

Chapter 2: Anonymous Workblogging in Context

The Scope of this Study

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

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

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

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

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

The absence of a labor organizing agenda

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

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

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

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

Inclusion of heterogeneous workplaces

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

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

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

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

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

Phase II: Ethnographic research: Small selection of anonymous workbloggers

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

Phase IV: Write-up

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

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

reading several of these blogs in their entirety as well as selectively reading comments on particular blog postings. With regard to the fired blogger cases (those which emerged in 2005 and 2006 as well as retrospectively), I conducted a survey of the international media response to these incidents, also tracking the discussion about these events in the blogosphere by following links from one blog to another, and using Technorati¹'s specialized blog search engine (and also Google, following the launch of its blog search engine in 2005). I also collected mainstream media coverage of some non-fired but “famous” anonymous workbloggers, such as Dr Dre (author of *Doing Less Harm*) and Wrapstar (author of *Call Centre Confidential*) who were gaining attention for their irreverent writing about the workplace. During this period, I tracked the corporate response to the workblogging phenomenon, collecting workplace blogging policies, legal briefs, and management association advice to employers on how to appropriately respond to the employee bloggers. This corporate response was easily traceable via press releases and online newspaper coverage of the emerging organizational response, as well as through Google searches relating to the phenomenon. Prompted by references to the Electronic Freedom Foundation's guide to blogging safely about work, which was first published in April 2005, I also closely followed the emergence of strategies to promote and enable covert workblogging.

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

¹ <http://www.technorati.com/>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Brief History and Overview of Blogging

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

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

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

Blogging platforms, skill, and anonymity

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

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

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

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

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

Blogging as a distinctive practice

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

As was emphasized in the introduction to this chapter, the anonymous bloggers in this study are distinct from the grassroots blog activists above in that they are not explicitly organizing around a specific cause and are often quick to deny any political intention behind their writing. However, in the case of the “fired workblogger” cases, which are covered in the following chapter, there is some sense that the blogging community has focused its usually diffuse writing power in overt support of beleaguered employee bloggers. The first “fired workblogger” cases emerged during the 2002-3 period, when a number of employees who had used blogs to report candidly on their office experiences were found out and dismissed by their employers, raising new questions about freedom of speech in the workplace. As is detailed in Chapter Three, cases such as the firing of Los Angeles-based web designer “Dooce” and Edinburgh bookseller Joe Gordon, generated considerable media attention and triggered widespread changes in workplace policy that ranged from the defensive (prohibiting blogging and increasing surveillance) to the strategic encouragement of employee blogging in order to co-opt and contain the phenomenon. Individual bloggers and electronic civil rights groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation (see <http://www.eff.org/bloggers>) responded by defending their practice, tracking and publicizing firings², and developing guidelines and tools that aid anonymous bloggers in eluding workplace surveillance.

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

² See, for example, Morpheme Tales’ posting, “Statistics on Fired Bloggers,” <http://morphemetales.wordpress.com/2006/10/09/statistics-on-fired-bloggers/>, which has tracked firings since 2004.

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

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

Measuring the blogosphere and locating anonymous workblogs within it

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

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

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

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

(about seven of the anonymous blogs referred to work on an occasional basis). Another indication of the number of anonymous workblogs might be taken from James Richards' 2005 data. In a thorough search that focused on finding as many anonymous³ workblogs as possible, Richards identified 744 work-related blogs, about 80% of which were from white-collar workers.

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

Technological developments in the blogosphere

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

³ Richards looked generally for work-related blogs but the vast majority were anonymously written.

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

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

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