmark study of the organizational self, W.H. Whyte (1956) observes the lives of workaholic executives who are "imprisoned in brotherhood," locked into a system that subtly harmonizes their feelings with the needs of the organization, dampening critical or rebellious impulses, and promoting blind trust and self-exploitation. These pessimistic analyses of the system's ability to exact cooperation and compliance, tend to foreground the passiveness of white-collar workers and their lack of solidarity, an insight that remains relevant to today's anonymous workbloggers.[6]

Burawoy (1979) adds another dimension to the containment thesis, focusing on the generation of consent at the point of production rather than at the level of the cultural apparatus. Looking at work in a Chicago machine shop, he observes an "enlightened"

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[6] Mills work is interesting in that he places the blame on the demise of the artisanal work ethic under the influence of mechanization and centralization, but stops short of problematizing ownership of the means of the production as central to the social ills that he has identified. He fails to foresee capital's attempt, during the dotcom era, to reclaim the artisanal work ethic under its auspices.

management doctrine that leaves the workers some freedom to set their own work pace, reining in this freedom periodically with "crackdowns" that temporarily tighten the rules. This cyclical process "obscures and secures" the extraction of surplus value, tending to contain class struggle between management and workers within the bounds of the "game" rather than spilling over into the type of conflict where workers would challenge the legitimacy of capitalism itself:

> The creation of an apparent freedom—freedom within limits—and the expression of consent on the shop floor is illustrated by the responses I received from fellow workers when I asked them why they worked so hard. A common reaction was a look of bewilderment and a statement like 'you think I work hard?' They would walk off chuckling to themselves. In other words, many workers not only did not think they were working hard but even thought they were getting back at management by goofing off as much as they did. (Burawoy, 1979, p. 223)

Burawoy finds that gaming thus not only legitimizes capitalist relations of production (makes the extraction of surplus value acceptable to workers) but also produces consent – the activity of working hard to produce that profit, convincing workers that it is they who are in control.

The logic of containment – whether at the level of the cultural apparatus or at the point of production – has been heavily evident in recent critical analyses of corporate culture. In his 1993 survey of resistance to corporate culture, Hugh Wilmott writes that, although cynicism and role-distancing are evident among knowledge workers, "the very process of devaluing corporate ideals tends to produce confusion and emptiness" (p. 538). Lacking a "well-organized, supportive counterculture," Wilmott notes, these workers vacillate between identification with the company and an ideological and social void, remaining tied to the "sense of stability and identity provided by a dramaturgical, cynical, instrumental compliance with corporate values" (p. 539).

Wilmott draws heavily on the ethnographic work of Gideon Kunda (1991), which epitomizes the contemporary characterization of white collar workplace resistance as a strongly evident yet ephemeral, individualized, and easily co-opted phenomenon. Kunda's research was conducted in a high-tech US workplace in the mid-1980s. Published as a book in 1992, his study concludes that cynical employees manage their organizational identity as an "active and artful construction, a performance, a tightrope walk" (p. 216), fluctuating between commitment to the company and moments of fleeting rebellion that are easily co-opted or contained by the organization. Kunda's primary focus is the organizational identity of high-achieving full-time employees who have chosen a stressful and demanding career path, as in this portrait of an engineer called Tom O'Brien:

> The company and his work seem to be central to his sense of self. He works hard and seems to enjoy it. He is emotionally committed…. Nevertheless, he appears at times wary and even watchful, even cynical or ironic about the culture, the company, and himself. An observer might read into his comments, jokes, and cultural self-consciousness signs of some distancing and considerable ambivalence (1992, p. 19).

Tracking this ambivalence as a constantly fluctuating sensibility that vacillates between embrace and rejection of the member role, Kunda finds that, due to the organizational culture's accommodation of their cynicism, workers are unable to obtain the critical distance necessary to formulate oppositional ideas. They become tied to the organization as a source of "stable meanings" that compensate for the "sense of confusion, lost authenticity, and inner emptiness" (1992, p. 222) that they encounter when they resist the company culture. Their lack of emotional and intellectual anchors outside of the organization returns them again and again to embrace of the member role, in spite of their vain attempts to escape it.

Anonymous Workblogging as Containment

Today's organizational cultures are able to tolerate self-direction to an unprecedented degree, so that the line between subversive and legitimate behavior – such as surfing the Internet on company time – is increasingly blurred. Drawing on insights from critical theory, knowledge workplaces, with their focus on informal social interaction and self-supervision, can be seen as giving the worker, as Marcuse puts it, "the feeling that he unfolds himself," (1988, p. 154) obscuring and securing the extraction of surplus value in increasingly sophisticated ways. Marcuse and other critical theorists successfully elaborated a view of technics as a means to suppress critical thought and absorb dissent, and any hopeful signs of resistance that emerge from the blogosphere must be evaluated against Horkheimer and Adorno's conviction that "amusement under capitalism is the prolongation of work" (2001, p. 137).

Anonymous workbloggers, like the shop floor workers in Burawoy's (1979) factory study, often construe their work as a game, employing inflated project completion timelines, fictitious system crashes, and other ruses to free themselves from the constraints of wage labor and clandestinely pursue their own creative projects. As is detailed in Chapter Three, periodic crackdowns on workplace computer use, coupled with well-publicized firings of 'outed' workbloggers have checked bloggers' ability to write freely, and may have successfully minimized their threat to the ideological hegemony of management gurus, securing their labor without explosively violating their sense of personal freedom.

Blogs may give workers a false sense of freedom that obscures the extraction of surplus value, inhibiting the development of an organized labor struggle. The knowledge

worker's relative comfort and freedom precludes her critical examination of the ecological and social consequences of her labor. Her daydreams of the alternative (such as the three-day week or sustainable production) are successfully contained in the realm of the imagination, stuff for idle reflection during boring meetings or while hiding out in the cubicle with a strong latte. Drawing on Wilmott and Kunda's analysis, anonymous workblogging may been seen as evidence of the dissonance that inevitably results from attempts to colonize the affective sphere, which leads workers to distance themselves from the firm's culture, while remaining strongly tied to their organizational identity, often continuing to perform their jobs well and taking a degree of pride in their work at the same time as satirizing their workplaces in the blogosphere. As such, the short-lived nature of blogs and the political ambivalence of their authors can quite easily be characterized as consistent with theories that highlight the ephemeral and heavily individualized nature of white-collar resistance.

However, an alternate, and more optimistic interpretation is also possible. Challenging this logic of containment, the following section draws together some critical theoretical perspectives that allow for the possibility for sustained and authentic separation from capitalist values, even in workers who are heavily invested in, and somewhat satisfied with, the system. Looking at the unique nature of networked technologies, the following complicates the boundary between the individual/personal and the public sphere, highlighting aspects of Wilmott's pessimism – pertaining to the lack of a supportive counterculture – that have been somewhat overcome by the blogging community. And contemplating the aspirations of the bloggers in this study, and their

orientation to the labor process, it differentiates them from the workers studied by Kunda, raising the hopeful possibility of a writerly challenge to corporate cultural hegemony.

The Logic of Separation and Transcendence

It is possible to locate, within the act of blogging, the optimistic moment in Marcuse's analysis (also hinted at, yet foreclosed, in Horkheimer and Adorno), which allows for the utilization of technics to sustain authentic opposition and promote radical change, wherever employees are able to manipulate the labor process in order to free up time to dream. Marcuse allows that the technical apparatus may have "released forces which may shatter the special historical form in which technics is utilized" (1988, p. 160), and senses cracks in the system that allow "a sensitive intelligence sickened by that which is being perpetrated," to flourish, emerging wherever people have "free available energy which is not expended in superimposed material and intellectual labor" (Marcuse, 1991, p. 242). This analysis, which is based on the reclamation of unfettered time from the capitalist labor process, lends a more radical bent to workers' efforts to steal minutes and even hours from the work day for their creative projects and entertainments.

The social network-oriented nature of the Internet points to the possibility of the formation of what Kahn and Kellner (2004) call a "virtual bloc" that monitors and critiques Western capitalism and imperialism (p. 88). Kahn and Kellner see bloggers as potential technoactivists, "favoring not only democratic self-expression and networking, but also global media critique and journalistic sociopolitical intervention" (p. 91). They argue that subversive uses of networked Internet technologies enable situationist interventions that can be used to "promote a revolution of everyday life and to increase the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment" (p. 93). In a similar vein, Carty

(2002) argues that, while the Internet has facilitated capital flight to unregulated labor markets, strengthening multinational corporations, it has simultaneously facilitated cohesive global activism that articulates oppositional and anti-corporate perspectives and stimulates the formation of counter-hegemonic social movements.

With regard to the labor movement, the Internet has also been analyzed as potentially strengthening labor unions, facilitating the rapid spread of information, building dialogue about labor issues, helping recruitment efforts (particularly by broadening the appeal of unions to younger members), and democratizing overly hierarchical organizational structures that persist in some unions. Ward and Lusoli (2003) argue that, depending on the strategy that unions adopt, the Internet may either erode or strengthen organized labor, being most effective where unions take advantage of networked technologies to reach out to potential members and to facilitate increasingly direct participation in labor organizing decisions among their exist membership. Carter et al (2003) look at the Internet's potential to support "polyphonic organization" within labor unions, enabling workers to find "a space for discourse that is not already colonized – or marginalized – by the strategies that power uses" (p. 295), while enabling discourse among conflicting viewpoints within the membership, which recursively strengthen the union. Pliskin et al (1997) find that email served as a powerful "secret weapon" in an industrial dispute, promoting unity and communication among the strikers and facilitating negotiations.

Vincent Hevern (2004) has argued that the blog is a concrete instantiation of the dialogical self suggested by Bakhtin's (1984) polyphonic conception of authorship. As Hevern writes of Weblog practices, "Voices within the self are varied, even oppositional,

and resist any simple attempt to harmonize their multiplicity into an unstable synthesis" (p. 330), yet the persistence of postings over time allow retrospective identification of "enduring positions" (p. 331). Looking specifically at bloggers who consider their blog an artistic production, this dissertation reveals a creative aversion to black-and-white soapbox style expression, and a preference for more nuanced writing that conveys a distinct viewpoint and a particular orientation to the labor process while valuing ambivalence and uncertainty. Such a disposition is incompatible with self-perception as being engaged in a single-minded "act of defiance" in the workplace, yet is heavily imbued with counter-hegemonic potential.

A cautious optimism, based on the opportunistic subversion of the capitalist system, is also found in James Scott's peasant ethnography, *Weapons of the Weak* (1987), which highlights forms of resistance that take place under the veil of compliance. The "performance" of deference or obedience has been mistakenly conflated in critical theory, Scott argues, with the concept of hegemony, which assumes that the lack of open resistance implies ideological conformity or normative agreement with the ideas of the dominant class. Scott argues that compliant behavior often exists side by side with radical oppositional ideas and covert actions that can be detected only by uncovering the "hidden transcript" of subversive thought and action that exists as the backdrop to public displays of obedience. Behavioral compliance thus cannot be equated with false consciousness: "The necessary lines may be spoken, the gesture made, but it is clear that many of the actors are just going through the motions and do not have their hearts in the performance. […] What is conveyed is the *impression* of compliance without its substance" (Scott, 1987, p. 26).

For Scott, the linkage between individualized resistance and the formation of an irreverent popular culture that romanticizes rebellion through myth and legend, serves to legitimize acts of everyday resistance and also to elevate shared participation in resistance onto a collective plane. He observes of Malaysian peasant life:

> Their individual acts of foot dragging and evasion are often reinforced by a venerable popular culture of resistance. Seen in the light of a supportive subculture and the knowledge that the risk to any single resister is generally reduced to the extent that the whole community is involved, it becomes possible to speak of a social movement (Scott, 1987, p. 35).

While culturally and socio-economically a world apart from the Asian peasant economy, bloggers' creative writings, some of which achieve an iconic status that comes to represent shared fears, grudges, and fantasies[7], demonstrate a form of collective myth-making and dialogue that, arguably, resonates with Scott's concept of the interplay between "unorganized, unsystematic, individual; opportunistic, self-indulgent" struggle and the development of class consciousness through popular culture.

Drawing on Hevern's polyphonic conception of blog-writing and Scott's analysis of everyday resistance, this dissertation challenges Richards' (2007) view that anonymous workblogging has little to do with resistance on two major counts. First, the line between what workers consider venting and what they would call an defiant act is both a question of semantics and a matter of how one conceptualizes the line between informal or everyday resistance and more formal resistance. Scott argues that everyday, seemingly individualized acts such as foot dragging and irreverent joking contribute to a popular culture where the dominant ideology may be effectively challenged and acts of

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[7] See, for example, the coining of the term *Dooced*, which is now synonymous with being fired because of one's blog, and was inspired by the firing of blogger Heather Hamilton (dooce.com) that is detailed in *Chapter Three*.

formal resistance, such as participation in a social movement, become possible. Bloggers' perceptions that their venting and coping mechanisms are purely individual or are divorced from the concept of resistance are further contradicted by the public, networked nature of their practice.

Drawing on Scott's framework, blogs can be read as revealing previously hidden transcripts of knowledge work culture. They reveal that workers who hide out in knowledge organizations and successfully negotiate their organizational identity so that they remain in good favor with supervisors while resisting taking on extra responsibilities, are sometimes able to free up a significant part of the working day to pursue their own intellectual and creative projects. They reveal dedication to what the French call *La Perruque* (the wig), which, as de Certeau explains, is "the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer," diverting time from the labor process for "work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit" (2002, p. 25). And bloggers' celebration of their efforts to insert irreverent workplace rituals and time wasting opportunities in the interstices of the working day suggests, in the spirit of Donald Roy's (1960) Banana Time, a concerted attempt among employees to stay partly free, maintaining in their minds a realm of possibility, and unfulfilled potentiality, without overt disruption of the labor process.

Anonymous Workblogging and the New Class Critique

Another optimistic theoretical orientation may be found in the hopes expressed by the New Class movement of the 1970s, which envisaged a role for skilled and well-remunerated workers in ending capitalism (Coates & Topham, 1970; Mallet, 1975). Alvin Gouldner (1979) emphasized that, by virtue of their education, training, and

exposure to cosmopolitan ideals, these workers (along with intellectuals) shared a culture of critical discourse (CCD) that predisposed them to doubt and challenge the prevailing system, particularly on ecological grounds or where they felt their autonomy being compromised (p. 44). Gouldner argues that in spite of their political apathy, these workers might wage a Gramscian war of position that might lead ultimately to radical social change: "Short of going to the barricades, the New Class may harass the old, sabotage it, critique it, expose it and muckrake it, express moral, technical, and cultural superiority to it, and hold it up to contempt and ridicule" (1979, p. 17).

Deviating from the Marxist assertion that revolution requires emiseration of the proletariat as its prerequisite, Serge Mallet posits a decisive role for relatively comfortable, skilled workers in fomenting radical change: "Precisely because it is placed in the centre of the most complex mechanisms of organizational capitalism, the new working class is brought to realize more quickly than the other sectors the contradictions inherent in the system. Precisely because its elementary demands are largely satisfied, the new working class is led to ask itself other questions whose solutions cannot be found in the realm of consumption" (1975, p. 29).

The New Class critique has been largely ignored in recent times, possibly because of the historical specificity of the alliances between labor and the intelligentsia that gave birth to New Class theory. However, this theory may be useful in analyzing anonymous workblogging, even in the very different and unorganized context of the knowledge economy. The members of the New Class analyzed by Mallet, Gouldner, Coates, and Topham, are interested, ultimately, in controlling the means of production. The bloggers in this study, by contrast, are relatively uninterested in transforming their workplace or

taking an explicit activist role, even as writers, in a radical social change movement. Many of them believe in the possibility of reorienting the labor process to more sustainable and human-centered values, but their artistic disposition and overall cynicism seem to discourage conscious embrace of a social change movement. Nevertheless, their education and skill level, coupled with their ability to use the tools and layout of the knowledge workplace to buy time for reflection, to render their relationship to the labor process transparent, and to engage in globally networked critical dialogue, all point towards the hope, advanced by New Class theorists, in the critical potential of skilled and privileged workers.

While New Class theory has fallen into perhaps unwarranted obscurity, the idea of resistance that takes place behind the veil of compliance is alive and well within the contemporary critical management literature. However, this literature has tended to focus on relatively unsophisticated forms of shirking, or has assumed the need for an outside organizing presence (such as a union) in order to generate more articulate and vocal responses from workers. In addition, this body of work has emphasized the apolitical and self-interested nature of workers who engage in covert resistance. This "revival" of the recalcitrant worker – and its shortcomings with regard to this study – is discussed below.

The Revival of the Recalcitrant Worker

Criticizing what they called a "Foucauldian turn" in organizational studies that is evidenced by the work being carried out by scholars such as Kunda and Wilmott, Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) lament the abandonment of the recalcitrant worker in a landmark article, entitled "All Quiet on the Workplace Front." Sociological inquiry, Thompson and Ackroyd claim, has shifted away from worker agency and toward all-

encompassing management control, falsely equating the demise of overt labor organizing with a general decline in workplace insubordination and collective resistance. Echoing the call for more inquiry into covert and interstitial forms of resistance, Edwards (1995) argues that practices which are "more subtle, covert and secretive and frequently less collective and organized" (p. 291), nevertheless carry significant disruptive potential.

Subsequent empirical and theoretical studies, such as Fleming and Sewell's (2002) use of "Svejkism"[8] as a metaphor for relatively invisible forms of strategic disengagement from the labor process, have responded by attempting to refocus attention on subtle forms of resistance. Fleming and Sewell's concept of Svejkism invokes the notion of a self-interested and ideologically detached employee who is invested in perpetuation of the system in which he is embedded, yet is effective in disrupting the effectiveness of the organization. Svejks are notably apolitical and self-interested: "Importantly, Svejks are never 'reformers' in the liberal democratic sense, acting on some enlightened principle of justice that informs conscious political intent" (865).

Most of the recent work on the recalcitrant worker (S. Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Jermier , Knights, & Nord, 1994; Knights & McCabe, 2000) focus on forms of interstitial resistance – such as taking false sick days, shirking tasks, and refusing to show enthusiasm – that require little sustained intellectual engagement or creative labor on the part of the employee. Those studies that highlight more creative forms of resistance assume the presence of labor organizers or employee activists oriented to union-building, who coordinate and focus worker-generated humor and satire around specific labor

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[8] Svejk is a soldier in Jaroslav Hasek's novel *The Good Soldier, Svejk*, who resists the discipline of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army "through subtle forms of subversion that are invariably 'invisible' to his superiors " (Fleming & Sewell, 2002, p. 863).

demands. Interstitial resistance is valued only insofar as it becomes focused into a union struggle. In this vein, Rodrigues and Collinson's (1995) study of a Brazilian telecom company documents how workers used an employee newspaper to launch a concerted attack on management and expose the hypocrisy behind the company's "happy family" philosophy. Moving from individualized to organized resistance, the Brazilian telecom workers use satire to exchange ideas and experiences, locate points of consensus, and formulate strategies to challenge company bosses as an organized and vocal group in which no individual worker is liable to be isolated and made a scapegoat. Similarly, Taylor and Bain (2003b) show how call centre workers use joking and satire instrumentally in building vigorous countercultures that oppose management doctrine, directing their efforts towards a union organizing effort in their workplace. Taylor and Bain argue that, in the presence of incipient trade unionism among employees, informal resistance can become a powerful organizing tool.

By contrast, the bloggers in this study demonstrate, without the presence of a labor organizing agenda, the ability to craft complex and nuanced critiques of the labor process. Rather than being coolly self-interested and pragmatic *Svejks*, they are "troubled" by strong ethical and political convictions that interfere with their ability to tranquilly engage in wage labor. And rather than confining these convictions to a purely private or micro-level domain, they disseminate their ideas and engage in dialogue about wage labor via loose networks that transcend organizational boundaries. Of course, in the absence of an explicit organizing agenda, and in a context where the desire to "hide out" in the organization makes overt disruption unpalatable, the primary impact of this activity is confined to the cultural realm. The central task of this dissertation is to assess whether

such an "armchair" form of resistance can be regarded as *authentic* (signifying separation from capitalist values rather than occasional venting of minor gripes) and *effective* in promoting free, spontaneous labor as an alternative to wage labor, critically assessing the linkage between this creative reclamation of time and energy as an individual project and as a larger societal goal.

A Theory of Creative Resistance

This dissertation seeks to challenge Wilmott's (1993b) notion of "confusion and emptiness" as the abiding sentiment accompanying resistance to organizational culture. It asserts that the knowledge economy has facilitated the development of creative, networked resistance, which is significant in three ways. First, the bloggers featured in this study consciously take advantage of the annual appraisal structure and the freedoms of the cubicle to limit their advancement within the organization, limiting their responsibilities and focusing their time and energy on alternate forms of self-fulfillment. This, in itself, is a rejection of Drucker's claim that the employee society explicitly aligns wage labor and human development, eliminating the need for subversive activity. Anonymous workblogs and the activities they chronicle, indicate that the self-managed, networked structure of the knowledge workplace has indeed created time and mental space where employees may question the status quo and play with the idea of the alternative, which presents a threat to the ideological hegemony of corporate culture. The instantaneously public, networked nature of the medium points to the possibility that individual workers may impact the cultural realm, engaging in dialogue with other bloggers, and connecting to mainstream media, potentially shifting the *zeitgeist* in favor of alternatives to corporate capital without necessarily going through the traditional

avenue of organized labor. A theory of creative resistance is thus structured around four inter-related concepts, which differentiate it from existing theory as follows:

1. Limiting responsibility, making room for the imagination:

Critical ethnographic studies of corporate culture such as Kunda's *Engineering Culture* (1992), Ross's *No Collar* (2002), and Hochschild's *The Time Bind* (1997) focus on workers who are relatively career-oriented, and who, at least until threatened by burnout and economic hardship, identify quite strongly with the organization's values and consciously attempt to integrate their creative desires with their paid employment. Insufficient attention has been paid to those workers – epitomized by the anonymous workbloggers in this study – who occupy relatively skilled or responsible positions, but approach the labor process cynically and pragmatically, have creative aspirations that they regard as incommensurable with paid employment, and choose to manage their organizational identities in ways that maximize free time for the pursuit of personal projects that nurture and articulate political and artistic values that differ markedly from those of the organizations in which they are immersed. This reclamation of time and energy, as Marcuse suggests in his more optimistic moments, reopens the possibility for critical thought and action.

2. Embodying ideas in a tangible creative form

Using Willmott's evocation of "confusion and emptiness," as a counterpoint against which to highlight the sophistication and concreteness of emerging forms of resistance, this study focuses attention on an under-researched type of resistance – the role of worker as *author*. Using members of the literati of previous eras as comparison, the attraction of relatively mundane office jobs to creative writers becomes readily

apparent. The writerly disposition, as is argued throughout this dissertation, militates against identification with a specific cause or social movement, and promotes self-expression that nuanced and many-sided, while capable of conveying an enduring critical perspective on corporate capitalism.

While they are not focused on organizing as oppressed workers, bloggers are very interested in getting together as writers, and the respect and mutual admiration that grows out of the writing process sustains important exchanges of ideas and experiences. Without wishing to place today's bloggers and literary giants such as Eliot, Kafka, and Dickens side by side, reflection on these writers' ambivalence about capitalism gives useful insights into the limitations and social change potential of the embedded writer. Finally, in considering these workers as authors, the "thrill" of alienation becomes apparent, as an uneasy yet satisfying compromise that both fuels their art and shields their creativity from commodification.

3. Using networked technology for exchange and dialogue

Bloggers have harnessed the technological and managerial structure of the knowledge workplace in order to express themselves in artistic and literary ways that, via the blogosphere, might become part of a collective attitude of irreverence and disengagement, rather than being confined to the private domain. Given current technology, the linkage between everyday resistance and popular culture seems sharper. While the logic of containment, as described earlier in this chapter, must be kept strongly in mind, the disruptive effect of the celebrity workblogger cases detailed in Chapter Three and unprecedented speed, global reach, and interconnectivity of the blogosphere, makes necessary a fresh evaluation of the containment thesis.

Writing over a decade ago, Wilmott observes that, "despite evidence of the distancing of employees from corporate values, there is as yet little sign of sustained questioning of, or organized resistance to, the implicit political philosophy of corporate culturism" (1993b, p. 541). He suggests that the absence of a community of critical dialogue among workers prevents the transcendence of critique beyond the level of individualized complaints. An alternative social formation, he argues, would require "(i) access to knowledge of alternative standpoints and (ii) a social milieu in which their competing claims can be critically explored" (1993b, p. 533). In a similar vein, Madeleine Bunting's recent investigation of overwork culture in the UK ends with a "rallying cry" for public dialogue that may trigger a deep cultural shift upheld by policy changes: "The changes required must be triggered through the spread of ideas, a growing awareness that shifts the *zeitgeist*" (2004, p. 319). A primary question, for this study, is whether anonymous blogging signifies the technologically enabled emergence of such a dialogue, and confirms the presence of an untapped critical and creative tendency among knowledge workers that represents something more than fleeting moments of dissonance and is attached to firmer ground than the ideological, social, and creative void that has been so heavily represented in the existing critical literature.

4. Dreams of what could be

The horizontal and transparent organization of the knowledge workplace has, according to the pro-business literature, provided unprecedented opportunities for employee self-development and the harmonization of worker desires with organizational needs. However, it has also, arguably, nurtured the intellectual and political development of workers in ways that foment discontent. Some of the bloggers in this study are haunted

by the sense that their labor is pointless; others are convinced that their productive activity during the working day has, either directly or indirectly, a negative ecological and social impact. Many see a reduction in the number of hours they spend at work as the key to self-fulfillment, expressing a sharp interest in moving to a 3-day week or otherwise reducing the significance of paid employment in their lives so that they might be truly free to pursue spontaneous creative projects that are not limited by the exigencies of making a living.

This interest in curtailment of the working week makes the literature of alternatives to wage labor central to an inquiry into knowledge workers' latent and explicit desires. The seductive promise of the humane workplace ideology must be evaluated against an alternative that Stanley Aronowitz (1985) has called "simply too threatening," delinking wage labor and income and providing a guaranteed income to all members of society. Aronowitz and DiFazio (1995) have argued that an economics based on full employment and continuous growth has failed on a global level, creating social breakdown and ecological catastrophe, a largely non-unionized and underpaid workforce, and unprecedented levels of long-term unemployment. They propose a society based on dignified non-work as a way of averting catastrophe and promoting authentic emancipation.

Central to the idea of reducing working time is the Marxist notion that wage labor is alienated and that capitalism tends to use technological gains to maximize extraction of surplus value, rather than in the service of human development (Marx, 1992, 2001). Where self-fulfillment coincides with capitalist production goals, as in the early days of many dotcom firms, this moment must be understood as part of a dynamic process that,

unchecked, tends toward rationalization and lower wages (Marx, 1992; Ross, 2002). Marx asserted in *The Grundrisse* that a wealthy society is one where necessary labor is reduced to a minimum, leaving people free to pursue spontaneous self-development and creative or scientific projects. Quoting an anonymous pamphlet of the time (Anonymous, 1821), Marx writes, "Truly wealthy a nation, when the working day is 6 rather than 12 hours." (1993, p. 706). Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue (1975) argued that workers must fight for "right to be lazy" over the right to work. Such dreams, it is argued, haunt today's anonymous workbloggers and infuse their creative product.

As this overview has hopefully highlighted, sociological analysis of corporate culture and modern knowledge work has tended to characterize white collar employee dissent as a highly individualized and apolitical phenomenon. Within the control-oriented literature, employees who do resist find themselves largely disoriented and without ballast, lacking a clear conception of an alternative to the status quo. Recent scholarly efforts to revive the recalcitrant worker by observing and validating interstitial forms of resistance have not yet captured the power of artistically inspired and globally networked worker narratives to upset the status quo. Bloggers are, admittedly, a very tiny subset of knowledge workers but their creative and conscious rebellion, their "active" hiding out in the knowledge workplace, begs to be explored more thoroughly.

The artistic ideal of toiling in obscurity at a humble office job has appeal for some workbloggers and reflects a long history of literary individuals who sojourn in humdrum office jobs. As Lyndall Gordon observes of T.S. Eliot, disguising oneself as a drone can be curiously liberating and empowering: "Eliot was invisible as a man of destiny: superman in the guise of a clerk. [Ezra] Pound and others thought it pitiful to spend his

days at a bank, but it left his imagination free, and he relished the completeness of his disguise, for he excelled as a clerk" (L. Gordon, 2000, p. 165).

Following the tradition of the great writer-clerks of the past, the bloggers in this study point to the presence, in today's knowledge organizations, of employees who enjoy their work yet are deeply critical of the ideological underpinnings of management philosophy and concerned that their labor is serving narrow corporate interests that fail to benefit individual workers and society as a whole. In a repressive climate where criticism is increasingly veiled, and frightened bloggers are removing their more "dangerous" postings for fear of losing their jobs, the impact of individual bloggers on corporate culture is small and fleeting. Yet, the urge to nurture a counter-cultural and creative milieu remains strong, and workers continue to carve out their role in the organization in ways that sustain this freedom. The following chapters turn to the writings and interview testimony of these intriguing employees, examining the possibilities and limitations of creative resistance.

Chapter 2: Anonymous Workblogging in Context

The Scope of this Study

Blogging first came to my attention in 2002 when *Guardian Unlimited*, my newspaper website of choice, ran a series of articles about weblogs and launched an award for the best of British blogs (Waldman, 2002). Working as a web designer at the time, I was at first rather skeptical about what was being hailed as an exciting new phenomenon, since it seemed to be a relatively subtle modification of existing web technology that was being hyped under a new name. Being interested in time-wasting in the workplace (partly because my IT career had allowed me to do quite a lot of it), I became more intrigued as I learned about bloggers who were being fired for writing about their workplaces, and followed the story of Dooce (a fired web designer whose story is detailed in Chapter Three) with some interest. I did not start seriously reading blogs until 2004, when a close relative of mine, an aspiring writer who was immersed in a dull but comfortable office job, started his own blog. At this time, I began to reflect on the connection between creative ambition and the decision to "hide out" in relatively unchallenging wage labor situations that offer collegiality and structure, pay the bills, but leave the mind free to pursue one's own creative projects on company time. In particular, I saw a conflict between this orientation to the labor process, and the type of total commitment work culture that I had been reading about in the sociological and management literature, as well as experiencing (and resisting) first-hand in my own IT career.

Given this entry to the topic of blogging, the focus of my study naturally became those blogs that were written with some degree of writerly flair as critical responses to

wage labor. Well-written blogs, it seemed, were most capable of connecting to mainstream media, of cultivating thoughtful dialogue, and articulating complex and often contradictory feelings about contemporary knowledge work. Given my interest in resistance to corporate culture, I naturally gravitated to blogs that were written anonymously, in a surreptitious mode that freed the writer to write candidly and satirically about workplace experiences. These anonymous workblogs have since been somewhat stifled by the corporate blogging phenomenon – detailed in Chapter Three – where organizations encourage their employees to blog under their real names. Companies have also instituted blogging policies that prohibit employees from blogging about work, and stepped up surveillance both inside and outside the workplace, making anonymous workblogging something of an endangered practice. As of 2008, only two of the six Manchester bloggers I studied in Chapter Four have continued to write about work, while the others have removed their work-related posts, changed the focus of their blogs, or have taken their blogs down altogether. Almost all those interviewed reported that they had stopped posting blog entries from work, although several still plan blog entries, read other blogs, and post comments on company time. As such, this study really captures a moment of resistance, which peaked between 2002 and 2005, and has since been on the wane in its current form. However, as is argued in this study, the motivation for creative resistance to corporate culture has not disappeared and the *form* of this technologically enabled opposition is – like the Internet itself – in the process of continuous evolution.

This study explicitly focuses on the "cream" of anonymous workblogs, favoring those that offer subtle and writerly critiques of knowledge work. Chapter Five looks at

the bigger picture of anonymous workblogging, arguing that the overall practice is markedly ephemeral and of a significantly lower writing quality than that featured in the earlier chapters. I make no claim that the bloggers highlighted are representative of a wider mass of clever, irreverent writers that have made themselves known in the blogosphere. Rather, I assert that this small, somewhat elite percentage of anonymous workbloggers has a social and cultural reach that makes their work moderately influential and serves as a touchstone for a group of likeminded iconoclastic workers who may read blogs without necessarily keeping one of their own.

The absence of a labor organizing agenda

Notably, in looking at these anonymous workblogs, I found little evidence of any explicit activist or organizing agenda. While they often hold strong ethical and political convictions, the bloggers in this study largely confine themselves to the realm of opinion and dialogue, without making any call for action or for joining together to build a movement. In the case of the call center bloggers, which are discussed in Chapter Five, there were nascent signs of a discussion forum that would explicitly bring workers from this sector together in order to organize around shared concerns but this effort was short-lived and it disappeared without a trace. Given this reality, I am wary of making the argument that bloggers will explicitly align themselves with organized labor. Rather, my claim as to their influence is therefore related to culture and cultural production, nurturing critical dialogue about wage labor and creating a climate that is broadly sympathetic to the demands of the labor movement, without necessarily coalescing into an organized effort.

Labor unions have been very active in adopting blogging as part of their communications and organizing strategy. The AFL-CIO promotes its campaigns and

mobilizes its membership via AFL-CIO Now Blog (http://blog.aflcio.org/), the Industrial Workers of the World weblog (http://www.iww.org/) promotes the idea of an international union for all workers, and in the UK, the Tigmoo (http://www.tigmoo.co.uk/) blog provides a network for trade union blogs and bloggers. While the bloggers who are the focus of my study might be politically sympathetic to these efforts, there is no evidence that they wish to align their own writings with union organizing efforts in the blogosphere. There is some recent evidence that a group of "professional" bloggers is seeking to organize a union, which may ultimately come under the aegis of the Writer's Union, and would afford them protections as freelance writers (Heher, 2007). This effort is interesting but is of little relevance to the bloggers in my study who have explicitly chosen to keep their creative writing separate from their paid employment.

There is some decisive evidence of activism among anonymous workbloggers around ethical and political issues such as free speech. As is detailed in Chapter Three, dialogue about employee freedoms has been a powerful ingredient of the more prominent fired blogger cases, and this has frequently spilled over into discussions of the need for broader labor protections. But this more overt activism does not form the main thrust of my argument, which focuses on the way bloggers convey persuasive critical ideas about the labor process without ever necessarily aligning themselves with a particular agenda, preferring a more nuanced mode of expression, that militates against explicitly allying themselves with a particular cause.

Inclusion of heterogeneous workplaces

81% of US adults had Internet access in 2006, with over a third of these having access to the Internet in the workplace (US Census Bureau, 2008). In the UK, 60% of

adults were using the Internet by 2006, and 43% of employed adults were accessing the Internet from work (Office for National Statistics, 2007). Among Internet users, blogging is a relatively widespread practice, with approximately 8% of US Internet users reporting that they kept a blog in 2006 (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Reflecting this breadth of use, anonymously written blogs that mention work are highly heterogeneous, emerging from all manner of workplaces in both the public and private sector, and being written by employees who occupy highly skilled and relatively unskilled positions. My focus on white collar workers does little to narrow the field, since this category still includes workers as far afield as a private sector call center operator in the Midwest US and a skilled programmer in the UK's National Health Service. From a methodological perspective, this makes analysis of the practice in relation to specific income, skill level, job prestige, working conditions, or job security something of a moving target that is impossible to focus with regard to such a diluted sample. This difficulty is further compounded by the highly fictionalized nature of the blog testimony that is included in this study, which is not backed up by direct workplace observation (this shortcoming is explained further in the methodological section below).

My justification for looking at heterogeneous workplaces in this study is twofold. First, the physical boundaries between one organization and another are rendered largely invisible by the blogosphere. Bloggers link to one another and comment on each other's work in a seamless space where connections are made through affinities of ideas and experiences rather than particular organizational or geographical affiliations. The immediacy and reach of the medium suggests a vast global workplace where employees may be in touch with each other via a few keystrokes, and physical proximity is not

particularly relevant to the frequency and intensity of communication. Second, and more importantly to the critical substance of this study, the rituals and culture of the workplaces featured in these blogs are remarkably similar, given their heterogeneity.

As explained in Chapter One, the last three decades have seen the large-scale adoption of a management ideology that is aligned with the needs the knowledge economy. Anonymous workbloggers from government call centers to private dotcoms find that they have in common an annual performance review process, a language for dealing with organizational change, and a certain amount of freedom to work unsupervised, that has been adopted by both large and small organizations in the public and private sector. It is this shared culture that holds the blogs featured in this study together and it is the common contradictions of this culture – such as the sense that the organization is demanding total commitment, or that the five day work week is fraught with ennui and ethical uncertainty – that this study is centrally concerned with.

Given this broad scope, the following section explains the methodology that was adopted in undertaking this study, and discusses the challenges of studying this heterogeneous and heavily fictionalized data.

Methodology

This research focuses on what webloggers have to say – using weblog content and interviews with webloggers to detail their practices and views. This testimony is situated, however, within a broader, less subjective context of weblog-related commentary from the political, legal, and technological sphere, employing media sources and sociological journals to track developments in these areas. The phases of the research and the rationale

behind each are described below. These phases of the research were carried out in an overlapping fashion between 2004 and 2006, with the write-up taking place in 2007.

Phase 0: Literature Review: Sociological and management literature plus literary examples of "writer-clerks."

Phase I: Media and blog research: Fired and famous blogger cases, media and corporate response

Phase II: Ethnographic research: Small selection of anonymous workbloggers

Phase III: Blog research: Broader sample of anonymous workbloggers.

Phase IV: Write-up

The phases of my research followed the genesis of my own interest in blogging, as described in the opening of this chapter. The foundation for this study is a review of the sociological literature, which draws on Marx, critical theory, and contemporary evaluations of corporate and Internet culture; a survey of the management literature with a particular focus on theorists such as Drucker (1973) as well as business "self-help" books; and a review of novels and biographies that help locate the practice of writing about white collar work within a longstanding artistic tradition. This literature review has been ongoing throughout the period of my research. The management perspective is informed partly by my own former career (1993 - 1997), working for an Washington DC-based organization development consultancy that worked in spreading corporate cultural philosophy during the dotcom boom.

