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Information, Social Norms, and New Media Technology

Edited by Bruce E. Drushel
Kathleen German

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BRUCE E. DRUSHEL AND KATHLEEN GERMAN

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Introduction

Emerging Media: A View Downstream

KATHLEEN GERMAN AND BRUCE DRUSHEL

T. S. ELIOT PREDICTED THAT, "the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time" (1943, 39). While the poet's prescient observations about the value of objective distance were focused on geographic exploration, he might well have been writing about the consequences when technologies collide with cultures. The former frequently is seen as always pushing forward, often not progressing toward a known end as much as being propelled from its beginnings. Along the way, it shapes and is shaped by culture, just as a river simultaneously is confined by and sculpts the geologic contours through which it flows. The changes to each may be subtle or dramatic, and so appear to be periodic when they are, in reality, continuous. In any event, once a traveler has traversed the rest of the river, she or he can never see the home port in quite the same way, and certainly not as isolated, unique, and unconnected. Like rivers in the natural world, a technical innovation never can be seen the same way — neither as intimidating nor as innocent — once it has altered and been altered by a culture.

Consider the telephone as a media innovation marking more than a century of interactions of culture and technology, altering the relationships of people to the world around them and to each other. Originally an outgrowth of work on amplification devices for the hearing-impaired, it became a symbol of wealth and an indicator of social class: Only those in commercial trade had need for instantaneous communication that justified the high cost of service.[1] In commercial centers such as

Budapest, the merchant class also was seen as the logical target market for an alternative early use of the technology — namely, unidirectional delivery of real-time market information and light entertainment (Marvin 1995, 175). High-end restaurants and clubs placed telephones at tables for patrons who could not be isolated from the markets or bothered to visit acquaintances at other tables. Words were added to languages to facilitate transmissions. In English, "hello" did not exist until the development of the telephone. The word seems to have been derived from exclamations used in fox hunting or the ferry trade.

Soon, telephone service became more affordable and widespread, and eventually was judged so essential that subsidies helped finance the stringing of phone lines in remote areas, introducing along with the lines a new etiquette and set of social relationships. In Western culture, calls to distant friends and relatives became events to be timed and arranged. Some, such as calls on Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays, and Christmas Day, became ritualized. Telephones were stationary and did not belong to individuals; they were household appliances of black Bakelite. But they did change their environments as telephone tables appeared in homes, and telephone booths and banks of pay phones emerged in public spaces.

Perhaps inevitably, extension telephones multiplied in capitalist economies, first within businesses and then in homes. The instruments became connected to and eventually expressions of single users. They were sculpted and colored to match the décor of rooms. Circuit traces, wiretaps, and call records became tools of surveillance and law enforcement. Unintended uses of the telephone prompted policymakers to enact restrictions on obscene language, harassment, and unsolicited personal selling. Budget-conscious families developed elaborate signals using the telephone that would save on long-distance tolls. Two unanswered rings at 8 p.m. might mean, "I arrived safely and all is well."

By the 1960s, telephones were figuring in major world events in the West. Much of the early broadcast coverage of the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy was conveyed by reporters on the air from pay phones. The Cuban Missile Crisis and other Cold War flare-ups revealed the need for better communication between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.; a dedicated, secure telephone connection known as "the hotline" was installed. When Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin walked on the lunar surface, a special interconnection between NASA radio systems and a telephone in the Oval Office enabled

President Nixon to "call" them with his congratulations. At that same time outside the West, a significant portion of the world's population still had not made a single phone call. Much of Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America remained mostly untouched by telephone technology. Even as it became more entrenched in many cultures, the telephone was an example of the uneven diffusion of technological innovation.

Serious efforts to allow telephones to follow their users began after World War II. A cellular system similar to the one that eventually emerged first was proposed in 1947. Like the wire line phone before, the automobile-based radio telephone, introduced to the public in the 1954 film *Sabrina*, became a symbol of conspicuous wealth and influence (Taylor, Wilder, and Lehman 1954). The first automated cellular system would not arrive for another quarter-century. Succeeding systems would digitize calls, shrink the instruments from suitcase-size to pocket-size, allow the sending of text content, and interface with online networks. Corporate entities made and lost fortunes in the process, while global consumers were sometimes baffled with the sheer number of competing technologies.

The telephone now was indeed personal, with each instrument linked to its own unique telephone number, and truly mobile. Its capabilities expanded beyond periodic voice communication to the sending and receiving of text messages, web searches, the playing of music and games, and photography. Users, especially younger ones, abandoned fixed wire line phones for mobile phones. Many developing nations leapfrogged universal wired telephone networks directly to less expensive and more easily constructed wireless networks, finally rendering telephone service, if not universal, at least more accessible.

With each new or expanded application of telephone technology, the relationships among people changed. So-called "enhancements" such as voicemail, call-waiting, caller ID, and distinctive caller ringtones dramatically altered the etiquette and civility of conversations. With other changes, such as call-forwarding, people could obscure their locations. The telephone continued to be a marker of class standing, as well as a way to alter the relationship of consumers and sellers. Twenty-four-hour telephone support centers facilitated routine communications between the two, while frequently making more complex exchanges frustrating and sometimes next to impossible. Telephones assumed a role in capitalist exchanges that was very different from the role it played as a conveyor of personal news and information. And, throughout its evolution, the telephone changed the way that people understood themselves in relationship to others, to time and space, and to information. Advances in telephone technology facilitated cultural practices and capabilities unforeseen when the first calls were placed. Lagging behind those advances was consideration of their wisdom, their fairness, and their reach into cultural practices not immediately or obviously connected to them.

Now, add another dimension, and consider the cultural implications not just of a single communication technology like the telephone, but many. Video, computers, computer networks, and recorded music have evolved markedly since their introductions, have influenced the cultures into which they were introduced, and have changed in response to culture. And consider further multiple convergences among these technologies that result in new media, new products, and new cultural forms, all of them evolving at a dizzying rate. If the past is any indication, the accolades will come first and much later the critical questions: Is this new technology better than what it replaces? Is it equitable? Does it reflect our values? How does it alter our priorities?

Perhaps the most intriguing question is how the emergence of a medium affects the practices of what it is to be human. The intersection of the technological with the human bears specific scrutiny. It is at this point that we begin our investigation — understanding how the human element, specifically the choices we make, are influenced by the technological apparatus at our disposal. Just as the telephone changed from its original application as a device for improving the lives of the hearing impaired to a ubiquitous and often intrusive feature in industrialized societies, most technologies evolve with applications that were never intended, bringing with them the ethical quandaries that must eventually be addressed.

This collection examines the role of ethics in emerging media with particular emphasis on specific contexts and applications. The essays that follow raise critical questions concerning ethical boundaries at the forefront of media development. It is interdisciplinary and international with scholars contributing from a variety of fields such as rhetoric, journalism and media studies, literature, cultural studies, art, and communication studies. Both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches are featured, allowing an eclectic and creative approach to investigating ethics.

We consciously have avoided the phrase "new media" because of our perception that the term no longer usefully describes the dramatic changes that surround us. In addition, the phrase has occasioned historical misuse and consequently engendered confusion over what it comprises. The phrase "digital media" is sometimes applied to contemporary transformations in media use but it is both overbroad and not necessarily new. It also excludes media changes that are not digital. "Emerging media" captures the immediacy and currency of the technologies on which this book focuses while simultaneously suggesting that there is not yet closure on their uses or implications. In short, "emerging media" secures the promise of technologies that are evolving at a rate that outpaces our abilities to understand them. Hence, the focus of this book.

Centering on different emerging media forms from eBay to weblogs and from digital television to social media, each chapter raises questions about how changing media formats affect current theoretical understanding of ethics. The assumption of our culture is that change equals progress. We might also argue that change is just change or even that change can be negative, something not generally admitted in American culture. This interrogation of conventional practices allows us to more fully analyze the challenges to ethical decision making in an age of rapidly evolving media. Each chapter focuses on specific cases within the broader conceptual fabric of ethics. The case studies ground the discussion of ethics in practical applications while, at the same time, addressing moral dilemmas that have plagued us for generations: censorship, civility, privacy, democracy, preservation, propaganda, responsibility. The specific applications are snapshots representing particular technologies and media forms at a particular point in history; they will undoubtedly change, but the ethical questions attending to them will endure.

As has been the case with other historical periods where extraordinary developments in communication technologies threaten to overwhelm our traditional modes of decision making, ethical models struggle to keep abreast of the more recent evolutions in communication. Our reflection on these changes provides a rare opportunity to ask how emerging media affect the ethical choices in our lives and the lives of people across the globe. The recent unrest in Iran, as well as the booming internet marketplace for goods and services, signals the amazingly rapid growth of technological applications that show no signs of slowing down. Rather than be swept up passively in this onslaught of technology, we must aggressively pursue the difficult questions of how media changes us by tackling the ethical dimensions of its influence.

Our exploration of ethical issues in emerging media has been organized into five sections. The first, "Citizens, Consumers, and Culture," focuses upon these issues as they are encountered by individuals in their roles as participants in a democratic system, as users of goods and services, and as consumers of popular culture. It begins with Robert MacDougall's consideration of the online auction site eBay as, not merely an electronic marketplace, but a social system with behavioral norms that are both self-policing (in that they play a role in one's success as buyer or seller) and externally enforced through the threat of expulsion. Though eBay is touted as a model for bottom-up neo-liberal democracy, MacDougall argues it is a subtly top-down corporate space and speculates how its construction of "citizenship" may translate to full-fledged digital democracy. Similarly, Christopher Bell analyzes the democratic pretensions of the wildly popular television series *American Idol*, in which the ages-old genre of broadcast talent competition is remade as an interactive platform for the expression of viewer opinion. The reality may be quite different, given producer manipulation of screen time and the potential for sponsor interference, which prompt comparisons with the quiz show scandals of the 1950s. A third essay by Mel Racho, herself both an educator and digital artist, offers a critique of the practice of creation of digital media. Racho notes that the internet serves not merely as a new medium for the expression of narrative storytelling and for performance of creative works, but fundamentally alters the roles of producer and consumer as well as our construction of the artist.

In the second section, "Ethical Practices of Conservators and Regulators," those charged with the containment and preservation of cultural forms and social practices are faced with the new conceptual landscapes wrought by emerging media, particularly when they assume some of the functions of older media. Daniel Heath Cull, assistant conservator of the Musical Instrument Museum, employs Deleuze and Guattari's *rhizome* theory to illustrate the dramatic shifts underway in conservation. Using Wikipedia as an example of the rhizome metaphor, in which knowledge is constructed as process rather than product, Cull's essay explores an emerging model of ethical conservation and the possibilities its relationships with new media hold for his profession.

In the legal profession, the use by adolescents of internet sites and social media as vehicles for sexual self-expression is forcing a redefinition of child pornography and exploitation, concepts grounded in older media forms such as magazines and videotape. Brett Lunceford's chapter considers the ethical issues surrounding "sexting" by situating the practice within a culture that at once celebrates and is suspicious of underage sexuality. The potential for emerging media technologies to supplant older ones on which populations of limited means and limited technological savvy have come to rely first presented policymakers with the question of whether such newer technologies should be subsidized as essential services. In the final chapter in this section, Bruce Drushel analyzes the ethical behavior of public officials who must administer a subsidy program found to be flawed.

The book's third section, "Speech, Civility, and Privacy," focuses on the ethical implications of advances in communication technology that distort the truth and blur the boundaries between the public and the private. It opens with an essay by Priscilla Marie Meddaugh, which argues the embrace of cybermedia by Holocaust deniers represents not just an alternative delivery vehicle for revisionist histories, but also an "electronic simulacrum" in which the promise of dialogical interaction instead works to silence the authentic voices of witnesses and survivors. In separate investigations that follow, Robert Bodle and Tammy Swenson Lepper each address the ethical considerations when emerging media encourage the publication of information that users consider private. Bodle's chapter examines account-based "Google Cloud" web applications that rely upon user-provided data and that shift responsibility for privacy protection to the user. Google's policies appear to echo the results of a study of Facebook users detailed in Swenson Lepper's chapter. Her examination reveals sophistication with the ethical implications of social media content among some users, who at the same time endorse personal responsibility as the best guarantor against abuse.

The remaining two sections of the book address professional practices. Section Four, "Propaganda and Strategic Communications," features two distinct perspectives on ethical issues within this growing field as it is being remade through convergence with digital media. The first, from Elspeth Tilley, concerns itself with the tendency of ethical approaches to public relations to lag behind the technologically driven evolution of the profession. Referencing McLuhan's theory of technological determinism, she advocates an approach in which ethical precepts guide the adaption of emerging media into strategic communications practice. The second, from practitioner-turned-scholar Ric Jensen, focuses on one of those adaptations: the practice of organizations compensating authors of weblogs to post material on those organizations' behalf. After reviewing economic imperatives that drive increased use of this practice, Jensen examines the potential for ethical lapses, and concludes with a comparative assessment of proposed remedial actions, including regulatory measures and self-regulation.

The final section, "Journalistic Practice," offers pieces examining the use of online comment fields and proposing an ethical standard for citizen-journalists in cyberspace. Michael Trice's chapter reports results of his study of comment fields linked to articles available at the websites of six local and global news organizations. The comments reflected extensive dialogue that differed rhetorically from reader input elsewhere in cyberspace and, given the growing popularity of "micro-blogging" media such as Twitter, portend what may be revolutionary changes in the relationship between source and audience. Kathleen German's chapter on the civic responsibility of online journalists begins with a recounting of online cell phone videos of the shooting death of a young woman who had been protesting the Iranian elections. German proposes Quintilian's concept of "decorum," which he had argued as prerequisite for civic participation by "good citizens," as a fitting ethical standard for citizen-journalists, on whom audiences increasingly rely for news that professional reporters are unable to cover, whether because of cutbacks at news organizations, the remoteness of the location, or censorship by ruling elites.

Every era it seems can be characterized by the issues that grip it. Their formidable challenge can often be framed as a fundamental ethical challenge, offering societies an opportunity to examine deeply held beliefs and widespread actions, potentially resulting in dramatic change. At the start of the twenty-first century, the explosion of new media technology and its widespread embrace by the world's wealthiest nations gave rise to issues that are likely to dominate discussions of ethics well into the century. The extraordinary impact of media technology on the political, professional, and personal lives of first world countries leaves us gasping in attempts to keep abreast. However, our love affair with innovation diverts our attention from the risks and social costs of these very same technological advancements. Technology seems to be moving much faster than our ability to investigate the ethical toll it may be taking.

This gap between practice and ethical reflection may disguise profound dangers for all of us. This book is an attempt to open a dialogue and reflect upon the ramifications of the media revolution that engulfs us.

Note

1 For additional examples of the impact of technological changes on society and human behavior, see Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society: A History from the Printing Press to the Superhighway*, New York: Routledge, 1998, and Asa Biggs, *Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge: Polity, 2010.

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I

Citizens, Consumers, and Culture

1

eBay Ethics: Simulating Civility in One of the New Digital Democracies

ROBERT MACDOUGALL, PH.D.[1]
Curry College

IN THEIR EFFORTS TO CONSTRUCT a stable and secure digital marketplace, eBay designers may have also created a workable template for an efficient neo-liberal social enclave. At one level, the business ethic on the internet's largest auction site has the appearance and feel of honest, timely commodity exchange. With all the panoptic controls now in place, it is difficult to do otherwise, lest one risk being banned from eBay altogether. This chapter paper describes the key features of eBay's user interface and argues that, particularly in digital contexts, top-down (i.e., corporate, quasi-governmental, administrative) entities can very effectively enhance their abilities to rationalize and control an otherwise seemingly democratic, bottom-up, and peer-to-peer situation. This study also highlights important relationships among the concepts of citizen, consumer, and socio-political actor today, and speculates upon the significance these various roles might play in a full-fledged digital democracy of tomorrow.

Today we find a broad array of digital communication media that constitute social environments for millions of people. These environments are often highly complex systems that can seem ecological, even biological in nature. As with any natural ecological system, human-made ecologies enable, constrain and, in part, define the entities that operate in and through them in various ways. These ecological systems always afford certain behaviors and limit others according to the specifics of their structure, layout, and general design features. Consider a lake, a river basin, a skyscraper, a commuter train, an interstate highway, a bicycle path, a laptop computer, or website. In every case, these systems carry particular biases, logics, and built-in predispositions that suggest and even prompt certain ways of experiencing, acting, and thinking about self and world. As James Carey (1989) succinctly put it, technologies have "teleological insight." That is to say, while not always singular, nor rigidly deterministic, every tool has certain ends "in mind."

A glance at the massive technological apparatus that is eBay reveals a relatively secure, stable, and highly efficient marketplace that allows hundreds of millions of people around the world to turn just about anything into extra cash. This remarkable success as a commodity exchange hub is closely linked to eBay's self-described civility. The sublimation of control on the world's largest consumer transaction website, however, is also consequential to social spheres traditionally conceived to be beyond the realm of commerce. As the interfaces, systems, logics, and functions that enable eBayers to do what they do emerge or are replicated elsewhere, an ecological analysis seems particularly apt. What follows is an abbreviated account of how eBay's environment detects, encodes, defines, and directs its users.

Some History

In 1651 Thomas Hobbes conceived of an orderly human society — the *leviathan* — as a self-organizing system possessing a life and intelligence all its own. George Dyson, writing in *Darwin among the Machines* (1997), draws out the contemporary significance of Hobbes' early notion of cybernetics or self-governing systems. Hobbes stated that "[h]uman society, taken as a whole, constituted a new form of life" and went on to suggest that "every joynt and member is moved to performe his duty" (in Dyson 1997, 3). From this, Hobbes maintained, the *salus populi* or people's safety would be assured. Foreshadowing Jeremy Bentham's insights on the *panopticon* about a century later, Hobbes' thinking was that a healthy balance of internal and external surveillance — the policing of both self and other — would most reliably ensure peace and prosperity. Like the high-pitched détente sustained throughout the Cold War, the threat of effective penalty, if not mutually assured destruction, was seen to be a reliable instrument for maintaining modes of life.

Hobbes' leviathan, Bentham's panopticon and, later, Foucault's (1973 and 1976) analyses of sexuality and the categorization of medical conditions together chart a history of emergent social control mechanisms. The fuller implications of various socio-technical systems deployed in cultures, and described by Mumford (1934), Innis (1950), Heidegger (1977), Ellul (1964), and Latour (1995) illustrate how the tandem technologies of definition and categorization can often be subtle, yet tyrannical in their capacity to direct and constrain the thoughts and actions of individuals and collectives alike. eBay counts, measures, and keeps track of all that occurs within its borders. Upon close examination, in fact, it becomes clear how this environment functions quite efficiently as a social-technical system of the digital kind.

Methods and Questions

This study is based upon an analysis of user content archived on eBay informed by ethnographic inquiry. Personal user commentaries obtained via participant observation and depth interview data were collected during the spring and fall of 2006. The core questions guiding the investigation include: How is the self/person negotiated and maintained on eBay? What is the nature of the relationship to specific others and to the collective? What does successful interaction look like and how is it structured? How are "violations" dealt with? And finally, how might behaviors adapted to this online venue contribute to an alteration in the way people think about themselves, each other, and the wider worlds they inhabit?

Marshall McLuhan's "tetrads" or "laws of media" approach is applied to help make sense of the eBay environment. McLuhan's approach characterizes and even makes tentative predictions with regard to how virtually any technology potentially enhances, reverses, retrieves from the past, and/or obsolesces particular features of human experience (McLuhan and McLuhan 1988). In its "reversal" quadrant, the tetrad reveals how, through a collection of procedures and rituals that are highly prescriptive on eBay, the structurally determined social construction of self results in a very specific kind of inhabitant that is counter-intuitive and quite unexpected. eBay frames, formats and presents not only its products, but also its users in quite systematic ways. Indeed, we'll discover that it is the users who become the product-qua-content on eBay.

With the aid of ten research participants, we begin to see how the personal thoughts, beliefs, and values that tend to make up the central features of analysis in contemporary studies of social interaction melt away as impractical, non-functional, and even disadvantageous concerns. It was not uncommon, in fact, for research participants to report that they were somehow compelled to act as they did: "I had to," "I didn't really have any choice," "this is just what you do," "sellers need to be polite," and "you better not mess around" were common retorts during conversations about intention and action.

The social formatting that takes place on the site is reminiscent of something Joshua Meyrowitz (1995) dubbed the "staging contingencies" of television. Like the commercial television context, eBay pre-figures and often reliably predicts the kind of individuals that emerge in its space. In so doing, the site prompts what for now can be called "ostensibly civil behaviors" in a patterned and systematic way. The behaviors prompted and channeled by eBay's environment thus constitute an emerging but already robust normative code that may be representative of an emerging norm online in general.

On the Mechanics and Media Logic of eBay

eBay hosts peer-to-peer interaction sustained through a highly formalized feedback mechanism centered around the exchange of goods that is bound, almost gravitation-like, by the network effect of hundreds of millions of daily users. At first pass, these processes appear to be working symbiotically with and through eBay users who dutifully and often enthusiastically sustain a self-regulating social control system that explicitly models and patterns successful behavior. To be sure, eBayers take their *rules* very seriously, and the resultant social patterning on the site fosters an eccentric and highly self-conscious kind of social and political consciousness. This, in turn, appears to engender a "culture of consent" that may be particularly susceptible to hegemonic control. Indeed, eBay's feedback system keeps tabs on virtually all activity that occurs in reference to auctions, payments, the shipping and handling of goods, and the fulfillment of transactions.

Through the posting process and feedback system, users essentially function as individual nodes that do the lion's share of work for eBay

in terms of advertising, promotion, quality control, security, and the distribution and circulation of commodities and capital. While eBay pedals virtually any kind of material item, it is the social and cultural capital in the form of user identities that is of particular interest here. eBayers are the primary dispensers of the various symbols that created and now maintain the eBay persona — the corporation's most precious commodity. On eBay, a global intelligence with a collective aim is distributed among nearly three hundred million users worldwide. *Everyday eBay* (2006) contains a broad collection of analyses focusing on the online auction house as an important socio-cultural phenomenon. In the introduction to the book, it is pointed out that:

> A crucial component of eBay's success, both economic and cultural, is its organization of the site as a series of stages allowing sellers to design, perform, and sell memorable experiences, thematically linked goods, for which purchasers are willing to pay a premium. These performances, and the willingness to pay, exceed commonsense understandings of eBay as a giant garage sale or the old-fashioned auction house writ virtual.
>
> (Hillis *et al.* 2006, 1)

On eBay a user's feedback rating is conspicuously displayed at the top of his/her profile page, visible to any visitor with a single click. Through commentary provided by several participants we see how most felt that their own eBay spaces, and their reputations that have been indexed there, mean something more than ever before — and for so many, probably more than any other *place* online. One side effect of this indexing is that an individual user's digital identity becomes a highly constructed and tightly controlled commodity intrinsically bound up with and embedded in the eBay brand. The development and eventual achievement of a good reputation on eBay becomes a legible, highly intentional, and strategic object to be designed and manipulated by users. But these are users who seem to be acting independently through self-interest and who are also effective nodes in a socio-technical control mechanism.

Of course, this is just good business — and it is nothing new. The merchants of ancient Cairo, Athens, Istanbul, and countless other trade hubs around the world also endeavored to be efficient and therefore sought positive recognition as reliable sellers in the open marketplace.

To do otherwise was to risk being eclipsed by the competition across the way — or worse, banished from the marketplace altogether. In the process these cities slowly took on a kind of brand identity in and of themselves, gaining distinction and prosperity in step with the workings of their markets. So it's not that we're seeing a wholly new kind of activity taking shape on eBay. What we have instead is a new kind of personality and social being emerging: one adapted to the forms, pace, and scale of social interaction that typifies our relationships enabled and shaped by computer technology. eBay's rigidly structured, primarily text-based interface that provides most of the social context for interaction is highly consequential in its capacity to realign values and perceptions of what constitutes successful actions, and by extension elicits positive and meaningful (here read *functional*) social behavior from its users.

Research participants offer insights that suggest how personal thoughts and private outlooks are rendered peripheral, even superfluous, concerns in the world of eBay because they tend to be non-functional and ultimately inconsequential to the way people behave there. Given this, we have to wonder if interaction patterns that are functionally beneficial in the eBay domain translate well to a sustainable way of being offline, in the "real world," so to speak. Of course, the consequentiality of acts and deeds in eBay has been impacting the offline world in very real ways for more than a decade, as new users set up accounts every day and experience the real consequences of money orders, checks, electronic deposits, and stock values. There seems to be more to the story, however, and it concerns a psychic shift now in process. As opposed to focusing on individual intentions, however, this study draws out the side effects and the unintended social and psychological consequences of dwelling and acting on eBay.

Return to the *Modern*: Codifying Stability, Security and Social Control

The most significant observation made in *Everyday eBay* (2006) is one that turns much of the extant cyber-identity and cyber-politics literature on its head: the "reassertion of a fixed, stable, and very modern identity formation" (Hillis *et al.* 2006, 5). Viewed this way, eBay represents a virtual commons where the post-modern analysis of human identity as an adaptive, fluid, homeostatic process finely tuned to the contingencies of the social environment quickly obsolesces because, quite simply, such an identity is counter-productive. To the contrary, in order to function successfully as a *citizen* of eBay, one needs to act out an almost mythically stable conception of identity. As opposed to being representative of an actual person in the flesh and blood, these fixed, hyper-stable selves give way to highly predictable behaviors that most resemble the stereotypical door-to-door salesman or overzealously tip-minded waitperson at an upscale eatery. More darkly perhaps, the model eBay citizen conjures the Machiavellian caricature of a calculating political candidate, social charlatan, or consummate grifter. Ideas, objects, or people — there is no functional distinction when it comes to closing the deal — all are quantified and rendered a utility on eBay.

Consequently, and perhaps more than anywhere else, eBayers appear consistent in thought, word, and deed, predictable actors in the world of online exchange. All becomes artifice as people find themselves acting or *acting out* in a kind of perpetual campaign mode. Human interaction — based ideally on something akin to Martin Buber's (1977) *I-thou*/subject-subject relationship, or Alfred Schutz's (1972) *We* relationship — quickly reduces in some of these new digital realms to a kind of mechanistic, rigidly time-bound and therefore almost purely functional, task-oriented, *I-it*/subject-object relation. In the process, an eBayer's consciousness-of-other moves systematically from *Thou* and *We* to *They* and *Other*, as virtually all interaction on the site is a means-to-end, subject-object confrontation.

We see, for example, how many eBayers who might otherwise be philosophically opposed to a practice like sniping admit to periodically engaging in that same behavior "just to get it this one time." Sniping describes various, sometimes nefarious, methods of achieving the winning bid. Borrowed from the online gaming culture, the term originally referred to first-person shooter games where a hidden gunman, a sniper, using a high-powered rifle (or any highly accurate and powerful weapon) is the most effective and feared killer. The term has since migrated to online auction sites and is now used to describe any number of methods and means of outsmarting, winning, or otherwise dominating another user at the "game" in play. The most common example of sniping is the last-minute or even last-second bid to almost entirely negate the possibility that another bidder will have enough time to win the auction. Sniping can be accomplished via human agent or by one of several artificial intelligence (AI) constructs designed for such purposes.

Or consider the game, film, or comic book trader who agrees to refund a buyer's money (who cited lost or damaged goods) and submits to an obvious ruse in the hope of preserving their own reputation as a fair and reliable seller. But again and again we find eBay users using others, and using and abusing themselves along the way. Buber's *I* and *Thou* become *Its*, and Schutz's *We* morphs to *They*. The formal structure of the medium helps to engender a kind of dehumanized interplay, as the narrowed bandwidth of primarily text-based interaction reduces immediacy and short-circuits user attempts to communicate empathy along a spectrum of non-verbal channels. Such narrowing undoubtedly has something to do with the systematic objectification of self and other observed. But more is at play than just this.

It is standard for eBayers to be allowed three claims that warrant the reimbursement of lost or missing funds. eBay, in other words, will *take your word for it* on three occasions. On the surface, this squares nicely with the standard "three strikes" rule applied in many situations where there is an effort by some form of authority to enforce appropriate behavior. The equation also seems to square nicely with one of eBay's five "fundamental values." As part of their effort to promote a communitarian ethic that they hope will create the kind of "small town" civility users might enjoy, eBay conspicuously proclaims its five beliefs:

1. We believe people are basically good.
2. We believe everyone has something to contribute.
3. We believe that an honest, open environment can bring out the best in people.
4. We recognize and respect everyone as a unique individual.
5. We encourage you to treat others the way you want to be treated

(eBay.com)

"We believe . . ." The rhetoric of hope is alive and well on eBay. It has come into vogue for politicians recently to deploy a similar ethos of hope through change. Something is surely being tapped here that may be a basic part of the human psyche: a whispered promise that points to the unwritten social contract of civilization. And if the notion of a better future has always been a compelling story, then eBay (through its feedback mechanism and online fora) crystallizes the dream. But is it a dream perpetually deferred? Dwelling in this digital-textual realm, can one ever be made to feel satisfied with his or her social position? In a place where obtaining virtually anything becomes possible, where one person's detritus always morphs into countless others' desideratum, how

do we know when enough is enough? As Jarrett (in Hillis *et al.* 2006) points out, "[t]hroughout the entire site, eBay's representation of itself minimizes its own authority" (112). Such veiled injunctions can become procedural dictate, a social rule to be good and proper (and ideally successful and wealthy too). And yet, "eBay's ability to make unilateral decisions, such as releasing consumer information to law enforcement officials, remains intact" (4):

> A liberal government works "at a distance," utilizing an array of technologies of the self — technologies that produce subjects already geared toward the dictates of liberal rule — rather than forcible impositions of its will. This hegemonizing impetus places a premium on seemingly noncoercive mechanisms of internal discipline, sites of normative judgment, and expertise through which 'correct' practice is inculcated and normalized within the psychology of the individual citizen.
>
> (Jarrett in Hillis *et al.* 2006, 109)

Rosanne Stone (1995) lodged an early critique of cybersociality by describing a "legible body" that comes to represent the standard denizen of the web. Stone predicted what has come to pass: the emergence of "fiduciary subjects" that have value primarily owing to their ability to engender public confidence. Of course, digital communication technologies did not bring this situation into being. Some of the first record-keeping devices included marked bones, rocks, and animal skins to tabulate the number of kills a hunter amassed in a season. Early medieval tally sticks, and later, more elaborate notched and cleaved wooden sticks could be mated back together to ensure proper repayments on loans to and from the king. Human beings have, in other words, been developing means of extending, tracking, and tagging the weight and measure of personhood beyond the body for thousands of years.

Today we establish, gain, and lose credibility through a wide variety of methods and mechanisms including: toll fare transponders, merchant discount cards and other point-of-purchase technologies, credit cards and credit reports, legal documents, street and email addresses, personal web pages, online profiles, and telephone numbers. The list seems endless. In the midst of this our hyper-legible digital selves become devices that certainly can liberate us in unprecedented ways by reducing the time it takes to get on and off the interstate, or shop or correspond with friends and family. But these new personas also can prove to be useful means of revealing some of the more subtle, but nonetheless deterministic, aspects of our physical and symbolic environments.

Tyranny of Text: Subverting the Subjective

While Heraclitus and Parmenides toyed, respectively, with fluid and stable ontologies of self in ancient Greece, it was not until the mid-sixteenth century when Michel de Montaigne wrote that the "inconstancy of our actions" was a central part of what it means to be human. But if Montaigne's insightful essay never gained much traction in his own time, today he (like Heraclitus) seems to have been mostly on track. Indeed, Montaigne's post-modern theory of identity had to wait 400 years before a broader awareness of this socially orienting, context-dependent, and fluid aspect of the human self gained prominence. Yet this recognition of a more flexible, situational self described so well in Goffman's accounts (1959, 1967) is now losing traction in the age of always-on, always-visible, always-working digital identities where fluidity and change are seen as suspect — a discernible character flaw writ large for the world to see. And there is good reason for this: "When identity was defined as unitary and solid it was relatively easy to recognize and censure deviation from a norm" (Turkle 1995, 261). Contrary to Turkle's suggestion that "[a] more fluid sense of self" would be an inevitable consequence of life online, a growing number of the digital spaces we occupy do not allow these naturally fluid aspects of our selves to emerge — aspects that have, arguably, always been closely linked to the social contexts humans inhabit.

A textual mode of representation can be almost tyrannical in its capacity to configure consciousness of self and other. McLuhan, in a rare one-on-one interview, suggests how this might work:

> We confront a basic paradox whenever we discuss personal freedom in literate and tribal cultures. Literate mechanical society separated the individual from the group in space, engendering privacy; in thought, engendering point of view; and in work, engendering specialism — thus forging all the values associated with individualism. But at the same time, print technology has homogenized man, creating mass militarism, mass mind and mass uniformity; print gave man private habits of individualism and a public role of absolute conformity.
>
> (Norden 1969, 25)

The textual certainly carries most of the symbolic load on eBay, where percentages and one-line qualitative comments form the backbone of the eBay user interface that constitutes user profiles. But another notable feature of the self-inscriptions on eBay is their openness to mass exposure. And MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube all represent test beds that are revealing some of the psychological, social, and political reverberations this strange new kind of public legibility plays in our lives (cf. Federman 2003). So let's consider what has become a fairly typical user feedback profile on eBay:

Figure 1.1. **eBay user feedback information collected Fall 2006**

The short verbal descriptions of sellers and buyers, and the numbers eBay's computers aligned with those descriptions, always seemed to be, as one user said, "in your face." This profile information echoes the small talk of a mid-twentieth-century Rockwell-esque diner or grocery store; yet, beneath the sunny syntax, something else is often churning. While described in a variety of ways, every participant informing this study reported a kind of hyper self-consciousness forged during interactions that seems rooted in the system's highly constraining textual format. Problematizing the argument laid out by Turkle (1995), there is little that feels therapeutic about this increasingly common aspect of *life on the screen*. To the contrary, these eBay experiences bolster a sentiment offered in the epilogue to Neil Postman's prescient *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: "In the Huxleyan prophecy, Big Brother does not watch us by his choice. We watch him by ours. There is no need for wardens or gates, or Ministries of Truth" (1985, 155).

Research participants suggest how their individual will and their inner thoughts and opinions can be effectively effaced by the formal logic of the system. For instance, this emergent social code limits content to very brief and often highly conventionalized accolades that seem to facilitate a generally positive mood on the site. As Ned, a 40-year-old engineer put it, most of the interactions on eBay read "like the ravings of a perpetually happy person." Prior to the auction, conversely, one is prompted to describe items accurately and in great detail from an objective vantage, as well as make clear one's own persona as a stable, rational player in the auction game.

The way eBay is structured, the site ends up functioning a bit like Adam Smith's free market on steroids, with a tincture of anti-depressant thrown in for good measure. From a business standpoint it works very well for all parties who maintain active membership. However, strangers and itinerants beware, as Trish, a 45-year-old college professor and music and film fanatic, suggests: "to be accepted on eBay you have to be more than a regular. You have to sort of live there." Jarrett (in Hillis *et al.* 2006), notes how "this is clearly a more liberalized panopticon than Bentham's model, but not only in that it denies the centralization of power in an appointed elite. It is also more liberal in that it effects its disciplining, not in the form of coercion by an external force, but disguised as an exercise of free will and autonomous, responsibilized activity" (116). No doubt, the air of autonomy and responsible activity Jarrett notes is apparent in most corners of eBay.

This suggests that the unique perspectives of individuals, even whole interpretive communities, can be effectively neutralized on eBay, where a subject position grounded in the here-and-now very often becomes a liability. In its place a homogeneous global outlook becomes the default perspective — an outlook that includes keeping one eye on the developing feedback commentary and the other on eBay's official clock. Traditionally, cultural mores, regional values, and even differences in geography, weather, and climate set perceptions and engender local understandings with respect to descriptors like "good" and "excellent." Yet such things obsolesce early in a game where Meyrowitz's *no sense of place* finds a place. Like eBay's prescription to adhere to its "official time" when doing business, one must also become attuned to its official geography of nowhere. On eBay, through some of the mechanisms just described, users are obligated to think more objectively, more universally, and outside their own experience in very systematic ways. This leveling or broadening effect (some have likened it to a *democratizing* effect) of electronic media also happens to be a key feature of globalization. It informed McLuhan's *global village* idea, through which he assumed we would all eventually gain access to each other's business (Norden 1969, 15).

Yet we begin to recognize some important differences between the kind of global village now emerging in places like eBay and the

McLuhan-esque version that has gathered attention in the popular press over the past decade. McLuhan predicted a smoothing over of human personas represented via screens in his seminal *Understanding Media* (1964). Straying in some ways from his predictions regarding computers and screen-based technology, a small renaissance of the written word is occurring online with blogging, Twitter, and several additional micro-textual modes of content production. The current status of the word as the central means of symbolization in a media environment like eBay (primarily in the form of lengthy item descriptions) may be only temporary, but it nonetheless problematizes McLuhan's characterization of personalities represented on screens as generally cool and indistinct. Indeed, the auction site forges fairly well-defined (McLuhan's "hotter") personas and therefore presents these users with a rather profound manifestation of the "catch 22." First, there are the challenges a seller in particular has in becoming acquainted with the multitudinous perceptions and perspectives represented by other players involved who are often rooted in very different physical and socio-cultural locales. Second, there is the challenge of following through with what is expected by eBay: performing behaviors that represent a consistent, stable actor. Of course, these are hardly parallel enterprises, and Meyrowitz (2005) elaborates on the problem this "glocalizing" effect creates for the individual still generally rooted in one physical locale. What happens to us — our perception of self and other — when our embodied, socially embedded experience loses its anchoring function, the basic context through which one gains and holds onto some sense of who she or he is? What happens when our familiar social and physical locales reduce to mere staging grounds for our actions online?

Richard Sennett's (1998) suggestion that modern, itinerant lifestyles and the attendant inability to gain a relatively consistent sense of self might help explain some of this. Along with Goffman (1959, 1967), and Mead (1934), Sennett sees the consistent interaction of persons in face-to-face encounters as the primary way we come not only to know others, but also ourselves (see also Bavelas *et al.* 1997, and Berger *et al.* 1973). Something is certainly lost when we no longer have the embodied *other* there to, in a sense, check our own behavior. What's more, the ability to substantially remake the self in a move from one geographical locale (and/or social place) to the next may become a thing of the past given the persistent personal histories maintained in venues like eBay. How do these always-visible (and so always-on) user profiles alter who we are?

A profound irony and powerful tension emerges between a stable, modern conception of self, and the fluid, post-modern theory of identity characterized in so much popular writing as something endemic to the internet. Certainly, as Turkle (1995) opined, "[a] more fluid sense of self [online] allows a greater capacity for acknowledging diversity" (261). However, a hyper-stable persona may now be surfacing as the preeminent being, the successful self in the context of online life.[2]

The Happy Hegemony: Content as Content

eBay feedback is a generally positive (if often half-hearted) history of the activities of parties involved.[3] A cursory glance through virtually any feedback profile reveals the nature of this prattle. The system generally elevates feedback scores and pushes the positive. Feedback on the site thus constitutes a form of viral advertising and promotion that accumulates around its users in a manner largely beyond their control. Next, we'll consider some of the ways eBay users themselves become the content of the medium they ostensibly employ in getting things done. In a sense, everything you can see on eBay is an advertisement for eBay. There is some precedent to thinking about advertising in this way.

McLuhan drew up an elaborate alternative to the standard psychological interpretation of advertising. He suggested ads form an environmental surround that subtly guides the formation of consciousness and community. "Ideally, advertising aims at the goal of a programmed harmony among all human impulses and aspirations and endeavors . . . When all production and all consumption are brought into a pre-established harmony with all desire and all effort, then advertising will have liquidated itself by its own success" (McLuhan 1964, 227). Functioning like a kind of tacit advertising, eBay's feedback mechanism provides the social lubricant for getting things done. It forms the background of experience — part of the surrounding ecology — and becomes the important cultural content which, for many users, is at least as consequential as closing the deal.

No doubt eBayers work hard and are willing to pay for this new kind of "street cred." For Adin, a 26-year-old graduate student from India, the price of a good feedback rating is "forty or fifty dollars . . . I won't argue and fight below that," he says, "I'll just pay . . . it is *very* important." Trish, the college professor, thought ten or fifteen dollars was her limit. Andy, a 47-year-old film buff, figured, "[h]ey, at this point I've got too much invested as a seller. If someone told me they didn't receive a $100 item and I even had all the records indicating that the delivery was made to their front porch, I probably wouldn't risk it. I'd refund their money." Now, whether Andy's theory ever cashes out in practice, his impression of himself (and his subservience to the system within which he operates) is notable. Andy described at length the way in which the constraints of eBay feel similar to the constraints written into the custody agreement with his ex-wife (someone with whom he must always "try hard to be civil with"). We begin, then, to see how the logics of thought and action engendered by eBay's environment can become adaptive or advantageous to activity inside that domain.

The Sinister Side of the Good Citizen

While it is obviously a burgeoning marketplace, there are a number of ways interaction on eBay may actually be disadvantageous to individuals, social groups, and the wider ecology, as patterns of interaction on the site as well as so much of the material by-product of that interaction bleed and diffuse elsewhere. As templates for civil behavior, the interaction now flourishing on eBay could probably never be sustainable in a wider context that aspires toward anything other than commodity exchange as its core activity. If we can say that eBay has created a good and stable society in its own domain, this assessment loses some of its force when we consider both the individual and broader social manifestations that can emerge from these underlying patterns of engagement. Given this, we have to begin conceiving of any medium or media system as an environment offering affordances (Gibson 1966, 1979) to the various agents and organisms dwelling there — *procedural templates* that are often highly consequential to both the thought and behavior of its inhabitants.

Carey's (1989) ritual form of communication may also be instructive here. With the invisible network in full effect, eBay is an environment that makes continued participation itself a warrant for virtually any prohibition, limitation, restraint, user co-optation, or governmental cooperation its administrators deem fit. And in the face of such mass inertia, user boycotts and strikes simply do not work. Ironically, with all of the subterfuge, it is the eBay members who take on the burden of work persuading each other that the site and all of its environs are safe, fair, equitable — and, increasingly, indispensable to their lives. eBayers become implicated, and contented, in their roles as the content of the medium.

Loosed, then, from the ethical moorings most intrinsic to contexts of embedded, embodied, face-to-face interaction, a troubling pattern emerges. Individuals tend to mislay their subject position, along with most of their personal drive, intuition, and instinct that have been tempered over time by the tacit cultural codes the vast majority of us live by. A new communicative concept emerges on eBay — and with it a shadowy ethic that is captured succinctly in the *snipe*.

Defined earlier in the chapter, sniping describes various, sometimes nefarious, methods of achieving the winning bid. Sniping has become an industry unto itself, with books, manuals, websites, dedicated services, and software devoted to the sure-fire snipe. eBay is clearly the epicenter of the sniping culture, and there are hundreds of specialized books, products, and related services with titles, names, and catchphrases like: "eBay Hacks," "Stomp Your Competition on eBay," "Powersnipe," "Auction Sentry," and "eBay: Top 100 Simplified Tips & Tricks." The whole enterprise betrays what is in fact fostered through interaction over time: a systemic enmity among and between buyers. I have been sniped by humans and automated "bots." I even managed to win a snowboard once by manually sniping an item out from under another bidder in the wee hours of the night. No one really gets hurt, but the activity is vicious pure and simple.

With all of this comes increased difficulty in discriminating between ethical and unethical rule systems, on the one hand, and practically advantageous or disadvantageous rule systems on the other. All, in short, becomes a matter of short-term, local functionality. When the key prescriptions for action flow top-down, a tendency toward consent develops out of sheer necessity. And, over time, when prescriptions come from the system — from everywhere or, apparently, from nowhere in particular — a tendency toward passive consent is predictable. Consent to, and even participation in, a behavior like sniping becomes not merely a way of thinking, but a matter of continued participation and survival. Sniping, in short, becomes standard operating procedure for any regular eBayer worth his or her salt. And for the larger socio-technical system a very wide range of policies and behaviors become possible, acceptable, and ultimately justifiable within the bounds of that system.

These include but are not limited to: sniping, the careful and highly conscious policing of self and other, difficulties in communicating with central authority and control personnel, narrowed means of signifying discontent between users (with an attendant tendency to artificially elevate perceptions of satisfaction), and a general ends-justifies-means *modus operandi*. In numerous totalitarian situations throughout history and around the globe such modes of thought and behavior meant survival (often meaning little more than continued subsistence, even mere existence for the unfortunate many). On eBay, this means continued bidding and buying according to the rules and codes and patterned activities now in place — activities that are progressively being appended to notions of the good life.

As Hannah Arendt (1963) made clear, one reason this kind of "banal evil" is so frightening is because it eludes our attention by becoming part of the background of experience, the baseline of everyday behavior. It is a very effective form of *overt covertness*, and it is through progressive habituation that it continues to defy detection. Indeed, we are not talking about a clear collection of dark, malevolent symbols like those offered to us in *The Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars* sagas. Banal evil is vague and unpredictable. It cannot be "read." Indeed, assessments of goodness and badness very often lose meaning when we move from the world of ideas to a "place" like eBay; a virtual, yet nonetheless concrete, world of actions-in-context. The extra twist on eBay is that while we are always participating in these processes, we never quite see the moves being made.

There is certainly a concreteness that spins out of the exchange process, since something very real is manifested in the funds that have changed hands and the receipt of an item won, but we should also ask ourselves if we care that the underlying machinations leading up to these concrete moments can be unmistakably Machiavellian in both design and intent. As one instantiation of an "intentional community," eBay does appear to have something *in mind*.

There are a few "offline" initiatives worth mentioning here. Less indicative of the intentions of any particular individual or group of policymakers, they seem more like the manifestations of much larger systems described at the socio-cultural level. These initiatives are analogous to the eBay mechanism in terms of the social and behavioral expectations they represent, and the tacit collusion they foster.

