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:
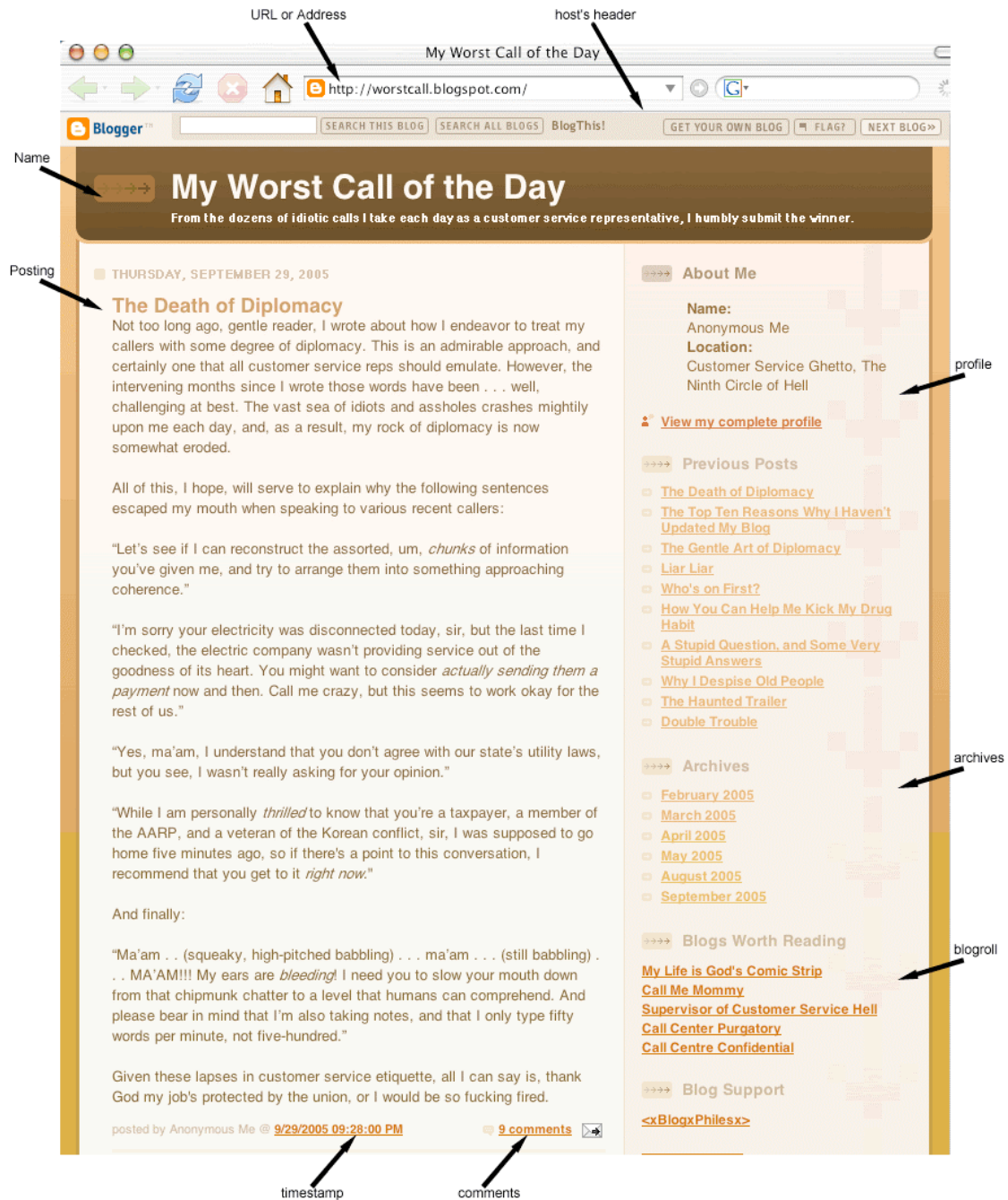
URL or Address: Just like a regular website, a blog has a unique address or

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

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

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arguments are later critically developed by Burawoy, whose work is discussed later in
this dissertation.

[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)).

yet "realistic" dissidence in order to sustain the myth of freedom (2001, p. 132), while

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

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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.

apparatus. Looking at work in a Chicago machine shop, he observes an "enlightened" 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).

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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.