Having become aware of blogs such as *Dooce* (the fired web designer featured in Chapter Three) and *Call Centre Confidential* (the UK-based call center blog featured in Chapter Four) through the mainstream media, I began my formal research in late 2004 by

reading several of these blogs in their entirety as well as selectively reading comments on particular blog postings. With regard to the fired blogger cases (those which emerged in 2005 and 2006 as well as retrospectively), I conducted a survey of the international media response to these incidents, also tracking the discussion about these events in the blogosphere by following links from one blog to another, and using Technorati[9]'s specialized blog search engine (and also Google, following the launch of its blog search engine in 2005). I also collected mainstream media coverage of some non-fired but "famous" anonymous workbloggers, such as Dr Dre (author of *Doing Less Harm*) and Wrapstar (author of *Call Centre Confidential*) who were gaining attention for their irreverent writing about the workplace. During this period, I tracked the corporate response to the workblogging phenomenon, collecting workplace blogging policies, legal briefs, and management association advice to employers on how to appropriately respond to the employee bloggers. This corporate response was easily traceable via press releases and online newspaper coverage of the emerging organizational response, as well as through Google searches relating to the phenomenon. Prompted by references to the Electronic Freedom Foundation's guide to blogging safely about work, which was first published in April 2005, I also closely followed the emergence of strategies to promote and enable covert workblogging.

The goal of this phase of my research was to capture what seemed like an intriguing management problem that had emerged from the employee freedoms of the knowledge workplace. I wished to understand the nature of the critique that was being launched against organizations in which these bloggers were embedded and to see

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[9] http://www.technorati.com/

whether this critique had any relevance to the critical sociological literature with which I was familiar. In particular, I was interested in whether there was any evidence in these blogs to support the sociological critique made by Andrew Ross, Arlie Hochschild, and others against the exploitative aspects of "enlightened" management philosophy, and whether these employees might have any kind of influence, either through direct political action or, more diffusely, in the realm of public opinion and alliance-building. Reflecting on Burawoy's analysis of the cyclical containment of dissent in the machine shops of the 1970s, I was interested in whether this new medium, and a new economy, offered substantively different possibilities for resistance and social change.

This initial phase of my research revealed an intriguing finding – that anonymous workbloggers were capable of energetic and informed critique of the systems in which they were embedded, yet were quite notable coy about admitting to any political intent. Given my familiarity (through my blogging relative) with the draw of the medium to aspiring creative writers, I became interested in how the writerly disposition intersects both with wage labor and with the politics of the labor movement. I resolved to look at a wider selection of anonymous workblogs, chosen for their literary value as well as their critical commentary.

Using snowball sampling, I identified approximately 20 anonymous workblogs that I looked at in some detail, loosely coding content around themes such as "training events" and "desire for time off." Because of my starting point and my UK-based blogging connections, this part of my research was very UK-centric but I made an effort to include US-based bloggers in order to see whether there were notable differences between the practice in the US and the UK. Ultimately, given my literary interest, I

favored the UK bloggers due to the higher quality of satirical and subtle writing that I discovered in these blogs, which may be a product of British cynicism, or merely a reflection of my own identification with British humor, counterculture, and working class intellectualism.

From the initial sample, I chose a group of six bloggers, for much closer ethnographic study. The decision to study bloggers in a particular geographical region emerged from my study of the initial larger sample, which identified a cluster of interesting blogs in the Manchester/Lancashire region, offering the opportunity to explore the phenomenon in terms of a specific economic and cultural context and the possibility of studying face-to-face interaction and local networking among the bloggers in question. I also became interested in identifying bloggers who were playing key roles in organizing the region's blogging community, whether by coordinating blogmeets (face-to-face gatherings of bloggers) or creating blogs specifically oriented to building a community of bloggers in the area. The study involved reading all archived material for each blog, following the development of each blog in the period January 2005 – August 2006, conducting email and telephone interviews with bloggers, tracking media coverage and interconnectivity among the blogs studied, and visiting Manchester for the first regional blogmeet.

Methodologically, this approach followed Sade-Beck's (2004) recommendations for pursuing an "overflowing description" (Geertz, 1973) of the virtual field by integrating online observations, offline in-person interviews, and content analysis of supplementary materials, adding a "real world" context to the Internet data in order to obtain a richer description of the blog as a research site. Paying attention to Hine's (2000)

view that virtual ethnographers should avoid lurking, and ought to learn about the field by trying to participate in it, I actively contributed as a regular commenter on one of the blogs, drawing on a preexisting relationship I had with the blogger in question. I also drew on Mortensen and Walker's (2002) observation that blogging researchers should seek legitimacy through having their own online space rather than through "flesh-world" credentials, offering interviewees a link to examples of my own creative writing on my own, long-established, website (http://www.bonkworld.org).

The blogs used in this part of the study are loosely connected as part of the Manchester blogging community; some have met in person through blogmeets, or gotten to know each other virtually through mainstream media coverage or reading and commenting on each other's blogs. The virtual relationships among the study participants are possibly too tenuous to be thought of as a community in the traditional ethnographic sense (Calhoun, 1991), but the emerging interconnectivity among some of the bloggers – both virtually and face-to-face – gives validity to the notion that these bloggers consider themselves as part of a shared social space. This study of Mancunian workbloggers thus attaches to a fluid and dynamic definition of community that accommodates multiple identities and often ephemeral, constantly evolving social networks (Beaulieu, 2004; Hakken, 1999).

Although an effort was made to meet with bloggers in person, direct workplace observation of these bloggers is not possible and one serious limitation of this study is that testimony and observations are limited to the way bloggers present themselves in virtual space. I am faced with the challenge of processing information and testimony that is highly fictionalized and difficult to substantiate in relation to workers' actual

experience of the labor process. However, my primary interest is in the creative sensemaking process itself, as manifested in virtual space. Each blog, while not theoretically informed, is reminiscent of Watson's (2000) "ethnographic fiction science" – an imaginative, partly fabricated construction drawn from actual workplace experiences. Through interviews and face-to-face meetings, I have tried, as far as possible, to build a level of trust that allows me to assume that the bloggers involved in the study are being broadly honest about out their occupation and are drawing their artistic inspiration from real events. My task is to create a theoretically informed interpretation of blogger testimony that accommodates the "made up" element in these accounts as providing a window on the role of the creative imagination in employee resistance.

Following the close-up nature of the ethnographic section of my research, which by design focused on well-written blogs with a pointedly critical orientation to the labor process, I felt the need to conduct a "reality check," situating my findings with regard to the Manchester bloggers in relation to the types of blogs one finds when looking more broadly and less selectively at anonymous workblogs. I was interested, in this part of the study, in illustrating the relative scarcity of blogs that are capable of putting forward relatively sophisticated and enduring positions, and this part of my research shows that such blogs are indeed rather a rare find, existing within a larger mass of poorly written and short-lived blogs about work. This final part of my research circumscribes the concept of creative resistance by considering blogs that are written from differing and conflicting perspectives.

The blogs that were used in this final stage of my research were drawn partly from my own Internet research. Between 2005 and 2007, I had identified and collected data from approximately 30 white collar anonymous workblogs, but I wanted to evaluate my own sense of "the field" against other research and, with this in mind, I adopted James Richards' blog as a key resource. Richards, then a PhD candidate at Heriot-Watt University, maintains a very thorough list of work-related blogs, organized by occupational category, and I used his list of blogs to identify and explore another 30 anonymous workblogs from white collar workers. Eliminating defunct and irrelevant blogs from this list of 60, I ended up with 25 blogs from the US and UK, which I studied by coding blog content and conducting a small number of email interviews. This part of the research is detailed in Chapter Five of this study, which argues that anonymous workblogs *in general* do not necessarily contribute to an anti-capitalist movement but asserts that there exist a small number of energetic, progressively oriented blogs that are well-written enough to cultivate the prolonged attention of like-minded readers and to connect to mainstream media.

A Brief History and Overview of Blogging

In order to understand the material in the following chapters, it is helpful to have some sense of what a blog is, in relation to other familiar Internet technologies such as email or webpages, as well as understanding who owns the platforms that support and facilitate blogging, and having a sense of the overall size and makeup of the blogosphere. The purpose of the following brief overview is to offer selective information that will aid in the comprehension of the material in subsequent chapters, situating anonymous workblogging within the broader practice of blogging, which has emerged and grown

explosively over the space of a few years. It is hoped that this overview will also help to distinguish the type of blogging that is the focus of this study from the multifarious other blogging practices that exist today, while emphasizing that anonymous workblogging is in many ways inseparable from the practice as a whole.

As stated in the introduction to this study, a blog is a type of online diary. Blogs are distinguished from regular webpages by their emphasis on fresh up-to-date content (the most recent entry always appears at the top of the main page and older material is automatically archived) and their high level of interactivity and interconnectivity. Visitors to a blog can generally leave comments that often turn into threads of conversation, and bloggers enthusiastically link to one another's blogs, taking advantage of cutting edge features that notify them when new content has been posted or when someone has created a link to their material. Early blogs almost always belonged to individuals, and were written in a personal capacity, but there are now many blogs that are written collaboratively or as the official voice of a corporation, political group, or newspaper. The anonymous workblogs in this study all belong to the former category, being maintained by individuals as personal diaries.

Blogging platforms, skill, and anonymity

The earliest blogging tools, which emerged between 1997 and 1999, grew organically out of existing web tools and were simply attempts by web developers to address two challenges or goals related to their websites: achieving lively interaction with visitors and keeping site content fresh and upfront. In 1999, blogging became easier when the first commercial blogging service, *Blogger*, was launched by Pyra Labs (Blood, 2002). This tool, which was acquired by Google in 2003, required neither a pre-existing website nor any type of programming skill, and thus opened up blogging to people who

had no specialized technical knowledge. Use of blogging grew steadily, gathering momentum through 2001-2 and hit the mainstream around 2003-2004, when exponential growth of the *blogosphere* (a collective noun that describes all the blogs in existence) led the Merriam Webster dictionary to declare *blog* 2004's word of the year (BBC, 2005).

Reflecting this explosion in blogging activity and Google's dominance of the market during this period, 20 of the 27 blogs reviewed in Chapter Five came into being in 2004 or 2005, and 22 are hosted by Google's *Blogger* service (discernible by the "blogspot.com" part of their URL). In the study of six bloggers from the Manchester area, four are hosted by Google, one by Typepad (http://www.typepad.com/), and one is an independent installation of Movable Type (http://www.movabletype.org/).

The preference for Google may reflect the relative ease of writing anonymously using the Blogger platform. A Google-hosted blog is relatively easy to set up anonymously, since no payment information is collected, and bloggers may use email accounts from similarly free/anonymous services such as Yahoo or Gmail as their contact information. Google is funded by advertising revenues but this commercial aspect is largely invisible on the blogs themselves, which are free from banner adverts, making it possible to perceive of the service as being part of the "gift" economy of the Internet. By contrast, Typepad's blog service costs a small monthly fee to maintain and is marketed to "serious" or "professional" bloggers (Typepad, 2008). Registering with Typepad requires the transmittal of personal information for payment purposes, but the blog itself need not identify its owner and may be operated under a pseudonym. The stand-alone version of Movable Type – the platform used by one of the bloggers in this study – is open source blogging software, developed by a disparate community of users, and it is the most

independent of commercial interests. However, a degree of technical skill is required in order to integrate Moveable Type into an existing website, and additional knowledge of anonymous domain name registration is needed in order to maintain a moveable type blog anonymously (without this the owner of the blog is easily identifiable via a "whois" search).

Blogging as a distinctive practice

The highly networked nature of blogs, coupled with their emphasis on dynamic, fresh content, has helped blogging to emerge as a distinctive social phenomenon. In 2003, blogging's power in the political and consumer arenas became evident: US political candidate Howard Dean used his blog to attract voters and entice the media, circumventing the need for a traditional large-budget advertising campaign; Salam Pax, an anonymous Iraqi civilian holed up in Baghdad, gave gripping day-to-day accounts of unfolding events that often countered the images being portrayed by mainstream news sources (Kornblum, 2003); and a community of bloggers publicized a flaw in Kryptonite locks that led to a massive product recall (Sifry, 2004a). Grassroots political activism and social movement formation among bloggers is widespread, particularly in areas where political repression of the mainstream media is strongly prevalent. In 2006, Egyptian activist Abdel-Fattah blogged from jail, communicating via scribbled slips of paper that were leaked from his cell and posted by his wife on their shared blog, Manalaa (http://www.manalaa.net/), which has been hailed as a key part of Egypt's political scene, and operates as a conduit for political free speech among the country's activist population (Press, 2006). Similar organized blogging efforts have been recorded in Burma (Wayne, 2007).

As was emphasized in the introduction to this chapter, the anonymous bloggers in this study are distinct from the grassroots blog activists above in that they are not explicitly organizing around a specific cause and are often quick to deny any political intention behind their writing. However, in the case of the "fired workblogger" cases, which are covered in the following chapter, there is some sense that the blogging community has focused its usually diffuse writing power in overt support of beleaguered employee bloggers. The first "fired workblogger" cases emerged during the 2002-3 period, when a number of employees who had used blogs to report candidly on their office experiences were found out and dismissed by their employers, raising new questions about freedom of speech in the workplace. As is detailed in Chapter Three, cases such as the firing of Los Angeles-based web designer "Dooce" and Edinburgh bookseller Joe Gordon, generated considerable media attention and triggered widespread changes in workplace policy that ranged from the defensive (prohibiting blogging and increasing surveillance) to the strategic encouragement of employee blogging in order to co-opt and contain the phenomenon. Individual bloggers and electronic civil rights groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation (see http://www.eff.org/bloggers) responded by defending their practice, tracking and publicizing firings[10], and developing guidelines and tools that aid anonymous bloggers in eluding workplace surveillance.

As an outgrowth of the organizational response to blogging, which was originally an individual practice, public and private organizations started setting up blogs to promote their own interests. 2005 saw an explosion in what has become known as

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[10] See, for example, Morpheme Tales' posting, "Statistics on Fired Bloggers," http://morphemetales.wordpress.com/2006/10/09/statistics-on-fired-bloggers/, which has tracked firings since 2004.

"corporate blogging," with businesses competing to generate their own blog content, leveraging the power of blogging to reach their customer base and market new products. Corporate blogging marks a shift in company attitudes to blogging, from treating blogs as a threat to embracing them as a business opportunity. At the same time, blogs are emerging from organizations within the labor movement (as described earlier in this chapter), as well as from nonprofits such as Amnesty International (http://blogs.amnestyusa.org) and even governmental agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (see, for example, http://blog.aids.gov/, which promotes AIDS awareness).

Beyond the spontaneous focusing of effort that takes place in defense of fired bloggers, this study finds little explicit linkage between anonymous workblogging and more organized activist or labor movement blogs. However, anonymous workblogs exist against this backdrop of energetic activity in the blogosphere from both corporate and progressive political interests, making them part of a broadly contested terrain of ideas that comprises the blogosphere as a whole.

Measuring the blogosphere and locating anonymous workblogs within it

Amidst the increased commercial and organizational interest in blogging, measuring and mapping the blogosphere has become a business in itself – a company called Technorati (http://www.technorati.com) has made a name for itself by providing some of the most accurate measurements of the growth and development of blogging. Technorati data for the 2004-5 period, communicated via CEO David Sifry's "State of the Blogosphere" reports, indicated a doubling in size of the blogosphere approximately every five months, with one new blog being created every second. At the end of February 2006, there were 27.2 million blogs, a leap from 14.2 million in July and 7.8 million in

March of 2005 (Sifry, 2006). Between February 2006 and April 2007, the number grew to 70 million (Sifry, 2007).

Blogging began as a US-centric phenomenon but has very rapidly become an international one. National boundaries are not particularly visible in the blogosphere, since blogs use Internet protocols and rely on an international addressing system that makes geographic location largely irrelevant in terms of use and interconnectivity. Technorati has recorded an increase in the spread of blogging around the world, noting significant blog presences in the UK, Japan, Korea, France, and Brazil (BBC, 2005). Korea's *Cyworld*, a personal website hosting system that serves similar functions to blogs, has been noted for its extremely high adoption by Koreans between 16 and 25 (Cellan-Jones, 2006). While natural affinities arise among blogs from a particular country, and while language barriers create natural disconnects between different linguistic communities, the blogosphere is remarkably international in its reach and scope.

So how many of these blogs are anonymous workblogs? Of the ever-growing number of blogs currently in existence, it is fair to guess that only an infinitesimal fraction are anonymously written blogs in which the *primary* theme is work. And given the growing number of types of blogging, and the decrease in blogging about work due to increased surveillance this number is becoming increasingly small. As an indication of how few blogs are anonymously written about work, in July 2006, I conducted a survey of the blogs from the Manchester area that are listed on the Manchizzle blog (http://manchizzle.blogspot.com/). Out of 65 blogs surveyed, 17 appeared to be written anonymously but only three were both anonymous and with a primary topic of work

(about seven of the anonymous blogs referred to work on an occasional basis). Another indication of the number of anonymous workblogs might be taken from James Richards' 2005 data. In a thorough search that focused on finding as many anonymous[11] workblogs as possible, Richards identified 744 work-related blogs, about 80% of which were from white-collar workers.

In spite of these small numbers, as mentioned above, in the 2003-6 period, blogs about work enjoyed a relatively high media profile as compared to other types of blog, due to the controversial employment issues raised by firings of workbloggers. As is detailed in Chapter Three, the potential for relatively isolated workbloggers to connect with the mainstream and influence public opinion has been a prominent topic of discussion in the media and in the management literature.

Technological developments in the blogosphere

The rise of free and low-cost Internet-based services for sharing photos, audio clips, and video has led to significant advances in the flexibility and power of blogs. Sites such as Flickr (http://www.flickr.com) and YouTube (http://www.youtube.com), which allow users to share photos or video footage, include features that allow a user to add audiovisual material to her blog in a couple of mouse-clicks. According to a 2006 study, 72 per cent of US bloggers display photos on their blog, 30 per cent have posted audio files, and 15 per cent have posted video clips (Lenhart & Fox, 2006, p. 15). This study focuses on anonymous workblogs where text is the main component. However, many of the blogs in this study are enhanced by multimedia such as photos and audio clips.

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[11] Richards looked generally for work-related blogs but the vast majority were anonymously written.

Tools that improve cross-referencing and linkage among blogs are also on the rise – syndication tools that broadcast updated blog content to a variety of news sources and search engines, and features such as "trackbacks" that notify bloggers when their favorite blogs have been updated or when someone has linked to their own material have been widely adopted and are being constantly improved. Overall, the trend is toward more powerful indexing of blog material, and more dynamic linkages among blogs, which may also technically facilitate the development of a sense of community or affinity among bloggers. Until recently, specialized blog search engines such as Technorati were needed to search for blogs. However, Google added blog searching capability in 2005, making it increasingly difficult for bloggers to hide in obscurity, since employers can easily search blogs using mainstream search tools.

Although searchability and surveillance of blog content are on the rise, there is also a concerted technological effort to support anonymous and covert blogging efforts. Hardware developments such as the increasing integration of Internet and camera capabilities into mobile phone technology have influenced the blogosphere, giving rise to "moblogs," which incorporate SMS text messages, audio recordings and images sent directly from mobile phones, allowing bloggers to post from remote and dangerous locations, such as treetops and police cells (Ito, 2005). A new phenomenon called "microblogging," allows users to blog via cellphone text messages, using microblogging hosts such as Twitter (http://www.twitter.com). There are also efforts, as detailed in Chapter Three, to develop anonymizing software that will mask blogging activity on conventional workplace computer networks. These efforts to circumvent surveillance and searchability are beyond the scope of this study, but the emergence of cellphone-based

blogs indicate the tendency toward the development of new technologies that circumvent surveillance on workplace computer networks and reopen the possibility of blogging clandestinely from work, which may be an interesting avenue for future research.

Chapter 3: Anonymous Workblogging and Organizational Coping Strategies

Introduction

Ever since workblogs – online diaries about work – entered the mainstream in 2002, bloggers' rights have been hotly contested, and the fight for blogger freedoms has raised labor and civil rights issues that go far beyond the act of blogging itself. High profile fired blogger cases have helped to shape the debate and have led to discussion about free speech in the workplace, the right of workers to organize, employees' freedom to do what they like when off-duty, and the encroachment of work into personal space.

This debate has placed management in an uncomfortable position – those employers who have disciplined or fired bloggers in order to remove what they perceive as a potential threat to their company have been subject to hydra-like retaliation from the blogging community. For business as a whole, the media focus on fired workbloggers has created bad publicity, drawing attention to the economic vulnerability of workers and revealing cracks in a corporate ideology that promises unproblematic self-actualization through the labor process.

Anonymous workbloggers make fun of management buzzwords, celebrate time-wasting on the job, and express a lack of motivation and an underlying conviction that their labor is meaningless. Their writings mirror the claims of a critical sociological literature that includes the work of Arlie Hochschild (1997) and Andrew Ross (2002), which exposes the insidious consequences of corporate culture in terms of time-scarcity and self-exploitation. As an act of ironic distancing from one's job, anonymous workblogging demonstrates the complex navigation of organizational self outlined by Gideon Kunda (1992), where workers use dramatization and irony to resist colonization

of their private thoughts and emotions by the company. The highly networked, Internet-based nature of the blogosphere[12] affords employees the opportunity to transcend organizational boundaries, form alliances, and connect with traditional media in ways that go beyond the individualized and easily contained resistance demonstrated by Kunda.

Organizational attempts to stifle workblogging by increasing surveillance and making workers aware of the probability of dismissal if they are caught blogging at work or blogging about the company, suggest Burawoy's (1979) conception of the cyclical containment of workplace rebellion. Anonymous workblogs grant workers an "apparent freedom" that permits self-expression while securing willing participation in the labor process. Periodic crackdowns on workplace computer use, coupled with well-publicized firings of 'outed' workbloggers check bloggers' ability to write freely, successfully minimizing their threat to the ideological hegemony of management gurus.

Burawoy sees the cyclical containment of worker rebellion as a highly effective means of suppressing radical social change, but fired bloggers have demonstrated the ability to surprise management by transcending organizational boundaries and connecting prominently to mainstream media. While workblogs seem on the one hand to fit the cyclical pattern of relaxation and control suggested by Burawoy, they may also have the potential to fatally disrupt this self-regulating system and push for a radical social agenda.

Aware of the ideological disconnect presented by anonymous workbloggers, savvy corporations have begun to embrace blogging, promoting employer-sanctioned blogs and open discourse between workers and their supervisors as the way forward.

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[12] A collective noun commonly used to describe all the blogs in existence.

However, the energetic pursuit of anonymizing strategies and legal protections on the part of the blogging community indicates that bloggers continue to see a conflict between company interests and their creative freedom.

The persistence of workblogging harmonizes with Thompson and Ackroyd's (1995) claim that corporate culturism cannot foreclose worker misbehavior. Although workbloggers do not generally see themselves as engaged in a labor struggle, tending to characterize their blogging activity as an act of creative self-expression rather than an act of resistance or defiance (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Richards, 2007), their artistic output potentially disrupts the labor process. Blogs promote countercultural values that militate against embrace of the organizational role and celebrate reclamation of company time for the pursuit of one's own creative projects. Where fired blogger cases have become *causes célèbres*, the debate has become focused on labor issues, highlighting knowledge workers sense of vulnerability and their rejection of job-centered fulfillment in favor of unfettered productive activity.

Fired Bloggers and the Media

In February 2002, Los Angeles-based web designer Heather B. Hamilton was fired from her job because of comments posted on her blog, *Dooce* (http://www.dooce.com). She had not mentioned the company by name and had concealed her identity, using only the pseudonym "Dooce," but someone emailed top executives at the company informing them that she was writing about the company on her blog and she was fired shortly after. The firing of Dooce became an instant hot topic in the blogging community and she was flooded with emails from her readers. The press

picked up on the issue and before long the term “dooced,” to be fired from one’s job because of one’s blog, had become part of the blogging lexicon.

Dooce’s blog was notable because it was extremely well-written, irreverent, and funny. Her postings in 2002 were varied but many described her experiences in the workplace, offering vivid and scathing caricatures of her colleagues. In “The Proper Way to Hate a Job” (Hamilton, 2002b), she counseled readers on “successfully avoiding any work related to your actual job,” suggesting that readers spend the afternoon conducting, “seemingly academic experiments with bandwidth by seeing how many simultaneous downloads of ‘Get Ur Freak On’ your CPU can handle.” At other times her portraits of colleagues were cleverly evocative, as in this description of her boss entitled “Intimidation”: “When she talks with her hands she looks like she’s molesting the air around her, sticking her fingers in holes and around forbidden curves. Often the air around her is the air around me, and my air doesn’t appreciate it.” (Hamilton, 2002a). Dooce’s posts were littered with cynical references to team meetings and Powerpoint presentations, making fun of corporate buzzwords like “consumerizing,” “creative shaping,” and “expandable flow linkage,” and demonstrating contempt for the company’s cultural norms and its butchery of the English language.

As a well-paid employee of a high-tech company that had embraced contemporary management thinking, Dooce’s comments were emerging from a workplace that afforded workers a significant degree of freedom to manage their time and set their own schedules, and her writing pointed to the exploitative and frustrating aspects of a boundaryless labor process. Yet prior to the firing, Dooce was also in good standing at the company and was far from being perceived as a disgruntled worker in the eyes of

her supervisor. As well as providing a safe place to vent about interpersonal conflicts, Dooce's blog gave her a way of distancing herself from those aspects of her job that she could not reconcile with her own value system, helping her to maintain an organizational self that could perform well on the job without total embrace of the company's culture.

As Gideon Kunda (1992) has shown, workers respond to the new emphasis on employee participation in a strong corporate culture in diverse ways, using irony, humor, and dramatic metaphors to negotiate an "organizational self" that meets the demands of the job while maintaining some distance from the company's claims on their private resources and emotional lives. As such, "The organizational self becomes an active and artful construction, a performance, a tightrope walk, a balancing act of organizational reality claims, fluctuating between contradictory modes of relating to the organization and always threatened with the threat of burnout, or the exposure of its own illusions" (p. 216).

Dooce's blog is in one sense an example of individualized role-distancing (G. Kunda, 1992), or innocuous blowing off of steam about minor workplace frustrations (Barsoux, 1993). However, the tone of her writings, the public nature of her blog and the media attention that her firing generated, suggests an altogether more explosive ideological disconnect, and represents a more threatening situation that goes beyond the type of self-contained and largely apolitical employee behavior analyzed by Kunda or Barsoux. Dooce's commitment to free self-expression, regardless of the consequences, persists as an inspiration to the community of bloggers who continue to risk being "dooced" by writing about their job or blogging on company time: "I made a conscious decision when I conceived dooce.com that I would never bow to the intimidation of

others, including employers or pussy-ass cocksmacks who think I should just stop complaining and be a good worker bee already" (Hamilton, 2002).

Dooce's firing was the first of many highly publicized blogging cases between 2002 and 2005 that caught the attention of the media, drawing attention to labor issues and demonstrating the reach that could be commanded by individual employees. In January 2005, Joe Gordon was fired from the Edinburgh branch of Waterstone's bookstore for his satirical blog, the *The Woolamaloo Gazette (*http://www.woolamaloo.org.uk*),* becoming the first person in the UK to be fired for blogging. Gordon, a senior bookseller in the store, had called the company "Bastardstone's," nicknamed his "sandal-wearing" boss as "Evil Boss," and called him a "cheeky smegger" for asking him to work on a bank holiday (J. Gordon, 2004).

Figure 2: A graphic created in Photoshop by an anonymous reader of Gordon's blog, who modified the Waterstone's logo in the store window to read "Bastardstone's" (http://img154.exs.cx/img154/4706/bastard4hw.jpg).

Quickly picking up on the situation surrounding Gordon's firing, *The Guardian* newspaper defended Gordon and questioned the company's actions. Noting that the name *Woolamaloo* is derived from Monty Python's fictional "University of Woolloomooloo,"

the paper conjured the ideal of healthy British irreverence against its institutions and authority figures. *The Guardian* article highlighted the fact that Waterstone's, which had carried out a 2001 advertising campaign that featured burned writings by Hitler and Pol Pot, had failed to live up to its PR image as a bastion of free speech (Barkham, 2005). Several novelists commented publicly, appealing for Gordon's reinstatement. Author Richard Morgan wrote in his letter, which was circulated via Gordon's blog, "The action that has been taken so far bears more resemblance to the behaviour of an American fast food chain than a company who deal in intellectual freedoms and the concerns of a pluralist liberal society" (J. Gordon, 2005c).

The word Bastardstone's (which Gordon had called his company in his blog) proliferated around the Internet, bringing condemnation from bloggers on both sides of the Atlantic. On his blog, Gordon collected testimony from people who had commented on his case and linked to other sites that were discussing the issue, marveling at the reach of his story: "In the Information Age we have electronic word of mouth: a message, if it strikes the right chord, may ripple outwards, forwarded on and on" (2005d). Sifting through responses from media and blog sources, he attempted to synthesize points of consensus that were emerging from the discussion:

"Common themes emerging seem to be about the possible erosion of the freedom of speech and expression …. and the intrusion of the corporate world into the personal; how far should a company have influence into the personal life of staff? Where do you draw the line? How much of your life is *your* life?" (J. Gordon, 2005a).

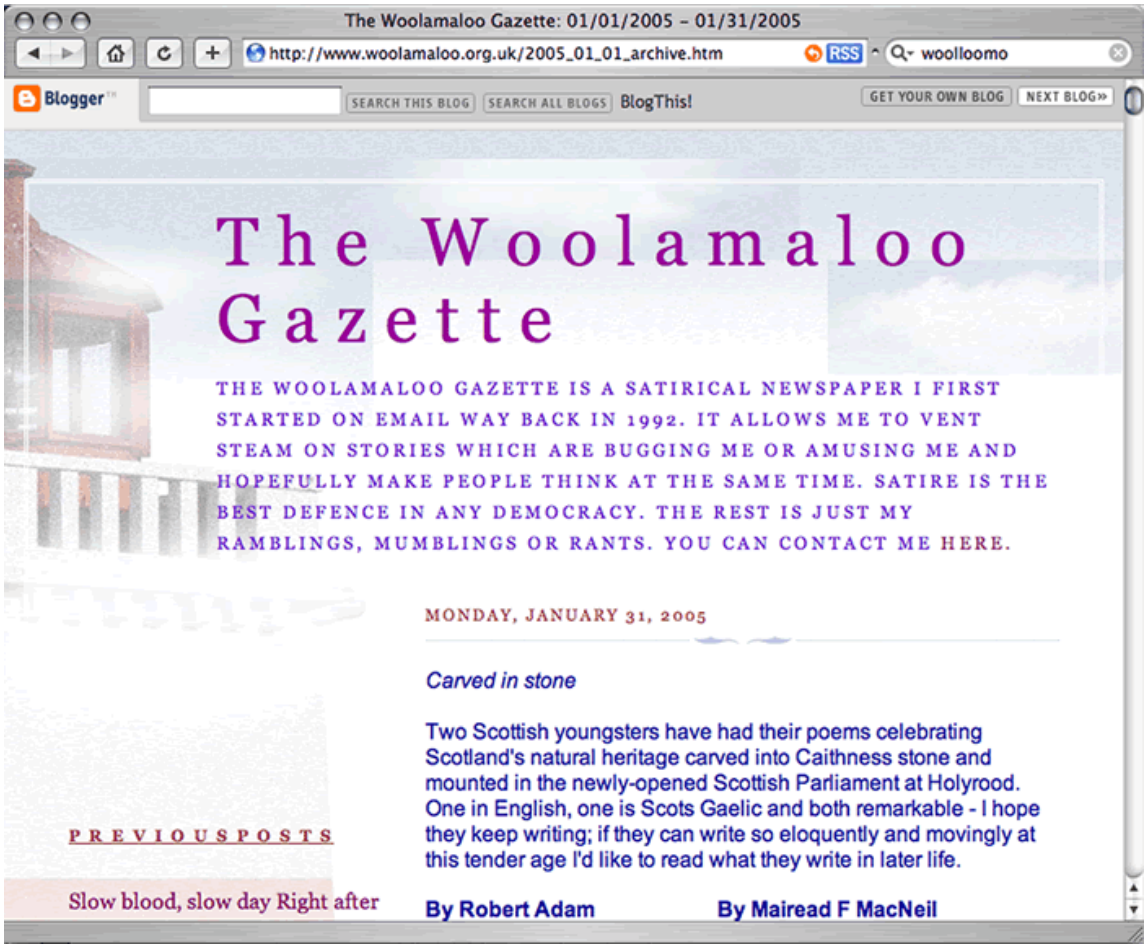

Figure 3: Gordon's blog, The Woolamaloo Gazette, a "satirical newspaper" started in 1992.

While in the media spotlight, Gordon wrote passionately about the help he had received from his union and linked his belief in organized labor to his working class ancestry. In a post entitled "United We Stand, he wrote, "previous generations of our family were miners and would never forgive me for not advocating unions." He counseled readers, "I've been a member for many years now and have often advocated membership to folk who ask – the more members then the stronger the union and the more it can ensure the welfare of the staff" (2005e).

Gordon used his situation as a platform from which to call for greater labor protections, creating embarrassment for Waterstone's, which had situated itself as a progressive, enlightened company. Coverage of Gordon's situation in *The Guardian* (Barkham, 2005) led immediately to increased traffic at The Woolamaloo Gazette. The story was then picked up by the international media and Gordon expressed his delight at receiving overwhelmingly supportive emails and comments from China, Brazil, Denmark, and Norway (J. Gordon, 2005b). Several blog visitors promised to boycott Waterstones, one reader suggested a "Hate Waterstone's Day," and others contributed tales of their own blog-related firing incidents. Using Photoshop to manipulate the press photo of Gordon in front of the Edinburgh store that had appeared on The Guardian website, an anonymous reader replaced the Waterstone's logo with "Bastardstone's" (see figure 2). A customer of the Newcastle branch wrote that Waterstone's stores are, "little more than sweatshops run by jumped-up little Hitlers who probably think The Da Vinci Code is a great novel;" another customer lamented the "corporate American management style" prevalent in the service industry (J. Gordon, 2005a, 2005b, 2005e).

Other booksellers raised issues of working conditions at Waterstone's and questioned the firm's exploitative practices. A former employee called Sandy S wrote: "It appears now that those working for the chain are being taken advantage of [...] still lousy wages (£12K p.a for a senior bookseller, after eleven years?), but they think they can get away with it, because people like you love books, are knowledgeable about what you do, and want to share that enthusiasm with others. That doesn't mean that they own you!". Another employee protested, "it seems we are now all corporate drones with no voice of our own, although we'd suspected as much for a while." A Borders employee advocated use of a Livejournal-style blog to limit readers to "friends" only as a way being able to blog freely about work; a group of Waterstone's employees discussed plans to create free speech oriented book displays in stores around the country (J. Gordon, 2005a, 2005b).

Drawing on the immediacy of the blogosphere, Gordon's situation rapidly became a global conversation, with discussion emanating from a distributed group rather than from an isolated individual. As a landmark case – Gordon was the UK's first fired blogger – the Woolamaloo Gazette received considerable mainstream media attention and stimulated broad-based discussion about labor rights, freedom of speech, and the failure of corporate management to nurture the intellectual and creative development of employees. The conversation was not sustained over a long period; the social connections generated among the participants were relatively ephemeral, yet the incident demonstrated the distributed power of bloggers to mobilize opposition to management actions. Whereas Burawoy (1979) illustrates the use of periodic crackdowns to contain oppositional and shirking behavior non-disruptively within the firm, Gordon's case – using networked technology – effortlessly transcended the workplace control framework

and connected to a wider community of workers and consumers. The ensuing discussion confirmed the presence, in corporate workplaces, of educated employees ready to engage in the kind of critical discourse suggested by Gouldner (1979), who emphasized, in particular, the readiness of the new working class to mobilize in order to protect free speech. While the dialogue surrounding Gordon's case could be to some extent characterized as the type of individualized and apolitical venting highlighted by Kunda (1992), Wilmott (1993a), and others, readers clearly used Gordon blog as a means to coordinate and rally around more formal types of protest, albeit in a relatively isolated historical moment.

Technology Policies With Teeth: Employers Respond to Bloggers

In reacting to the blogging phenomenon, employers have followed a learning curve that mirrors wider developments in workplace culture and corporate ideology. There has been an increased demand for surveillance of employee computer use and efforts to establish written guidelines to discourage anonymous blogging about work. But some companies are also pursuing an alternate strategy – a cautious corporate embrace of blogging, with some firms going as far as encouraging their employees to blog under the banner of openness and transparency.

Firms are stepping up monitoring of Internet use amid calls from technological management consultants such as the ePolicy Institute's Nancy Flynn to use technological surveillance tools to "battle people problems" (American Management Association, 2005). According to the 2005 Electronic Monitoring and Surveillance Survey conducted by the American Management Association (AMA) and the ePolicy Institute (American Management Association, 2005), "companies increasingly are putting teeth into their technology policies," with 26% firing workers for misusing the Internet and 76% monitoring workers' website connections. According to guidelines on Internet and email policies, produced by ACAS, similar trends are identifiable in the UK (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service, 2004).

In addition to technical solutions, firms are also being pressured to institute blogging policies that add to existing policies on Internet and email use. The AMA survey reports that 89% of firms inform employees that their Web usage is being tracked but that only 20% had policies on operating personal blogs on company time. Law

experts argue that having a policy in place can protect an employer from appearing heavy-handed. In February 2005, UK employment law firm Cobbetts (2005) advised employers, “failure to have such a policy in place may result in claims that sanctions imposed are too draconian and may lay an employer open to claims in the employment tribunal.”

A Tentative Embrace: Corporate Blogging

While surveillance and guidelines restricting or banning blogging can seem like simple solutions, big problems arise when these policies clash ideologically with management strategies that are based on building trust and openness among staff and supervisors, and nurturing self-motivation rather than closely supervising workers. Companies increasingly claim to honor workers' ability to set their own work schedule, and social activity that blurs the boundaries between work and play have long been tolerated in many white collar workplaces (Bunting, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Ross, 2002). A corporate policy that curbs freedoms can lower employee morale and threaten to burst the ideological bubble of the caring, humane workplace.