In the United States the relatively recent establishment of the Department of Homeland Security has resulted in widespread alterations to international travel security protocols, domestic mass-transit safety measures, and telecommunication security rules and regulations; a kind of popular acceptance continues to gather around the notion that *if you aren't doing anything wrong then you have nothing to be concerned about*. And with this an old trope found new life as localized pockets of resistance to the initiatives quelled in the midst of a nationalistic fervor reminiscent of the kind of insidious social cohesion sustained from the beginning of World War II through the McCarthy era.

Like much of the operative communication on eBay, the submission of hearsay has in fact been codified as a valid way to proceed with the Military Commission's Act passing late one night in October of 2006 by a government asleep at the wheel and for a public largely unaware of the implications. Then, with the signing of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act in July of 2008, which includes retroactive immunity for telecommunications companies that helped the federal government spy on Americans in suspected terrorism cases, the structure of an emergent national security system is all but complete. In such cases we see the formal institutionalization of what essentially amounts to gossip and innuendo as a means of censoring individuals, determining the rightness or wrongness of specific behaviors, justifying incarceration without representation, and ultimately enforcing corrective action. It is notable, with the feedback mechanism configured as it is, that these same methods and means come to represent the core of eBay's ethic. As such, eBay becomes a powerful incubator of cultural mores and norms that seem antithetical to standard notions of what it means to have an open and free democratic society.

Conclusion: Programming Panopticism

By modeling one incarnation of civic behavior in order to facilitate the online auction and shopping experience, eBay functions very efficiently as a social control mechanism. Unfortunately, "[e]verything that human beings are doing to make it easier to operate computer networks is at the same time, but for different reasons, making it easier for computer networks to operate human beings" (Dyson 1997, 10). Echoing many of the caveats Norbert Wiener lodges in his 1948 book *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, Dyson offers a distinctly media ecological argument, pointing out that "[s]ymbiosis operates by way of positive rewards. The benefits of telecommunications are so attractive that we are eager to share our world with these machines" (Dyson 1997, 24). Systems like eBay indeed facilitate the control of humans and encourage a willingness to submit to that control.

If interaction on eBay reduces our roles to those of fellow surveillors, we should remain acutely aware that any social fabric, whatever its primary medium, has the tendency to tear itself apart when the primary impetus for action is rooted in fear (of detection, of reprisal, etc.). Commenting primarily on the social pathologies intrinsic to Soviet Russia, Bertrand Russell noted how "neither a man nor a crowd nor a nation can be trusted to act humanely, or to think sanely, under the influence of a great fear" (Russell 1943, 98).

I've argued throughout this chapter that understanding the intrinsic design features of certain media can help us make predictions concerning their social and psychological consequences and "side effects." Eisenstein (1979) and Ong (1982) reveal how the move to mass-produced printed material at the end of the fifteenth century prompted a corresponding cognitive shift toward abstraction and objectification. eBay's formal design features (features present in many new digital communication platforms) may systematically facilitate a kind of McCarthy-esque social reversion. Virtual places and spaces like eBay can retrieve old and/or onerous social and psychological patterns by reversing or flipping back into ways of being and seeing that are now recognized to be non-functional, maladaptive, and ultimately unsustainable forms of life. Nonetheless, we seem to be moving ahead full steam, back to a warped 1950s Americana, when the appearance and talk about a golden age, of being a good neighbor, merely sustained the surface appearances of a peaceful, healthy, and orderly society.

Such was the self-delusion of the day. However, for so many, and simmering just beneath the sickly sweet veneer, loomed a whole cadre of suppressions, repressions, and social anxieties. There is mounting evidence that suggests our modern mass media have exacerbated trends in these caustic forms of life (Schor 1991, Showalter 1997, Oldenburg 1999, Bauerlein 2008). And now with the always-accessible, always-on nature of communication made possible by the internet, the ability for social pathologies to proliferate is significantly enhanced.

As eBay renders certain behaviors normative, academic questions concerning the interplay between sociogenic and psychogenic forces turn moot. Indeed, these questions now have a ready answer. In the midst of hundreds of millions of users acting in kind, an emergent rule system gains fairly rapid social acceptance and legitimizes itself along the way. Given this, we can no longer nor so easily accept the notion of individual intentions or psychological patterns setting off a cascade of social effects to impact larger collectives. No *one* can make anything happen on eBay. Instead, an amorphous new kind of collective intelligence sets the pace, design, and changing structure for what, in an earlier time, used to be considered individual psychological types. And with this a new species emerges. It is a top-down social organism without a centralized nervous system or localized command and control center. It fixes hitherto human subjects like Gutenberg's press stamped out its primordial font types in progressively widening patterns of dissemination. And these processes conjure more than just a biological metaphor. They are organic and ultimately ecological in their emergent morphological patterning, moving from the fringes of society in toward the center of our personal and professional lives.

With the steady transmutation of our symbolic spaces from the spoken, to the written, to the pictorial, iconic, and imagistic (with the new *thing-ing* ability all this allows), the representation of human beings takes on a very different hue: at a distance, different, object-like, and manipulable. Likewise, in the transmutation from atoms to electrons, the nature of being human has shifted even further from *a way of being* to *being a kind of thing*. Or as William Burroughs once opined, we may indeed come to see just why and how: "*[h]uman . . . is an adjective and its use as a noun is in itself regrettable*" (Burroughs *et al.* 1998). And so, finally, it seems high time to remind ourselves of the message on the sign that reportedly hung in Albert Einstein's office: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts." eBay and other similar socio-technical manifestations tend to systematically discount much of what really matters. They obsolesce features of the free, intentional being — the foibles and the frailties — what it means, what it has always meant, to be human.

Notes

1 Robert MacDougall is an Associate Professor of Communication and Media Studies at Curry College on the outskirts of Boston, MA. His research centers around the social, political and psychological roles communication media have played through time. Dr. MacDougall is currently researching and writing about the progressive use of the internet as a primary information-gathering apparatus and nexus of social interaction.

2 The terms "modern" and "stable" in no way imply the necessary existence of an authentic self or core identity elsewhere. Rather, they merely point to the emergence of a highly functional self, adapted to the specific requirements of many emerging digital domains like the eBay interface within which users operate — itself a highly rationalized, stable, consistent environment.

3 For being so quantified (number of sales, feedback ratings and quotients), eBay's rating system only provides three options: positive, negative, and neutral. In the end this is a pretty unsophisticated meter. It is akin, as Adin opined, to saying: "I'm more happy than unhappy, therefore I must be happy." For many Americans this was the quandary they found themselves in when the president asked, in 2004, if we were better off at that point (rather than four years prior). A systematic oversimplification and distillation of personal affect results. However, not all online commodity-based communities are the same in this regard. For instance, Amazon's marketplace offers a 1–5 rating system. If still certainly constraining, this is slightly better in terms of representing personal impression. As of May 2008, eBay no longer allows its users to post negative or neutral feedback. This development was a predictable by-product given the underlying logic of the system.

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New Romance: A Digital Media Practice in the Age of the Internet

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The open-source environment of the internet promotes prolific and widely dispersed digital art. Digital theorists point toward the new media or digital artist's incorporation of or resistance to the internet, identifying fertile formal and thematic grounds for the emerging digital artist to develop and produce. The dizzying pace of technology and global conglomeration raises the question: How does an artist who works within a new media framework assess her work in a continually changing — upgrading, reformatting, and remediating — field? What is the role of the conscious digital producer in a post-modernist, post-Romantic, post-colonial feminist era, rife with post-humanist dialectic? As visual culture and digital media studies deepens, necessarily hybridizing non-art disciplines into revised scholarship, artists of the digital and information age are met with the opportunities and pitfalls of a medium that defies static codification and definition into the binary of low and high art. This chapter aims to address how a new media artist might find modes of understanding in how human beings connect and relate to one another when the context we operate from is inundated with cold, hard, and harsh data. What are the ethical complications of proliferating work that is easily disbursed and dispensed from an array of contexts? Looking primarily through the panoptics provided within

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation*, Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*, Margaret Dikovitskaya's interviews in *Visual Culture*, and Lisa Nakamura's *Digitizing Race*, this chapter begins the process of locating constantly evolving art practice through the theoretical, ethical, and critical frameworks that serve to define it.

For the digital media artist operating under a post-modernist rubric, the bravado of the artist working in feverish creative isolation cannot hold the same kind of Romantic sway as it once did when Pollock dripped and DeKooning gashed. The Baudrillardian vision of a society of flickering and mechanized screens is eerily proven by Josh Harris' nightmarish Quiet project.[2] Furthermore, the rhizomic nature of emerging media privileges a collective and collaborative mentality in digital artists whose work is contextually, culturally, and historically rooted in the age of the internet. Even at its most experimental and abstract, digital and new media art is not "free-form" in that its auteur cannot simply emote code nor expect a sequence of video to edit itself by happy accident. Work that is programmatically sequenced and parsed randomly is still consciously entered and debugged. Even the increasingly popular format of video and film work screened in backyard cinemas and micro-cinemas is consciously (humanly) sequenced together and is a curatorial event. Similarly, randomized video work on the web, such as the Perpetual Art Machine (PAM), though mathematically parsed, must be selected and uploaded by human curators. Furthermore, an audience that is, for the most part, no stranger to the digital medium (i.e., software that creates web pages and edits video exists pervasively on desktops) and is, by proxy, a consumer/producer, and the digital artist work within a pedestrian medium that potentially works outside of the gallery structure and therefore cannot expect the same adulation bestowed by the modernist myth of artist/genius.

Posthuman Persistence

The contested neutrality of the internet complicates its open-source roots even as the web's 2.0 makeover continues to crumble our notions of our bodied selves within world-building, identity-building, and community-building applications such as Second Life and the micro-weblogging tool Twitter and its integrated infomatic peripheries (i.e., bit.ly). In the case of the latter, the identifiable role of the human serving up the information is further mediated by a URL aggregating/shortening

application. While not speaking specifically of emerging media, in *Digitizing Race*, Lisa Nakamura identifies an applicable trend:

> Online practices of visualizing bodies have, far from defining users as "posthuman," come to constitute part of the everyday material activity of information seeking and communicating that defines membership in the information society.
>
> (Nakamura 2007, 13)

While the dialectics of "posthumanism"[3] continue within and around new media and feminist and cybernetic discourse, this chapter is concerned with how the un-tethering of our corporeal selves might translate into a digital art practice. What are, if they so exist, the problematics of such un-tethering? Ultimately, do we have a responsibility to each other's bodies? Is this responsibility mitigated by the preservation of our corporeal selves?

The digital artist defies neat categorization as painter, printmaker, or sculptor, instead concerning herself with a quintessentially ephemeral surface, a screen with infinitely vast amounts of visual and non-visual information. She wields the potential to relate to and reach a tremendous audience, subverting the distance between the artist and viewer where distinctly human barriers of geography and social strata exist. That said, could a new media artist find modes of understanding in how human beings connect and relate to one another when the context we operate from is inundated with cold, hard, and harsh data? And is there a way to ultimately posit these relationships as positive or hopeful when framed within a wider context?

There is no ostensible beauty in an online database. As it appears in its original source code, with its series of logically parsed statements, it is aesthetically cold and uninviting. A viewer might not engage in a dialogue so easily about the formal qualities of a database in the same terms as paintings, sculpture, or video. Yet, media and informatics artist and University of California at San Diego professor of visual arts Lev Manovich compares "data visualization art" — art as it links to the informational systems of databases — to "the *anti-sublime*" (original emphasis). A self-styled "cultural" [forecaster], Manovich parallels human interaction with algorithmic processes and data structures, serving up a compellingly logical framework from which to understand the complexities of the real world. Manovich "softens" data by reframing its ubiquitous qualities in terms of human perception (Manovich 2001). In a sense, he infuses what could be a cold and reductive medium into one that is expressly optimistic. Manovich finds the human intersection within a medium that is not typically considered accessible on an emotive human scale. The question of importance or validity in this contextual cultural and historical moment arises: Perhaps a humanist approach, in response to the post-humanist, must be adopted to unpack these ethical considerations.

The Softening of Data

While one might not overtly find blatant optimism in a practice such as Manovich's, as evidenced in his "Top Portals 2000," a work which deals with aggregating enormous amounts of data, the digital artist champions the internet as a mode for a new breed of dialectic whereby artist and viewer participate in and manipulate dialogue. Furthermore, if one understands that "the Web has transformed the personal computer into a smarter machine" (Burnett and Marshall 2003, 28), one whose turnover rate exponentially outpaces its commercial output, is this machine, to paraphrase Tracy Kidder's titular work, one that we can understand and genuinely concern ourselves over developing a soul?[4] If so, what is the nature of that soul if we take it to be the product of digitization and digital interpolation?

The digital artist is one who deals with "new media" — didactically understood as media that is not historically understood as fine art in material nor in critical and theoretical morphology. She produces work in a climate that favors applications to the linearity of desktop programs — the buzz of dynamic, self-generative media-saturated information where the distinction between producer/viewer, professional/amateur continues to blur. The current or very near future of the digital artist is online where digital video, audio, and images are neatly suitcased and potentially accessible to the widest possible demographic. If we take a cue from Manovich to soften the mechanics of the medium, then perhaps a working model exists in the synthesis of technologic engagement with ever-expansive dialogue of "realistic optimism." In this case, perhaps in Romanticism, as informed by a post-modernist, post-structuralist, and pluralistic age, there is a path toward a digital practice that could be a viable agent of relevant and affecting dialogue within this age and beyond an art context. I wish to offer my practice as one informed by current media trends and theories invested in digital forms, constantly evolving, but ultimately rooting its content — how people relate — in a paradigm of inclusivity.

In considering an aesthetic position reframed against a Romantic and modernist framework, one must re-imagine working within a digital framework that is comprehensible on a human scale as well as capable of grasping the sublime. Academic art is broadly judged by the balance between "form" and "content," as mediated by the artist's intentionality. If, for example, an artist summarizes her work as dealing with the drama of the mundane, then she might assume an audience asking themselves: What does that mean? The subjectivity of the clause: Is there drama in the mundane? Drama, as in a literary or "soap" context? The artist and viewer is, after all, post-Wittgenstein, post-Nauman, post-Holzer, and is inclined to believe that art is misconstrued and mis-communicated even when dissected into the binary. The artist, therefore, must appeal to the universal aspects of routine (i.e., repetitious activities in which one engages within a 24-hour cycle) in order to activate the viewer's sense of optimism of the everyday, co-existing with the grander themes of human reality. Perhaps, in that a digital artist is in the business of creating form out of what is ostensibly mediated by a machine's reading of zeros and ones, the ultimate goal is to create work (objects) to aggregate into a creative history, a database of sorts. Why then does there exist a reason to adopt a Manovichian approach to define a different aesthetic model apart from a modernist approach?

As a unilateral movement within the fine and literary arts, Romanticism delineates beauty for students invested in defining it — the sublime awe of the incomprehensible, unbridled natural power that is beyond human grasp. Returning to Manovich, who neatly defines Romanticism just as he proposes an art form to defy its tenets:

> If Romantic artists thought of certain phenomena and effects as un-representable, as something which goes beyond the limits of human senses and reason, data visualization artists aim at precisely the opposite: to map such phenomena whose scale is comparable to the scales human perception and cognition.
>
> (Manovich 2001)

Why bring the "un-representable" to human scale? How should art — in this case the work of "data visualization artists" — fulfill this need if it, in fact, exists? As author of this chapter, my bias implicates an eventual disenchantment first with Romanticism and then its substrate, modernism. In *Has Modernism Failed?*, Suzi Gablik asks the titular question, answered in part in her succeeding book, *The Reenchantment of Art*, where her "yes" is implicated in the proposed need to "re-enchant" art. The current condition of the world, as it is flooded by socio-economic, political and ecological gravities, is such that the private anguish of an artist no longer draws allusions to genius: "This sovereign specialness and apartness was symbolized by the romantic exile of the artist, and was lived out in modes of rebellion, withdrawal and antagonism" (Gablik 1991, 5). As a historical dialectic of a particular style or mode as it pertained to socio-political movements (i.e., the homosocial relationships within Robert Bage's *Hermsprong* or Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, both written in the "fervor" characteristic of Romantic style), Romanticism remains a relevant key interest. However, if one aligns herself with Gablik — there exists a clear need to address the "dangerous implications" in our "global amphitheater" where "there are no longer any sidelines" (Gablik 1991, 5); the world is beleaguered by destructive tendencies which no longer make passive cynicism a viable option for an artist who wishes to participate in any type of discourse. Carol Becker, in *Zones of Contention*, illustrates the problematic nature of the artist operating solo, free from any societal anchor: ". . . the artist alone, free to do whatever he or she imagines possible, but inevitably alone, without an ongoing dialogue with the world larger than the art community" (Becker 1996, 31). The characterization of the lone artist as lone wolf becomes a stereotype within the global context where, beauty, famously beheld by its beholder, becomes the least of our collective worries.

Romanticism loses its allure[5] once one develops a contextualized artistic practice that considers the framework from which it arises. Gablik quotes Albert Camus: ". . . the period of the revered master, of the artist with the camellia in his buttonhole, of the armchair genius is over" (Gablik 1991, 8). Provided one finds success in traditional gallery outlets, the cavalier attitude of the Western art world certainly was and still is seductive in terms of gratifying the individual artist's ego. Still, if a desire to participate within it exists, then it is inevitably mediated by terms of a larger context that considers not only the cloistered art world but also an audience. Inevitably, practicing art in the twenty-first century draws certain lines in the sand. An artist who is a non-white woman from a post-colonized nation might find personal and ethical

problems in singularly exalting the sublimely beautiful when the terms of exaltation are inherently constructed in a language imposed by (cultural) proxy. Digital artists can be seen as positioning themselves against modernism's structuralist demand for flatness in literature and orientation, which desires that every element of signification be spread out in the simultaneity of form. An interest in digital media and its potential for a decidedly anti-complete or incomplete narrative allows for one to move away from a singular definition of beauty onto one that permits a democratized interpretation. A medium to accommodate this aggregation of data and creativity and still retain the relevancy of two-way dialectic satisfies this interest.

It is this author's conviction that artists creating in this current climate cannot, either consciously or unconsciously, sidestep the inherent collective mentality native to the internet. If we accept that the artist working in isolation is no longer a plausible process and, as this author contends, an intentionally irresponsible act, then creative and artistic work produced within this current context is unavoidably affected by context — particularly those whose practices are tangentially, if not exclusively, a digital practice (as is the case of the artists discussed below).

In looking at works of three ostensibly dissimilar emerging artists, similarly trained with academic and fine art backgrounds, Aay Preston-Myint's fabric and paint animation *Some Ghosts* (2006), Jodie Mack's animated cut-out musical *Yard Work is Hard Work* (2008), and Latham Zearfoss's video *Self Control* (2008), the work is seemingly disparate. However, upon closer examination, Preston-Myint, Mack, and Zearfoss are bound through what this author identifies a privileging of dialectics within a wider community. Preston-Myint uses fabrics and paint to create a playful environment in which ghosts shoot out of doors and colors weave themselves in and out of fabric doors against a glitchy low-fidelity soundtrack in collaboration with musician Alexis Gideon.[6] Preston-Myint's work is usually collaborative, as in *Some Ghosts*, and privileges the collective and the dialogue that inevitably arises from working with or in response to group input. Similarly, filmmakers and video artists Mack and Zearfoss work with materials and with hybrid methodologies that privilege dialogue through accessibility accentuated by popular culture references, do-it-yourself production qualities, and open-ended distribution. Mack's work is a musical sung by characters cut out from magazines collaged and animated on 16 mm film. Mack's characters sing original music written and recorded by Mack in collaboration with Chicago musicians Roommate. In using images from ubiquitous publications and harmonic songs, the viewer is transported into a landscape of familiarity in work that examines relationships, gender roles, and stereotypes. Similarly, through saturated hues and queer iconography, Zearfoss's work "examines trust, community, subjectivity and identity through cakes, blood, and 80s' pop songstress Laura Branigan." Work that explicates this particular brand of human connectivity is underscored in the work of mid-career artist Huong Ngo's collaboration with the Kindness and Imagination Development Society (K.I.D.S.), who use street theatre as a venue to develop and re-develop their "childhood selves." Her ongoing work, *Text Me Theater*, explores the subject of privacy mediated through the mundane details of lives as chronicled in text messages. Ngo and K.I.D.S. participants stand atop a milk crate and read aloud the "script of their lives from the text messages on their phones."[7]

The Internet is the Ultimate Box

Consider how this democratic or autonomous quality is exemplified in the ether that comprises the internet. Martin Heidegger's treatise on "The Origin of Art," considers "a self-contained block of granite [as] something material in a definite or unshapely form" where "form here means the distinction and arrangement of the material parts in spatial parts" (Heidegger 1971, 29). Does this approximation apply when the form — i.e., any scripting language that builds a media-enabled page — fills no "spatial" territory and therefore cannot be physically lifted nor arranged? The internet, despite its vast mapping of psychic human territory, is certainly lighter than a granite block. Artists who use the computer as a tool to shape the internet's form into matter — that is, its incarnation into art — participate in what new media theoretician Jon Ippolito calls "creative misuse of [technology]" (Ippolito 2006). Rather than using a computer for its "intended" use, artists "misuse" the computer so that it goes beyond simply fulfilling a utilitarian and information-driven potential. Moreover, the internet's universality and inherently unfinished quality in constantly aggregated or "linked" content ensures an evolving and open-ended dialogue, evidenced in a codex that is open-source by definition. Granted that HTML, the syntactical building block of all online content, was conceived in

the romantic alphabet, it is universal in how it is interpreted by web browsers; conversion into ASCII, or its superset, Unicode (Castro 2003, 30) ensures this universality. The internet is many things to many people; a current aesthetic position might be one that privileges the potential of the internet as a key facilitator in a practice that aims to address or assuage psychological and societal ills.

The internet, relying heavily on text as well as still and moving images, draws an inevitable comparison to video — specifically, video formatted for television — as it became an accessible technology during the 1970s. The computer screen, much like a television screen, contains a key difference: the potential of interactivity always exists with the former, either through how content is uploaded or managed and/or how the viewer perceives it and, through bulletin boards and email, reacts. Historian and digital artist Margot Lovejoy's *Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age* elucidates a relevant condition that plagues video formatted for the television screen:

> . . . that television could become a democratic alternative as a tool for cultural and social change. These hopes grew out of Marshall McLuhan's "global village" attitudes of the 1960s and did not take into account the huge distance between high-culture style and mass-media realities.
>
> (Lovejoy 2004, 115)

The reality of "mass-media" is a synthesis of multiple digital media — the internet, network and cable television, film and radio — that the internet houses because of its propensity for data structures. As Burnett and Marshall note, the web provides a "burgeoning supply of information [that] has often become the current shorthand for this information overload" (Burnett and Marshall 2003, 23). Furthermore, institutions such as the Guggenheim, Dia Center, and the Whitney — purveyors of "high-culture style"– readily commission and showcase art based in the World Wide Web. Presumably, the internet has broken into the mainstream art world. Internet art, unlike video art, however, is not readily "collectable" as a sculptural form — "a three-dimensional cube with a flickering face" (Danto 2000, 160) nor, perhaps, holds the same dramatic cultural gravity in the very first instance that video — or, the moving image — made an appearance. Perhaps early adopters of the internet as a medium were drawn to this ephemeral quality, likely in the way that women video artists flocked toward video as a medium once it became accessible and relatively affordable. As Michael Rush attests in *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art*:

> [Video's] seeming endless possibilities and relative affordability make it increasingly attractive to young artists who have been raised in an era of media saturation. Video is a way of participating in and reacting to media overkill; it is also a manageable means to communicate personal messages.
>
> (Rush 1999, 128)

Specifically, the climate of the 1970s, rife with political and social upheavals, student revolt, and a sexual revolution, gave rise to the insurgence of First-Wave Feminist video art and artists (a list including Joan Jonas, Hannah Wilke, Dara Birnbaum, and Martha Rosler). Such artists were understandably drawn to video, as participants in "the cultural context in which video art emerged" (Rush 1999, 80) were able to create "a striking personal, feminist landscape by using [their own bodies] in ways the female body was rarely seen in conventional media" (Rush 1999, 103). The digital media artist's investment in video and the internet are, perhaps, not quite as revolutionary as in the early days of the medium. However, as new technology spurs new brands of creativity and accessibility, these umbrella characteristics of the digital internet-ready media indicate or, perhaps, portend total media inclusiveness, regardless of gender, platform, or medium. After all, the internet, which houses television, cinema, and radio — either illicitly or legally as downloaded or streamed content — has shared interests, or perhaps parallel interests with the open-source environments, applications, and languages propagated and maintained by programmers, software engineers, and other individuals with amateur or hobbyist interests. The creation of Cycling '74's visual programming environment MAX/MSP and its generative audio and video subset, Jitter, have been a toolset of electronic musicians, new media artists, and those drawn to the modularity and intuitive graphical interface. On the other hand, Pure Data (PD), MAX/MSP's open-source counterpart, accomplishes the same with the main distinction being that PD is free and extensible by the wider programming community. MAX/MSP is a sizable investment for the desktop artist/hobbyist. With their graphical interfaces, both are easy to navigate and with pleasing user interfaces — MAX/MSP's interface is

bolstered by Mac-friendly icons — provide accessibility to the creation of interactive applications without strict coding knowledge. Access paths to such knowledge still are mediated by gender, ethnicity, and other socio-economic variables; however, particularly with PD, artistic creation as it intersects with physical computing is commercial reality.

The inclusive qualities of the internet draw diverse artists and their communities a voice, albeit housed within a disparate box and under constant risk of censorship through Net Neutrality legislation. The romance of the internet as an uncharted territory is threatened, if not abolished, through its policing. In his 2007 Technology Entertainment Design (TED) talk, Lawrence Lessig, attorney, founder of the free-licensing scheme Creative Commons, and one of the most outspoken proponents of online creative culture, underscores the importance of the internet in the preservation of society's collective ideas. Lessig emphasizes the importance of the internet's generative properties in propagating new and, as he suggests, better ideas through methods of appropriation. The internet, in Lessig's approximation, is an entity under fire because of its potential to uproot the status quo through the propagation of creative work and ideas of the "next generation."

The lure of the internet's seemingly user-controlled/defined plane and gift-economy mentality, contextualized with the necessarily pessimistic lens of the twenty-first century, cannot come without certain weariness and cynicism. Nakamura's *Digitizing Race* sheds light on the dearth of critical discussion of the early iterations of internet to hegemonize a white, largely male audience and gaze. Nakamura however, points at the opportunities that internet's users have to create a consciously racialized space online (Nakamura 2007, 93–94) — that is, in marginalized communities' active partaking in the cultural production of the medium. The new media artist who is used to working regardless of gallery representation or validation has the benefit and misfortune of self-reflexivity when it comes to artistic production.

Digital Female-identified Artist: Learning Through Failure

Without explicitly referring to the art potentialities of an online environment, Nakamura identifies the internet as a space for niches whereby underrepresented communities can co-exist and, essentially, exchange information and experiences. Because the internet takes into account what early video set as precedent and because, like the artists who took up video in its relatively new state, digital artists flocked to the internet and its technologies and tools at its early and current state. Arguably, the internet is nearly two decades old, hardly "new" — however, the technologies by which to shape and append it have recently become common and commercialized knowledge, accessible, and relatively affordable. Considering Linda Nochlin's, "'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' Thirty Years After," one can only imagine her feeling of satisfaction in revising her original work to include the "women artists, women art historians, and women critics" who "have made a difference, then, over the past thirty years" (Nochlin 2006, 28). If, however, we consider emerging media as having intertwined or shared histories with open-source movements, we cannot help but notice a disproportionate leaning toward male-identified, male-authored, and male-curated environments. This is not to undo or de-emphasize the progress the art world has made in terms of gender-based equality, just to note that it leads toward a questioning of pathways allowing female-identified (and, at that, non-white, minority) new media artists visibility. A cursory glance at the program showcase and tutorials on Cycling '74's website reveal what appears to be a dearth of female-identified authors, artists, engineers, and/or hobbyists.[8] A question similar to that asked by Nochlin might be asked currently of the emerging media community: Why have there been no great women new media artists? This question is one that is problematic on two counts. First, it assumes a modernist approach to "greatness" as it applies to art disciplines, which this author readily assumes is contentious and problematic. Second, new media, digital media, and other time-based or real-time work often happens online and, therefore, occupies the liminal spaces of the internet and World Wide Web. As Nakamura's examination of online communities indicates, anonymity is where the internet's power lies. It is, therefore, unnecessary to find "greats" where their existence may very well be unnecessary and their practice is inherently undisclosed. The wider question is, perhaps, whether or not it matters if there are great new media artists. I am inclined to believe that visibility is the path to equality, yet I question the context in which such a question can or should be asked: Do we ask it because we have assumed that a "great" artist is one with a solitary and unique gift? This learned assumption is one that modernism and, perhaps, Romanticism awards us.

The nature of the fine arts discipline, within or beyond a pedagogical framework, presumes that new media artists stay abreast of current trends, theories, and technologies within both the art world and wider context. Developing and honing an aesthetic lexicon presumes that one learns to edit and economize the language of the medium to suit conceptual needs. Therefore, an integral base is having an informed and invested approach when dealing with emerging media. I posit that a practice that roots itself in a basic impulse to tell stories — the "bread and butter" of narrative, faux narrative, non-linear and/or broken narrative work — is inherent to a digital media work.

Consider how video is edited and its similarity to word processing, in that corresponding elements (sequences in the former, sentences in the latter) are essentially cut, copied, and pasted, creating logical syntax. Hence, the web is pivotal to a practice that asks its auteur to combine and re-combine multiple sound and video elements, whether posting drafts online for peer-review or publishing finished works. In this sense, the internet acts as a database of sorts, where video and/or audio exist as "objects" collected within the ethereal space of the internet. As Manovich writes: "Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don't have a beginning or end; in fact, they don't have any development, thematically, formally or otherwise which would organize their elements into a sequence" (2001, 194). Manovich refers to the crux of my continued interest and investment in digital and new media work — a new media object's ability to tell a story in the traditional narrative arc (i.e., exposition, climax, conclusion, etc.). For artists drawn to narrative forms both grand and mundane, digital and new media enable multiple combinations of objects to facilitate a new mode of storytelling suited for a pluralistic and plugged-in world.

Notes

1 Mel Racho is a Chicago-based video artist, working through interdisciplinary means to create site-specific multimedia installations. She received a dual degree from Grinnell College in 2003 in English and Studio Art and an MFA in Interdisciplinary Art and Media from Columbia College in 2007. Mel has actively exhibited since 2002. She teaches digital design at DePaul University.

2 *We Live in Public*. Film, directed by Ondi Timoner (Chicago, IL: Interloper Films, 2009). Harris — an early internet pioneer of the 90s dot.com boom and bust — placed voluntary subjects into pods connected through surveillance video feeds in a custom-built bunker. Participants could literally channel surf through each other's video streams.

3 For a comprehensive discussion on the subject, see N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

4 In Kidder's non-fiction narrative, *The Soul of the New Machine* (Atlantic: Little, Brown, 1981), the machine in question is the dedicated efforts of engineers

at Data General Corporation and its genesis through grassroots efforts versus the typical top-down corporate management is as pertinent, if not more pertinent, to the technological progress of the 32-bit machine it created.

5 Romanticism's penchant for Emersonian (American) privileging of emotionalism and self-conscious bombasticism or, for that matter, Yeatsian (British) concern for the human grasping of the sublime, can be considered "allure." For further discussion of the former as it specifically relates to *avant garde* cinema, see P. Adams Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

6 Aay Preston-Myint, "Some Ghosts," Aay Preston-Myint, http://illcutyou.com/aay/.

7 Huong Ngo, "K.I.D.S.," Huong Ngo, http://huongngo.com.

8 This author acknowledges her learned and codified presumptions — i.e., "Andrew Benson", a frequent tutorial author, could very well be a woman or female-identified individual.

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3

Idol Concerns: The Ethics of Parasociality

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WHILE IN SOME RESPECTS THE U.S. television series *American Idol* might be considered among media that have emerged, rather than those that are emerging, its interactive nature, with viewers voting by phone for their favorite performers, seems to mark it as at least converged media, if not entirely new. More importantly, its interactivity and the ways in which that interactivity has been exploited by producers and a sponsor prompt new questions regarding the limits of ethical behavior in what viewers are led to believe is a fair, transparent, and democratic process. This chapter applies Horton and Wohl's theory of "parasocial interaction" as a lens through which to examine production processes in this wildly popular television program and efforts to manipulate the relationship between audience and competitor.

When Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl published their widely cited paper entitled, "Mass communication and parasocial interaction: observations on intimacy at a distance" in *Psychiatry* (1956), their focus was on television "personalities." These personalities included "quizmasters, announcers, 'interviewers' in a new 'show business' world — in brief, a special category of 'personalities' whose existence is a function of the media themselves" (Horton and Wohl 1956, 216.) They could not possibly imagine the explosion of reality television throughout the 1990s and 2000s that would herald the advent of a new breed of "personality": the "celetoid." Coined by Chris Rojek, the "celetoid" refers to:

> . . . the accessories of cultures organized around mass communications and staged authenticities. Examples include lottery winners, one-hit wonders, stalkers, whistle blowers, sports' arena streakers, have-a-go-heroes, mistresses of public figures and the various other social types who command media attention one day, and are forgotten the next.
>
> (Rojek 2001, 20)

Celetoids quite often appear by means of the "demotic turn," which Graeme Turner categorizes as "the increasing visibility of the 'ordinary person' as they turn themselves into media content through celebrity culture, reality TV, DIY websites, talk radio, and the like" (Turner 2006, 153). Although shows such as *Candid Camera* have been around since the 1950s, creating a legacy of derivatives from *Real People* to *America's Funniest Home Videos*, the genre has expanded exponentially in recent years (Baker 2003, 57). With the sharp increase of "reality" programming throughout the 1990s and 2000s, more and more celetoids have taken root in the cultural landscape, forming a new group of "personalities" to whom Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction theory can be applied. In turn, the ethical considerations of parasocial interaction theory are a rich landscape to be explored. After all, although there has been considerable examination of ethics in entertainment, it has almost always been content-based in terms of analysis (Young 2007). This chapter attempts to look at the ethics of manufacture rather than the ethics of content.

Take, for example, the popular television program *American Idol*. While *Idol* has been interrogated on many levels in the court of public opinion, it is an uncommon occurrence that a great deal of thought is given to the ethical dimensions and considerations of the program's construction. That is to say, *American Idol* may be many things to many people, but it does not spontaneously generate itself. It is the product of careful creation and deliberate preparation by a conscious set of sentient beings, and therefore subject to the ethical dilemmas that surround each of us every day.

A *caveat*, here at the outset: I do not claim to be an ethicist or an expert in the field of media ethics (I am a popular culture specialist). In fact, it would be disingenuous to claim much more than a passing familiarity with the extant ethics literature. As such, my goal in this chapter is not to fully examine and analyze the ethical implications of the subject at hand. Instead, I am attempting to reveal a new sphere into which ethical discussions can be introduced — provide a map, if you will, to a new ethical frontier where few (if any) footprints of scholars past have been left.

With that in mind, the following is submitted: *American Idol* represents itself as a democratic institution in the most traditional of senses: a public with disparate interests, values, and ideas comes together to decide, through direct participatory action, an outcome. Viewers of *American Idol* are encouraged to call in or text message a vote on which contestant the viewer would like to see remain in the competition. While theoretical concerns such as, "one person, one vote," are cast aside, in essence, the competition of *American Idol* works not all that differently from any other sort of election (Paskoff 2003; Cornfield 2004). A candidate stands before the public and makes a case for selecting him/her over other viable choices.

However, the ideals of democracy, such as every candidate having equal opportunity to secure votes and procedural interference by the presiding system being kept to a minimum, are intentionally and blatantly disregarded by those in charge of the creation of *American Idol*, such that the amount of tampering by the producers results in a manipulation of the viewing public. *American Idol* is no level playing field.

American Idol

On October 5, 2001, the British television station ITV1 debuted a radical new television program called *Pop Idol*. The idea was simple: a nationwide talent show in which viewers would select the next big new singer in the United Kingdom. Created by music producer Simon Fuller in 1998, his company, 19 Entertainment, launched *Pop Idol* to high ratings in the UK, and quickly moved to export the show overseas.

American Idol debuted on June 11, 2002, to 9.9 million viewers. That number increased by the season finale to more than 23 million viewers.[2] On January 16, 2007, Season 6 of *American Idol* debuted to 41.84 million viewers — more than seven times the number of viewers of its closest competitor, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*.[3]

Kelly Clarkson was the first *American Idol* winner; her debut album went multi-platinum in seven months back in 2003. In 2006, in the same amount of time, her third album had gone three times over multi-platinum on its way to become a six-times multi-platinum smash. Carrie Underwood's debut album netted the Season 4 winner a five-times multi-platinum honor. It is not even necessary to win *American Idol* to sell millions of records; Season 5's fourth place contestant, Chris Daughtry, as of this writing, has the fastest-selling debut rock album in history, according to Nielsen Soundscan ratings.[4]

American Idol is a ratings juggernaut to be certain — a massively destructive force of nature akin to a cultural tsunami. Even though its ratings have suffered somewhat over the past two seasons, *Idol*'s viewership is still impressive. There is little that its competitors can do to combat this social Goliath. Carter states,

> Listening to the Fox network's competitors describe what *American Idol* has done to the television landscape is not unlike listening to a group of quavering readers offer a synopsis of a Stephen King novel: Once a year an unrelenting monster invades a town, and all the townspeople, cowed by years of being crushed under its massive claws, have to pay it fealty or run off and hide until it goes back into a six-month hibernation.
>
> (Carter 2007)

In fact, other networks have even taken to adopting a "duck and cover" approach to *Idol*, trying to simply stay out of its way for fear of being demolished. Carter goes on to report, "ABC . . . went into retreat this month with one of its signature hit series, *Lost*, moving it from 9 p.m. on Wednesdays to 10 p.m., when it no longer has to face *Idol*. One senior network executive said the shadow *American Idol* casts was so formidable that 'we have *Idol* strategy sessions.' The executive asked not to be identified because the network did not want to acknowledge openly the impact *Idol* was having" (Carter 2007).

Of course, all of this success in the ratings translates to dollar signs in terms of advertising revenue. For the 2007 spring television season, purchasing a 30-second advertising spot during *American Idol* cost more than $600,000,[5] meaning each episode pulled down more than $9 million per half hour. Given that *Idol* airs three times a week for at least one hour per episode (often, especially during the audition and early competition episodes, two hours at a time), *Idol* is generating enormous income for Fox. In fact, the finale of Season 5, in which Taylor Hicks competed against Katherine McPhee for the crown, drew a whopping $1.3 million for a 30-second advertising spot.[6] *American Idol* is the 900-pound gorilla in prime-time television programming; all other television shows simply try to stay out of its unstoppable way.

Parasociality and the Parasocial Contract

In 1956, Richard Wohl and Donald Horton published a seminal piece of theory in *Psychiatry*. In "Mass communication and parasocial interaction: observations on intimacy at a distance," Horton and Wohl assert that:

> One of the striking characteristics of the new mass media — radio, television, and the movies — is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer. The conditions of response to the performer are analogous to those in a primary group. The most remote and illustrious men are met *as if they* were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in these media in an especially vivid and arresting way. We propose to call this seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a *parasocial relationship*.
>
> (1956, 215)

This parasocial relationship is key to the proper functioning of participatory competition reality programs. If audience members are not immediately invested in the contestants, and do not develop a personal sense of responsibility for and identification with the contestants on some level, there is no incentive to pick up the phone and vote. Without votes, the show flounders, eventually withering and dying out. It is in the producers' best interest to foster these parasocial relationships as quickly and efficiently as possible. The audience member is encouraged not to simply recognize or even to like the contestant. The audience member is bidden to identify with the contestant. According to Kenneth Burke,

> A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so.
>
> (Burke 1969, 20)

Assuming that A is an audience member, and B is an *American Idol* contestant, their interests are most certainly not joined. A will not share directly in B's success; A will not receive a cut of B's album sales or B's lucrative live concert tour. Therefore, A must be *persuaded* that his interests are joined to B's. In other words, "two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an 'identification' that does not deny their distinctness" (Burke 1969, 21). This commonly takes place via repeated exhortations that the contestants are all "ordinary people" who have battled through thousands of auditioning competitors to make it into the final group. Horton and Wohl describe this as, "ordinary people . . . shown being treated, for the moment, as persons of consequence" (1956, 223). Emphasis is placed on the hard work, determination, and sacrifice of the singers, which are values it is assumed viewers share. If the audition shows are any indication, the message has been received loudly and clearly by the audience that virtually "anyone" could get discovered by *American Idol*; this is the vehicle for identification between audience and contestant.

As Horton and Wohl state, "Almost every member of the home audience is left with the comfortable feeling that he too, if he wished, could appropriately take part" (1956, 223). These common principles ("Everyone wants to be a star," and "If I worked hard, I could be on television, too") join A with B. A is identified with B, not through real common interest, but by being persuaded that common interests exist, however vicarious they may be (Hoffner 1996). This common interest can manifest itself in a variety of similarities, attractions, or identifications (e.g., Anderson and de Mancillas 1978; Rubin and McHugh 1987; Turner 2006). In point of fact, the principle of identification works specifically because A and B are not the same. As Burke writes, "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (1969, 22).

Parasocial interaction requires identification, predominantly, but does not require much else on the part of A. Burke states:

> In being identified with B, A is "substantially one" with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time, he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another.
>
> (1969, 21)

The responsibility for maintaining this consubstantiation lies solely with B. Horton and Wohl argue:

> Parasocial relations may be governed by little or no sense of obligation, effort, or responsibility on the part of the spectator . . . the interaction, characteristically, is one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible to mutual development
>
> (1956, 215)

Repeatedly, viewers are reminded how much work the singers have undertaken in order to entertain them. If viewers want to "save" their favorite contestant, they must call in and vote (as though dire consequences await if the viewer does not act). The outcome of the vote strengthens and underscores the level of identification. However, this is the only action required on the part of the audience member. It is the *result* of the parasocial relationship, not its *cultivation*.

I would argue that in the case of participatory competition shows, plot becomes secondary to character, and it is within the realm of character that the formation of parasocial relationships primarily takes place. Each of the singers must create for himself/herself (or have created for him/her, through editing and judges' commentary) a role to play on the show. Horton and Wohl note:

> These roles are chiefly derived from the primary relations of friendship and the family, characterized by intimacy, sympathy, and sociability. The audience is expected to accept the situation defined by the programme format as credible, and to concede as "natural" the rules and conventions governing the actions performed and the values realized. It should play the role of the loved one to the persona's lover; the admiring dependant to his father-surrogate; the earnest citizen to his fearless opponent of political evils. It is expected to benefit by his wisdom, reflect on his advice, sympathize with him in his difficulties, forgive his mistakes, buy the products that he recommends, and keep his sponsor informed of the esteem in which he is held.
>
> (1956, 219)

There can be no denying the effect that the creation of these roles has on the viewing audience. From Brooke White's overwhelmed authenticity to Adam Lambert's glam-rocker-in-training vibe to Kellie Pickler's down-home naivety, each singer transformed him or herself into a persona intended to connect with a particular segment of the audience and engender identification. The more an audience member watches the program, the more parasocial interaction takes place (Gleich 1997; Grant *et al.* 1991). The success or failure of these efforts are, in part, measured by the contestant's retention in the competition; those who cannot stimulate identification are quickly ousted.

The parasocial relationship is not mere identification, however. It is the creation of the classical *doxa*: ". . . namely, the regard in which one stands. If the regard, in keeping with what emerges in it, is a distinguished one, *doxa* means fame and glory" (Heidegger 1959, 102–103). The very nature of the program itself verifies this association of parasocial relationship with *doxa*; the show urges viewers to select not the *best* singer, but their *favorite* singer. The difference is significant. The development of *doxa* is not left to chance, either; the entire program is enlisted in the process. Horton and Wohl state:

> Numerous devices are used in a deliberate "coaching of attitudes," to use Kenneth Burke's phrase. The typical programme format calls for a studio audience to provide a situation of face-to-face interaction for the persona, and exemplifies to the home audience an enthusiastic and "correct" response. The more interaction occurs, the more clearly is demonstrated the kind of man the persona is, the values to be shared in association with him, and the kind of support to give him.
>
> (1959, 219)

The format of host, judges, and studio audience all act in concert to supplement the dancers' personae. Each plays a crucial role in the parasocial interaction between the dancer and the audience member and the associated *doxa*. It is the studio audience and the judges who represent and exemplify the enthusiastic and "correct" response to the contestants. The members of the studio audience on *American Idol* make no secrets of their preferences. Not only does the studio audience cheer for its favorites; the judges are routinely admonished with a chorus of jeers and catcalls should they ever make a negative comment about one of the crowd pleasers. On the opposite end of the spectrum, every season, some contestants fail to gain favor with the studio audience, and the studio audience's indifference undoubtedly contributes to those contestants being quickly voted out.

While the studio audience is providing examples of "correct" response to the contestants, the judges engage in thinly veiled attempts to influence voting viewers as well (Bell 2010). Simon Cowell's ruthless persecution of Sanjaya Malakar's performances eventually led to his demise, while the panel's constant reification and adulation of Adam

Lambert's stage presence and vocal talent no doubt helped keep him in the competition until the final two.

The host plays a particularly essential role in the development of *doxa*. Ryan Seacrest's weekly reproach of the viewing audience that it is nobody's fault but the audience member's own if a favorite contestant is voted out, creates the illusion of a reciprocal relationship between the persona and the viewer. The future of a singer — not just in the competition, but, seemingly, the singer's entire career — is held in the hand of the viewer; Seacrest repeatedly, throughout each broadcast, reminds the viewer that if he wants to see his favorite again next week, the responsibility is his. He must pick up the phone and actively save his favorite. When each singer is voted out, a montage vignette of his or her time on the show is played, accompanied by appropriately emotional music, to signify his or her demise. The aim appears to be that the viewer will not want such a sad event to happen to his own favorite, and will be sure to call in a vote. The intensity of the parasocial relationship between viewer and persona cannot be denied.

