

# **The Turn to Facebook? Adoption of Emerging Social Networking Technologies by Anonymous Workbloggers**

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## **Abstract (revised)**

In recent years, publicly available workblogs have provided rich and irreverent testimony about working life. Between 2002 and 2006, blogs such as *Doing Less Harm* and *Call Centre Confidential* received media attention for providing “insider” perspectives that were well crafted, humorous and – under the protection of anonymity – critical of the organizations in which these bloggers were embedded. More recently, intimate blog-based reports from offices, factory shop floors, hospital wards, and retail establishments are harder to find, perhaps in response to increased surveillance and blog searchability, as well as a possible movement of former bloggers behind what has been referred to as “The Great Wall of Facebook” (Vogelstein, 2009).

This research will attempt to answer the following question: Have anonymous workbloggers moved their online activity from public to private social networking spaces? In exploring this question, the paper looks at whether these bloggers are still writing publicly about their work or whether they are shifting into newer forms of social networking with restricted access, such as Facebook. The study investigates why bloggers change their habits, looking at whether their job situation has changed, whether blogging was a “fad” that they became tired of, or whether they may have consciously shifted to private social networks to avoid the possibility of being detected by employers. However, it also reflects on the persistence of public blogging, looking at reasons why anonymous workbloggers might continue to write in the public sphere, rejecting Facebook and other private social networking tools.

The study involves analysis of blog content and follow-up interviews with a small group of bloggers who were part of my original dissertation research on anonymous workbloggers (Schoneboom, 2007, 2008), exploring how their blogging habits have changed since 2007. Additionally, a small number of bloggers who are linked to one of these blogs were interviewed as part of the study. Ultimately, this research is concerned with the deeper issue of whether workblogging and related practices constitute a form of resistance to the labor process, and whether shifts in employee blogging habits signify the repression or resilience of critical voices. As such, it will engage with theoretical frameworks that highlight how resistance is contained and absorbed (Burawoy, 1979; Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993). But it will also engage with perspectives that uphold the persistence of employee recalcitrance (Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995) and highlight the dialectical emergence of new technologies that enable resistive practices to continually morph and flourish (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Marcuse, 1988). Ultimately, current workblogging practices are tentatively likened to the ‘Ford whisper’ (Beynon, 1984) or to Scott’s “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1987) and their impact on popular culture.

## **Keywords:**

Blogging, workblogging, Facebook, Twitter, resistance, web 2.0.

## ***Introduction***

This research looks at a group of anonymous and semi-anonymous workbloggers, considering how their blogging habits change over time, and paying particular attention to the impact of new social networking technologies on the practice. It focuses on a small group of loosely interconnected blogs written by employees in various fields who have at one time or another used their blog as a vehicle to write *irreverently* and publicly about aspects of their job, workplace culture, and company ideology. Since 2002, when blogging hit the mainstream, pseudonymously written accounts of working life have drawn considerable media attention, particularly when employees have been fired for their blogging activity. Increased workplace surveillance of blogging activity and the well publicised risk of disciplinary action have arguably created a deterrent against publicly diarising workplace experiences. In addition, it is likely that blogging is subject to the usual wax and wane of technological fashions, and will be gradually superseded by emerging social networking tools that are perceived as more current or ‘edgy.’

Bearing these tendencies in mind, the current research takes an in-depth look at a small group of bloggers, investigating how their blogging practices have changed over time. It examines whether they are still writing about work, in spite of the risks, and whether new social networking tools have offered them the opportunity of developing their practice in a way that secures anonymity or shields their writing from the gaze of employers. Particular attention is paid to the distinction that bloggers make between the *desire* to write publicly about workplace events and their *ability* to do so within constraints such as fear of loss of livelihood if they are found out. In addition, the study explores whether new communication tools such as Twitter and mobile devices such as iPhones have a synergistic relationship with conventional workblogging, or whether these new developments are adopted at the expense of conventional blog posts.