During 2004 and 2005 an alternate corporate strategy emerged that is in some ways a tacit acknowledgement of the ideological limitation of workplace policies that result in high profile fired bloggers. This new strategy has been promoted by David Sifry, Founder and CEO of the influential company Technorati, which monitors trends in the blogosphere and advises business of commercial opportunities. In October 2004, Sifry announced in his blog, "there is still a tremendous opportunity for forward-thinking companies and management to have a significant positive impact on their public perception by encouraging an enlightened blogging policy, encouraging openness both within and outside of the organization" (Sifry, 2004b). Sifry announced that forward-

thinking companies such as Sun Microsystems were encouraging their workers to have personal blogs, while other firms, including Boeing and General Motors, were setting up corporate blogs where they invite employees to post authoritatively on new developments and products. This news marked a new corporate embrace of blogging, with firms competing to adopt these "enlightened" strategies that are in line with the latest management thinking.

In this spirit of open embrace of employee blogging, several companies, including IBM and Yahoo, encouraged public posting and discussion of their blogging policies, taking a high profile stance on the issue. Writing in May 2005, IBM employee and blogger James Snell vaunted IBM's policy as a triumph against anonymous blogging, noting the company's full endorsement of IBM bloggers and its full involvement of employees in devising and formalizing the policy:

> IBM today is publishing an announcement on its Intranet site encouraging all 320,000+ employees world wide to consider engaging actively in the practice of "blogging" […] The core principles – written by IBM bloggers over a period of ten days using an internal wiki – are designed to guide IBMers as they figure out what they're going to blog about so they don't end up like certain notable ex-employees of certain notable other companies. (Snell, 2005)

Snell scornfully dismisses as "crap," a CNN article offering advice on anonymous workblogging, and reminds IBMers, "this isn't a policy that IBM is imposing upon us – it is a commitment that we all have entered into together." The guidelines themselves emphasize IBM's corporate values of "open exchange and learning" and "trust and personal responsibility in all relationships," and encourage IBM bloggers to identify themselves and their role in the company. Company-hosted blogs are to be written in a way that "adds value" to the company, and, while the guidelines indicate that what employees do outside of work is their own business, they are cautioned that, "activities in

or outside of work that affect your IBM job performance, the performance of others, or IBM's business interests are a proper focus for company policy" (Snell, 2005).

Anonymous Blogging Continues

Corporate blogging has been received skeptically by many in the blogging community and the entry of corporations is seen as antithetical to the blogosphere's not-for-profit ethos. In the *Daily Telegraph*, James Hall (2005) captured this reaction commenting that, "The very point of blogs is that they are open and honest. But how can blogs that have been sanctioned by a company be objective, wary bloggers ask." Amid proposals that employees should gain permission from their employer before starting their blog, *The Guardian*'s Patrick Butler (2005) argued that employer-sanctioned workblogs by definition lack a satirical edge that makes them so capable of revealing truths and perspectives that cannot be gained elsewhere.

In 2005 there was a surge in management seminars and conferences aimed at providing techniques in which companies can turn blogging from a threat into an opportunity, but those who are hoping to profit from the blogosphere continue to tread carefully, not wishing to repeat mistakes such as the "Raging Cow" episode where trendy young bloggers were recruited to blog about a new Dr Pepper/Seven-Up-owned drink, resulting in accusations of underhand practice and a boycott of the drink by annoyed bloggers (Ireland, 2003). The mainstream media continued to air concerns that an employer-sanctioned blog is no substitute for one written in complete freedom. As Jeremy Blachman who was 'outed' in December 2004 as the author of very popular blog *Anonymous Lawyer* argued in an August 2005 *New York Times* Op-Ed column:

> Now that everyone can publish online, we can get these incredible glimpses into worlds we might otherwise never get to see. People across the world can share

> stories, commiserate and connect with each other. Potential employees can see beyond the marketing pitches. (Blachman, 2005)

The promotion of corporate blogging by David Sifry, James Snell, and other supporters, has been met by a counter-thrust from non-profit organizations and individual bloggers devoted to anonymous blogging. In April 2005, The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF, http://www.eff.org), a US-based nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting Internet freedoms, published its guide, “How to Blog Safely about Work or Anything Else" (2005a) which clearly states EFF's support for anonymous blogging and provides concrete advice on how workers can continue to blog without revealing their identity.

The EFF guide describes blogs as “personal telephone calls crossed with newspapers,” and counsels bloggers not to give away telling details about their workplace, as well as strongly advising against blogging while at work due to the high probability of being detected. It also outlines anonymizing technologies and services, such as Tor, Invisiblog, and Anonymous Surfing software, which conceal the IP address of a computer, potentially helping bloggers to elude surveillance efforts. Such efforts serve as a reminder that blogging technology will morph continually, and that blogs themselves will probably ultimately be replaced by other technologies. As Internet-enabled cellphones become the norm, reliance on workplace networks in order to blog from work is no longer a necessity, and new developments such as “microblogging” (see Twitter, http://www.twitter.com/) are taking advantage of SMS text capabilities and are driven by postings from mobile phones rather than computers.

EFF has also issued popular FAQs that explain bloggers’ legal rights, reminding non-unionized US employees that in most states they are hired “at will,” a status that

affords workers very few protections from being fired at the employer's whim. The Labor Law FAQ (2005b) informs US-based bloggers that, under the First Amendment, they cannot be fired for talking about unionizing or (so long as they notify the appropriate regulatory body first) for whistle blowing, and it explains the protected category of speech called "concerted speech," where two or more people may legally blog about their working conditions, such as the pay scale or vacation policy without fear of retaliation.

By reminding employees of their at-will status and their right to organize, EFF is reaffirming the role of unions in protecting workers' rights and reinvigorating labor questions that may previously have seemed irrelevant or anachronistic to many workers. Although EFF's guides are focused on US employment law, the organization's efforts toward protecting the right to anonymous and free speech on the Internet have generated heavy interest and support in the UK, highlighting the need for a similar organization specializing in UK issues and triggering an Internet campaign that led to the formation of the UK-based Open Rights Group (http://www.openrightsgroup.org) in November 2005 (Doctorow, 2005).

Figure 4: Graphic promoting the Electronic Frontier Foundation's resources protecting bloggers' rights (2005).

As well as supporting existing organizations, individual bloggers who want to protect the right to blog anonymously about work have responded by forming new coalitions and information nodes. San Francisco-based writer Curt Hopkins' posting, "Statistics on Fired Bloggers" (Hopkins, 2006), on his blog *Morpheme Tales*

(http://morphemetales.blogspot.com), which invites readers to provide updates and corrections, has become a focal point for collecting information on people around the world who have lost their jobs because of blogging. Another blogger-organized focal point was the (still live but no longer updated) *Anonymous Work Blogs Blogring*. (http://anonworkblogs.blogspot.com**),** which lists links to anonymous blogs about work and encourages each person listed to place a link from their blog to the next person in the ring.

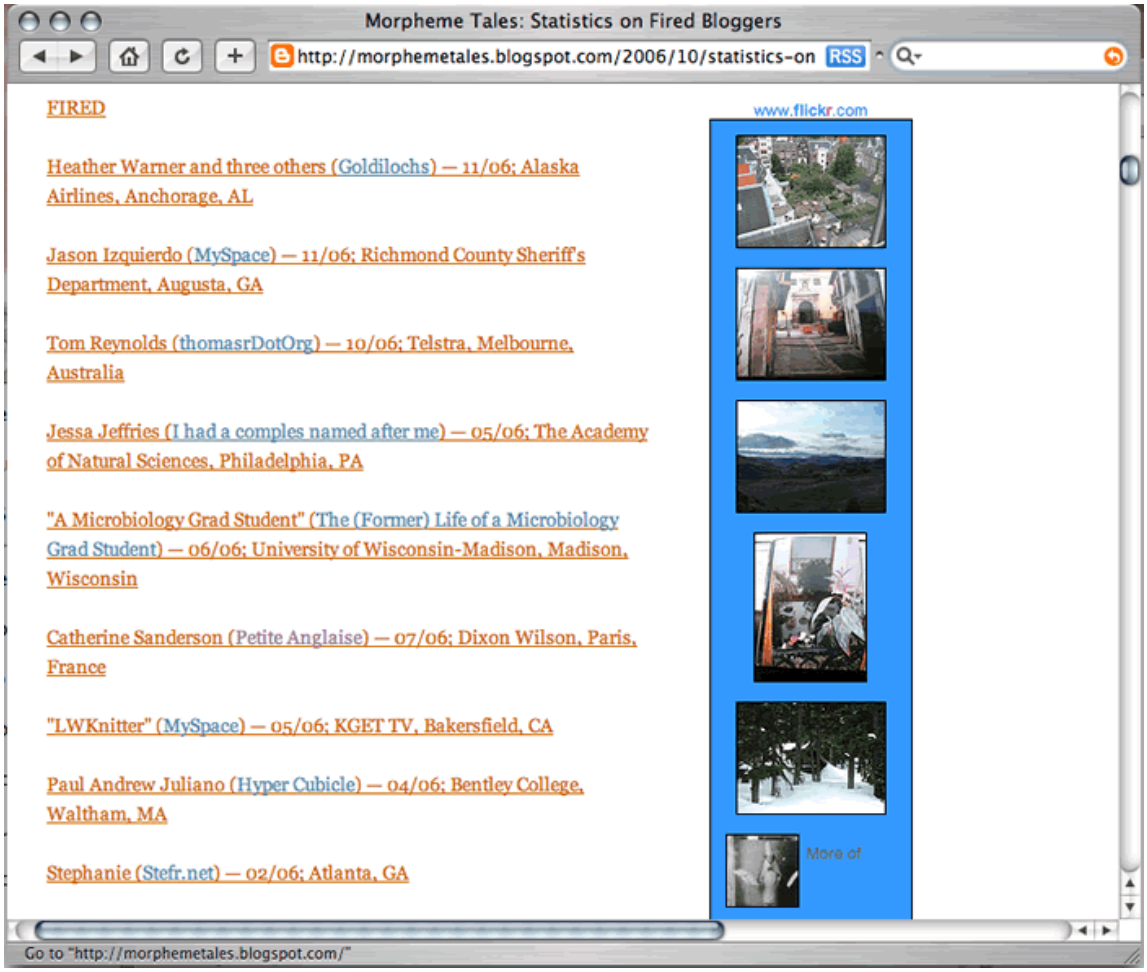

Figure 5: A list of fired bloggers from the Morpheme Tales blog, which has tracked blogger who are fired or disciplined since 2004.

Throughout the blogosphere, many bloggers have posted their own individual reactions and manifestos related to the firing of anonymous workbloggers and other related blogging controversies, often linking to or commenting on similar postings on each others' blogs, and creating a global dialogue that spreads news about and reactions to the latest developments. While this dialogue encompasses many opposing viewpoints, it also nurtures a sense of community, however heterogeneous and disparate, that elevates employee concerns above the individual level and creates the potential for exchange and organization among those who support anonymous blogging.

Caution and Renewed Commitment: Anonymous Bloggers Cover Their Tracks

For those members of the blogging community who write irreverently or critically about their work, it has been difficult to avoid the warnings and cautionary tales about fired bloggers and some have responded to the warnings by stepping back and reevaluating their practice. Dan13, a blogger in the north of England, describes how he has reacted to the new warnings with a mix of caution and renewed commitment:

> One thing I don't write about now, although I used to, is my work. I had written a series of posts, starting out quite harmless, but ending up a lot more risky- there was one all about racist remarks made by a colleague, one comparing a visiting VIP visitor from company HQ to a particularly self-important Roman Emperor, and another about my unwillingness to take on a move to another team because, among other things, it sounded a bit too much like hard work and I would have less time to devote to the blog. I started to worry about being found out (it would at that time have only taken a Google search for my name) so one day took them all down. But those stories are all just in hibernation really and the day will come when they reappear in some untraceable online place – I even have the title of my new blog all worked out. (personal communication, November 11, 2005)

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[13] Name changed to protect this blogger's identity

Dan has been alarmed at the prospect that blogging might threaten his livelihood but he hasn't given up hope of continuing once he has covered his tracks better.

Eluding detection based on the content of their blog is an ongoing challenge for anonymous workbloggers. The Google search engine added blog searchability in September 2005 (Sifry, 2005), making it increasingly difficult for bloggers to hide in obscurity. Posting content that does not reveal too much of a blogger's identity is a craft that demands constant alertness and artistry, especially for writers devoted to conveying realistic dialogue and events from their daily lives. Many bloggers use fictionalizing techniques that remove their anecdotes and stories from the actual events that inspired them. UK blogger, Tim[14], who writes *A Free Man in Preston* (http://afreemaninpreston.blogspot.com), refers to this practice as using his "blogger's license" to "exaggerate here, caricature there, mess about with time frames when it suits me" (Tim, 2005i), leaving readers guessing about how much is truth and how much is conjured from Tim's rich imagination, and reminding his audience that anything they read on his blog may be pure fantasy. Carefully covering his tracks, Tim is one of many anonymous bloggers who are committed to continuing to blog anonymously and whose art has perhaps gained a certain caché from the corporate blogging phenomenon with which it exists in stark contrast.

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[14] the alias this anonymous blogger uses in his postings.

The Case of Petite Anglaise

In July 2006, well after the first wave of fired blogger incidents had come and gone, and the organizational response to blogging had developed into the controlled acceptance strategy outlined above, a new firing incident came to light, which returned the discussion of blogging and employee freedoms to the headlines. Popular blogger "Petite Anglaise," an Englishwoman residing in Paris, was sacked in April 2006 after her employer found out about her blog and accused her of blogging on company time and potentially bringing the firm into disrepute through her writings. Petite, whose real name (as revealed by the press) is Catherine Sanderson, worked as a bilingual secretary for the accounting firm Dixon Wilson but she had never identified the firm or made reference to the accounting industry in her blog, and wrote only very occasionally about incidents at work.

The sacking of Petite was in some ways anachronistic – her firm was notably conservative and was clearly oblivious to the learning curve that many organizations have followed with regard to the negative publicity that could result from firing an employee for blogging. However, the case also represented a maturing of the blogging community and confirmed the persistence of anonymous workblogging in spite of corporate attempts to subsume or control it. Petite's case highlights widespread attachment in the blogging community to principles of free speech and the right to maintain a detached and even critical orientation to the labor process. Her firing, and the explosive media and Internet coverage that it generated, exerted a "sleeping giant" effect, communicating the possibility that any employee could be connected to a powerful and vocal network of supporters. The case also highlighted knowledge workers' dedication to making use of workplace resources and networks for their own creative projects, pursuing self-

fulfillment through avenues other than their formal work duties. Further, *Petite Anglaise* illustrated the power of creative writing itself in cultivating a following, creating a sense of intimacy among a diffuse group of readers, and nurturing countercultural values that clash subtly with the notion of job commitment.

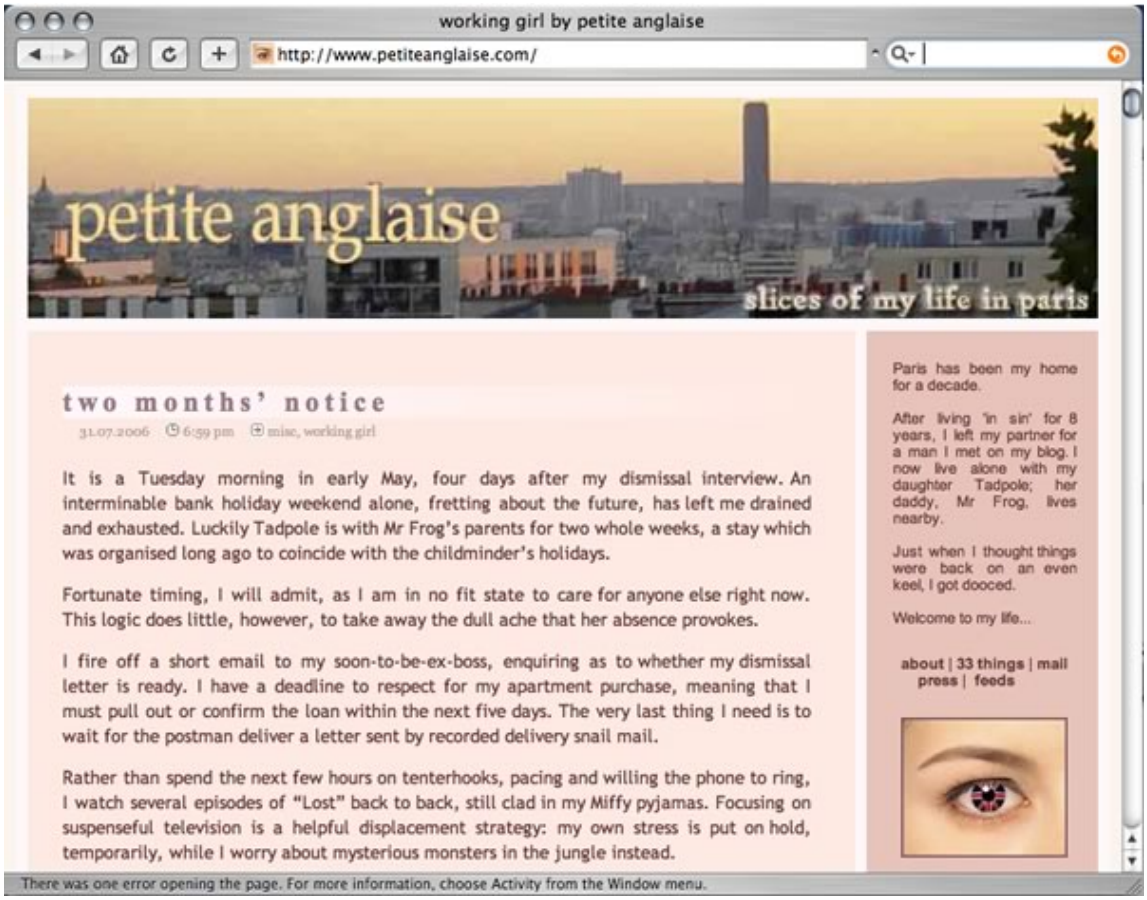

Figure 6: One of Petite's postings from July 2006, telling the story of her firing and its aftermath.

Catherine Sanderson started writing *Petite Anglaise* in July 2004 after reading about blogging on *The Guardian*'s website and following links to blogs such as Belle de Jour, the now discontinued blog of a London call girl (Anglaise, 2007a). Writing anonymously as "Petite," Sanderson's blog chronicles her personal struggles in raising a child, coping with the ends and beginnings of relationships, and trying to sustain a survive financially in the French capital. It was already a relatively popular blog before the firing incident, commanding a readership of about 3000 visitors per day (Randall, 2006), but this number swelled ten-fold to 30,000 a day immediately afterwards (Frost, 2006).

In the entire history of Sanderson's blog there are only a handful of anecdotes that relate to workplace events and characters – Petite gives the number as 12 out of 384 posts (Anglaise, 2006a). In one, entitled, "titillation," she describes the accidental baring of her cleavage during a videoconference hookup, making reference to the conservatism and sexism that prevails at the firm. In a passage that was later heavily referred to in the press, she writes of one of the firm's partners: "This other boss is very old school. He wears braces and sock suspenders (although I don't have any firsthand experience of those), stays in gentlemen's clubs when in London, and calls secretaries 'typists'" (Anglaise, 2005b). Petite also intimated in her blog that she had taken time off from work on a false excuse in order to spend time in a hotel room with her new lover (Anglaise, 2005a). And, as became important in the legal case against her, it was evident from the timestamps on her blog entries that she had blogged during work hours.

Petite wrote about her firing in July 2006 and was immediately bombarded with comments from readers, provoking interest from a Paris-based *Daily Telegraph* reporter

who broke the story in the mainstream press, quoting Sanderson as taking a moral stand, "defining the boundaries between personal and professional activities, where the line should be drawn for bloggers who touch on the events of their working life in their writing" (Randall, 2006). Multiple press and radio interviews followed and the story was picked up by Associated Press and syndicated worldwide. In *The Guardian*, Petite described herself as a "competent and dependable worker" (Sanderson, 2007), commenting in *The Times* that she objected to otherwise good workers being sanctioned for their blogging activity (Bremner, 2007). In the following months, she was given opportunities to write opinion pieces for *The Guardian* (Sanderson, 2007) and *New Statesman,* and secured a book deal worth close to a million dollars with Penguin (Rickett, 2006) and a memoir based on her blog is due for release in 2008. In March 2007, Petite won a legal victory against her employer, when a French labor tribunal granted an unfair dismissal verdict and ordered her firm to pay 44,000 Euros in damages. She told *The Guardian* that she hoped her case would, "send out reassuring signals to the millions of people blogging in France" (B. Johnson, 2007).

In the aftermath of Petite's firing, regular followers of the blog were joined by new readers who had heard of Petite's plight, and the slew of comments immediately following the media publicity overloaded the server that hosted Sanderson's blog, marking her extreme popularity (Anglaise, 2006a). The comment box at *Petite Anglaise* became a gathering place for people who wanted to offer their sympathies, express their support for free speech, and report on how the story had been covered in their local media. Readers from places as far afield as Estonia and China posted comments about how the story had reached their local and national newspapers. While not all comments

were supportive, the vast majority were, leading a reader called O. to comment, “there are literally thousands of readers supporting you,” while a visitor called Monty chimed in with, “You represent the people and to all our eyes you are perceived as the victim” (Anglaise, 2006b).

More specifically, Petite’s blog became a site where other workers talked about their own fears about blogging from work. Several “Dooced” bloggers commented about their own firing episodes, and others posted information about employee rights, including the ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) Internet guidelines (2006) and the EFF guide to anonymous blogging (2005). A reader called Sydneysnider commented, “hope everyone reading this is unionised” (Anglaise, 2006b). Some readers lamented the increased surveillance that bloggers faced at work – as the labor tribunal commenced, a reader called Morgan wrote, “This e-climate of terror will have most of us censoring ourselves for protection, even though we write because we believe in free speech and rights to personal, non-corporate opinion” (Anglaise, 2007b). Among the comments, were several demonstrations of solidarity with Petite in asserting the right to blog from work, with visitors commenting that they were reading through the comments and posting from work on company computers in their own workplaces. According to one commenter, Petite’s fans temporarily effected a Google bomb (influencing the ranking of a given page in results returned by the Google search engine), associating the search term “Dixon Wilson” to the Wikipedia definition for stupidity (Anglaise, 2006a).

Although most of the comments were one-off remarks, at times, readers responded to each other, building on previous comments and bringing forth diverse viewpoints amidst the largely supportive tone of the discussion. In response to the

tribunal result, a reader called Paul Reichel interrupted the generally supportive vein of opinion by posting an opposing view: "You used their time and their facilties [sic] - both of which they and not you had paid for." A debate ensued, with some readers defending Petite's right to blog on company time or to be given fair warning rather than an immediate dismissal, while a smaller number upheld the view that Petite's employer was partly in the right.

The incidents surrounding Petite's firing and subsequent legal proceedings, gave her readers – many of whom were bloggers themselves – an opportunity to reflect on their orientation to their organizational role and to elevate their acts of creative self-expression onto a plane in which the reclamation of time and resources from the labor process became a communal rather than an individual act. Petite's high profile case elevated the everyday acts of resistance undertaken by her audience, imbuing the reading of blogs on company time with moral and political significance. Through engagement in the discussion, readers were able to affirm their ideological distance from corporate values, renewing their commitment to writing anonymously on their own blogs. Regular readers who had been attracted to the blog by the quality of Petite's writing, became united around shared values – such as a lack of job commitment – that were subtly present in the blog before the incident but became overt after the firing. By demonstrating their intellectual sophistication – expressing contempt for tabloid newspapers, for example – Petite's readers attempted to distinguish themselves as educated, critical thinkers, ready to contribute their ideas and analysis to the case.

While Petite's readers made no move toward any kind of long-term political organization, their willingness to engage in discussion about the labor process

demonstrated, in particular, a creative need for unfettered self-expression and a commitment to borrowing time from the work day for dialogue and artistic endeavors. Research on workblogs has indicated that bloggers do not identify their activity as resistance (Richards, 2007), and has highlighted the personal nature of the phenomenon (Lenhart & Fox, 2006), emphasizing that most anonymous workbloggers blog as an act of creative self-expression rather than an act of defiance. Amidst the media furore over her firing, Sanderson referred to her blog as a personal endeavor, yet acknowledged its inherently public nature: "I've often thought it's a little like being an actor on the stage and not being able to see the audience because of the lights. You can kind of forget that they're there and just write for yourself" (Frost, 2006). Her blog underscores the connection between creative writing and resistance, helping to unravel the seeming contradiction between writing that is intimate and personal yet able, albeit ephemerally, to precipitate large-scale political mobilization in support of worker's rights. In the long-term, Petite's blog, and others like it, helps members of the blogging community to strengthen their adherence to iconoclastic values, making subtle connections between their writing and a literary culture that rejects traditional career values and fuels its members' individual efforts to limit their participation in a labor process that they find alienating.

Anonymous Workblogging as Creative Refusal

Critics of corporate culture such as Arlie Hochschild (1997), Andrew Ross (2002) and, in the UK, Madeleine Bunting (2004), have argued that the colonization of workers' emotions and creative impulses in the service of salaried time has led to overwork, time-scarcity, and neglected families and communities. Looking at workers in a high tech

environment who are simultaneously seduced by the company culture yet wary of its encroachment into their private space, Gideon Kunda (1992) adds an important and subtle dimension to this analysis, focusing on how white collar workers negotiate their organizational identity as a tightrope walk that permits some distance from their role yet, in the absence of a compelling alternative, returns them to the organization as their principal source of affirmation. Echoing Kunda, Hugh Willmott has emphasized the confusion and emptiness that workers face when they try to resist corporate culture (1993a).

Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) have criticized Kunda for promoting a "Foucauldian turn" in organizational sociology that forecloses the possibility of resistance in the knowledge workplace. They advocate a revival of academic research into informal and subtle forms of resistance. The mainstream media, in covering high profile fired blogger cases, has often treated anonymous workblogging as a political phenomenon, characterizing bloggers as recalcitrant employees engaged in conscious acts of rebellion. However, recent studies of blogging have cautioned against regarding the workblogging phenomenon as a conscious act of defiance and have downplayed the idea of blogs as public forums for rhetoric and debate (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Richards, 2007). Yet, analysis of the relationship between personal creative writing and political mobilization in the blogosphere reveals a subtle yet concrete process of ideological convergence around anti-corporate, anti-work, and generally iconoclastic values that represent a firm and sustained detachment by bloggers and their readers from the labor process in which they are engaged.

Anonymous blogging, which allows workers to vent their frustrations and distance themselves from corporate culture using highly fictionalized identities, represents, on the one hand, a form of role-distancing that enables workers to accommodate value differences and express feelings of alienation without disrupting their job performance. The containment of blogging through periodic tightening of Internet surveillance and institution of blogging guidelines has been effective in stifling workplace and work-themed blogging. The controlled persistence of workblogging suggests Burawoy's (1979) analysis of the creation of consent to the capitalist labor process through carefully managed freedoms that make workers perceive the labor process as a game that they are winning.

However, as recent high-profile workblogging controversies have illustrated, anonymous blogging is a potentially disruptive, highly networked phenomenon that makes use of rapidly evolving Internet technologies to create new opportunities for dialogue and action. Efforts to suppress anonymous blogging by increasing surveillance and discouraging the practice through written policies have encountered ideological limitations, since they clash with corporate culture based on employee freedom and self-management. These limitations have been partly surmounted by a powerful new corporate strategy of embracing blogging as an integral aspect of the corporate culture and encouraging employees to blog openly and candidly about their work.

Yet, although this "corporate blogging" strategy has garnered vocal support from prominent employees of influential organizations and has been hailed as a moral victory over anonymous blogging, employer-sanctioned blogs fail to accommodate the continued need for unfettered critical distancing from the labor process.

Ultimately, the workblogging controversy has raised questions about whether negativity and irreverence can be tolerated in a new corporate culture that attempts to incorporate workers' whole selves into its organism. Anonymous blogs about work, and blogs written surreptitiously on company time, expose the fact that even good employees feel resentful at having their time colonized by the company, that they often find their work and the goals of the organization deeply meaningless or even troubling, that they do not trust that the company cares about them and see the threat of downsizing beneath the caring company jargon. Blogs lament the demise of union protections, and they cry out for health benefits and vacation time. Blogs start and maintain conversations on a global level that transcends organizational boundaries, going beyond the individualized and easily neutralized resistance identified by Kunda.

As creative writers and satirists rather than pamphleteers, Dooce, Joe Gordon, and Petite Anglaise are not labor activists engaged in a campaign to directly impact the labor process. Yet their actions as high profile bloggers help to create a popular culture of resistance that is based in the everyday actions of workers who are not particularly invested in their jobs or the companies they work for. Bloggers such as Petite Anglaise, the fired secretary turned millionaire, become iconic representations of disengagement from the organization. On the one hand, famous fired bloggers become, like Horkheimer and Adorno's (2001) stenographer turned starlet – part of a projected fantasy world that obscures exploitation and generates consent. Yet, on the other hand, their stories demonstrate and inspire authentic resistance, encouraging workers to use the technics of the knowledge workplace to support the idea of refusal (Marcuse, 1991). While not aligned with traditional labor organizing, workblogs and the interactive discussion they

precipitate nevertheless suggest polyphonic models of labor activism and social change (Carter et al., 2003).

The subversive everyday actions of bloggers and blog-readers build and sustain a popular culture of resistance. As conveyed by James Scott's (1987) work on peasant resistance and de Certeau's (2002) invocation of *La Perruque*, these actions are linked to social change and emancipation without necessarily following the trajectory of an organized popular movement. Most importantly, the writings of bloggers confirm that being a good and dependable knowledge worker does not denote ideological compliance. As Scott writes, "If, behind the façade of behavioral conformity imposed by elites, we find innumerable, anonymous acts of resistance, so also do we find, behind the façade of symbolic and ritual compliance, innumerable acts of ideological resistance" (304).

In spite of the very real fear of losing their jobs because of publicly declaring their feelings, bloggers continue to write critically about their work, taking advantage of technological developments to reclaim time and resources for their writing, employing creative subterfuge in order to protect their identities, and building alliances that protect their legal rights. The networks they form are diffuse and are defined around an interest in the creative process and self-expression rather than overt labor organizing or political activism. Lacking the kind of sustained organization necessary to demand and effect systematic change, their activities may actually promote consent, acting as an employee safety valve that actually promotes the stability of the capitalist system. Yet blogs, as sites for unfettered global dialogue and creative self-development, cultivate an awareness of contradictions within the labor process, nurture opposition to the status quo, and cultivate the belief that another world is possible.

Chapter 4: Anonymous Workbloggers in Greater Manchester and Lancashire

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections, both of which delve into the lives of anonymous workbloggers from the UK's northwest region, through virtual ethnographic research conducted between 2005 and 2007. **Part One** is a close look at an individual anonymous workblogger called "Tim," who writes the blog *A Free Man in Preston*. Unlike the celebrity fired bloggers mentioned in the previous chapter, Tim has managed to stay under his employer's radar and, as such, he is an "ordinary" anonymous workblogger who has not received the kind of media attention that others have gained by losing their jobs. This first section looks closely at Tim's blog and its relation to his creative and working life, drawing both on the writings contained in *A Free Man in Preston* and on interview testimony from email and phone interviews conducted in December 2005 and June 2006, respectively. **Part Two** introduces a small group of bloggers, all of whom are loosely connected to Tim via the Manchester blogging community. Exploring the common themes contained in these blogs and how these connect to the ambitions and values of the bloggers, this piece reflects on the practice of anonymous workblogging in relation to some of the existing scholarly work on the labor process reviewed in Chapter One. Looking at the complex interplay between bloggers' politics, their art, and their paid employment, this chapter challenges existing research on blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Richards, 2007) that treats creative writing and resistance as mutually exclusive and mistakenly conflates ambivalent and apolitical orientations to the labor process. The methodology for this chapter is explained in-depth in Chapter Two.

Part One: Profile of an Anonymous Workblogger: A Free Man in Preston

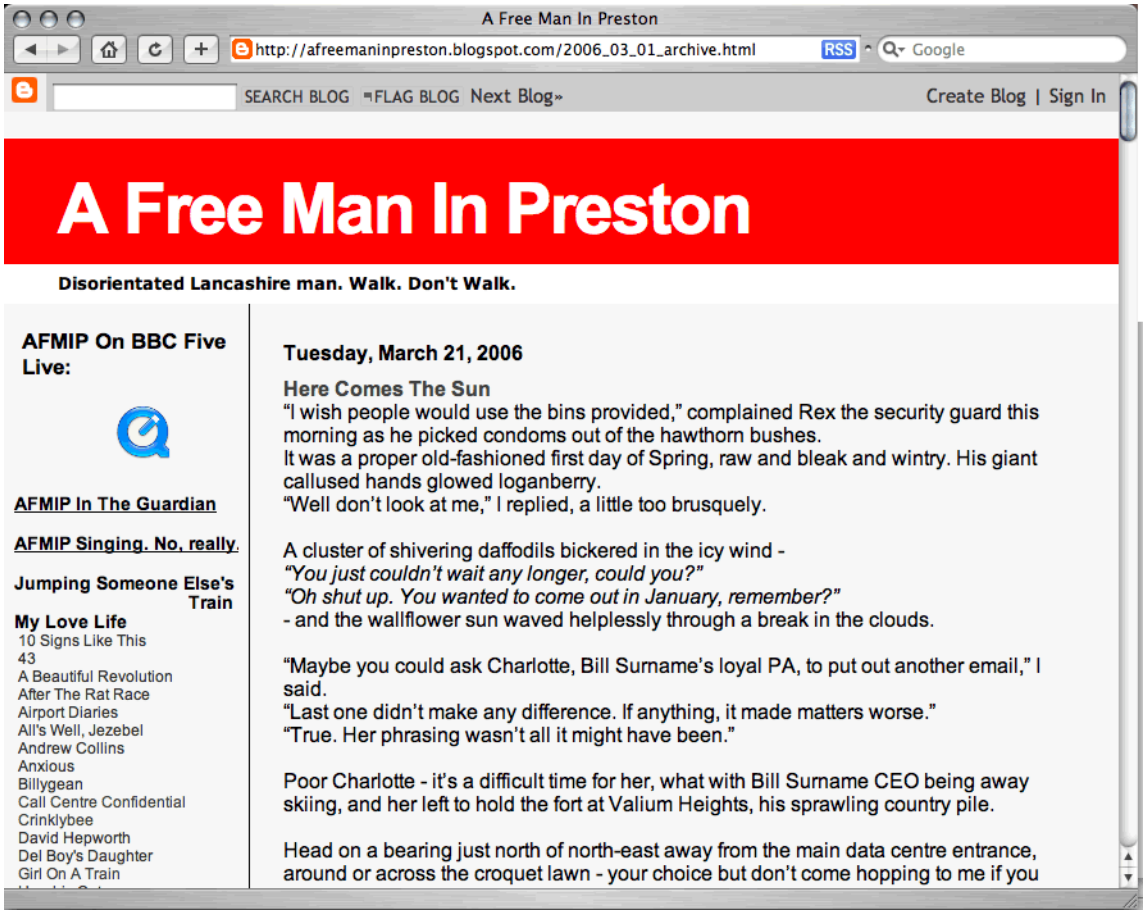

Figure 7: A Free Man in Preston (image captured 10 July 2007)

Introduction

A Free Man in Preston (*AFMIP*) is the creation of "Tim," an anonymous IT worker in the northwest of England who started his blog in March 2004 after reading about blogging in *The Guardian* newspaper. Updated two to three times a week, *AFMIP* features anecdotes from Tim's office life interspersed with more general writings about his life outside of work. As far as blogs go, it is quite a popular read – according to the blog's sitemeter (a free service provided by Google that is linked to the main page of

Tim's blog), it has received 92,346[15] visitors since its inception, with regular visits from readers outside the UK, in the United States, Australia, and other locations worldwide. In July 2005, Tim's blog was mentioned in *The Guardian Guide* and he was interviewed, in his capacity as an anonymous workblogger, by BBC Radio 5. Although he was flattered by this media attention, he says that his main goal in writing the blog is not so much to cultivate celebrity status as, "to create good pieces of writing just for its own sake" (personal communication, 14 December 2005).

I initially came across Tim's blog while conducting a broad survey of workblogs from the UK and US, using Internet searches, newspaper articles, and recommendations from blogger friends as a starting point, then somewhat randomly following links from one blog to another, as described in the methodology section above. I have since read and indexed all the archived material from *AFMIP* (March 2004 – August 2006), conducted telephone and email interviews with Tim, tracked comments and other visitor statistics, and observed Tim's ongoing participation in the blogging community. All testimony about Tim's workplace is based on interview and blog testimony, not on direct workplace observation. Informed by the testimony I have gathered and the virtual ethnographic method, I make the assumption that Tim's blog is based loosely on reality and that his interview testimony about, for example, the degree of commitment he feels to his job, is reliable.

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[15] Figures based on July 2, 2007 statistics from the publicly accessible Google Sitemeter (http://www.sitemeter.com/stats.asp?site=sm3fr33maninpreston) on Tim's blog based on a start date of March 13, 2004 (The first posting is actually March 11, 2004).

Becoming a Blogger

In 2003, *Guardian Unlimited*, the online version of the UK newspaper *The Guardian*, ran a series of articles covering the blogging phenomenon. Reading an article about the newspaper's annual awards for the best of British blogging (Waldman, 2003),Tim followed links to some of the most notable and popular blogs of the day. Among the blogs he discovered were two influential anonymous workblogs: *Call Centre Confidential* and *Belle de Jour. Call Centre Confidential,* which Tim calls "the Daddy of all work blogs" (personal communication 19 December 2005) is the diary of a call center manager in the Greater Manchester area and is studied in greater depth in Part Two of this chapter. *Belle de Jour*, as mentioned earlier, is the diary of a London call girl that has since been taken down and marketed as a novel by Phoenix Press. Taking the lead from these bloggers and assuming that pseudonymous and somewhat professionally risky writing was the norm, Tim quickly tried his hand at creating his own anonymous workblog under a concealed identity, using Google's user-friendly Blogger software.