This identification through *muthos* and *doxa* leads to what I refer to as the *parasocial contract*. The parasocial contract is an implicit agreement between the contestant and the audience member that the contestant will continue to try his or her best to perform to the best of his/her ability to remain in the competition. The audience member will continue to vote for the contestant as long as the contestant continues to perform to the best of his/her ability. The two are bonded parasocially; they do not know one another, but are symbiotically attached out of necessity. If the dream of the contestant is to be fulfilled s/he needs the audience member; in fulfilling the dream of the contestant, the audience member keeps alive his/her own hopes of eventual discovery or stardom or "making it big" (perhaps not as a singer, but along the lines of the classic ideograph of the "American Dream").

Screen Time

Manipulation, by and large, is a qualitative claim. In order to prove manipulation qualitatively, one must demonstrate that audience members other than the analyst manifested the same sorts of interpretations as the analyst. This sort of proof would require, at the very least, large-scale surveying informed specifically by in-depth interviews with audience members. Even following such extensive qualitative methodology and analysis, the final evaluation is completely subjective. It would be nearly impossible to definitely substantiate a claim of manipulation qualitatively with any measure of complete certainty.

However, perhaps another, simpler methodology may reveal, at the least, a correlation of sorts, by removing audience interpretation and dealing directly with the text. There has been a significant and measurable increase over the course of six seasons in the amount and scope of pre-competition audition programs aired by Fox Television. When the program debuted in 2002, *Idol* aired a total of one episode devoted to the audition process, for a total of two hours of screen time. In 2008, Fox moved to airing as many as six hours in a single week of prime-time *American Idol* programming, for a total of 22 hours (22 times the amount of the original season), and audition programming was stretched over five weeks prior to viewers casting a single vote.

The increase in audition programming works to 19 Entertainment's advantage: more *Idol* programming equals more advertising revenue. However, the byproduct of increased audition time is an increase in opportunity to precondition audience response to contestants the producers favor. To conduct the simplest of analyses, thus removing all qualitative analyst bias and all extraneous quantitative measurements, in this study time has been used as the unit of measurement. Every audition episode from the season premiere through the end of "Hollywood Week" for Seasons 5, 6, 7, and 8 were compiled and viewed. Time was calculated using industrial time code as the measure. For each contestant, a log of the amount of screen time given was kept. "Screen time" was determined as follows: any time a contestant was clearly visible on the screen, whether s/he was a part of a large group, in the background, or the focus of the shot was included. Also, if the contestant was not visible, but his or her voice could be heard, this was also included. As well, any time the contestant was not visible but one or more of the judges was clearly speaking about the contestant was included.

For each season, the total tally of on-air screen time for each contestant was compiled (Table 3.1). The table notes the contestant's name, the amount of screen time the contestant received (to the nearest whole second), and the order in which s/he was voted off, ranging from first out to the eventual winner. The light gray denotes a top ten contestant; the dark gray denotes a top five contestant.

Notice the sharp decrease in screen time for the contestant receiving the least amount. In Season 5, Bobby Bennett received just one minute,

Table 3.1. Total minutes of airtime for each contestant through the end of Hollywood Week (Seasons 5-8)

Season Five	**Season Six**	**Season Seven**	**Season Eight**
Paris Bennett (9:52) 20	Antonella Barba (12:04) 10	Carly Smithson (11:10) 19	Danny Gokey (12:59) 35
Kellie Pickler (9:38) 19	Sundance Head (9:14) 12	Brooke White (10:43) 20	Michael Sarver (9:08) 28
Katharine McPhee (8:55) 23	Gina Glocksen (7:01) 16	David Archuleta (7:33) 23	Adam Lambert (8:36) 36
Taylor Hicks (8:37) Winner	Sanjaya Malakar (6:03) 18	Syesha Mercado (7:17) 22	Scott MacIntyre (8:22) 30
Chris Daughtry (8:19) 21	Jordin Sparks (5:59) Winner	Asia'h Epperson (6:45) 11	Jasmine Murray (7:00) 25
Kevin Covais (6:44) 14	Blake Lewis (5:36) 23	Amanda Overmyer (6:39) 14	Lil Rounds (6:32) 31
Ace Young (6:07) 18	Chris Sligh (5:30) 15	Kristy Lee Cook (5:23) 18	Alexis Grace (6:03) 27
David Radford (6:04) 7	Phil Stacey (5:18) 20	David Cook (5:21) Winner	Matt Giraud (5:33) 33
Jose Penala (5:53) 8	Alaina Alexander (4:59) 6	Michael Johns (5:01) 17	Megan Corkrey (5:08) 29
Ayla Brown (5:51) 11	Nicholas Pedro (4:52) 5	Joanne Borgella (4:59) 3	Anoop Desai (5:07) 32
Mandisa Hundley (5:49) 16	Lakisha Jones (4:44) 21	Ramiele Malubay (4:29) 16	Jorge Nunez (3:37) 26
Lisa Tucker (5:46) 15	Melinda Doolittle (4:41) 22	David Hernanadez (3:59) 13	Allison Iraheta (3:12) 34

Continued

Table 3.1. Cont'd

Season Five	Season Six	Season Seven	Season Eight
Brenna Gethers (5:45) 5	Rudy Cardenas (4:31) 3	Danny Noriega (3:40) 12	Kris Allen (3:03) Winner
Becky O'Donohue (5:31) 1	Paul Kim (3:57) 1	Chikezie Eze (3:12) 15	
Will Makar (5:13) 10	Brandon Rogers (3:57) 13	Colton Berry (3:01) 4	
Elliott Yamin (4:51) 22	Haley Scarnato (3:50) 17	Robbie Carrico (2:51) 8	
Stevie Scott (3:20) 3	Chris Richardson (2:33) 19	Kady Malloy (2:47) 9	
Patrick Hall (2:45) 4	Sabrina Sloan (1:17) 11	Alaina Whitaker (2:31) 7	
Gedeon McKinney (2:42) 12	AJ Tabaldo (0:58) 7	Amy Davis (2:01) 2	
Kinnik Sky (2:30) 9	Amy Krebs (0:55) 2	Alexandrea Lushington (1:48) 6	
Heather Cox (2:12) 6	Stephanie Edwards (0:45) 14	Jason Castro (1:07) 21	
Bucky Covington (1:52) 17	Leslie Hunt (0:44) 8	Jason Yeager (0:35) 5	
Melissa McGhee (1:46) 13	Jared Cotter (0:37) 9	Luke Menard (0:26) 10	
Bobby Bennett (1:34) 2	Nicole Tranquillo (0:34) 4	Garrett Haley (0:80) 1	

33 seconds of screen time. In Season 6, Nicole Tranquillo received the least amount of screen time, with approximately 34 seconds of on-air time. In Season 7, the least amount was allotted to Garrett Haley, who received only eight seconds of screen time — five of which were shown during the tenth and final audition episode. It is also important to note that Haley's name was never shown or spoken until this tenth episode, which was also true of Jason Yeager, Jason Castro, and Luke Menard. Interestingly, Bennett's 0:01:33 is *eleven times* the exposure the least-shown contestant received just two seasons later, when screen time for Haley dipped to mere seconds.

The format for determining the top 12 singers changed in Season 8, so data were collected only for those singers. In another twist, the program announced it would actually be putting through a top 13 instead of a top 12. For the top 13 singers, the least amount of screen time was given to eventual Season 8 champion Kris Allen.

The Parasocial Contract at Work

Following the audition episodes, for three weeks, four contestants per week are eliminated from the competition until only 12 contestants are left. In Season 6, for the first two weeks of this period, not a single contestant who had been featured five minutes or more of total on-screen time during the audition episodes was eliminated. This featuring took a variety of forms, from the contestant talking about his/her family, background, or dreams of becoming the next American Idol, to the contestant practicing, to the contestant actually performing on stage. The contestant may be alone, or may be speaking or singing as a part of a group of contestants. Typically, for some of the least featured performers, the only time they were featured was during the final audition episode, when the list of the final 24 contestants was revealed.

In the third week, both of the top two contestants (in terms of screen time) were eliminated; however, for a week prior to the third vote-off, Antonella Barba, the recipient of the largest amount of screen time during the auditions, was the subject of a vicious internet media circus during which nude photographs of her (which she had intended for the private ownership of a boyfriend) surfaced, and she was roundly castigated. It could be argued that in the gender climate of twenty-first century America, almost no one could survive being publicly branded a whore.[7] Barba was voted off tenth out of the 12 non-semifinalists. In that season, both the winner and the runner-up had been given more than five minutes of screen time during the auditions.

Over the course of Season 7, the disparity was even more pronounced. The first ten contestants voted off had received less than five minutes of air time during the audition episodes. In fact, of those who received more than five minutes of air time during the audition episodes, only Asia'h Epperson failed to make the top 12 contestants; four of the top five contestants remaining at the end of the season had received five or more minutes of screen time during the auditions.

But look back at Season 5. That season, many more contestants received five or more minutes of air time than in any of the following seasons. Even with the approximately one-minute upward shift in the total amount of screen time the average top 24 contestant received, the first six contestants voted off had been shown a total of six minutes or less during the audition episodes — about the same line that can be drawn at the five-minute mark in the following two seasons. In fact, every winner and first runner-up in Seasons 5, 6, and 7 was shown more than five minutes during the audition episodes; Season 8 changed this a bit, with only the first and second runners-up receiving more than five minutes. However, all but three top 13 contestants in Season 8 received more than five minutes of screen time, and three of the top five. In both Seasons 5 and 6, the winner was one of the top five contestants in terms of screen time. In every season from 5 to 8, at least one of the top two contestants was among the top five screen time recipients.

Of course, I hesitate to label this a direct cause-and-effect relationship, for reasons that should be obvious. However, the preponderance of evidence appears to point to a clear correlation between screen time during the audition episodes and continued success in the competition. Again, this cannot be stated as a cause-and-effect relationship but one of correlating predictability; given the amount of screen time one is given during the audition episodes, it can be reasonably predicted how early in the competition a contestant will be voted out. Five of every six competitors voted off between the auditions and the semi-finals in Season 6 were featured less than five minutes during the pre-competition episodes.

In order for the parasocial contract to be formed, audience members have to be provided with time in which to bond with the contestants. When one contestant receives more air time during the crucial stage of the progression (the time during which viewers are evaluating to

whom they will attach and show loyalty), the opportunities to form parasocial contracts are unequally distributed. Jordin Sparks had nearly 12 times the opportunity as Nicole Tranquillo. Did this directly lead to Tranquillo's demise and Sparks's success? Not definitively, but it would be difficult to deny that screen time plays a significant role in the development of parasocial contracts. How can one hope to cultivate a parasocial relationship if s/he never receives air time?

To be certain, receiving a great deal of screen time is no guaranteed path to the semifinals, and a contestant can definitely overcome being "below the line"; while well over half of the top 24 contestants in Season 5 received more than five minutes of air time, only eight competitors during Season 6 were featured more than five minutes during auditions, only nine received more than five minutes in Season 7. (In Season 8, ten of the top 13 competitors received more than five minutes.) Twelve contestants each season make the semifinals. Contestants from "above the line" can fail, of course, and obviously, contestants from "below the line" have an opportunity to catapult into the semifinals; Season 8 proves that contestants well "below the line" can even pull off a major upset and win the entire competition. However, these are not slots that are simply "open" to all competitors; the construction of the remaining contestants, via on-screen vignettes, judges' commentary following their performances, and the order in which a contestant performs, as noted later, certainly plays a role in those contestants' continued success.

Taken deontologically, in the Kantian tradition,[8] the implications are clear: If *American Idol* is willing to manipulate this one small component of the overall production, with such clearly impactful results, the producers have established themselves as manipulators. Whatever else follows is simply a matter of degree. To be frank, if the producers will manipulate this, what else will they manipulate?

Also, in the interest of complete fairness, it could be simply coincidental that those contestants featured more in the audition episodes happened to enjoy better voting percentages during the elimination rounds. This would be quite an alignment of the planets, so to speak, a perfect storm of categorical proportions, but, indeed, not outside the realm of possibility.

When one just watches the program for entertainment purposes, it is difficult to determine what, if any, ethical lines have been breached. The manipulation that the producers of *American Idol* are engaging in is subtle and indirect, and may not even be conscious action. However, when the time data are considered, it is clear that there is (at the least) questionable ethical ground upon which the program stands.

Secrecy, Deception, and Ethical Standards

The ethicist Sissela Bok offers that, "For all individuals, secrecy carries some risk of corruption and of irrationality; if they dispose of greater than ordinary power over others, and if this power is exercised in secret, with no accountability to those whom it affects, the invitation to abuse is great" (Bok 1984, 106). This seems to be true for *American Idol*'s producers. The secrecy with which they operate, behind the scenes, outside of the purview of the audience, coupled with the absolute power they wield, are a recipe for the kinds of abuse *Idol* engages in, from the stranglehold contracts contestants are forced to sign to the amount of screen time they afford favorites over those out of favor.

On the other hand, Bok might argue that a certain amount of secrecy is actually healthy and beneficial for the competition. After all, the suspense of learning who has been ousted from the program is a significant part of the draw and aura surrounding *American Idol*. Bok goes out of her way, in *Secrets*, to refrain from the assumption that secrets are inherently bad. In fact, she lists several ways in which secrets can be very good: privacy, identity, and, at their most simplistic, spice: If everything that could be known were always known, wouldn't life be boring? No secrets means no surprises, no suspense (Bok 1984). While all deception requires a measure of secrecy, not all secrecy is meant to deceive (Bok 1984, 26).

Most ethical decisions are three-component processes: intent, action, and result. Thus far, we have explored the action (featuring certain contestants more than others), the result (voting outcomes that heavily favor the more featured contestants), and briefly touched upon the apparent intent (pushing more telegenic and marketable contestants to the finals). At all three levels, it would seem as though there is room to at least question the ethics of *American Idol*'s producers.

There is another ethical consideration here as well, in light of the historical context in which *American Idol* exists, and the multiplatform, interactive nature of the program: Does manipulation (whether it is intentional or unintentional) of the parasocial contract constitute a breach of the Communications Act?[9] Unlike the quiz show scandals of the 1950s, the producers are not directly influencing the outcome of the

program. That is to say, clearly, *American Idol* is not "rigged" or "fixed" in any way. However, contestant face time does appear to have significant correlation with the eventual standings of the contestants.

Additionally, the media in which *Idol* operates change the face of the ethical dilemma as well. Because, unlike quiz shows of the past and other forms of competitive reality television in the present, *American Idol* (and programs like it) directly involve the audience in participatory democracy, there are ethical considerations of fairness not just in the presentation of the program, but endemic to the media themselves. The telephone and the television have never been so closely tied together as they are in competitive reality programming. With this connection comes its own ethical dimensions. For example, at the conclusion of Season 8, it was revealed that 38 million votes had come from the state of Arkansas, which contains approximately 2.9 million residents (Cochran 2009). Subsequently, it was reported that representatives of AT&T had attended two fan parties in Arkansas, Kris Allen's home state, and provided free text-messaging services, including teaching the attendees how to send up to ten text messages at a time with a single touch of a button (Johnston 2009). Since AT&T is the only mobile network that allows fans to text message votes for *Idol* contestants, the ethical implications are clear — even if, as it was in this case, the story is overblown (as it turned out, the two representatives were invited to the parties, and each had only a few demonstration model phones with them), the mere implication of impropriety should be cause for, at the least, an examination of the ethical principles involved in this emerging area of interactive, multiplatform media. The action (AT&T employees providing free text-messaging to Allen fans) and result (Allen wins Season 8) are both present. That is enough to at least question what the intent may have been.

One of the operating principles of *American Idol* is that it is a fair competition: 24 singers stand before America to be judged, and the voting audience will select its favorite. There are, according to Amitai Etzioni, exogenous ethical principles that sustain competition; for example, there is the American belief that competition "builds character" (Etzioni 1985, 291). Equally important is the embedded "endorsement of competing fairly" — competing by the rules (291). These types of ethical principles are "expected to help avoid violent or otherwise ruinous competition" (292), and help to legitimate the proceedings.

The notion of legitimacy is slippery; by definition, "legitimate" connotes an adherence to established and accepted rules and practices.

If we take the accepted ethical practices of competition to mean, as Etzioni noted above, a freedom from unfair advantage and a fidelity to the rules, the time data would seem to suggest that *Idol* is, by definition, illegitimate to some extent as a competitive enterprise. That is, some contestants have a distinct advantage over other contestants that has very little to do with their actual prowess at the competition at hand. The time data raise several ethical questions endemic to participatory competitive reality television programs (i.e., programs in which the audience vote directly influences the competition) that have not been raised in other forms of interactive media.

It is strange to think of a media entity as ethical or unethical, moral or immoral. Christians, Ferrâe, and Fackler point out that, "Institutions are more than impersonal machines. They do resemble a complicated package of gears, engines, and levers; but like people, corporations write contracts, meet deadlines, take precautions, act incompetently, issue reports, pay taxes, own property, and incur financial liability" (Christians *et al.* 1993, 128). This juxtaposition of corporation as both machine and person can be problematic, but Christians *et al.* offer an alternative:

> The solution to the machine-person dichotomy is the rational-agent model, which considers the corporation a moral agent, but not a moral person. Institutions use moral reasoning in their organizational decision-making, but that does not entail their having all dimensions of personal morality, such as pleasure and guilt.
>
> (1993, 129)

The rational-agent model might be useful for understanding corporate decision making, but, in some respects, lets grand-scale organizations off the hook for their less than scrupulous behaviors. While some might excuse (or, at least, explain) the ethical decision making of the producers of *American Idol* as merely a reflection of corporate profit-driven and ratings-driven culture, not everyone agrees. Mascaro argues:

> Entertainment programming decisions . . . should not be attributed to a monolithic television industry culture but instead to the actions of individual network executives who have the power to exercise judgment and authority over programming and content.
>
> (2004, 151)

Ultimately, responsibility and, therefore, accountability lies firmly with the people running organizations and developing the ethical standards for their employees. In this case, the Machiavellian ethics and standard of secrecy and deceptive practices manifest in *American Idol* is the product of the producers, and, by extension, the Fox Network as a whole.

A Possible Solution

So, then, what is the solution to *American Idol*'s ethical dilemma? Cunningham writes:

> Typically, reference is made to Aristotle's Golden Mean, and the accompanying description identifies this mode of goodness as a sort of middle ground or *juste milieu* between two extremes of excess and defect. Accounts generally disavow a simplistic linear midpoint. Even so, they centralize the notion of a mean or in-between point as capturing the essential structure of virtuous conduct.
>
> (1999, 5)

Although Cunningham goes on to a scathing criticism of the Aristotelian "golden mean" model of ethical decision making, arguing that strict Aristotelianism leads not to virtue, but to an avoidance of non-virtuous behavior, the "golden mean" does provide a model for a possible compromise between the current Machiavellian structure under which *American Idol* operates and some far-off (and wholly unrealistic) egalitarian competition. After all, the "golden mean" has been used, quite successfully, as a model for corporate behavior in other, non-media arenas (Wicks, Berman, and Jones 1999; Chan 2003; Kim *et al.* 2004; Douglas 2004).

In the case of *American Idol*, it would be entirely impracticable to expect the producers to adopt some sort of utilitarian standard of ethics in creating their show. Nobody should be so naïve as to think *American Idol* something other than, first and foremost, a capitalistic venture designed specifically to generate advertising dollars and multiplatform commercial interests. Presuming *Idol* producers will, out of a sense of ethical obligation, suddenly see the value of doing the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people is setting off down a path toward disappointment.

However jaded Cunningham's view of the Aristotelian "golden mean" is, there is a measurable improvement in ethical behavior from "whatever is best for me" to "avoiding non-virtuous behavior." It may not be necessary for *Idol*'s producers to arrive at a state of virtue; it might be enough to simply have the competition administered as fairly as possible.

Using the "golden mean" as the ethical standard, and Cunningham's description of locating the "golden mean" as a guide, a preferable new ethical standard for *Idol*'s producers would lie somewhere between the two extremes available. On the one hand, it might not be necessary to label the entire production as an unethical hoax, a sham competition in which the public has been systematically duped by a malevolent corporation into believing it is participating in a democratic process when, in actuality, it is participating in only the *illusion* of democratic process. On the other hand, it would be equally undesirable to force the producers to devote an entire episode to each of the top 24 singers, meticulously detailing every aspect of the contestant's life, family and work, stretching the pre-competition episode count to over 30, and spending six months giving background on each competitor before votes are cast.

Utilizing Aristotle's "golden mean," perhaps *American Idol* could produce an even more exciting and enticing program. Simon Cowell has lamented on air multiple times that *Idol* is, first and foremost, a singing competition. However, that is not exactly accurate. *Idol* is a popularity contest where the contestants happen to sing, and currently, an unfair one at that. Were *American Idol* to simply adopt the standard of, "Each of the top 24 contestants receives an equal amount of screen time during the audition episodes and 'Hollywood Week' episodes," the playing field would certainly be a good deal more level. It would not require an extensive amount of work, nor, in reality, that much of a paradigm shift. America has proven that it can get it right without so much of the producers' help. In the first season, voters managed to select the most successful American Idol in the program's history, Kelly Clarkson (who has gone on to become a multiplatinum artist, Grammy award winner, and bona fide music superstar), while viewing only half the amount of packaged audition footage. A change from the Machiavellian ethical framework to a more Aristotelian one could produce a positive result not only for the contestants and the voting public, but also, in a very concrete, commercial way, for the producers as well.

In the end, it is problematic to think of *American Idol* as "just a television program." There is an interactive element to the series that differentiates it from other types of programs, and there may be larger, more serious societal implications that reach far beyond selecting the nation's favorite singer. First, *American Idol* has no age requirement to cast votes. In a very real sense, programs like *American Idol* will be many, many Americans' first foray into the democratic process. These television shows are inculcating a spirit of democratic ideals in American youth. The message currently being translated is, "If one's face is on the television more, it automatically implies the candidate is superior to others, regardless of the candidate's actual skill or talent." *Style over substance* may not be the ideology American society wants as the foundation of its future voting public.

Secondly, the ease with which the voting public is so easily influenced should be of monumental alarm to anyone interested in U.S. politics. *American Idol* is the most watched television program on the air, and the most successful reality television program in history. Well over a billion votes have been cast during the show's eight seasons. If something as small as screen time can have such a profound impact on the outcome of the "election," what does this say about the myriad of ways in which voters can be swayed when a qualitative element is introduced — when volume is not the only factor, but content also is considered?

Finally, there is the matter of competitive legitimacy and "fair play." At its most base level, *Idol* purports to be a fair competition. In truth, the producers are bound by laws set decades ago to prevent direct tampering in game shows with cash prizes, and *Idol* may be one of the most lucrative game shows of all times. 19 Entertainment cannot directly "rig" the votes; they go to great lengths to contract independent accounting firms to receive and tally the audience vote. However, the time data clearly show that the producers have an enormous ability to sway the way the audience votes through the manipulation of the parasocial contract, and the AT&T incident demonstrates how easily a sponsor with a vested interest can, at the very least, appear to influence the outcome.

Of course, when the company and its parent companies and partners own not just the contract of the winning contestant, but the record label the contestant will be releasing albums under, the tour company the contestant will be using for live shows, and the merchandising company that will sell the winner's merchandise, the corporate entities have a vested interest in hedging their bets, ensuring that more marketable contestants find their way into the top ten, the top five, and the finale.

The ethical question remains: Just because they evidently *can* influence who the audience votes for through the parasocial contract, does it mean that they *should*?

Notes

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2 www.nielsenmedia.com/newsreleases/2003/AmericanIdol.htm.
3 http://pifeedback.com/eve/forums/a/tpc/f/63310451/m/73710482/p/1.
4 www.daughtryofficial.com/news/daughtry-once-again-locks-down-1-spot-billboard-top-200.
5 www.mediabuyerplanner.com/2007/01/16/american-idol-highest-price-regular-season-ad-buy/.
6 www.mediabuyerplanner.com/2007/01/16/american-idol-highest-price-regular-season-ad-buy/.
7 The litany of websites which participated in the public scarlet lettering of Barba is enormous. For examples, see: www.votefortheworst.com/node/131, http://bumpshack.com/?p=2341, http://tv.popcrunch.com/the-case-against-antonella-barba/, www.msnbc.com/id/17389008/, et cetera, et cetera.
8 http://webs.wofford.edu/kaycd/ethics/deon.htm.
9 In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States of America ruled, in *Federal Communications Commission v. American Broadcasting Co., Inc.* (346 U.S. 284), that the emerging genre known as the "quiz show" was not the same as gambling. In doing so, it opened the floodgates for a variety of different televised game shows to enter the televisual landscape. The amount of prize money available on these new programs was, for the time, shocking — consider that prior to its television debut, *The $64,000 Question* began its life on the radio as *The $64 Question*. In 1955, when the show debuted, $64,000 was the contemporary equivalent of just over half a million dollars ("Cost of living calculator" n.d.). With big money came big ratings and high stakes. More and more quiz shows flooded the airwaves. The profit for Revlon, the show's major sponsor, was $1.2 million in the first year of the show; over the subsequent four years, it rose to $11 million ("A sop to the public at large" n.d.). While on air, it appeared as though contestants were authentic and their triumphs and losses were genuine; behind the scenes an entirely different reality was taking place. In 1959, it was revealed that, in fact, many of the quiz shows were blatantly rigged, with producers deciding who would win or lose based upon contestants' popularity with the audience ("A sop to the public at large" n.d.). In 1960, Congress passed amendments to the Communications Act (47 U.S.C. §509), making it illegal to influence, prearrange or predetermine any form of contest in which money or prizes are at stake — something that, astonishingly, had not been explicitly prohibited until that point.

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II

Ethical Practices of Conservators and Regulators

4

Rhizomatic Restoration: Conservation Ethics in the Age of Wikipedia

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MIM — Musical Instrument Museum

IN 1987 GILLES DELEUZE AND Felix Guattari co-authored *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, giving birth to the theoretical concept of the *rhizome*. This theoretical model has developed as a powerful metaphor for theorizing the societal impact of the internet, particularly in relation to emerging social media. Using Wikipedia as a point of comparison this metaphor is here applied to the contemporary profession of conservation, a field currently undergoing dramatic shifts in its understanding of ethics. The conservation profession is moving away from classical conservation ethics, which could be considered to be as much about systemic enforcement of professional norms as about critically engaging with ethical issues. Contemporary conservation, influenced by post-modernism, is developing an alternative approach of adaptive ethics; this approach differs significantly in that it gives preference to process over final product. In its rhizomatic nature this emerging ethical conservation model reflects its synchronistic relationship with the emerging media landscape. The further development of these approaches opens up a host of possibilities for the conservation profession.

It's hard to imagine, even with the aid of hindsight, that on February 25, 2002, a revolutionary new epoch in professional conservation began. It was admittedly a quiet revolution; it's doubtful many conservators awoke on February 26 to the realization that their world had been irreversibly altered. Who could have known the potential changes that could result from the humble act of adding a single sentence to a then relatively obscure online encyclopedia, an entry that read: "The process of halting the decay and perhaps even renewing to the original state works of art undergoing change is called Conservation and Restoration" (Wikipedia Contributors 2002). Not since the invention of the printing press have developments in media technology shaken society to such a degree as the emerging social media in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Today broadcast monopolies no longer rule: "In the new world, connection and community is king" (von Appen *et al.* 2006). Within the conservation profession, emerging media, also known synonymously by the terms social media and Web 2.0, have come to play a significant role in the continuing process of self-reevaluation. As the profession seeks to increase its role as the public face of cultural heritage protection, new approaches and challenges await. Herein the discussion will revolve around ethics — "the moral guidelines that order society" (Child 1988, 8) — and the effect of the emerging social media on the traditions and ethics of classical conservation. The development of ethics in the profession will be considered in light of the new possibilities that working directly with the public, and communicating at far greater speeds than previously possible, offer the profession.

The contemporary incarnation of the internet, known colloquially as Web 2.0, has been essential to the increasing adoption of the technology within post-modernity. The ever-increasingly connected world has combined with these emerging read-write technologies to cause a shift from mass consumption to mass creation; this user-generated content is changing the world as we have known it. Today networks of dispersed users can create "fast, fluid, and innovative projects that outperform those of the largest and best-financed enterprises" (Tapscott and Williams 2008, 65). Nowhere is this more visible than with the website Wikipedia. There is a huge and growing network of people who contribute to Wikipedia and as a community "call themselves, proudly, Wikipedians" (Hoffmann and Herczeg 2005). Wikipedia is today among the most successful sites online: "all told, the use of Wikipedia is more popular on a typical day than some of the more prominent activities tracked by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, including online purchasing, visiting dating websites, making travel reservations, using chat rooms, and participating in online auctions" (Rainie and Tancer 2007). One of the founders of Wikipedia likes to talk in grandiose terms about the aims of the project: "Imagine a world in which every single person is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That's what we're doing" (Wales 2009, xv). However, such grand visions may not be that far from the reality. In terms of depth and breadth of content, Wikipedia is outpacing all other printed and online encyclopedias, and despite several intriguing controversies (Lih 2009) has demonstrated an equal level of accuracy in quality of information (Giles 2005).

From humble beginnings the entry for conservation-restoration (Wikipedia Contributors 2009a) has developed significantly. There are now numerous pages associated with various aspects of conservation practice, profession, and professionals, and there are entries concerning conservation in numerous languages across Wikipedia. Although these entries are not yet the main source for online conservation information, their continued development holds the potential for the site to become the most significant single port of call for online, multilingual, conservation-related information, and as such represents a truly democratic international independent resource. This development is the result of the effort of a large number of Wikipedians, including numerous conservators. The development of Wikipedia and other emerging media demonstrates a significant shift in power relations toward a system in which the public can exercise a greater degree of control over the media and thus the message of the profession (Deiser and De Keijzer 2009). This is a new and developing area of concern for the ethics and theories of conservation, one that must be grappled with, for in today's world we face the stark choice of the new reality: "Harness the new collaboration or perish" (Tapscott and Williams 2008, 12).

Wiki Wiki What?

The Wikipedia encyclopedia is a free, web-based, collaborative encyclopedia project supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation; it is one of the most successful examples of contemporary emerging media. "Its name is a portmanteau of the words *wiki* (a technology for creating collaborative websites, from the Hawaiian word wiki, meaning 'quick') and *encyclopedia*" (Wikipedia Contributors 2009b). Wiki technology can be traced back to 1994, when computer programmer Ward Cunningham was working on what he called wikiwikiweb, named after the wiki wiki airport shuttles at Honolulu airport in Hawaii (Cunningham 2003a). The groundbreaking feature wiki introduced was allowing anyone to make additions and edits to a webpage, and crucially for those additions to be tracked, and easily reverted. In describing the intention behind these developments, Cunningham said: "In creating wiki, I wanted to stroke that story-telling nature in all of us" (Cunningham 2003b). In 2001 Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger were to use Ward Cunningham's wiki system as the basis for their new encyclopedia, launched with the following promise: "http://www.wikipedia.com/Humor me. Go there and add a little article. It will take all of five or ten minutes. —Larry" (Sanger 2005). It seems this low level of commitment in order to contribute continues to be a draw for many people. Entries such as that for conservation-restoration often begin as simple statements of intent or desire for a topic, what are known as stubs. Indeed, the process of adding stubs has become a recognized method of indicating intent or desire to see an article develop around a particular topic or area of interest. Although the simplicity of a system in which "the Web protocols for reading and writing Web pages are almost equally simple" (Bowen and Angus 2006) can help to explain the phenomenal rise of Wikipedia, it does not alone account for people's willingness to contribute, which appears to owe a debt to the not-for-profit status of the website. This status was formally enshrined in 2002, after Spanish language users, fearing their work could be used for others' commercial gain, threatened to fork the Spanish language site. Wikipedia rapidly moved from a dot-com to a dot-org, in line with its new status as a formal non-profit foundation. It was the creation of formal guarantees that "the site's content could never be alienated from its creators" that was to "create the trust necessary for users to commit to it long term" (Shirky 2008a, 274). Suggesting that a sense of collective ownership is a prerequisite for successful collaboration will come as no surprise to museum professionals who are used to working collaboratively in the not-for-profit world.

Wikipedia's governing principles are known as the "five pillars" (Wikipedia Contributors 2009c). They state that Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, is free content, has a code of conduct of respect, has firm rules, and is written with a neutral point of view. The writing style of Wikipedia, known as "neutral point of view" (NPOV), is significant in its aim to represent "fairly and without bias all significant views that have been published by a reliable source" (Tunsch 2007). This NPOV provides an interesting comparison to the museum voice, known as the Unassailable

Voice (UV). On a subconscious level the UV suggests that museums are the center of knowledge, which they philanthropically share with the masses. However, in truth, the UV, "for all its apparent unflappable confidence, often represent[s] a series of compromises" (Walsh 1997, 70); in this respect it is not unlike those compromises made by Wikipedia's NPOV. The essential difference, of course, is that the museum traditionally aimed to present their voice as the final objective authority, whereas an authoritative version of Wikipedia is understood to be impossible. This is a truism for all websites built using a wiki, since "a wiki is always in the process of being organized. But for every hour spent organizing, two more hours are spent adding new material. So the status quo for a wiki is always partially organized" (Cunningham 2003a).

It's a Community; Everyone's a Critic!

The Long Tail, a system summarized as "culture unfiltered by economic scarcity" (Anderson 2008, 53) has become a recognized theory for explaining the societal impact of emerging media. Economically the effect has favored those who sell small quantities of a large number of niche items, a system that exploits what is known mathematically as the power-law distribution. Although mathematics can help explain the successes of the system, a more complete understanding may need to be built directly from the people who embrace this system — who build communities and trust among one another, and who create content for the love of it, with no concern for monetary value. "We are used to a world where little things happen for love and big things happen for money. Love motivates people to bake a cake and money motivates people to make an encyclopedia. Now, though, we can do big things for love" (Shirky 2008a, 104). This system of love is based on communities working collaboratively for the greater good, a system that employs what Shirky (2008b) elsewhere refers to as the cognitive surplus. However, not everyone sees the development of such collaborative communities in a positive light.

Caricature lies at the heart of many criticisms of the Wikipedia project. Such critics are easy to dismiss, whereas others deserve a fair hearing. For example, one of the co-founders of the Wikipedia project, who has now left to form a different online encyclopedia entitled Citizendium, stated: ". . . *regardless* of whether Wikipedia *actually is* more or less reliable than the average encyclopedia, it is not *perceived* as adequately reliable" and furthermore "as a community, Wikipedia lacks the habit or tradition of respect for expertise" (Sanger 2004). While the argument for deference to expertise may make sense, it is doubtful that the project would have become the success it has if such policies existed from the start, the failure of Nupedia, and the slow growth of Citizendium, being interesting cases in point. It is also disingenuous to completely write off the existing regulatory system. It may however be true that some combination of the two systems would elicit greater support for Wikipedia from within the academy. Another critique states that: "Accuracy in a text is not enough. A desirable text is more than a collection of accurate references. It is also an expression of personality" (Lanier 2006). This critique focuses on the ever-present tension between the individual and the collective. Although online responses were quick to point out that the articles themselves may appear at face value to be decontextualized, the context can be found within the associated talk pages in which it soon becomes clear that Wikipedia "is the product not of collectivism but of unending argumentation. The articles grow not from harmonious thought but from constant scrutiny and emendation" (Shirky 2008a, 139). Despite the caricatured nature of some of this critique, the focus on the individual and the people behind the content creation is significant: "The beauty of the Internet is that it connects people. The value is in the other people. If we start to believe that the Internet itself is an entity that has something to say, we're devaluing those people and making ourselves into idiots" (Lanier 2006). Other critiques have revolved not around the specifics of Wikipedia *per se*, but the societal impacts of emerging media as a whole. Such critiques demonstrate that "the important questions aren't about whether these tools will spread or reshape society but rather how they do so" (Shirky 2008a, 300). Perhaps the biggest critique has been concern about the piggybacking role of corporate capitalism as it adapts to user-generated content. "Relations are the key here. We need to acknowledge that relations of subjectivity, everyday life, technology, media and publics also are related to dimensions of capitalism. This relation reconfigures patterns of use into practices which carries a resemblance of work relations, transforming users into losers" (Petersen 2008). The potentially exploitative nature of user-generated content remains a very real concern, perhaps tempered slightly by a comparison to the consumerist nature of broadcast media. Criticism of Wikipedia, and other emerging media will, of course, continue to develop; some critiques will inevitably

be more worthy of consideration than others. The most sophisticated approach for conservators, and other users, is one of critical engagement with emerging media and its critiques, bringing an awareness of the possibilities and pitfalls of the technology.

Let's Get Rhizomatic

Searching for a means of comprehending emerging media and the internet, and drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the metaphor of the rhizome has developed in pedagogical studies. "The *rhizome* is a model of thought that defies the very idea of a model; it is an endless, haphazard multiplicity of connections not dominated by a single center or place, but rather decentralized and plural. It is thought characterized by a radical openness to an outside" (Newman 2001, 105). This has left it difficult to be clearly defined and some have stated "therefore, a rhizome is a rhizome is a rhizome . . ." (Tella 2000, 126). Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome is extracted from botany. "A rhizomatic plant has no center and no defined boundary; rather, it is made up of a number of semi-independent nodes, each of which is capable of growing and spreading on its own, bounded only by the limits of its habitat" (Cormier 2008). The metaphorical rhizome is concerned with principles of connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and rupture. Deleuze and Guattari further describe the principal characteristics of the rhizome as being: "unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play a very different regime of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21). The extrapolation of these central components of the philosophical concept of the rhizome onto the post-modern nonlinearality and labyrinthine nature and hypertextualization of the internet enable it to be characterized as a rhizome.

The vastness of the internet contains such a mass of information that it is beginning to challenge expert knowledge because "information is coming too fast for our traditional methods of expert verification to adapt" (Cormier 2008). Critics of the internet have often focused on this lack of expert authorship as being problematic; conversely, however, it could be considered to be liberatory as "the 'author'-ity of authorship will transform as the lines between readers and authors blur" (Burnett

1993). The "short-term memory, or antimemory" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21) of the rhizome is comparable to the ephemeral nature of content within the internet, which has also been a source of critique. These critics however fail in that they have not made the necessary theoretical structural leap to the rhizome from the hierarchical systems in which "conceptions of foundational knowledge are strong in most disciplines" (Cousin 2005, 124). In hierarchical systems there is a binary logic in which one canonical text produces two, and then four, and so on. The internet by comparison is an antigenealogical system, a rhizome, a system that explicitly jettisons the tree structure. "We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 15). This antigenealogical system then contains the seeds of the most fascinating societal potential of this rhizomatic model; a model in which "cognitive jumps, which must be mechanically forced in a hierarchy, are intuitively sustained in a rhizome" (Burnett 1993).

Moving away from hierarchical foundational models facilitates greater maneuverability whereby "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7). This both frees up scholars to take new approaches and also allows for excess data creation, and crucially for mass amateurization. The rhizomatic model mirrors the concept of the long tail, incorporating the mathematical power law distribution observed in the statement, "the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7). In a rhizome the creation of authoritative content moves from a centralized model to a community model in which, "if a given bit of information is recognized as useful to the community or proves itself able to do something, it can be counted as knowledge. The community, then, has the power to create knowledge within a given context and leave that knowledge as a new node connected to the rest of the network" (Cormier 2008). This non-hierarchical model has been described as a map rather than a tracing: "What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12). This experimentation orients the traveler through the rhizome, differing however from hierarchical system maps in that it does not pinpoint the position of the traveler within a known totality. Instead it is created as it is used: "It is tracings that must be put on the map, not the opposite" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21). These are adapted as the traveler progresses: "It is the stand-point of that traveler which creates the rhizomorphic structure of any given moment" (Burnett 1993). Such conceptual mapping mirrors the idea of user-generated content within the emerging media. This rhizome metaphor then is more than a purely theoretical model of looking at the internet with analytic detachment; it also allows us to understand how scholarly approaches may differ and a new approach may develop, one in which "creative scholars will be effective communicators, and it will be their messages which will stand out in the tangle of the rhizome" (Burnett 1993).

Conservation 1.0: The Journey Begins

Conservation is a profession in which "sophisticated and costly actions are performed in order to solve or delay the otherwise unavoidable decay of certain objects" (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, 171). The profession developed a unique melding of scientific and artistic skills, and can trace its origins to the employment of Friedrich Rathgen at the Royal Museum in Berlin: "With the approval of the museum authorities, on April 1, 1888, Rathgen was appointed 'chemist-in-charge', a position he held for some forty years" (Gilberg 1987). The conservation idea was broadcast to the museum world through the publication and translation of Rathgen's "handbook" *Die Konservierung von Altertumsfunden* (The Conservation of Antiquities) (Rathgen 1898). This was the first such publication and drew on his unique experience as the world's first professional conservator. In popular discourse the words "restoration" and "conservation" are used synonymously; however, this is not the case amongst conservators or restorers. In fact "the words 'conservation' and 'restoration' are like all other words in that they may have many meanings and these meanings may change with time and vary with context" (Ashley-Smith 1994, 89). A historiography of the conservation profession is just beginning to develop, within which it has been demonstrated that "each specialism has its own history of development and traditions" (Eastop 2006, 517). In the field of ethnographic conservation, new ways of understanding objects have been developing, reconfiguring the concept of ownership of material culture and applying the conceptual framework of stewardship. This approach began in areas where indigenous people and museums that house ethnographic collections are in close contact, and has since spread around the globe, fostering an approach based on mutual respect (Dignard *et al.* 2008) and socio-politically based on decolonization (Sully 2008). This approach is formed from the realization that "we cannot change the past, but we can indeed shape the future" (Whiteduck 2008, xv). Despite many conservators at first resisting or dismissing these changes, they are occurring and are redefining the profession. Today it is vital to understand that "conservation has become a social practice just as much as a scientific one" (Pye and Sully 2007, 24). Emerging media therefore can be contextualized within the increasing social practices of the conservation profession, a change both facilitated by the tools of this social media and accelerated by the technique. These changes to the profession then "are the result of a dynamic which is fundamental to systems of value and ethics. They change over time — a long-term 'sea-change' which brings the boat to new shores" (Clavir 2001, 57).

Museology and museum ethics can be said to have begun in AD 2 with Ptolemy's Temple of the Muses at Alexandria (Child 1994); however, it was not until much more recently that the codification of ethics began. Ethical codes of conduct are significant within the conservation profession, and some have argued that "the codes of ethics for conservators in different countries provide the clearest and most agreed upon descriptions of this field" (Clavir 2002, 48). Such codes first began with the International Institute for Conservation — American Group, who in 1961 formed a committee to draft a report into standards of practice. This report was accepted by the membership in 1963 (The Murray Pease Committee 1964) and in 1967, based on this report, a code of ethics was adopted (Pease *et al.* 1968). Codes of ethics are seen as serving several functions. In addition to defining the purpose and reason for existence of the profession, they provide "a basis for making choices" (Caple 2000, 59) and acknowledge a "willingness to explicitly take collective responsibility" (Clavir 2002, 48). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, codes of ethics proliferated as the first generations of conservation graduates announced their arrival in museums and their newly claimed professional status.

For new recruits to a profession, codes of ethics also serve a secondary function, that of "educating or indoctrinating" in order to reduce the need for supervision (Caple 2000, 59). Ethical codes in this respect are intended to instill general values that will influence how the person acts, for "once people have been inculcated with a value system, they cannot be expected to violate it to order" (Keene 1994, 19). Ethical codes attempt to enforce a system in which "it is hoped that eventually all conservators will automatically argue that one type of conduct is right and one type wrong" (Ashley-Smith 1982, 12). In so doing, the codes systemically attempt to prevent discussion in favor of all-encompassing ideas.

As Chris Caple has noted, "Over the years a number of terms or phrases have sought to express a single quintessential guiding ethic for conservation such as: minimum intervention, reversibility, true nature" (2000, 61). In reality these remain open to interpretation in order to support a broad spectrum of possibilities, and furthermore, have been open to critique in that, first, "a code of ethics may merely be a status symbol to be acquired by a young and aspiring profession and second that whatever ethical standpoint is taken in the 1980s it will not be absolute but will be overtaken by the spirit of the 1990s or the new millennium" (Ashley-Smith 1982, 11). This is best demonstrated by the controversy surrounding the idea of reversibility: once considered a key principle of conservation ethics, it is now seen as "a fuzzy concept" (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, 185).

As the conservation profession adopts ideas from the canon of postmodern thought, new challenges to ethics have developed. Conservation has traditionally focused exclusively upon the objects themselves. However, these new ideas posit that "conservation is a part of material culture as well as being a commentary on it" (Eastop 2006, 530) and furthermore "all the power objects possess is attributed to them by people" (Pye and Sully 2007, 23). This has led to an increase in subjectivity within the profession, and the development of the idea of stewardship, challenging the classical notion of "conservation as a 'truth enforcement' operation" (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, 65). Contemporary conservation is therefore concerned with a multiplicity of intangible understandings of material culture necessitating conservators developing a new role between object and people, in which "conservators should aim to work with the outcome of the connections between people and objects. Only this interaction will enable informed and relevant conservation responses" (Peters 2008, 187). As some develop a practice based on antifoundationalist thinking and questioning established traditions, it has been noted that in response others "will hide behind custom and practice, minimum intervention, established ethics, etc." (Child 1994, 141). However, as the redrafting and revision of ideas such as reversibility demonstrates, "ethics in conservation are both complex and evolving" (Caple 2000, 59), and evolution requires continued dialogue.

In fact, "there is some correlation between discussion and sensible decision making" (Ashley-Smith 1994, 89). The result of such dialogue is that contemporary conservation is in the process of developing an adaptive ethical approach that "adapts to the needs of the users, revealing that these needs are ethically much more relevant than any scientific principle" (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, 214). Conservators are in the process of adopting this adaptive ethical approach at the same time as they adopt the internet, which is an intriguing coincidence, since perhaps nowhere other than online has the encouragement of dialogue and adaptability to users demonstrated more potential.