In terms of the scholarship of employee recalcitrance or workplace resistance, workblogging trends can be theorised in two ways. Either, in the Foucauldian view (Kunda, 1992, Willmott, 1993), employees have transient feelings of cynicism that are unable to attach in any sustained way to a counterculture or social movement. In this scenario, which can also be framed in reference to Burawoy's (1979) account of the cyclical containment of workplace rebellion, employers can be perceived as having skilfully contained blog-based dissent by creating subtle deterrents and making it more difficult to speak openly, without appearing overly draconian. On the other hand, and consistent with scholarship that captures the persistence of a more sustained desire to resist or criticize the employer (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), bloggers might be perceived as exemplifying a sustained disalignment with employer values and prerogatives. While employer 'scare tactics' might be temporarily effective, these employees might be perceived as tenaciously exploring new ways to articulate their critical feelings that advance the possibility of effective agitation against corporate culture.

This study finds that this group of bloggers increasingly practices self-censorship due to concerns about employer repercussions and decreasing anonymity, yet in many cases the *desire* to blog about work remains strong. At the same time, commitment to blogging in general has waned for some of these bloggers, due to lack of time and energy or, in some cases, a reduced need for the therapeutic benefits of self-expression. Most of the bloggers studied have adopted emerging social networking tools, and these tools have absorbed some of the energy previously spent blogging, but have not significantly affected ability to communicate freely about work matters. Twitter seems to offer some a new avenue for irreverent "in-the-moment" workplace communication, but Facebook, in spite of being less public, tends to feel less anonymous and more constrained. Overall, workblogging practices are seen as becoming increasingly interstitial,

and may be thought of as subtly cementing social and ideological ties between likeminded employees, without leading to concrete or concerted action. At the same time, this study acknowledges the dialectical tendency of technology to evolve rapidly in ways that effectively counter or transcend employer efforts to inhibit work-related communication.

### ***Methodology***

The study focuses on a small group of bloggers who were part of my original dissertation research. Although interviewing a group of 25 of the bloggers from my dissertation was the original goal, this approach produced a very low response rate, as a high percentage of those blogs have become inactive and their owners are now impossible to contact. I revised my approach, concentrating on a core group of five bloggers from the Manchester/Lancashire area with whom I have maintained ongoing contact since the beginning of my study in 2004. One of these blogs, *Crinklybee*, belongs to a close relative with whom I am in frequent contact. I succeeded in obtaining four in-depth interviews with the Manchester/Lancashire bloggers (the fifth, who discontinued his blog in 2005, did not respond). I also read and coded the blog entries of each for the period January 2009 - February 2010. I then followed links from Crinklybee's blogroll (list of links to favourite or frequently read blog) to identify five additional bloggers for interview and blog data collection, one of which (Non-WorkingMonkey) is featured in this paper.

The methodology employed is in keeping with that recommended by Ellis and Richards (2009) who note the importance of trust-building in obtaining interviews with workbloggers, noting that bloggers are increasingly distrustful of researchers because of the perceived threat of disciplinary action if their identities are uncovered. The use of *Crinklybee*'s blogroll in order to identify other blogs of interest is akin to snowball sampling. The core bloggers were also asked

to identify any blogs that they thought might be of interest. The interviews and blog postings were coded using techniques drawn from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1968), taking care to allow the codes to emerge from the data.

One obvious limitation of the study is that no face-to face observation of workbloggers in their work situation is possible. Also, in most cases, face-to-face contact was not possible due to bloggers' concerns about protecting their identity. This limitation can be countered by a degree of trust that had been established over a long period, which allowed me to feel that the information provided in the interviews was an accurate portrayal of these workers' experiences insofar as they felt comfortable sharing. With regard to blog postings, my interest is in the meaning-making process that blogs embody, and the role of employees as cultural producers. It is important that the core blogs studied are based on actual workplace experiences, as I am most interested in how the material conditions of labour give rise to countercultural responses. However, I am less interested in the factual accuracy of these accounts, and more concerned with how employees fictionalise and draw out workplace experiences using satire, exaggeration and other techniques.