The name of Tim's blog is a humorous take on the Joni Mitchell song, *Free Man in Paris,* in which Mitchell contrasts the responsibilities of work with the desire for unfettered freedom:

> I do my best
> And I do good business
> There's a lot of people asking for my time
> They're trying to get ahead
> They're trying to be a good friend of mine
> I was a free man in Paris
> I felt unfettered and alive
> There was nobody calling me up for favors
> And no one's future to decide
> You know I'd go back there tomorrow

> But for the work I've taken on
> (Mitchell, 1974)

Writing short anecdotes and dialogs, Tim began to chronicle his daily office life in the data center in the form of an irreverent and witty journal imbued with the spirit of Mitchell's lyrics. In *A Free Man in Preston* he could give free rein to his creative urges and reflect openly on his relationship to a job that he claims to enjoy yet is also troubled by. The results were quickly rewarding. In little over a week, Tim's blog had caught the attention of his blogging hero, Wrapstar, the author of *Call Centre Confidential,* who recommended *A Free Man in Preston* to his readers and created a link from his blog to Tim's. Tim giddily told his readers how flattered he was that Wrapstar had acknowledged his existence: "I ought to drop him a line to say hi, but I'm feeling a bit star struck. I'm not sure if I'm in a fit state to drive home just yet"(Tim, 2004h).

Satisfying Creative Urges

Tim says that the goal of creating good pieces of writing far transcends the need to make any kind of point in his blog. He comments, "I feel under pressure from myself to create something worthwhile and lasting" (personal communication, 14 December 2005), and has found that writing a blog partially satisfies this need for a creative legacy. He chooses to write about work because it is the place where he spends a great deal of his time, and it provides him with raw material — characters and snippets of dialogue — on which to base his postings. Although it deals with employment issues, Tim sees his blog primarily as an "art project" (personal communication, 22 June 2006) — he acknowledges that blogs are a powerful communication tool but he does not see his own blog as having a social change agenda, preferring to think of it as a humorous personal diary that offers people a "sneaky look" into his world. His blog entries, which are all

written at home to prevent detection by his company's surveillance software, are usually short (10-20 lines), but they are carefully composed and time-consuming to produce, reflecting Tim's commitment to the craft of writing.

Tim's characterization of his blogging activity as creative writing and not as a political platform is consistent with Richards' (2007) study, which finds that anonymous workbloggers do not generally see themselves as engaged in an act of defiance and with Lenhart and Fox's (2006) survey of bloggers, which finds that creative self-expression is overwhelmingly the most popular motivation for blogging. However, looking in detail at Tim as a writer embedded in the workplace, and reflecting on how his creative process is linked to his values (which include a tendency not to take himself too seriously), it becomes difficult to dismiss his writing as "purely" creative.

AFMIP is a composite of fact and fiction with a distinctly literary quality. Tim exaggerates real life events to create an improbable but humorous effect, and inserts unlikely phrases and pop culture references into ordinary office conversations and business communications. A minor disruption in the office is related as an all-out brawl ending with blood spattered over the flat-screen monitors (Tim, 2005b). Email messages from the CEO or passages from a technical manual become peppered with song lyrics and snippets of inner monologue (Tim, 2004d, 2004f). In Tim's blog, the data center itself has become embedded in a pastoral setting where a green-fingered security guard milks the company goat and tends his sweet peas, offering advice on apple crumble and winter frosts. At times, the rural fantasy and hi-tech reality blur together, as in this post about apples infiltrating the office (the underlines signify links to photos):

> A good crop - Cox's Orange Pippins, Cornish Gilliflowers, and of course, Bramleys, from up by the old henhouse, next to the potting shed where helpdesk staff go to enjoy relations during their lunch hours, returning to their desks red faced, elbows and fingernails black with John Innes No. 3. There are apples everywhere, racked up in cardboard crates in reception, free for anybody who wants them… Apples spill onto the floor, rolling around like ball bearings. Unsuspecting visitors trip on them, sending them and themselves scattershot. They wend their way onto every floor of the building, into every crevice, riding the lift all day, playing hide and seek in cupboards and filing cabinets, leaping out of the coffee machine - Boo! - when you least expect and buggering up the photocopier (Tim, 2005a).

Tim frequently makes his writing process explicit, telling readers that he is about to relate the "blog version" of events rather than the milder real life version, and reflecting in his postings on the "blogger's license" he employs to protect his anonymity and to make things more interesting.

The writing style itself is diverse, with postings varying from straightforward prose and short dialogs to surreal word collages and short plays. He introduces imaginary friends with whom he reflects on the quality of and inspiration for his posts, and sometimes invites other bloggers to "guest blog" while he is away on holiday. In addition to plain text and hyperlinks, his postings are often accompanied by Castposts[16] of music (sometimes his own songs, which he records in a small home studio), and he sometimes includes links to photos he has taken on his travels, creating a multimedia-enhanced presentation.

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[16] Castpost (http://www.castpost.com/), a free service, allows users to create streamed broadcasts of audio or video files. Castposts can be easily integrated into blog postings.

Workplace Realities and Blog Fictions

Tim says that his work is fairly well-remunerated and that his hours are reasonable. He puts in 37.5 hours a week and has 21 days of annual leave, excluding public holidays (personal communication, 14 December 2005), an amount that is usual by UK standards, where Working Time regulations stipulate that full-time workers must have four weeks paid annual leave. Although there are busy periods when the job becomes hectic, he doesn't usually feel overworked or stressed out, and the busy times are balanced by periods when the machines appear to look after themselves and he is left to his own devices. These quiet periods worry Tim a little and he tries to appear occupied because, although the job feels relatively secure in the short term he is aware of a "slow decay" in job security at his firm and does not expect, nor necessarily desire, to be in the same job when he retires (personal communication, 14 December 2005). The work is relatively interesting and varied, involving a fair degree of skill and initiative, and although Tim does not see himself as a techie and thinks of the job as "just a job," he finds the work fairly enjoyable.

In spite of this relative satisfaction with his job, Tim experiences quite a lot of doubts and frustrations regarding his work life, particularly the amount of time that his job eats out of his day, and he acknowledges that these feelings influence the types of things he writes about in his blog:

> What I write about in the blog is a caricature of my life, as you might have gathered. I do go a bit over the top with the exaggerations, but there have been times in my life when I've been working, just commuting daft hours…or going off on jobs and what have you, and the motorway's no place to live your life. Being sat in traffic jams is no way to live. There's that old cliché about nobody ever says on their deathbed that I wish I'd spent more time in the office, and I think that's very true, and it's certainly a rule of thumb in my life (personal communication, 22 June 2006).

He admits that, in the interest of comedy (personal communication, 22 June 2006), he devotes more time in his blog to the negative aspects of his work than the more enjoyable or successful parts, but this negative choice of material — which includes caricatures of his colleagues, parodies of office social rituals, training seminars and motivational retreats — also reflects strong value differences that set him apart from the company and from the majority of his colleagues, as detailed below.

Colleague Caricatures:

The cast of *AFMIP* have vivid and often unflattering names such as "Creepy Keith from accounts" and "Stella, my eighties style yuppie witch of a team leader." Tim ruthlessly exaggerates the features and traits of his workmates and of company clients, as in this description of a customer from a site visit: " Prince, the IT manager at Twat Brothers has a head shaped like a gnarled bone, lumps missing from his ears and nose, and firm doesn't begin to describe his handshake" (2005d). Regular figures are marked by recurring symbols that complete the caricature. Stella's preoccupation with positivity-enhancing new age paraphernalia such as wind chimes and whale music provides a humorous contrast to Tim's more sardonic worldview. On the most basic level, these caricatures help protect Tim's anonymity by abstracting from the true identities of his colleagues, but they also highlight the particular value differences and conflicts that arise in his working life.

Tim says he maintains cordial and successful working relationships but feels somewhat alienated from the majority of his colleagues. Within the IT department, this alienation derives in part from the fact that, unlike his more geeky colleagues, he is not particularly interested in computers beyond the requirements of his job. He finds the data

centers where he spends much of his time, " incredibly grey and boring," (personal communication, 22 June 2006) and this aesthetic deprivation is the inspiration for the color and sensuality of the rural theme in his blog-writing, which he sees as the sharpest possible contrast to the "windowless, airless, cheerless" (Tim, 2004e) interior of his workplace.

Tim feels that he is something of an outsider to the "hungry go-getter" attitude of many of the firm's employees. In particular, he dislikes the conspicuous consumerism and naked ambition of the company salesmen:

> An ejaculation of salesmen sit gloating on the wall, with their RayBans and Bluetooth earpieces, looking for all the world like emissaries from Planet Twat, making deals, doing business, cutting corners, greasing the wheels, booking their seat at the captain's table. These are the school prefects, the headmaster's golden boys, his crack squad of sales storm troopers, for whom the bell never tolls and life in the fast lane is not a song by The Eagles but a statement of intent. High in the upper echelons, where the air is thin and different rules apply, speed is a right, not a privilege, dog eats dog, power corrupts and the winning is more important than the taking part (Tim, 2004b).

In spite of this generalized disdain for the type of people he encounters at work, Tim's writing about his colleagues is sometimes affectionate. He feels a certain envy for those of his colleagues who have a clear sense of purpose and direction, admiring Stella's lack of angst and her unquestioning positive attitude:

> I know I give her a lot of stick, but I do have a certain affection for Stella, my eighties style yuppie witch of a team leader…The answer is yes, Stella, I do like you. I admire your blithe spirit in the face of overwhelming reality, and your ballsy indifference to the same gloom that frequently swamps me. I envy your drive (Tim, 2005e).

Acknowledging the emotional strain of existing as something to an outsider to organizational culture, Tim sometimes envies Stella's ability to harmonize her identity with company goals and values. However, as described below, he is simultaneously

proud of his own anti-corporate values and, in spite of the alienation and "gloom" that results from his outsider stance, he values his ability to distance himself from the firm and its objectives.

Corporate culture:

Tim's blog goes beyond portraits of individual quirks to commentate more broadly on organizational culture and ritual. He makes fun of office social rituals such as the annual turkey-giving, satirizes company training events and business language, and disdains the greedy power-mongering at the higher levels of the company. A team of representatives from a competing firm who visit the office in connection with a possible takeover bid are quickly dubbed "the Four Horsepersons of the Apocalypse," and described as cold and inhuman: "dressed in Undertaker's Black, beady eyed and pointy of beak - they hardly stopped to breathe, let alone speak to anybody" (Tim, 2005h). Ultimately, two of the Horsepersons of the Apocalypse become full-time employees and appear from time to time in Tim's blog under the names of "Death" and "Pestilence," a persistent reminder of the way in which the company embraces and rewards predatory capitalist behavior.

Tim also writes critically about company training events and retreats, which feature team-building games and motivational workshops, facilitated by management consultants. In one posting, about a training event in the Lake District, he describes the contempt that he and his colleagues feel for the "Motivational Guru" who leads the workshop, and gleefully relates the antics that they devise in order to leave the Guru "wonderfully confused and enraged" (Tim, 2004a) by the end of the two-day session.

By contrast, Stella (in Tim's fictionalized account) returns from training seminars

enlightened, and excited about trying out the latest management techniques and buzzwords on her bemused team. Tim's anecdotes about Stella's literal and uncritical absorption of the management ethos of the company, cleverly critique the company's use of superficial motivational language to nurture unquestioning commitment from its staff. Stella's whiteboard, he observes, is a "huge migraine of boxes, squiggly arrows, intersecting balloons and a number of buzzword infested statements on the subject of being 'goal orientated'" (Tim, 2004g). When the Horsepersons of the Apocalypse arrive in their SUVs to begin a hostile takeover process, Tim uses Stella's whiteboard to illustrate how management and self-help language are a veil for questionable organizational practices. She buries herself in a "barrage of psycho-babble," covering her whiteboard with an elaborate "Magnum Opus" that reads:

> Feeling moderately eager with high expectations? Distressed? Angry? Where do I fit? What is expected of me? Do it, delegate it, wish away your troubles? I need to find a place and establish myself. Come on over to my place: let's do business. Customers who bought books by Margaret Thatcher also bought books by these authors: Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, Alex Comfort. My girlfriend was blown away just hours after I read this book. Dependant on authority and hierarchy? Some of the techniques taught will make your performance above average (Tim, 2005g).

Tim feels that his values conflict directly with the company's philosophy, which he finds unethical and excessively materialistic: "The entire company ethos seems to be founded on conspicuous consumerism. It's how we gauge our success" (personal communication, 14 December 2005). Although his employer — a private small-to-medium-sized enterprise (SME) that provides services to other businesses — gives lip service to ethical issues, Tim observes that it doesn't shy away from unethical clients: "We do business with a few companies that you would never find in the portfolio of an ethical investment fund." He feels that his values are incommensurable with those of the

company's bosses who, he argues, could never comprehend the concept that "it's possible to get through life without ever wanting to drive a powerful German car" (personal communication, 14 December 2005).

While he hasn't thought much about the origins of the management buzzwords and training techniques that he parodies in his blog, Tim feels that there is something objectionable and possibly un-English about them, particularly as relates to the lack of irony displayed by people who embrace corporate ideology and embody business success: "I don't know, maybe it's just my Englishness or something like that but to me it just seems daft and I'd feel daft and self-conscious and doomed to fail if ever I was to try and be like that" (personal communication, 22 June 2006).

He partly attributes the value he places on irony and self-effacement to the *New Musical Express* (*NME*),[17] an underground music magazine that he read avidly as a teenager: "I don't think I've ever been a hippie or anything like that but I was raised on the *NME*, the *New Musical Express*, and I suppose you pick up a lot of values. The values you pick up when you're 16 tend to stick with you for the rest of your life" (personal communication, 22 June 2006). Tim says that *NME* gave him a fundamental dislike of "people who really, really fancy themselves," and lack a sense of humor or irony. His unmaterialistic sensibilities, were also influenced by his father's "don't spend money on things when you can make it yourself" mentality. In one posting, he reminisces about

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[17] The New Musical Express is known for its political viewpoints as well as its musical content. Throughout the eighties, it was associated with critical journalistic commentary on the rise of conservatism in the UK, and promoted bands such as Billy Bragg's anti-Thatcher collective, Red Wedge.

how his dad eschewed shop-bought kites for ones that were home made out of bamboo and brown paper: “He could have just gone out and bought me one, but that wasn’t his way, and I guess this is a trait I’ve picked up from him for better or worse” (Tim, 2004c).

Appraisals and Limiting Ambition at Work

Tim is not a “go-getter” at work but he is a hard-working employee who takes a certain pride in his job, which involves installing computers, troubleshooting technical problems, and keeping clients happy, and he makes no secret of this in his blog. Writing about a challenging week at work, he reflects, “Joking aside, I want to do this well. I don't want the whole thing falling apart on my watch, thanks very much” (Tim, 2005i). This sense of a strong commitment to doing his job well has firm limits, however, and is counter-balanced by Tim’s lack of interest in taking on more responsibility or committing himself more fully to his IT job.

Appraisals are a frequent topic in Tim’s writings, focusing in particular on Stella’s efforts to use the appraisal process as a vehicle to make him more career-minded. In one of several appraisal-related postings, Stella takes him to one side, hands him a packet of motivational materials and, “between a succession of vitamin tablets," counsels him: "You need to trumpet your achievements […] I want you to be more ambitious, Tim” (Tim, 2005f). In spite of Stella’s exertions, Tim demonstrates a certain cynicism about the company's attempts to get him to devote more of himself to the job. Writing about the firm’s inconsistency in rewarding his exertions, he refers to times when he has “laboured and slogged, and put in the hours and driven the extra mile” (Tim, 2005k) without a pay rise or any kind of recognition.

Although Tim's unwillingness to be more ambitious is caused in part by wage and reward issues, his rejection of career ambition is more closely tied to his creative aspirations and his definition of success, which, as he frequently elaborates, has very little to do with promotion and advancement within the traditional career context. Indulging in an imaginary confession to Stella, he bluntly tells her: "I've also found that not being ambitious gives me more time for other stuff and suits my temperament much better. Paradoxically, I think it makes me more productive. You want to chase your tail all day in the heat of the sun? Knock yourself out. But it ain't me, babe" (Tim, 2005k).

The humorous appraisal- and ambition- related postings in his blog reflect an ongoing real-life effort to limit his own commitment to the firm and separate himself from the "go-getter" expectation that pervades the company in order to preserve energy and resources for his creative life outside of work. He believes that this effort has been successful, in that his supervisor has learned not to ask him to go for a promotion or take on more responsibilities (personal communication, 14 December 2005).

This conscious limiting of ambition and commitment is also reflected in Tim's anecdotes about surreptitious time-wasting on the job. In one posting about his to do list, he informs readers that he keeps a list of jobs that don't actually exist, "I just make them up then cross lines through them to make it look like I'm good at getting stuff done," much to Stella's approval, who compliments him on being a "busy boy" (Tim, 2005j). For Tim this need to appear busy even during quiet periods is related to the threat that IT staff may one day become superfluous due to technological progress. Reflecting on the autonomy of the systems he manages, he writes, "the truth is the systems pretty much look after themselves. There are robots to change their backup tapes for them, and they

can diagnose their own faults and even arrange site visits from engineers after hardware failures. It won't be long until they don't need us administrators at all" (Tim, 2005c). Aware of the ongoing possibility that his organization may one day consider him obsolete, Tim carefully manages his organizational identity so that he can benefit from the structure and financial rewards that his workplace offers without becoming emotionally attached to his organizational role, or compromising his personal and creative freedom.

Separating Creative and Professional Life

Tim's creative and social life exists in sharp separation from his paid employment. The sharp boundary between his creative interests and his job is something he finds liberating, not aspiring to blur the two. His desire to separate his creative life from financial exigencies relates to a conviction that creative expression is constrained when it becomes a profession, and a preference for maximizing the spontaneity and freedom of his art.

As an undergraduate, Tim trained as a photographer, and after college he pursued a photography career for a while but found that it was very hard to make a living: "I tried to become a photographer for a few years, and was reasonably good but terrible at making money." While he admires successful artists, he admits, based on his own experience as a struggling photographer, "I'd be useless at making a living doing something more creatively satisfying" (personal communication, 14 December 2005). By contrast, the IT job gives him financial stability and frees him up to pursue photography, music, and writing in his free time, without having to worry about making a living from his artistic output. Tim is skeptical of the amount of real freedom he would have in a

more creative career and feels that people who work in a paid creative capacity probably feel constrained in one way or another (personal communication, 14 December 2005).

Tim is unwilling to reveal his more creative side in a paid professional capacity, and this separation of creative self from the organization helps him to reconcile his ethical differences with his employer, since his identity is not defined around his job. He'd like to work for a company "whose work was worthwhile and in some way admirable" (personal communication, 14 December 2005), but by minimizing his commitment to the company and keeping intact his creative life outside of work, he is able to do his job well and ensure that his pursuit of creative self-fulfillment is shielded from financial prerogatives. He enjoys his job and likes the money and stability, but maintains, "whatever 'succeeding in life' means, it doesn't have much connection with what you do during office hours" (personal communication, 14 December 2005).

Although this compromise works well most of the time, time-scarcity is always an issue. Tim acknowledges that his inability to sustain creative projects is partly due to his own lack of self-discipline, but he would like to have a shorter workweek or a more flexible schedule in order to make more time for his creative projects, and worries that blogging is sometimes a "quick fix" compared to the more involved creative projects, such as music recording, that he would like to devote time to:

> If I'm trying to write a song — sometimes I do songs and recording stuff into a little studio — it takes hours and hours! I [recently] did a song that I put up on my blog […] and it just took absolutely forever. I spent all weekend doing that. So I threw it together, and it's a little bit slapdash. I'd like to do it again with a little more care and attention, but I did it in a really slapdash way and just bunged it out as soon as I'd finished it, and again it just took me all weekend, I didn't get anything else done. So really, to have done a proper job of that, I'd have to spend a week or a month or fortnight, and that's what I would actually like to be doing (personal communication, 22 June 2006)

This sense of not having enough quality time for creative projects fuels Tim's ongoing effort to manage his employer's expectations via the appraisal process, making sure he remains in good favor, while diplomatically resisting his Stella's enticements to be more ambitious or company-oriented.

Writing, Social Change, and Membership in the Blogging Community

Tim's blog stats, which are publicly available via the blog's Sitemeter, indicate about 90 visitors a day, most of which are referrals from other blogs. [18] His blog is blogrolled (included in a list of favorite blogs) by at least 50 other bloggers[19], and, as stated in the introduction, has garnered the attention of mainstream media, including a mention in *The Guardian Guide* and an interview on BBC Radio 5 (both in July 2005). Tim acknowledges that having an audience for his writing makes him more disciplined as a writer and he enjoys "the buzz of writing and publishing right away" (personal communication, 22 June 2006). He enjoys the "kind, encouraging comments" he gets from visitors, but gets the sense that his blog isn't really that popular and says, "most of the time, I don't have much of an idea who is reading" (personal communication, 14 December 2005).

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[18] Based on Sitemeter statistics, 7/5/06, http://www.sitemeter.com/?a=stats&s=sm3fr33maninpreston.

[19] Based on blogshare.com data, 7/5/06.

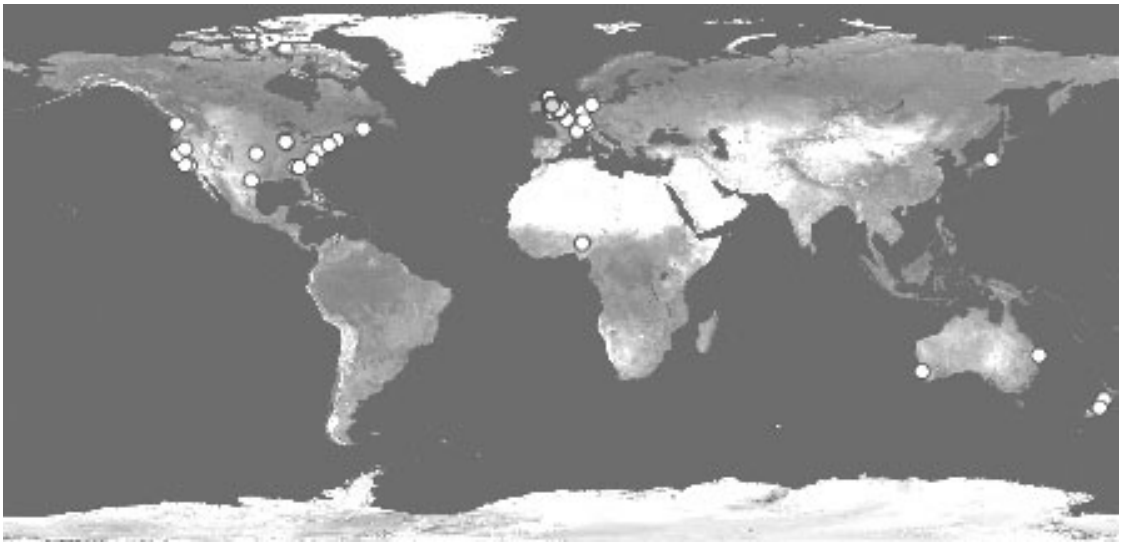

Figure 8: Google's Sitemeter displaying a geographical representation of the last 50 visitors to Tim's blog (October 12, 2006). URL: http://www.sitemeter.com/?a=stats&s=sm3fr33maninpreston&r=79.

Most of his postings, in fact, get between five and ten comments, some of which he replies to. The comments on his blog are often from regular readers, some of whom are other bloggers who are featured in this study. Often, readers offer their own insights in support of Tim's assertions about working life, briefly sharing their own experiences. In a typical example, a post entitled "Forgotten But Not Yet Gone," Tim gave an update on some compulsory redundancies that have occurred at his company, writing, "One of the things I like most about working for Company X, perhaps the only thing, come to think of it, is this: You are never in any doubt as to how much your contribution as an employee is valued. Because it is sod all" (Tim, 2006). Among the eight comments, four pick up on and agree strongly with Tim's assertion that employees need to avoid the delusion that they are valued by their employer, the others being broadly supportive or addressing other topics. A reader called "Anxious," writes: "As soon as you have experienced a wave of redundancies (even if you're not the victim), I think you realise the

futility of your corporate existence (if you haven't already). It's a case of maintaining the same attitude toward the corporation. You are there to line your pockets, none of it really matters" (comment posted August 3, 2006). "K," another reader, concurs, writing: There's just been a "restructure to focus on the core business", as they euphemistically call it, at my company, and anxious is right – even though I wasn't affected, I now realise that I could be at risk another time no matter how much work I do" (comment posted August 5, 2006). Another reader, "Zed," expresses his support by simply quoting one of the lines from Tim's posting, and writing "Boy, do I know that feeling" (comment posted August 5, 2006). Comments posted to Tim's blog reinforce his sense that his blog is generally read by a small and quite familiar audience of fairly like-minded people. Contact with this community of similarly cynical workers gives Tim an opportunity to "celebrate" his outsider status, and offers a sense of community that may counterbalance the alienation and fatigue he experiences as a result of rejecting the organizational culture.

Tim regularly reads several other blogs (although he doesn't write his own blog at work, he does read other people's blogs on company time), and stays in regular contact with other bloggers by email or by posting comments on their blogs in what sometimes becomes a reciprocal relationship of reading and responding to each other's postings. He and his girlfriend "Beth" (who is also a blogger and is featured in Part Two of this chapter) have also attended a couple of "blogmeets," where bloggers get together informally face-to-face in a pub. Going to blogmeets is a somewhat risky prospect for anonymous bloggers, but Tim is interested in meeting some of the people he has made

friends with online and feels he has developed enough trust through the blogging community not to worry about his anonymity being compromised.

Just as Tim's motivation to write a blog is centered on his creative desire to produce good writing, his participation in the blogging community is oriented primarily to the craft of creative writing and not to critique of the labor process. He seeks to connect to community of writers and readers, not to meet like-minded frustrated employees and organize for social change, and he prefers reading blogs that, like his own, do not have an explicit agenda. However, this intent does not negate the critical content of his blog or deny the possibility that his readers might relate to some of his more scathing comments about corporate culture. His unmaterialistic, somewhat anti-corporate values are ever-present in his writing and are intrinsic to the humorously disaffected tone of his postings. Although Tim's writing is not outwardly oriented to social change, he feels strongly that the current social system is not equitable and that "it would be good if everybody everywhere had the means to support themselves in a way that was dignified and sustainable, for society and the planet itself" (personal communication, 14 December 2005).

Figure 9: Tim's blogroll (links to his favorite blogs), as captured in October 2006 (left) and July 2007 (right), indicating the growth and development of his social network.

He admits that he has not devoted much time to thinking about the mechanisms of social change and does not see his blog as a tool for overturning or improving the system in which he participates. Tim's experience with unions has been disappointing – and although he is not sure of whether unions are worthwhile, his prior contact with organized labor has given him the impression that unions are "not terribly effective or competent" (personal communication, 22 June 2006). While he is interested in shorter hours to make time for his creative projects and feels that many people are exploited and underpaid, he also feels that many people are workaholics voluntarily and that, if we had a shorter work week, "people might curse all their free time. It might be just like the Christmas holidays. It would just go on for ever and they'd be twiddling their thumbs and secretly wishing they could get back to work" (personal communication, 22 June 2006).

Tim's feelings about social change and the need to for worker advocacy and organization are mixed and he is happy enough with his lot not to think too much about it. However, he remains firmly attached to the conflicting values that prevent his unquestioning immersion in corporate culture, and this sense of discontent is intrinsic to the humor and artistic depth of his writing.

A Free Man in Preston and the Literature on Resistance

Tim does not characterize his blogging as an act of resistance because, at least in part, he is not given to grand statements about himself and his work. His identity as a creative writer militates against such earnest terms as "activist" or "labor organizer," which preclude the necessary wiggle-room that an artist needs in order that his work might be rich and unpredictable. He has a love-hate relationship to his job, and is not

particularly enamored of unions, or attracted by a vision of some alternative workless world, and his writing encapsulates this ambivalence. Yet, he readily agrees that his values are embodied in his writing, and that his aversion to predatory capitalist behavior, his liking for old-fashioned homemade stuff, and his sense that the world could be organized more fairly and sustainably – come through in his blog.

He is too opposed to the company and all that it stands for to be, in Barsoux's (1993) sense, merely blowing off steam about a labor process that he finds otherwise satisfying. He is not a *Svejk* (Fleming & Sewell, 2002), a lone wolf, opposed to the system, yet working it to his own benefit with purely self-interested motives. His anti-corporate values are too concrete and too linked to a community of likeminded others to be interpreted as Wilmott's "confusion and emptiness" (1993a). His identity is too solidly anchored outside the organization to put him in the position of Kunda's (1992) engineers, who maintain a "tightrope walk" of identification with the firm and rejection of its values, yet return to the organization as their primary source of affirmation.

Cosmopolitan, educated, and skilled, Tim is shaped by and engaged in a Culture of Critical Discourse (Alvin Ward Gouldner, 1979), but he is not interested in controlling the means of production. Rather, he wants to cut back his labor time, and have more unfettered, uncommodified time, for his creative projects. He manipulates the work day to make time for his own projects, resisting colonization of his self by the organization and making time to dream, free from the exigencies of making a living. His acts of blog-writing are connected to a larger subculture of anonymous workblogging that imbues his actions with broader social significance, and are reminiscent of Scott's (1987) notion of everyday resistance. He comes close to the notion of refusal (Marcuse, 1991), but stops

short of wanting to participate in an organized social movement. He enjoys his high material standard of living and his professional status. He is aware of the compromise that his job demands and somewhat resigned to it, but – at least in the world of ideas – he is not politically apathetic. Tim understands the most authentic creativity to be that which is least commodified, least fettered by the need to make money. His resistance is embodied partly in his subtle, literary critique of the workplace, but it is also present in his ongoing effort to carve out the kind of time for unfettered artistic production that Marx (1993) sees as the ultimate goal of ending capitalism.

Tim is a well-remunerated employee with a transparent and critical awareness of his company's activities and interests. He is prepared to indulge in a professionally risky blogging practice in order to maintain his right to uncensored self-expression, and feels the need to criticize and cajole his employer. He is content working with the technical gadgets around which his job is based, but he also uses his computer skills to undermine his employer's ideological hegemony. He has organized his life in a way that allows him to "hide out" in the organization, making enough money to achieve creative freedom when he is away from work, and eluding alignment with any cause or agenda that might reify his writing.

Employees who hide out in this way have a role in social change, especially when they publish their private reflections to the world. Tim's aversion to attaching himself to a cause is not unlike the reticence of writers such as Charles Dickens or E.M Forster. Dickens was always ambivalent about industrial progress and E.M. Forster flirted with the radicalism of the Bloomsbury group without ever declaring himself a member. Yet, Gradgrind's preoccupation with "facts and calculations" in Dickens' *Hard Times* and

E.M. Forster's "anger and telegrams" portrait of the commercial classes shot arrows through the brash confidence of the capitalists of another era. In Tim's blog, Stella's wind chimes and buzzwords; the sensual contrast of the apple harvest with the drab and dehumanized interior of the data center; and the dark, looming presence of employees called Death and Pestilence whose only emotion is greed, have a critical power that, when considered cumulatively along with the voices of other bloggers, might help to create a climate in which support for alternatives to the current status quo becomes tangible.

Tim's blogging practice, his motivation to write about his workplace, and the distance he maintains between his creative identity and his paid work, points to a complex critical relationship between knowledge workers and their organizations. Looking at a wider group of anonymous bloggers from the Manchester and Lancashire region, all connected in one way or another with *AFMIP*, the next section explores the differing values and career choices of a broader range of workers who have been inspired to blog about their work under concealed identities, conversing with other workers who seek creative fulfillment by "hiding out" in the knowledge workplaces of the 21st century.

Part Two: A Group of Mancunian Bloggers

Building on the close study of Tim's blog in the last section, this broader case study focuses on a diffusely connected group of anonymous workbloggers from the Greater Manchester and Lancashire region. These bloggers are referred to in this account as "Mancunian," to denote their identification with the city of Manchester as the cultural capital of the region. The Manchester area, which boasts both flourishing hi-tech workplaces and a strong countercultural tradition, has given rise to some of the most resilient and popular anonymous bloggers, such as the now defunct *Doing Less Harm*, written by an IT worker in an NHS Trust, and *Call Centre Confidential*, the diary of a call center manager. Upfront parodies of work are becoming noticeably scarcer as workplace surveillance of bloggers increases and the risk of being 'Dooced' (fired because of one's blog) intensifies. However, critical commentary on working life persists, albeit in a more veiled and intermittent form, surfacing in blogs that are ostensibly devoted to other topics and cropping up in accounts of daily life where the urge for self-expression overwhelms cautiousness.

Looking both at blogs that explicitly parody work and at others where the labor process is a more subtle and fleeting presence, this section further explores the relationship between anonymous blogging and paid employment, exploring an ideological meeting ground that exists among knowledge workers in quite varied work situations. Reflecting on the countercultural values and creative aspirations of these bloggers, and how they are interconnected as part of Manchester's blogging community, this piece reflects on the potential of blogging to transcend individualized cynicism and contribute to the formation of an organized and vocal movement. Considering these

workers *as authors*, it reveals that a small yet vocal number of cynical workers are engaged in sophisticated, creative, and networked forms of resistance, exploiting the knowledge workplace's decentralized structure to reclaim time and creative space from corporate culture's encroachment.

Manchester is currently a booming new media and information capital, yet its rebirth is linked inextricably to a home-grown pop and clubbing culture that embodies disaffected rebellion, anti-commercialism, and rejection of mainstream career values. The blogs in this case study reflect this tension – a sense that the booming knowledge economy has provided well-remunerated, skilled jobs that give employees considerable autonomy during company time, and, on the other hand, a sense of artistic yearning, existential angst, and rebellion.

Introducing the Bloggers

The bloggers featured in this study are employed in a range of workplaces and occupations that typify the regeneration of the region's economy. All are college graduates in their late twenties to early forties (see Table 1 on following page). As indicated in the table, some write solely about work, while others mention their employment only as an occasional theme. While none of these employees has been fired for writing a blog, some have taken down work-related material or discontinued their blog as a result of being found out, or due to the fear of being discovered. This is also indicated in the table:

Table 1: Anonymous Workbloggers from the Manchester and Lancashire Area

Blog Name / URL #visits (up to April 24, 2007)	Blogger alias	Job (Sector/Orgtype)	Theme	Blogging since
A Free Man in Preston afreemaninpreston.blogspot 86,686 visits.	Tim	IT Specialist (Private, SME**)	Work is the main theme but also chronicles Tim's social life and travels.	March 2004 - present
Call Centre Confidential callcentrediary.blogspot 282,778 visits.	Wrapstar	Call centre team manager. (Private, SME)	Work. Very little mention of events outside the office.	Feb 03 - Jul 06 **Discontinued.** (Ended in March 2004, began again briefly in Jan 2006, but no new posts since July 2006.)
CB* url suppressed* 24,860 visits.	Dan*	Industrial Customer Service (Private, US-owned multinational)	Work is one multiple themes pertaining to Dan's life in Manchester.	Dec 2004 – present **Work postings removed.** (work postings cited in this paper were taken down in 2005 through fear of being identified.)
Doing Less Harm anytownnhstrust.blogspot # visits not available	Dr Dre	IT Specialist (Public, NHS Trust)	Work. Very little mention of events outside the office in posting available for this study.	Jul 04 – January 05 **Discontinued.** (Dre took down his blog after being identified)
Girl on a Train girlonatrain.blogspot # visits not available	Beth (has a pre-existing relationship with Tim)	Consumer Advisor (Public, local govt.)	Nominal focus on commuting, with MP3 playlists but work often mentioned, especially during stressful periods.	Jun 04 – present
Slow Afternoon www.slowafternoon.com # visits not available	Slowdown	IT Project Manager (Private, small Internet consultancy)	Current events, occasionally interspersed with events from Slowdown's personal/working life.	Jul 04 – present **Work postings discontinued.** 2006 due to change of job.

* name and alias changed to protect blogger identity – his blog is semi-anonymous.
** SME = Small to medium sized enterprise.

Short profiles of the bloggers in this case study are given below. Tim (*A Free Man in Preston*) is omitted since his blog is described in detail in the previous section.