Conservation 2.0: Conservation Gets Connected

In the 1990s, museum professionals made bold proclamations such as: "We are the architects of the future; we can make this happen. The future begins now" (Fink 1997, 8). Today, in the early twenty-first century, the intentions behind such statements are beginning to come to fruition, as all museum professionals come to understand the significance of the internet to their work and lives. In the 1990s, museum futurists predicted that "the near ubiquity of the Internet, and WWW, projected to happen within a decade, could even come sooner" and "that virtuality will alter the way in which we think about and act in the world" (Bearman and Trant 1999, 9). Attempting to stay at the forefront of a changing media landscape, museums theorized the potential for what has become known as Web 2.0, noting the need "to ensure that the communication enabled by the network is not one way" (Trant and Bearman 1997, 2). It was realized that the emerging media allowed "the will of people to leave a mark — aesthetical, rhetorical, or otherwise" which could "address the issue of feedback" (Deck 1999, 53). Museum futurists commented on the ability of such networks to exist between institutions and also between people, building a community that would encourage a multiplicity of communications, stating that "in short such a network could become nothing less than a new domain of the human spirit — a territory of cultural discovery and innovation" (Fink 1997, 7).

Conservators are beginning to inhabit this new territory as a means of communication and collaboration, fulfilling the "effective communications network" role Sloggett (2009, 173) identified as being essential to mature disciplines. The use of blogging, photo and video sharing, micro-blogging, wikis and social networks has increasingly become common, although in fact "while *Wikipedia* and *Flickr* are somewhat recent developments, the idea of conservators sharing information over the Internet is hardly new" (McCoy 2009). The longest-running internet-based conservation effort is the Conservation Distribution-List, an email distribution list that was the first stage of the website Conservation OnLine (CoOL). CoOL started in 1987 when a flier was posted on the (non-electronic) bulletin board at the American Institute for Conservation Annual Meeting, inviting people to participate in the nascent DistList, a list that currently has around 9,682 members in 91 countries (Henry 2009). The sharing of information online then can be seen to have tradition and institutional support within conservation. Although some institutions have also attempted to provide guidelines to their employees to assist their use and adoption of emerging media (Indianapolis Museum of Art 2009), the real significant change is that conservators no longer require institutional support to develop collaborative projects and to communicate among one another. It is from this community of conservators collaborating and experimenting with emerging media that reports are finding their way to the conservation community at large. Articles have been published that document the changing media landscape (Cull 2009; McCoy 2009), as well as discussing specific platforms, such as wikis (Andrews 2007; Casella and Cocks 2007) and forming working groups to collaborate on projects, such as conservation-related Wikipedia pages (Cull *et al.* 2008). While the literature within the conservation field remains limited, with the increasing normalization of emerging media within the profession, this field of research is likely to grow.

The real significance of experiments in emerging media will not be measured in terms of numbers of Wikipedia entries concerning conservation topics or numbers of preservation-themed blogs. Instead it will be seen in a shift in public perception concerning the ethics of caring for cultural heritage and the wider world: "Conservators provide a paradigm not just for fixing things when they are broken, but for a wider social ethos of care, where we individually and collectively take responsibility and action" (Jones and Holden 2008, 16). Increasing numbers of people around the world have become dissatisfied with passively consuming culture broadcast at them by others. In response to this dissatisfaction they are "creating their own content" (Smith 2008). In so doing, the "way people access information, spend their leisure time and interact with each other continues to evolve as the world becomes increasingly wired" (McIntyre *et al.* 2008). The growth of user-generated digital archiving is one such evolution: "The word conservation here acquires new meaning, because not only are news and contributions digitally available well after their paper support is gone, but also sources and comments remain readable on the Web" (Gaia *et al.* 2005). This process of archiving evolution can be observed within Wikipedia where the platform has developed as both a location for encyclopedic entries on numerous topics and also up-to-the-minute repositories for recording current events. These over time become encyclopedic entries about, or archives of, information pertaining to the recent past. It has been said that the world of Wikipedia is comparable to the museum world inasmuch as they are both communities of people "dedicated to the expansion of knowledge" (Tunsch 2007), knowledge targeted at a large and unspecified audience we call the general public. Interestingly, the Wikipedia community also functions as a living example of contemporary conservation's adaptive ethics inasmuch as it systemically aims to prevent damage and encourage discussion. Wikis are an ideal conservation system built in such a way that it is easier to fix acts of vandalism than it is to create them: "Imagine a world where it was easier to clean graffiti off a wall than to put it there in the first place" (Shirky 2008a, 136).

Under Development: The Conservation to Come?

Collectively we confront the new virtual global village "with an enormous backlog of outdated mental and psychological responses" (McLuhan and Fiore 1967, 63). Despite this, many people are developing strategies to positively adapt to the new media landscape. For conservators who work in a world in which "the methodology of conservation could be said to preserve works of art first by means of intellectual analysis" (Clavir 2002, 18), it is no surprise that access to, and more specifically control of, information is a potential point of conflict. The democratization of access to information lies at the heart of ethical issues surrounding emerging media and the conservation profession. Conservation ethics has begun to move beyond the concerns of professional technicians with ideas such as reversibility and minimum intervention, toward a far more profound and public ethical question: "What is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom?" (Foucault 1989 (1984), 434). Contemporary theories of adaptive ethics are allowing conservators to radically reinvent the profession and its interaction with both material culture and civil society. In so doing, "the borders of conservation are changing and becoming less distinct, and professional networks are being renegotiated" (Eastop 2006, 529). It is in this period of renegotiation that new media have begun to emerge that not only help facilitate the process, but moreover help further it, ably demonstrating that, "the Internet has been about networking: not just networks of wires and hubs but networks of people" (Gurak and Logie 2003, 25).

In the twenty-first century Pye and Sully (2007, 29) challenge conservators to "have the confidence to rethink principles as theory and practice evolve." In fact, through examining the drafting, revisions, and redrafting of codes of ethics, we can observe that there is, and has been, an ongoing complex discourse rethinking conservation principles and ethics. The rhizomatic model of emerging media makes a profound addition to this discourse through demonstrating that "one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9). The subjective nature of emerging contemporary conservation is leaning toward the adoption of an ethical approach that aims to elucidate the differing meanings contained within an object. In a method comparable to NPOV, the conservator's role is not to choose whose voice to follow, but to decide "how to combine them to satisfy as many views as possible" (Muñoz-Viñas 2005, 214). This entails developing a discourse around the objects, and an end to the reversibility paradigm. Within emerging media we encounter this phenomenon in terms of a process of incompleteness: "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25). Such a process has also been observed by anthropologists working with contemporary anti-authoritarian activist groups, who describe consensus-based decision making as a process: "We are dealing with a process of compromise and synthesis meant to produce decisions that no one finds so violently objectionable that they are not willing to at least assent. That is to say two levels we are used to distinguishing — decision making and enforcement — are effectively collapsed" (Graeber 2007, 341).

The importance of process over final product has also been recognized within the conservation literature: "It is the process, the practice and articulation of a collective ethic, not the finished code, that makes a profession a moral enterprise, often distinguishing it from other job categories and making it worthy of being entrusted with caring for cultural heritage" (Clavir 2002, 49). This being the case, the conservator no longer plays the role of overarching decision maker, but instead plays the role of facilitator within a community. Significantly, we can observe the same patterns at play within the structures of emerging media such as Wikipedia:

> Wikipedia is a process, not a product, it replaces guarantees offered by institutions with probabilities supported by process: if enough people care enough about an article to read it, then enough people will care enough to improve it, and over time this will lead to a large enough body of good enough work to begin to take both availability and quality of articles for granted, and to integrate Wikipedia into daily use by millions.
>
> (Shirky 2008a, 140)

When it comes to contemporary conservation ethics, "the fact is that there are no ready solutions to be followed, no recipes, no one-size-fits-all" (Peters 2008, 187). Could it be then that the development of a process-based adaptive conservation ethics, both on- and offline, could help integrate the care for cultural heritage into the daily lives of millions too? Perhaps then contemporary ethical conservation can best be seen as a stub in need of expansion. How and if it expands could now be in all our hands.

Note

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5

The New Pornographers: Legal and Ethical Considerations of Sexting

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SCHOLARS HAVE LONG NOTED THE role of the media in the sexualization of children and adolescents. However, with the advent of new media technologies such as the internet and cellular phones, children and adolescents are no longer merely consumers of this sexual ideology, but also creators of digital content that performs this ideology. Such content can range from the relatively tame "girls making out" images found on sites such as collegehumor.com to sexually explicit photographs transmitted through cellular phones within a circle of friends that draws the attention of law enforcement. In this essay, I discuss the practice of adolescent sexting (the practice of sending sexually explicit text messages) by reviewing some of the more prominent cases covered in the media; next, I explore the legal aspects surrounding the practice of sexting; finally, I consider the ethical issues surrounding sexting, exploring the issue of harm to both the individual and society by rooting the practice within a culture that celebrates, yet remains suspicious of, adolescent sexuality.

Despite numerous studies that demonstrate that adolescents and children are sexual beings (e.g. Calderone 1985; Martinson 1994; Buzwell and Rosenthal 1996; Davies *et al.* 2000; Larsson *et al.* 2000; Santelli *et al.* 2000; Whitaker *et al.* 2000; Woody *et al.* 2000; Lamb 2001; Little and

Rankin 2001; Sandnabba *et al.* 2003; Woody *et al.* 2003; Graupner 2004; Hornor 2004; Manning *et al.* 2005; Cornell and Halpern-Felsher 2006; Kelsey 2007), American society remains ambivalent toward adolescent sexual expression. This is especially the case where photographic evidence of sexual behavior is concerned. But in a culture that celebrates aggressive female sexuality, adolescent girls are given mixed messages. Paris Hilton is famous for appearing in a sex tape and for the ubiquitous upskirt photographs that feature her *sans* panties, yet a 14-year-old New Jersey girl faced potential child pornography charges with the accompanying sex offender registration for posting explicit photographs of herself on MySpace (*Brattleboro Reformer* 2009; Defalco 2009; Kalson 2009; *Providence Journal* 2009). Despite the seemingly clear-cut laws surrounding child pornography, the realities of adolescent sexuality trouble our conception of what constitutes legal and ethical behavior, especially in the digital age, when images, text, and video can be transmitted at the touch of a button to many people at once. The assumptions surrounding child pornography — that adults are exploiting children — are challenged by a new generation of youth who seem determined to put themselves, and their sexuality, on display.

Many adolescents seem unaware of the potential for humiliation and embarrassment that can occur when these photos and videos are distributed to unintended parties. Thus potential harm to the individual is an underlying ethical concern. For example, Jessica Logan, an 18-year-old woman from Ohio, killed herself after her ex-boyfriend sent nude pictures of her to other girls at her school. Logan was tormented by other students; she "was called all sorts of names, people were throwing stuff at her, and one day her mother found her in her bedroom. She'd hanged herself" (Feldman 2009, 1). Sometimes the photos can be made even more public, as in the case of Vanessa Hudgens, of Disney's *High School Musical* series, who caused a public relations embarrassment when nude pictures meant for her boyfriend were leaked to the internet (*Bennington Banner* 2007; Hicks 2007; Keating and Zeidler 2007; *New York Post* 2008).

This essay examines the practice of adolescent "sexting," or sending sexual messages or images through text messages. I will first discuss the practice of sexting by reviewing some of the more prominent cases; next, I will explore the legal aspects surrounding the practice of sexting; finally, I will consider the ethical issues surrounding sexting, exploring the issue of harm to both the individual and society by rooting the practice within a culture that celebrates, yet remains suspicious of, adolescent sexuality.

Digital Exhibitionism: The Case of "Sexting"

Eric Schaefer (2002) explains that the advent of 16mm film technology revolutionized pornographic films. Digital video technology and the popularity of the internet seem to have wrought a similar revolution. With the internet, channels of distribution have been eliminated, and anyone with a digital camera and exhibitionistic tendencies can expose himself or herself to thousands of people. Martin Barron and Michael Kimmel (2000, 165) trace the development of three forms of pornographic media — magazines, videos, and Usenet — describing how these shifts illustrate "the increasing 'democratization' of pornographic media." However, these forms of pornography remain relatively anonymous. Unlike those who post images online for their own sexual fulfillment, teenagers are currently engaging in distribution of pornographic images of themselves in a more targeted manner, often through cellular phones. Such acts have been described in the media as "sexting."

Sexting is a growing concern among parents, law enforcement officials, and legislators. A study published by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com (2008, 1) found that 22 percent of teen girls, 18 percent of teen boys, and 11 percent of young teen girls (ages 13–16) "have sent/posted nude or seminude pictures or video of themselves."[2] What's more, Bill Albert, a spokesman for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, states that "legal consequences were very low on their list of concerns" (Marks 2009). Although this is a phenomenon that seems to be shared by both males and females (see also Hamill 2009a), many of the news reports seem to focus on cases involving adolescent females who sent photos to their boyfriends, which frames the behavior as mainly a heterosexual phenomenon. However, we have no way of knowing whether this is the case, because the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com study did not identify sexual orientation.

There have been several recent high-profile cases of sexting that have been widely reported, the most spectacular of which is the case of Jessica Logan, who killed herself after nude photos of her were disseminated to her classmates (Feldman 2009; Fletcher and Jolly 2009; McCarty 2009;

Morelli 2009; *Patriot Ledger* 2009). Another case involved a group of students in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania, where two freshman girls sent nude photos of themselves that were then forwarded around the school (Boeckel 2009; Evans 2009; *Evening Sun* 2009; Gross 2009; Parker 2009; Shaw 2009; *York Dispatch* 2009).

One case that illustrates the fuzzy boundaries of what is considered acceptable adolescent self-expression involved a group of teenagers in Wyoming County, Pennsylvania (Gram 2009; Hamill 2009a, 2009b; Marks 2009; Nissley 2009; Rubinkam 2009; Searcey 2009). Seventeen students had been caught either with nude or semi-nude photos of classmates on their cell phones, or they were identified in the images. These students accepted an offer to take a course dealing with pornography and sexual violence in lieu of being charged with child pornography. However, three other students rejected the offer because they did not feel that they had done anything wrong. In the case of two girls who were both wearing bras, District Attorney George Skumanick Jr. considered the photo "provocative" and threatened them with child abuse charges if they did not take the class (Hamill 2009a). He also threatened a girl who was photographed wearing a bathing suit (Searcey 2009). Thus in some cases the motive may not even be sexual expression, but is perceived as sexual by others.

Skumanick put forth a rather overbroad definition of child pornography, one that would render illegal almost any Calvin Klein ad aimed at the teenage market. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Skumanick claimed that "a girl in a bathing suit could be subjected to criminal charges because she was posed 'provocatively'" (Searcey 2009, A17). Yet the girls were being sent mixed messages, essentially being told that when similar images are taken in a different context, it is art or commercial speech. MaryJo Miller, the mother of one of the girls who appeared in their bras, observed, "There are photos of girls in magazines wearing bras" (Nissley 2009). Moreover, much more provocative photos, such as the semi-nude photos of Miley Cyrus in *Vanity Fair*, have resulted in little more than hand wringing about the sexualization of teens. Jim Farber states that "The quasi-nude *Vanity Fair* spread drew howls of outrage from parents, and shrieks from kids who thought it beneath their sweet idol" (Farber 2008, 35). Yet this did not result in child pornography charges against *Vanity Fair*, Annie Leibovitz, or any of the millions who likely own a copy of the magazine. Cyrus defended the photos, stating, "I thought, 'This looks pretty, and really natural.' I think it's really artsy"

(Winkler 2008, C5). Even so, she later conceded that "it was honestly one dumb decision. I just think I need to be a bit more careful next time" (*Sunday Mirror* 2008, 6). Similar arguments could likely be made by other, less famous teens with less illustrious photographers.

Three of the girls accused by Skumanick have taken the case to court, arguing that they are not guilty of producing or appearing in child pornography. MaryJo Miller, the mother of one of the girls, argued, "There was absolutely nothing wrong with that photograph" (quoted in Rubinkam 2009, 8). Critics argued that the District Attorney's Office was overstepping its role in protecting children. Witold Walczak, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, which represents the families who are fighting the charges, stated, "Prosecutors should not be using a nuclear-weapon-type charge like child pornography against kids who have no criminal intent and are merely doing stupid things" (Hamill 2009a, A21).

The various cases of sexting demonstrate the variety of punishments that prosecutors have attempted to impose. Recently, a 14-year-old girl from New Jersey was accused of distributing child pornography and arrested for posting explicit photos of herself on MySpace (*Brattleboro Reformer* 2009; Defalco 2009; Kalson 2009; *Providence Journal* 2009). Yet, the *Providence Journal* (2009, B1) reported that "Maureen Kanka, the New Jersey mother who pushed for [Megan's] Law after her daughter was killed by a sex offender, blasted authorities for charging the 14-year-old, saying the girl 'should have intervention and counseling, because the only person she exploited was herself.'" But in the face of strict child pornography laws and laws that counter child exploitation, such as Megan's Law, that was not a decision for her to make — the laws are clear: child pornography is child pornography regardless of who creates it. The girl received probation and court-ordered counseling (Billups 2009), but such a case reveals a need for nuance in legal and ethical considerations surrounding not only child pornography but adolescent sexuality in general. According to Perry Aftab of wiredsafety.org, an online internet safety website, "The laws are either too hot or too cold and we need to make sure we find one that is just right . . . We are either charging kids under child pornography and sexual exploitation laws as if they were registered sex offenders — which they will be if they're successfully prosecuted — or we're giving them a slap on the wrist with harassment laws that were not intended to address this" (Marks 2009, 25).

Adolescent Sexuality and the Law

In media depictions of sexting, its legal status is a primary concern: is it a crime or is it simply a foolish thing that youth today are doing? As far as the law is concerned, it is a crime, but the ways in which legal scholars and legislators frame the laws concerning adolescent sexuality can reveal underlying ethical stances. Because a core ethical consideration concerns the potential harm to both the individual and society, it is important to consider the existing legal debate surrounding the practice of sexting which, in some ways, mirrors the ongoing debate surrounding the rights of the individual versus the rights of society as a whole. First, however, we must consider sexting within the context of the current sexual practices of adolescents.

Much of the hand-wringing surrounding sexting concerns the transmission of nude photos of teenagers. Nudity is not sexuality, of course, but the display of the unclothed body is a common form of sexual self-expression in both adults and adolescents. For example, one teen referred to her sexting as "flirting" (Marks 2009, 25) and another stated, "It's just like another form of sex" (quoted in Cahalan 2009, 3). As noted earlier, research demonstrates that adolescents and even children are sexual beings. John Santelli *et al.* (2009, 378) note that despite a decrease in sexual initiation in adolescents from 54 percent to 48 percent, they also "found an increase in current sexual activity from 1991– 2007 among sexually experienced students." In other words, slightly fewer teens are beginning to have sex but those who are having sex are having more of it. Jodi Cornell and Bonnie Halpern-Felsher (2006, 299) found in their study of ninth-graders that 20.3 percent had had oral sex, 12.6 percent had had vaginal sex, and 10 percent had had both oral and vaginal sex. Moreover, teens are not only having sex with their romantic partners, but other "hook ups" as well. For example, Manning *et al.* (2005, 398) found that over a third of sexually active teens had sex with a partner with whom they were not romantically involved (see also Manning *et al.* 2006). Such behaviors persist as adolescents move into adulthood and go to college (Paul 2006; Paul and Hayes 2002). Add to this ambiguity concerning relationships the ambiguity of definition: some teens do not consider oral or anal sex to be "sex" (Carpenter 2001; Nicoletti 2005).

Despite the reality of adolescent sexual experience, the United States has passed laws that attempt to legislate it into submission. Mary Graw Leary (2007, 32) describes the inherent tension existing in laws

governing adolescent sexuality: "Although juveniles lack the capacity to consent, they do not necessarily lack the ability to intentionally have sexual contact." In the case of self-produced pornography, the laws, where they relate to images of minors, are quite clear. The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act (2006) includes "possession, production, or distribution of child pornography" (§ 16911(7)) as an offense for which one must register as a Tier II sex offender and which carries a 25-year registration period (§16915(a)). Other attempts at curbing child pornography include the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation Act of 1977, Child Pornography Prevention Act of 1996, and the PROTECT Act of 2003 (for legal commentary concerning the issue of child pornography, see Adler 2001; Burke *et al.* 2002; Mota 2002; Ost 2002; Reid 2003; Bernstein 2005; Kornegay 2006; LaRoy 2008; Russell 2008). Unlike the laws governing sexual contact, the laws surrounding the production of child pornography do not seem to have any provisions for self-produced material or concern for the age of the producer.

As demonstrated in news reports, law enforcement officials are still trying to determine how to deal with a case in which the victim and the perpetrator are the same person. There appear to be two prevailing schools of thought — those who advocate a hard-line approach because of the potential harm to society as a whole, and those who argue that child pornography laws were never meant to punish teenagers, advocating leniency when teens send pictures of themselves to other teens. Leary (2007, 4–6), a proponent of the first position, observes that:

> Minors, without the grooming or coercion of adult offenders, are voluntarily creating and distributing self-produced child pornography. This "self-exploitation" occurs in countless circumstances including commercial production, producing with the intent that there will be a limited audience, self-posting of sexually explicit images on a web page or social networking site, producing for fee, making images of oneself and distributing or posting them on the Internet for recognition, attention, or profit, recording sexual encounters by a minor with another, and others. Whatever the circumstances, because this activity is the production of child pornography, these children face significant criminal penalties.

She concludes that "Because we as a society have acknowledged child pornography's harm extends beyond those children depicted, we cannot ignore this harm when the producer is a juvenile. Thus, our child pornography jurisprudence supports juvenile prosecution as an option to stem its proliferation" (Leary 2007, 36).

Yet Stephen Smith (2008, 544) counters,

> To funnel into the criminal or juvenile justice systems cases of self-produced child pornography — material that, at its root, steps from the undeniable fact that today's teenagers are sexually active well before they turn eighteen — is unjustified. To do so would expose minors to the severe stigma and penalties afforded by child pornography laws. It would also cause minors to be branded as registered sex offenders and to incur the onerous legal disabilities and restrictions that were passed with sexual predators in mind, not minors engaged in consensual sex with their peers.

Smith (2008, 529) concludes that "these laws are simply too blunt an instrument to deal with consensual teenage sex that the minors involved chose to film in a culture where, for good or ill, sex among teenagers is commonplace."

Smith and Leary illustrate two opposing ethical stances — the good of the individual versus the good of society as a whole — and it seems that the legal system still is trying to strike an appropriate balance between the two. Moreover, it seems that legislators and legal scholars are attempting to impose a form of adolescent morality that never was. However, unlike sexual contact between individual teens, this form of sexual expression can be shared by hundreds of people as it spreads virally. If such images were to proliferate, it would become increasingly difficult to distinguish voluntary adolescent sexual expression from child pornography created through coercive means. Because the issues surrounding sexting are complex, it seems far from being resolved.

The legal system has always grappled with the rights of the individual and the impact of individual actions on others. Yet both of these stances ignore the implications of the fact, if not the fact itself, that these adolescents are *choosing* to create erotic images of themselves. These teenagers were not plied with drugs and alcohol, nor were they coerced into creating these images. As such, these images transgress the commonly held narratives surrounding the production of child pornography. In media and legal discourse concerning sexting, these images are continually described as self-exploitation, yet there must be some kind of compelling

self-interest in producing these images because, as Baruch Spinoza (1992, 165) suggests, "Nobody, unless he [or she] is overcome by external causes contrary to his [or her] own nature, neglects to seek his [or her] own advantage." In other words, these images may not actually be exploitation — at least in the minds of the participants. Therefore, we must examine sexting from a different standpoint, one that acknowledges the complicity and agency of the adolescents themselves.

Sexual Norms and the Ethics of Sexting

John Stuart Mill (1907, 2–3) argues that "all action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and colour from the end to which they are subservient." He continues, "When we engage in a pursuit, a clear and precise conception of what we are pursuing would seem to be the first thing we need, instead of the last we are to look forward to" (Mill 1907, 3). What, then, seem to be the ends implicit in the act of sexting? I suggest that at its heart, the utility value of sexting is in the construction of a desired presentation of self.

Erving Goffman (1959) suggests that we are constantly performing, presenting ourselves in ways that are socially desirable. This is also the case in sexuality; one is always performing one's sexuality. Yet, as Judith Butler (1990, 140) notes, "We regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right." Women are caught in a paradox, required to perform both the innocent virgin and the sexually knowing wanton. Men are implored to value virility and sexual experience, such that the term "virgin" is used as a slur. Thus, it is not enough to simply consider these displays of sexuality as a performance — rather, it seems that these images function rhetorically. Parke Burgess (1970, 120) states that "the strategies and motives of any rhetoric . . . represent an invitation to a life-style, an invitation to adopt a pattern of strategies and motives, verbal and nonverbal, that determine how men and women will function together in culture." This is especially the case with sexual media: Richard Miller (1989, 149) argues that "pornographic media use suggestive images that appeal to affections and sensual pleasures; they are also speech acts in that they bid their patrons to assent to judgments demanded by the medium."

Edwin Black (1970, 119) explains, "In all rhetorical discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something, but to *be* something.

We are solicited by the discourse to fulfill its blandishments with our very selves." Thomas Benson (1989, 318) provides a similar argument: "Rhetorical being, knowing, and doing are simultaneous and overlapping actions that together constitute rhetorical action: discourse is fabricated, judgments are made, understandings are shared, agents move others and are themselves moved to belief and action, and identities are revealed and created." By exposing themselves sexually and disseminating the images, these adolescents not only perform a sexual identity that they seem to believe is socially desirable, they also reveal a positive orientation toward such acts. That these images are then spread through the adolescent community likewise reveals ambivalence toward the legal implications of such images.

In some ways, these adolescents create a self-fulfilling prophecy; they engage in behaviors that they know will attract attention and thus reinforce the behavior as desirable. They have found that the more explicit the act, the more desirable they will seem and the more attention they will receive. Thus it seems little wonder that photographs seem to be following a trajectory from less explicit and flirtatious images, to more revealing images, up to openly sexual images. Mill (1907, 9–10) proposes that "Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure." There is likely some degree of pleasure derived from knowing one's own desirability. Susan Bordo (1999, 190) describes the "receptive pleasures traditionally reserved for women," such as "the pleasures, not of staring someone down but of feeling one's body caressed by another's eyes . . . Some people describe these receptive pleasures as 'passive' . . . 'Passive' hardly describes what's going on when one person offers himself or herself to another. Inviting, receiving, responding — these are active behaviors too, and rather thrilling ones."

From a utilitarian standpoint, there is little wrong with putting oneself on display if one seeks attention, especially in a culture that celebrates sexuality and youth. Mill (1907, 11) notes that "some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and valuable than others," and in a culture saturated with messages imploring adolescents, especially young women, to be not only sexy, but sexual, the pleasures derived from sexual expression are certainly valuable and desirable. Candice Kelsey (2007, 5) argues that "girls crave feeling like an adult. And many girls believe that adult equals

sexy — a conclusion that's repeated endlessly to them by marketers and media outlets hyping sexualized images and products." Adolescents who engage in sexting seem to have internalized the sexualization of the world in which they live.

There remains the underlying question of whether the act of adolescents taking sexually explicit images of themselves and sending those images to others is ethical. I propose that the core issue here is harm, both to the teen — emotionally and that which is done to his or her future — and to society as a whole. It is clear that sexting may cause potential harm to the participant's emotional well-being, as evidenced in the case of Jessica Logan. Adolescents may be ill-equipped to deal with the potential betrayal of trust that comes when sexual images of themselves are passed on to others without their consent. At the very least, such images may prove to be embarrassing if they resurface in the future, as in the case of Vanessa Hudgens. If those who favor a hard-line approach to defining sexting as the production of child pornography have their way, there may also be potential harm to the individual's future if he or she is required to register as a sex offender. Yet all of this (with the exception of the potential for sex offender status) also applies if the individual in the image is 18 years old or older. Once the individual turns 18, an act that was once creation and distribution of child pornography becomes merely a bad decision, and the law is not meant to protect people from bad decisions. Moreover, this implies that somehow, on an arbitrary date (i.e., one's 18th birthday), an act transforms from a morally reprehensible act to one that is simply in poor taste.

From a societal standpoint, Leary (2007) takes the stance that any images of adolescent sexuality must be eliminated because they may be used by pedophiles to groom other victims. Yet pedophiles commonly use mainstream pornography to groom victims as well (Dombrowski *et al.* 2007; Itzin 1997), and there are legal alternatives that could just as easily stand in for a grainy cell phone photograph of a 17-year-old. The implicit argument concerning sexting seems to be that such images *will* be used to groom pedophiles; from the standpoint of this argument it seems incomprehensible that such images can be defined as yet another variety of pornography or simply self-expression. This line of reasoning seems to function as an extension of what W. Phillips Davison (1983) calls the "third person effect," in which individuals perceive that others will be more affected by mediated messages than themselves (see also Perloff 2002).

Of course, each instance of sexting tends to normalize the practice. Yet one cannot lay this entirely at the feet of the adolescents involved. Once again, we must consider the phenomenon within the larger media landscape in which these teens reside. Bandura (2002, 132) notes that "media portrayals can alter perceived social sanctions by the way in which the consequences of different styles of conduct are portrayed." In many media portrayals of adolescent sexual behavior, the act is shown as a desirable outcome, a consummation of the relationship. Sexual intercourse is the logical *telos* of romantic relationships, even when teens are involved. Harris and Scott (2002, 313) suggest that "watching numerous sitcoms and movies showing teenagers being sexually active may cultivate acceptance of such a position in the viewer and thus weaken family-taught values against premarital sex." Sexting can be considered simply another form of sexual expression, which the media portray as desirable. As such, sexting is merely a symptom, rather than the disease itself.

Regardless of the reasons why, it is clear that adolescents seem determined to express their sexuality and, when viewed as a rhetorical act, sexting functions as a way to re-imagine adolescent sexuality. It also provides an opportunity to redefine the idea of child pornography, because it is clear that the teens who produce these images are not thinking of it as child pornography; rather, they use terms such as "flirting" (Marks 2009; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com 2008), "a joke" (*Gadsden Times* 2009; Gram 2009; National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com 2008), or a "thrill" (*Omaha World–Herald* 2009). Semantics matter. Feminist scholars have described how language affects women's self-image, especially where it concerns their sexuality (Ho and Tsang 2005; Pitts 1998). Victoria Pitts (1998, 71) writes, "Reclaiming or resistance ideology implies that social inscriptions on the body can be rewritten, and the body — especially the female genitals and breasts — can be reclaimed." A similar impulse may be at work in adolescents' refusal to see sexting as criminal or even as morally wrong. Such linguistic strategies diminish the potential legal and emotional consequences of the act.

Taken from a utilitarian ethical stance, sexting can be seen as an appropriate, if not legal, form of sexual self-expression. Mill (1907, 61) suggests that "nothing is a good to human beings but in so far as it is either itself pleasurable, or a means of attaining pleasure or averting pain." The potential pleasure found in sending sexual images of oneself, however, must be tempered with the potential pain of betrayal. But sexual expression is a natural part of life; likewise, the potential harm in such acts of self-expression is also a part of life. If ethics were to eliminate the potential for harm, one must denounce sex itself as unethical. Alan Soble (1992, 1146) argues that "the sexual permeates our Being. But this does not make sexual ethics *sui generis*, even if this ethics is important. Nor need it be restrictive; if our being is sexual, that could be just as much reason for a relaxed, as for a restrictive, sexual ethics." Adolescents are forcefully asserting their sexual agency. The clearest ethical stance concerning sexting lies not in forcing them to behave in a manner that adults consider appropriate, but rather in teaching them how to minimize the harm to themselves, as well as others, as they perform their sexuality. This, more than anything, seems likely to yield the dividend of a generation that can behave sexually in an ethical way.

Conclusion

The issues surrounding pornographic images of adolescents created by the adolescents themselves have no easy or obvious solutions. Although the government has a compelling interest in protecting children and adolescents from sexual predators, the law as it currently stands exposes the fissures between what is considered normal adolescent sexuality and the lived experience of adolescents. When public health researchers estimate that almost half of the adolescent population has engaged in sexual intercourse (Santelli *et al.* 2009), it seems clear that adolescents will seek not only to engage in sexual practices, but will also perform their sexuality and express themselves in sexual ways, much as adults have chosen to do.

Guy Debord (1994, 151) declared that "the spectacle is the acme of ideology." By placing themselves on display in a sexual manner, these adolescents perform an ideology that considers sexual images an appropriate mode of self-expression. Moreover, it constitutes a rejection of the belief that adolescents are innocent creatures who are mere children under the law and who must be protected from exploitation. More disturbing, however, is the internalization of the sexuality that pervades American culture. They have learned far too well that they must be sexually enticing, and that one's worth is measured by his or her physical attractiveness and desirability. Maurice Charland (1987, 143) notes that "ideology is material because subjects enact their ideology and reconstitute their material world in its image." It seems clear that adolescents have embraced the pornographic mindset and are performing it in a logical manner. When adolescents are continually bombarded with imperatives to be both sexy and sexual, it should come as little surprise that they would use new technologies to perform an identity that reflects these attributes. If the desire is to gain acceptance from others, especially peers, then sexting provides a means of generating considerable pleasure.

New media provide a way to recalibrate ethical considerations surrounding sexuality, especially adolescent sexual activity. I have argued that legal and ethical concerns surrounding adolescent sexual expression must be considered within the larger culture that encourages such behavior. Moreover, one must also consider the constraints of the media themselves because, as Marshall McLuhan (1994) reminds us, the medium influences how the message is perceived. In the case of sexting, teens choose to send images to their friends or romantic partners; these images are not simply stumbled upon by surfing online. More importantly, the individuals depicted in these images are known to the recipients. This is likely one reason why these images have a greater potential to spread virally, even when the image was originally meant only for one person.

Teens who engage in sexting are pushing the boundaries of adolescent sexuality in ways that have less to do with the adolescents themselves and more to do with the technologies available to them for expression of these desires. Jacques Ellul (1964, 133) argues that "technique elicits and conditions social, political, and economic change. It is the prime mover of all the rest, in spite of any appearance to the contrary." Technology changes not only the available modes of expression, but humanity as well. Adolescents are sexual beings, and sexting provides a mode of sexual expression that is familiar to these "digital natives." One thing is certain, however: it is unlikely that society will simply be able to legislate sexting out of existence. As Hannah Arendt (1976, 273) observed, "No punishment has ever possessed enough power of deterrence to prevent the commission of crimes. On the contrary, whatever the punishment, once a specific crime has appeared for the first time, its reappearance is more likely than its initial emergence could ever have been."

The case of sexting provides an opportunity to reconsider the ethical limits of adolescent sexuality and sexuality in general. Current attempts to combat adolescent sexuality seem to ignore what anecdotal experience and scholarly research have demonstrated all along — adolescents are sexual beings. Generations of adolescents have demonstrated the difficulty of reining in their sexuality; yet, until recently, it has been possible to simply ignore the issue and believe that such acts were happening elsewhere. But biology is a harsh mistress, and attempts to squelch adolescent sexuality have simply yielded more creative means of sexual expression. The prevalence of sexting has brought the issue of adolescent sexual expression into the public sphere in a dramatic way. Viewed from an ethical standpoint, I have argued that the phenomenon of sexting must be placed within its societal context. This is not an argument for moral relativism, but rather a case where utilitarianism provides some explanatory force for behavior that may, on the surface, seem damaging to both the individual and society. When adolescents are taught, largely through the mass media, that sexual experience is a desired good, and these values are then perpetuated among their peers, it seems clear that portraying oneself as sexual would be a desirable strategy. Trying to save adolescents from themselves without understanding the roots of the behavior is misguided at best.

Notes

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2 Some have raised concerns about the methodology used to gather the data for this survey, suggesting that the figures may be inflated because the teens that are online are those who would be more likely to engage in sexting (see Bialik 2009).

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6

"I'm Here to Tell You it's OK": The FCC Chairman, Digital TV, and Lying to the Government

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THIS CHAPTER DEPARTS FROM THE others in this collection in that it deals not with the ethical issues in the content or use of an emerging media, but rather with the ethical behavior of public officials charged with ensuring service to the public from an emerging medium. In 2009, over-the-air television stations in the U.S. converted their transmissions from analog to digital, arguably the most significant technological change to the medium since its introduction. The transition to digital multiplexed television largely went unnoticed by most viewers but put at risk service to older and lower-income audiences who were more likely to lack cable or satellite service, new digital receivers, or converter boxes. The government made available coupons intended to defray the cost of converter boxes for those households, but some of the coupons expired before the recipients could use them. The head of the FCC caused a local uproar by effectively advising a questioner at a public forum to commit fraud by having a friend or neighbor falsify an application for more coupons. This chapter examines the ethical behavior of public officials faced with the competing duties to uphold regulations that impede the provision of practical public benefit and to ensure the greater public good.

On February 17, 2009, full-power television stations in the U.S. were scheduled to discontinue their analog transmissions, leaving millions of households lacking cable or satellite service, newer digital televisions, or government-subsidized converter boxes, with no television service. Added to the numbers of households losing service were those who applied for $40 government subsidy coupons but who failed to redeem them before they expired, making the household ineligible for the discount. In many cases the discount was substantial, accounting for 50 percent or more of the cost of the converter.

At a public forum in Cincinnati five weeks before the switchover, FCC Chairman Kevin Martin advised one questioner whose coupon had expired to ask a neighbor who did not need a coupon to falsify an application, and then to use the neighbor's coupon. When the questioner and several others pointed out that they effectively would be committing fraud to obtain a federal government subsidy, Martin downplayed their concerns, adding, "I'm here to tell you it's OK" (Kiesewetter 2009).

The incident highlighted the ages-old paradox faced by appointed public officials charged both with implementing the will of legislators and other policymakers and with serving the public good in cases in which the two appear to be in fundamental conflict. This paper examines Martin's behavior and subsequent rationale in light of ethical precepts and models for public officials developed in the years following the Watergate scandal and other lesser but well-publicized bureaucratic lapses.

Background

More than two decades after engineers and policymakers first began serious work on updating technical standards for color television transmission and reception in the U.S., Congress set February 17, 2009, as the date by which full-power television stations were to discontinue use of their analog transmitters in favor of newer, digital transmission systems (Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act 2005). The new systems facilitated the broadcast of higher-resolution images and improved sound, and also allowed stations to transmit multiple programming streams — as many as five or six — instead of a single channel. But the systems were incompatible with the older National Television Standards Committee (NTSC) analog system, meaning new reception systems would be required: either purchase of an Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC) standard receiver, subscription to a cable or satellite television service (which would convert the digital signals to analog during distribution), or use of a digital-to-analog converter box with older analog receiving sets.

The FCC launched a promotional campaign to make viewers aware of what would constitute the most fundamental change to television broadcasting since the early 1950s, when both color transmissions and UHF channels were introduced ("Chairman Powell" 2004), including required disclosures by retailers still stocking analog receivers and on-air announcements the National Association of Broadcasters valued at $1 billion (Steinberg 2009). In June of 2008, FCC commissioners themselves began appearing at forums in larger cities around the country to respond to questions as the transition date neared.

In an effort to defray costs of the transition for households requiring converter boxes, Congress authorized the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to distribute up to two $40 coupons to households for each analog receiver still in use (Deficit Reduction Act of 2005). But a late surge in applications immediately before the February deadline dried up the $1.34 billion budgeted for the program, funds that would be paid for by the eventual sale of segments of the electromagnetic spectrum formerly allocated for analog television. Forty-four point six million coupons were mailed to 26 million households, but only 19.8 million (47 percent) had been redeemed as the deadline approached. The NTIA would, in effect, recover the funds budgeted for the unredeemed coupons, but only after they expired (Bray 2009). In the meantime, more than 2 million requests were unfulfilled a month before the transition date (Eggerton 2009a). Congress proposed spending an additional $650 million to provide the NTIA the liquidity needed to honor new coupon requests (Bray 2009), though an estimate from the Consumers Union put the amount needed at closer to $1 billion (Steinberg 2009). Congress eventually resolved the backlog by extending the transition date to June 12, 2009, to allow the NTIA time to fulfill the requests (Eggerton 2009b).

Viewers without newer digital receivers or cable or satellite service and thus most at risk of losing television service after the transition were more likely to be older and to have a lower income. According to one study, the median household income of adults with over-the-air television only was $33,879 a year, or about half the income of adults with cable or satellite television. Adults in antenna-only households also were 29 percent less likely than the average to own their own homes (Mindlin 2009). As if to underscore both the lower incomes of the households affected and their dependence on television, a Houston organization providing food service delivery for low-income shut-ins and the elderly solicited donations of unused coupons and then delivered and installed converter boxes to more than 1,500 households (Steinberg 2009).

Advice from Chairman Martin

Among the forums arranged by the FCC to address public questions and concerns about the transition and the converter coupons was one in Cincinnati's Bond Hill neighborhood attended by FCC chair Kevin Martin in January 2009, roughly six weeks before the scheduled termination of analog signals. Of the hundred people who attended the forum, more than a dozen complained that their coupons had expired before they could purchase converter boxes and the NTIA would not re-issue replacements to the same address. According to a newspaper account of the forum (Kiesewetter 2009), Martin recommended those whose coupons had expired ask a friend, neighbor, or relative who would not be needing a coupon to apply anyway, and use their coupon:

> Find someone else to apply and get them for you. They are fully transferable. What's important is that you get a coupon and go get a converter box.
>
> (Kiesewetter 2009)

When one of those whose coupons had expired protested that he and a neighbor were going to do just that using the NTIA's online application, but stopped when they realized they would have to lie about the neighbor's needing the coupons, Martin reportedly commiserated, but justified his original advice by saying that the NTIA itself had recommended it:

> They're saying it's OK. I'm here to tell you it's OK . . . It makes no sense. I'm not here to defend it. I'm here to tell you how to get a coupon.
>
> (Kiesewetter 2009)

The protester remained unconvinced:

> That's not right, to make you falsify an application . . . It's immoral. It's absolutely unconscionable. I don't know what I'm going to do.
>
> (Kiesewetter 2009)

Indeed, contrary to Martin's statements, there is every indication that the intent of the government was to maintain tight control over distribution of the coupons and to prevent their transfer. The original statutory language charges the head of the NTIA with controlling the number and recipient of the coupons: "The Assistant Secretary shall ensure that each requesting household receives, via the United States Postal Service, no more than two coupons" (Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act 2005). Subsequent rulemaking by the NTIA stipulated:

> (d) Once Contingent Funds are available for the Coupon Program, only over-the-air households will be eligible. During the period in which Contingent Funds are available, households must certify that they do not receive cable, satellite, or other pay television service

and

> (g) If an applicant does not meet the above eligibility requirements, the request will be denied.
>
> (Household Eligibility and Application Process 2009)

Thus, ineligible households were not supposed to apply on a neighbor's behalf. In addition, the following section appeared to preclude the transfer of coupons from one household to another:

> (g) The coupon has no cash value. It shall be illegal to sell, duplicate or tamper with the coupon.
>
> (Coupons 2009)

So concerned was the NTIA about the potential for fraud and abuse in the coupon program that, prior to implementing the program, it had requested comments from accounting firms regarding mechanisms to prevent such occurrences. Deloitte and Touche responded:

> We recommend that NTIA adopt program rules specifying that the necessary eligibility certifications be made under penalty of law . . . In addition, the language should state that persons willfully making false statements on the form can be punished by fine or forfeiture under Title 18 of the United States Code, 18 U.S.C. § 1001.
>
> (Comments of Deloitte Advisory Financial Systems 2006)

Though the firm's comments do not say so specifically, its recommendation that coupons be assigned serial numbers that would be tracked from issuance through retail purchase further suggests the NTIA did not intend them to be transferable.

Ethics and Public Officials

Philosophically, modern Western conceptions of the ethical responsibilities of public officials, whether they be elected or, as in the case of the FCC's Kevin Martin, appointed, seem to have two sources: Immanuel Kant, who argued the ultimate morality of an action was to be judged more from motive than from consequence (1780/2008), and Niccolò Machiavelli, who in *The Prince* (1532/2004) suggested a statesman sometimes must violate conventional moral codes in order to achieve the well-being of the state.

Despite minor distinctions in focus, the two have in common a dynamic tension between the ideal and the realistic. For Machiavelli the two are expressed as paired moral domains: the first containing the more utopian morality prevailing in everyday life and the second containing the more practical morality necessary to guarantee the preservation of the state (Pesch 2008, 339–40). Kant's deontological, or duty-based, viewpoint sometimes is placed at opposition to a second "utilitarian" viewpoint (Cody and Lynn 1992, 6). The author would argue that Chairman Martin was faced at the Bond Hill forum with a choice between moralities: supporting the integrity of a legitimate (if somewhat flawed) program or suggesting circumventing the rules of the program to produce the intended outcome for an individual.

Until recently, much of the literature on the ethical behavior of public officials was prescriptive in nature and rooted as much in aphorism as in philosophy. Bailey (1965), for example, offers this advice on the competing demands of established procedure and situational decision making:

> The public servant who cannot recognize the paradoxes of procedures will be trapped by them. For in the case of procedures, he who deviates frequently is subversive; he who never deviates at all is lost; and he who tinkers with procedures without an understanding of substantive consequence is foolish.
>
> (292)

The post-Watergate concern with openness and morality in politics and public administration particularly in an age of heightened vigilance by the press and by citizen watchdog groups provided a renewed sense of urgency for both prescriptions and proscriptions that were concrete and practical. Warwick (1981), for example, devoted much attention to the specific duties of the public official, headed by the observation that:

> A sound ethics of public service should be based upon both an accurate understanding of the behavior and environment of the public servant and on moral principles applicable to the dilemmas that arise in public administration.
>
> (93)

Warwick concluded that five ethical principles are of particular importance: a public orientation, reflective choice (as opposed to organizational routine), veracity, restraint on means used, and procedural respect (1981, 115–124).