### ***Introducing the bloggers***

The bloggers who were the focus of the study are described in the following table:

Blog title (start date)	Pseudonym	Job type	Still blogs about work	Facebook	Twitter
Non-Working Monkey (7/06)	Non-Working Monkey	Advertising agency / private sector	Y	Y (under blog alias, linked to blog and real name, not linked to blog)	Y (under blog name, linked to blog)

A Free Man in Preston (3/04)	Tim	IT system admin/private sector	Y	Y (under real name, not linked to blog)	Y (under musician name, linked to blog)
Crinklybee (6/04)	Jonathan	Public sector	Y	N	N
Girl on a Train (6/04)	Beth	Public sector	Y	N	Y (under blog name, linked to blog)
Slow Afternoon (7/04)	Slowdown	Web consultant /private sector	N	Y (under real name, not linked to blog)	Y (under real name, not linked to blog)

**Non-WorkingMonkey** is written pseudonymously by an advertising agency executive who started the blog during a period of unemployment in 2006. Her blog chronicles her experiences as an English ex-patriate living in Canada; features quirky YouTube videos, travel photos and cooking projects; and lays out her philosophy of non-working: “the strong desire to do very little (unless it's something you really like doing) and be answerable to no-one, whilst understanding that working is necessary in order to get money, which we need to live” (2007). Although she now mentions work very infrequently and indirectly, her earlier work-related posts are featured prominently on the sidebar of her blog. She maintains a “Non-Working Monkey” Twitter account and Facebook page that are linked to the blog, as well as having a non-linked Facebook page under her real name.

**A Free Man in Preston** is authored by ‘Tim,’ who works for a medium-sized IT company in the private sector. His blog is dedicated largely to a novelistic account of workplace events.

Characters such as Stella ('my eighties style yuppie witch of a team leader'), have been developed over several years. Tim's finely descriptive postings offer critical insight into company culture, as in this irreverent dramatisation about Web 2.0:

A steering committee is investigating the creation of a Company X Twitter account, which will be in place by Spring 2010," Charlotte continues. "And a Company X blog could be implemented as soon as Christmas after next. So on behalf of myself, Bill Surname, and the board of directors, we urge you to embrace clients old and new into the Company X Family, share ideas and innovations, communicate freely, and engage regularly in every kind of intercourse. Podcasts may follow. Bing bong. (Tim, 2009)

While still of the same quality and theme, Tim's blog postings have become less frequent over the last year, declining from 33 in 2008 to only 11 in 2009. Tim now frequently uses Twitter, which is linked to his blog, and he also has a MySpace account to showcase his music. Both of these are under his 'musician' name, Idiot Johnson. He has a Facebook account under his real name, which is not linked to his blog, and which he uses infrequently to keep up with local events. Tim is also Beth's partner.

**Crinklybee**, written by 'Jonathan,' focuses on life in Manchester, child-raising and the trials of Newcastle United, with occasional postings about work. Although his work postings are infrequent and fairly buried amidst other subject matter, they tend to be fairly candid, as in this recent extract from a post entitled "Unproductive," which chronicles an unsuccessful work day:

10:42AM: Man at reception dealt with. Start to write 'things to do' list but am distracted by rogue idea of escaping to my 'secret' office somewhere else in Westside (it officially belongs to an organization I work with, but I'm the only person who ever uses it) and spending long lunchtime updating too-long-neglected blog.

10:45AM: Commencement of battle to the death between work ethic and rogue secret-office blog-writing idea.

10:47AM: On scooter, headed for 'secret' office. Experience return of sense of purpose as vague but not unpleasant tingling sensation. Stop off at Co-op for ham sandwich and bananas to fuel writing session (Jonathan, 2009).



Since beginning his blog, Jonathan has switched careers, moving from a customer service position (which he titled the ‘flangedesk’) in the private sector, to a job in the public sector. Jonathan posts about 1-2 times a month to his blog and this rate has been fairly consistent over the last 2 years, but as detailed later in this paper his work postings have become more constrained over time. He does not use Facebook or Twitter.

**Girl on a Train** belongs to ‘Beth,’ a public sector worker whose posts focus on her commute to work, her social engagements and travels, with occasional glimpses into her work life. Her postings tend to be relatively short, and often offer links to photos and playlists of music she has been listening to, which harmonise with the mood of the writing, as in this post about job insecurity:

This morning passed in slow motion. It was all about the 'R' word.  
This afternoon we were promised "Nothing will be decided until April, and even then... "  
That "*even then*" just hangs in the air, because no one really believes it can be painless.  
Grey Skies and Work Things - The Lilac Time  
Welcome To The Working Week - Elvis Costello  
Not A Job - Elbow  
The Employment Pages - Death Cab For Cutie (Beth, 2009)

As explained later, Beth’s work-related postings are increasingly scarce (declining from up to 5 work-related postings a month in early 2009 to 2 or less by the end of the year), and her blogging frequency (often 10 posts a month in early 2009) declined a little toward the end of 2009. She does not use Facebook but has recently become a keen Twitter user, and her ‘Tweets’ can be read via her blog.