Wrapstar (*Call Centre Confidential*)

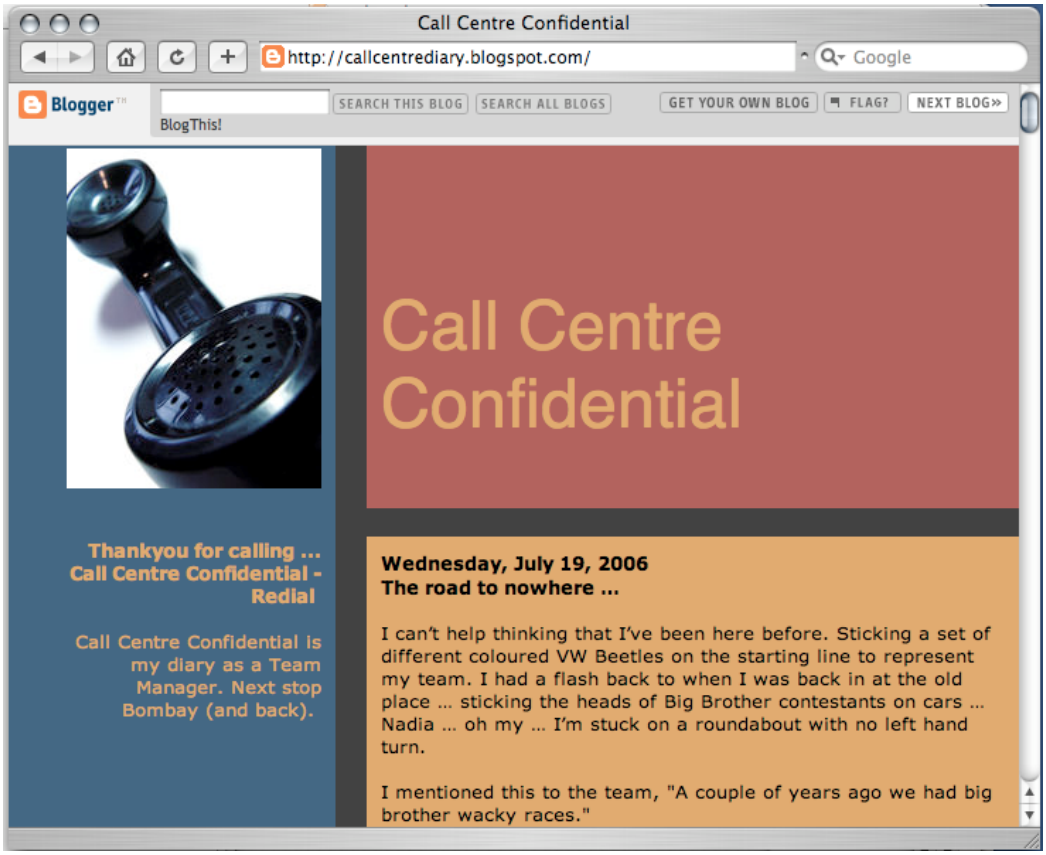

Figure 10: Call Centre Confidential (image captured 7 September 2006)

Call Centre Confidential (CCC), the diary of a call centre team manager, is one of the most famous anonymous workblogs, and has entertained over a quarter of a million visitors since its inception in February 2003.[20] In October 2004, *The Guardian* celebrated *CCC*'s status as one of the first anonymous blogs to "gain real recognition" and called it

[20] Sitemeter statistics, July 24, 2006, http://www.sitemeter.com/?a=stats&s=s10wrapstar

an "inspiration to others" (McClellan, 2004). By March of the following year, however, *CCC* was dramatically abandoned by its creator, who wrote fantasy resignation letters in his last posts, wishing farewell to, "this…vampiric nightmare of a job that has sucked me dry of energy, creativity and the will to live" (Wrapstar, 2005) and claiming that he was quitting because his boss wanted to transfer him from Bolton to Wigan. Just as abruptly, on January 09, 2006 the blog started up again, but subsequent postings were infrequent and the blog is now once again inactive. In relation to this study, Wrapstar was very difficult to contact and although he expressed willingness to be interviewed, the interview never came off. All material quoted here is based on blog postings and media coverage.

Dan (*CB*)[21]

"Dan," a modern languages graduate in his late thirties, works in one of the national sales offices of a large multinational corporation. His job, which involves taking orders and managing inquiries from industrial clients is relatively well-paid, secure, and stress-free, and he is rarely required to work more than 37.5 hours a week. Like Tim, Dan found out about blogging while reading *The Guardian* online newspaper at work. His own blog features writing on many subjects, including Manchester area's lesser known football clubs, outings to obscure curryhouses in the city's back streets, and raising his young son. During the first year of his blog's existence he wrote a series of posts about his job, detailing the time-wasting rituals he and his colleagues had devised to relieve

[21] CB is not the real name of this blog. The real name has been changed to protect this blogger's anonymity, as he has taken fewer steps than the others to protect his identity. The name of the author, "Dan," has also been changed from the pseudonym the author uses. The blog image is not shown to protect his identity.

workplace boredom, satirizing corporate culture, and reflecting on his efforts to limit his career advancement in order to leave time for his creative projects outside of work. In June 2005, alarmed by stories about sacked bloggers in the mainstream media and worried that he had not taken sufficient steps to protect his anonymity, he took all of his work-related postings down. Since that time, he strenuously avoids mentioning work, except in a very tangential or innocuous fashion.

Dr Dre (*Doing Less Harm*)

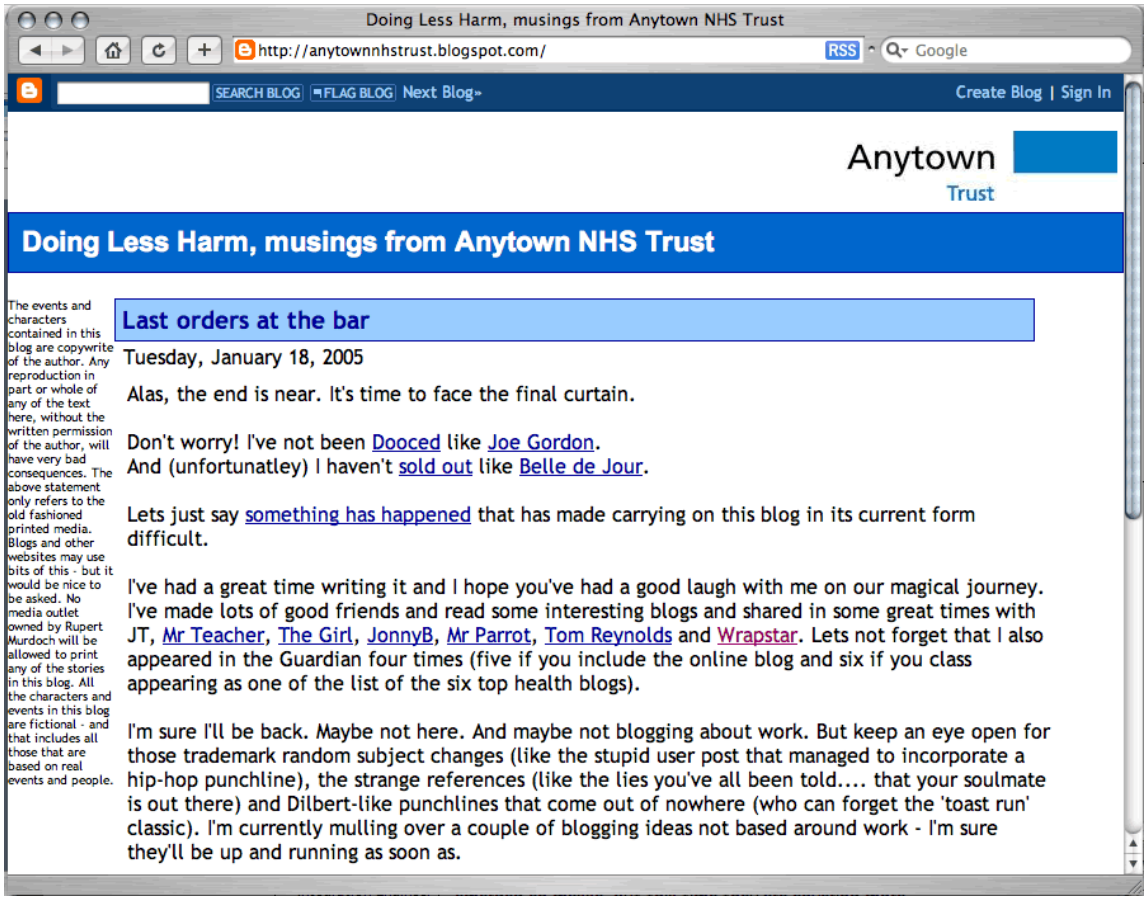

Figure 11: Dre's final post on Doing Less Harm (image captured 10 July 2007)

Dr Dre, a graduate in his thirties, works in the IT department of one of the UK's National Health Service Trusts[22]. His blog, which started in July 2004 and ended in January 2005, was an irreverent account of office life and the dynamics of contemporary healthcare delivery. Dre's postings, which were inspired by the BBC comedy *The Office* as well as his reading of other blogs that he found out about through *The Guardian,* were sketches of daily office events – meetings, answering the phone, the toast run to the canteen – rendered in a comedic way that highlighted the petty ego battles and what he perceived as the absurdly inefficient decision-making processes that shaped the daily life of the organization (personal communication, 29 December 2005). Dre's blog quickly gained popularity and, in October 2004, he was one of three bloggers selected for a *Guardian* feature about anonymous workblogging (B. Johnson, 2004). In January 2005, Dre was placed in a situation where he was forced to choose between his blog and his job, deciding to take the blog down (personal communication, 29 December 2005). He has since started another blog and continued to be an active member of the blogging community, but no longer writes about work.

[22] The decentralized administrative units that were ushered in during the 1990s as part of the government's attempt to streamline how the nation's universal healthcare system is managed.

Beth (*Girl on a Train*)

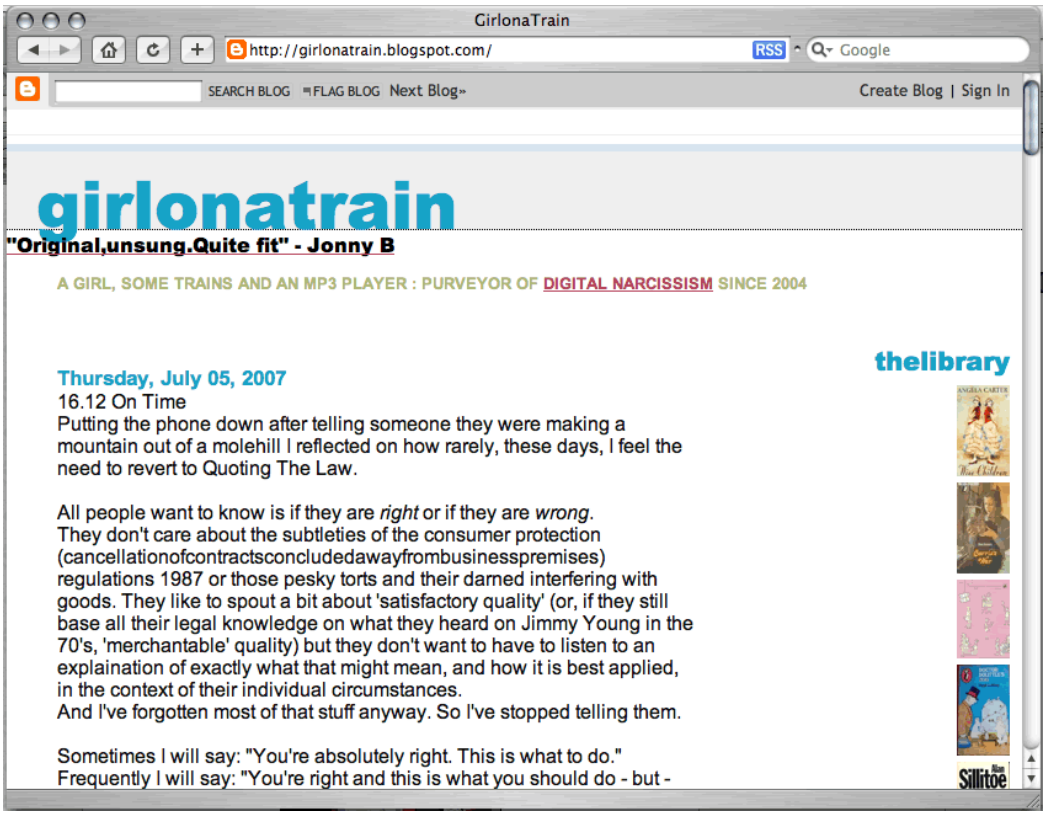

Figure 12: Girl on a Train (image captured 9 July 2007)

Girl on a Train is the creation of Beth, a consumer protection advisor who works in the public sector in the Lancashire area. Her blog – which was initially a diary of her train commute to work, but has become more job-focused – is written in a kind of poetic shorthand, using short prose and songlists from her mp3 player to convey complex emotions. Beth works 36 hours a week and gets 27 days of annual leave, doesn't usually feel overworked, has a lot of job security, and never has to take work home with her. Recently, however, because of a corporate-style workplace reorganization that she has found deeply troubling, she has found herself writing more candidly and critically about work, but she tries to remain cautious about protecting her anonymity (personal

communication, 1 January 2006). Beth is also Tim's partner (a relationship that long predates the blogging phenomenon).

Slowdown (*Slow Afternoon*)

Figure 13: Slow Afternoon (image captured 9 July 2007)

Slowdown has recently switched jobs but, during the period of this study, he worked as an IT project manager at a small, private Internet consultancy. His blog is a collection of short news snippets and pop culture tidbits (usually illustrated with images), interspersed with wry commentary on issues such as free speech and democracy. He entered the company at the startup stage and witnessed its growth and development over the space of several years. When he joined the company, he was excited about the relaxed work culture and the large degree of autonomy granted to employees. However, in recent years, he became very disillusioned and burned out, a situation that led him ultimately to

hand in his resignation (personal communication, 22 March 2006). These turbulent career events have been visible on his blog through occasional brief posts about long work hours and career decisions, but they are also present in a more obscured fashion through poems, links, images, and quotations that Slowdown includes in his postings.

Convergent Themes in Anonymous Workblogs

The anonymous workblogs in this section, while inspired by diverse workplace environments and occupations, have been selected for this study because of certain common features that in some ways are determined by the anonymous status of their authors. These blogs differ sharply from professional or corporate blogs, which are generally written under a real name, with the intent of building the author's organizational or professional credentials. In the previous section, Tim's blog, *A Free Man in Preston*, revealed suspicion about company language; contempt for management gurus, corporate rituals and training seminars; and concern about the blurring of boundaries between work and private life. This section, in looking at a broader selection of blogs from the region, follows other workers who have much in common with Tim's orientation to the labor process, using their blogs to express cynicism about organizational culture, and offer detailed testimony about the creative and subversive ways in which they waste time at work. The reclamation of time for spontaneous production, as well as the sophisticated composition of the posts themselves, among this disparate yet loosely connected, group of workers, signals the emergence of a milieu, where alternate values and artistic ambitions can be celebrated.

Perhaps the most strikingly common theme among the blogs studied is distrust of corporate language, and mockery of management gurus, consultants, and business self-help books. Bloggers in both the public and private sectors contrast their personal experiences – such as a sense of lack of control over change – with the bold claims regarding fulfillment and purposefulness embedded in the official organizational culture.

Wrapstar, the author of *Call Centre Confidential*, depicts his company as run by a management-guru-obsessed entrepreneur called Bernard, whose shelves buckle under the weight of books such as *The One-Minute Manager* (Blanchard & Johnson, 1981), *Who Moved My Cheese* (S. Johnson & Blanchard, 1998), and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War.* He satirizes well-known management gurus and reserves particular scorn for motivational videos such as *Fish!* the popular management tool based on the fun-loving fishmongers of Pike Place fish market in Seattle, about which he writes:

> The fishmongers are a group of relentlessly cheerful dorks who have derived a way of dealing with the mundane nature of their work […] The whole video is designed so your trainer can say: "Well what do you think? These guys work a 14-hour shift and permanently smell like a docker's gusset and yet they love their job and customers. You lot work in a nice clean office with hot running water – stop being so fucking miserable and enjoy your work!" (Wrapstar, 2003a).

In a similar vein, Dan, the author of *CB*, makes fun of the dynamics of multinational corporatism, likening a site visit from his company's American Managing Director to that of a Roman Emperor to a remote outpost of empire:

> There is a rumble of chariots, and we look up to see an unmistakable sharp-suited figure, surrounded by hangers-on, and nervous-looking management, like a prize-fighter on the way to the ring. He – for it is He – whirls around our side of the office, glad-handing and exchanging precisely 2.5 seconds of standard issue corporate banter with the employee attached to each proffered hand (Dan, 2004c).

Dan's postings about his job are grouped under the title "Diary of a Working Boy," an homage to Ignatius J. Reilly in John Kennedy Toole's (1980) novel A Confederacy of Dunces, who keeps an irreverent journal about his office job in a run-down pants factory.

Contempt for management practices is echoed among bloggers in the public sector. Alarmed by the creep of management lingo into his NHS work environment, Dr Dre plays 'reverse management bingo,' trying to cram all the possible buzzwords that he might encounter during a work day into a single blog posting. The post concludes, "By the end of today, my deliverables will all be goal-orientated and within my core competencies and the strategic game plan. They take into account lessons learned on previous mission critical objectives. And my proactive paradigm shift will show quantifiable benefits on a real time basis" (DrDre, 2004c). He voices skepticism about the NHS's money- and time-wasting investment in management consultants and re-branding campaigns, commenting cynically about these approaches, "But they're from the private sector and everything that comes from there is wonderful. Like Enron and Railtrack" (DrDre, 2004d).

Also writing from the public sector, Beth, who works for local government, reacts angrily to her employer's attempt to ready its employees for a major reorganization by hiring a management consultant who delivers a euphemistically packaged "Communication Event" that glosses over the complicated reality of the transition. Parodying the consultant's language, Beth writes: "Apparently we live in interesting times. We must keep a positive attitude. We will almost certainly be empowered. I *think* he said we could all play for Chelsea if we wanted it enough, but I might have slipped

into a coma and misheard at that point. He definitely used the phrase "whatever floats the boat" more than necessary (i.e. *ever*)" (Beth, 2005).

As well as mocking the culture, all of the bloggers in this study make reference in their postings to their conscious efforts to waste time at work when the opportunity arises. Surreptitiousness is integral to the humor of these postings, emphasizing transgression of official norms regarding workplace socializing. The bloggers studied write about snoozing through meetings, devising elaborate sports that are played when the supervisor is not looking, taking "sickies" (absence on pretense of sickness), and writing lengthy responses in *Guardian* discussion forums that consume entire afternoons of company time. Dr Dre, who uses morning meetings as "a chance to wake up properly" (DrDre, 2004b) often reminds readers that he is in no hurry to get his work done. After one singularly unproductive day, he reflects, "I am left pondering what I have actually done today. Is it possible I could have gone through an entire day without doing any work? Does writing this mean I have done some work? Do I care?" (DrDre, 2004a).

Mirroring Dre's disdain for the idea of being a committed company man, Dan's writings glorify the art of time-wasting on the job. Many entries are devoted to the creative exploits that he devises along with his small band of like-minded co-workers, showing how they exploit and fetishize the banal aspects of their work environment in order to shield themselves from boredom. These group rituals include the "Pie Club," (Dan, 2004a) an underground society organized around "savoury pastry items from the works vending machine," and "In-the-Tape" a game that consists of throwing a juggling ball into a nearby giant roll of sticky tape for a prize of a key-ring featuring soap star Mike Baldwin (Dan, 2004b).

Keeping Creativity Separate from Paid Employment

All of these employees claim that they are performing well at their organizational role. Their disdainful and often witty treatment of management culture harmonizes with Gideon Kunda's role-distancing concept, which captures workers' attempts to distance themselves from company culture while simultaneously being attached to and immersed in the organizational value system. However, bloggers' writings and interview testimony reveal a more fully formed set of alternate values and goals than the career-oriented engineers in Kunda's study, who indulge in moments of cynicism but ultimately anchor their identity within the organization. By contrast, some of these bloggers avoid promotion and elude supervisor's efforts to make their role more fulfilling or personally challenging, actively maintaining a lowly status in the organization and selecting careers and professional roles that do not utilize their full talents or threaten to fulfill their creative aspirations.

At appraisal time, Beth makes clear her rejection of ambition and career mindedness, writing that she is, "Pondering the wisdom of telling LineManager that I am treading water, stagnating, marking time *and quite happy with it* during my Personal Development Appraisal" (Beth, 2004c).

Dan resents his supervisor's attempt to align his identity with what he sees as the narrow confines and social importance of his job, and finds that he must carefully maneuver the appraisal process to avoid being promoted while still appearing committed. He comments, "[I] constantly resist – or take a non-committal attitude towards – advancement, because I don't want too much responsibility, and don't want to get so drawn into the corporation, and all that entails, that I feel I can never escape" (personal

communication, 11 November 2005). This fear of being drawn in, which is reflected to a greater or lesser extent in all of the blogs in this study, is driven by a conviction that increased career commitment will be accompanied by unacceptable levels of stress and burnout that will clash unsustainably with these workers' alternative values and creative goals. Even Dr Dre, who is otherwise happy in his NHS job and not overworked, is worried about a more subtle work intensification process: "I'm not talking about huge things, just little things – like in places where it is now commonplace to work through lunch and if you try and take a lunch break you get a reputation as a slacker" (personal communication, 29 December 2005).

The literary antecedents of today's bloggers illustrate that participation in the labor process while simultaneously critiquing it does not necessarily suggest co-option or ideological ambivalence. T.S Eliot's biographer Lyndall Gordon notes that he relished his job at the bank because "it left his imagination free, and he relished the completeness of his disguise, for he excelled as a clerk" (2000, p. 165). Likewise, Franz Kafka, whose boss considered him an "eminently hardworking employee," insisted on rigid separation between his art and his livelihood. As his friend Max Brod wrote, "Franz insisted that the job have nothing to do with literature; that would have seemed to him a debasement of literary creativity" (Pawel, 1984, p. 182).

Bloggers' complaints about time-scarcity and work-life balance relate to clear-cut value differences and firm convictions about limiting the significance of paid employment and career in order to maintain an unfettered creative sphere for personal projects. Again, these convictions underscore that these bloggers do not fluctuate between organizational commitment and an ideological void, but are instead anchored by

a solid creative identity outside work that helps them limit the job's centrality in their lives.

Slowdown, whose comments about work are generally more veiled than the others', expresses his dilemma about the amount of time he commits to work by quoting Phillip Larkin's poem 'Toads' (Slowdown, 2004a):

> Why should I let the toad work,
> Squat on my life?,
> Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork,
> And drive the brute off?
> Six days of the week it soils
> With its sickening poison
> Just for paying a few bills!
> That's out of proportion.
> (Larkin, 1989)

Elsewhere, writing his blog from the office, he reports that he is working evenings and weekends to meet client deadlines, and offers a link to a book called *Downshifting: How to Work Less and Enjoy Life More* (Drake, 2001). During a similarly stressful time, he posts a picture of the iron bars on his office window, writing "There's no getting around it - I'm in prison" (Slowdown, 2004). After being signed off work for burnout, he feels that he has discovered the value of cutting back his work responsibilities in order to pursue more spontaneous and unfettered creative projects: "Having had time to actually do these things and rediscover myself a bit, I now feel much more that the activities themselves are what's important, for the relaxation, energy, satisfaction and self-knowledge that they give" (personal communication, 22 March, 2006).

Figure 14: A photo of Slowdown's office, posted during a stressful period (Slowdown, 2004).

For some of the bloggers, resisting career commitment is more than a reaction to extreme demands from the company, or a process of stepping back from an otherwise fulfilling career. These bloggers have actively cultivated a disengaged relationship to the labor process that supports their commitment to an alternative set of creative and social ambitions. Dan describes how his identity as a creative writer helps him to resist the encroachment of the organization into all aspects of his life:

> Well my creative life certainly isn't integrated with my work life – and you know I am not always sure I would like it to be. There is something romantic about being a lowly clerk and cultivating a rich inner life, isn't there? You know, living inside your head and savouring those little victories. And the blog is central to all

> of that – it gives me a discipline, an identity, a reason to keep on writing, and last but not least, an audience (personal communication, 11 November 2005).

Dan's conscious choice to resist promotion is a way of shielding the creative sphere from the exigencies of earning a living, emphasizing that the very mundaneness of his job helps to fuel and sustain his creative identity.

Beth also has creative ambitions that she wishes to keep separate from the arena of paid employment. In an email interview, she comments, 'I think having a paid job which satisfied my creative urges would be too much pressure' (personal communication, 3 January 2006). Beth feels strongly that her definition of success has little to do with paid employment. She'd love to write a book, and to spend more time in the garden. She'd also like to live somewhere more rural, and travel more. She wouldn't necessarily want to give up her job, which she finds relatively satisfying and worthwhile, but she would like more time to be able to pursue her personal ambitions:

> I would love to work in a three day week society. If I had more time I would cook better meals, take more exercise, take control of my time instead of letting it control me, have no excuse not to do all the things I keep saying I can't do because I don't have time (personal communication, 3 January 2006).

Anonymous Workbloggers and Social Change

While very interested in issues surrounding work-life balance and the encroachment of work into private life, the bloggers in this study vary quite widely in the amount of thought they have given to the idea of transforming the labor process. Slowdown, who is ambitious about his career but believes professional life should be organized so as to absorb a smaller quantity of the individual's creative and intellectual resources, has given considerable thought to an alternative way of organizing society, and would like to see a reduced work week that would leave two days a week for

volunteering, activism, further education, and personal creative projects. However, his clarity of vision breaks down when he tries to imagine how such a project would be realized. He comments,

> I've been telling my friends for the last six months that in the future we will need to move to a three-day work week, or a mixture of paid work and volunteering. How it will happen I don't know, because it's a massive social engineering task (personal communication, 22 March, 2006).

Dan is vocal about linking his frustrations about the labor process to a more radical social vision. He explains that he and some of his more left-wing colleagues entertain fantasies of participating in a 1970s-style labor movement. In this fantasy, he explains, "We'd down our headsets and march outside, and we'd have donkey jackets on and we'd stand around a brazier, and we'd bring the country to a halt because they couldn't get hold of flanges" (personal communication, 21 July 2006). He would love to be a union member and would gladly join a union if an attempt was made to organize his workplace. Articulating his conviction that the clash of interests between employees and management has been obscured rather than eliminated in recent decades, he comments, "I would join it, because I'm on the side of unions, man, I'm on the side of the workers" (personal communication, 21 July 2006).

In spite of some interest in labor issues, none of the bloggers in this case study directly associates their blogging activity with an overt or calculated attempt to create social change in the workplace. Some strongly deny any attempt to make a point through their writing, emphasizing the entertainment value of their postings as their primary goal. This would seem, on the surface, to confirm Richards (2007) finding that anonymous workblogging has little to do with resistance. However, in spite of arguing that blogging is an individual, purely personal act of self-expression, several of the bloggers

simultaneously acknowledge that their writing, even if not consciously, does convey a critical perspective on office life that may have repercussions in terms of social change and new forms of worker organization.

The enthusiasm with which bloggers seek to dissociate themselves from any kind of social agenda is evident in an interview exchange between a *Guardian* reporter and Dr Dre during an October 2004 interview. Asked by the reporter whether his blog was a personal way of dealing with frustrations at work or whether it served "a more general, possibly political purpose - a kind of low-level whistle-blowing function - letting people know the reality of certain modern jobs," Dre replied: "I really didn't start my blog for any other reason other than to make people laugh. If in that process, I can make some statements about the modern workplace or some quasi-political posts about the NHS, then that is purely a side issue" (B. Johnson, 2004b). Dre does not deny that critical commentary on the workplace is present in his posts: "I suppose in some way my blog does whistle blow but not on the NHS so much, more on the office environment in general and what it is like to work in the 21st century"(B. Johnson, 2004). In a later email interview, Dr Dre acknowledges that postings were connected to his ongoing resentment regarding the shift in the balance of power between employees and management: "There is too much power, or at least perceived power with the employer. So blogging was one way I'd let off steam. It would allow me to share my frustrations and also help put things in perspective" (personal communication, December 29, 2005).

Dan shares the opinion that his blog is primarily about producing well-crafted writing that will entertain readers, but he is also aware that his writings convey his political opinions and hopes that they may contribute to a critical dialogue about the labor

process. Reflecting on whether his blog is trying to make a political or ideological point, he comments:

> I know that somebody who reads my blog is going to know what my values are. I do feel that is something that's important. I sometimes think that what I do 9-5 stops me from putting my principles into practice, and I think that doing the blog, putting across my worldview, is a kind of contribution or a counterweight of some kind (personal communication, 21 July 2006).

Although he is not specifically affiliated with any group or organization directed at social change, he readily aligns himself intellectually with left-wing causes and would like to take a role in a movement oriented to a social transformation away from capitalist values. However, he sees himself as a social commentator, using his writing skill to back progressive causes from the sidelines, rather than taking center stage as a political organizer:

> If I had a role in social change then I think it would be more to do with what I do, being the observer, and maybe satirizing stuff, and being the person behind the scenes […] My blog is basically a modern-day online pamphlet that's waiting for a cause to attach itself to (personal communication, 21 July 2006).

Dan is not shy of attaching himself to a cause but feels that, as a writer, his role would be to offer anecdotal and personal insights that might make people think about social issues. Artistically, he is inclined against trying to make "absolutely black and white points" or consciously contriving to write posts with a forced message behind them. He prefers to allow his values and opinions to percolate subtly and unconsciously through his writing, emerging through his reflections on day-to-day experiences.

Anonymous workbloggers' refusal to attach themselves to a cause in spite of their critical disposition make most sense when their efforts are considered from a literary perspective. Blog writing is made more captivating by studied avoidance of ideological closure, permitting a degree of polyphony (Bakhtin, 1984; Carter et al., 2003) to pervade each posting. This technique is common to some of the best writing – Dickens' novels, as David Cecil writes, contain "no voice but reveals in its lightest accents a unique, unmistakable individuality" (Cecil, 1935, p. 39). Similarly E.M. Forster, who flirted with radicalism yet was repelled by organized political action, is noted for the dialectical nature of his prose (Stone, 1966). Yet, in spite of the difficulty in pinning these authors down ideologically, the critical power of their writings remains.

The bloggers in this study see themselves primarily as creative writers, not as activists or political agitators. They are, in many ways, the intellectual descendents of writers such as Albert Camus, Henry Miller, Franz Kafka, and T.S. Eliot, who, having endured the office routine, all saw in white-collar life some of the fundamental contradictions of their age. The disposition of some of the bloggers in this study – their political reticence, their pursuit of a double life that permits creative emancipation within the organization – can be interpreted in the light of Dickens' love-hate relationship with the machine age, which saves his novels from being overly ideological (P. Ackroyd, 2002); Eliot's delight at "sojourning among the termites" (L. Gordon, 2000, p. 165), which sharpened and freed his artistic faculty; and Kafka's refusal to pursue a paying literary career in spite of the "permanent torment" (Pawel, 1984, p. 222) that arose from his work as an insurance clerk. While acknowledging the distinctly bourgeois sensibilities of these writer-clerks, the historical impact of their writings in uncovering,

for example, the tyranny of bureaucracy or the sensual poverty of the industrial era, is undeniable. Similarly, study of anonymous workbloggers reveals employees who actively limit their advancement within the organization in order to maximize time and intellectual energy for competing projects outside of work – sharing the fruits of these efforts via their blogs, in ways that reveal cracks in the ideological hegemony of corporate culture.

Regardless of political intent, the creative aspirations of these six bloggers provide a counterweight to the organizational demands being made on them and provide a type of ballast that helps anchor their identity and values outside of the organizational culture. All struggle to find enough time to pursue serious writing or artistic projects that they feel are central to their self-development. Participation in the Manchester blogging community – which features face-to-face "blogmeets" and connections to local publishing opportunities – provides a strong sense of purpose and identity for these writers, and has forged connections among them that point to opportunities for dialogue and exchange of ideas, even at the level of simply identifying common values by reading each others' work.

As well as all being listed on *The Manchizzle* (http://manchizzle.blogspot.com), a blog dedicated to building and publicizing blogs from the region, several of the bloggers in this study are cross-linked via the blogrolls on their respective blogs, or are aware of each other through media coverage, especially via the *Guardian* website. Dr Dre cites *Call Centre Confidential* as a direct influence on his own decision to start a blog, and Dan also recalls encountering *Call Centre Confidential* by following a link on the *Guardian* website. Dan, Beth, and Tim are listed on each other's blogrolls (based on

blogroll data collected on August 3, 2006) and frequently read each others' postings. These three bloggers are also long-time readers of *Petite Anglaise* – Petite guest-blogged several times on Tim's blog before her sensational firing, and both Beth and Dan wrote about being shocked to find that *Petite Anglaise* was no longer accessible from their workplaces shortly after the incident.

Evident in the blogs studied is a community of shared critical insights about the labor process and creative fulfillment. This community is a loose, heterogeneous, and shifting entity, formed by the ever-evolving overlap between different blogs and their readers, which is in turn loosely articulated to mainstream media sources and traditional publishing avenues. Lacking a labor organizing agenda and opposed to anchoring creative writing around a cohesive set of demands, this community is highly unlikely to crystallize into a social movement. However, its denizens are engaged in a sophisticated writing and reflection process that coheres and garners interest without the need for an external organizing drive. Each blog is a social milieu in which individual identity might be adequately anchored, successfully competing against the pull of workplace community and the hold of organizational culture. But each anonymous workblogger is also making a positive contribution to a global conversation that might help shift the *zeitgeist* against today's corporate cultures and in favor of more authentic and sustainable freedoms.

By pursuing creative identities outside their work, the six bloggers in this study demonstrate a concrete sense of identity and purpose that increases their resilience to corporate culture and helps them to make controlled decisions about limiting their organizational responsibilities. Since they continue to perform their organizational role, they are, in Kunda's sense, demonstrating a type of role-distancing that might be

construed as weak and easily co-opted, yet they are not vacillating between corporate values and the void. The very solidity of their creative aspirations, bolstered by participation in a social network of bloggers and blog-readers that provides both community and opportunities to acquire status and even fame, suggests a conscious process of limiting organizational identity. Rather than vacillating between a corporate embrace and "confusion and emptiness," (Willmott, 1993a) these workers anchor their sense of purpose and identity outside of the workplace, and confidently erect immovable barriers to the encroachment of corporate culture into their creative and private sphere.

The link between blogging and organized social change is tenuous but, considered broadly, the cumulative power of employees writing critically about the labor process may contribute to an emerging public dialogue that undermines corporate capitalist hegemony. Workblogs are compelling because their authors are embedded participant-observers, reporting first-hand on office gossip, overheard conversations, meeting dynamics and corporate communications and transforming them into eloquent human comedy and drama. Bloggers who have the creative ability to dramatize or to juxtapose office events in provocative ways are able to reveal not just the foibles and quirks of individuals, but also important contradictions in organizational ideology.

Although this apparent freedom of expression – which is periodically reined in through tightening of electronic surveillance or media "scares" about fired bloggers – may suggest the type of cyclical consent-generating and dissent-containing process analyzed by Burawoy (1979), the nature of the medium suggests more disruptive possibilities. Even if bloggers, as good employees, remain armchair critics, their published writings contribute to a growing public discourse about the labor process. Their

aversion to aligning themselves with social causes does not necessarily reduce their writing to the innocuous level suggested by functionalist models of workplace humor, especially when considered as an artistic orientation to self-expression that favors polyphonic and nuanced writing.

Following the tradition of the great writer-clerks of the past, the bloggers in this study point to the presence, in today's knowledge organizations, of employees who enjoy their work yet are deeply critical of the ideological underpinnings of management philosophy and concerned that their labor is serving narrow corporate interests that fail to benefit individual workers and society as a whole. In a repressive climate where criticism is increasingly veiled, and frightened bloggers are removing their more "dangerous" postings for fear of losing their jobs, the impact of individual bloggers on corporate culture is small and fleeting. Yet, the urge to nurture a counter-cultural and creative milieu remains strong, and workers continue to carve out their role in the organization in ways that sustain this freedom. As Dan comments:

> I sometimes think that I need to have a borderline meaningless work life in order to fuel the creative stuff that I do outside of work. I want to be a lowly clerk and to be doing my blog stuff when I'm not being a lowly clerk. It feels heroic sometimes. (personal communication, 21 July 2006)

Chapter 5: Violence and Poetry: A Broader Sample of Anonymous Workblogs

Introduction and Methodology

The previous chapter introduced a group of blogs that have emerged from the geographic and socio-cultural context of the north-west UK, which are loosely held together by similar values and orientations to the labor process. The group of Mancunian blogs I chose to study in that chapter reflect the "flesh-world" in which they are embedded. The sophisticated humor, the sardonic worldview, and the cheeky tone that pervades blogs like *A Free Man in Preston* is very much a reflection on northern British humor and the disaffected, Indie subculture that prevails in the Manchester area among educated and cosmopolitan *Guardian* readers. I specifically sought blogs of this type in order to study manifestations of creatively expressed progressive politics and anti-capitalist values in the blogosphere, which is the focus of this dissertation.

This chapter takes a step back and explores a broader range of white collar workblogs. The goal of this section of my dissertation is to further define the concept of creative resistance and to circumscribe it by placing the blogs that we have dealt with so far within a wider context of others that are written from differing and conflicting perspectives. Looking at a sample of approximately 25 anonymous workblogs from the United States and the UK (including one English ex-pat in Australia and one Australian ex-pat in the UK), this chapter attempts to capture the tone, writing quality, and political orientation of a more diverse selection of blogs, illustrating that anonymous workblogs *in general* do not necessarily contribute to an anti-capitalist movement. At the same time, this chapter illustrates that, particularly in certain sectors such as the call center industry, there exist a small number of energetic, progressively oriented blogs that are well-written

enough to cultivate the prolonged attention of like-minded readers and to connect to mainstream media. This type of blog, it is argued, ultimately contributes to the formation of a counter-hegemonic bloc that may advance a progressive social agenda based on principles such as work-life balance, fair trade, and ecological sustainability.

For this chapter, I decided to focus only on blogs where work is the central theme, since the inclusion of blogs where work is mentioned only fleetingly (such as *Girl on a Train,* featured in Chapter Four), created too diffuse a sample for systematic study. The results summarized here indicate many defunct workblogs, suggesting that anonymous workblogging is a transient phenomenon that is very much on the wane. Many of the anonymous workblogs in my broader survey ended in 2005 or 2006, and do not appear to have been directly replaced by new, up-and-coming blogs of the same type. This decline, as I have already argued, indicates not a disappearance of discontent among workers, but a shift to more covert blogging activity, such as cellphone-driven microblogging, or "generalist" blogs where work is mentioned occasionally and interstitially rather than as the central theme.

I have been reading anonymous workblogs since late 2004, when I began the preliminary research for this dissertation. As explained earlier, most blogs feature archived postings that date back to the blog's inception, so it was possible, in some blogs, to read posts that dated back as far as the year 2000, when the blogging phenomenon was first emerging. My initial collection of anonymous workblog material was gathered somewhat haphazardly, using search engines, recommendations from bloggers and blog readers, fired blogger lists at *The Papal Bull* (http://homepage.mac.com/popemark/iblog/C2041067432/E372054822/) and *Morpheme*

Tales (http://morphemetales.blogspot.com/2006/10/statistics-on-fired-bloggers.html), blog networking mechanisms such as the *Anonymous Workblog Webring* (http://anonworkblogs.blogspot.com/), and mainstream press coverage. Having generated my own list of blogs, I felt the need to evaluate my notions of the range of blogs that constituted the "field" against the work of other scholars. Fortunately, as summarized in the literature review in Chapter One, scholarly work on blogging is beginning to emerge, making it possible for those studying the phenomenon to compare notes and findings.