Similarly, Moore (1981, 8) outlined what he called three obligations of public officials: (1) ". . . to respect the processes that legitimize their actions"; (2) ". . . to use the powers of their offices to accomplish public purposes as effectively, efficiently, and as decently as they can"; and (3) ". . . to treat their colleagues and subordinates . . . with respect." At the same time, he seemed to anticipate works of the following two decades whose guidance is steeped in classical philosophy when he observed that, "Despite our best efforts, then, we have not succeeded in constructing a governmental system that is independent of the moral qualities of its leaders" (5). Moore's evident privileging of absolute moral standards and their necessity to public administration echoes Kant, who was dismissive of more practical measures of the public good as assessments of administrative ethics.

Recent scholarship in the field of government ethics tends to acknowledge Kantian preferences for public officials who adhere to strict *a priori* moral codes and Machiavellian realism and its morality of outcomes, but finds neither extreme to be particularly useful in guiding decisions taken by contemporary public officials. Petter (2005, 211), having delineated eight types of responsibility relevant to public officials, concludes that, "A professional bureaucrat may be internally conflicted when a professional expectation contrasts with a moral obligation." Some scholars attempted to find a middle way, usually by means of *ad hoc* compromises (Cody and Lynn 1992, 6). Among them, Van Wart (1996, 532) argued that administrative decisions can be evaluated only by the thorough consideration officials give all legitimate competing values in formulating the best possible decision.

Moore (1981, 24) embraced the notion of three possible directions public officials could take when faced with the need to reconcile their obligation to work toward the public good with flawed procedures that appeared to make that impossible, but his third way was less about compromise than reducing the perceptual distance between the others. The first two capture the dynamic tension between idealism and realism: to behave as though the processes were ideal regardless of the reality, which risks continuing both unfair processes and unfair results, or to ensure what is thought to be a just result without regard to the rules governing conduct, which both risks operating under faulty perceptions and weakens the process. His third option, to make adjustments in the process to bring it closer to the ideal, which Moore concluded was the most attractive, seems to assume both the time and authority to change the rules by which the game is played.

Assessing the Ethical Behavior of Kevin Martin

Any judgment of the ethical behavior of FCC Chairman Kevin Martin's advice to falsify an application for a converter box coupon necessarily depends upon the standard applied. A Kantian analysis of his advice likely would focus on the moral breach evident in recommending another lie to obtain a government benefit and judge Martin harshly. The fact that the advice circumvented a policy that treated more stringently than necessary those who did not immediately redeem their coupons and would provide individuals with a benefit to which they otherwise were entitled would not outweigh the moral weakness that produced the advice.

Machiavellians would judge Martin more kindly. He proposed a solution that, while it undermined government procedures and appeared to give government imprimatur to an act of deceit, resulted in a net public good. The good may be modest — a discount on a converter box — and other solutions may have been possible that required no deceit and would have required only a modest financial outlay on the part of those receiving the benefit, but Martin's action did not require another's sacrifice and did not even cost the U.S. Treasury, since the coupon requested but not used by the friend/relative/neighbor of the real beneficiary would already have been in the budget.

Reconciling these contrary judgments would be less straightforward. The facts of the case and the standards applied to judging it, both idealist and realist, seem to allow little room for compromise. It is an example of what Waltzer (1973, 160–80) has termed The Problem of Dirty Hands: a public official has acted in a manner contrary to conventional moral principles to achieve what the official saw as a greater good. Yet, Martin in no way profited from the act; there was no financial benefit for him. As an official who was appointed, not elected, Martin's increase in public popularity from helping a member of the electorate circumvent a bureaucracy would be of no direct tangible value. And, since FCC chairs tend to leave the Commission for the private sector at the end of the administrations that appoint them, it would hardly help him secure his place at the agency.

Moreover, Martin was faced with a dilemma not of his own making: Congress mandated broadcast television's digital transition (Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005), imposed the transition deadline, appropriated funds for the public information campaign, and authorized the NTIA to launch the coupon program. The NTIA, an office in the Commerce Department, designed and administered the coupon program. Even the FCC's role in the transition, including its public information campaign and its traveling forums, were set in place by Martin's predecessor.

Pesch (2008, 338–39) distinguishes between The Problem of Dirty Hands and The Problem of Many Hands, in which the issue of accountability for the situation that created the need for the public official to act becomes significant. In such a case, the responsibility may be either active or passive according to Bovens (1998, 26–37), depending upon the role, if any, the official had in creating the situation. While Martin no doubt considered alternatives before recommending lying on the coupon application, that may have been the extent of his role in this instance.

Though he joined the FCC as Commissioner in 2001 and was named chairman in early 2005, Martin certainly was unlikely to have been party to the deliberations that resulted in the Congressional mandates regarding the analog-to-digital transition. As Krasnow *et al.* (1982, 88) have observed, “the power of Congress over the Commission is both pervasive and multifaceted.” The FCC as an administrative agency is a creation of Congress. In keeping with that paternalistic relationship, communication between Congress and the Commission is frequent, but generally unidirectional.

Similarly, he would not have been party to discussions within the NTIA regarding the implementation of the coupon program. The NTIA evolved during the late 1970s within the Commerce Department as an advisory body to the White House on telecommunications policy (Krasnow *et al.* 1982, 72). Its responsibilities focus on economic and legal research, and it serves as the principal advocate for executive branch positions on communication issues before Congress and the FCC. The coupon program represented a rare foray by the body into policymaking. While the relationship between the FCC and NTIA is not adversarial, the former owes allegiances primarily to Congress and only secondarily to the White House, while the latter is allied solely with the executive branch (Krasnow *et al.* 1982, 72). While the two agencies have fields of interest that overlap, they seldom coordinate their efforts.

In any event, Bovens (1998, 74) argues, Martin would bear the ultimate responsibility for the dilemma presented by the coupon program as the person at the top of the FCC’s organizational hierarchy, not merely because he represents the hierarchy, but because, as Pesch (2008, 339) explains, under the concept of administrator as citizen, he is actively involved in preserving the interests and values of the society in which the FCC functions.

It might be argued that, as the administrative home of the digital television coupon program, the NTIA’s hierarchy should be responsible for the shortcomings in the program that necessitated Martin’s advice. This ignores, however, certain key distinctions between cabinet offices in the executive branch on the one hand and legislatively constituted administrative agencies on the other. As a specialized office within the Department of Commerce, the NTIA usually lacks the discretionary space to act within the broad mandates of laws written by Congress. Instead, it carries out assignments from the White House and enforces (in the broadest sense of the term) legislation. In the case of the coupon

program, section 3005 of the authorizing legislation specified the program’s budget, how and when the money was to be spent, the value of the coupon, how many each household could receive, and the expiration date (Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005); virtually no major decisions were left to the NTIA, except for perhaps the design of the online registration website and the size and color of the coupon itself. Thus, with such little contribution to be made, the assistant cabinet secretary in the Department of Commerce, who serves as the agency’s chief administrator, seemingly would fail to meet Pesch’s (2008, 339) standard of active involvement in preserving the interests and values of the society.

Perhaps then Congress, having micromanaged the coupon program, including the 90-day window during which coupons could be used, is the party responsible for its shortcomings. But while the role of the legislative branch in the interests of society during the digital transition and in the value society places upon television reception is difficult to question, identifying a single pair of “Dirty Hands” there in the coupon dilemma is difficult. Majorities in chambers of 100 and 435, respectively, voted to authorize the program. Dozens of members of each chamber served on the committees that designed it. Presiding officers in each chamber called for the votes that passed it, and the president signed it. Making an argument that any one of them sufficiently represents the relevant hierarchy is a formidable task.

The Communications Act of 1934, which still serves as the primary statutory document by which the radio, television, satellite, and cable industries are regulated, established the FCC as the body with responsibility “to execute and enforce” the act’s provisions (Communications Act of 1934, 2006, sec. 151) and particularly to oversee broadcasting (sec. 152). Moreover, because the digital transition was mandated by Congress, which in turn charged the FCC with implementing its plan, Martin’s hierarchy arguably is the one bearing ultimate responsibility for its success or failure and the ethics of his behavior are the ones that are most relevant.

Conclusions

Applying either the Kantian (1780/2008) absolute moral standard or the more complex standard of The Problem of Many Hands (Bovens 1996, 45–52; Pesch 2008, 338–39), FCC Chair Kevin Martin committed an ethical lapse when he recommended those with expired DTV converter box coupons have an acquaintance falsify an application to obtain others; he may have committed another in advising that the coupons were fully transferable since, while some of the tracking safeguards recommended by Deloitte and Touche (Comments of Deloitte Financial Advisory Systems 2006) may never have been implemented, it clearly was the intent of the NTIA that the coupons be used by the applicant, not by a third party.

The Machiavellian belief that an official's ethics should be judged primarily on the basis of the consequences of his actions would conclude no lapse had occurred. Other standards employing an *ad hoc* compromise of the sort advocated by Cody and Lynn (1992, 6) and Van Wart (1996, 532) were not applied in this paper, but might reach a contrary result, depending upon the relative weights given the advocacy of an illegal act by a public official and the prospect of saving $40 on a set-top box on the other. That will be left to a future analysis.

At the risk of pre-judging such a test, it is the relatively meager amount of public good at stake in this incident that is most troubling. While it cannot be denied that $40 may represent several days' worth of meals in an economically disadvantaged household or that the prospective loss of free over-the-air television by a lone senior on fixed income would measurably reduce his/her quality of life, it also seems to undervalue the importance of ethical behavior on the part of a public official.

If they were asked, most U.S. citizens likely would admit — jokes about the best government money can buy aside — that most public officials, whether elected or appointed, are not corrupt or, failing that, that they at least have sufficient respect for the laws and regulations associated with their agencies that they would not dismiss them as unimportant or advocate their violation. The FCC has in its past — a distant past one former chair referred to as the "whorehouse era" — a number of well-publicized cases in which commissioners socialized with license applicants and accepted gifts and monetary loans from others with business before the commission (Weinstein 2004, 23) in seeming disregard for their own procedures. Regulatory reforms appear to have cleaned up the most egregious ethical issues. But those that remain damage the reputation of the agency, whether they arise from greed or simple expedience.

Moreover, the increased reliance of individuals on media and media technologies, both those well-established and those still emerging, also

increase the likelihood that public officials will be faced with questions of how best to ensure access to the benefits attending the technologies in the context of a market that seldom distributes those benefits equitably and of government policies whose flaws in implementation are all too common.

Note

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III

Speech, Civility, and Privacy

7

Holocaust Denial, Cyberspace, and the Question of Moral Convergence

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THIS CHAPTER ARGUES THAT HOLOCAUST denial within a geo-technical framework of the internet diverges from its historical antecedents in distinctive, and perhaps more sinister ways. The Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust creates and sustains a "technical monologic" that discursively distorts, indeed silences, the authentic voices of the Holocaust. However, the site's electronic simulation of "debate," the illusion of the Other's presence, appears to acquiesce to the ethical authority of dialogism. Subsequently, its co-creator Smith's exploitation of technical monologic privileges denial doctrine while simultaneously fabricating the epistemological promise of dialogic interaction. This kind of electronic simulacrum has disturbing implications for how future generations will interact with the process and products of cyber knowledge, particularly when we consider the ubiquitous nature of virtual reality — a reality in which we increasingly choose to immerse ourselves.

On a summer afternoon in Washington, D.C., the observance of one tragedy was shattered by the act of another. Longtime white supremacist James von Brunn, whose writings on anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial were self-published on his website, *Holy Western Empire*, walked into the Holocaust Memorial Museum with a .22-caliber rifle and began shooting. In the opening salvo, museum guard Stephen Johns was fatally wounded. In return fire from other guards, von Brunn was also injured and taken to George University Washington Hospital. Federal authorities report he is expected to fully recover and will be tried for first-degree murder, as well as other charges (Ruane, Duggan and Williams 2009).

Federal officials characterize von Brunn as a "hard core white supremacist," and the Southern Poverty Law Center has followed his cyberspace activities since the early 1980s (Johnson and Hsu 2009). His online book, *Kill the Best Gentiles!* — identified by von Brunn as "The Racialist Guide for the Preservation and Nurture of the White Gene Pool" — argues in detail about the alleged "myth" of the Holocaust, the worldwide domination by the Jewish state, and ultimately, "the destruction of all Gentile nations through miscegenation and wars" (2002, 14).

While von Brunn's assault culminated in taking the life of another, surely the most serious of offensives against humanity, his hate represents another kind of violence, less immediate but no less insidious — the attack on history. As decades pass and witnesses and survivors of the Holocaust die, their collective memory becomes more vulnerable to distortion and falsification (Lipstadt 1994, 12; Wright 2006, 53). Scholarship that critically examines the products and processes of Holocaust denial becomes crucial in safeguarding authentic discourses of history (Wright 2006, 53). Shermer and Grobman write:

> If people can be convinced that the Holocaust never happened, perhaps they can also be persuaded to believe that slavery is a hoax perpetrated by blacks to coerce Congress to institute affirmative action programs. Once we allow the distortion of one segment of history without making an appropriate response, we risk the possible distortion of other historical events. For this reason, Holocaust denial is not just a Jewish issue. It is an attack on all history and on the way we transmit the past to the future.
>
> (2000, 16)

Clearly, Holocaust denial does not represent a singular ethical dilemma regarding a singular event. Rather, it alerts us as to the fragility of historiographies as the epistemological building blocks of future knowledge.

Holocaust Denial

According to denial literature, the Holocaust — the systematic subjugation and eventual extermination of six million Jews — never occurred (Lipstadt 1994, 26). Deniers, or "revisionists" as they routinely refer to themselves, argue that while Jews did perish during World War II, these deaths were primarily a consequence of wartime conditions such as starvation and disease (Shermer and Grobman 2000, 99). Deniers argue that the "holohoax" was perpetuated by the Jewish culture to parlay international sympathy into economic, geographic and political world dominance (Lipstadt 1994, 27).

The genesis of the contemporary holocaust denial movement is found in the aftermath of World War I, when a group of legitimate historians were unconvinced as to accounts of German atrocities posited by the victors of the "Great War" (Wright 2006, 57). However, in contrast to World War I historical revisionists, who relied on accepted standards of evidence, sound historiography techniques and peer review, modern holocaust "revisionists" blend falsehoods and misinformation with pseudo-science (Lipstadt 1994, 25). Shermer and Grobman write: "Holocaust deniers (conveniently) disregard any convergence of evidence; instead, they pick out what suits their history and ignore the rest. They divorce their chosen details from the overall context" (2000, 34). Adopting the moniker of "revisionism," however, deniers attempt to cloak anti-Semitism rhetoric and fascist ideology in legitimate traditions of another era.

Holocaust denial remained a relatively obscure movement in America until 1976, when Arthur Butz, an electrical engineering professor at Northwestern University, published *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*. Butz's book represented a notable shift in the tactics of Holocaust denial for a number of reasons. First, for deniers to gain any credibility for their arguments, they would have to distance themselves from extremist groups and blatant anti-Semitic rhetoric (Lipstadt 1994, 126–127; Zeskind 2009). Second, Butz's publication utilized an academic format and an objective air to facilitate the impression of valid historical research, a strategy that other denial literature, such as Mark Weber's online journal, the *Institute for Historical Review*, soon appropriated (Borrowman 1999, 46; Lipstadt 1994, 141–142; Stern 1993). Despite that his engineering credentials afford Butz no intellectual training in the field of Holocaust studies, his efforts mislead naïve readers who are taken with his ethos as a professor and his extensive, seemingly well-documented arguments, a strategy that translates well to the "moral convergence" of cyberspace (Bugeja 2008).

Cyber Denial

The internet affords Holocaust deniers a unique linguistic space in which to subvert discourses of legitimate historiography. We should first consider the ubiquitous nature of the internet and new generations of information consumers that have come to depend on it. The Pew Internet Project reports that almost three-quarters of college students surveyed use the internet rather than library facilities to access information (Jones 2002, 12). Fast, easy to access, and suitable to the multi-tasking orientation of America's youth, the dependence on the internet seems likely to continue. According to Kraidy, the only activity that children and young adults engage in more than mediated communication is sleeping: "Virtual reality is increasingly becoming the environment with which people choose to surround themselves . . . It is fair to say that we are drifting away from perceiving our environment in real terms in order to favor a visual representation of it" (2002, 103).

The media convergence of cyberspace — the blurring of distinct identity, ownership and authorship between print, radio, and television — presents new challenges in critical thinking for audiences of all ages (Bugeja 2008, 2). The internet has turned the public into potential publishers, avoiding the gate-keeping role of the traditional press (Plaisance 2006). Cyberspace citizens consume more information in less time, and with less attention. The democratic promise of the internet produces an "orgy" of information, with no guideposts to establish legitimacy of such information (Koch 2005, 170). Publication ethics have dissipated in the conflux of media integration, or what Bujega calls "moral convergence." He cautions that "the digital doppelganger of 'new media convergence' has confused the best ethical minds whose moral boxes no longer apply to either audience or media discipline because the audience multitasks and the disciplines have combined" (2008, 6).

The challenges of moral convergence make the internet the ideal apparatus for spreading messages of hate, particularly Holocaust denial. Stern notes the conflux of historical timing and technological developments that make today's youth a captive audience for deniers — those raised in a cyberspace era who view accounts of World War II and the Holocaust through the prism of virtual reality (2001–2002, 73). The technological, geographical and economic advantages of the internet have proved to be a boon to hate groups and Holocaust deniers in terms of promotion, recruitment, and expanding their base to include younger audiences (ADL 1997; Leets 2001; Williamson and Pierson 2003). In contrast to the gate-keeping characteristics of traditional media, such lack of restrictions in cyberspace allows deniers great latitude postulating their ideology:

> Holocaust deniers can publish their works as widely as they like . . . Although their message on television, when it is there at all, is mediated by a reporter, producers, or a talk-show host, the denier's message can be constructed on the Web in any way they choose. This freedom allows them great latitude when constructing their ethos — their credibility or authority.
>
> (Borrowman 1999, 45)

I argue that Holocaust denial within a geo-technical framework of moral convergence diverges from its historical antecedents in distinctive, and perhaps more sinister, ways. While scholars are beginning to examine the abundance of online racist rhetoric (Bostdorff 2004; Duffy 2003; Lee and Leets 2002; Stern 2001–2002; Waltman 2003), the "technical grammar" (Williamson and Pierson 2003) of the internet demands a contemporary ethical frame in critically analyzing such texts. I use cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's mediations on dialogism and monologism (1984) to analyze the discourses of the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (CODOH), identified by the Anti-Defamation League as one of the seminal, and most influential, Holocaust denial sites. The CODOH creates and sustains a "technical monologic" that discursively distorts, indeed silences, the authentic voices of the Holocaust. However, the site's electronic simulation of "debate," the illusion of the Other's presence, appears to acquiesce to the ethical authority of dialogism. Subsequently, Smith's exploitation of technical monologic privileges denial doctrine while simultaneously fabricating the epistemological promise of dialogic interaction.

Theoretical Perspective

Bakhtin, a cultural theorist preoccupied with the validity of claims to epistemological certainties, was suspicious of logocentric assertions of a "ready-made truth" (1984, 110). According to Bakhtin, knowledge is grounded within the meditation of Socratic dialogue, a process that emphasizes the juxtaposition of "discourse-opinion" from multiple perspectives. He writes: "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for the truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (110). Rather than the keeper of ultimate wisdom, Socrates viewed his role in the pursuit of knowledge as a "midwife" who "brought people together and made them collide in a quarrel, and as a result the truth was born" (110).

It is against this backdrop that Bakhtin's thoughts of dialogism and monologism have evolved; concepts which scholars suggest saturate his works throughout his life (Holquist 2002). As a linguistic field, dialogism emphasizes the reciprocal association between the author/speaker of discourses and reader/listener and its "other" orientation in the construction of meaning. "Taking this attitude, one tends to think that the meaning in a given text can be co-created by speaker/author and listener/reader" (Yu and Wen 2004, 371). Meaning is subsequently unstable and open to transmutation, challenged by multiple voices or "linguistic stratifications" within a particular environment of historical, political and economic factors (Bakhtin 1981, 272–273). These social factors coalesce as a centrifugal field, enabling a "multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems" to collide, or dialogue, subsequently challenging any singular belief system or ideology to prevail (288).

In contrast, monologism is a closed linguistic field, unconscious and unresponsive to the Other in the meaning-making process, and assumes the cloak of a "ready-made truth" (Bakhtin 1984, 110). Monologism, then, privileges the author/speaker over the reader/listener, attempting to establish a "unitary language," a sort of linguistic tunnel vision through which to stabilize and centralize knowledge: "Instead of responding to listeners, monologue is a close, isolated and finished utterance. Meanings in monologue are fixed, unified, and finalized . . . Simply speaking, taking the monologic attitude toward communication, one tends to think that the meanings are in a given text" (Yu and Wen 2004, 371). Monologism is organized by a centripetal field, a set of historical, political and economic circumstances that serve to minimize or silence the multiplicity of linguistic stratifications that may be present in any given era in favor of a unitary language, a verbal-ideological world-view.

Scholars agree that Bakhtin clearly championed dialogism over monologism regarding the epistemological and ontological status of knowledge (Crowley 1989; Holquist 2002). He writes:

> Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself or another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights *(thou)* . . . Monologism is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any *decisive* force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and the represented persons.
>
> (Bakhtin 1984, 292–293)

Bakhtin's framework of dialogue and monologue provide a valuable perspective in the era of the internet, a linguistic space rich in a wide variety of ideologically bound voices, the ultimate "midwife" in the new millennium. His notion that centrifugal and centripetal environments that unify or destabilize language — the historical, political, and social factors of an era — can be naturally extended to the technological dimensions of a culture, particularly one so invested in computer-mediated communication (Killoran 2005, 134). The internet, however, affords a technological syntax absent in historical forms of genre, a grammar that cyberspace authors appropriate to sustain, minimize or silence dialogic interaction on web pages.

Bradley Smith and the CODOH

One of the first websites focused exclusively on the Holocaust denial, the CODOH was co-created by Bradley Smith and Mark Weber in 1987. Smith has long been involved in the denial movement, formerly contributing to a number of projects for the Institute for Historical Review (Lipstadt 1994, 16). However, he meticulously distances himself from blatant neo-Nazi or anti-Semitic rhetoric, adopting a reasonable posture (Shermer and Grobman 2000, 59–62). Known outside the movement for successfully purchasing CODOH ads in university papers across the country, Smith frames Holocaust denial within the guise of free expression and the pursuit of knowledge (Lipstadt 1994, 183–184; Stern 1993, 12–13). CODOH contains hundreds of files by Holocaust denier notables, including Austin J. App, Harry Elmer Barnes, Arthur Butz, Paul Rassinier, Mark Weber, as well as contributions by anonymous authors. Quantcast.com, an online service that examines website traffic and demographics, estimates that CODOH garners about 3,000 hits a month. About two-thirds of visitors are male, and about 50 percent have had some exposure to college. The age of CODOH readers ranges broadly, anywhere from early teens to 50-plus.

The Illusion of Presence

The site's designation, "Center for Open Debate on the Holocaust," is the initial step in creating the illusion of dialogic interaction on CODOH web pages. According to Berg, "What is characteristic of dialogue is its recognition of the interdependence of Self and Other, whereas monologue does not recognize Otherness" (2009, 42). Smith's strategy, then, entails implying dialogic interaction on CODOH's pages while simultaneously maintaining the epistemological dominance of the movement. His efforts are enabled by the notion of intertextuality, the collapse of discourse genres and discursive integration located in a multimedia environment. Williamson and Pierson suggest that, "Internet texts are uniquely intertextual. The devices they employ resonate, reflect, and extend tropes, artifacts, and topoi borrowed from several other texts" (2003, 251). The notion of intertextuality acknowledges the porosity of texts and their relative reading in the social and political organization of discourse (Clark and Holquist 1984, 297). "Cyberspace, where one has anonymous sources and the ability to use parts of diffuse texts to construct a single message, makes it much more difficult to determine culpability or clearly define the sphere of influence" (Williamson and Pierson 2003, 255).

The illusion of presence, of multiple voices engaged in dialogic interaction, is a multi-layered construct on CODOH web pages, composed by Smith through technical exploitation and textual repetition. As Webmaster of the site, he weaves together multiple elements to stabilize denial doctrine — the content, page design, font, publication format, and link paths — that discursively confines the user. The first layer of illusion greets users each time they access the main page, where a quote from a well-known source appears. For example, one visit to the site prompts a George Orwell quote that states, "A genuinely unfashionable opinion is almost never given a fair hearing." Imported from the

book, *Animal Farm* — Orwell's commentary on the Soviet regime — the quote has no connection to events of the Holocaust. Re-contextualized by Smith on the CODOH main page, however, the quote — a single sentence taken out of context from the complete artifact — becomes a plea for reasonable "debate" on the Holocaust. The greeting quote is changed frequently, drawn from a variety of recognizable sources that have no relationship with CODOH, yet legitimize its efforts.

The CODOH's geographic position in cyberspace gains an immediate advantage over traditional media as Smith utilizes web pages as an enormous repository for Holocaust denial literature. Articles may range anywhere from a few paragraphs to book-length entries, appropriating familiar publication formats that resonate with users. Housed within CODOH pages, Smith offers introductory articles, academically structured essays, campus advertisements, printable fliers, question and answer columns, book and movie reviews, and full-length online books. His assemblage of materials mimic the Bakhtinian notion of polyphonic discourses, ideological bound, socially defined, and internally stratified (1981, 262–263). For example, the CODOH online column "AnswerMan," frequently appropriates a variety of speech types arranged in a question-and-answer format, a simulacrum of dialogue witnessed by the user:

> What was achieved from Holocaust lies?
>
> Dear AnswerMan,
>
> A friend has asked me this question: "About the holocaust, what I do not understand is why this group of people had to organize such well orchestrated lies, what did they achieve thro' all that? In the short and long run?" Any help to answer this would be appreciated.
>
> Many thanks,
>
> Robert P.
>
> AnswerMan Replies:
>
> First AnswerMan! warns that there may be a few misconceptions in the question that your friend has asked. In brief, as the answer to this question could quickly become book-length, the Holocaust story largely began in newspaper stories in the early 1940's. The earliest accounts were largely wartime propaganda and were used to cast enemies (Nazis/Germans)in as diabolical and evil a light as possible while deriving popular sympathies for the Allied cause. Some of these atrocity tales

> were reruns from the First World War including tales of "corpse factories" and mass "gassings." By 1948, the Holocaust story became an important founding myth of the State of Israel. It was a major argument in the Zionist arsenal. It is has since been used to justify the establishment of an "apartheid" state between Jews and Palestinians as well as the killing of innocent civilians. Although such behavior would seem to be contradictory to the lessons of the Holocaust, in fact it becomes justified for without such actions, it is said that the Jewish people would become victims once again of a massive genocide. Although there is no doubt that there were lies, and recent examples abound, early propaganda stories and the desire to psychologically bankrupt a political system took on a life of its own. Today the story is bolstered by museums and memorials around the world. Many people of good will believe the Holocaust story and treat it with reverential respect. It is positioned in nearly religious rather than historical terms. Organizations have been established to condemn and persecute anyone who is skeptical of even the most far-fetched elements of the traditional story. Throughout Europe, many countries have made questioning the Holocaust punishable by fines and imprisonment.

AnswerMan's "response," discursively framed within the header, "What was achieved from Holocaust lies?" echoes a frequent theme in Holocaust denial literature. Deniers argue that the "myth" of the Holocaust was contrived to afford the Jewish state billions of dollars in reparations as well as appropriation of the land of Israel, the political, economic, and spiritual capital of the world (Lipstadt 1994, 27). Further, deniers assert that the Holocaust insulates modern Jews from reproach, propelling them into the spiritual stratosphere as God's chosen people. According to Lipstadt, the denial movement argues, "it is not the Germans who were guilty of aggression and atrocities during the war. The real crimes against civilization were committed by the Americans, Russians, Britons, and French against the Germans" (26). The "holohoax" subsequently reframes Nazi criminals punished for war crimes as the "authentic" martyrs of World War II, the icons of the white racialist movement.

While the content of AnswerMan's reply reinforces traditional Holocaust ideology, the electronic composition — the font choices, graphics, language choices and position on the page — is distinctly different. The alleged exchange between anonymous voices, cloaked by screen names, offer no genuine identification to the reader. Subsequently, partial or complete fabrication of the interaction becomes an option, with questions potentially manufactured to suit the already established doctrine of Holocaust denial. However, the variation in language and font — between the participants — again, if there are actually two legitimate voices present — provides users a simulation of an active exchange where, in fact, a static one exists. The inquiry by Robert P. uses a traditional typewriter font and a colloquial voice, complete with grammar errors, while AnswerMan uses formal voice, a bolder font, and an authoritative tone. Though the substance of the message is significant, it is the discursive simulation, the illusion of the Other's presence, which acquiesces to the ethical authority of dialogism. Subsequently, Smith's exploitation of technical grammar insulates denial doctrine from other ideologically diverse voices, while simultaneously suggesting the epistemological potential of dialogic interaction.

The CODOH frequently appropriates other publishing formats, such as film or book reviews, that resonate with readers. For example, the site offers multiple book reviews of scholar Deborah Lipstadt's work, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. In contrast to the boundaries of print media, the endless pages of virtual space allow multiple "reviews" of the same work, a revolving textual repetition of denial doctrine. CODOH contributor John Anderson begins his review in a neutral posture, establishing common position with authentic publication practices, using the identifying information of the author, title, and publisher. His tone becomes aggressive however — freed in cyberspace from established publication standards — engaging in rhetorical attacks and name-calling. Furthermore, as an electronic composition, Anderson's voice dominates, restricting the speaking space of "Ms. Lipstadt" by "pseudo-phrasing" rather than accurately paraphrasing the text. He dismisses Lipstadt's doctorate, by ignorance or design, further muting her authority, while conversely offering the reader no credentials of his own. Nevertheless, Anderson attempts to elevate his ethos by concluding the CODOH review of Lipstadt's work in a broader context:

> It is beyond the scope of this review to elaborate on the specific falsehoods in Deborah Lipstadt's book. Holocaust revisionist scholars will most certainly analyze it in detail from cover to cover. But it is doubtful that any negative comment will ever appear in any regular scholarly source or in the media. The only place to find an honest and scholarly

> critique of this book will probably be in the writings and publications of the Holocaust revisionists.

Here, Anderson relies on a frequent cyber strategy of deniers: positing the internet's mechanics of freedom of expression over the alleged manipulation of "Jewsmedia" and other information systems (Daniels 1997, 108). Cyberspace, where hate groups are exponentially expanding, afford what deniers assert as the only linguistic space free of the distortion of Zionist "brainwashing." Thus, denial propaganda is privileged over information offered by the mainstream media.

Other CODOH contributors appropriate an academic format to fashion a sense of intellectual authority — replete with impressive word length and extensive footnotes — such as articles found in the CODOH Revisionist Library. Rather than inform, these essays overwhelm the reader with what appears to be extensive documentation, as well as rhetorical bursts of minutiae divorced from the geographical and historical context of the Holocaust. Yet, to the naïve reader, the veneer of academic ethos may be impressive, even convincing. With the advent of the internet, however, Borrowman notes the paradigm shift between academic ethos and techno-ethos, which she characterizes as the authority that the author establishes through technical means (1999, 47). Hypertextuality, unique to internet texts, becomes a crucial element in defining credibility in cyberspace.

Hypertextuality and the Social Organization of Discourse

Hypertextuality, characterized by Kraidy as an "electronic interactive communication technology," transforms the relationship between the author, text, and reader regarding the center of the meaning-making process. In historical forms of print media consumption, or what Ponzio calls "linear reading," authorship is of primary importance to the substance of the communication act. That is, the author controls the direction of the linguistic movement between the reader and the medium's message. According to Ponzio, "the author obliges the reader to move according to the order of exposition and as a function of author intention. Consequently, the reader is stopped from cultivating his own space and moving freely as a function of what reading provokes him in terms of uninterrupted flow of ideas" (2007, 290). In this context, the meaning of any given communication is inherent in the authorship of the text. The epistemological potential of a traditional text is limited, at least initially, to the linguistic space of the author's voice, upholding the fidelity of the one world-view. Further, the processes of reading and writing are discrete, separate acts that are estranged by time and space.

Hypertextuality, in contrast, utilizes embedded links within a web page that may afford the reader immediate access to any number of other texts beyond the original. Scholars have characterized hypertext as reading-as-writing — that is, reading and writing are no longer discrete, linear acts. Through hypertexts, reading and writing become fused as a cohesive performance, directed by both the choice of links and the positions of these choices within the communication act itself (Kraidy 2002, 99; Ponzio 2007). According to Ponzio, hypertext belies the author as the primary agent in the construction of meaning. Rather, "Hypertext is a reading-text in a strong sense; in other words, it privileges the reader insofar as it allows him to choose from different reading trajectories" (2007, 289–290). A single web page may play host to multiple voices, enabling a linguistic space where world-views collide. Hypertext becomes the immediate site of the meaning-making process — the ultimate midwife in Socratic dialogue. Extending Bakhtin's metaphor to cyberspace, scholars suggest that hypertextuality is inherently dialogic, a reciprocal communication relationship where meaning is unstable and open to change (Killoran 2005; Ponzio 2007).

Though Smith navigates hypertext grammar on CODOH pages in a variety of ways, he nevertheless remains vigilant in his management of the user's discursive movement, privileging the intent of the author. For example, the series, "An Introduction to Holocaust Revisionism," framed for the user with an educational tenor, avoids the use of hypertext almost exclusively, denying the reader access to other voices that may challenge denial ideology. These introductory essays reverberate with themes that frequent traditional literature: debating the number of Holocaust victims, the "myths" of the gas chambers, the alleged atrocities of Allied forces, as well as propagandizing the nature of Holocaust "revisionism." One essay, "The Case for Open Debate," begins:

> **The Holocaust Controversy: The Case for Open Debate**
> *The Contemporary Issue*
> *NO SUBJECT ENRAGES* campus Thought Police more than Holocaust Revisionism. We debate every other great historical issue as a matter of course, but influential pressure groups with private agendas have

> made the Holocaust story an exception. Elitist dogma manipulated by special interest groups corrupts everything in academia. Students should be encouraged to investigate the Holocaust story the same way they are encouraged to investigate every other historical event. This isn't a radical point of view. The premises for it were worked out centuries ago during a little something called the Enlightenment.
>
> *The Historical Issue*
> *REVISIONISTS AGREE* with establishment historians that the German National Socialist State singled out the Jewish people for special and cruel treatment. In addition to viewing Jews in the framework of traditional anti-Semitism, the Nazis also saw them as being an influential force behind international Communism. During the Second World War, Jews were considered to be enemies of the State and a potential danger to the war effort, much like the Japanese were viewed in this country. Consequently, Jews were stripped of their rights, forced to live in ghettos, conscripted for labor, deprived of their property, deported from the country of their birth and otherwise mistreated. Many tragicallyperished in the maelstrom.
>
> Revisionists part company with establishment historians in that Revisionists deny that the German State had a policy to exterminate the Jewish people (or anyone else) by putting them to death in gas chambers or by killing them through abuse or neglect. Revisionists also maintain that the figure of 6 million Jewish deaths is an irresponsible exaggeration, and that no execution gas chambers existed in any camp in Europe which was under German control. Fumigation gas chambers did exist to delouse clothing and equipment to prevent disease at the camps. It is very likely that it was from this life-saving procedure that the myth of extermination gas chambers emerged.

The author, presumably Smith, collapses rhetorical strategy and technical grammar to fashion the illusionary construct of what Borrowman characterizes as the "search-for-truth-defense," the notion that "knowledge is value-free and disconnected from ideologies" (1999, 46). The essay begins, "NO SUBJECT ENRAGES campus Thought Police more than Holocaust Revisionism." The use of all caps, considered "shouting" in computer-mediated language, frames authentic historiography as "irrational," dialectically inferring the "rational" practices and discourses of "Holocaust Revisionism." The next paragraph attempts to establish

common ground with "establishment historians," an effort to link the movement with authentic scholarship, an intellectual relationship that, of course, does not exist beyond CODOH web pages. By the third paragraph, the author "parts company" with legitimate research, free to propagate the distortion, or complete fabrication, of history.

Even more revealing, however, is the absence of hypertext, the lack of which prohibits the reading-as-writing relationship with the user. As a technical monologic orientation, the Other is unseen and unheard in service to the Self, subsequently privileging the epistemological intent of the author. Ponzio writes: "We must underline the epistemological and methodological contribution that may come from the intermedial hypertext for our understanding of the text and, consequently, for an adequate approach to the text in translation processes" (2007, 293). Other CODOH articles vary this tactic — hypertext is used, but only to establish a link between the author's name and other writings he or she may have contributed within the site. This strategy allows the impression of discursive diversity without the commitment to authentic interaction, constructing a kind of ideological revolving door that never lets the user exit. Nevertheless, the sense of movement implies a reciprocal relationship with the text.

Additional CODOH writings may offer hyperlink citations throughout the course of an essay, but these links lead only to notes at the conclusion of the text, still subverting alternative voices outside the movement. For example, Robert Faurisson's essay, "Dissecting the Holocaust," contains multiple hyperlink citations within the text's body. He writes:

> The Revisionists are neither diabolical nor negative. By no means are they "naysayers". They are positive in outlook. At the conclusion of their research — which is positivist in character — they affirm that certain beliefs are just myths. *Such myths are harmful in that they feed hatred.* The Revisionists strive to describe what has taken place and not what has not taken place. In sum and substance, what they proclaim to a wretched humanity is good news. Seeking only historical accuracy, they find themselves fighting against calumny and for justice. They have suffered and they will continue to suffer, but I believe, all things considered, that history will declare them right and render them justice.[[24]] [[24]] A basic work, indispensable for the study of historicalrevisionism, is that of Canadian trial lawyer Barbara Kulaszka, *Did Six Million Really Die? Report of the Evidence in the Canadian "False News" Trial of Ernst Zündel — 1988,* Samisdat

Publishers, 206 Carlton Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5A 2L1, 1992 (online: www.zundelsite.org/english/dsmrd/dsmrdtoc.html).

The in-text citation leads to "Notes" at the end of the essay, information that merely serves to reinforce and stabilize holocaust doctrine. As in many other CODOH articles, Faurisson cites other deniers' "works," an incestuous pseudo-intellectualism devoid of the rigor of legitimate scholarly processes. Here, the reader escapes the pages of CODOH's website, but not the ideology. In this case, Barbara Kulaszka served as an attorney for Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel. Further, her book, *Did Six Million Really Die?*, was published by Samisdat Publishers, a press owned and operated by Zundel. Again, the sensation of linguistic movement mimics a dialogical relationship, while simultaneously preserving the monologic orientation of the text.

Conclusions

I have argued that Holocaust denial within a geo-technical framework of moral convergence diverges from its historical antecedents in distinctive, and perhaps more sinister, ways. The CODOH creates and sustains a technical monologic that discursively distorts, indeed silences, the authentic voices of the Holocaust. However, the site's electronic simulation of "debate," the illusion of the Other's presence, appears to acquiesce to the ethical authority of dialogism. Subsequently, Smith's exploitation of technical monologic privileges Holocaust denial while simultaneously fabricating the epistemological promise of dialogic interaction. This kind of technical simulacrum has disturbing implications for how future generations will interact with the process and products of cyber knowledge, particularly when we consider the ubiquitous nature of virtual reality — a reality in which we increasingly choose to immerse ourselves. As Koch cautions us, "Simulation represents a fabrication of the 'real' without reference to an origin. To put it another way, the project of simulation is to make the real conform to that which is fabrication" (2005, 162).

Though scholars make strong arguments that Holocaust denial should not fall under the protection of the First Amendment (Marouf 1999; Nemes 2002), I hesitate to advise such a course of action. The ideals of free expression allow for even the most abhorrent speech in the marketplace of ideas to ensure a democratic society, even if these ideals are sometimes abused. There is also, of course, the question of constructing standards that can be applied consistently in regulating Holocaust denial in cyberspace. As Leets notes, "Issues of regulation naturally lead to the questions of whether it is even possible. Cyberspace does not have geographical boundaries so it is difficult to determine where violations of the law should be prosecuted" (2001, 296).

Rather, in acknowledging our dual roles as scholars and educators, I believe the focus of mitigating Holocaust denial and other forms of hate speech rests in new pedagogical approaches in critical ways of reading, seeing, and thinking for students of all ages. As Kraidy argues, the traditional curricula paradigm — educators as the fundamental source of information — is no longer effective in the era of media convergence. She writes, "Education needs to focus more on the meaning of information than on the information itself. This entails that with superhuman data storage at our disposal, knowledge generation depends more on the quality of the research interpretation than on the amount of processed data" (2002, 104). Contemporary pedagogy needs to emphasize computer-mediated communication, media literacy, and other curricula developments that underscore the epistemological potential of new communication technologies. Training in the critical appraisal of information, rather than merely its acquisition, will best prepare students to navigate the virtual landscape of the new millennium.

Note

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8

Privacy and Participation in the Cloud: Ethical Implications of Google's Privacy Practices and Public Communications

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THIS CHAPTER ADDRESSES THE ETHICS of online privacy in emerging media by analyzing the privacy policies of web search industry leader Google. Growing user activity is taking place at the interface between Google's "Search" and its growing suite of personalized applications and services known as the "Google Cloud" (or "Search 2.0"). Account-based services in the cloud increase the data provided by users, and axiomatically also increase the privacy risks. Google acknowledges the growing concern over its unprecedented access and ability to exploit user information, and often responds to regulatory pressure by increasing its outreach and educational efforts. The author examines the company's public communications including privacy videos, policies, and notices and finds Web 2.0 discourse that celebrates user empowerment through productivity and sharing, but that also shifts responsibility for privacy protection onto the user. This chapter uses critical linguistic and discourse analysis to investigate Google's privacy policies and education video series to identify the ethical implications of an interest-based, self-regulatory approach to privacy protection in the cloud.

This study looks at the primary tools of privacy protection in the

Google cloud — Google's privacy policies and privacy education video series — to assess how Google meets online privacy challenges and positions itself within the ethical debates over privacy in emerging media. In 2006–2007, issues surrounding the roles search engine companies play in protecting and exploiting users' online privacy began to receive wider attention. Embarrassing events such as AOL's accidental release of user search queries and detailed reports released by privacy watchdog groups brought increased scrutiny to search engine company practices, including cookie life, search logs, and targeted ads. Industry leader Google received the brunt of the criticism with many declaring the search engine the worst at protecting user privacy. The negative publicity from these reports prompted many search companies to announce changes in their data collection and retention policies effective December 2007 and July 2008 (CDT 2007). Announcements of temporary search data holdings (cookies), "anonymizing" methods, and new user controls indicated that the search industry was moving in the right direction. Yet, many of these changes were not apparent to the average user, and privacy advocates argued that the initiatives either did not go far enough or that they actually "extended the data retained" (CDT 2007). At stake for Google are the implications of potential privacy policies and regulations that may encroach upon its business practices.

Google's massive financial growth has translated into political influence in the arena of policy formation and issue framing in online privacy protection debates (Williams 2009). Google aggressively lobbies and campaigns against the regulation of internet companies, arguing instead for the freedom to find technical and design solutions to online privacy protection. While being involved in a robust and aggressive anti-regulation effort, Google also has shown leadership in addressing the anxiety of users and privacy advocates through freedom of speech advocacy (Global Network Initiative). Additionally, the release of Google Dashboard reflects an attempt to "calm fears about its intentions" (Cringley 2009) by offering users "greater transparency and control over their own data" (Whitten *et al.* 2009). The promise of Google's free speech advocacy efforts and user controls may address some privacy concerns, but they should be recognized within an anti-regulation regime building effort that seeks to build consensus around privacy norms, attitudes, and principles. Within a deregulated, unenforceable, and unmonitored model of industry self-regulation, trusting in an industry's intentions is offered as the primary means of ensuring

privacy protection. Thus, privacy advocates continue to seek "independent oversight" over internet-based corporations and call for a "new international framework for privacy protection" (The Public Voice).

This research calls into question Google's anti-regulatory approach to privacy protection by highlighting the company's efforts to place the responsibility of managing privacy protection onto the user. This emphasis on user responsibility occurs through an appeal to "transparency and choice" (Google Privacy Center). Users are persuaded to trust in the transparency of Google's intentions, and to choose to assume responsibility for their own data protection. In an increasingly integrated online environment, the average user faces unprecedented challenges controlling his/her personal information flows that mix search histories with personal calendars, email activity, and transaction histories. The self-proclaimed qualities that the company publicly acknowledges, "transparency and choice," provide criteria to evaluate Google's intentions and performance in protecting user privacy in the company's public communications (privacy policies, notices, user education and outreach videos).

Web 2.0, Cloud Computing, and Threats to Privacy

User-generated content sites (e.g., YouTube), social networks (e.g., Facebook), and microblogs (e.g., Twitter) have transformed personal computing; people are uploading and sharing photographs, videos, music, and text in ways that constitute an interactive read/write web. This interactive web, or Web 2.0, promotes a discourse that characterizes users as participants, emphasizes sharing, and downplays notions of personal privacy protection. A tacit agreement in Web 2.0 is the use of free interactive sites and services in exchange for the disclosure of one's data used for secondary purposes (targeted or behavioral advertising). As a result of an ethos of sharing, and Web-based applications that help facilitate it, users are disclosing more and more of their personal data, channeling their private information flows into online storage databases, free web-based applications, and social network sites.

Cloud computing describes this activity of working and storing information on the web, rather than on one's personal computer — "helping make the computer disappear" (Greene 2007, 4). With the growth of wireless networks and internet-accessible mobile devices, the benefits of cloud computing are apparent. One need not be chained to a particular computer, or even own a computer for that matter. At the forefront of cloud computing is Google, Inc., which, in recent years, has made available a formidable suite of free account-based applications and services, including Gmail, Google Buzz (social integration feature), Google Documents, Calendar, Picasa (photos), Desktop, and Mobile. Together Google's applications form a comprehensive integrated suite that provides for one's online needs in the cloud. As multiple account-based applications are utilized, user data from many different sources are submitted and collected, accumulating into a rich digital dossier.