**Slow|Afternoon** is written by ‘Slowdown,’ a former project manager who is currently a freelance web consultant. In 2004-5, when I conducted my dissertation research, Slowdown

covered various news-related topics but he was also using the blog to reflect on his stressful work environment. However, as explained later in this paper, since leaving that job in 2006, Slowdown has stopped blogging about work. His posts now focus solely on developments in the news, amusing cartoons, photos and videos, with occasional snippets about what is going on his life. Recent topics cover the Copenhagen climate change conference, a humorous reflection on the multiple meanings of the word ‘quite,’ and a bizarre snippet of East European music. He has Facebook and Twitter accounts, and his ‘Tweets’ are fed to his blog.

### ***Workblogging trends: Desire versus Comfort***

Interviews with the workbloggers reveal a sharp distinction between the *desire* to blog about work and ability or comfort level in doing so. For four out of five of the bloggers studied, the comfort level with workblogging has declined over time, for reasons that are explained below. At the same time, general enthusiasm for blogging appears to be waning for most of the bloggers. However, for most of them, the *desire* to write about work-related matters remains strong, especially if they could do so without fear of reprisals.

#### **1. Declining comfort level with blogging about work**

Almost all of the bloggers noted a level of discomfort about workblogging that has increased over time. Non-WorkingMonkey notes that she now writes about work only indirectly, because too many of the people she works with (including her boss) have become aware of her blog (personal communication, 11 February 2010). Jonathan (*Crinklybee*) notes that he used to write about work a lot but was deterred by scares that rippled through the blogosphere, such as “when Petite Anglaise got the sack- and I would get all nervous and coy for a few months.” However, this discomfort would be periodically overcome: “the sheer tragicomic potential of office life would get the better of me again and I would find myself likening my boss to a Mafia

Henchman again. Which wasn't really fair as she was really a nice well-brought up girl from the suburbs of Blackburn.” Now in a new job, he writes about work infrequently and worries that he does so “under a cloak of anonymity that anyone with a passing knowledge of the public sector paying any sort of attention would peel off within ten minutes flat” (personal communication, 5 February 2010).

Beth (*Girl on a Train*) reports that she has become more wary about writing about work recently due to an organizational restructuring that is placing all employees under increased scrutiny. She also notes that her blog has become less anonymous over time and more friends and colleagues are aware of its existence, leading to reservations about sharing her thoughts: “Girlonatrain' me has crept closer to the 'real' me ... there are things I've blogged in the past that I wouldn't feel comfortable about blogging now - I've become inhibited” (personal communication, 1 February 2010). She would like to start an entirely new anonymous blog but feels attached to the ‘blog circle’ she has established through *Girl on a Train* and would not have time to maintain two separate blogs.

Slowdown (*Slow|Afternoon*) feels that writing about work helped him deal with a stressful period but when he finally left the job he felt some regret about ‘prattling about it on the internet’ (personal communication, 13 January 2010). He is now self-employed and therefore freer to blog about whatever he wants but his desire to do so is limited, as detailed in the following section. By contrast, Tim (*A Free Man in Preston*) has become less comfortable about blogging about personal matters, which became ‘cringeworthy,’ and now focuses entirely on writing about work and developing the fictionalised characters that are the main players in the blog, seeing himself as just a ‘bit player’ (personal communication, 15 February 2010).

Bloggers' sense of personal exposure and their awareness of the reprisals that could result from being identified indicate that employers have been successful in eliciting a degree of self-censorship among employees. This would appear to be coupled with a general decline in enthusiasm for blogging as the novelty of the practice fades, as time scarcity makes blogging more difficult, or as job-related frustrations are resolved, as explained in the following section.

## **2. Waning enthusiasm or energy for blogging**

Energy devoted to blogging changes over time, and appears overall to have declined without being coupled with disillusionment with the *idea* of blogging. Non-WorkingMonkey notes that, even though her blogging enthusiasm fluctuates, she would be “really really sad” to lose her blog. Tim feels ‘as enthused as ever by the idea of ‘trying to create something approaching good,’ yet feels somewhat sated by the amount of writing he has produced and therefore feels comfortable posting less frequently.