With this in mind, I have recently adopted, as a point of reference, James Richards' workblogging site, *Work-related Blogs and News* (http://workblogging.blogspot.com/), which has emerged as the most comprehensive listing of anonymous workblogs available at present. The process of generating my own, not so comprehensive, list of this type of blog enabled me to ascertain that Richards' list is particularly thorough. It has been helpful to work in reference to a list of blogs that has been identified by a separate, independent researcher, in order to counter my tendency to highlight only those blogs that support a progressive social change agenda. Between 2005 and 2007, I collected data from approximately 30 anonymous workblogs written by knowledge workers. Beginning in June 2007, I explored a total of approximately 30 additional blogs from three of Richards' categories: "Office and manager," "IT, technical and craft" and "Call centre."

Eliminating blogs that had completely disappeared or were about topics that were completely irrelevant to my research, in each blog I read postings from one or two sample months, as well as following links to the user profile and reading postings that were

tagged or otherwise identified to be specifically about work. I coded my findings using a qualitative approach that took note of the subject matter as well as the tone and relative sophistication of writing of the postings. From this broad content survey, I identified approximately 25 blogs that highlighted key themes or tendencies that had emerged from the data. Given my focus on creative resistance, I also conducted in-depth interviews with two call center bloggers who stood out as particularly talented authors. The blogs featured in this chapter are listed in **Table 2** on the following page.

Table 2: Sample of Anonymous Workblogs.

	Blog Name / Alias / URL / # visits*	Country	M/F	Active	Work	Notes
1	*Aginoth's Ramblings* Aginoth aginoth.blogspot 46,000	UK	M	Y 12/05 – present	Ministry of Defense	
2	*A Large Farva /* Richard / richardeid.blogspot # not available	US	M	N 6/04 – 1/07	Corporate office	Very infrequent posts
3	*Blogging the Swoosh /* Swooshblog / swooshblog.blogspot # not available	US	M	N 1/06 – 4/06	Nike Marketing	
4	*Bored Ramblings of an Office Worker /* alias not available / boredramblings.co.uk # not available	UK	M	N n/a	not available	Taken down
5	*Call Center Purgatory* / callcenterpurgatory.blogspot Anonymous Cog / # not available	US	M	N 2/04 – 1/07	Call Center	
6	*Corporate Peon* / Kate / corporatepeon.blogspot & corporatepeon.wordpress.com 21,000	US	F	Y 6/04 – present	Corporate office	Moved to password-protected Wordpress blog in April 06
7	*CAD Monkey in the Cubicle Jungle* / CAD Monkey / cadmonkey.blogspot 14,000	US	F	N 1/04 – 7/06	Corporate CAD Designer (Architecture)	
8	*Diary of an Office Wench* *T* officewench.blogspot # not available	AUS	F	N 7/04 – 1/06	Corporate office	Moved to new non-work blog
9	*Diogenes Liberated /* T / diogenesliberated.blogspot # not available	US	F	N 10/03 – 5/04	IBM software developer	
10	*Furballs /* Jeber / www.svarri.com/jeber_wp # not available	US	M	Y 7/06 – present	Corporate help desk	
11	*Hypercubicle* hypercubicle.blogspot Paul 17,000	US	M	Y 10/04 – present	Information technology	Semi-anonymous

	Blog Name / Alias / URL / # visits*	Country	M/F	Active	Work	Notes
12	*Intern in New York /* Intern Andy newyorkintern.blogspot # not available	US (NY)	M	N 1/05 – 4/06	Comedy Central HQ	Moved to new non-work blog
13	*Just Quit Work /* Damien / justquitwork.com # not available	US	M	Y 1/04 – present	Corporate office	Infrequent posts
14	*Ms. Machiavelli /* Ms. Machiavelli / msmac2.blogspot # not available	US	F	N 8/04 – 1/05	Corporate office	
15	*My Worst Call of the Day /* Anonymous Me / worstcall.blogspot/ 15,000	US	M	N 2/05 – 10/05	Government Call Center	
16	*Seldom Updated /* Seldom / seldomupdated.blogspot 1,809	AUS	F	N 2/03 – 2/06	Corporate accounting	UK expat?
17	*Sentimental Geek /* Jo / sentimentalgeek.blogspot # not available	UK	F	Y 2/05 - present	Information Technology	
18	*Shit That Bugs Me At Work /* Resource / shitthatbugsmeatwork.blogspot # not available	US	M	N 7/03 – 10/03	Corporate office	
19	*Stress Release /* Stressrelease stressrelease.blogspot # not available	US	F	Y 12/04 – present	Corporate office	
20	*The Advertising Agency Writer* theadvertisingagency.blogspot # not available	UK	M	Y 6/04 - present	Advertising agency	
21	*The Staple Gun* Kristian / thestaplegun.blogspot 1,030	US (NY)	F	N 2/05 - 4/05	Corporate office	Writes as man
22	*Things to Do at Work When You are Dead /* Joe Slacker / thingstodoatworkwhenyouaredead.blogspot 1,633	US	M	N 6/04 – 7/04	Corporate office	

	Blog Name / Alias / URL / # visits*	Country	M/F	Active	Work	Notes
23	*What's New, Pussycat /* Shauny www.shauny.org/pussycat # not available	UK	F	Y 5/00 - present	Corporate Office	Australian expat
24	*Why Be An Engineer? /* Little_Armadillo / littlearmadillo.blogspot # not available	UK	M	N 12/04	Engineering	
25	*Wide Lawns and Narrow Minds* Subservient Worker widelawns.blogspot 432,000	US	F	Y 10/05 - present	Homeowner's association	Much of blog taken down
26	*Work Hate /* Workhate / workhate.blogspot # not available	UK	M?	N 1/04 – 3/05	Corporate office	
27	*Yet Another Grey Suit /* NHS Manager / greysuit.blogspot # not available	UK	M	N 11/05 – 3/06	NHS	

* visits July 22, 2007

This broader survey of anonymous workblogs, involved reading a lot of blogs that were, at least for me, somewhat less compelling than those featured in Chapters Three and Four. The writing quality of the blogs reviewed for this chapter is highly variable and ranges from carefully crafted prose to repetitive, misspelled ranting. Several of the workblogs in the sample contain minutely detailed accounts of illness, others feature vitriolic rants about workplace grudges that are somewhat alarming in tone. Some start off with fiery claims about their mission and peter out after a handful of postings. Others feature postings that condemn academics for "getting it wrong again" in their attempt to reveal flaws in the capitalist system. A smaller number resonate with the humorously expressed yet intellectually sophisticated anti-corporate sentiments that were highlighted in the previous chapter, and which support the notion that certain knowledge workers are transforming their workplace experiences into compelling narrative that embodies

politically progressive values. These few, it is argued, embody the kind of creative resistance that is the focus and thrust of this dissertation.

Tired of Blogging?

Like most Internet phenomena, the practice of anonymous workblogging is morphing rapidly. Given that most of the blogs in the sample have already petered out, the first part of this chapter looks at reasons why anonymous workbloggers stop blogging, which often points to a lack of creative resources, coupled with lack of readership. Analysis of defunct blogs confirms that bloggers are writing in an environment of heightened surveillance and also points to a relationship between creative talent and persistence that helps to distinguish creative resistance from less structured venting.

As outlined in Chapter Three, bloggers are increasingly subject to technological change and managerial crackdowns that make it harder to blog anonymously on company time. The passing of the initial media furore about anonymous workblogging means a simultaneous decline in novelty value that may lead less tenacious workbloggers to move onto new projects and new technologies. Most of the workblogs in this sample ended in 2006 or earlier. Many include a farewell of some sort that indicates the author's reason for discontinuing the blog, while leaving the postings intact for posterity. Others end abruptly with no explanation, or are taken down entirely, apparently to elude detection.

The anonymous author of *Bored Ramblings of an Office Worker* (http://www.boredramblings.co.uk/) leaves this apology to the person whose name he used to register his blog, indicating the climate of increasingly heightened surveillance in which workbloggers operate: "Sorry, but although this domain is registered to a

completely random person and can't really be tied back to me the press are starting to sniff around. So to save me (and the poor guy who's name I used to register this domain) any hassle I've decided to take my blog offline" (Anonymous, 2007). Another blogger, Kate, who writes *Corporate Peon*, opts to take her blog out of open view in April 2006, shifting from Blogger (http://corporatepeon.blogspot.com/) to Wordpress (http://corporatepeon.wordpress.com/), which offers password-protection (Kate, 2006).

Other bloggers appear to become tired of blogging because they run out of things to say, because they feel that nobody is reading their posts, or because they feel that they have become too depressed to write anything interesting. "CAD Monkey," the author of *CAD Monkey in the Cubicle Jungle* (http://cadmonkey.blogspot.com/) signs off in 2006 after 2.5 years of blogging, writing, "I'm done, guys. There's nothing left to do but complain, therefore, this blog has nowhere to go but down" (Monkey, 2007). An NHS manager stops writing his blog *Yet Another Grey Suit* (http://greysuit.blogspot.com/) because he is too disillusioned by his circumstances and feels he is writing into a void: "I haven't posted anything on here for a while. That *(sic)* partly because I'm not sure that anyone reads my musings anyway, but also because my morale has been so low that I just couldn't bring myself to put things down on 'paper'" (Manager, 2006). By contrast, "Seldom," who writes *Seldom Updated,* signs off because her work situation has become *less* disagreeable: "Maybe I've lost the art, or maybe I've got nothing to say. There's certainly nothing inspirational enough going on in my life right now that could result in the vitriolic posts I was spewing out a while ago" (Seldom, 2006a).

Other bloggers end their workblog to signal a new chapter in their lives. T., the author of *Diary of an Office Wench* (http://officewench.blogspot.com/), writes, "The

office wench gig has been ditched, the bags have been packed and April 1 marks the beginning of the Great Overseas Adventure" (T., 2006). She invites readers to visit her new blog *Girl.blog.etc* (http://girlblogetc.blogspot.com/), which chronicles the backpacking adventures that follow her resignation. Similarly, downsized worker "Kristian," who authored *The Staple Gun* (http://thestaplegun.blogspot.com/), stops posting when she gets a new job and returns to the workforce. Other blogs are creative experiments that are abandoned when their authors move onto other blog projects. For example, *Intern in New York* (http://newyorkintern.blogspot.com/), the journal of an intern at Comedy Central, comes to a halt after six months when the author, "Andy" directs readers to a new blog he has started on a completely different topic.

Some of the workblogs in the sample are very short-lived, with the enthusiasm of the first few posts quickly fading. *Blogging the Swoosh* (http://swooshblog.blogspot.com/), a blog written by a Nike employee, begins with the promise of rich anecdotal content about life inside the firm, "You are reading the inaugural post of a blog that will peer into life at Nike. Not a view from the marketing department, not a view from wall street analysts, but a view from 1 of the 24,000 employee's *(sic)* world wide that has made this company his life" (Swooshblog, 2006a). After three months, Swooshblog "retires," saying that he is bored, that he cannot think of interesting topics to write about, and has had his chance to vent (Swooshblog, 2006c).

Bloggers often disappear with no explanation, leaving their blogs intact for years after the final posting. "Joe Slacker," author of *Things to Do at Work When You are Dead* (http://www.thingstodoatworkwhenyouaredead.blogspot.com/), gives up after two months, in spite of his blog's energetic beginning, in which he seems enthusiastic about

using work time to chronicle his experiences:

> Since my energy level is highest during the day when I'm at work I've decided that I am wasting far too much time on actually doing my job. What I need to be doing is using my peak energy time to follow my dreams. So there you have it. That is what this blog will be about, a daily chronicle of me pursuing my dreams and interests on the corporate dime and offering the occasional slacker tip for other corporate cogs (Slacker, 2004c).

Joe Slacker's workblog, like many abandoned blogs, becomes littered with spam comments, but remains otherwise intact three years after its demise, leaving readers who happen upon it clueless as to what became of the author.

Blogs, like any other artistic or literary work, require a degree of persistence in order to attain significance. Those that are too fleeting undermine the seriousness and conviction of their authors. Blogs that end after a significant period of time retain their artistic integrity as finished pieces that are no less meaningful for having been discontinued, persisting in the blogosphere as archived testimonials that can be accessed as easily as blogs that are still active. Becoming tired of blogging, or of writing a particular blog, does not necessarily undermine the value of that piece of work. However there does seem to be a relationship between writing ability and duration, with less able writers becoming bored more quickly. Also, some workblogs can be active and lively, without necessarily suggesting creative resistance. In exploring the type of blog writing that may constitute an intellectually and creatively sophisticated response to the labor process, it is also helpful to examine the type of blog content that falls short of this mark. With this in mind, the following section looks at blog content that, while often interesting and valid in its own way, is distinct from the notion of creative resistance that is the focus of this dissertation.

Rants, Ailments, and Pro-Capitalist Sentiments

The tone of anonymous workblogs varies widely, from the jauntily disaffected to the irate, and the frequency or fervor of posts does not necessarily make for good reading. Less skilled writers tend toward repetition or unstructured ranting, and some bloggers come across as almost paranoid or unstable. Poorly written, mentally unhinged, or overly mundane blogs, while they may point to workplace discontent and serve a cathartic function for their authors, do not qualify as creative resistance, which elevates individual experience onto an artistic plane where criticism that is not purely instrumental or personal becomes possible. Additionally, while opposition to corporate ideology can accommodate many perspectives, some anonymous workblogs are too explicitly pro-capitalist to be considered under the category of resistance as it is used in this dissertation.

As alluded to above, there is a strong correlation between writing skill and blog duration. Blogs are primarily a written medium, and inability to communicate effectively in writing necessarily decreases the power of a particular blog. Where bloggers lack the writing ability to turn everyday events into fluid prose, they often seem to lose steam, realizing that the medium cannot satisfyingly convey their feelings, even to themselves. Conveying a generally depressive worldview, "Resource," the author of *Shit That Bugs Me At Work* (http://shitthatbugsmeatwork.blogspot.com/) writes (spelling errors are retained from the original), "So today is a crappy day again. Wish i didnt have to bitch about my job all the time. I think I wont ever be happy. Life sucks here" (Resource, 2003). Resource's blog peters out after three months and lacks any kind of sustained energy. In other blogs, the language used to express dislike of co-workers becomes

somewhat disturbing as well as repetitive. “Rich,” the author of *A Large Farva* (http://richardeid.blogspot.com/), writes of an annoying employee who visits from another office, “I could choke her” (Rich, 2004b). His blog, which consists of only a few postings, is a collection of rants against individuals from home and work who have enraged him, with musings such as “Which person should I murder first?” (Rich, 2004a) that make him appear mentally unhinged.

Some bloggers are able writers who offer interesting anecdotes and reflection about workplace experiences, but they simultaneously come across as so self-absorbed that their testimony can sometimes seem more of a personal grudge than a critical commentary. “Damien” who writes *Just Quit Work* (http://www.justquitwork.com/) writes that he is a dependable and hard-working employee but has come to realize that the long-hours culture of his workplace is a trap. Writing on company time, he warns other workers:

> One reason that i’ve *(sic)* become so resentful of corporate whoring is this: at the end of the day, it doesn’t matter how hard you work. The corporate structure could care less. You’re a cog in the machine. Machines have interchangeable parts. Thus, you’re always expendable. Don’t let them convince you that you’re necessarily a better person because you log more hours on the clock than anybody else (Damien, 2004a).

Elsewhere, he offers thoughtful anecdotes about race in the workplace (he is the only African American at the bank where he is employed), and comments on his plans to start his own business some day. However, his postings convey a degree of instability that makes his testimony less convincing. In one post, he offers an account of his employment history that includes jumping from job to job and being often close to being fired. Of one bank job he writes, “the Teller Manager pulled a scandal, and tried to take everybody else down with her. It’s a long story; just know that I had to bail out on it…”

And of a subsequent job at a different bank, "I was miserable from day one. By the time I decided to take some extended time off, I was on written warning" (Damien, 2004c). Damien's blog has a sharply misanthropic tone and the writing is lacking in the nuanced and ambivalent tone of blogs such as *A Free Man in Preston* (featured in Chapter Four), often degenerating into repetitive outbursts. A typical post about Damien's frustrations begins: "As you probablly know by now, i'm trying to leave this shithole of a job. I'm at the point now where i've even stopped pretending to work. Usuall I don't get to that point until about a year or so into the job. But this place sucks worse than any other place i've worked" (Damien, 2004d). The spelling errors and rant-like construction of these posts do not make for particularly compelling or informative reading, even allowing for the fact that Damien is writing surreptitiously on company time and attempting to convey the intensity of his emotions in the moment. Phrases such as "This place sucks. It's so fucking backwards" and "This job is so unchallenging and boring. It fucking sucks" (Damien, 2004c), and homophobic utterances (Damien, 2004b) detract from the more carefully crafted reflection that is found in Damien's blog.

Sometimes, the level of mundane detail in some anonymous workblogs becomes overwhelming, narrowing the audience potential and suggesting that these blogs are written more for catharsis than for reading by visitors to the blog. In *Diogenes Liberated* (http://diogenesliberated.blogspot.com/), which is an intelligently written, play-by-play account of a woman's final year at IBM, the author seems aware that the level of detail offered affects the readability of her blog, opening her blog with the header: "The following is a revealing look at ethics in corporate America and the lack of protections for employees in the workplace. With allowances for readability, the events are presented

as they occurred" (B, 2005a). The blog consists of long and minutely detailed postings that criticize the culture of endemic overwork at IBM, and also lay out the author's personal struggles with her mood disorder.

Detailed accounts of illness are commonplace in some of the workblogs studied and health issues often become intertwined with employment-related narrative, often resulting in an unrelentingly negative tone. Stressrelease (http://stressrelease.blogspot.com/) writes, "The job stress is getting unbearable. I have anxiety from the time I wake up in the morning until I get home everyday. Actually I think its *(sic)* one big long anxiety that lasts from Sunday night to Friday afternoon every week" (Stressrelease, 2006b). Aginoth's Ramblings (http://aginoth.blogspot.com/) features detailed information about his struggles with various ailments, including arthritis, psoriasis, and depression, and chronicles his hopes of being signed off work permanently for medical reasons. CADMonkey offers a lengthy and detailed account of her hip surgery (Monkey, 2006), and Jo, the author of *Sentimental Geek*, (http://sentimentalgeek.blogspot.com/) mixes her frequent accounts of hospitals and illness with racist invective against the National Health Service and its staff (Jo, 2006), which is followed by a slew of comments from readers condemning Jo's racist views.

Anonymous workbloggers write from all manner of political and spiritual perspectives including Christian, Libertarian and even Machiavellian. "B," the author of *Diogenes Liberated* (http://www.diogenesliberated.blogspot.com/), writes that she interprets her struggles as an IBM employee through the lens of Christ's teachings (B, 2005b). Paul, the author of *Hypercubicle* (http://hypercubicle.blogspot.com/) writes that he is a staunch Libertarian (Paul, 2004). Ms. Machiavelli (http://msmac2.blogspot.com/)

writes her postings as illustrations, albeit in an attempt at humor, of maxims such as "The enemy of your enemy is your friend" (Machiavelli, 2004). Many heterogeneous perspectives contribute to the critique of capitalism embodied in anonymous workblogs – libertarian and religious accounts can critique concentration of corporate power, just as ardently as those which spring form a socialist, secular perspective, and these must also be considered as a valid dimension of creative resistance, even though they are often highly incompatible with the thrust of progressive politics, which is the focus of this dissertation.

The practice of anonymous workblogging is by no means synonymous with anti-capitalist sentiments, and some blogs are so pro-corporate as to exclude themselves from the banner of resistance, at least as the idea of resistance is understood for the purposes of the current study. The Nike employee blog, *Blogging the Swoosh*, quoted above, is notably lacking in any kind of critique of Nike's global labor practices and focuses instead on topics such as the need to tighten administrative spending (Swooshblog, 2006d) or promoting the idea of Nike buying out the Portland Trailblazers basketball team in order to achieve direct product placement (Swooshblog, 2006b). Another anonymous workblog, *The Advertising Agency* (http://theadvertisingagency.blogspot.com/), is explicitly pro-capitalist, and specifically opposed to academia, as indicated by this post protesting attempts to regulate junk food advertising to children, "Once again, this kind of loaded 'research' is funded by your taxes. The communists might have lost the war but they're still fighting their anti-capitalist battles behind the iron curtain of academia" (Writer, 2007). In addition, blogs such as *Sentimental Geek,* which is explicitly racist, and homophobic blogs such as *Just*

Quit Work, also tend to exclude themselves from participation in a community of progressive ideas in which such sentiments are unacceptable.

As illustrated by the above, motivations for writing anonymously about the workplace vary widely, and while pro-capitalist or racist writings may be highly creative in form, they are beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focuses on a concept of resistance that is aligned with the critical sociology of the labor process. This dissertation research does not set out to make the claim that anonymous workbloggers *in general* are likely to become engaged in an anti-capitalist project that critiques corporate practices in ways that support a left-wing social change agenda. Nor do I intend to argue that any employee blog qualifies as creative resistance purely because it involves written documentation of workplace experiences. Rather, this research is concerned with highlighting the presence, in the blogosphere, of a relatively small yet significant number of iconoclastic, intellectually sophisticated creative responses to the labor process that harmonize with the progressive political notions embodied in critical organizational studies. Within the sample, several of the blogs fit this description, as detailed below.

Glimmers of Creative Resistance

The above highlights bloggers who complain about work and malign their co-workers and managers, using a form of critique that remains at the operational, mundane level. This section attempts to highlight both quasi-literary attempts at expressing workplace discontent and also examples of analytical reflection on the labor process that, while often tied to specific individuals and circumstances, creatively transcend particularity in order to speak more broadly to the system in which many knowledge workers are embedded.

Several of the bloggers in the sample use the writings of others to frame their own critique of corporate culture, work-life balance and overwork, elevating their concerns above the individual level. Looking critically at the long-hours-based meeting culture of her organization, "Seldom" opens a posting by quoting some text from the website *i-resign* (http://www.i-resign.com/) to give weight to her own experiences. The quoted text, culled from an essay on workplace boredom by T.J. Snaith, begins "Meetings are the diabolical ceremonies that sustain and propagate the boredom cult," (Snaith, 2002) and counsels employees to quit office jobs that cause intense ennui. Seldom then documents her own budget meeting schedule, which results in fifteen hour days, and vows that she is going to pretend to be sick in order to avoid having to attend the next cycle of meetings (Seldom, 2006b). Also using the writing of others to contextualize her own reflections on work, "Stressrelease" quotes the full text of a *San Francisco Chronicle* article that extols the virtues of taking time off work, and condemns American overwork culture (Stressrelease, 2006a). The article, by columnist Mark Morford exhorts Americans to do their work well but do less of it, linking personal and political ills to time-scarcity:

> Think of what you could do. Paint the house. Start your novel. Drive across the country. Finish that Proust bio. Rethink your life. Read up on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and come up with a solution because apparently they all insist on remaining pious violence-drunk hatemongers who regularly shame their God. Fly to Bali. You know, do stuff (Morford, 2002).

Thoughtful musings on how much time is spent at work are particularly common. "Little_Armadillo," an engineer, reflects in his blog *Why Be an Engineer?* (http://littlearmadillo.blogspot.com/) on the possibility of a shorter work week, and wonders why it has never been realized in spite of the promises made in the 1970s: "I

remember a British 'Horizon' documentary from 25 years ago which caused quite a stir, prompting questions in parliament the next day. It asked how we would adjust to lives of leisure, working for only two days a week but with a high standard of living, because of the rise of the microchip. I was quite excited at the prospect" (Little_Armadillo, 2004).

Other bloggers encourage other workers to join them in reflecting on the meaning of work. Kristian, the author of *The Staple Gun* (http://thestaplegun.blogspot.com/), muses, "I mean, I'm pretty sure as human beings we weren't meant to sit in an office for 12 hours a day, in a temperature controlled environment, worrying about whether we have time to get another latte before we have to go to yet another meeting on interpersonal effectiveness…" (Kristian, 2005a). She wonders whether happiness is more attainable in traditional societies that are not based on maximizing productivity and consumption. An anonymous commenter advises her to give up her job and do some kind of work that pays less but involves being outdoors: "Life is pointless, but it seems even more so in an office […] We don't need to aspire to this consumer driven ideology that we've been fed." Another commenter, "Dr God" advises her to take time out to travel, work in the community, and discover herself. Kristian also attempts to collect work stories from other employees (see figure 15), and although her efforts seem largely unsuccessful and her blog quickly peters out, her impulse is to connect to other workers and share stories about office experiences in order to shed light on the meaning of work in general (Kristian, 2005b).

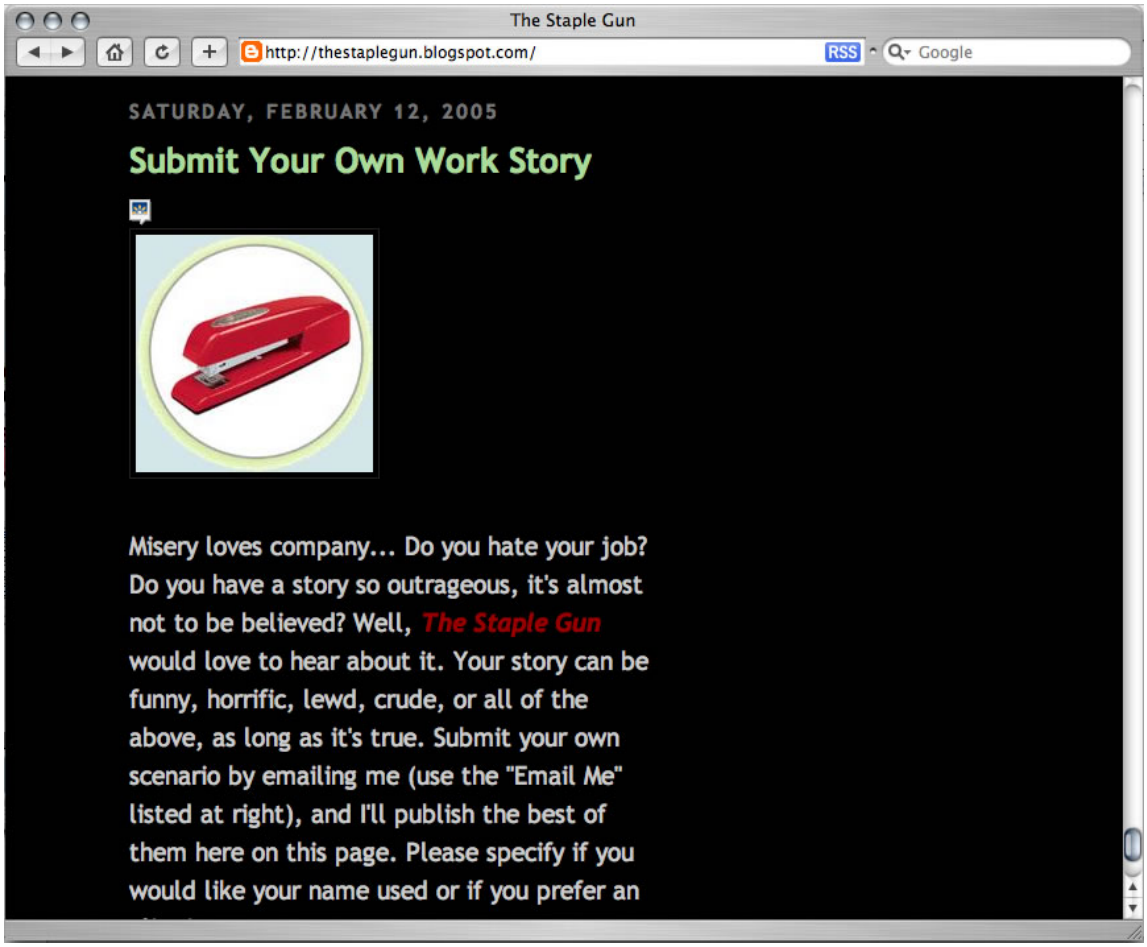

Figure 15: Staple Gun's attempt to collect work stories from other readers.

The impulse to connect with and influence other workers is also strong in Joe Slacker's blog, *Things To Do At Work When You Are Dead* (http://www.thingstodoatworkwhenyouaredead.blogspot.com/). During the short life of his blog, he encourages fellow workers to form a union and to adopt a slacker mentality, offering links from his blog to the AFL-CIO's website, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and to writing guides that might encourage slackers to devote company time to their own creative projects. He celebrates his own slacking efforts, which include writing a movie script on company time (Slacker, 2004a); muses about the heartlessness with which layoffs at his firm are implemented (Slacker, 2004d); and encourages readers to check out

Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* (Slacker, 2004b). Joe tells the story of his own disillusionment, which began when he witnessed the laying off of a 61 year old man who had dedicated his life to the organization. He reflects, "That my friends is the day Joe Slacker was born. I realized I needed to look out for myself first even if it meant doing it on company time" (Slacker, 2004d). However, as noted above, his blog peters out after a very short time, and Joe Slacker leaves no forwarding email address.

Creative time wasting is a feature of several blogs in the sample. *What's New, Pussycat?* (http://www.shauny.org/pussycat/), written by "Shauny," includes many postings about her attempts to stave off workplace boredom in a variety of temporary administrative jobs. She creates artworks that are a commentary on the banality of office work, as in the following posting, where she creates a collage of fruit stickers on office stationery: "Late last year I was bored at work and decided to start sticking all the stickers from my pieces of fruit on an old Expense sheet in my company diary. Since I do no work of real consequence for said company and never have any expenses, I could think of no better use for a beautiful blank page." She posts a photo of her collage (see figure 16) along with a detailed tally and a pie chart she has created to track all the pieces of fruit she eats in the office (Shauny, 2002).

Figure 16: Shauny's Apple sticker collage on an expense sheet (http://www.shauny.org/pussycat/images/2002/08/cropped_apples.jpg).

Some blogs stand out as being approached by their authors as focused creative projects. Among the blogs studied, *Work Hate* (http://workhate.blogspot.com/), conveys the sense that it has been conceived as an integral whole, as a time wasting hub for bored workers. The *Work Hate* blog, whose authors (or author) write under the pseudonym "Workhate" features links to intriguing websites such as the now defunct "Virtual Bubble Wrap" (Workhate, 2004b), each with its own "Time Waste Potential" index; and posts such as "The Great Sick Day Getaway" (Workhate, 2004c), which celebrates the "national tradition" of taking time off work under false pretences. Workhate's "Mission Statement" celebrates the art of "skiving" or using company time for one's own creative endeavors:

> Everything we write for workhate is created at a place of employment when we should be doing something productive for the people who actually pay us a wage - but instead we're secretively typing away, glancing over our shoulder in case anyone sneaks up and discovers what we're really up to (Workhate, 2004a).

Workhate also makes fun of corporate jargon, as exemplified in the link to the blog's "sister site" *Huhcorp* (Workhate, 2004b), a fictional consulting company whose website lampoons new age management jargon (see figure 17). Workhate abandoned the blog after a year, leaving a humorous "exit interview," but it remains as an entertaining testimonial to the idea of subversive use of company time for Internet-enabled creativity, and the desire to flee one's job for a more exciting and carefree life.

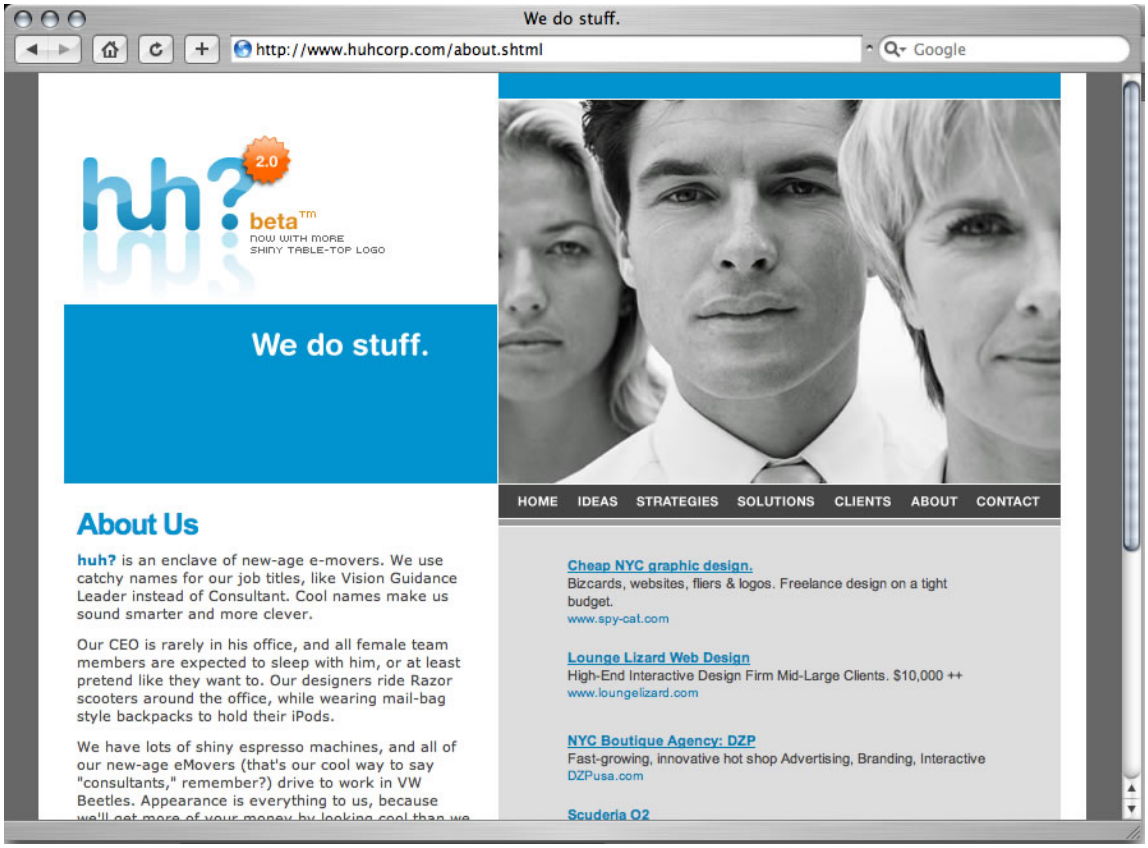

Figure 17: Huhcorp (http://www.huhcorp.com/), the "sister site" of Work Hate

These efforts – even when somewhat ephemeral or excessively lighthearted – show a level of sophistication that goes beyond the mere rant or mundanely descriptive journal. Blog entries such as those from Shauny's *What's New Pussycat* and Joe Slacker's *Things to Do at Work When You Are Dead* are written from the heart, and express an attempt to intellectualize, or, in Shauny's case, to respond artistically to their work experiences. Kristian's effort to collect workplace stories shows a similar effort to creatively synthesize shared experiences, trying to move beyond purely personal anecdotes and reflect on larger questions. However, this type of content is by no means the norm in the sample of blogs studied. Rather, thoughtful and well-crafted blog postings are relatively scarce in the sample of anonymous workblogs reviewed for this chapter.

Writing talent, motivation, and audience feedback seem closely intertwined, even where the positive feedback is on a small scale (as in Manchester blogs such as *CB*, featured in the previous chapter). Some bloggers, such as "Subservient No More," the author of *Wide Lawns and Narrow Minds*, attract gratifyingly large or intimate readerships that help to sustain creative momentum. *Wide Lawns and Narrow Minds*, which featured (recently taken down) compelling writing about a young woman's office job at an upscale country club, garnered a large following, relative to the other blogs in the sample, and is quickly recognizable as the work of a good storyteller. In 2007, "Subservient No More," tried recently to resign from her blog, claiming that it was distracting her from more sustained creative projects, but she was bombarded with supportive comments from readers who urged her to keep posting, and she has since decided to keep blogging but transition toward a new blog with fewer postings. She has also asked her readers to support her when she tries to become a published author, a request that was received enthusiastically by many of her commenters (More, 2007).

All types of anonymous workblogs are important in forming an iconoclastic milieu that incorporates many levels of writing skill and accommodates disturbing rants and thoughtful musings alike. However, creative resistance is the domain of relatively talented writers or artists who have chosen to hide out in the knowledge workplace and who have felt inspired to turn their talents in the direction of critiquing their employers in a more than ephemeral, superficial fashion, that might readily be placed alongside quality journalistic or fictional writing in more traditional media with which it co-exists.

The Exceptional Eloquence of Call Center Blogs

Among the blogs studied, call center blogs stand out as a particularly interconnected, lively, and iconoclastic group. In addition to *Call Centre Confidential* (featured in Chapter Four), there are several other humorous, and thoughtfully written blogs originating in call centers that have gained popularity in the blogosphere. *Call Centre Purgatory* (http://callcenterpurgatory.blogspot.com/), which ran from 2004 – 2007 and cultivated a large readership (based on blogshare statistics at blogshares.com), is particularly notable among call centre blogs for its well-crafted writing and humor. As in some of the blogs featured in Chapter Four, the author of *Call Centre Purgatory*, who writes as "the Anonymous Cog" or "AC" manages to criticize capitalist excesses through subtly exaggerated anecdotal postings about daily life in the call center where he is employed. In a typical posting, he satirizes a caller who babbles excessive amounts of caffeinated jargon, paraphrasing her real meaning as: "when will this be handled in a satisfactory manner so that we can begin to construct our forced labor sweatshops, I mean outsourcing activities in the Latin American nation of NoHayTrabajoBuenoAquí?" (Cog, 2004d). Elsewhere, he expresses similar sentiments about corporate greed by quoting or linking to poetry, literature, news articles, and the writings of other bloggers. In one posting, he copies out, in full, a poem from James Kavanaugh that he has seen on another blog (Cog, 2005): "There are men too gentle to live among wolves; Who prey upon them with IBM eyes; And sell their hearts and guts for martinis at noon" (Kavanaugh, 1991).

In another posting, he shares the lyrics of James Taylor's song "Millworker," in which one of the verses goes, "Yeah, but its my life that's been wasted, And I have been the fool, To let this manufacturer, Use my body for a tool" (Cog, 2004b). This posting is part of a series of reflections on alienation, in which AC sets out by summarizing Marx's

theory of the routinization of the labor process and the demise of artisanal production: "Instead of being able to craft a product such as a barrel, to have control of it from the time you picked the materials to the manner in which it was sold, you become an anonymous cog in a large barrel making machine" (Cog, 2004a). Subsequent postings meditate on how this logic has been applied to the call center industry, resulting in dehumanized, repetitive work.