Meanwhile, web search remains an integral part of the online experience, with Google remaining the preeminent search engine. Google's cloud then represents an unprecedented integration of its search engine with its suite of additional services and applications, attempting a "perfect gaze" at the user (Zimmer 2008, 77). Internet-based companies that can combine search histories with a wide array of free account-based services bring questions of privacy to the forefront. Privacy protection remains a principal concern among cloud users even while cloud-computing activities increase (Horrigan 2008).

Although cloud computing increases privacy risks, as evidence suggests, some find that Google's privacy policies have not increased in proportion to them (Clarke 2006; Zimmer 2007). Google acknowledges this growing concern by providing more user control and increasing its outreach efforts: uploading instructional videos on YouTube, posting notices on its public policy blog, and placing a privacy link on its search page granting access to the "Google Privacy Center." Yet, underlying this analysis is the question of whether anti-regulatory efforts based on user control and transparency adequately meet the new privacy challenges of cloud computing and attend to the ethical implications of privacy rights in the cloud.

Comparative Privacy Ethics, Privacy Approaches, and the Responsibility of the User

Online (or informational privacy), as Herman Tavani (2006) suggests, is one of three basic kinds of privacy (accessibility, decisional, and informational). Informational privacy involves "control over information dissemination," (Goodwin 1991, 149) including data about "one's daily activities, personal lifestyle, finances, medical history, and academic achievement" (DeCew 1997, 75, quoted in Tavani 2008, 139) stored or

transmitted over information and communication technologies (ICTs). Informational privacy can also be better understood and analyzed by the following qualitative factors:

1. The amount of personal information that can be collected,
2. the speed at which personal information can be exchanged.
3. The duration of time that the information can be retained.
4. The kind of information that can be acquired.

(Tavani 2008, 139–140)

These factors indicate how ITCs deepen privacy concerns, suggesting the need for legal and regulatory attempts to address information privacy while keeping pace with a qualitatively new privacy context.

By contrasting ethical approaches to informational privacy, we can gain insight into the differences in privacy protection approaches. In the U.S. a strong anti-regulation position, led by internet companies like Google and Microsoft, advocates for a utilitarian or "business friendly" approach to data-protection (Burk 2007, 97 quoted in Ess 2009, 55), maintaining that online business practices that require access to user data provide "the greatest good for the greatest number" (Ess 2009, 56). A utilitarian ethical approach is reflected in a U.S. market-dominated privacy policy consisting of a "loosely defined self-regulatory" arrangement between online users, companies, and the U.S. Government (Fernback and Papacharissi 2007, 716). These self-regulatory practices include "industry norms, codes of conduct, and contracts" (McStay and Bakir 2006). Certainly, there are well-established federal and state laws that address various aspects of privacy protection online in the U.S. (e.g., health and finances), however these piecemeal laws do not cover much of our online lives, and rely on contracts between online companies and their users, which place an inordinate amount of responsibility on the user/consumer, and faith in the "good practice" of industry (Burk 2007, 97, quoted in Ess 2009, 55). This self-regulatory arrangement is not inevitable, as a comparative view of privacy regimes reveals (Strauss and Rogerson 2002). The European Union's strongly held deontological approach "rests upon a conviction that privacy is an inalienable right — one that states must protect, even if at considerable economic and other sorts of costs" (Ess 2009, 55). The E.U.'s approach to privacy is reflected in comprehensive statutes that are enforceable by law to protect citizens' personal information in all contexts.

Competing conceptions of privacy, interest-based (utilitarian) and rights-based (deontological), also can reveal other important definitions of privacy. Privacy can be considered a democratic value embodied by a concept of citizenship that places freedom at the center of "one's ability to control one's relation and position in the world" (Zimmer 2007, 78). This freedom relies on "autonomy and liberty" (ibid.) to "sustain a personal space, free from interference by other people and organizations" (Clark 1999, 60) to be able to "lead a rational, autonomous life" (Alfino 2001, 7 quoted in Tavani 2008, 134). Here interest-based notions of privacy are reconciled with rights-based approaches, by acknowledging this "fundamental interest" (ibid.), in thinking for one's self as an "inalienable right." A shared set of norms might provide the basis for a meta-ethical position, where both approaches can be legitimate.

Other notions of personal interest may undermine a rights-based approach to privacy. For example, one's control of one's own privacy can create a "property interest" in information, something that one owns and can now trade, sell, leverage, and negotiate in economic terms (Tavani 2008, 134). Individual interest can be bartered away perhaps at the risk of weakening the principle of collective protection. There may be vested interest in the market logic of web-based companies that frame consumers' privacy rights as a matter of individual interest and control. Interest-based approaches can direct focus and responsibility away from collective protection and oversight and towards individual responsibility and choice. The nature of this choice in the E.U. model is to "opt in" if one wants his/her data collected (data is protected by default). And in the U.S., people must "opt out" if they want their data to be protected (data is unprotected by default), tilting the balance away from user agency by building into Web 2.0 services data sharing as a passive function, sanctioned by user agreements, privacy policies, and terms of service (TOS) contracts.

Recent studies suggest that users largely misunderstand privacy policies, including "the nature and legality of information-collection techniques" (Hoofnagle *et al.* 2007, 1). Some users assume that the mere presence of a privacy policy guarantees limits on personal data handling practices (ibid.). Other studies suggest that users may be willing to give up personal information if they perceive that they have control, trust the company, and get something back in return (Fernback and Papacharissi 2007, 718). This suggests, then, that consumers' attitudes toward data protection are contextual with much to gain by cultivating trust and control (ibid.). Google's privacy policies and consumer outreach statements create a context based on perceptions of trust, user control, equality, and reciprocity while simultaneously soliciting a continuous life-stream of data from the user.

Google's Privacy Policy — "We're Committed to Transparency and Choice"

There are nearly 50 applications or Google products with separate supplemental policy practices (More Google Products). These practices refer back to Google's primary privacy policy and require the user check the primary privacy policy against the individual privacy practice of a given application or service to monitor consistencies among the clauses. Cross-checking among multiple supplemental privacy policies for each application requires extra effort and can exhaust the attention of the user (Google Privacy Center).

The high volume of applications with individual and overlapping privacy policies illustrates the problem of legibility within the ever-changing integrated environment of the Google cloud. Multiple privacy policies also suffer from legalese. Irene Pollach's industry-wide analysis of online privacy policies concludes that privacy statements are generally written "with the threat of privacy litigations in mind rather than commitment to fair data handling practices" (2007, 107). Privacy policies as legal statements contain "catch-all stipulations" to protect companies against litigation, and provide protection through ambiguity. Privacy policies are also written to shape user perceptions of personal data and manage their understanding of a company's data handling practices. A critical linguistic analysis of Google's Privacy Policy also finds rhetorical patterns that render privacy protections ambiguous and misleading.

Language is bound up in causes and effects and can influence attitudes, behavior and consumer orientation (Fowler and Kress 1979). Linguistic forms within Google's Privacy Policy frame privacy protection as "a choice between privacy and convenience" (Fernback and Papacharissi 2007, 724) and help orient users as free agents, empowering individuals to choose. The linguistic forms that help promote this shift from organizational responsibility to personal choice involve patterns of mitigation and obfuscation, and include (1) modality, (2) lexical choice, and (3) coherence (Fowler and Kress 1979).

Modality: Google's Privacy Policies "May Change from Time to Time"

The linguistic form of modality is the use of hedging claims, adverbs, or "modality markers" used to downplay the frequency of how many times something occurs (e.g., perhaps, may, might). The most frequently used hedging adverb in Google's Privacy Policy is "*may*" and it applies to far-reaching statements regarding Google's data handling practices. For example:

1. "We may process personal information to provide our own services."
2. "Some Google features and services may not function properly if your cookies are disabled."
3. "We may combine the information you submit under your account with information from other Google services or third parties."

(Google Privacy Center)

The use of modality markers enables Google to downplay the frequency of its privacy protection exceptions in order to lessen any perception of abuse, while also making allowances for an unlimited number of abuses to occur. This mitigation serves to manage user anxiety by encouraging a sense of trust in the Google brand. Google seeks to establish its credibility, a prerequisite for trust, appealing through good faith: "At Google we recognize that privacy is important." Another linguistic pattern evident in privacy involves lexical choice to emphasize qualities that steer the focus away from the company and toward the user.

Lexical choice

Lexical choice is the "systematic use or avoidance of words" (Pollach 2007, 106). Google contextualizes users' understanding of Google's privacy policy by systematically utilizing terms of enhancement, shifting the nature of privacy from a right to be protected, to a commodity to be traded in exchange for perceived benefits. User benefits are offered as the reason why information is collected and shared in the Google Account and throughout each product-specific privacy notice. For example, the Privacy Policy states that Google may share user information with third parties, "in order to provide you with a better experience and to improve the quality of our services." In the Mobile Privacy Policy, Google collects an extensive amount of personally identifiable information, including user ID and actual location, but maintains it

is collected "to improve the overall quality of Google's products and services" (Google Mobile Privacy Policy). Google fails to disclose how these data enable location-based ad services, and offers only that it is ". . . to provide you with a better user experience."

Emphasizing improved services and better user experience orients users to view their privacy as a choice between benefits or informational privacy protection. The systematic focus on enhancement in exchange for data security also conceals the benefits for Google. Google builds detailed user profiles to enhance its ability to serve well-targeted ads that earn greater revenue per ad placement (Zimmer 2007; Turow 2007). What is not mentioned is the financial benefits to Google from enhanced ad-serving capabilities based on the aggregation of personal data. This pattern of omission reveals an asymmetrical transparency that is one sided, user-centric, and highly selective. Another linguistic pattern that may compromise clarity or create ambiguity is overlexicalization, or the pattern of re-labeling.

Overlexicalisation

In Google's Privacy Policy personal information is labeled "sensitive," "personally identifiable," and "non personally identifiable." Google fails to make a distinction among these terms, preventing the user from deriving the meaning and implications of each classification of data. A lexical pattern known as overlexicalization suggests a pattern of relabeling that involves synonymous or near-synonymous terms and describes how relabeling can provide a new set of terms to promote "a new perspective in a specialized area . . . [that] sometimes involve inversions of meaning" (Fowler and Kress 1979, 210–11). Google's Privacy Policy contains an array of synonyms used to describe the company's personal data handling practices that could provide room for confusion — lexical imprecision obscuring important distinctions. Throughout the Privacy Policy, Google states that it: processes, stores, combines, aggregates, uses, collects, and shares user information. This overlexicalization may obscure the specifics of this "process," revealing that Google's handling of personal information is "an area of intense preoccupation" (Fowler and Kress 1979, 212). To complicate matters, Supplemental Notices for individual applications contribute even more synonyms or near synonyms including "associate," "mix," "record," and "personalize," user data, and suggest a pattern of classification that creates ambiguity. The Supplemental Notices for products and services in the Google suite insist the user refer back to the primary Google Privacy Policy for more clarification. Yet the vague imprecision of multiple terms used to describe Google's data handling practices makes it difficult to reconcile the privacy notices against the Privacy Policy. Overlexicalization allows for inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and contradictions, and confounds users' attempts to make sense of how their data are being yoked together from diverse applications across Google's cloud. The relabeling of data practices in Google privacy statements tends to obscure the private nature of these data, and how informational privacy is protected. The combination of linguistic patterns, or coherence, also provides insights.

Coherence

Coherence, or internal consistency, addresses how linguistic patterns interrelate in order to "define an ideological basis of the discourse itself" (Fowler and Kress 1979, 213). Often the combination of modality and overlexicalization is used together to obscure the extent of Google's data handling practices. For example, in the Privacy Policy, "we may process . . . we may associate . . . sometimes we record . . . [data] may be mixed." Critical linguistic analysis helps connect linguistic structure to social structure, revealing how relationships between actors (users and Google) are established through linguistic forms. In Google's Privacy Policies and Supplemental Notices, patterns of linguistic consistency may frustrate accurate readings and provide protection for the company's data handling while framing it as an enhancement — something users choose for their own benefit. Assigning self-interest to personal data protection also re-emphasizes privacy as a choice, freely made by empowered individuals, rather than valued as an inalienable right and fundamental interest.

A reading of Google's privacy videos that combines textual analysis (critical linguistic analysis) with intertextual analysis (discourse theory), will provide more insights into how Google positions the individual user within interest-based notions of privacy, thereby becoming responsible for his/her own privacy protection, reinforced by a message of self-reliance, transparency, and trust.

Google Search Privacy Videos: Obscurity Through Simplicity

Google mitigates concerns about their data handling privacy practices while simultaneously arguing their indispensability, communicating a message of transparency, simplicity, and familiarity through the modalities

of genre (e.g., YouTube educational video) and discourse (e.g., Web 2.0 discourses of empowerment). Through the language of user-generated video, Google is able to articulate the legal discourse of privacy policies within colloquial discourses of domesticity, everyday conversation, and do-it-yourself home improvement-speak. The videos reinforce this articulation through amateur aesthetics that utilize low-tech graphics, direct presentational modes of address, and minimalist set design.

Google provides users information about its data handling practices through a series of streaming videos embedded in various application pages available at Google's privacy center and on the Google Privacy Channel on YouTube (www.youtube.com/user/googleprivacy). The video series called *Google Search Privacy* includes: *Google Search Privacy: Plain and Simple* (987,696 views); *Google Search Privacy: Personalized Search* (519,775 views); and *Google Privacy: A Look at Cookies* (243,993 views). The videos address a range of topics including web history, cookies, IP addresses, and search logs presented in a "plain and simple" format by Google spokesperson and engineer Maile Ohye. Comparing the videos to the Privacy Policy and privacy notices helps to assess consistency of purpose, compare modalities, and appraise the combined impact of both text and video in creating the perception of user control. A multi-semiotic reading of the videos helps to interpret how language interacts with media and genres (amateur, how to, education, animation, YouTube, Web) in mutually supportive ways.

Media and language together produce meanings that: (1) renegotiate boundaries, (2) reorient the reader/user, and (3) shape identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. The interaction of various codes of discourse in Google's privacy video series (genres, aesthetics, and web discourse) reinforce the language of domesticity, simplicity, and the everyday. In generic terms, Google's privacy videos can be classified as educational videos, public service announcements, and user-generated YouTube videos. The combination of genres redraws the boundaries between user education and marketing with an inversion of the amateur and the expert (prevalent in Web 2.0 discourse); Google becomes the amateur, the user becomes the expert. This textual heterogeneity also redraws the social relations between public and private, with Google repositioning itself as a public utility interested in the public good, not a private company with private interests.

Outside of the Google Privacy Channel, Google's privacy videos also are accessible on YouTube, associated with other user-generated content and shared among the YouTube community, contextually situated among "related videos" and "promoted videos." The videos replace the official discourse of legalese with the language of the average user; common themes of simplicity and user empowerment emerge. Google's privacy videos clarify some of Google's data handling practices but they also obscure through their simplicity. It will be argued that Google's privacy videos attempt to deflect suspicion away from its privacy practices, while assigning the role of privacy protection to the user.

Common Craft: Do-it-Yourself Aesthetics and Domestic Remediation

A narrative and stylistic prototype for Google's privacy video series is the educational video *Google Docs in Plain English*, produced for Google by Common Craft founded by Sachi and Lee LeFever, which explains in low-tech graphics and domestic references how customers can utilize the Google cloud for creating, storing, and distributing word documents and spreadsheets. Common Craft creates "Paperworks," a whiteboard and paper format that features limited graphics, outline drawings, and cutouts that are moved by hand against a white background. New media scholar Christopher Lucas suggests that Common Craft educational videos tap into the auto-didacticism prevalent in Web 2.0 culture (2007). The minimal "amateur-seeming" production reassures users through a Do-it-Yourself appeal, where amateurs are encouraged that it is easy and that they can train themselves (ibid.). Presenting technology training in a low technology style manages anxieties about new media and empowers users by generating feelings of positive self-esteem through technological self-reliance. *Google Docs in Plain English* demonstrates, in a fast-paced, conversational voice-over, the benefits of using Google's web-based word-processing and spreadsheet applications. Language in the Common Craft video relates technological features to everyday household examples, easily segueing from domesticity to home computing: "Home is where we keep the things we need. Whether it's a lawn mower or coffee pot, it has a home in our lives. Of course, our documents are no different. Each person has their own computer based home for documents . . ." (*Google Docs in Plain English*). Remediation allows new technology to be "refashioned" from its predecessors and understood in relationship to older forms of media and contexts (Bolter and Grusin 2000). Google's privacy videos will follow this approach, using low technology and domestic examples to explain technologically complex

topics, and managing anxiety through commonplace associations and narratives of empowerment.

Amateur "How To" Aesthetics: Building a Common Ground

Google appropriates the visual rhetoric of unmediated, authentic, user-generated media prevalent in the Common Craft videos and on YouTube generally. *Google Search Privacy: Plain and Simple* is the most widely seen video on Google's privacy channel and established a standard for the Google Search Privacy series (first posted to YouTube August 8, 2007). The video works to establish trust through direct address, through "amateur-seeming" graphics, by maintaining a focus on the benefits of personal data collection for users, and by establishing a non-hierarchical relationship between users and Ohye (as the face of Google). The style of the video, like the title, is plain and simple — a presentational medium close-up composition of Ohye in soft pink long-sleeved jersey T-shirt against a backdrop of a white dry-erase board. The image connotes transparency — that there is nothing to hide, that everything is in full plain view. The clean visual style reminiscent of the Gap Inc. brand aesthetic suggests equivalence, accessibility, transparency, and presence. Ohye's appearance in casual everyday attire also represents Google Inc. as a familiar online user/participant, and positions the viewer as an equal. A friendly and direct mode of address encourages this non-hierarchical relationship; Ohye speaks at eye-level directly into the camera and illustrates privacy points with hand-drawn images that are occasionally animated with stop motion effects (e.g., first shot — image of house, next shot — image of house with rain). Together, low-tech graphics, YouTube contextualization, amateur aesthetic elements, and stylistic cues help establish a common ground between users and Google. Simplified everyday language also helps close the gap between Google and the user. In *Google Privacy: A Look at Cookies*, Google goes further in removing boundaries and alleviating anxieties over personal data protection by comparing its online monitoring, storage, tracking, and retrieval of user data to everyday domestic examples.

Domestic Analogies and the Language of the Everyday

In *Google Privacy: A Look at Cookies*, Google distances itself from the catch-all legalese and overlexicalization of the Privacy Policy and application notices, providing familiar everyday examples as points of comparison with data tracking technologies. George Lipsitz suggests that in order for new technologies to be readily accepted, they should be introduced as extensions of traditional practices (1990). For example, phonographs, radios, and televisions were introduced to households enclosed within decorative cabinets, fitting in with other household items through their domestic appeal as furniture. In a similar way, web cookies (or HTTP cookies) are couched in domestic terms, their function explained within commonplace transactions that require tracking and recognition. In Google's privacy videos, users are encouraged to feel comfortable with the use of cookies by relating them to domestic examples that argue the vital functionality of user recognition: "cookies can save you a lot of time and hassle." Ohye suggests that cookies are, "a lot like the claim check you get back from the dry cleaners . . . when you come back for your clothes, the person working there uses the number on your claim check to make sure they give you the right stuff." (The search term is the requested garment, the cookie is the claim ticket, and Google is the dry-cleaning company.) Ohye draws arrows on the dry-erase board, illustrating a circular pattern of recognition and retrieval, tracing the transfer of ticket information at the dry cleaners to the customer holding a claim check to the requested garment. Later in the video, Ohye suggests that users can simply delete their cookies, but immediately reverses herself and argues their necessity: "Just remember that if you disable your cookies, websites won't be able to retrieve your prior preferences." Customers understand the value of getting the right clothes back, cleaned in the right manner. Although Google is clearly not a dry-cleaning company, the association helps establish a pattern of mollification through everyday domestic comparisons. HTTP cookies might help users get the right search results, but they also help Google track users from site to site, from search term to search term, and from search to the cloud and back.

Narratives of User Empowerment

Through read/write web discourse, Google redraws social relations by reorienting the needs of citizens within a limited notion of empowerment in the marketplace. The second installment of the series, *Google Search Privacy: Personalized Search*, manages anxiety over Google's data handling practices adopting the language of Web 2.0 empowerment,

which promotes personalization, participation, sharing, interactivity, reciprocity, and self-reliance: "We strongly believe that you should have control over what information we maintain about your web history and when we can use it to personalize your search results." Google suggests privacy control is in the hands of the user and that the work of protecting one's web history is a form of power sharing. Andrejevic critiques the inequity of the interactive economy, where "the labor of detailed information gathering and comprehensive monitoring is being offloaded onto consumers in the name of their own empowerment" (2007, 15). Through an appeal to participation and self-reliance, Google seems to "offload" the responsibility of personal data protection onto the user. Activating Personalized Search requires maintaining a web history that "takes into account your personal preferences . . . to give you exactly the information you want, when you want it." Although a web history suggests a permanent record, Google assures that "you control every aspect of your history" and "you can clear your web history, but we still keep your IP address, search query, and cookie." Simplicity of the message overlooks a subtle distinction being made between "web history" and "search history," suggesting that even if one clears his/her web history, his/her search history will be maintained. Although the user assumes he/she controls his/her information, he/she is merely controlling a feature that activates a personalization service that already occurs (with the maintenance of IP address, search query, and cookie). *Google Search Privacy: Personalized Search* provides a partial understanding of privacy control, when what is in users' power is the degree to which they can monitor their own preferences, tastes, and search habits. What is omitted from the educational videos is how cooperative participants can help Google maintain databases used for secondary purposes.

The Google privacy video series both lessens anxieties and encourages personal disclosure through appeals to user empowerment and attendant attributes including control, participation, and self-reliance. By soliciting users to participate in their own monitoring and then naming it control, Google may disempower users from their fundamental interest in privacy protection. Contextualizing the language of participation within marketing terms may also distract from the democratic necessity for autonomy, self-determination, and power sharing. When users disclose personal information including search preferences, it furthers Google's asymmetrical control over users' personal information and draws them into participating in their own informational disclosure.

Andrejevic describes this "asymmetrical" privacy arrangement: while "the shield of privacy [is] claimed by commercial organizations . . . individuals are becoming increasingly transparent to both public and private monitoring agencies" (2007, 7). Another way to obscure privacy in the cloud is by separating Google Search from applications in Google's suite.

Separating Google Search from Google Suite

Explanations of data gathering practices in Google's privacy videos appeal to non-specialists because they are easily comprehensible, simplified from the complex overlexicalization of the privacy policies, and distanced from information gathering in Google's suite of cloud-based applications. In *Google Search Privacy: Plain and Simple*, Ohye suggests that a user's search query is merely "one kind of data we collect to analyze search patterns and ultimately give you better search results." Search is presented as a discrete service, decontextualized from the array of services available through a Google account. Multiple means of tracking, Ohye asserts, including data from search queries, IP addresses, cookies, and search logs, are collected and analyzed all "to ensure that search results go to the right computer." Removing the link between Google Search and the Google account conceals the practice of aggregation mentioned at length in the Privacy Policy and privacy notices. The video's reification of data aggregation across "search" and "suite" contradicts the privacy policies. However, the lexical choice of enhancement reinforces the erasure of Google's special interests in collecting user data to enhance its ad-serving business.

Google is a Networked Individual

Multimodal discourse analysis helps illuminate how mutually reinforcing modalities of genre and discourse shift boundaries and thereby shape identities and social relations. The egalitarian structure of network society enables internet companies such as Google to portray themselves as networked individuals, other members of the online community, thereby redrawing the social relations between the companies and the user. Manuel Castells' description of network society provides a social context to help explain how these shifts can take place. Network society is: "a major transformation of sociability" that substitutes "networks for spatial communities," characterizing a shift from "groups and hierarchies to networks" (Castells 2001, 127; Benkler 2006, 18). This shift from hierarchies to networks tends to obscure power differences between social actors, individuals and companies. In network society the individual is connected on a horizontal, distributed, and decentered plain of autonomous connectivity — networked individualism. This perception of equality, however, is an illusion, and one that Google can use to redraw relationships between Google Inc. and the user. In network society, Google spokesperson Maile Ohye is able to appeal as a networked individual, and Google is able to outwardly embody the appearance and social affordances of a person. Corporate personhood status granted in an 1886 Supreme Court decision afforded corporations the same legal protections and constitutional rights as any person. "But even more important than the legal protections," write Mokhiber and Weissman, "are the political, social and cultural benefits" (2001). If companies can successfully portray themselves as members of the community (networked individuals), they can be entitled to the "same freedoms available to others, and the same presumption of non-interference that society appropriately affords real people" (Mokhiber and Weissman 2001).

Conclusion

With the rise of mobile communication, cloud computing provides attractive and practical techno-social affordances including interactivity, mobility, flexibility, and accessibility to information on demand. Yet, cloud computing also brings increased privacy risks. Google has responded to these risks through small design features, public relations, user education, and outreach. However, its intentions are unclear: design features are incomplete, simplicity obscures transparency, and empowerment narratives based on user choice do little to change the redistribution of power and control between users and Google. If little is publicly known about what Google does with vast customer databases that connect offline and online user data, the "strategic logic" is evident. With our data Google can grow its business and service through enhanced advertising revenue in support of growing expenses including server farms and the electricity to run them. Supporting a corporate strategy built upon sharing user data to third parties (online advertisers) is an ethical position that frames informational privacy within individualized terms that balance personal data protection with the greater good of enhanced web applications and services. The industry-led anti-regulatory position built upon an interest-based conception of privacy is in direct opposition to an international movement of privacy advocates who argue for a multi-stakeholder rights-based set of practices, norms, and agreements on informational privacy protection. Competing ethical conceptions of privacy will not be reconciled here. Nevertheless, as more users move away from desktop computing and toward networked communication in the cloud, society needs to look beyond the individual benefits to identify the broader social implications of emerging technologies. One way we can empower ourselves by participating in this debate is to achieve a greater understanding of the ethical approaches that stand to shape global privacy standards and practices in the near future.

Note

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9

Facebook: Student Perceptions of Ethical Issues About Their Online Presence

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FACEBOOK AND OTHER SOCIAL NETWORKING sites provide university students with a method of staying in touch with their friends on campus and in their home towns. While scholarship has examined privacy and Facebook and how students maintain connections with others through social networking sites (SNSs), little or no scholarship has addressed how Facebook users perceive the ethical issues that are raised by Facebook use. For this study, 264 students at a midwestern university were surveyed over four semesters to determine their attitudes about Facebook. Results showed that students view Facebook as more like a private conversation than a public performance and most of them report that they use the privacy features offered by Facebook. Students believe that authority figures should not use Facebook to make judgments about people. They report that they primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with friends or make plans with them. Most reported that they haven't posted questionable pictures of themselves, but they report that nearly 90 percent of their friends had. Students also listed a number of ethical issues that they perceive, such as people posting inappropriate pictures of others without the others' permission, harassing or hurting others, or using Facebook during a class or in another inappropriate situation. They also believed that the best way to handle these ethical issues was for people to take responsibility for their own profiles by using the privacy settings and not posting inappropriate materials.

Since Facebook's inception in 2004,[2] over 400 million people have created profiles and shared information with 'friends' around the world. In the intervening years, Facebook and its users have experienced many growing pains. Privacy is a key issue that has arisen, both for users and for the Facebook organization. As Wagner (2006) has pointed out, the indiscriminate sharing of information on profiles has left some people embarrassed, while others have suffered more serious consequences, like being dismissed from athletic teams, not being hired, or losing jobs. Because the consequences for users have sometimes been related to the way that the Facebook organization has handled its privacy policies, Facebook has had several instances in which changes in its corporate privacy policies caused profile owners to protest (boyd 2008).

The impetus for this exploratory project grew out of a controversy on campus that began when residence hall staff members (RAs) were fired because of their behavior during a spring break trip. Other students formed a Facebook group called "Save the RAs." A group of student employees subsequently was disciplined, according to the administration, because the students breached their contract by joining the Facebook group and opposing the administration's decision about the RAs. Students were upset and angry that the university's administration used membership in a Facebook group as a rationale for disciplining their peers (Grimm 2007).

As a communication scholar interested in ethical issues, my attention was drawn to the tension between student speech rights and the rights of the administration to discipline employees. Furthermore, I was interested in discovering how students perceived their use of Facebook. I wanted to know if Facebook seemed more private, like email, or more public, like a bulletin board.

Since its beginning in a Harvard University dorm room in 2004,[3] Facebook has become a fruitful area of research for scholars in the social and computer sciences. Scholars have examined how people use Facebook and other social networking sites (SNSs) and have researched how personality variables are related to people's use of Facebook. While legal, ethical, and social aspects of Facebook have been discussed by numerous authors, little or no research has been done about the ethical issues that users perceive in their use of social networking sites (see boyd and Ellison 2008 for a complete review). As with all new technologies, ethical issues arise when people use communication technology in ways that were never expected. For instance, the iPod, originally intended as a music player, has been used to cheat on tests and as a flashlight (Colman, 2007). In this chapter, I will review relevant literature about Facebook and other SNSs (particularly literature related to privacy), present my research questions, and discuss the ethical issues students perceive in the use of Facebook.

Privacy

Many scholars have examined privacy from the micro level to the macro level in relation to SNSs and have compared people's perceptions of privacy of different SNSs (Dwyer *et al.* 2007). A number of authors have examined how users of SNSs use privacy settings. Privacy settings are an important aspect of Facebook and other SNSs because they allow the profile owner to control who sees his or her content. Many of the ethical issues arise from perceptions that profile owners' privacy was invaded.

While the study of SNSs is in its infancy, there already is evidence that users have changed the way they allow access to their profiles. In 2005, Gross and Acquisti found that few people had made parts of their profiles private, while by 2008, Lewis *et al.* found that one-third of respondents had private profiles, and Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) noted that one-half of participants had private profiles. Women were more likely to have private profiles regardless of the date of the study, and the number of women with private profiles has increased (Lewis *et al.* 2008; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008). On the other hand, numerous studies have found that most users do not change their privacy settings; they let everyone in their network see their profiles (Kolek and Saunders 2008; Stern and Taylor 2007). This is consistent with Tyma's (2007) study that examined the tensions between privacy and publicly disclosing information on SNSs. He argued, based on Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, that "If the potential return on the exchange of information is deemed higher than the potential risk, CPM contends that the user will reveal the information, further allowing her or his identity to be observed and commented on by others within the community" (35). Thus, as people grew to perceive greater risk in sharing information about themselves, they were more likely to make their privacy settings stricter.

Related to privacy settings is the question of how willing profile owners are to disclose information about themselves. Gross and Acquisti found that students willingly provided information about themselves, such as images, birthdates, phone numbers, or where they lived (2005, 5; see also Kolek and Saunders 2008). Acquisti and Gross (2006) asked how concerned students were about privacy, their privacy settings (on a survey), and also compared survey results to student profiles. They discovered, “in short, the majority of FB members seem to be aware of the true visibility of their profile — but a *significant minority* is vastly underestimating the reach and openness of their own profile” (emphasis in text, 2006, 53).

Facebook users became concerned about privacy issues directly related to the information structure of Facebook when the newsfeed feature was added in 2006. The newsfeed allowed people to know when their friends added other new friends, joined a group, or posted to their walls. Previously, people would have had to go to the profile owner’s page to view this information. In order to prevent all Facebook friends from seeing everything posted, users had to opt out by changing privacy settings. This change was significant because there are multiple levels of friendship among “friends” on Facebook. Some Facebook friends are acquaintances, others are colleagues, while others are friends with whom one is willing to share private information. boyd (2008, 16) points out that “participants have to consider how others might interpret their actions, knowing that any action will be broadcast to everyone with whom they consented to digital Friendship” and that people may not want all of their friends to know the groups they’ve joined, such as groups related to their sexual orientation.

Legal issues related to Facebook use are also a concern. In a discussion of case law related to privacy concerns and Facebook, Brandenburg (2008) notes that there are not clear precedents about privacy that can be applied to Facebook. She states that the terms of service might be applied in such a way that employers could be sued for using Facebook to investigate current or potential employees, but that there have been no clear rulings about whether users should have an expectation of privacy when using Facebook.

At the macro level, the architecture of SNSs influences how private profiles are. Papaacharissi (2009) examined how the architecture of three social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, ASmallWorld) determined the publicness or privateness of that interaction. He found that the architecture of Facebook is more open than at LinkedIn and ASmallWorld. ASmallWorld protects users’ privacy the most because, in order to use the site, one must be invited by another member and the ability to invite members is limited. On the other hand, Facebook is open to everyone and Facebook users simply accept or reject people’s friendship requests.

Connecting to Others

In addition to privacy issues, scholars have examined how SNS users use SNSs to maintain relationships. Acar (2008) found that network size was positively correlated with extraversion and that online friend networks were bigger than real-life social networks, as did Gross and Acquisti (2005). A curvilinear relationship was found between extraversion and network size when observers were asked to rate profile owners based on the number of friends they had (Tom Tong *et al.* 2008). People with too many friends were not perceived as extraverted, but rather as having some type of personality trait that made them seek an excessive number of Facebook friends.

Because the mass media have reported about inappropriate pictures posted to SNSs, a number of studies have examined profile pictures or other photos posted to users’ profiles. A profile picture is the picture used to identify the person’s page. Most people use pictures of themselves, while others may include images of scenery, their children, or cartoons. Typical of studies of profile pictures was one that examined three randomly selected Facebook profiles from the largest university in each state in the U.S. (Watson *et al.* 2006). The study found few socially irresponsible behaviors represented in central photos; approximately 9 percent of pictures contained references to alcohol use. The findings are consistent with Kolek and Saunder’s (2008) study at a single university at which approximately 7 percent of profile pictures showed alcohol or alcohol use.

Scholars have examined the effects of Facebook on relationships, and the reasons why people use Facebook. Sheldon (2008) found that the six most common factors that motivate Facebook use are relationship maintenance, passing time, membership in a virtual community, entertainment, coolness, and companionship. She also found that people “who were unwilling to communicate offline tended to go to Facebook to pass time when bored or to feel less lonely but not to meet new friends” (2008, 72). Mazer *et al.* (2009) found that students who viewed a profile of a graduate teaching assistant that included a lot of self-disclosure were more likely to be motivated and to have higher levels of affective learning, and that the classroom climate would be warmer.

Finally, students use Facebook as a communication tool. Stern and Taylor (2007) describe how students use Facebook to learn more about potential friends or romantic partners, to see whether their romantic partners are cheating on them, to break up with their partners, to do "mean" things to others, to send messages, and look at photos.

Ethics and Facebook Use

While previous research helps us understand how students use Facebook and other SNSs, it does not elucidate how students perceive the ethical issues related to the use of Facebook. Ethical issues in studies of Facebook arise only tangentially. For instance, students are concerned with issues like stalking and a few admit they have gotten into trouble on Facebook (Stern and Taylor 2007). Scholars have also pointed out that users seem unaware of how visible their profiles are to those who are not their friends (Acquisti and Gross 2006; Cain 2008).

Others argue that students do not seem to know how long their profile information may be available to those outside their network. Wagner (2006) notes that "where students get into trouble with online communities is not understanding that the information they post may stick around, becoming a paperless but permanent record of their character. So such things as photos and detailed descriptions of a drunken weekend posted in one's blog and hateful or threatening comments posted in another person's blog could easily be discovered by a future employer conducting a simple background check . . ."(7).

Stern and Taylor (2007) note that many activities that students carry out on Facebook raise ethical issues. For instance, some users used "FB for 'sex,' 'to find out more about a girl I slept with the night before,' and 'get random play or friends with benefits.' Conversely, students have used FB to break up with their boyfriends or girlfriends. And others have used it to 'make people jealous,' 'be mean to someone,' or 'write mean rumors about people and defame people's characters, although sometimes the rumors are actually facts'" (Stern and Taylor 2007, 13). However, no study has specifically examined how students perceive ethical issues in their use of Facebook.

Based on the literature discussed, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Do students view communicating on Facebook as more like a conversation with a friend or as a public performance?
RQ2: What are students' perceptions of the privacy features of Facebook, including how they and their friends use those features?
RQ3: What are students' expectations about authority figures' use of Facebook to evaluate users' behavior?
RQ4: Why do students use Facebook?
RQ5: What ethical issues do students perceive in the use of Facebook?

Method

Participants in this study were drawn from a convenience sample of students at a small midwestern university (N=261). Because every full-time undergraduate student has a laptop computer, a high percentage of students have Facebook profiles (over 97 percent) and most participants were frequent users of Facebook; of those who had profiles, only 4 percent rarely checked their profiles. The other 96 percent of Facebook users checked their profiles at least daily or several times per day. Participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 26 (mean = 19.66, SD = 1.57). Significantly more participants were female, reflecting campus demographics (women = 205 (79 percent); men = 56 (21 percent); average on campus over last eight years is 61 percent female).[4] Student participants were disproportionately freshmen (44.8 percent) because the surveys were distributed in the Communication Studies Department, where students take a mandatory public speaking class, primarily during their first year.

Participants responded to Likert-type scale items that asked them about their perceptions of their own Facebook use as well as their friends' use.[5] Items asked: (1) how students and their friends use privacy features, (2) whether Facebook is more like a conversation with a friend or a public performance, (3) whether students or their friends have posted pictures of themselves that could get them into trouble, (4) whether authorities (police, university officials) should be able to use Facebook to look for violations of the law, (5) whether coaches and universities should ban Facebook use, (6) whether employers should be able to look at profiles when hiring, (7) how students use Facebook to keep in touch with friends, and (8) whether students or their friends have felt "stalked" on Facebook. The survey also asked if participants had a Facebook account, how long they had had a profile, and how often they checked it.

All participants answered the closed-ended questions; a smaller sample in later groups of participants also answered open-ended questions about the ethical issues they perceive in Facebook and how they manage those issues.

Results and Discussion

This section details the survey responses that students gave, including some responses to open-ended questions about the ethical issues participants perceived in the way that they and their peers use Facebook.

Conversation or Public Performance

Perhaps the most interesting finding that related to the first research question — whether students perceive Facebook as being more like a private conversation with a friend or as a public performance — was that, over time, they were more likely to agree or strongly agree that it was both. Students hold these contradictory ideas simultaneously. Of the 264 participants who responded to these items, over 50 percent strongly agreed or agreed that Facebook is a lot like a conversation with a friend, while more than 40 percent believed that Facebook is a lot like a public performance. Participants were more likely to see Facebook as a conversation with a friend than as a public performance ($t[263] = 2.26$, $p < .025$).

Because this study was conducted over multiple academic years and with new as well as upperclass students, further analyses were done to see if, first, experience with campus norms impacted student perceptions and, second, if any trends were discernible over time. First year students were significantly more likely to view Facebook as a private conversation and significantly less likely to view it as a public performance than were upperclass students (private conversation: $t[261] = 3.84$, $p < .01$; public performance: $t[262] = -2.11$, $p < .02$). A comparison of responses between those who took the survey during the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 academic years revealed that, over time, students increasingly saw Facebook as a conversation with a friend or as a public performance (public performance: $t[262] = -2.47$, $p < .01$; conversation with a friend: $t[262] = -1.95$, $p < .05$).

Perceptions of Privacy Features

Over 84 percent of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they use the privacy features on Facebook, and nearly 88 percent of women agreed or strongly agreed that they used the privacy features. Also, because previous literature has shown that women are more likely to use privacy features than men, a *t*-test was performed to determine if the same was true in this sample. Consistent with previous findings (Lewis *et al.* 2008, Raacke & Bonds-Raacke 2008), women were more likely to agree that they use privacy features than men ($t[260] = -3.02$, $p < .01$).

Because of the increase in concerns raised in the media about privacy over the time that participants were responding to the survey, responses from each academic year were compared. The students from 2008–2009 were more concerned with privacy settings than those from the previous academic year ($t[260] = -2.63$, $p < .01$). Additionally, findings suggested that women from the more recent group to be surveyed were more likely to agree that they used the privacy features than those from the earlier group ($t[172.32] = -2.81$, $p < .003$).[6]

Thus, students were aware that privacy is a concern on Facebook, most students claimed that they use the privacy features available, and there appears to be a trend toward increased use of those features, especially among women. If the users actually have made their profiles private or portions of their profiles private, it is similar to the shift in usage patterns found in previous studies (Gross and Acquisti 2005; Kolek and Saunders 2008; Lewis *et al.* 2008; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008). Media coverage and discussions on college campuses of problems associated with having public profiles may have influenced more students to use privacy features.

Expectations about Authority Figures' Use of Facebook

Overall, students believed that authority figures should not use Facebook to find information about profile users. Almost two-thirds (62 percent) of students disagreed with the statement, "The police should be allowed to use Facebook to detect legal violations (underage drinking, tearing down goalposts after football games, etc.)." Nearly three-quarters of students thought it was wrong for the university to take disciplinary action based on what students post on Facebook or other internet sites (73.1 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed) or for coaches to bar athletes from using Facebook in order to head off scandals or recruiting violations (71.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed). Students were strongly opposed to the university banning access to Facebook from university computers (84.8 percent disagreed/strongly disagreed). On the other hand, fewer than half of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed that employers should be allowed to look at Facebook pages in order to evaluate job candidates (43.6 percent).

Because many students viewed Facebook as a private conversation, they also believed that authority figures should not use Facebook to find out information about them. However, many students wrote comments that suggested that if people had public profiles and did not use the privacy settings, they deserved to suffer the consequences of the information displayed in their profiles. For instance, one student noted, "It is public information when being considered for a job. I think that although it's public, you are able to restrict who sees your page and if you have a private profile it should remain private with the exception of people who you allow to view it." This student took the nuanced view that a public profile was available to everyone, but that people should not be able to get around privacy settings the profile owner has set. This suggests that the student would find it unethical for an organization to get access to a student's profile through one of that student's online friends. Another student said, "I don't think schools should try and limit their students from using Facebook, however. If someone is silly enough to post something on Facebook that is incriminating or damaging to their reputation then they deserve to be punished." This student, like many others, believed that it is the responsibility of profile owners to make sure that they have made their profiles private or, if they have public profiles, to avoid posting anything incriminating on them.

Reasons for Facebook Use

Students are more likely to keep in touch or make plans with current friends than they are to make new friends through Facebook. Over 90 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they used Facebook to keep in touch with their friends from home, while nearly 100 percent

agreed or strongly agreed that Facebook was a great resource for connecting with friends. Over 80 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that they used Facebook to make plans with friends on campus. It seems that most students use Facebook to connect with people they already know. Fewer than half of the students (48.4 percent) strongly agreed or agreed that they have made new friends through Facebook.

While this study did not examine in detail the uses that students make of Facebook or other SNSs, its finding that these university students primarily use Facebook to keep in touch with friends or make plans with others and not make new friends are consistent with Raacke and Bonds-Raacke's (2008) conclusion that SNSs are used to keep in touch with old or new friends, post pictures, or find old friends.

Perceived Ethical Issues

Fewer than 40 percent of students reported posting pictures on Facebook that could get them into trouble, while they believe that nearly 90 percent of their friends had done so. They also reported that while they have rarely felt stalked by someone on Facebook, they have many friends who have felt stalked.

Participants who took the survey during fall semester 2008 and spring semester 2009 also answered questions about the ethical issues they saw in Facebook. Students believed that the most important issue was the posting of inappropriate pictures or materials that could get the profile owner in trouble. They also felt an ethical issue was raised when people post pictures of others that the others might not want posted. Many firmly believed that authorities should not use Facebook as a tool for evaluating job candidates. As one respondent said, "I think the issue that stands out the most to me is potential employers viewing people's Facebook or other networking site pages to judge whether or not they should be a candidate for a job. A person should be allowed to have a personal life completely separate from work and what they do on their own time should have nothing to do with their work as long as it does not cause conflict or [a] poor work ethic." A significant group of respondents (n = 11) felt that there were no ethical issues in the use of Facebook.

Students also were asked to describe the best way to deal with the various ethical issues they saw in the use of Facebook. Responses to this question were limited, but most students said that they thought that it was up to individuals to be smart users of Facebook and to use the available privacy settings. Some said that Facebook should take responsibility for improving the site to eliminate the ethical issues they perceived, while others had no suggested solutions for those ethical issues.

Students were aware of many of the ethical issues that have been discussed in the news, such as stalking, use of Facebook by authority figures, and posting of inappropriate pictures or materials. They also discussed a number of ethical issues that have not been prominent in the news media or the academic literature. First, students were concerned about judging people based on what is in their profiles. One student said, “Sometimes a person can be portrayed as someone he/she is not because of certain pictures that are posted. For example, most pictures are taken on nights gone out, and if those are the only pictures people see, they may have a perception that is not correct.” Surprisingly, several students were concerned about people hacking into accounts in order to get access to accounts from which they had been restricted. A final issue for participants was the use of Facebook in classes or people who used Facebook too much. One student said, “I think Facebook detracts from the educational setting. I often witness students spending the majority (if not all) their time in classes (large lecture setting, or condensed class sizes) on Facebook because they ‘can.’”

Conclusion

While this exploratory study found that many students perceive ethical issues in the use of Facebook that had not been discussed before, its major weakness is its sample. The sample includes students from only one campus and it does not follow students’ attitude changes over time. A study that examined how students’ privacy and ethical concerns changed over time would help demonstrate the influence of the media and the influence of campus campaigns to inform students about the negative sides of Facebook, on students’ perceptions of Facebook, and their use of Facebook. Since this study took place at a “laptop university,” it is possible that students are more technically savvy than students at other campuses and may have more access to computer time.

This study also relied on students’ self-reports about their use of privacy features and whether they posted inappropriate pictures or content. Because it is self-report data, social desirability might have influenced responses. A content analysis of profiles would provide data that accurately reflects the way students use their profiles on a day-to-day basis. A comparison of self-report data and students’ profiles would provide a baseline for future research that uses self-report data.

The sample group for this project was mostly female. Given that women are more likely to use privacy features then men, a gender-balanced sample would provide a more accurate representation of typical users. The sample was also predominantly first year students; again a sample that better represented all academic years would provide a more accurate reflection of how all users employ the social network.

Finally, this study’s biggest contribution is that it asked students about the ethical issues that they perceive in their use of Facebook. Many of these issues, such as students’ judging one another because of pictures that are posted, “hacking into” others’ accounts, and using Facebook too much, have not been noted in previous research.