Jonathan feels that his blogging zeal peaked in 2005 when the phenomenon seemed like a particularly promising way for amateur authors to get noticed and when having one “was the only thing keeping me from jumping out of the flangedesk office window in a work-related fit of terminal ennui.” He feels that his current lack of blogging commitment is due not to loss of enthusiasm but to a lack of time and his career move to a more creatively demanding job that leaves less energy for personal writing. Beth comments that her blogging energy is currently at an all time low. In addition to the job-related concerns mentioned above, her commute to work has been shortened, leading to a loss of writing material, the comment function on her blog became disabled leading to a loss of social interaction, and she has become interested in Twitter, which has sapped some of her blogging energy.

Slowdown remarks that his enthusiasm for blogging has waned since he started blogging, noting that there is no great driving purpose to his blog, and that newer online tools are fulfilling the purpose of staying in touch with his social network. Unlike the others, his sense of having resolved his work-related frustrations also removed his need to blog, as detailed below.

### **3. Persistent desire to write about work**

In spite of the constraints mentioned above, several of the bloggers expressed a persistent, if unfulfilled, desire to write about work. Jonathan (Crinklybee) notes that although he has removed himself from the ennui of the flangedesk to a more ‘meaningful’ job, “all kinds of things about the job would make excellent blog postings, but not all of them get written.” He frames his desire to blog about work matters as a need for a “frisson of naughtiness,” which is enhanced by the possibility of detection. His feelings are shared by Beth, who notes that current workplace events are “potential comedy gold” and makes a sharp distinction between her desire to write about them and her freedom to do so: “I would love to be able to write more about what is currently going on at work, but I would need to start a new, totally anonymous blog to be able to do that at this time.” Beth’s words are echoed by Non-WorkingMonkey, who says her workplace has vast comedy potential and notes that she often lies in bed and writes imaginary blog posts.

By contrast, Slowdown, who has resolved his work-related frustrations by becoming self-employed, notes that he no longer has any compulsion to blog about work: “I’m my own boss now and I’ve few complaints.” However, he feels that expressing his dissatisfaction and angst through his blog had a cathartic effect and helped him to move out of a difficult situation.

Clearly, a number of forces are at work in influencing bloggers’ motivation to keep going, and their tendency to blog about work. Career and logistical changes make a difference in

the level of creative energy and time available for writing, as well as resolving frustrations and removing the need for an expressive outlet. Fear of employer reprisals and declining anonymity lead to increased caution and reticence about public self-expression. However, there is a persistent sense, at least among some of these bloggers, that they would love to write more about work if they could do so without being detected. There is a strong sense from Jonathan, Beth and Non-WorkingMonkey of resisting temptation, of caution overcoming desire. And, based on the evidence that they continue to blog about work, albeit infrequently, this tension can be viewed as something that is negotiated daily, with the need for unfettered self-expression sometimes overpowering restraint. Such muted communication, increasingly buried in the interstices of blogs, is unlikely to have any kind of major social impact, however it might be likened to a Ford whisper (Beynon, 1984) or to low-level footdragging that, as Scott argues, can potentially ripple upwards and impact popular culture (Scott, 1987). Given that technology evolves rapidly and the possibility to blog clandestinely may re-emerge using new tools or devices, it is important to explore whether bloggers who feel a persistent desire to write about work, are interested in using these tools to develop new avenues for chronicling workplace dramas. This question is explored in the following section.

### ***Adoption of new social networking tools***

The adoption of new social networking tools and the possibility of using them to express work-related thoughts seems a likely direction for bloggers who feel that their self-expression has been suppressed by workplace surveillance. New tools and practices that are not yet regulated by employer computer use policies or which circumvent workplace computer networks might also reopen the possibility of using work time to blog (a practice that all the bloggers interviewed view as having become particularly risky), simultaneously addressing time scarcity

issues and fears of detection. With this in mind, the bloggers were interviewed about their adoption of new social networking tools and whether these have offered new opportunities for talking about work online. Overall, these bloggers appear to have mixed feelings about new social networking tools, with Twitter providing some intriguing possibilities for clandestine workplace communication.