Like blogs such as *A Free Man in Preston*, AC's blog is characterized by an ambivalence that enriches his postings and makes for interesting reading. In a post celebrating his outsider status, entitled "The Joy of Alienation," he recounts his desire to be part of the group: "I've felt guilty I could not be as successful as the other call center superstars. I've wished I could have received the performance plaques…" However, he observes that his alienated position enables him to see the flaws in the system in which he is embedded, concluding, "Without people who are on the outside of the dominant group, looking in and seeing what is wrong with that group, there is not a chance for positive change" (Cog, 2006b).

At a glance, *Call Center Purgatory* seems somewhat similar in tone and content to blogs such as *CB* (featured in Chapter Four), which spring from a secular, left-wing political perspective. Yet closer reading reveals that AC is not from a progressive political background, that he grapples with his Republican upbringing, claiming still to hold many Republican political views, and that he draws his convictions about creating equitable, meaningful labor from his Christian faith. In a series of postings entitled "Christian Capitalism," he proposes a spiritual economic doctrine based on "the idea that making profits is of secondary importance to how you treat the world around you, how

your business affects the world around you" (Cog, 2004c). He alludes to Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* to promote the idea of humanized commerce, which, for AC, is a religiously inspired concept.

By contrast, another popular call centre blog, *My Worst Call of the Day* (http://worstcall.blogspot.com/), is written from an anti-religious perspective. The author, "Anonymous Me" writes scathing accounts of the "hillbilly," stridently Christian, and xenophobic customers whom he deals with in his government job, linking their manners and beliefs to the excesses of the Bush regime. In one humorous posting, entitled "King of the Douchebags," he recounts the story of an irate caller who is complaining about the telephone company's support for its gay employees and its donations to Planned Parenthood (Me, 2005c). Anonymous Me fantasizes about telling the customer to find an alternate phone company "preferably a Halliburton subsidiary" to do business with. In other postings, he lampoons outraged callers who protest about the illegal aliens in their neighborhood (Me, 2005b) or expect privileged customer service because they are Christians (Me, 2005a). At one point, he protests, "Imagine being forced to listen to the State of the Union Address for eight hours a day, and you'll have a sense of why I sniff glue on my coffee breaks" (Me, 2005d).

Clearly, *My Worst Call of the Day* and *Call Center Purgatory* are written from quite different and somewhat incompatible ideological perspectives, yet they are united in their focus on criticizing the call center industry and using its machinations as a metaphor for some of the wider problems related to corporate greed. Their respective authors, Anonymous Cog and Anonymous Me, display different attitudes regarding religion, yet the process of blogging reveals common ground regarding a mutual sense of exploitation

in their respective customer service jobs, and a sense that their work situation symbolizes deep contradictions within the capitalist system. Anonymous Me comments that he respects Anonymous Cog's blog because of a sense of empathy in terms of their common work situation, but also because of the quality of the writing, which attracts him to Anonymous Cog's blog in spite of a clear divergence of opinion on the topic of religion: "I'll read workblogs with points of view I don't necessarily share, but the craftsmanship of the prose might be enough to keep me coming back for more" (personal communication, 1 August 2007).

This heterogeneity of perspective amidst broader agreement regarding the need for change is reminiscent of the notion of polyphony within the labor movement (Carter et al., 2003), which makes room for a broad range of personal orientations to the labor struggle while allowing for broad consensus building around issues such as the need to stem corporate greed and increase employee power. Although call center workers, unlike the Liverpool dockers in Carter et al's account, are not organizing a union, their writings are capable of operating in harmony to send out a message that is more powerful than the sum of its parts. Anonymous Me sees this loose solidarity as a mosaic, built by many different bloggers with different but often overlapping viewpoints:

> I see my relationship to other workbloggers as like pieces of a mosaic. We do all cover roughly the same ground, but with widely varying individual themes, tones, language, and perspectives. So if you read a large enough assortment of our blogs, the big picture about contemporary office work does tend to emerge (personal communication, 1 August 2007).

Underscoring this tendency for the blogosphere to support a degree of heterogeneity in terms of ideology as well as rank, while simultaneously building consensus, there are signs of solidarity between more lowly call center employees and middle managers. Some call center blogs are written by middle managers or supervisors

who, while also criticizing the workers they supervise, also focus on the power dynamics inside the company, and the pressures of work in the industry. *The Supervisor of Customer Service Hell* (http://thesupervisorofhell.blogspot.com/) introduces herself as "the company's wage-slave, my manager's gofer, the puppet of the upper brass, the faceless representative of "The Man" – the one that's responsible for shepherding over of all this misery that you see" (Supervisor, 2005b). She muses on her struggles to be a good manager, often complaining about insubordination among the employees that she supervises, but also chronicling her own disillusionment and cautioning against becoming loyal to the organization:

> I guess the best advice that I can give all of you is that you should never trust a company that you work for. Regardless of mission statements, executive speeches, and corporate pep rallies, the company does not want to invest in you or provide a great opportunity for you. They don't care about you, or your family, or the community. The company is always interested in one thing – profit (Supervisor, 2005a).

Mirroring the language of *Call Center Purgatory*, The Supervisor concludes about her work life, "Wherever I go, whatever I do, I'll just be a cog in the machine" (Supervisor, 2005a).

Call Center blogs are strongly interconnected and appear to reference each other and to identify as a group more powerfully than the more diffusely connected office blogs featured earlier in this chapter. Call Center bloggers frequently devote a section of their blogroll to other call centre blogs (see figure 18) and quote each other in their postings, attempting to build a kind of virtual solidarity in spite of differing political and spiritual perspectives and differences in rank. *Call Center Purgatory*, *The Supervisor of Customer Service Hell*, and *My Worst Call of the Day* are all linked via each other's blogrolls. AC and The Supervisor provide lists of links to a large number of other call center blogs.

Call Center employees seem keen to talk to each other and to be interested in building a social network. AC encourages other call center workers to join the now defunct discussion forum entitled "Call Center Slave" (Cog, 2006a). Jeber, an IT help desk worker observes how many call center workers are blogging and relates the energy behind this group of blogs to the relative exploitation of workers in that sector. In a post entitled "Help Deskees Unite!," he writes:

> It turns out I'm not the only help desk technician who is speaking out on line. Purely by accident I happened across several blogs being published by other help desk agents, and judging by what they write, our experiences are fairly common. *Call Center Purgatory*, *Call Center Guru*, *Craziest Call Center*, *My Worst Call of the Day* and *Call Center Redemption* are all posted on Blogger[23], which is only natural considering the below-average pay we receive for working in our cubicles (Jeber, 2005).

[23] Blogger is a free blogging service – Jeber here implies that call centre employees are too low paid to be able to afford higher cost blog services such as Typepad.

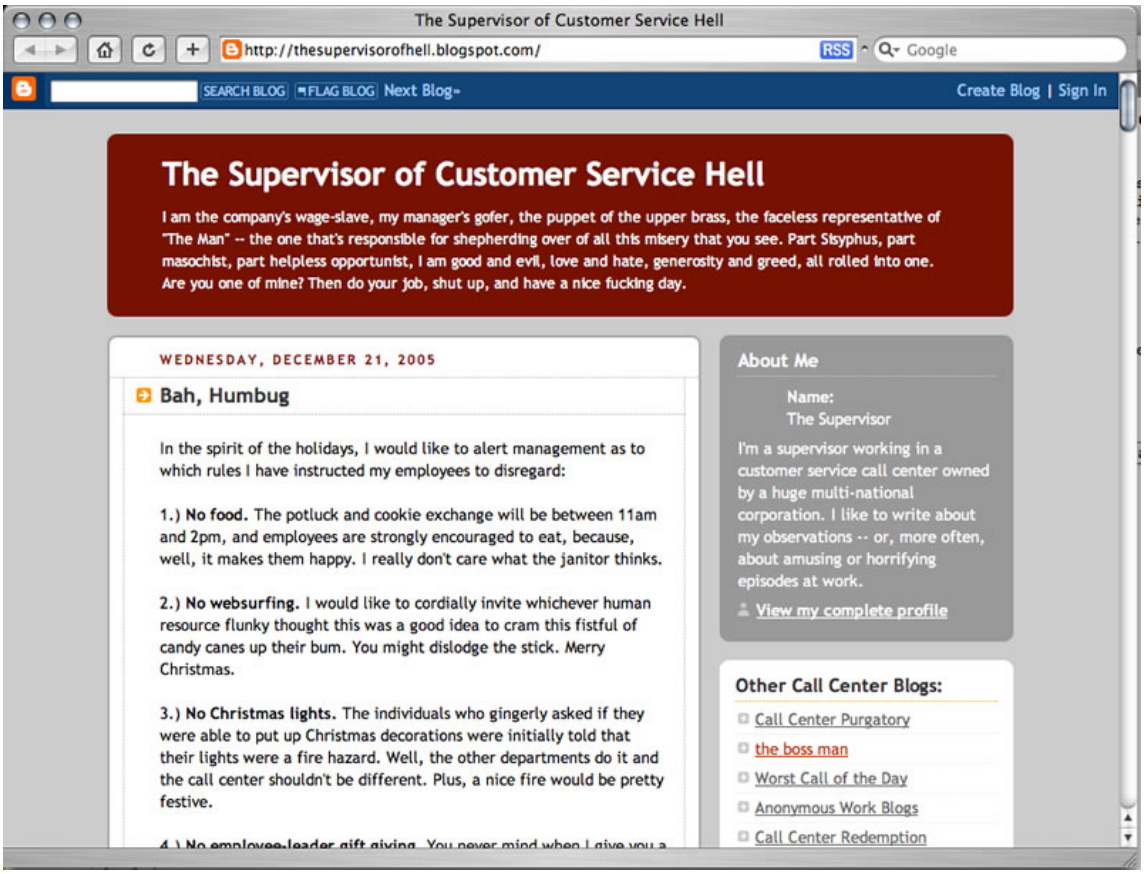

Figure 18: The Supervisor of Customer Service Hell (http://thesupervisorofhell.blogspot.com/) showing blogroll links to other call centre blogs from middle management and rank-and-file employees.

Call center bloggers frequently comment on each other's blog postings. For example, in response to The Supervisor's posting about company loyalty (described above), several other call center employees chime in with advice. "Miss Manager," another supervisor agrees with the need to disengage, writing that the job "will eat away at your soul and when you look in the mirror (if you ever get a bathroom break, that is), you don't even know yourself." Another call centre employee "CallGirl," concurs, "Unfortunately, I only learned not to trust when I was betrayed after 15 years with a company, so that they could replace me with a lower-paid worker. That realization took

the wind out of my sails, also, and sadly, I don't think I've been the same kind of employee since" (Supervisor, 2005a).

Retaining distance from organizational culture, and carving out space for one's own writing projects is an act of resistance that goes beyond mere venting or footdragging, particularly for those bloggers who view themselves as creative writers. Anonymous Me says that he writes his blog primarily to amuse. However, he also agrees that writers and artists can change the world by transmission of their experiences and ideas. He argues that when art is tied too overtly to a cause it becomes propaganda, yet he also feels that workblogs manifest an unconscious aim to subvert the corporate hierarchy or status quo (personal communication, 31 July 2007).

Like the Mancunian workbloggers who were interviewed in Chapter Four, Anonymous Me aims to keep his creative and work life separate, and to limit the encroachment of his job into the time he spends developing his own art. He is a diligent employee with a work ethic he describes as "solid but not exemplary," but does not look to his job as a central part of his identity, commenting, "it's pretty clear to everyone around me that I'm just there for a paycheck" (personal communication, 31 July 2007). He likes to keep his creativity separate from his paying work – he obtained a degree in English "just for me, not for any kind of career," and he feels that his creativity would suffer if he tried to tie it to a paycheck:

> Personally, I can only write when it's purely for my own amusement or edification. I lose all motivation to write when I have to do it to someone else's taste. My creativity (at least in terms of writing) would surely escape to the dusty recesses of my brain if I had to rely on it for a living. So yes, the blog has been enormously helpful in balancing what I'm paid to do with what I want to do (personal communication, 31 July 2007).

The prevalence of talented, critical, progressively minded writers in the call

center industry presents intriguing possibilities for social change, not least of which is the ability to make manifest a yearning for more absolutely unfettered time, and a demand, however subtle and polyphonic, for a radical shift in work-life balance and a significantly shorter working week that would enable creativity to flourish, unhindered by the exigencies of making a living.

Toward a Theory of Creative Resistance

The preponderance of high quality writing and the impressive degree of interconnectivity among call center blogs points to several conclusions about the social change potential of the blogosphere for knowledge workers in general. On the one hand, call center workers are perhaps one of the most exploited kinds of white collar workers, enduring Taylorized work environments where surveillance and monitoring of employees harks back to the factory discipline of previous centuries. Their protests could be interpreted as a sign of intense exploitation and degradation, in line with the Marxist notion of the emiserated proletariat who have nothing to lose but their chains and, in this case, have taken up the computer as a weapon against their oppressor. However, close reading of call center blogs reveals that those blogs that are successful in terms of building a community of readers, being sustained for a significant period of time, and featuring a high standard of creative or analytical writing, are not produced by the most emiserated or lowly call center workers. Rather, they are written by relatively educated people in somewhat stable jobs who have time to look about them, and who have perhaps manipulated their work environment (some of them becoming middle managers) to free up time for critical reflection on their working life. The particular banality of call center

work seems to lend an artistic sharpness to blogs that emerge from the industry, since call center employees are reporting from an sector that often epitomizes the dehumanizing influence of capital on the labor process and its tendency to commodify social relations. However, the best call center writing also highlights an existential dimension of employee struggles that are common, if less obviously, in more flexible and "enlightened" workplaces where workers are relatively free to structure their own time and set their own goals.

Call center bloggers, at least at the beginning before surveillance made this too difficult, used the tools of their cubicles for blogging activities, suggesting the dialectical emergence of resistance emerging from the capitalist labor process itself, which is embodied in Marx's analysis of the dynamic transcendence of capital (Marx, 1992). Witty, scathing, and satirical call center blogs such as *My Worst Call of the Day* draw artistic and political inspiration from the notable exploitation and routinization that is prevalent in the industry. However, these blogs also strongly suggest the hopes of New Class theory (Coates & Topham, 1970; Alvin Ward Gouldner, 1979; Mallet, 1975), which held up relatively skilled, educated, and comfortable workers as a powerful force in critiquing and moving beyond capitalism. As in Marcuse's more optimistic analysis of technology (Marcuse, 1991), some call center workers have been able to manipulate their circumstances and harness digital tools in order to free up time for critical reflection and for creative self-expression that protested their disgust at the system in general. Their articulate efforts to protest the meaninglessness of their work speaks to the

concerns of a larger white collar workforce that is often well-paid and materially comfortable yet existentially dissatisfied.

Close reading of the blogs in this sample, and of the reader comments and blogroll links that they sustain, indicates a series of little overlapping worlds that are characterized by broad agreement. Apart from occasional moments where readers realize that a blog they are reading is advocating views that they find offensive – for example when *Sentimental Geek*'s readers encounter her racist views – individual blogs seem largely to sustain broadly like-minded communities. Blogging is not only a "very large hidden subculture" (Richards, 2007, p. 5) but rather it is a multiplicity of subcultures that are concealed from each other by virtue of value and stylistic differences that make one set of blogs particularly appealing to a particular audience yet passed over quickly by another type of reader. The concentration of thoughtful comments at *Call Center Purgatory*, indicate that educated, progressive-minded employees are more likely to be drawn to the thoughtful world of *Call Center Purgatory* than to the misspelled invective of blogs such as *Shit That Bugs Me at Work,* even if AC's religious perspective differs from their own. This view of the blogosphere still harmonizes with the claim, made in the previous chapters, that some workers are using blogs to create and sustain sophisticated oppositional responses to work, but it adds the qualifying assertion that blogs tend to bolster a pre-existing orientation to the labor process and create communities of like-minded readers, rather than necessarily "converting" readers to new worldviews.

Creative talent, or lack of it, is a defining factor in the persistence and popularity of a particular blogger. A handful of particularly skilled bloggers have succeeded in creating iconoclastic reflections on contemporary knowledge work that appeal to a broad audience, but these blogs are as heterogeneous as they are critical. Even in the relatively interconnected case of the call center blogs, there is little sign that bloggers are interested in aligning themselves, in a coordinated fashion, with the labor movement. Their heterogeneity nevertheless supports a mutual respect that seems founded in the quality of the creative writing itself, as much as in the views behind it. As such, the blogosphere brings together writers with diverse yet broadly harmonized views and allows them to work loosely in concert in developing a polyphonic critique of the labor process. At certain rare points within the ever-shifting, noisy, and conflicted blogosphere there is a sense of an emerging community of writers and readers that is also an emerging community of progressive values, of workers who think of themselves as too gentle to live among wolves, and who may be increasingly more demanding about how their society is organized.

Ultimately, this dissertation is concerned with a particular type of worker who combines a critical intellectualism with the reality of being embedded in the knowledge workplace, and is able to transform his or her impressions into relatively sophisticated prose. This chapter has therefore suggested the limits of the anonymous workblogging phenomenon, indicating how the power of the medium is circumscribed by the ability of an individual employee to perform as author. The following chapter, outlines the characteristics of these employee-authors and attempts to show how their output

simultaneously draws on and adds to a rich fabric of creative resistance that succeeds in challenging the arrogance of corporate capitalism.

Chapter 6: The Fabric of Creative Resistance

> You don't even see people photocopying their body parts any more. Those all-in-one machines put an end to that. They're just not built as sturdy and they're always doing something. I mean, you can hardly hop aboard and Xerox your ass when there's a fax coming through at the same time.
> – blog entry by Shauny, *What's New Pussycat?*, October 23, 2003

> Generally speaking, clerks go unnoticed, people underestimate them.
> – Jose Saramago, *All the Names*

Introduction

Looking closely at the artistry and craftsmanship that workers employ in resisting corporate culture, the preceding chapters have highlighted the diversion of significant creative and intellectual resources away from the labor process. Anonymous workbloggers who possess sufficient writing talent and an iconoclastic orientation to the labor process, are able to transform their workplace experiences into witty, satirical critique of organizational ideology and office culture. These wage-workers maintain a writerly ambivalence and autonomy that suggests a heterogeneous confluence of anti-corporate opinion rather than attachment to a unified political agenda. Their writings provide a solid anchor for individual identity that militates against the possibility of becoming a "company man" and – in the presence of a growing ecological and economic crisis – helps to shift the *zeitgeist* in favor of alternatives to corporate capitalism.

This dissertation has posited the existence of a countercultural trope, in today's knowledge economy, that is limited to a small group of skilled, creatively talented, and iconoclastic workers, yet contributes to the ecologically, economically, and ethically mandated shift toward sustainable production and reduced working time. These employees limit their job responsibilities in order make room for the imagination; embody their iconoclastic responses to wage labor in a tangible and enduring creative

form; use globally networked technologies for rapid exchange and dialogue; and organize their wage labor in a manner that frees up time and energy from the encroachment of capital, inhabiting a critical space where the dream of what could be supercedes acceptance of what is.

While blogging is, most likely, an ephemeral form of protest, creative resistance to wage labor is not. The employee-authors in this study contribute to, and are shaped by, a broad and intellectually sophisticated iconoclastic terrain that reaches back at least 200 years. The significance of anonymous workblogging is best understood against the backdrop of literary, celluloid, and musical milestones in the anti-work or anti-commercial tradition, with which bloggers interact. Surveying some of these works and examining the lives of their authors, the first part of this chapter argues that anonymous workbloggers form part of a rich and well-established subculture that emerges from within wage labor itself – opposing capitalist ideology and celebrating the reclamation of company time for one's own creative pursuits. Analyzing the literary tradition of "hiding out" in wage labor situations while pursuing one's art, I argue that this orientation is both political and activist, being circumscribed but not negated by its "armchair" and complicit nature.

The concluding chapter, builds on the loose consensus in the anonymous workblogging tradition of maximizing unfettered time for spontaneous self-development through rigorous separation of wage labor and creative activity. Acknowledging bloggers' deeply held ecological and ethical concerns about the impact of corporate capitalism and their enthusiasm for the three-day week, the final chapter outlines the need for social change that underlies their discontent, imbuing blog postings with a critical

power even where the decision to give up material comforts or join forces with what is perceived as a strident left politics is absent. Accommodating the stuff of bloggers' dreams, this study concludes by tracing the possibility of human emancipation through nonwork, setting out from Marx's concept of minimizing the working week as elaborated in the *Grundrisse* (1993). However, using the literati of the past as a guide, the conclusion also highlights the intellectual thrill of unrealized dreams and foiled ambitions, which makes the postponement of the end of capitalism, and oppression itself, a source of exquisite fulfillment for those who pursue their art clandestinely.

Critical accounts of office work: A historical perspective

Anonymous workblogging has not emerged from the void. A vast library of iconoclastic creative responses to the labor process offers ballast to workers who are being bombarded by new workplace philosophies that demand total commitment and uncritical dedication to the organization. Looking broadly at the tradition of writing about office work, the following surveys critical literary accounts of knowledge work and argues that these – through a loose fabric of association – furnish anonymous workblogs with political and intellectual gravitas. Drawing in particular on the lives of writers whose accounts of office life were drawn from their own workplace experiences, I underscore the argument that creative writers are unlikely to align themselves with an activist agenda, yet are politically and ethically motivated, and capable of political impact. Focusing on the relationship between non-literary wage labor and Franz Kafka's writing process, I develop an archetype for the embedded yet critical employee, using this archetype, along with testimony from the lives of Eliot, Miller, and Pessoa, to analyze anonymous workblogging's potential and limitations with regard to social change.

Direct experience of wage labor is not necessary in order to write a powerful critique of it. For example, E.M. Forster's (1910) autodidactic office clerk Leonard Bast, who conceals poetry and scientific pamphlets beneath his ledger, exists in sharp counterpoint to the "anger and telegrams" of the capitalist society that surrounds him. Forster's writing challenges not only the workplace ideology of the time in which *Howard's End* was written, but also persists as a viable critique of post-industrial capitalism. Yet Forster's life as an independently wealthy intellectual involved no exposure to the office routine. Similarly, Oscar Wilde's aestheticism, which promotes a cult of idleness under such edicts as, "work is the curse of the drinking classes," derives from an aristocratic tradition that upholds the dignity of non-work and rejects the Protestant work ethic of the vulgar commercial classes.

Of particular interest to this dissertation, however, are literary *insider* accounts of office life, which I refer to broadly as the "writer-clerk tradition." These direct responses to wage labor span over two centuries, and the novels and poems inspired by white-collar drudgery are some of the milestones of modern literature. Having endured the office routine, writers such as Camus, Henry Miller, Franz Kafka, T.S. Eliot, Dickens, and Gogol all saw in white-collar life some of the fundamental contradictions of their age. As alluded to in Chapter Four, the lives of these authors, as well as the works they produced, provide insight into the orientation of today's bloggers to office jobs that are simultaneously enjoyable and deeply troubling.

Nineteenth and early- to mid- twentieth century writers were preoccupied with the physical hardship endured by low-paid clerks in damp offices, but they were also concerned with the psychological dimension of the labor process, depicting rule-bound

and petty bureaucracies that tyrannized every aspect of a worker's existence, trampling human dreams and desires. Writings about lowly office workers flowed from the pens of authors such as Charles Dickens, who had worked as a law clerk and endured factory labor, as well as writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, who were independently wealthy (even if, in the case of the latter, precariously so) and conjured the lives of clerks from their imaginations rather than from direct experience.

Charles Dickens transformed his experience of the capitalist labor process into fiction that challenged the 19th century business world's glorification of the separation of heart from mind. His office-related characters and settings possess keenly observed and exaggerated traits that communicate the shortcomings both of individual human nature and society. John Wemmick, a law clerk with a letterbox mouth, embodies the conflict between human feeling and impersonal bureaucratic values in *Great Expectations* (1861); in *Little Dorrit*'s (1857) Circumlocution Office, paper circulates furiously but nothing of any meaning or importance ever gets done; and, looking more broadly at industrialism, *Hard Times'* (1854) Thomas Gradgrind, "a man of facts and calculations" (Dickens, 1980, p. 12) parodies an industrial ideology focused on rational calculation and efficiency, mourning the loss of the sensual and the spontaneous from the lives of working people.

Among nineteenth century writers, the Russians made a specialty of capturing the inner lives of low-ranking civil servants who worked in obscurity in stiflingly impersonal bureaucratic hierarchies. Nikolai Gogol[24], who was of aristocratic birth but worked for

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[24] Gogol is Ukrainian but wrote in Russian and is considered to be part of the Russian literary tradition.

some years as a minor civil servant, wrote a series of stories – such as "The Nose" (1835) and "The Overcoat" (1842) that captured the life of the Petersburg bureaucrat, reflecting upon the tormented yearnings of insignificant men. Tolstoy's (1886) short story *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, is the reflection of a bureaucrat who looks back on his life and finds it has been meaningless and wasted. Dostoyevsky's early work *Poor Folk* (1846) charts the romantic inner life of an impoverished, aging civil servant, while *The Double* (1846) features a clerk who meets an exact and rather cheeky replica of himself in the desk opposite. And in *Notes From Underground* (1864) , an embittered civil servant holes himself up in a St. Petersburg basement to mull over the contradictions of human existence and the failure of reason, and write out his manifesto against men of action.

Another landmark in office writing is Herman Melville's short novel *Bartleby the Scrivener,* which announces in its opening lines that office clerks are more intriguing than they might initially appear. The narrator remarks on his fascination with scriveners as, "what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written" (2004, p. 1). Bartleby's "I prefer not to," in Melville's (1853) tale of the intractable law clerk has been widely debated in the literature on resistance. Hardt and Negri (2001) see in Bartleby's passive refusal a clearing of the decks – an opening that may be colonized by less passive forces, which push toward the positive negation and overcoming of capitalism. Zizek (2006) has argued that "I prefer not to," is *in itself* a revolutionary moment, that infuriates rather than parasitizes the capitalist enterprise, enduring as a substantive force that is not merely superceded but persists as an essential part of the process of overcoming.

These nineteenth century literary works highlight the beautiful contradiction between the clerk's humble exterior and his sensitive, quirky, and romantic soul. From the clerk's vantage point, the oppressiveness and banality of the total institution is palpable. His stifled inner life is a commentary on the failure of industrial capitalism or Tsarist bureaucracy to meet the needs of the human heart. His poverty and servility castigate a social system that fails to maintain dignity and meet basic human needs. And the tension of his existence holds up a mirror to the existential struggle of human nature against itself, hinting at cracks in the Age of Reason's confidence that its bold machinery will lead to peace and happiness for mankind.

Twentieth century writing focuses more explicitly on the existential dimension of working life, and the contradictions and crises of individual identity. White-collar life and dehumanized bureaucracy are examined in works such as Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), which features a salesman who loathes his job and *The Trial* (1925), which is partly set in suffocating offices. After Josef K almost faints while visiting a government office, the bystanders discuss his predicament:

> "I am an official too, after all, and accustomed to the air in offices, but the conditions are just too awful, you say so yourselves."
>
> "See," he said to the girl, "I've hit on the truth. It's only here the gentleman feels unwell, not in other places" (Kafka, 1999)

In the same decade, Eliot's "The Wasteland" (1921) finds office workers confined by stultifying 9-5 routine and living compartmentalized existences. In the rush hour of the poem's "Unreal City," sighing and lifeless workers trudge across the bridge to work, arriving at the "dead sound on the stroke of nine," and confined until the end of the work day when "the human engine waits like a taxi throbbing waiting" for release to a private

life where, "The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights Her stove, and lays out food in tins."

In the mid-century, Camus' (1995) – who cited Herman Melville as one of his key influences – discovers the mundane as something far more horrifying than his childhood poverty in his first office job. Writing autobiographically as "Jacques" in *Le Premier Homme* (written in 1960, and published several decades after his death), Camus recalls his summer job in an Algerian shipping office, noting that it was not rough treatment by his employers that horrified him, but the stultifying office routine:

> But this office work came from nowhere and led nowhere. Selling and buying, everything turned on these ordinary and petty actions. Although he had lived till then in poverty, it was in this office that Jacques discovered the mundane, and wept for the light he had lost. (Camus, 1995, p. 268)

Camus' most famous protagonist, Meursault, in *L'Etranger*, an office worker whom author Julian Barnes has called, "one of the most disaffected characters in postwar fiction," (1995) moves through his pleasant yet mundane existence as though through soup, numb and disengaged. Seasoned by his own experience of the mundane, Camus sees through modern white-collar life to a disenchanted void.

Commenting on the legacy of the Human Relations Movement as well as anticipating the total commitment work culture of later decades, novels of the 1950s and 60s disrupt the logic of continuous labor and enlightened management. Sloan Wilson's *Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1955), depicts executive Tom Rath's struggle against the seductive encroachment of office work into his personal life. And in a satirical vein, John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* (published 1980 after Toole's suicide, but written in the 1960s) situates the overweight and over-educated medievalist Ignatius J Reilly as an office clerk in a dilapidated pants factory where he proceeds to wreak havoc

from within the organization. Echoing in some ways the orientation of today's anonymous workbloggers, he reassures himself that "being actively engaged in the system which I criticize" (Toole, 1980, p. 46), will be an interesting irony, and dedicates a loose leaf folder to a new journal entitled, "Diary of a Working Boy, or, Up From Sloth" (p. 86) in which he enthusiastically records his observations of the working world.

More recent novels capture and critique the insidious nature of corporate and dotcom culture, in which drudgery and repetition have been replaced by artificial cheeriness and an attempt to colonize the worker's soul. Contemporary novels offer an existential recoil from a business culture that presents itself as whole yet is essentially hollow. These novelists seek to capture the subtle exploitation and shattering of identity inherent in white collar culture. In this vein, Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991) critiques the moral void underlying the yuppie corporate culture of the eighties, Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs* (1995) captures the emotionally barren and angst-ridden existences of software engineers caught up in Microsoft and startup work culture, and Michel Houellebecq[25]'s *La Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* (published in France in 1994, translated as the less intriguingly titled *Whatever* in 1999) portrays the spiritual sickness of a corporate IT worker patterned after the author's experiences as a computer engineer who, bombarded by corporate babble of the firm's enterprise culture, protests the pointless and menacing nature of his work life:

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[25] Houellebecq has been hailed as an intellectual descendent of Camus, and there are many allusions to Camus' work in his novels. Platform, his third novel, opens with the line, "Father died last year," evoking the opening line of Camus' L'Etranger (Barnes, 2003).

> I don't like this world. I definitely do not like it. The society in which I live disgusts me; advertising sickens me; computers make me puke. My entire work as a computer expert consists of adding to the data [...] It has no meaning (Houellebecq, 1999, p. 82).

Anti-work ideas as pseudo self-help, comedy, and interactive art

In recent years, eloquent anti-work manifestoes have also emerged in the realm of literary non-fiction and pseudo-self-help manuals that are, arguably, a reaction against the earnestness of the enlightened management literature reviewed earlier in this study. Corinne Maier's bestseller, *Bonjour Laziness: Jumping off the Corporate Ladder* (2005), counsels office workers to "…seek out the most useless positions," and to "never, under any circumstances, accept a position of responsibility" (p. 135). Paying homage to Oscar Wilde, G.K. Chesterton, and others, Tom Hodgkinson's *How to be Idle* (2005), which was a top ten bestselling book in the UK, celebrates laziness and overtly counters the long-hours, total commitment work culture. Hodgkinson is also the founder and editor of *The Idler*, a magazine that celebrates idle reflection and promotes lifestyles based on shorter working hours (also available on the web at http://www.idler.co.uk).

In the past few years a new form of humorous self-help book has emerged, marketed to knowledge workers who feel the squeeze of the corporate culture-driven workplace. As Mark Saltzman writes in White Collar Slacker's Handbook: Tech Tricks to Fool Your Boss:

> Technology might have created a 24/7 work culture, but a handful of savvy white-collar cubicle dwellers are standing up to 'the man' and using these very same (de)vices – the PC, World Wide Web, email, and portable gadgets—to make it look like they're working when and where they're not" (2005, p. 2).

Saltzman's book is a step-by-step tech handbook that guides workers through techniques such as using remote access software to circumvent company restrictions on Internet use; faking corrupted documents and software installations; and making use of

panic buttons such as the infamous “Alt+Tab” keystroke that quickly conceals non-work activity from the eyes of a passing supervisor. In a similar vein, Chris Morran's *Hardly Working: The Overachieving Underperformer's Guide to Doing as Little as Possible in the Office*, directly addresses the need to appear to “go the extra mile” in today's workplace, presenting strategies that employees can use to make it look as if they are putting in long hours while in fact freeing up time to work on a novel or screenplay on company time. Morran emphasizes the “revolutionary” role of the “Overachieving Underperforming Employee” (2004, p. 101), who cleverly sabotages productivity and sows discontent among his colleagues while making sure he does not get labeled as unproductive or disruptive.

In the realm of TV and film, The BBC's smash hit series *The Office* and the movie *Office Space* stand out as eloquent protests against contemporary workplace culture. Set in the mid-sized sub-office of a paper merchants in Slough, *The Office* was originally aired in the UK in 2001and gained huge popularity on both sides of the Atlantic. The show revolves around the banality of office life, following manager David Brent's ill-fated attempts to apply new age management techniques to his unreceptive staff. Brent grapples constantly with downsizing-hungry visitors from head office and, in spite of his peppy willingness to go the extra mile for the company, he is made redundant in the final episode. As one of the most successful comedies of recent years, *The Office* has spawned spin-off versions in multiple languages.

The Office was preceded by the movie *Office Space* (1999), which is set in Initech, an uninspiring US workplace with an aggressively peppy corporate culture. *Office Space* follows a stressed-out cubicle dweller who seizes control of his situation,

and decides not to go into work any more. In a bizarre series of events, he becomes the darling of a team of management consultants who have been brought in to streamline the company, offering them a brutally honest account of how he spends his work day that resonates with many cubicle-dwellers:

> I generally come in at least fifteen minutes late. I use the side door, that way Lundbergh [his boss] cannot see me, and after that I just sort of space out for about an hour … I just stare at my desk but it looks like I'm working. I do that for probably another hour after lunch too. I'd say in a given week I probably do only fifteen minutes of real actual work (Judge, 1999).

In the realm of popular music, anti-work lyrics abound, from direct references to the office experience to more abstract yearnings for time off. Indie music, with its distinctly anti-establishment orientation has produced sharply disaffected lyrics that chronicle the suffocated dreams of workers. The Smiths' song "Frankly Mr Shankly" (from the album *The Queen is Dead*) intones, "Frankly, Mr. Shankly, this position I've held; It pays my way, and it corrodes my soul" (Morrisey, 1986); *Radiohead's* track "No Surprises" (from the album *OK Computer*) opens with, "A heart that's full up like a landfill, a job that slowly kills you" (Yorke, 1997), and Clearlake's "I Want to Live in a Dream," on the Lido album, imagines a life without work and money worries, protesting,"I'm sorry but I really can't be bothered" (Pegg, 2001).

The Internet is the site of multifaceted anti-work or work avoidance artworks, interactive games and forums. In addition to the blogs that are the focus of my study. Multiple "Bored at Work" sites offer multimedia creations and forums designed to distract workers who are able to surf the net on company time. In a more intellectual vein, the "Bureau of Workplace Interruptions," (http://www.interruptions.org/) is a "time-stealing agency" created by artist Chris Barr, which invites workers to schedule an interruption in their work day. Visitors to the site are informed:

> The ruptures we create are temporary spaces for open dialogue, invisible resistance, and general amusement. In short, we hope to invigorate some of the time you spend at work in order to create new experiences and possibilities outside the flow of capital (Barr, 2006).

Taken together with this broad fabric of critical response to the labor process, the writings of bloggers, which might otherwise be more easily disregarded as "light" venting against a system that otherwise delivers the goods, are imbued with a weightier significance. Several of the bloggers in this study refer directly in interviews and blog postings to this iconoclastic cultural fabric. Recall, for example, from Chapter Four, Tim's use of Joni Mitchell's lyrics from *A Free Man in Paris* to articulate his sense of lost freedom; Slowdown's reference to Phillip Larkin's poem "Toads" as a protest against his long-hours work culture; Beth's use of Indie music playlists that channel and express her ennui and dissatisfaction; and Ben's work-related blog postings that are grouped as "Diary of a Working Boy," a direct homage to Ignatius J. Reilly.

The culture of critical discourse in which these liberal arts educated workers engage, is unquestionably a space in which Dickens, Kafka, and their ilk are respected, if not revered. Further, this cultural exchange is not one-way or bounded, as the (albeit rare) case of blogger-turned-littérateur Catherine Sanderson, fired author of *Petite Anglaise*, illustrates. Direct influence and use of literary artifacts by workers is difficult to track, and an attempt to assert direct and definite causality between, for example, a liking for Dickens and the work ethic of a particular knowledge worker, would be, arguably, misguided. Nevertheless, these authors are denizens of an intellectual subculture that, by association, imbues their writing with gravitas and militates against the dismissal of anonymous workblogs as an isolated or apolitical phenomenon.

The Writer-Clerk Tradition

Analysis of these creative and intellectual responses to work culture reveals a rich iconoclastic tradition in which it is readily apparent that the producers of anti-work philosophy are often workers themselves, rather than outside observers of the work world. Looking at the double lives of writers such as Franz Kafka, T.S. Eliot, Henry Miller, and Fernando Pessoa – who sojourned in office jobs yet maintained a powerful critical distance from their jobs and from the ideological system that underpinned it – it becomes apparent that participation in the work world and critique of it are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, observation of author's lives reveals that "hiding out" in a humble office job – even or especially when double life becomes a torment – can be artistically liberating and empowering. Self-incarceration in a well-ordered workplace in which one occupies a semi-outsider role, curiously sharpens the senses, accentuating the ecstasy of snatched moments of freedom, and restraining self-destructive urges, yet allowing the creative imagination to soar.