Notes

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2 Retrieved from Facebook Factsheet, www.facebook.com/press/info.php?factsheet, February 26, 2010.
3 Retrieved from Facebook Timeline, www.facebook.com/press/info.php?factsheet#!/press/info.php?timeline, February 26, 2010.
4 WSU Databook, retrieved from: www.winona.edu/air/ir/DataBook/default.htm, October 2, 2009.
5 For a copy of the survey and detailed results, please contact the author.
6 This t-test did not assume equal variances across groups.

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IV

Propaganda and Strategic Communications

10

New Culture/Old Ethics: What Technological Determinism Can Teach Us About New Media And Public Relations Ethics

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New media have changed the parameters of public relations, multiplying audiences and altering the nature of relationships. Practitioners' ethics approaches have been slower to adapt, frequently proving inadequate to the changes. McLuhan's theory of technological determinism predicts this lag in conceptualizing and adapting to technological evolution; with awareness of the problem, however, practitioners have an opportunity to consciously shift to *using* the potential of new media proactively for ethical guidance, rather than continuing to allow ethics processes to lag behind technological capacity.

In 1967 Marshall McLuhan wrote, "When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past" (74). His words referred to the gap he observed between the potentially innovative functionality of new media, and the predominately traditionalist approaches to their use. While McLuhan's comments are now more than 40 years old, and a host of newer technologies has evolved from those he described, his point remains strikingly germane: This chapter demonstrates that there is still a chasm between the potential and the utilization of new media, and explores the implications of that chasm for the specific context of new media and ethics in the field of public relations.

Called by some a "poet" and a "trickster" (Theall 2001), McLuhan's works are varied, vivid, and cryptic. Nonetheless, he is widely credited with contributing to communication and media studies his penetrating understanding of the extent to which new media change culture, necessitating answering changes to the norms of social attitudes and behaviors. Viewing the intersection of public relations ethics and new media through the lens of McLuhan's technological determinism helps to demonstrate that the changes to human relations wrought by new media technologies render obsolete most of the traditional systems for encouraging and regulating ethical public relations behavior.

A central tenet of McLuhan's work was the argument that, since changed social norms are an inevitable consequence of the introduction of any new medium, users should be conscious of and proactive about such change, embracing the opportunity to alter the world for the better each time the advent of a new technology sparks a transformation process. In the words of Don Theall (McLuhan's biographer and first doctoral student), McLuhan "applied the image of Poe's mariner — who saved himself by studying the action of the whirlpool and cooperating with it" (2001, 5). This chapter takes that premise that it is both more efficient and more fruitful to understand the altered dynamics of new media and use them to create new social and ethical norms than it is to struggle to endure them using old expectations, regulations and habitual behavior patterns, and applies it to current cases of online media use within the field of public relations.

In particular, this chapter draws on McLuhan's (1967) text, *The Medium is the Massage*, in which he provides remarkably accurate predictions of some of the current challenges to achieving ethical behavior online. From McLuhan's perceptiveness about the radically altered shape of the world after electronic media also comes a possible way forward. This chapter argues that, given global changes in the constitution of self and society, an accompanying paradigm shift to a new age of feedback-oriented, consultative, consequentialist ethics could harness new media's enhanced capacity for social interrelatedness to support and develop new standards and practices of ethical accountability for public relations.

Public Relations

In the past 30 years, normative definitions of public relations have increasingly emphasized its role as an organization's ethical compass (Bowen 2002; Grunig and Hunt 1984; Heath 1996; Ryan and Martinson 1983). The discipline's dominant body of theory has shifted from seeing effective public relations as the creation of positive images, to seeing public relations as a process of actually listening and authentically responding to public concerns (Grunig *et al.* 2002). In short, normative public relations theory has developed in ways that seem to echo early twentieth-century practitioner Ivy Lee's contention that "A purely selfish policy is not a good policy" (Lee 1925, 54). The best-known contemporary public relations theorist, James Grunig (2006, 165), argues that, "If the role of public relations in strategic management is to bring the voices of publics into the decision-making process, public relations should be able to improve the ethics and social responsibility of organizational behaviors."

Over the same period, public relations practice has expanded its remit within organizations, from a junior publicity function to a management function overseeing a broad range of reputation and relationship-oriented functions. Public relations staff may now implement mechanisms of ethical responsiveness such as corporate social responsibility programs, and manage internal relations including organizational ethical standards and compliance (Tilley 2009). Also over the same time period, public relations has encountered a raft of new technologies that have opened its clients to greater scrutiny than ever before, from a wider range of perspectives, as well as offering countless new ways to engage in conversation with publics. As Breakenridge (2008, xvii) argues, social media may have provided "the greatest evolution in the history of PR." Managing the enhanced ethical diversity that results from such technology is another new parameter: Kruckeberg (1998, 46) points out that, "The challenge for public relations practitioners who are professionalizing in a global setting is at the strategic level in which profound differences in ethical perspectives will occur that must be reconciled before public relations can be practiced."

Are public relations practitioners equipped to cope with such expansion of their responsibilities and activities at both theoretical and practical levels? Specifically, are they equipped with the ethics tools to cope with expectations of unselfishness, social responsibility, transparency, and dialogue on a global, interactive scale? Or, conversely, do they remain (to put it in McLuhanesque fashion) attached to the ethics tools of the past, even though new media have remade the world? Many public relations scholars fear that there is only "shallow . . . ethical knowledge and study in public relations" and "most practitioners have little training in ethical analysis or decision making" (Bowen 2004, 69 and 85). In particular, for those who do seek or prescribe ethical guidance, there tends to be reliance upon two traditional approaches: virtue ethics and deontological codes. Examples from the field suggest that, in the online context, these approaches are not preventing unethical public relations behavior.

Old Ethics

The new social media capacities and characteristics of Web 2.0 mean that, for public relations, "new types of ethical issues involved in making use of the social media's unique characteristics also exist" (Lim and Ki 2006, 285). In the past five years, numerous cases of questionable online public relations activity, including by large and long-established public relations firms, have come to light. Some examples include: the "Walmarting Across America" debacle, in which a public relations company did not divulge that an apparently grassroots blog was in fact a paid tactic on behalf of Edelman (Taylor 2006); "The Zero Movement," which led to the Coca-Cola Company being ridiculed by blogger groups and critiqued in mainstream media after what looked like an unaffiliated grassroots webpage and discussion board were shown to be brand-building for Coke Zero (Hearn 2006); "Al Gore's Penguin Army," an apparently amateur YouTube video lampooning Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, which *The Wall Street Journal* revealed may have originated in a public relations company with links to the Republican Party and oil companies (Regalado and Searcey 2006); the Whole Foods fiasco in which a senior company executive posted anonymous messages for years that denigrated a competitor (Burns 2008); and the backlash over a flog campaign for Sony's PlayStation 3 (Breakenridge 2008). These and other cases of flogging (fake blogging) or astro-turfing (bogus grassroots campaigning) support the accuracy of Joon Soo Lim and Eyun-Jung Ki's charge that, increasingly, "public relations professionals are abusing the characteristics of social media such as user-generated content (UGC), word of mouth tactics, and anonymity" (Lim and Ki 2006, 285). As new tools and uses proliferate, it seems that existing popular public relations

ethics tools such as codes and virtue ideals are struggling to keep up with practitioners' behaviors as they venture into new media applications in pursuit of a competitive edge for their clients.

McLuhan observed in the 1960s that, "In the name of 'progress,' our official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old" (1967, 81). McLuhan's observation that our ways of thinking about the world are inevitably slower to adapt than the rate at which we can produce new media that change that world, can still be demonstrated in the area of ethics for public relations, where practitioners and associations continue to attempt to guide and regulate new media behaviors using the ethics processes of an earlier age. In a bluntly homogenized global sense, the "fashion" for understanding, teaching, promoting, and enforcing ethics for public relations has had two main phases: character-based or virtue ethics and rule-based or deontological ethics. It has also entered, but arguably not yet fully engaged with, a third phase of outcome-oriented ethics. Temkin (2004, 354) provides a useful summary of the focus of each phase: "Virtue theorists ask the question: 'What kind of person ought I to be?', deontologists ask the question: 'What are my duties?', and consequentialists ask the question: 'How ought the world to be?'"

This chapter argues that, if public relations scholars and practitioners accept McLuhan's premise that new media have completely reshaped the way individuals see themselves and interact with and perceive duties to others in groups, the profession needs to move rapidly and wholly to a phase of ethics in which the question 'How ought the world to be?' is the principal guide. In a field such as public relations, where ethics must be achieved not only in a private sense but in a very public fashion too, only a globally attuned, outcome-oriented mindset can cope with the altered parameters and ethical challenges of new media. However, new media themselves also provide the most promising means for public relations practitioners to achieve workable outcome-focused ethics standards and processes in the future.

Virtue Ethics

There have been many supporters of virtue ethics as one of the principal processes of inculcating ethical behavior for public relations practitioners. Martinson (2000) argued for practitioners to use Aristotle's "Golden Mean" as a yardstick for virtuous character. More recently, Baker (2008, 236 and 249) argued for a resurgence in virtue training, suggesting "that virtue-based theory should be more fully studied, mainstreamed and applied to advertising and public relations ethics" for several reasons, but particularly because of its "motivational, inspirational and renewing nature."

Virtue ethics' consideration of individual character is undoubtedly an important starting point for developing ethical motivation and awareness but, as Bowen points out (2004, 85), "using individual values as a guide to organizational decision making is problematic," not least because "the lack of a rational and systematic analysis might leave any number of publics or alternatives unconsidered in the decision." Virtue ethics does not align well with Grunig's prescription to "bring other voices" into the organization's influences.

In recent decades, reliance upon virtue has become particularly challenging for public relations. Multiplications of the links between organizations and publics in different cultures owing to globalization and the internet make reliance upon personal (culturally specific) values risky and inadequate. Different cultures may have values systems so different as to be "ethically incompatible" (Shuter 2003), meaning reliance upon virtue standards can lead to mutual incomprehension on ethical issues. Indeed, when dealing inclusively with multiple stakeholders or publics with diverse viewpoints (as practitioners are by definition if they are engaging in normative public relations), it would, ironically, be potentially unethical to make any decision that affected others by referencing *only* personal values (Tilley 2009). Botan (1993, 71) argued that public relations practitioners have an "ethical responsibility to enhance, not degrade, the humanity of all parties involved in public relationships," which means giving other people's values, even if completely different from their own, equal respect and validity.

Furthermore, new media, as the percipient McLuhan noted, specifically change the context that traditionally developed a stable or clear set of personal virtues:

> The family circle has widened. The whirlpool of information fathered by electric media — movies, Telstar, flight — far surpasses any possible influence mom and dad can now bring to bear. Character no longer is shaped by only two earnest, fumbling experts. Now all the world's a sage.
>
> (McLuhan 1967, 14)

With the anonymity available online, one of the crucial props of virtue ethics' effectiveness at any age — shame or risk of shame to a sense of pride in "self" — is gone. As McLuhan points out, the circle of influences from whom acceptance, love even, is important, may now be enormously wide, and contain a massive diversity of models, values, and expectations as to what is "good."

Virtue ethics expects that individuals will be ethically self-regulating (Darwall 2003). In the online public relations environment, this seems naïve, perhaps optimistic at best. The online *environment* has certainly shown itself to be frequently self-regulating, with many public relations practitioners who engage in flogging or astro-turfing exposed and criticized by audiences (as the cases listed above indicate). However, at a personal level, very little lasting public "shame" of individuals resulted from the exposure of these incidents, meaning a virtue or character-based motivation for other practitioners to avoid such behaviors may be minimal. Individual public relations practitioners are often not seen as the face of organizational activities (indeed at a recent government communicators' conference in New Zealand, one presenter argued that "the less you see us the better job we are doing" (personal communication 2009)). The constant emergence of new cases of flogging and astro-turfing also suggests that past exposés have little disincentive effect — and possibly even a latent publicity effect. Breakenridge says of the PlayStation 3 campaign that, despite the backlash over its inauthenticity, it is "still talked about" (2008, 23).

Online technologies facilitate this disconnection between the individual and the incident. Online, all constructed identities have the potential to operate removed from the intensely personal sense of the offline or embodied conscience. The Walmarting Across America incident temporarily tarnished the corporate reputations of Walmart and its public relations company, Edelman, but had little impact on the reputation of particular individuals. Indeed, the blog debate about Edelman CEO Richard Edelman suggested that he may even have earned kudos for being willing to take responsibility and publicly apologize after the event. Research by Fredricks and colleagues at Pennsylvania State University, which "tested undergraduate and graduate students' interpretation of the Enron, Adelphia, and Martha Stewart scandals" showed that "most students believe that at heart everyone was a good person and that they made a few bad choices" (Susan Fredricks, personal communication, March 3, 2009). The research also found that students' values systems tended to prioritize family loyalty over more abstract values such as fairness; for example, students "expressed admiration" towards one CEO "for employing his children" (Fredricks and Hornett 2007, 84). Without the sanction of a widespread or universal sense of communal shame for particular behaviors, virtue ethics lacks the necessary "conscience power" to encourage ethical self-enforcement. In a world where influences are multitudinous, an alternative value is easy to find — witness the Enron traders whose small-group communal values enabled them to positively reinforce each others' behavior in manipulating energy supplies (McLean 2007).

There are other ways, too, in which new media influences are making virtue ethics less helpful as a framework for public relations. One of the classic virtue ethics training techniques used in the public relations profession (Tilley 2009) asks practitioners to reflect upon their "goodness" by writing a draft of their own obituary — to consider how they want to be seen by the world after their death. The idea of death's permanence notionally has enough solemnity to motivate individuals to take living achievements and behaviors seriously. Yet in the online environment, the construct of mortality loses its momentousness. A person can kill his/her avatar at any time and arise, phoenix-like, in a new identity moments later. The public relations practitioners involved in the exposed flogging incidents listed above could return to the blogosphere in new identities without needing to change jobs, or even change desks, if they wished. In an attempt to regulate such behaviors, professional public relations associations have often turned to deontology, and most often to one particular deontological tool, the code of ethics.

Deontology

Public relations ethicists such as Kruckeberg (1998, 48) invoke a deontological paradigm when they call for globalization of the profession to lead to universal professional rules for ethical conduct by practitioners: "As public relations continues to professionalize, multicultural perspectives in public relations ethics will yield to a universal practice in public relations that will be predictably ethical according to professional ethical norms." This aim has been reflected in the activities of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, an international professional organization that has spent some years studying national professional codes in order to arrive at a global code that aims to "increase professionalism and provide guiding references for the development of similar codes by member societies" (Global Alliance 2009, para. 9).

Codes, like virtue ethics, are important as motivational and inspirational tools, but ultimately insufficiently effective for a complex area such as public relations, particularly in the new online social and cultural environment created by emerging media. Harrison (2004, 3) pointed out that application of ethics codes, "in particular their effectiveness and enforcement, has been . . . problematic" with, for example, both Australian and New Zealand public relations institutes having "difficulties enforcing codes and sanctions in recent times." One reason is that code enforcement is usually reactive, with compliance assessments made only in response to complaints; another is that codes rely upon effective group dynamics, such as, firstly, members reaching consensus on the values embedded in the code and secondly, the sanction of expulsion from the group carrying enforcement weight, because members value their membership and have few alternatives. In the New Zealand case study described by Harrison (2004), the practitioners simply resigned their membership with the professional association after questions about their adherence to its ethics code were raised, and continued to practice public relations.

In the new media age, alterations to social networks may have further changed the context in which deontology was most effective. McLuhan wrote that "the medium, or process of our time — electric technology — is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence" (1967, 8). And it is "social interdependence" that is at the very heart of deontological ethics, which relies for its efficacy on the human impulse to gregariousness, the need to belong to a group. Gregariousness is of course a dialectical quality, ever enmeshed in a tug of war with needs for privacy, autonomy, and independence, and people have it in different quantities. New media, however, have changed the possibilities for how that dialectic is enacted.

The deontological premise of belonging to the group as motivation for acceptable behavior doesn't necessarily work for the groups constituted by new technologies in the same way as it has traditionally worked for offline groups. For the Enron traders, who were shown in the movie *The Smartest Guys in the Room* (Gibney 2005) exchanging telephone and system-text-message mutual congratulations as the energy price was manipulated, it appears that a sense of being part of a "community of players" developed, hand-in-hand with a total detachment from the physical-world consequences of their actions. (The movie shows traders sitting at screens manipulating colored blips that represent prices. These scenes are intercut with images of the actual devastation caused by the price-manipulation, but the game-like interface that the traders used allowed them to achieve powerful actions without ever witnessing the outcomes, as well as entirely preserving their anonymity as agents in the events.)

There are already many documented circumstances of online public relations activity in which a concealed identity has allowed for instances of material deception, such as the allegation in Canada that bloggers who defended Alaska Airlines from what appeared to be a personal or citizen standpoint may have been employees (Hermanns 2005); in New Zealand the numerous examples of fake blog posts exposed by media commentator Russell Brown, including "Robin from Connecticut" who appeared on blogs worldwide praising palm oil in terms that could have come straight from a marketing brochure and ignored all negative aspects of the product and its production (Brown 2007), and many other examples of employees attacking competitor companies on message boards, or paid marketers posing as disinterested citizens to post promotional material to discussion lists. These are the ones we know about.

The deontological premise of belonging to a group also didn't work for Edelman in the Walmarting Across America case. Edelman was a founding member of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), and as such helped design the WOMMA Code of Ethics, which stated at the time that members will "practice openness about the relationship between consumers, advocates, and marketers" (WOMMA 2007, para. 2). The Walmarting flog arguably directly contravened this principle — the code's effectiveness, then, relies upon signatories to it actually caring whether their membership in a group such as WOMMA continues. WOMMA has subsequently specifically strengthened this section of its code (WOMMA announces 2009), but effectiveness will continue to be governed by the value that members place on continuing membership as opposed to the value they perceive in other kinds of relationships, such as being perceived as effective brand-builders by clients.

Deontology, then, requires an overriding sense of broad communal obligation to the consensus values of a group to be effective. But new

technologies have radically altered our understanding of, and the functionalities of, communities. "The public," McLuhan said, "in the sense of a great consensus of separate and distinct viewpoints, is finished" (1967, 22). How do you create a sense of group obligation in an environment where people are geographically spread, unidentifiable and/or unaccountable, able to leave and re-enter a group at will, and have a massive smorgasbord of possible alternative groups to join? For public relations practitioners specifically seeking ethical guidelines, how should choices about which publics' views and standards to include or prioritize be made if there is no sense of a "great consensus?"

McLuhan noted that "the older training of observation has become quite irrelevant in this new time, because it is based on psychological responses and concepts conditioned by the former technology — mechanization" (1967, 8). Exactly the same must be said of the older training of public relations ethics if it follows the virtue or deontological approaches. These too are based on psychological responses (fear of expulsion from the group and inability to survive without the group's acceptance) and concepts (a sense of the public self as inseparable from the private self) that no longer commonly apply. Everybody now, like a celebrity performing a role in the public eye, can have "public" and "private" personae, meaning the lines of connection between public image and private feelings of self-worth that traditionally gave virtue ethics its power to motivate are not clear-cut. Everybody now can rapidly reconstitute their social group beyond the borders of their traditional "village" and make new alliances to sustain a sense of belonging if membership of one group becomes compromised.

In the different age wrought by new technologies, then, it becomes imperative to use a broader frame of ethical reference, such as that offered by a consideration of outcomes, than the self-focused and group-focused methods available in virtue and deontology. Embracing outcome-oriented thinking more clearly and more fully in public relations ethics teaching and reasoning may help practitioners to better cope with the changes new technologies bring — and indeed, maybe new technologies can also help public relations professionals cope better with figuring out what outcomes are ethical. If, as Kruckeberg (1998, 47) argued, "Professional ethics must be consonant with the expectations of the society in which that profession is practiced," then public relations must seek better means to be constantly in touch with that society and its diverse and evolving ethical expectations.

Consequentialism

Bowen (2004, 76) argues that outcome-focused ethics (consequentialism) "is not useful in public relations . . . because it requires the much too formidable task of accurately predicting the future impact of a decision and the varying reactions of many diverse publics to that decision." Yet with new media enabling transparency, traceability, and open feedback from a range of publics on decisions or actions that an organization is contemplating, the lack of guidance that Bowen sees as inherent in outcome ethics can be replaced by wide pre-consideration of possible ethical issues and outcomes in consultation with publics.

New media offer opportunities to open up decision making for the better. As one of the blog *Powerline*'s founders said, "The world is full of smart people who have information about every imaginable topic, and until the Internet came along, there wasn't any practical way to put it together" (*Time* 2004, para. 3). These same people also have information about the different outcomes that might result from organizational activities and the values that may apply. Proactively consulted, their input may well lead to more ethical decisions (Tilley 2005a).

Outcome-oriented ethics systems such as consequentialism are also the only systems that offer the possibility of approaching McLuhan's vision for technologies to enable a world in which pluralism has its own power. McLuhan's idea was that:

> In an electronic information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained — ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation.
>
> (McLuhan 1967, 24)

Much progress has been made toward this ideal — for example, the Seattle WTO protests, and the exposure of political and mass media untruths by bloggers and citizen journalists, such as the identification of discrepancies in reports of George W. Bush's military service (Tilley and Cokley 2008) — but it seems unlikely that we are yet at the point where "we have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other" (McLuhan 1967, 24).

Outcome-orientation is the ethics paradigm that can take us closer toward that ideal. There is a growing body of research evidence showing that a presumption of inter-connectedness (such as a literal or metaphorical kinship relationship) with others enhances the ethics of our behavior towards them (Madsen *et al.* 2007; Zyglidopoulos and Fleming 2008; Fredricks *et al.* 2009). Then if, as McLuhan believed, new technology has the potential to create a world that "involves all of us, all at once" so that "no detachment or frame is possible" (McLuhan 1967, 53), it is through activation of the consequentialist mindset in combination with those new media that that dream might be possible.

McLuhan's concept of myth is relevant here:

> Myth is the mode of simultaneous awareness of a complex group of causes and effects. Electric circuitry confers a mythic dimension on our ordinary individual and group actions . . . Myth means putting on the audience, putting on one's environment.
>
> (1967, 114)

This is a precise description of the *modus operandi* of consequentialism: to effectively practice outcome-based ethics, one must seek to develop simultaneous awareness of all of the audiences of one's actions, all of the interconnected impacts of one's behavior. The consequentialist mindset encompasses the totality of the environment that one impacts when acting: it is, effectively, "putting on one's environment" as McLuhan describes. This is also, regardless of what diverse activities might *actually* currently be taking place in the name of public relations, an apt description of public relations' normative ideal. Everett argues for public relations to be understood as an "ecological practice" because it "deals with the interdependence of organizations and others in their environments" (Cutlip *et al.*, cited in Everett 2001, 311). Grunig, as noted above, argues for public relations professionals to see their role as bringing as many external voices as possible into the decision-making process. In an applied sense, emerging media, and particularly social media, can make this happen.

Case Studies

It is not easy to find case studies that exemplify using new media as part of an outcomes-oriented ethical approach to public relations, but possibly Southwest Airline's various emerging media activities may indicate an attempt to evolve to new levels of interconnectedness, responsiveness, and transparency via new media. Southwest has a public blog on which, although moderated, the company pledges "to present opposing viewpoints as we have done since our blog first went 'live' several years ago" (Southwest Airlines 2008, para. 4). Southwest has floated some operational changes via the blog before decisions were made upon them, was responsive to public feedback, and does, in theory, see the risks of doing so as outweighed by the benefits:

> [Southwest] CEO Gary Kelly once mused on his blog that the company might do away with its open seating policy. He received about 700 e-mails in response, mostly negative. Berg [the public relations practitioner at the head of Southwest's emerging media program] said, "To get that immediate passionate feedback in a short period of time at no cost had a significant impact on the internal debate on assigned seating and showed our executives the power of this tool."
>
> (Edwards 2008, para. 11)

Also promising in terms of technology's facilitating transparent public relations has been Southwest's willingness to participate in an "access all areas" reality television show, *Airline*. Berg said, "That was a big risk, we had no editorial control over that show . . . There were shows where we would just cringe" (quoted in Edwards 2008, para. 8). Again, however, the trust and relationship-building that resulted seem to have outweighed any negative effects from allowing openness:

> [J]ob applications to the airline rocketed after each broadcast. "That was our first step into the transparency and authenticity that's required to be successful in the social media space."
>
> (Berg, quoted in Edwards 2008, para. 8)

Another innovative, but by comparison less courageous and open, example of public relations staff using emerging media to facilitate transparency can be found in the New Zealand company Icebreaker's use of what it calls "Baa-codes." These tags on woolen garments provide unique codes that, entered into the company's website, provide some traceability for raw materials and labor (Icebreaker 2009). The "Baa-code" indicates which sheep stations the wool came from, and the site links to video of a station and production facilities. This is a positive step, but (when viewed in mid-2009), all of the communication involved was

one-way. Icebreaker suppliers and staff were interviewed for YouTube videos, but there was no opportunity for, say, factory workers to freely comment on a blog, environmental or animal welfare advocates concerned about sheep farming to respond online to the video, or any other kind of live interaction. The videos were static (pre-recorded and edited), rather than allowing, say, live webcams that enabled unfettered scrutiny of the treatment of sheep or sheepdogs at any moment. Nonetheless, that Icebreaker offers traceability in any form for its garments is a significant advance on many other apparel manufacturers' public relations.

Most online corporate public relations is still a long way from achieving the call in 2005 for organizations to be not only "unafraid if interest groups want to look over [their] operations and publicly voice their opinions, but actively inviting such inspection" (Tilley 2005b, 5). The above examples are very much first steps in using the power of new media to try to open up organizational activities to wider feedback and scrutiny. Some examples of e-consultation from non-commercial environments offer possible models for the future of enhanced corporate public relations engagement online, such as, in New Zealand, *The Couch* (www.thecouch.org.nz) and *Safe As* (www.safeas.govt.nz).

The Couch is an online panel run by a Crown agency, the Families Commission. In its first year 3,000 people joined to answer online questionnaires, and their responses were used in the Commission's reports to the government on topics such as childcare and the legal drinking age (Families Commission, n.d.). *Safe As* is a self-moderating road safety forum where the public can talk to Transport Ministry staff about road safety policy in New Zealand. It was established for community consultation on a particular law, but has remained active: "Ministry staff continue to use the platform to work with stakeholders, share ideas and supply information to concerned individuals. Open attitudes and collegial relationships built online have meant fewer requests under the Official Information Act and letters to Ministers" (Sommer 2007, n.p.).

Another New Zealand forum with numerous responses was the open wiki established by the New Zealand Police as part of a Policing Act review in 2007. The unmoderated wiki was hailed internationally as "one of the best ideas for participatory democracy" (New Zealand Police 2009) but, ironically, was so successful (there were reported to be more than 26,000 responses in its first three days) that it was disabled sooner than planned to enable processing of input. (It was reopened after the legal review finished, to allow ongoing capture of ideas for the future.)

Ideally, corporate public relations practitioners would establish similarly open and ongoing points of consultation for their organizations and, in particular, specifically seek input from cyber-publics on the consequences and ethics of their organization's planned actions before such actions took place. The ultimate goal of consequentialism is to encourage very long-term and far-reaching thinking that takes into account all the people, even through future generations, who could be affected by an action. Specifically encouraging input of that nature on business decisions could potentially help practitioners be more effective in providing an "ethical compass" to their organizations, as well as building reputational capital for their organizations as consultative and responsive.

Of course it is important not to make the process of thinking through ethical outcomes so big that it becomes overwhelming. To make consequentialism manageable, carefully structured systems for consequentialist thinking — that is, practical modes of consultation focused on identifying ethical outcomes — should be seen as a first, achievable step. Such systems can use emerging media's capacities for plural, multi-directional feedback to consider the impacts of different behaviors within any given situation and time-frame. The New Zealand government's guidelines for e-engagement (which are publicly available at http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/Guide_to_Online_Participation and cover both principles and operational matters) may offer commercial public relations practitioners some ideas and case studies for developing manageable e-engagement approaches to ethical guidance for their organizations.[2]

For example, *The Couch* managed input by using polls on key issues to structure and contain audience responses to relevant areas (thus avoiding the overload that affected the Police wiki). Public relations practitioners seeking input on organizational ethics could also use online polls to good effect, provided, as with *The Couch*, options for qualitative, open input were also available for those who felt the need to respond outside poll boundaries. To keep discussion focused on ethics, new media polls could be used to seek public input on an organization's policies and practices in terms of their specific alignment with, say, the criteria of the United Nations Global Compact (n.d.), which has ten principles spanning four areas (human rights, labor standards, environment and anti-corruption), or the draft ISO 26000 on Social Responsibility, which proposes principles in seven areas: accountability, transparency, ethical behavior,[3] respect for stakeholder interests, respect for the rule of law, respect for international norms of behavior, and respect for human rights (International Organization for Standardization 2009). The ISO 26000 development process is itself a good example of managing multi-stakeholder engagement and transparency via emerging media, with stakeholders globally distributed and every working document and meeting minute held in an open online repository, which the public can also access (see www.iso.org/wgsr).

Similar levels of engagement by corporate entities would necessarily open them to multiple and conflicting viewpoints, but the non-corporate examples above suggest that engagement could still be successfully managed around particular points relating to ethical performance. At present, however, it appears that most corporate public relations activity continues to "think fragmentarily, and on single, separate planes" (McLuhan 1967, 114) rather than embracing the multi-point open dialogue that is now technologically possible. Walmart thinks of its customers and tries to look good in their eyes: it does not consider its other audiences, including the cyberpublics who expect that their online environment will be treated with respect. Richard Edelman later regretted his firm's actions (Golitsinski 2007) but not before they had been labeled "one of the worst examples of public relations for 2006" and "an example of a company blogging 'for worse'" (Burns 2008, 22). This and the other cases discussed in this chapter illustrate that, to satisfy online audiences of a commitment to transparency, public relations practitioners will need to embrace proactive, not reactive, distribution of information. To claim public participation in organizational activities will necessitate openly inviting audiences to consider consequences and ethical parameters of planned activities beforehand. Good outcomes will require deliberate planning for good outcomes — and consultation to determine whose definitions of good outcomes will apply. In short, public relations ethics will be enhanced if practitioners learn, as McLuhan urged, to surf the new media whirlpool rather than struggle against it.

Conclusion

Globalization, and the internet in particular, have shifted the boundaries of individual and group identity in ways that make the primarily individualistic and group-centered ethics systems, virtue and deontology, less relevant and less workable. Virtue ethics relies on intrinsic senses of pride and shame, developed in relation to those whose approval we desire most. Yet with the possibility of anonymity and the massive expansion of the reference groups from whom practitioners might seek approval, in the online environment clarity about what individuals should be proud of becomes more challenging. Deontology sets rules for a group. Yet with groups that cross cultural, geographical, demographic, and every other border, and which have no fixed parameters for membership and little ability to impose sanctions for rule breaking, classic deontological tools such as ethics codes become near-unworkable, as the practical examples of online public relations misbehavior given in this chapter show.

In contemporary public relations, greater professionalization and the growing likelihood of working in a globally networked context mean that a broader frame of ethical reference is increasingly necessary. Flogging, astro-turfing, and other technologically enabled unethical practices that have beset public relations' initial forays online could not have been envisaged when the greatest influences on dominant Western paradigms of ethical philosophy, such as Aristotle or Kant, formulated their guiding principles. By contrast, McLuhan's ideas provide a direction that encompasses the world after new media. His analysis of the inevitable social changes facilitated by technological change remains relevant, as do his particular prescriptions for successfully harnessing that facility. McLuhan's work offers both a diagnostic and a prescriptive tool for contemporary public relations ethics.

This chapter has argued, then, for public relations practitioners to embrace a new age of consequentialism, the ethics system that asks us to consider outcomes in a global sense, or as McLuhan termed it, a "mythic" sense in which we perceive ourselves as ever-connected to and part of our environment. Empirical research indicates that creating a sense of connection to those affected by our actions enhances the probable ethics of those actions (Madsen *et al.* 2007). This chapter has proposed that new media offer ways to operationalize that connectedness with the social environment by broadening access to organizational decision-making processes and facilitating diverse input from a wider range of voices and ethical perspectives.

As new technologies expand our communication and relationship horizons, so must our ethical approach broaden to think first and foremost about long-term goals for the kind of place we want the world to be, and perhaps only secondarily about how we as individuals or members of smaller groups want to be seen. Consequentialism is a far more challenging and uncertain system than either virtue or deontology. It does not give simple answers, or certainty. It will require a certain amount of confrontation to existing assumptions and deconstruction of the paradigms that limit public relations practitioners' sense of duty to confined groups, such as financial stakeholders or already-active publics. It will require proactive engagement with the potential of emerging media to make organizational behavioral choices and their long-term outcomes visible to the widest possible range of viewers for their feedback. But, in the words of McLuhan, "survival is not possible if one approaches [one's] environment, the social drama, with a fixed, unchangeable point of view . . . Our time is a time for crossing barriers, for erasing old categories — for probing around" (1967, 10).

Notes

1 Dr. Elspeth Tilley (senior communication lecturer, Massey University) has been researching public relations ethics in New Zealand since 2004. In 2005 she developed an applied ethics system, the ethics pyramid, and has since conducted a longitudinal, consultative action research program to develop and modify the ethics tool in workplace situations and explore the real-world barriers to ethical action. Her research on public relations, new media, and ethics topics has appeared in refereed conference, book chapter, and journal publications. Elspeth is also editor of the online refereed public relations and communication research journal, *PRism* (see www.prismjournal.org).

2 Possibly the internationally noted growth and diversity of recent e-engagement initiatives by New Zealand government bodies reflects the government's establishment of a proactive and specific e-engagement policy in 2006, including a site, ParticipatioNZ (http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz), as a "community knowledge pool" to share experiences and guidelines on fostering constant citizen engagement with and input to government policy. The e-engagement policy was itself created collaboratively via wiki.

3 Arguably, the ISO standard's proposed principles all relate to ethical behavior, and this should be a superordinate rather than subordinate category, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

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11

Blogola, Sponsored Posts, and the Ethics of Blogging

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THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES ISSUES SURROUNDING the ethics of paying or otherwise compensating individuals to blog on behalf of a company or organization. It provides a broad overview into mass communication ethics, describes why it makes economic sense for corporations to pay bloggers, and presents some of the ethical lapses that have occurred. The chapter then discusses various remedies that have been proposed: government regulation, self-regulation by the industry, and perhaps most importantly, steps that individual bloggers can take to act ethically.

When blogs (first called web logs) were introduced in the late 1990s, many of us were excited about this new form of internet journalism. The promise of blogs was that this new medium would allow anyone to post his/her authentic thoughts and opinions in a virtual diary that could be read by anyone with web access. But when you talk with friends and colleagues about blogging today, much of the initial fanfare that accompanied the introduction of blogging seems to have faded away. Instead, many of us now have a difficult time discerning if the content of blogs is anything more than sponsored advertising, thus crippling the credibility of the content. What has transpired that has so significantly altered the blogosphere?

As a starting point, the extent to which people are blogging is increasing exponentially. A 2008 report estimated that more than 180 million people have started a blog, more than 26 million of them in the United States. And people are paying attention — more than 346 million individuals read blogs in 2008 and of that number more than 94 million blog readers live in the U.S. (Winn 2009). Other recent data suggest that roughly 100,000 new blogs are being created every day (Hayes *et al.* 2007) and that nearly 10 percent of Americans get their news from blogs (Smith 2008).

In a nutshell, the main problem is that many people who blog are no longer being transparent in their writing and are not divulging the extent to which their expressed opinions may have been unduly influenced by the payments and gifts bequeathed by sponsors. A related concern is the extent to which bloggers may be required to write only positive reviews in order to receive cash gifts or other compensation. In other words, when I read a "Mommy blogger" describing how her children loved their most recent vacation to Disneyworld, it's nearly impossible to determine if the writing is an accurate account of what the author experienced or if the writer is instead merely repeating key marketing messages from Disney as part of a bribe to earn a free trip to the resort. Along similar lines, how can I be sure that writers didn't just fabricate descriptions of the products and services they wrote about in order to get a paycheck?

In this chapter, I will try to present an overview of some of the core ethical issues related to mediated communications in general and to blogging in particular. I will also examine many of today's key debates concerning the ethics of blogging.

An Overview of Issues Related to Blog Ethics

As a starting point, it might be useful to examine a macro-level framework to assess ethical issues that may affect all media-related disciplines. From a big-picture perspective, there are many broad parameters that can be used to determine if people are acting with moral and ethical integrity, including perhaps deciding what to write in blogs. Rest and Narváez (1994) suggest that ethical behavior includes:

- acting with moral sensitivity and being aware of different ethical choices
- using moral judgment by discerning which behaviors are morally acceptable and which are unethical
- building moral character in which individuals consistently have the courage to make ethical and moral choices
- being motivated to act ethically and morally and desiring to choose an ethical and moral course.

Using Rest and Narváez as a foundation, Baker (2007) created an ethical framework to guide the morals of communicators. Baker suggests that public relations ethics can be viewed by examining the extent to which practitioners act with virtue, truthfulness, authenticity, respect for others, equity, and social responsibility. Baker incorporated these elements into the TARES (truthfulness, authenticity, respect, equity, social responsibility) model, which could be used to gauge if the efforts of bloggers are in fact ethical. The Model of the Principled Advocate builds upon the TARES model and suggests that media professionals act with integrity when they are transparent, truthful, authentic, and respect those they communicate with by disclosing payments and gifts they received (Baker 2008).

In addition, we want to identify some of the big ethical quandaries facing the blogging community. Some of the major ethical concerns include:

- bloggers who plagiarize and fabricate content
- bloggers who accept funds from corporations, but do not disclose these sponsorships
- bloggers who misrepresent their affiliations.

One of the core debates about blogging ethics being discussed by academics centers on the issue of whether codes of ethics need to be developed and the extent to which they are being used in practice. On the one hand, Medina (2005) suggests that the development of a code of ethics is inevitable because the vast majority of bloggers want to be taken seriously. Similarly, Kuhn (2007) argues that developing a code of ethics would, if followed, ensure that more blogs are crafted with transparency and honesty, thus reflecting more people's authentic first-hand personal experiences. Kuhn (2007) suggests that a blogging code of ethics must require that authors tell the truth, avoid deception, and respect their readers. He predicts that the temptation of bloggers to skew their writings in favor of those who pay or otherwise compensate them for their work will only increase as advertising becomes more prominent in this social media. According to Kuhn, "Truth in the blogosphere is threatened when opinion is misrepresented as fact, when bloggers plagiarize, when conflicts of interest are not disclosed, or when a blogger lies about his identity." One writer has suggested that a new code of ethics does not need to be created for bloggers; instead, the existing code of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) could be used to guide ethical blogging. Smudde (2005) notes that some of the fundamental principles of the PRSA code are to ensure that information is truthful and accurate, to communicate with transparency, and to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

By contrast, other voices contend that a blogging code of ethics is not needed. Beeson (2005) suggests that bloggers should not be asked to follow a journalism code of ethics because many of those who blog consider themselves to be fundamentally at odds with the conventions of mainstream reporters. On a similar theme, Webber (2007) contends that bloggers and public relations practitioners "shouldn't be expected to be totally transparent. It's not what our clients pay us for. We're storytellers and we are paid to tell a story that is in the best interest of our clients." As an alternative, Webber suggests that public relations professionals be honest and "translucent" — a term that he describes as "A warm flattering light that lets you see almost, but not quite everything" (2007).

A few studies have specifically examined the ethical issues associated with blogging. Perlmutter and Schoen (2007) reported only 10 percent of the 30 political blogs they examined featured a clearly stated code of ethics. Beeson (2005) believes blogging ethics should not be approached from a journalism perspective. He quotes longtime blogger Rebecca Blood saying, "It's unrealistic for the blogger to uphold journalistic standards [when] most of us aren't interested in being a journalist." Instead, Beeson describes how leaders in the blogging community are calling for a "list of standards" to be developed that would ask bloggers to "be transparent with sources, biases, and behavior."

A Brief History of Sponsored Posts in Social Media

In order to fully understand why "blogola" (a term that recalls radio's payola scandals, in which station playlists were influenced by record company payments) is such a pressing concern, we first need to understand

how the practice of sponsored messages in new media has evolved. The first instances of paying bloggers to create word-of-mouth and buzz seem to have occurred around 2002 when Nick Denton formed the Gawker Media blog network (Miller 2009). Only a few years later, this new social medium had grown to be so popular that 2004 was referred to as "The Year of the Blog" (Perlmutter and McDaniel 2005). By 2005, there were several instances in which corporations paid people to write favorable reviews on their blogs, resulting in ethical controversies. Some of the common trends associated with these ethical lapses were that the sponsors and the bloggers they hired were not transparent. In other words, the blogging was represented as the authentic experiences of individuals when in fact much of the writing consisted of sponsored posts. In 2003, the soft drink brand Dr. Pepper created a team of hired bloggers to develop a virtual marketing campaign for its Raging Cow carbonated milk drink, but it was later revealed the bloggers had been compensated for writing about the product (Goddard 2003). In South Korea, sponsored bloggers were paid only after their posts garnered a high number of readers (Perlmutter and McDaniel 2005).

But corporations were not the only ones who hired bloggers to craft glowing reviews; politicians were doing it, too. The Howard Dean Presidential campaign of 2004 was accused of paying bloggers to create positive coverage (Black 2005). The Dean campaign hired two political bloggers to write favorable articles about the candidate. According to Dean campaign consultant Zephyr Teachout, the bloggers were hired "largely to ensure that they said positive things about Dean . . . [the bloggers] never committed to supporting Dean for the payment — but it was very clearly, internally, our goal" (Black 2005). Similarly, Virginia Senatorial candidate James Webb and Connecticut Senatorial candidate Ned Lamont hired paid bloggers for their campaigns. But Glover and Essl wrote that "few of these bloggers shut down their 'independent' sites after signing on" to aid in these races (2006).

By 2006, ethical concerns were voiced about a new tactic known as "flogging." Flogging occurs when fake or false accounts of happy imaginary customers and consumers are created. As Corcoran *et al.* have observed, "A number of brands have had their fingers burned by negative PR when it has come to light that they were paying bloggers to shill their products or services" (2006, 148). "Flogging" refers to fake blogging or reviews that are not authentic. The first landmark case involving flogging occurred in 2006 when Sony hired the Zipatoni viral marketing firm to create a blog that was purportedly written by a teen who desperately wanted a PlayStation video game system for Christmas. The blog was titled "AllIWantforXmasIsAPSP.com" and an accompanying website displayed a rap video. Critics discovered the blog was fraudulent after they found out the domain name for the site was registered by Zipatoni. According to Bailey, "Eventually, Sony pulled the site down but not before a great deal of damage had been done to both the company and the brand. To this day, the fake blog remains a source of parody and scorn . . . Good advertising, viral or otherwise, never relies upon trickery or deception. Sony's mistake was thinking it could trick the Internet into believing the fake blog was genuine" (2008). Nevertheless, there is a desire on the part of many corporations to create fake blogs in order to establish one-on-one social relationships with customers (Baker and Green 2005).

By 2006 and 2007, some of the world's largest corporations were engulfed in full-blown flogging scandals. McDonald's worked with the JSH&A public relations agency to develop blogs that were allegedly written by two contest participants; afterwards, the project was exposed as a flog that had been concocted by the agency. In one blog, fictional participant Marcia Schroeder wrote "effusively and relentlessly about McDonald's food quality and variety" (Siebert 2006). In what is perhaps the most over-the-top example of currying favor with a blogger, ABC-TV gave blogger Michael Ausiello a speaking part in an episode of its *Scrubs* situation comedy "in return for coverage" on his blog (Barnes 2007). CBS-TV used a different blogging tactic to generate buzz about one of its situation comedies, *The New Adventures of Old Christine* (Barnes 2007). Engaging so-called "mommy bloggers" to write about the series would be a logical fit, since the show often addressed themes associated with motherhood. The network invited 12 mommy bloggers to an all-expenses paid visit to the set, where they watched a rehearsal and were taught how to create videos with the cast they could post to their blogs. Chris Ender, Senior VP of Communications at CBS, said "The goal is to go beyond the filter of the TV critic and mainstream media to create a direct connection with potential viewers" (Barnes 2007). Two other blog ethics scandals unfolded in 2006. Microsoft and AMD worked with Edelman to send Acer laptop computers preloaded with the Vista operating system to a dozen or so prominent bloggers in exchange for hoped-for positive publicity and buzz (LeClaire 2007), while Mazda sponsored fake blogs to hype viral videos promoting its new line of cars (Blyskal 2009).

In 2006, a singular scandal that brought blogging ethics to the forefront of national attention involved a couple named Jim and Laura and the giant retailer Wal-Mart. In basic terms, Jim and Laura traveled across the country in a recreational vehicle, making sure they stopped at Wal-Marts along the way. Throughout their sojourn, they routinely posted blog entries about enthusiastic and pleasant Wal-Mart employees they met along the way. For example, Jim and Laura's blog entries featured such inspiring stories as a Wal-Mart employee whose company insurance paid for a costly pacemaker for his son, and a female employee who rose from being a cashier to a manager in the corporation (Craig 2007). The scandal arose after it was revealed that Jim and Laura's trip had been paid for by a front group called "Working Families for Wal-Mart" that was funded by Wal-Mart. Working Families paid Jim and Laura's expenses, including their work to develop blog entries (Gogoi 2006). The Jim and Laura fiasco was especially damaging to the public relations industry because the couple had been hired by the high-profile Edelman public relations firm. Ironically, at the same time they were encouraging Jim and Laura to blog unethically, Edelman was leading efforts to write a code of ethics for the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) that demanded transparency. As Boynton noted, "When they learned the true identities of Jim and Laura and of their agency connection, bloggers felt betrayed and outraged and feared guilt by association" (2007, 218). Boynton quoted blogger Marianne Richmond who said the Jim and Laura incident "erodes the trust in what is the very heart of social media and the culture of blogs; that they're 'people like us' who are writing those blogs and who they say they are and are telling us the truth" (Boynton 2007, 218).