Jonathan feels distaste for both Facebook and Twitter and has little intention of exploring them, though noting that his impressions of these tools are not based on first-hand experience and that they are “probably all really good.” While he regards blogging as a haven for “bored, overeducated office workers,” he imagines that Facebook is less substantive and engaging: “I think my general impression of Facebook is the people who work in my office posting pictures of their cats on each other's walls while waiting for Eastenders to come on.” While not as reviled by Twitter, he feels that the microblogging format (posts on Twitter, known as Tweets, are limited to 140 characters) leads generally to poor writing: “My general impression of Twitter is Stephen Fry being impossibly witty in fourteen-word bursts, and everyone else in the world trying desperately to be Stephen Fry, and failing.”

Beth and Tim share Jonathan's lack of interest in Facebook but have recently embraced Twitter. Beth's friends persuaded her to try out Twitter and she is now a frequent user: “I'm sure it's a great waste of time and leads to a shortened attention span & need for instant gratification but I have become hooked on it.” Beth's tweets appear on her blog via a widget that feeds her latest posts into a side column, and her account on Twitter is an extension of the *Girl on a Train* online persona. Feeling somewhat protected by the pseudonymous nature of her Twitter account, she tweets about work with some frequency. She also notes with some trepidation that she uses Twitter on company time: “I do use Twitter while I am AT work - so sly conversations can be

carried on throughout the working day, and 'overheard in the Office' tweets can be unleashed on the world as they happen." Tim is also enthusiastic about using Twitter to capture snapshots of everyday life, as they happen, and believes that the 140-character limit spurs creativity and humor. When tweeting about work, he uses the same caution as on his blog, avoiding specific details.

While Twitter offers some promising avenues for work-related self-expression, Facebook's normative structure appears to militate against its use as a tool for irreverent workplace communication. Slowdown notes that the norm of using one's real identity on Facebook precludes the candid communication that was possible on his blog: "I would certainly write differently as it would be much more publicly 'me' than slow|afternoon." In addition, Slowdown is sceptical about Facebook's frequently changing corporate policies toward privacy and content ownership. Tim also rules out writing irreverently about work on Facebook, since he uses his real name in that medium. He is also unsettled by Facebook's emphasis on being 'friended' by people you barely know. Only Non-WorkingMonkey maintains a Facebook page under her blog pseudonym (as well as a completely separate one under her real name), but she sees this as merely extending her blog character, rather than enabling more unfettered self-expression.

Facebook's emphasis on communicating under one's real name to a select circle of 'friends' might appear to open possibilities for critical, collegial conversations about work but the dominant sense among these bloggers is that Facebook is a venue for less substantive and more cautious exchange. By contrast, Twitter extends many of the norms of conventional blogging, being generally public and often pseudonymous. While Twitter's enforced brevity suggests to Jonathan and Beth a lowering of the bar in terms of crafting prose, its novelty and



emphasis on the here and now, and its highly conversational nature has increased Beth and Tim's enthusiasm for online publishing and 'fly-on-the-wall' workplace reportage. Tim also notes that handheld devices (e.g., iPhones) make Tweeting especially easy.

### ***A tentative theoretical framework***

Foucauldian theories of worker control (Kunda, 1992, Willmott, 1993) tend to emphasize the inability of employees to attach to a counterculture that might sustain their critical feelings. Lacking access to a community of likeminded employees, cynical employees return to the organizational culture as a source of identification and self-realization. The bloggers in this study resist such a classification, both through establishment of fairly longstanding social bonds, and through a shared irreverence about work and career that is increasingly hidden in the interstices of blogs but readily apparent to frequent or long-term readers of these blogs. While their thoughts on social networking technologies are somewhat divergent, their responses to questions about work ethic are quite similar. Non-workingMonkey comments, "My idea of success is giving up my job as soon as possible...I've never felt defined by work which I think is confusing for a lot of people." Tim is skeptical about the notion of achieving fulfillment through his paid job and enjoys pursuing creative projects on the evenings and weekends. Jonathan emphasizes the need to be able to forget about his job when he gets home and devote time to his creative writing. Similarly, Beth notes that her commitment to work has decreased over time, while Slowdown sees work as enjoyable but "not what life is about."