Franz Kafka: The Archetypal Writer-Clerk

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) worked from 1908 until the end of his life as an insurance clerk at the Workmen's Accident Institute in Prague, a semi-governmental organization that oversaw accident prevention and provided compensation for injured workers throughout the Kingdom of Bohemia's major industries. He was both a hardworking employee and a tortured but highly productive artist. His refusal to merge creative and wage labor, and his resulting struggle against time-scarcity and over-commitment to his paid job throw light on the decision made by the bloggers in this study to pursue their art under the veil of non-literary paid employment.

Born into a middle class Jewish business family, Kafka obtained a doctorate in law and dabbled with the idea of a paying literary career, but – craving a degree of stability and structure – became an insurance clerk in his mid-twenties. Through an influential uncle, he obtained a position at the *Assicurazioni Generali*, an "obdurately medieval" and rule-bound insurance firm that paid him a meager salary for a six-day working week where long workdays were the norm. Right away, the tension between the creative intensity that comes from time-scarcity, and the painful sacrifice of creative time and energy to office drudgery becomes apparent. After his first week at work he wrote happily to his lover Hedwig Weiler that he was learning Italian and taking vigorous exercise at the end of the working day: "True, I have a position with a tiny salary of 80 crowns and an immense eight to nine hours of work, but I gobble up the hours outside the office like a wild beast" (Pawel, 1984, p. 177). His excitement at this new sense of the precious nature of time was offset by an awareness that too much time was being wasted. He writes a month later, "What I resent is not the work as such so much as the indolence of swampy time. The office hours, you know, are indivisible; even during the last half hour one feels the pressure of the preceding eight as keenly as the first one" (p. 177). Lamenting his lost freedom he exalted idleness, while remaining resigned to his office-bound existence:

> People who haven't idled away at least part of their life till age twenty-five are much to be pitied; the money you earn you can't take with you to the grave, unlike – and of this I am convinced – the time you lazed away. I am in the office at eight in the morning and leave at 6:30 at night (p. 177).

In spite of his awareness that his art was suffering as a result of his office job, Kafka stubbornly resisted the idea of pursuing a paying literary career, insisting on

absolute separation of his writing craft from his paid employment. As his friend Max Brod writes:

> Now when it came to the point of having to make a living, Franz insisted that the job have nothing to do with literature; that would have seemed to him a debasement of literary creativity. The bread-and-butter job had to be kept strictly separate from his writing; he would accept no commingling of the two, such as for instance in journalism…" (Pawel, 1984, p. 174).

After a creatively unproductive year at the Assicurazioni Generali, Kafka obtained a position with the Workmen's Accident Institute, which by virtue of its semi-governmental structure implied a mere six hour workday, leaving afternoons free for literary work.

According to biographer Ernst Pawel[26], Kafka's new job afforded much-needed collegiality and structure, and provided him with meaningful work that improved industrial safety. In addition, his conscientious and skillful work was rewarded by frequent pay rises and promotions. Kafka was fascinated by the insurance business and had a hand in writing important documents in which he seemed to take some pleasure and pride, sending copies of the company's annual report to his friends, with his own contributions underlined. He was popular with his colleagues, one of whom referred to him as "our office baby", (p. 188) and held in high esteem by both his boss, who thought him an "eminently hardworking employee endowed with exceptional talent and devotion to duty" (p. 186). Even the office cleaning lady remembered Kafka as exceptionally considerate and gentlemanly.

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[26] Pawel also lived the double life of writer and insurance executive, spending 36 years as an employee of New York Life Insurance.

At the same time, “he hated the monster bureaucracy to which he felt indentured” (175) and was able to behold and critique the system’s ramifications from his relatively comfortable position. His professional surveys of Bohemian factories made him aware of the frequent maiming and death of workers, and the cold impersonality of the apparatus that was supposed to deliver compensation or, better, keep them from harm. In the early years of his career, Kafka is rumored to have quietly intervened in order to overcome bureaucratic impasses, expressing his surprise and concern that the workers did not rise up against the bureaucracy that victimized them: “How modest these people are. Instead of storming the institute and smashing the place to bits, they come and plead” (Pawel, p. 188).

As his increasing seniority multiplied his responsibilities, Kafka struggled with the energy-sapping demands of his job and resented the sacrifice of time that should have been spent writing to his growing duties as an insurance executive. Pawel comments that, “recognition, success, promotions were all bought at enormous expense in time stolen from his true task in life” (p. 190). He wrote to a friend in 1911 that balancing his writing with his job meant leading a “horrible double life, from which madness probably offers the only way out” (p. 190), and in his diary he railed against the impossibility of balancing writing and his work responsibilities, “At the office I live up to my outward duties, but not to my inner duties, and those unfulfilled duties grow into a permanent torment” (p. 222).

Kafka was tormented by his effort to separate his job from his artistic life but felt that the purity of self-expression demanded such a rigid separation. The stifling offices and bureaucratic nightmares that characterize his novels and short stories, are testimony

to this unrest, in spite of Kafka's apparent simultaneous enjoyment of his job, which offered the neurotic author much needed structure and collegiality. His experiences illuminate the efforts of today's workbloggers to pursue their art clandestinely, supported by wage labor that leaves time and energy free for creative projects. This process of "hiding out" simultaneously provides artistic inspiration and fuels their critical orientation while providing the comforts, collegiality, and sometimes plain job satisfaction that balances a creative process that is often highly strung and erratic. Shielding their art from economic considerations they are able to produce without consideration for what might sell or be judged important by cultural institutions and the artistic community.

There are many limits to this archetype, as applied to the bloggers in this study. First, Franz Kafka was a literary genius who composed numerous towering works of fiction, and it is not the intention here to make comparisons as to the relative degree of talent that is manifest the respective writings of world-famous authors and today's anonymous workbloggers. Second, Kafka was extremely neurotic, depressive, and tortured – a comparison with his life does not allow for the relatively happy compromise that some of the bloggers in this study achieve through limiting their ambition and freeing up work time to pursue their creative projects. However, his perception of the inversely proportional relationship between promotion/job responsibility and creative output underscores the wisdom behind bloggers' careful management of the appraisal process to prevent promotion and the increased commitment that more senior positions demand. A third limitation of this comparison is that there is no evidence that Kafka wrote his novels on company time. Rather, he sought to locate a government job with a six-hour work day,

something that was possible in Prague a century ago but is less easily imaginable in today's long-hours work culture, which remains fixated on the eight-hour day as an unchangeable norm. Perhaps Kafka's six hours of wage labor point to a more fulfilling relationship between wage labor and creative activity that – in an enlightened society based on minimizing working time – could obviate the need for time-stealing.

Elliot, Miller, and Pessoa

T.S. Eliot, who experienced a somewhat less tortured double life than Kafka, worked from 1917-1925 in the foreign department of London's Lloyds Bank, and represents the more happy yet enduringly critical compromise that can be achieved between wage labor and art. Eliot enjoyed the creative tension that the office routine introduced into his life and he drew artistic inspiration from "sojourning among the termites" (L. Gordon, 2000, p. 167). His friend Ezra Pound criticized his choice of career but, as Lyndall Gordon observes, the poet reveled in his humble disguise: "Eliot was invisible as a man of destiny: superman in the guise of a clerk. Pound and others thought it pitiful to spend his days at a bank, but it left his imagination free, and he relished the completeness of his disguise, for he excelled as a clerk" (p. 165).

Leading a double life as clerk and poet imbued Eliot's life with an intensity that illuminated the problems of his society. During his snatched lunch break, Eliot watched the old-time fishermen along the banks of the Thames and marveled at how they "spat time out" (L. Gordon, 2000, p. 164), unhindered by the rigid schedule that drove him back to the office once lunch was over. The office job was, for Eliot, an experience that sensitized him to the imposition of numbing routine and the time-scarcity that characterized the modern urban labor process. Eliot ultimately ended his sojourn and proceeded to engage in wage labor that directly drew upon his literary talents. However,

his decision to pursue a clerkship furnished him with insights that fueled his famous commentary on modernity. Taking refuge in obscurity afforded him creative freedom and confidence to develop a style that may not have blossomed so readily had he spent his days in literary circles.

The double life of the employee-artist is enacted more explosively in the case of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn*, which illustrates the rich satirical fodder that derives from wage labor, the urge to reclaim time for one's creative and subversive endeavors, and the dialectical relationship between the writing process and rejection of the system in which one is embedded. Miller's writing career was launched by an ill-fated commingling of literature and bread-and-butter that ended ultimately in his 1930 flight to Paris to live as an impoverished artist. He spent the years 1920-1924 employed at the Western Union telegraph company in New York where he was responsible for hiring and firing messengers in a chaotic office. Western Union, which Miller calls alternately the Cosmodemographic, Cosmodemonic, and Cosmococcic Telegraph Company of North America was, "senseless from the bottom up. A waste of men, material and effort. A hideous farce against a backdrop of sweat and misery" (Miller, 1993, p. 19).

As a writer, Miller felt that his desk job perch allowed him, "a bird's eye view of the whole American society" (p. 20), in all its rotten glory. Sucked into the chaotic office culture, he worked hard at the job but, along with his colleagues, kept an eye on the door, exploiting any opportunity for a prank or a sexual encounter: "We were a merry crew, united in our desire to fuck the company at all costs." (30) This desire was indulged when Miller received an invitation from the vice-president to write a Horatio Alger-style story about the messengers. Miller was repelled by the idea of using his literary skill in

the service of the organization as, for him, the self-reliant, entrepreneurial, rags-to-riches heroes created by Alger were the "dream of a sick America." He resolved that his story would be a chance to, "wipe Horatio Alger from the North American consciousness," and to use all the writer's notes he had been gathering for years from behind his office desk. He wanted to capture the dirty reality of the people who came to his office looking for work, often destitute and derelict, yet in Miller's opinion worth a hundred times more than the degrading job they had to beg for. The result, a story called *Clipped Wings*, was a story about twelve messengers, "gentle souls, insulted and injured, who run amok or suffer violence; the stories are full of bitterness and horror, ending in murder or suicide, usually both" (Wickes, 1974, pp. 170-192).

Miller felt that as a piece of writing the story was a failure, but the process of writing it was cathartic, driving him to break with the 9-5 once and for all. The desk job increasingly symbolized an inertia that he had to escape in order to become an artist. In *Sexus*, he expresses the colonization of the self and the foreclosure of reflection that his Western Union job entailed: “I hardly know myself, living the way I do. I’m engulfed…I wish I could have days, weeks, months, just *to think*” (p. 189). He continues:

> Do you know what I think sometimes?” I went on. “I think that if I had two or three quiet days of just sheer thinking I’d upset everything. Fundamentally everything is cock-eyed. It’s that way because we don’t let ourselves think.

For Miller, the life of the writer-clerk is ultimately untenable. As he later wrote in *Tropic of Capricorn*, "I had to learn, as I soon did, that one must give up everything and not do anything else but write, that one must write and write and write…" (Miller, p. 34). Although the break was necessary, his years of office life gave him rich artistic fodder that formed some of the most original passages of his work and his most vivid condemnation of American society. Miller, with his readiness to flee, his ability to

sacrifice the stability of the day-job for the penurious unknown, represents the reckless moment in anonymous workblogs, the dream of quitting that runs through many of the blogs in this study.

As an icon of creative resistance, Miller is both ballast that makes ennui and participation tolerable ("I am doing this banal job in order to satirize the system"), and a disruptive force that militates against acceptance and ennobles only those who are willing to take a risk – of being fired for their blog or of impulsively throwing up the job after a bad day. The time to think that Miller craves is, arguably, the same time that Marcuse discusses in reopening the possibility of the Great Refusal. It is this idea that many of the anonymous workbloggers in this study subscribe to. Even without taking Miller's final step of giving up the job to pursue an artistic career, they live with an acute awareness of that possibility. Their efforts to steal time within the working day are the beginnings of a reflective process that could potentially "upset everything." Even if this possibility is held out only as an aesthetic sensibility that is indulged during the interstices of the working day, it has political power when waged, through well-crafted and widely read blog postings, against a culture of continuous labor and total commitment.

While Miller exemplifies the cathartic break with routine, Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) expresses the fulfillment that derives from endlessly postponing that break. This Portuguese writer who never left Lisbon as an adult, wrote an ode to hiding out as part of what became his *Book of Disquiet*, which comprises a set of loosely associated fragments – some of them written on office stationery from the firms he worked for – that were found in a trunk after his death. Pessoa's office work involved writing business letters in foreign languages and he was fairly autonomous and comfortable. However,

living through his autobiographical semi-heteronym, Bernard Soares, he becomes an assistant bookkeeper in a fabric warehouse, whose job is to enter prices and quantities of fabric into a ledger.

Soares exalts inaction and lowly clerkdom as an aesthetic ideal and a source of existential satisfaction. His writings, which recount mundane office events and muse philosophically on existence, are not dissimilar in tone and structure from blog postings. He writes that there is "an aesthetics to wasting time" (Pessoa, 2003, p. 266), which consists of carefully managed monotony that renders small events thrilling and frees the mind to dream. Intrinsic to his philosophy is the notion that dissatisfaction is innate to the writer and that actual achievement of ambitions removes the more infinite and exquisite pleasure of unfulfilled dreams. Echoing Dostoevsky's underground man he rails against men of action and instead advocates "a code of inertia for superior souls in modern societies" (p. 265). Resolutely opposed to advancement that would awaken him from this thrillingly monotonous existence, he longs to remain in the lower ranks of the organization: "I think that I shall always be an assistant bookkeeper in a fabric warehouse. I hope, with absolute sincerity, never to be promoted to head bookkeeper" (p. 314). Relishing his clerkdom as a sublime realm of the possible, he admits that movement toward his goal would mean closure and a narrowing of existence:

> "My days at the office, where I always do the same dull and useless work, are punctuated by visions of me escaping, by dreamed remnants of faraway islands, by feasts in the promenades of parks from other eras, by other landscapes, another I. But I realize, between two ledger entries, that if I had all this, none of it would be mine" (p. 154).

Pessoa's writerly acknowledgement that the artistic temperament thrives in a state of carefully managed adversity is echoed by Henry Miller who, in spite of his own

confident rejection of bourgeois capitalism, is disinterested in crafting alternative social programs, or writing manifestoes:

> [A writer] doesn't want a new world which might be established immediately, because he knows it would never suit him. He wants an impossible world in which he is the uncrowned puppet-ruler dominated by forces utterly beyond his control. He is content to rule insidiously – in the fictive world of symbols – because the very thought of contact with rude and brutal realities frightens him. True, he has a greater grasp of reality than other men, but he makes no effort to impose that higher reality on the world by force of example (Miller, 1965, p. 18).

Miller and Pessoa express the existential satisfaction that is gained from hiding out, making transparent the pursuit of an art that is deeply critical, which flourishes alongside an existential interest in perpetuation of the exploitation and injustice that inspires it.

Taken together, the lives of these writers – Kafka, Eliot, Miller, Pessoa – express convictions that describe and circumscribe the lives and limitations of the bloggers in this study. Overlapping and contradictory, their choices and their writings loosely describe a way of being that is anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic in nature, yet also inert and opposed to action, beyond the action of putting words together and expanding the time available for waking dreams. The implications, in terms of social programs or organized social change are indeterminate but the region that is carved out is one of possibility rather than resignation. As Miller expresses, the price of writers' extreme sensitivity is often inertia. The writer-clerk tradition denies its own power but in doing so creates an aesthetic of time-wasting that both negates the existing system and agitates by provoking dreams of the alternative.

Kafka, Miller, and their ilk would be a very sorry and ill-chosen organizing committee for progressive politics. Kafka could not even eat in company due to his neurotic attachment to Horace Fletcher's mastication guidelines; Eliot was prone to

nervous breakdowns and anti-semitism; Miller's repugnant sexism and malice are anathema to progressive ideals; and Pessoa writes that humanitarians make him sick to the pit of his stomach. Yet, as icons of an oppositional, countercultural, and subversive tradition these writers are linked by a current of discontent that exists in continuity with the blog writings featured in this study. Drawing on insights from the writer-clerk tradition, the following chapter posits a theory of creative resistance that encompasses the maverick talents and political skittishness of today's writer clerks.

Chapter 7: Anonymous Workblogging and Social Change

Introduction

This dissertation set out by considering three major competing theoretical orientations against which to evaluate the anonymous workblogging phenomenon. The first, a *pro-capitalist* scenario that draws on Drucker, Welch, Lundin, and Barsoux, is that some employees are bad-seeds who refuse to attach themselves to the benign goals and culture of the organization. The second, a *critical but pessimistic* scenario that draws on Burawoy, Mills, Kunda, and Wilmott, holds that knowledge workers are alienated yet consent to capitalism because of the way the cultural apparatus and the labor process itself conceal exploitation and absorb resistance. The third, a *critical but optimistic* scenario, applies the new class analysis of Gouldner, plus the contributions of Scott, Marcuse, and de Certeau to today's knowledge workers, emphasizing the creative, conscious, and subversive striving of knowledge workers against the organizations in which they spend most of their time, while remaining very cautious about bloggers' potential for organized action.

This study rejects the pro-capitalist view and interprets anonymous workblogging from a critical perspective that strongly favors the third theoretical orientation – where the logic of transcendence is privileged even while acknowledging the system's powerful ability to absorb dissent and mask its contradictions. Examining the first fired blogger cases and the efforts by organizations to contain or co-opt the phenomenon, Chapter Three illustrates that a small number of bloggers and their audiences are committed to using the medium as a forum for critical dialogue about the labor process. It argues that

increased surveillance has stifled the practice in its current form, but that rapid technological change (such as Internet access via mobile phones that circumvent workplace networks) will create new avenues for technologically-enabled resistance. The subsequent chapter looks closely at writing and interview testimony from a small and disparate group of anonymous workbloggers from the Manchester/Lancashire region, whose broadly anti-capitalist values and interest in creative writing generate a solid countercultural community that promotes solid distancing from corporate culture and transforms ephemeral work experiences into a tangible and enduring creative product that embodies and nurtures resistance. Chapter Five takes a step back, looking broadly at anonymous workblogs and noting that, overall, they are both short-lived, highly heterogeneous in political perspective, and often of an inferior writing quality. This broader examination proposes that anonymous workblogs *in general* do not necessarily contribute to an anti-capitalist movement but suggests that there exist a small number of energetic, progressively oriented blogs that are well-written enough to cultivate the prolonged attention of like-minded readers and to connect to mainstream media. Situating this practice within a tradition of critical writing about the white collar workplace, Chapter Six argues that creatively talented and critical anonymous workbloggers effectively contribute to the formation of a counter-hegemonic bloc that advances a progressive social agenda in spite of the fact that these worker-authors generally do not see themselves as activists.

Drawing on findings of the previous chapters, this section returns to the theoretical discussion, presenting three scenarios, as they pertain to anonymous workblogging, and attempting to situate the practice within an existing theoretical

tradition, while modifying that tradition to acknowledge the sophisticated yet maverick contribution of creative resisters.

Three Scenarios for analyzing anonymous workblogging

1. Bad Seeds

Pro-capitalist theory, stemming from Peter Drucker (1973), and continued in a more aggressive vein by Jack Welch (2005), suggests that anonymous workbloggers are misfits or "bad seeds," particularly misanthropic or cynical individuals whose behavior is due to a fundamental lack of team spirit and perhaps self-destructive impulses that spring from their own ineptness and lack of appreciation of the benign nature of dynamic, decentralized capitalism. At best, they are badly suited to their current role and might possibly function better if they could find a job to which they were better suited.

A milder pro-business interpretation, based in Barsoux's work, and supported by recent blog research (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Richards, 2007), might hold that the venting of anonymous workbloggers is a relatively healthy and innocuous activity that stems from the absurd and comedic aspects of business or, perhaps, the conflicts and frustrations that arise from the system's inevitable imperfections. These employees are understood to be generally sympathetic to the firm, understanding that capitalism is on the whole the best system. They must be made aware of the boundaries of workplace satire and cautioned about the impact that their humorous postings might have on the reputation of the company. Those who don't understand this, fit the "bad seed" diagnosis and should be fired without delay.

2. Consent and containment

The next scenario is a critical yet pessimistic interpretation that draws on the work of Horkheimer (2001), Burawoy (1979), and Kunda (1992), among other containment theorists whose work was reviewed in Chapter One. Anonymous workblogging, in this scenario, has arisen from the alienation of knowledge workers, who experience dissonance between the ideology and culture of the organization and their own values. Knowledge work is subject to the logic of capital, which makes employees continuously vulnerable to downsizing, and requires them continuously to adjust to new directions and priorities set by the firm. Also, knowledge work nurtures self-management and organizational transparency, giving rise to questions about the limits on employee power. There is thus a sharpened contradiction between labor and capital, leading to ever more Orwellian control techniques that aggressively colonize workers' hearts and minds in order to cover up ongoing exploitation and excuse the inevitable crises of the capitalist system. Organizations have evolved control mechanisms that successfully contain dissent and frustration, and are able to accommodate workers' frustrations by giving them controlled opportunities to get back at management by wasting time at work and venting in the blogosphere. At the point of production – in the structure of the working day – workers are given certain freedoms (such as the ability to surf the web or daydream during a team meeting) that give them the impression that they are getting a good deal and lead them to consent to capitalist relations of production. The cyclical curtailment of these freedoms, plus genuine worker motivation to do a good job some of the time, prevents a situation arising where worker idleness would lead to a crisis, either economically or in terms of control. Consent is also generated in the cultural sphere – the

blogosphere itself is part of a vast cultural apparatus that has itself developed under the auspices of the capitalist knowledge economy.

This networked apparatus creates a sense of empowerment without connecting to any kind of organized action. Protest is flattened and operationalized, reduced to humorous characterizations and gags, the critique of the whole is lost amid the myriad banner adverts, graphical wallpapers, and hypertext associations that leap seamlessly from the serious and weighty to the banal. Blogging is patterned on knowledge work itself and represents an introjection of capitalist consciousness, not true rebellion. Those workers who do resist the system are lost and disoriented. There is no cohesive alternative. Beyond the "belongingness" of corporate culture, which has absorbed social and family life, there is an existential and ideological void that leaves rebels alone and confused. They become ambivalent selves, ricocheting back and forth between commitment to the company and a whining rejection of its values. What resistance there is, is highly individualized and shows little or no prospect of leading to class consciousness or radical demands.

3. A New New Class?

The third scenario builds on the work of Alvin Gouldner (1979), Marcuse (1991) in his optimistic mood, and James Scott (1987), being also informed by reflection on the writer-clerk tradition. It positions anonymous workbloggers as members of a new class, which has persisted in spite of the ideological hegemony of corporate culture in recent decades. These workers, by virtue of their exposure – through college education, working class intellectualism, and pop culture – to critical discourse, are predisposed to distrust corporate culturism and to feel violated by its encroachment on their sphere of

autonomy. Further, these workers, being essentially cosmopolitan and often ecological in outlook, fundamentally question the activities of the organizations they work for and the system as a whole.

Just as this class of workers has arisen from the logic of capitalism, the computer networks used by anonymous workbloggers have also arisen dialectically as a side-effect of the globalization of capital and the shift from manufacturing- to information-based economies. In addition, through its origins in hacker subculture, the blogosphere (as an extension of the Internet) has a countercultural logic of its own that is capable of operating outside of the closed logic of the entertainment industry.

In spite of ever-increasing work hours and responsibilities, knowledge workers are able to exploit both the technological tools and the layout of their workplaces to reclaim time for reflection on their situation within the labor process. The network itself provides opportunities for them to connect with other like-minded workers across organizational and national boundaries. They use creative writing to synthesize and draw out the major contradictions in corporate culturism, rather than reducing these operationally to individualized gripes. Through making positive connections to one another in the blogosphere, which in turn link to mainstream media, these employees participate in a diffuse, highly networked critical discourse.

Their lack of interest in traditional labor organization does not preclude their commitment to a Gramscian war of position that may lead ultimately to radical demands and fundamental social change. The system will try to control them, co-opting blogging in the form of corporate-sponsored employee blogging or just by increasing surveillance, but the logic of technological development in a decentralized information-based system

will aid their continual ability to elude control. Anonymous workbloggers represent the tip of the iceberg of a latent new class, whose members are "hiding out" in knowledge workplaces, manipulating the system in order to maximize their free time on the job, and maintaining a permanent distance between their political values and the ideology of the system in which they find it convenient to participate.

Theorizing the Desire for Unfettered Creativity

There is much in anonymous workblogging to recommend that these intriguing workers fit within the functionalist "bad seed" scenario described above. These creative critical responses to the labor process are often oblique, with authors explicitly avoiding programmatic calls to action, or manifestoes for an alternative to corporate capitalism. They enjoy workplace collegiality and are notably ambivalent about alternatives to the status quo. The practice also lends itself to the logic of containment, as described by the second scenario. The workers featured in Chapter Four are all in good standing, and get their work done to the satisfaction of their supervisors and colleagues. Their writings are powerful but their impact is diffuse enough to be non-threatening, especially when managed by periodic clampdowns on workplace freedoms that encourage self-censorship without disrupting employees sense of general wellbeing. Writers are maverick and individualistic enough that they are capable of acting in concert only at isolated moments such as when a blogger is fired. They are averse to attaching their writings to any kind of organized political platform and, as such, their writings have only an ephemeral impact.

However, these interpretations, while not easily dismissed, do not altogether capture the cheeky and subversive spirit of anonymous workbloggers. In the foregoing chapters, this study has emphasized that these workers limit their responsibilities and

make room for the imagination; embody their ideas in a tangible creative form; use networked technology for exchange and dialogue; and dream of what could be, rather than what is. The orientation of the anonymous workbloggers in this dissertation – particularly those analyzed in Chapters Three and Four – is intriguingly continuous with the lives of Kafka, Miller, and their ilk, sharing both the limitations but also the political potency of the writer-clerk tradition. Their disinclination to associate creativity with paying work; their yearning for change and angst over time-scarcity; their sense that the office provides rich anecdotal material for literary commentary on larger issues at stake in contemporary society; their desire to throw up everything and live the life of a struggling artist – all point to a shared artistic sensibility that differs from that of the traditional labor organizer yet has social change potential in terms of changing men's minds. Bloggers' writings, while not necessarily of comparable caliber to the works of Kafka or Dickens, nevertheless occupy something of a common space, embodying similar values and feelings about what is not right with the world. Their ability to harness networked technologies and the confluence of their writings with a growing ecological and ethical crisis, suggest the possibility of the third scenario. However, as the following section argues, this radical potential must be balanced against the existential thrill that derives from unfulfilled dreams and ennui.

The reality of dissatisfaction and time-stealing

Today's anonymous workbloggers – the small number whose writing talent permits a degree of eloquence – are citizens of a sophisticated literary community that reviles the drabness of the office routine and the petty tyranny of superiors. They adhere to a worldview that romanticizes the notion of the sensitive and intelligent being caught

up in a nonsensical and oppressive world, and attaches to him significance as a social actor, waging an inner war against soul-crushing bureaucracy or corporate culture. These white-collar writers do not necessarily call for a return to nature or lay out alternative social programs, but they reveal how individuals detach their dreams from the labor process in which they participate, inviting reflection on what *could be*.

In spite of their ambivalence about alternatives to the current status quo, the anonymous workbloggers in this study express an almost unanimous desire for more unfettered time, and a sense of dissatisfaction with the number of hours that must be devoted to paid labor in order to make a living. Their creative activities are surreptitious attempts to seek self-fulfillment in the interstices of the working day. Their efforts are testimony to the failure of corporate culture, in spite of its lavish promises, to emancipate the knowledge worker within the capitalist labor process.

The networked and decentralized knowledge workplace has made it possible to carve out time during the working day for unfettered reflection and self-expression. The technologies of the cubicle make it possible to transmit the products of this reflection – many of them pointedly critical of the status quo – to a global audience of other knowledge workers. As this study shows, this opportunity has been taken up enthusiastically by employees with considerable creative writing talent. Anonymous workblogs are part of a broader movement, in cubicles and open plan offices across the globe, where web designers and customer service representatives are surreptitiously writing screenplays, inventing false meetings that allow them to take the afternoon off, inventing technical problems that give them time to write college papers, and using

computer rear-view mirrors that help them elude detection while they engage in their own creative projects (Schoneboom, 2005).

Research into "humane" work environments where play and socializing on the job is tolerated or rewarded by management have tended to overlook this subversion of the labor process or to treat it as cooperation with a seductive business philosophy that encourages self-direction and a little fun during work hours. Studies of blue-collar work such as Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent* (1979) or Donald Roy's *Banana Time* (1960) explored the ways in which workers *subversively* reclaimed time for their personal use during working hours. A similar understanding is needed of the ways in which knowledge workers take advantage of the humane workplace to reclaim time colonized by the labor process. Focusing on contemporary knowledge workers' cynical orientation toward the productive goals of the organization, and their active concealment of creative and social pursuits from supervisors, the cultivation of solid emotional and ideological detachment from the company credos becomes readily apparent, and the foreclosure of resistance by corporate culture becomes less certain .

As this study of anonymous workbloggers confirms, many knowledge workers successfully reclaim time from the labor process for creative and critical self-expression while simultaneously inhabiting a "good worker" mentality – meeting deadlines, and maintaining high work standards, as well as playing along with new management doctrine such as "going the extra mile." This behavior, as indicated by the lives of bloggers, partly signifies a happy compromise that infuses the thrill of concealment into the mundane work day and might be characterized in functionalist terms as embodying overall support for the status quo. However, creative resistance also points to deeply held

and skillfully expressed convictions about corporate injustice in terms of the global environment, bitterness over the long-hours culture that is endemic to the "humane" work environment, and an ongoing tension that may lead ultimately to struggle and conflict.

Time and creative fulfillment

Above all, creative resistance is a politics of time-scarcity. It captures employees who have rejected the idea of creative fulfillment via the capitalist labor process and who do not mind working, but are disgruntled at *how much* they must work, and feel robbed of the opportunity to develop themselves fully in the time left available to them after the working day is done. Throughout Marx's work, reduced labor time is a central to the emancipation of labor, both as an end in itself and as a means for achieving the overthrow of capital. In the *1844 Manuscripts* , the full and sensual connection to the creative wealth of humanity is made possible by maximizing disposable time for spontaneous self-development. Marx quotes Shulz, insisting that men must "above all, have *time* at their disposal for spiritual creative activity and spiritual enjoyment" (Marx, 2001, p. 73). In *The German Ideology,* Marx writes that once technological advances are oriented to meeting society's needs rather than profit, time will be freed up for the free development of individualities, making it possible, "to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, and criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic." (Marx & Engels, 2001, p. 53) In the *Grundrisse* the radical displacement of labor is central to the process of emancipation, making possible the maximization of disposable time, "which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific, etc. development of the individuals in the time set free" (Marx, 1993, p. 706).

For Marx, technological advances create the conditions for the overthrow of capital. Tied to profit-creation, technological gains simultaneously displace labor and lengthen the working day for those who remain in the workforce, denuding human productive activity of its sensual and enriching content. Technology has a "revolutionary" basis (Marx, 1992, p. 617), forcing constant change and creating a mobile and dynamic workforce, who may use technology to oppose capital. Technological innovation thus "ripens both the elements for forming a new society and the forces tending toward the overthrow of the old one" (Marx, 1992, p. 635). Beyond capital, these same labor-saving technologies are available for society's benefit, creating the "true wealth" of the six-hour working day (Marx, 1993, p. 706).

There have been moments when a reduced working week or self-directed work that follows the creative impulses of the worker seems within reach. Encouraged by both the prospects of automation and the increased negotiating power of labor during the 1970s, E.P. Thompson envisages a shorter work week that would balance work-discipline and unbounded creative or idle time, bringing a new synthesis of old and new work rhythms: "Punctuality in working hours would express respect for one's fellow workers. And unpurposive passing of time would be behavior which the culture approved" (1993, p. 402). The dotcom revolution created the impression that this kind of technologically enabled liberation was possible within capital. The freewheeling digital workplaces of the early 1990s promoted the notion that self-fulfillment could be tied unproblematically to profit goals. However, as Andrew Ross (2002) has shown, this moment of emancipation was ephemeral. During the boom, dotcom workers were able to transcend their instrumental relation to the apparatus and recover the use of their instruments as tools for

the realization of spontaneous, creative goals, in spite of their economic dependence on the multinational corporations that dotcoms served. But this control was usurped as the economy tightened and the corporate-financial apparatus initiated a cycle of overwork, routinization, and moral degradation that shattered the liberal capitalist dreams of the dotcom movement.

Anonymous workblogs confirm that self-fulfillment has not been realized by today's knowledge workplaces, in spite of the promises of management gurus. However, this workforce is clearly not emiserated in the manner envisaged by Marx. While not in economic need, the bloggers in this study resent the colonization of their time by the capitalist labor process and use the tools of the office for the subversive pursuit of unfettered creative freedom in the interstices of the working day. In one sense their activities embody critical theory's vision of the total administration of work and leisure time, which sustains the reification of consciousness and precludes critical thought. Blogs are patterned on knowledge work itself; resistance is contained within the remove of the blogosphere, and oppositional forces are successfully absorbed while creating a sense of realistic dissidence (Horkheimer, 2001, p. 132).

However, critical theory – in Marcuse's account, at least – also allows for the neutrality of technics wherever time and energy are reclaimed from a cultural apparatus that enforces a mechanics of conformity. Wherever people have unfettered time for reflection (even if this is time stolen from the working day), opposition may be reignited. Repeating Marcuse's words that were quoted earlier in this dissertation, there exists, "a sensitive intelligence sickened by that which is being perpetrated," and this intelligence emerges wherever people have "free available energy which is not expended in

superimposed material and intellectual labor," wherever they are freed from the "enslaving contentment" of "comfort, business, and job security in a society which prepares itself for and against nuclear destruction" (1991, pp. 242-243). For Marcuse, technology, which is merely congealed labor power, can be harnessed in the interests of refusal. The technologies perfected by the knowledge economy are also "forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society" (1991, p. xlvii) – available for destruction of the status quo, wherever worker are able to subvert the doctrine of self-management and borrow company time for creative acts of resistance that might, in Miller's words, "upset everything."

The ecological and ethical mandate for social change

The New Class critique, which affords a revolutionary role for skilled workers further counters the reification thesis and bolsters the notion of emancipation as the special project of employees who have achieved a degree of comfort and privileged access to the inner workings of the system that enables them to look about and question the status quo:

> Precisely because it is placed in the centre of the most complex mechanisms of organizational capitalism, the new working class is brought to realize more quickly than the other sectors the contradictions inherent in the system. Precisely because its elementary demands are largely satisfied, the new working class is led to ask itself other questions whose solutions cannot be found in the realm of consumption (Mallet, 1975, p. 29).

Gouldner (1979) sees the new class as a flawed universal class – self-seeking and morally ambivalent but ultimately progressive, cosmopolitan, and ecologically minded. Vehemently opposed to censorship and devoted to a culture of critical discourse, this class is ready to wage a Gramscian war of position against a capitalist system focused on profit for profit's sake.

The employees profiled in this study – IT professionals like Tim, customer service specialists such as Dan and Beth, and call center operators like Anonymous Me, are not interested in taking over the productive forces but – as their writings attest – they are not ideologically resigned to the status quo. They want personal time to work on their novels, to write music, and to spend time with their families, but they also desire that their labor should not perpetuate ecological destruction or gross economic injustice. Their writings gently yet powerfully make a case for change. Ambivalent and self-involved, they are not coalescing as a class ready to push for a new era of worker-controlled production. But they are making a contribution in the world of ideas that might give momentum such a movement.

Bloggers' desire for unfettered productive time, coupled with their anti-corporate convictions, harmonizes strongly with Aronowitz and DiFazio's (1995) vision for dignified nonwork as an alternative to growth-based economics. Countering Piore's view that high-tech capitalist production has increased worker independence and resourcefulness, Aronowitz and DiFazio argue that corporate domination continues to be deleterious to human life and the life of the planet. They argue for reduced work hours and regulation of capital, bolstered by international labor solidarity and sustained by guaranteed income, universal healthcare, childcare, enhanced public services, entitlement to higher education, and reverse remuneration for those who do society's most unpleasant or dangerous work. In this context, high-technology would be constantly evaluated and harnessed in the direction of maximizing free-time, quality of community life and ecological sustainability.

The heterogeneous perspectives contained in the progressive workblogs featured in this study cannot be neatly placed within a particular ideology, and their authors' reluctance to associate their writings with a program for social change cautions against the temptation to draw firm conclusions about the implications of creative resistance. This study has identified talented employee-authors in the blogosphere who are broadly sympathetic with the project of building of a society that is ecologically sustainable and which promotes ideas such as the three-day week. Paying close attention to the polyphonic and irreducible nature of the anonymous workblogging phenomenon, this dissertation has attempted to capture accurately the motivations of these employee-authors, understanding their work in the context of a broader iconoclastic popular culture that imbues their work with larger significance.

Like Dostoevsky's underground man, the bloggers in this study are somewhat repelled by men of action, and for this reason it is seems presumptuous to attach their writings to a political action agenda. However, there is an effective form of protest contained in their refusal to work all the time, and the diversion of energy and resources away from capital, particularly when these resources are used to craft anti-corporate diatribes with mass appeal. Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue (1975) argued that workers should demand a three-hour day, asserting their "right to be lazy" and replacing capital's glorification of productivity with the Greek ideal of leisure and feasting. Anonymous workbloggers represent the tip of the iceberg of a latent and radicalized new class who embrace the right to be lazy, whose members are "hiding out" in knowledge workplaces, manipulating the system in

order to maximize their free time on the job, and maintaining a permanent distance between their political values and the ideology of the system in which they find it convenient to participate. Asked about his work ethic, Ignatius J. Reilly, the anti-hero of this dissertation comments "I dust a bit. In addition, I am currently writing a lengthy indictment against our century" (Toole, 1980, p. 6). Anonymous workbloggers enthusiastically indict their workplaces but they do not necessarily have the energy or the motivation to reorganize our factories and offices. However, they have the creative wherewithal to produce eloquent and humorous protests that reveal cracks in the system, contributing to a growing counter-hegemonic bloc that may ultimately use networked technology to shatter the status quo. The job of the labor movement and of the left is to figure out how to harness this progressive and witty class of workers without triggering their – possibly well-founded – aversion to and cynicism about the organized politics and institutions that are needed to make change happen.

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