Except for Slowdown who, aside from the Manchester/Lancashire connection, belongs to a different circle of bloggers, the bloggers in this study are loosely interconnected via their blogrolls. The existence of these social ties arguably provides a community where irreverent or relatively unambitious work attitudes might be indulged and bolstered. This effect is at most a

subtle reinforcement of existing attitudes and is in no way linked to concerted action but it is sufficient to form a critical undercurrent that helps these bloggers feel they are not alone in their attitudes.

Aside from Tim's blog, work-related postings are increasingly located in the interstices of the blogs studied, and are therefore less likely than older office blogs such as *Call Centre Confidential* to be identified by journalists (or sociologists) as focused or sustained critiques of workplace culture. However, the critical sensibility persists, even in what is unsaid or unwritten on these blogs, in the commitment to remaining anonymous, or in the avoidance of using social networking tools for *professional* networking. These bloggers might also be seen as sharing in and contributing to a popular culture that, through fired blogger cases such as *Petite Anglaise* (mentioned earlier), has more explicitly challenged corporate culture and questioned attempts to control employee freedom of expression. As such they could be considered "ready" or "primed" to respond vocally should one of their fellow bloggers receive unfair dismissal or encounter other job-related difficulties.

Theorising such a subtle yet sustained irreverence about work presents some challenges. As noted above, the Foucauldian framework falls short of the countercultural sensibility and community that these workers have maintained. However, the interstitial nature of their irreverent workplace critique is by no means focused on any kind of concerted action. The persistence of irreverent workblogging is in keeping with Thompson and Ackroyd (1995) who caution against equating a demise of overt labor organizing with a decline in workplace insubordination and collective resistance. It also harmonizes with Edwards (1995) claim that practices which are "more subtle, covert and secretive and frequently less collective and organized" (p. 291), nevertheless carry significant disruptive potential. Subsequent studies have

refocused attention on subtle forms of resistance (Fleming, 2005, Taylor and Bain, 2003, Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), yet the blogging practices described in this study seem simultaneously more intellectually ‘crafted’ and networked (as opposed to fleeting joking or time-wasting practices; and more diffuse and disorganized (as opposed to taking place in a single workplace or responding to a specific employer policy) than those covered in the existing literature.

In terms of subtlety, perhaps current blogger practices might be tentatively likened to James C. Scott’s (1987) insights about the linkage between everyday resistance and popular culture. Scott’s focus on “hidden transcripts” of subversive thought and action, which form the backdrop to displays of obedience fit well with the anti-Foucauldian literature. 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. Similarly, bloggers’ critical writings, however intermittent and buried, might be seen as part of a fabric of irreverence that extends from their individual working conditions to a much broader countercultural sensibility.

And what of the emerging social networking tools that seem potentially to offer new opportunities for worker recalcitrance? According to this study there is no clear evidence that bloggers who desire to write more about work are searching actively for new outlets where they can express themselves more freely about work. Twitter, where discovered and embraced, has created a small return to the idea of blogging from work, creating the possibility of a kind of Ford Whisper (Beynon, 1984) of irreverent workplace commentary conveyed via handheld devices, but these communications remain relatively veiled and cautious. And Facebook seems

not to appeal as a tool for clandestine workplace communication. However, bloggers are aware of the rapid evolution of social networking technologies and the availability of handheld devices and these media and tools may offer more concrete opportunities for clandestine workplace critique as they mature. For most of this group, the desire to blog about work-related matters remains strong but ability and energy to do so are limited for the various reasons detailed in this paper. Viewed as a dialectical tension, this unmet desire might be seen as fertile ground for the continual adoption and development of technologies that circumvent employer control strategies.

Such an optimistic evaluation is bolstered by the Internet's inherent tendency to evolve in ways that overcome censorship and promote countercultural interventions (Carty, 2002, Kahn and Kellner, 2004). It also resonates with Marcuse's notion that the technical apparatus may have "released forces which may shatter the special historical form in which technics is utilized" ([1941] 1988, p. 160), allowing "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, [1964] 1991, p. 242). As online anonymity remains contested and the need for caution remains, this evolution may be relatively slow. However, given the persistent desire among creative and irreverent employees to freely express themselves, sudden and explosive developments can also be expected.

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