Several scholars have tried to deconstruct the Jim and Laura scandal to determine what went wrong and why it occurred. Baker (2007) suggests the real failure in the "Jim and Laura" scandal occurred when Edelman encouraged actions to intentionally mislead readers of the blog, thus showing a lack of respect for the public. Baker wrote, "It should be an absolute given that all blogs, ads and promotional campaigns should be transparent and truthful in naming their sponsors up front. This forewarns readers, listeners, and viewers as to the source of the information they are receiving. In the case of a blog, sponsorship and funding should be readily visible and permanent features of the site" (2007, 24). Another writer suggests that Wal-Mart and Edelman were unethical in how they worked with Jim and Laura because they provided content and suggested topics to write about (Barbaro 2006).

By contrast, Golitsinki (2007) suggests that we have to know the media environment Wal-Mart was operating in at the time to understand why they would pay bloggers for positive PR. Golitsinki's thesis notes that the company was being besieged by such critics as Wal-Mart Watch and Wake Up Wal-Mart. In an effort to respond to these opponents, Wal-Mart worked with Edelman to create a network of bloggers who spoke on behalf of the company and its policy stances, including Jim and Laura.

Today, blogs and other social media and new media are becoming essential components of public relations campaigns. Danielle Wiley, a social media manger for Edelman, notes their public relations campaigns are required to include such social media components as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. According to Wiley, "All marketers are seeing the importance of social media in the marketing mix . . . I can't think of any programs that we do now that don't include social media" (Levins 2009).

Why Paying Bloggers Makes Sense for Businesses

To fully understand why blogola is such a widespread problem, we first have to comprehend the business environment that makes hiring people to flog make so much sense for businesses. First, the heightened corporate interest in paying people to blog is in large part a response to the perceived dwindling effectiveness of traditional media. In other words, as fewer people watch network TV, read their local printed daily newspaper, and subscribe to a printed magazine, advertisers and public relations professionals are searching for new media forms that better connect with target audiences. For example, blogs and other emerging media can more effectively reach a large audience of people who are passionate about a product, lifestyle, or trend than can old media (Miller 2009). One estimate projects that word-of-mouth marketing spread by blogs and other new media will grow to more than $3 billion annually by 2013 (Taylor 2009). Second, paying hired "mommy bloggers" may make business sense as the best way to tap into more than 10 million American women who spend more than $2 trillion each year on their families. Research suggests that many of these women make purchase decisions based upon the content they read on blogs (Ramirez 2009). Third, blogs may be a very effective strategy to generate buzz and positive word-of-mouth among more than 70 million "millenials" (so-called because they were born between 1979 and 1996 and came of age beginning in 2000) in the U.S. Ford provided the use of free cars to a dozen bloggers over six months and encouraged them to share their experiences through such social media as blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr. According to Ford social media director Scott Monty, "We told them to be completely honest — that's the only way it's going to work. We won't tell them what to say, nor will we censor or edit any of their content" (Barry 2009).

Blogs also offer a cost-efficient means to get marketing messages in front of potential customers, even if sponsors have to offer payments and gifts. Evidence suggests that blogging and tweeting may be especially effective in generating brand exposure. Ten authors spent a week at SeaWorld and blogged and tweeted about their experiences with the new "Manta" ride. The bloggers generated more than 300,000 advertising impressions (Spalding 2009). Paying bloggers to write about products and services makes the most sense if a brand has awareness, but little "buzz" (positive word-of-mouth currency). In 2008, K-Mart gave several prominent bloggers free shopping sprees in exchange for sponsored posts about its stores and buzz increased 59 percent in one month (Lukovitz 2008). Blogs and Twitter "tweets" also may be more likely to build personal relationships with consumers than other forms of emerging media. Blogger Chris Brogan said that "sponsored thoughts" posted on blogs and Twitter may help firms develop a closer personal relationship with consumers than web-based banner ads" (Kunz 2008).

Companies may also want to hire people to blog if it increases the likelihood their companies will show up at the top of web search results. For example, Apogee reported that the traffic to its website increased by 500 percent after it began to hire paid bloggers in 2006, in large part because the blogging made the firm more highly ranked in web searches. That said, leading internet search engine Google penalizes paid blog entries by demoting them in its search results (Kunz 2008; MacMillan 2009).

The Extent of the Blogola Problem

Now that we have described what constitutes "blogola," how the practice evolved, and why it seems to make sense for the business world, we must now ask if "flogs" are isolated incidents or if, on the other hand, unethical blogging has reached epidemic proportions. Unfortunately, data documenting the extent of blogola are not readily available. Anecdotal accounts, on the other hand, abound.

According to internet marketing analyst Jay Weintraub, fake blogs make more than $500 million in sales annually, and the most popular flogs can generate up to 10,000 sales a day (Sullivan 2009). In the restaurant industry, it's common practice to provide food critics who blog with free meals and other favors since word-of-mouth is so critical to attract and maintain patrons. Many restaurants host special events, offer free meals, and invite bloggers to exclusive tasting events, with the hope of garnering favorable reviews. According to McLaughlin, "As online food sites become increasingly influential in the restaurant business, chefs and owners are paying bloggers with free meals to get good write-ups" (2007). By 2006 derivations of the sponsored web log were raising new ethical questions: "faux blogging" and "blogvertials." Faux blogging occurs when fake or false accounts of happy imaginary customers and consumers are created. Corcoran *et al.* (2009) claim that "A number of brands have had their fingers burned by negative PR when it has come to light that they were paying bloggers to shill their products or services" (148).

Some bloggers defend the practice of being given free products or services in order to write a more authentic review. Stephanie Precourt, who authors the blog "Adventures in Babywearing," said her writing becomes more credible when she writes personal accounts of how she has used a product. She contends that it would be more difficult to try out and test baby carriers and clothing for infants if free samples were not provided (MacMillan 2009).

The concept of sponsored posts has begun to spread to Twitter. Ted Murphy created a company called Izea that features a site titled "Sponsored Tweets." It enables Twitter users to sign up and set the price they want, and then matches companies willing to pay for messages, or "tweets." To date, more than 10,000 users and more than 700 advertisers have signed up. Some sponsored tweets are disclosed with a tagline at the end of the message, but it's often hard for consumers to recognize those warnings. Gregory (2009) wrote, "If someone speaks highly about a product on Twitter, don't followers have a right to know if that message is a compensated mouthpiece?"

"Blogvertorials" occur when paid bloggers are required to write positive reviews in exchange for cash payments or free products or services. The concept of paying bloggers to craft positive posts about a product

or service became more overt and institutionalized in 2006 when Ted Murphy founded PayPerPost.com and offered to pay bloggers to write reviews for pay (Fine 2006). By 2009, several prominent corporations including Sears, Hewlett-Packard, SeaWorld and Dirt Devil were working with PayPerPost to recruit bloggers. Burkit reports that bloggers were often paid $3,000 to write a flattering 200-word review (2009).

Danielle Wiley, who leads social media efforts for Edelman Public Relations, suggests that many "mommy blogs" are paid conversations and endorsements, rather than authentic descriptions of everyday experiences. She says that many mommy bloggers "aren't really writing about juggling work and home and kids. These blogs are created to get products to make money" (Ramirez 2009). In another interview, Wiley suggests that sponsors who require that bloggers only write flattering reviews are not doing anyone any favors. She says, "Blatantly positive posts that are clearly a result of free perks aren't helping anyone . . . and are going to engender less trust than an editorial that's fully transparent and disclosed. They don't help the marketer, they ultimately don't help the blogger [and] readers are going to have less trust in [their] words" (Levins 2009). Perhaps equally importantly, Wiley suggests those bloggers who accept cash to write positive comments actually harm the majority of bloggers who are trying to act ethically and transparently.

In 2009, General Mills created a formal network of bloggers. Bloggers were instructed that "If you feel you cannot write a positive post regarding the product or service, please contact the MyBlogSpark team before posting any content." In other words, only blogs praising the company were encouraged (Ramirez 2009). Along similar lines, General Motors worked with Automobear.com to recruit bloggers who were instructed to post glowing reviews. Baker and Green described the problem this way: "Even if GM doesn't pay for positive coverage in blogs, just consider the possibilities in this footloose media world. There's little to stop companies from quietly buying bloggers' support, or even starting unbranded blogs of their own to promote their products or to [damage] the competition" (2008).

New FTC Regulations

In response to the concerns about pervasive incidents of flogs and blogola, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has been developing guidelines to regulate paid bloggers. In broad terms, the intent of these guidelines is to make sure that people who write endorsements using new media more fully disclose if they were paid or compensated by the companies and organizations they endorse. This should make it easier for readers to discern when blog articles were written independently and when, by contrast, the opinions may have been influenced by payola.

According to Richard Cleland, the FTC's Assistant Director of Advertising, the purpose of the new rules is to provide voluntary guidelines bloggers should follow, rather than establishing a framework for law enforcement. The premise behind the new FTC rules is that the same principles that are used to regulate transparency and accountability in traditional media (e.g., magazines, newspapers, etc.) can be applied to new forms of social media. According to Yao and Fredrix (2009), bloggers who violate these regulations likely face FTC sanctions or lawsuits. Jack Gillis of the Consumer Federation of America said that new FTC rules are needed to protect the public from the increasing number of unethical bloggers: "Consumers are increasingly dependent on the internet for purchase information. There's tremendous opportunity to steer consumers to the wrong direction" (Yao and Fredrix 2009). The emphasis of the new FTC rules is to determine the extent to which the relationship between advertisers and bloggers constitute a "sponsored message." To do this, the FTC will gauge the extent to which a blogger received compensation and the extent to which blog posts are paid endorsements.

Some media analysts suggest that the FTC rules are targeted toward "recreational" bloggers and to third party networks that connect potential sponsors with bloggers, but it is unclear how the rules might apply to those who edit and publish "professional" blogs. Klaasen and Learmonth (2009) believe the new rules suggest the FTC may look at how often and how much bloggers are compensated by sponsors when determining if blogola may be occurring. It's been argued that the new FTC should have the flexibility to evolve its regulations as rapid changes in social media occur. Arnold (2009) says the FTC rules may cover cases where companies sponsor third-party blog conversations, when sponsors encourage bloggers to post corporate ads and videos, and when firms provide exclusive information and free products to the highest-ranked bloggers.

Are Bloggers Being Singled Out for Regulation?

There is a concern among bloggers that the proposed FTC regulations are not fair on several levels. One concern is that blogging is singled out for criticism because people don't understand and respect this new form of media. Kelly Cook, who founded the Beauty Snob blog, argues "There's the feeling that [bloggers] are not as trustworthy as traditional print media and need to be policed. That singling out is what offends me" (Schaefer 2009).

Critics complain that the proposed FTC regulations unfairly set a higher standard for bloggers than for traditional mainstream media. According to Felten:

> Newspapers with the strictest of ethics rules accept free copies of books for review. Movie, music and theater reviewers get their tickets comped. The scribblers covering sports aren't in the habit of paying skybox rates for their privileged perches at the stadium. While newspapers make no secret of these common practices, they don't plaster warnings on every book review or description of a football game. But that's exactly what the FTC is requiring of bloggers.
>
> (2009)

Ted Murphy has complained that bloggers are being asked to provide full disclosure while other forms of traditional media do not have to meet such a standard. He says, "I'm in favor of universal standards on disclosure, but when radio hosts endorse McDonald's coffee, there's no disclosure on that" (Burkit 2009). Blogger Duncan Riley complains that "The problem here is that mainstream journalists receive goods for free on a regular basis and only rarely is any relationship disclosed" (Krall 2009). Cherenson asked, "What film critic buys a ticket to the opening-night premiere? Yet, bloggers who accept free gifts in exchange for exposure are now in the crosshairs as purveyors of blogola" (2009b).

Perhaps blog ethics that guide how authors should deal with potential conflicts of interests will evolve as this form of emerging media evolves. While well-established media have developed policies that ban reporters from accepting gifts worth more than $25, many bloggers have not developed similar ethical standards. But Barnes (2007) observed, "Blogs are starting to calcify into more traditional media operations as they grow — establishing ethics rules about accepting gifts in the process." The notion that the FTC has taken the position that something needs to be done about the perceived problem of "pay for play" blogging is seen as a good thing by some users of social media. Nadine Habosh, who writes the beauty blog Jolie Nadine, believes "The fact we're being regulated is actually a backhanded compliment since it establishes legitimacy and shows that blogging is here to stay" (Schaefer 2009).

How Bloggers Can Ensure They Act Ethically

Having acknowledged that blogola is a problem and pointed out some of the problems that arise with corporate sponsorship of content in emerging media, the question then becomes: How might bloggers improve their ethical behavior?

Industry groups including sponsors and bloggers could develop voluntary self-policing programs that their members would pledge to adhere to as a way of perhaps alleviating the need for government regulation. Cherenson (2009a) contends that self-regulation by the public relations and advertising industries may be a better ethical policing tool than stricter FTC rules. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the National Advertising Review Council already have developed professional standards that call for increased transparency when corporations sponsor blogs. PRSA Professional Standards Advisory PS-9 encourages bloggers to disclose any "exchange of value" (e.g., cash, gifts, travel, etc.) that may influence the manner in which information is presented. In addition, the PRSA Code of Ethics states it is unethical to knowingly fail to "request disclosure of confidential compensation to a communication medium for the placement of specified editorial content" (Cherenson 2009b).

As a general rule, companies hiring bloggers must be transparent and reveal payments and gifts given to those who write for them. Both the sponsoring firm and the bloggers they work with must be held accountable for any misleading or false statements they make about a product or service (Bernoff 2009). There are signs that firms engaged in encouraging blogola might be changing their tactics in response to the new FTC rules. When PayPerPost.com arranged for 16 bloggers to take an all-expenses paid trip to SeaWorld to create buzz for a new ride, they encouraged the bloggers to reveal the fact they were compensated (Burkit 2009). When Ford recruited bloggers to document their first-hand experiences with the Fiesta, they insisted on honesty and transparency (Barry 2009). In 2006, Gawker Media instituted an ethics code that required its bloggers to identify any gifts they received worth more than $25. Gawker's intent was to clearly separate its news and advertising blogs, "So that none of the companies buying space on the sites have ever tried to influence content" (Barnes 2007).

Danielle Wiley, who oversees social media for Edelman Public Relations, claims, "There have been instances where we've refused to work with bloggers who aren't going to disclose properly. We've reached out to them with a product and asked them to review it; they've come back to us and offered to do a positive review in return for pay. We don't do that. We said no" (Levins 2009). However, it's hard to place faith in the ability of trade associations to police themselves in light of the numerous scandals reported in this chapter. After all, Edelman was also a leading proponent of a code of ethics being crafted by WOMMA that called for transparency, yet still sponsored Jim and Laura's Wal-Mart flog (Craig 2007).

Apart from requirements imposed by professional associations and those who employ bloggers, individuals who blog should prominently disclose posts that may have been influenced by compensation from sponsors (Covel 2007). They ought to describe the extent to which they were provided free products or services in exchange for the products they write about and if they were required to post positive comments in order to be paid (BlogHer.com). In addition, bloggers should separate sponsored posts from editorial content. As a guiding principle, blog posts should reflect the author's authentic opinions, findings and beliefs, rather than being overly influenced by the compensation that was provided — the "golden rule" is that bloggers should disclose their actions, motives, and financial considerations that went into the writing process (Lasica 2005). There are indications that some writers have recognized this imperative. Several bloggers have chosen to take part in a program titled "Blogging with Integrity" in which they promise to disclose material relationships and business practices that may affect their writing. As of August 2009, more than 2,700 bloggers had signed the pledge (Kuhn 2009).

Summary

Generally speaking, consensus seems to suggest that bloggers must be transparent about who is providing them with cash payments and gifts and whether this compensation is affecting the amount of praise they might lavish upon a particular product or cause. Similarly, it is now considered to be ethical business practice for bloggers to truthfully represent themselves, either as authentic individuals speaking from their own experiences or as paid endorsers who are shilling for a corporation. As important, advertisers and public relations professionals pitching story ideas to bloggers must never insist on positive coverage. It is essential that the integrity of the blogger to write truthfully and openly about his/her actual experiences must be preserved. Unfortunately, these ethical constructs evolved only after a series of scandals occurred throughout the blogosphere in such diverse subject areas as politics, entertainment, travel, food, and lifestyle issues. Some might suggest that the ethical taint that these blunders inflicted on the blog industry will have lingering effects that will be hard to easily erase.

I suggest that the evolution of blogging ethics mirrors the way in which moral standards in many other media industries unfolded. When the technology was first introduced, few understood blogging and/or realized its importance. After the business world recognized the economic potential of blogging, authors and publishers seeking instant fame, fortune, and gratification flocked to the new medium and some played fast and loose with the rules. Finally, when unethical behavior became too widespread, media and social critics stepped in and demanded reform, hence the new FTC rules. Even so, there remain unsettled questions. These include:

- Should bloggers be governed by the same regulations and ethics that journalists must adhere to, or are bloggers truly a different type of medium that should be treated with a different code of ethics?
- Is the FTC unfairly being heavy-handed in regulating blogging and bloggers? In other words, is the FTC more concerned about pay-for-blogging practices than it is about the free gifts often given to professional TV, radio, newspaper, magazine, and web-based reporters?
- Will the blogola scandals spread to other new media and, if so, which forms will likely be affected? We already have seen concern about sponsored tweets. Sadly, it seems inevitable that ethics scandals will continue to unfold as new technologies are introduced.
- Can industry regulation be sufficient to reign in unethical bloggers or is federal regulation the best way to stop these abuses?

We now know some important things about the ethical environment of the blog community. We know that some ethical lapses have occurred. We also know that some professional associations and individuals want to ensure that the industry acts ethically and have taken steps in that direction. That being said, we don't know if the ethical problems facing those who blog can be easily remedied and, if so, how it may be accomplished.

Note

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V

Journalistic Practice

12

How We Comment on Web Journalism: A Case Study on Dialogue Found in News Articles

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In examining the comment fields of six newspapers in the United States, this case study seeks to explain the nature of conversations taking place by the public on news sites. The definitions offered within this case study exist to form a foundation for examining what normative merits exist for these social spaces and the conversations that occur within them. This chapter also offers a brief glimpse at the next generation of social commenting via the web in examining how the tweeting of live speeches and events reflects a similar space to online comment fields, from rowdy crowds at tech conferences to minority opposition during presidential addresses.

For many scholars and philosophers that deal in communication, the key question of the last 70 years has involved the spaces of meaning-making: physical, social, and mental. From the democratic demands of Jürgen Habermas's evolving public sphere (Habermas 1989, 25–31) to Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic interpretation of language (Bakhtin 1981, 369–370), the obligation upon communication to examine the ethical spaces of meaning-making, whether via the public or interactions of language, have rarely been so immediate as they are for those who study the nascent spaces and interactions of the web. With less than two decades of history from which to draw and a changing environment that in this time has seen the web move from bulletin boards and email to Facebook and YouTube, an enormous burden falls upon those in the field of communication to examine how these new spaces shape the conversations that occur within them.

Few areas can claim to feel this burden to the same degree as journalism. With the crushing blows to print news over this same time period, journalism has leaped into the arms of the web for its economic survival. In doing so, professional journalism has created a myriad of new places for public meaning-making by integrating social networking technology directly into the news sites. But what is the nature of this meaning-making? How do people use it? How does this use reflect upon what we expect of ethical and useful meaning-making?

Before we can evaluate any normative expectations of these public spaces, first we must understand what is already happening within them. This chapter seeks to present an opening foundation for the larger normative discussion regarding meaning-making by the general public on news sites; the key to setting this foundation rests in examining the basic question of what types of conversations are already occurring in these new spaces.

One of the least examined aspects of web communication arises in the building block element of comment fields. The ubiquitous comment field appears on forums, blogs, and increasingly on professional news sites. Moreover, new web applications continue to arise that utilize the premise of comment fields, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Google Buzz. These web applications are then mimicked by established media sites to capitalize on the phenomenon known as the social web. The integration of these tools no doubt makes news sites seem more modern and relevant, yet little work has occurred that examines how people use these comment fields on news sites and the potential ethical implications surrounding their use. Do these comment fields change the readerships' understanding of the article? Do the comment fields carry weight similar to the article itself? These are key questions that seem worth asking even as newspapers seek relevancy and simple survival in the social web.

Thus, understanding the core functionality and nature of comment fields becomes vital to parsing how they affect online journalism. Yet, perhaps because the comment field is seldom seen as the focus of any given page, the comment field as a unit of discussion — and potentially deliberation — has been largely ignored. This chapter examines the nature of interaction occurring within six professional news outlets that utilize comment fields as a means to increase readership interactivity, offering a quantitative analysis of what occurs within the comment fields of these news sites. As such, it seeks to point out a potential ethical crisis more than to expressly determine the nature of that crisis. By explaining how comment fields are used, this chapter hopes to inspire a new conversation about their use on news sites and the risks of such use. However, as an additional consideration for the importance of this topic, the conclusion of this chapter addresses the recent phenomenon of comment fields being used real-time beside live journalistic events and the havoc that can ensue from such interactions.

What is a Comment Field?

Comment fields share a tradition of spatial relation, taking the form of a string of entries that appear in a linear chronology, either past to present or present to past, and which are tied to a specific focus. This focus might be a blog entry, status update, a news article, a video, or even a live performance. In their earliest forms, comment fields simply used a discussion topic thread as a focus, but blogs expanded this territory into the form of focus more common to news sites, where comments follow either a key video or textual article. Currently, comment fields can even focus upon live events, such as the use of Twitter to follow speeches, protests, or natural disasters. Perhaps the best known popular cases of this occurred during the Iranian protests and President Obama's first address to Congress, which made it so far as to warrant mention in the United Kingdom's *Guardian* newspaper (Was it impolite 2009). While this integration of comment fields into live events creates a pressing need to understand the nature of discussion that occurs within this aspect of the social web, it should not completely overshadow the effect comment fields have upon textual and recorded news articles as well.

The following image demonstrates a typical representation of comment fields as seen from a short-lived blog I ran while attending the 2008 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference in San Francisco:

Blogger Comment Fields

While scholarship addressing blogs, Facebook, and even Twitter has started to grow, little work exists on the comment field specifically. When one considers the effect of comment fields in personal spaces, this might be a defensible oversight given the vast range of social media available for study; yet, with the rise of comment fields in professional journalistic spaces (CNN, the *Guardian, International Herald Tribune*, etc.), the possible effect of the comment field as content can no longer be neglected. This remains particularly true if journalism's attempt to save the newspaper continues to evolve into an attempt to turn news sites into social sites with comment fields, rating systems, avatars, and linked blogs. While this chapter does not judge such attempts as a whole, it notes that the choice to do so places a new emphasis upon studying how these elements function within journalism.

By examining six websites utilized by established news media outlets, the author hopes to illuminate the nature of dialogue occurring within comment fields in these journalistic spaces. Specifically, regarding comment fields on news sites, is content dialogue occurring and to what degree?

Figure 12.1. **Blogger Comment Fields**

Comment Fields as Remediation and Convergence

Two concepts will help illustrate the importance of reviewing comment fields as dialogue, remediation as explored by Jay David Bolter in *Writing Space* (2001), and convergence as defined by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006). These two concepts, remediation and convergence, have been used over the last several years to discuss the evolution of media, particularly multimodal media, but they also help shape how we view current media and their purpose. The manner in which comment fields fit within these two established concepts can help justify the effect of comment fields upon journalism.

Jay David Bolter introduced the concept of remediation in his second revision of the text, *Writing Spaces*. After the original edition was viewed as overly steeped in technological determinism, Bolter produced the at times apologetic second edition (Bolter 2001, 7–9). In this edition, Bolter explained that media are not deterministic but adaptive in both directions (Bolter 2001, 24). In other words, while web text may try to emulate some elements of books, inevitably some books will attempt to mimic websites as well. Media adapt — or remediate — based on the successful elements of other media regardless of which is the old or new medium (Bolter 2001, 208). This suggests that media that share certain common goals or purposes move closer together in creating a type of shared context that is strengthened by whatever element of each media space most diffuses into the population. If the media are indeed the message, remediation suggests that even this message is subject to certain dialogic rules of idea sharing that cause two concepts to mutually — and inescapably — define one another's context and purpose.

It also means that our study of emerging media can be placed in a historical context; we are free to see how even ancient traditions are remediated in emerging media, such as when Robert Burnett and P. David Marshall make claim to the internet as Agora in their book, *Web Theory* (2003, 106). In a similar vein, comment fields remediate a range of activities that are captured in what the name implies: group commenting, interactive conversation, and commentary as monologue. The possibility of having a water-cooler discussion concerning a news article right in front of the reporter certainly speaks of something very old being used in a very new way.

Convergence, Henry Jenkins's concept for how multimodal communication morphs from one element to another on a mostly uncontrollable and unpredictable path, also bears mention (Jenkins 2006, 9). While

Jenkins sees convergence as a freewheeling enterprise, it can also arise from intentional juxtaposition of very different media. In this case, joining a traditional news story to social networking creates a hybrid of the two media, an intentional convergence. The question becomes whether the results of the hybrid are intentional or even predictable.

Yet, even if we do not have a name for this hybrid of professional news article combined with immediate public discourse, we can see how two forms of media have converged to create something quite different. The news article aspect suggests something more formal than a Facebook entry, but the comment field suggests something more personal than a CNN telecast. Even if the combining of the two elements is intended by all parties, it still constitutes convergence due to the distinction between the modes that are combined. This juxtaposition also constitutes some of the unanticipated consequences of convergence. How do we read the hybrid form? What gives it weight — the journalist, the public discourse, or the synthesis of the two?

Case Study

Method

This study examined six news websites in an attempt to gather a wide range of comment fields from local, national, and global news providers. The focus remained largely centered upon a United States perspective. Among global sites that used comment fields, the two — CNN and the *International Herald Tribune* — were owned by United States corporations (Time Warner and The New York Times Company, respectively). While the *Guardian* has added comment fields as of 2009, their use is becoming ubiquitous in U.S. news outlets given its growth in municipal papers, as represented within this study by the cities of Portland, OR and Austin, TX. In fact, the company that provides comment field capabilities to the *Guardian* is based in the United States and is the same company that provides the service to *USA Today* and the *Austin-American Statesman*.

The following newspapers were selected for this study:

- The *Austin-American Statesman* (local): A city paper for Austin, Texas, with a metro area slightly over one million people.
- *The Portland Oregonian* (local): A city paper located in Portland, Oregon with a metro area approaching one million people.

- *USA Today* (national): The primary news daily within the United States that lacks a metro identity.
- The *Washington Post* (national): Focused on the Washington, D.C. area, this paper also covers a number of national topics and is sold across the United States.
- CNN (global): The sole cable news provider examined, CNN has a more historically established global focus than other U.S. cable networks, including CNN-branded divisions on multiple continents.
- *International Herald Tribune* (global): Owned by the New York Times Company, the *Tribune* promotes itself as a globally focused news daily.

For each news outlet a search was done using the site search engine: once for the term “traffic” and another for the term “endorses”. The choice in terms was driven by two criteria:

- Each term needed to be a common news word to increase the likelihood it would appear in an article for each news agency during the time selected.
- The terms together should pull from two different sections of each online news agency.

“Traffic” issues are common fodder for news and the 2008 primary elections in the United States ensured that “endorses” also possessed a high frequency of use during the study period.

Initial searches were completed using the *Statesman*, CNN, and *USA Today* websites with a date range of January 21 through January 30. A second information gathering was done using the *Oregonian*, *Post*, and *Tribune* for a date range of February 27 through March 30 to create a comparison at each level: local, national, global.

Coding

Based on the work of Sally McMillan in her article, “The Microscope and the Moving Target,” tight coding was considered essential to this case study due to the history of weak coding in web content analysis (McMillan 2000, 91–93). The following definitions were used and exclusively applied:

- News website: the branded website of an established news outlet with a traditional form of publication either as a news daily paper or telecast. All outlets were members of the Associated Press.
- Article: a piece of reporting that appears on the branded website, credited to either the AP or the staff of the news organization owning the paper. This excluded unpaid bloggers.
- Comment field: a post by a labeled user that is specifically attached to the article in question.
- User/username: a recognizable label attached to a comment that demarks who or what account made the comment.
- Content interaction: a comment field that referred directly to the textual content of an article.
- Comment interaction: a comment that quoted actual text or a username from another comment field attached to the same article.
- Introduction of new content: a quote, quoted fact, or link to outside material not mentioned in either the article or another comment field.
- Introduction of complex arguments: multiple ideas expressed within a comment that are denoted by the use of multiple sentences or semicolons to identify separate thoughts.
- Unique poster: the number of unique users identified by name in each string of comment fields attached to a single article.

Each comment field entry was coded for each trait it possessed from the above list. This methodology was used to look at what type of interaction occurred within the context of the comment fields and no attempt to draw conclusions about the news sites based on these data was pursued due to the limited number of sites viewed. While the statistics might appear to suggest trends based on news site size or the type of news organization, this paper stops short of endorsing any such reading at this time due to limited sample size.

Results

Among the six websites, 11 of 12 possible matches were found. The lone exception was that CNN did not have an article for traffic within the set date range for comments. However, in all other cases matches were found. This resulted in a pool of 206 comment fields across 11 articles and six websites.

While the full data set is available from the author of this study, the results have been summarized below for the sake of space and clarity. The percentages quoted reflect the total percentage of the 206 posts that contained the form of content listed as coded by the earlier definitions.

Content Interaction: 85.92 percent of Posts

As expected, most of the comment fields reflected on the content of the article. However, the amount of additional discussion was surprising; the comment fields averaged almost 100 words per post. The interaction also seemed to reflect upon the style of posts. While spelling errors, punctuation problems, and other issues frequently arose, emoticons were noticeably absent. This suggests a formality to comment fields on news sites that challenges the way we think of posts on many other social sites as brief and even playful. The time taken to write such long posts suggests the writers take this interaction seriously, and this suggests a new type of civic and public action, even if its worth is not yet validated. How newspapers govern and evolve such spaces could have an immense effect upon how and whether civic involvement grows or falters in these spaces.

The following example shows a comment field from the *Washington Post* interacting with the article:

Figure 12.2. **Article Interaction Post**

Comment Interaction: 9.7 percent of Posts

A low rate of comment interaction comparative to article interaction should be expected. In fact, given the tight coding this study required for comment interaction (quoting a username or quoting direct text), the rate of comment interactions seems quite high. While the majority of comment fields fail to produce traditional back and forth dialogue, they do produce some internal reactions. The most important aspect of this may simply be proof that many people who post comments also read the comments left by others.

This is key since — when posting occurred in this study — the average post count was almost 20 posts per article; comment interaction, thus, required considerable commitment of time to read and engage. While this study's highest post count on a single article was 86, several articles that did not meet the strict search criterion of this paper's methodology had well over 100 posts.

This sample from the *Oregonian* demonstrates comment interaction:

Figure 12.3. **Comment Interaction Post**

Introduction of New Ideas: 31.07 percent of Posts

The flood of opinions and public analysis may not stir too much immediate concern within the ranks of news organizations, but the introduction of unverified links and facts not presented within an article might give pause. If people are reading these posts, which previous results suggest they are, then the news sites also are introducing the facts and links within the comment fields. Since all the sites observed contained some form of moderation, there also exists a tacit — if somewhat ambiguous — editorial approval of links and facts contained within the comments.

While opinions speak to a personal dialogue, it appears that many users took it upon themselves to cite sources and introduce considerable amounts of new information into the article discussions. Even in this limited sample, users linked to political websites, organizations, and even other major news sites to elaborate on the facts or related issues. Citations often did not relate directly to specific information but were links to general sites. No attempt was made in this case study to verify the accuracy of citations.

Here is a *USA Today* example of new information being introduced:

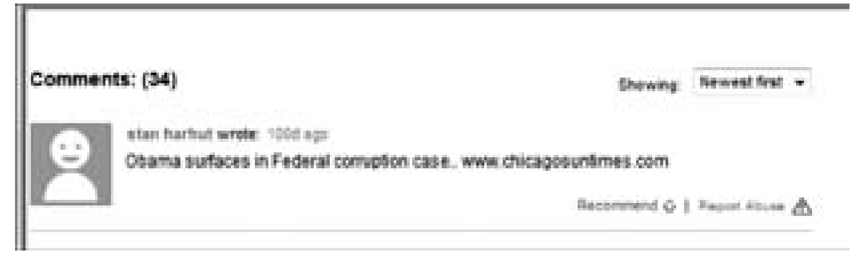

Figure 12.4. **Introduction of New Ideas Post**

Introduction of Complex Arguments: 88.83 percent of Posts

This statistic offered one of the most compelling insights into news site comment fields. People truly wish to write and express themselves in these posts, if we take volume as an indication. They may vary greatly in skill, but the effort to produce certainly seems evident. These were seldom scatter-shot asides, but significant commentary, rants, tirades, proselytizing, and all the forms of discourse that we might expect were shouted into the public spaces or agora.

Here is a response from CNN demonstrating a multilayered response:

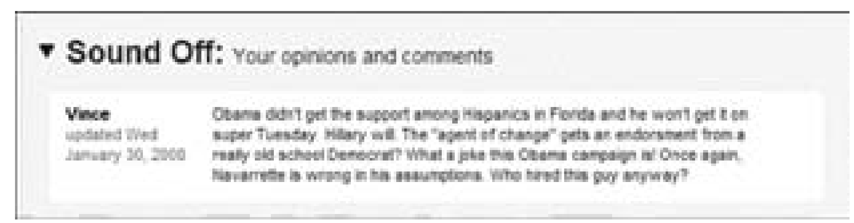

Figure 12.5. **Introduction of Complex Arguments Post**

Conclusion

While plenty of additional study needs to be pursued regarding comment fields in general, including further studies into how they affect readership and who is posting these comments, the information provided in this study leaves little doubt that some level of dialogue is occurring based on the percentages of quotations of other comment fields and the citation of outside materials. This study also suggests that the comment fields on news sites reflect the nature of their environments by possessing substantial word count, multiple ideas, active discussion, and attempts at citing sources. The lack of emoticons and common internet abbreviations also suggests a different rhetorical space than many other websites.

These comment fields appear to remediate less water-cooler conversation than the rough and freewheeling speech of a heckler or aside monologist who upon occasion exchanges a series of shouted diatribes with another heckler. While it hardly appears to reach the level of deliberation, these spaces are clearly active and interactive. Certainly less professional than the articles with which they interact in their editing and style, these comment fields nonetheless are being read, responded to, and they shape the news experience in which they exist, according to the statistics presented here. Thus, they warrant documentation as a reality of modern journalism and must be considered a part of the journalistic system. Moreover, their use calls for increased scrutiny of the practical implications arising from the fact that these discussions occur next to legitimate news stories, including studies of whether people grant higher credit to these comments due exclusively to the rhetorical place they inhabit on legitimate news sites. Is a conspiracy theory more believable because it occurs in a *Washington Post* comment field than a random net forum?

Limitations

It is worth repeating that this study looked only at the comment fields themselves, not the sites in which the comment fields occurred. Many of the sites used different systems to allow comments and the role of moderators was completely ignored in this paper because the sites did not offer fully transparent codification of the role moderators played in governing the comment fields.

The actual identity of posters also remains a complete mystery. Who posts on these sites and to what end can only be guessed at and needs further study. The tracing of IP addresses might lead to interesting discoveries of who is shaping the discussion of particular topics. It also might demonstrate just how nationally or regionally biased this phenomenon actually is.

The systems used also warrant a closer look. Of note, one company (Pluck, now a part of Demand Media) created the commenting software for half of the sites examined within this paper (*USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and the *Austin-American Statesman*) and six of the 11 articles coded.

Such domination in this growing field cannot be overlooked in the analysis. The possible concern of so few shaping the manner of a growing public discourse also deserves additional and continued research.

One final call to research exists in whether the discourse of news sites varies from that of popular, independent blogs. It might help define the current role of both journalism and blogs to understand the who, the how, and the why of comment field interaction with each.

A Narrative Aside as Warning: Sarah Lacey, SXSW, and Twitter

In concluding this case study, the author wishes to relate a case that helps illustrate the current impact of this hybrid culture and why it creates an immediate concern. The case involves a technological revolt against a journalist and the bombast that destroyed the initial journalistic endeavor and threatened to have wider reach. This event should demonstrate the power and possible threat of these comment fields if left unexamined and undervalued.

In March of 2008, Sarah Lacey interviewed Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg in front of a live audience at the SXSW Interactive Conference in Austin, Texas. The tech-savvy crowd received Lacey's interview style poorly and many felt that their concerns were ignored by an interview that was unresponsive to the audience.

The crowd turned to what was at the time a little-known "microblogging" tool named Twitter — in essence a comment-gathering website designed for real-time events, but limited to only 140 characters rather than the hundreds of words useable in the examples within this case study. The crowd created *ad hoc* comment fields via Twitter about Lacey's live interview. The commenting became so aggressive that the live crowd began to disrupt the live interview with jeering, shouted questions, and direct dialogue with the performance inspired mainly by the discussion in Twitter. The hybrid event created by the live interview and the Twitter commenting led to a revolt in which the crowd took over the interview and Lacey became angry, flustered, and confused — totally unaware at the time of how or why the crowd had turned on her.

The possibility that news site comment fields could be remediated back into the public space via software like Twitter should be of great concern to politicians, teachers, business executives, actors, and anyone who fails to appreciate the power of a unified, active audience. Did the fact that the crowd began to associate the Twitter comment field and the journalistic event as rhetorically one and the same, rather than distinct enterprises, allow the crowd to more assertively justify disruptive behavior?

As technology diffuses, audiences will empower their own comments upon public speaking forums, generating live dialogue during these events. The debacle at SXSW shows why understanding comment field hybrids is important before other media remediate in this direction and intentional convergence becomes unanticipated convergence.

Reacting to the possible breakdowns caused by unintentional convergence rather than planning for them is clearly unacceptable when the need for study is visible now, as is the means of study. The author hopes that proof of the capabilities of comment fields will inspire further, aggressive study and consideration for comment field research.

Note

1 Michael Trice is currently fulfilling a year at the University of Leeds under a Fulbright student scholarship to the United Kingdom. At the Leeds' Centre for Digital Citizenship, he is working on developing wikis and other social media capable of storing the oral traditions of localized communities. Michael received his B.A. in English from the University of Texas and an M.A. in Technical Communication from Texas State University. He also serves as an Assistant Editor for *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. He has worked for Apple Computer, Hart InterCivic, South by Southwest Interactive, and Wizards of the Coast.

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13

Citizen Journalists and Civic Responsibility: Decorum in an Age of Emerging Media

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BEGINNING WITH THE CASE OF Neda Agha Soltan, whose death on June 20, 2009, was captured by cell phones and circulated worldwide through social media, this analysis focuses on citizen journalists in an age that has been characterized as the secondary orality of cyberspace. The classical concept of decorum that guided the good citizen in the classical era provides the foundation for understanding the function of the individual in society, the changing idea of community, and the challenges of citizen journalism to institutional power.

On June 12, 2009, Iranians went to the polls to elect a new president. In what was popularly perceived to be a fraudulent outcome, incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the election against favored opponents. Widespread protests immediately broke out as citizens took to the streets. In an effort to quell protests, the Iranian government curtailed foreign reporting, cracked down on protesters, and attempted to jam internet access (Grossman 2009, 23; Le Favre 2009; Sreberny-Mohammadi 1990, 367).

Since foreign journalists were limited to filing one news report per day and generally banned from participating in any street activity, Iranian citizen journalists filing stories via cell phones, tweets, Facebook, and blogs were a critical source of information during the news blackout. As a CNN newscaster admitted: "We're dependent on Iranians reporting from inside the country for our understanding of what is happening there" (CNN 2009). Emerging media were critical to eyewitnesses inside Iran who functioned as citizen journalists reporting to the outside world.

On June 20, 2009, two cell phone videos, one 40 seconds long and the other 14 seconds long, captured the death of a young Iranian woman, Neda Agha Soltan, shot during the protests. The videos were circulated among almost seven million viewers worldwide who joined the discussions through social media and other online news forums that featured commentary, breaking news, background information, and, of course, the video itself (CNN 2009). It was the top trending topic on Twitter by the evening of Soltan's death and during the following days. According to one citizen journalist, "The final moments of her tender young life leaked into the pavement of Karegeh Street today, captured by cell phone cameras, and not long after, took on new life, flickering across computer screens around the world" (CNN 2009). This case offers a window on citizen journalism, fast becoming a prominent feature in news reporting. As media corporations undergo economic downsizing and convergence, reliance on citizen journalists for news reporting has increased (Miller and Stone 2009). The coverage of events during the Iranian protests reflects practices that are becoming commonplace in news gathering and reporting worldwide. Although not a new idea, ordinary citizens have contributed as news reporters because of easy access to emerging media outlets and economic pressures on traditional news organizations (Grossman 2009, 24).

The Soltan case demonstrates the ethical conundrums of citizen journalism. As such, it requires a closer examination of the historical tensions among the individual, community, and power as well as the implications for ethical practices in the expanding role of citizens in reporting news. Citizen journalists are defined by scholars as those who broadcast personal, often narrow, observations outside the realm of professional journalism. In the Soltan case hundreds of citizens armed with cell phones and internet connections kept the world informed of developments inside Iran in spite of the government news blackout and attempts to intimidate Iranian citizens (Grossman 2009, 24; Rhoads *et al.* 2009, A9).

The widespread availability of multiple media channels has encouraged citizen journalism to an extent never before witnessed (Rutigliano

2007, 227). The result has challenged the traditional functions of journalism and requires further examination as we reconceptualize citizen journalism as the performance of public citizenship. Using the case of Soltan, this chapter will investigate the ethics of citizen journalism in relationship to civic responsibility. Our concern is not the individual citizen operating as a journalist, but rather the changing relationships generated by emerging media. First, we will examine the historical roots of citizen participation and then consider its impact on ethical practices in three general arenas — the conceptualization of self, the community, and power relationships.

The Importance of the Individual

In Western tradition, generations of scholars have examined the role of the individual in relationship to society. A fundamental theme in their reflections is the tension between communication that seeks to influence and communication that is moral. This tension is crystallized in the Platonic bifurcation of the flatterer and the philosopher in early Greek rhetoric (Enos 1995, 9; Kennedy 1963, 25–42; Walzer 2006, 276). Later, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian provided a compromise when he described the human being's functioning as part of an oral society with a particular responsibility to it (Walzer 2006, 267). Such a man (slaves and women were excluded) operated fully within his society but was guided by the principles of responsibility, straddling purposive communication (rhetoric) and its grounding in reason (philosophy). Decorum, or the comportment of individuals as they speak and act in a civil manner in society, became the objective of Quintilian's "good man" (Book II 2002, xxi, 14–15). And, in Quintilian's view, the citizen who chose to engage in public discourse was required to demonstrate his own character as a precondition to civic participation. The good man (and much later, woman) continued to be a condition for public expression into the twentieth century. Like Quintilian's good man, citizen journalists operate as members of a society that requires their active participation to ask essential questions, to test the assumptions of claims, and to address critical social issues.

Recently, scholars have characterized the new media frontier as the coming of a new orality, not unlike the social order of Quintilian's day. Walter Ong posits that communication technology accounts for changing culture and consciousness in this age of "secondary orality" (1971, 284–303). Secondary orality resembles its pre-print predecessor because it fosters a sense of community, concentrates on the present moment, and elevates formulaic expression (Ong 1971). A primary difference between the new orality and its Greek predecessor is access to a larger community grounded in emerging media technologies. For participants in primary orality, the community extended as far as the sound of the human voice would carry, thus Greek and Roman philosophers and teachers focused on the role of the public orator (Enos 1995, 41; Kennedy 1963, 39). Today technological changes allow us to interact with a far larger audience, perhaps more extensive than we can imagine (Eisenstein 2007, 102).

The proliferation of new media allows individuals to bypass the traditional gatekeepers in society — governments, corporations, socio-political interests, and other institutional barriers — creating a proliferation of maverick users and thereby placing even greater importance on the character of the citizen journalist. Professional journalists are bound by professional codes of ethical conduct as well as laws that protect and proscribe their function. However, the citizen journalist is not limited by such codes, intervening layers of editors, or other constraints. As a result, their news can take almost any form.

The circulation of information via emerging media makes it possible for individuals to establish a personal presence on mass consciousness in a new way. The effect is to empower the individual and to lower the barriers between private identity and public consciousness. The availability and variety of emerging media provide the catalyst for thousands of users to broadcast their observations to the rest of the cyberworld as forms of ego-casting (Dervin and Riikonen 2009, 126). Blogs, for example, are a popular venue for individuals to vent and potentially to influence others. As one citizen journalist summarizes, "It's less about the act itself, and more about the affiliation of the person who perpetrated the act" (Agaric 2007). In this configuration, traditional source credibility distinctions break down among internet users (Rainie 2008). Secondary orality stresses the centrality of the individual in the communication process, even if the communication occurs globally (Nagle 1995, 87).

In this era of secondary orality, we are simultaneously group-minded and hyper-conscious of self. As Ong speculates, "Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward" (1995, 68). While this claim seems curiously contradictory, it reintroduces the concept of decorum, as the individual participates directly in the wired community of the internet. It raises the conception of the individual who functions as Quintilian's good man — simultaneously private and public, inseparable from a public role. At this juncture, the old joins the new as the primary orality of ancient Greece re-emerges, transformed into the secondary orality of cyberspace.

The Changing Idea of Community

New media technologies allow users to transcend the limits of geography and to make localities more immediate than ever before. This seeming paradox is evidenced by the failure of unidirectional print news to thrive in a world of new media where individuals can communicate directly with others, making information immediate and geography irrelevant. Quintilian understood the public person as operating within an immediate, recognizable community or public. Walter Ong also situated people in a public context, needing to act, but subject to the strictures of the public environment. He recognized the need for each individual to make decisions grounded in an ethical stance within the immediate situation (Ong 1977, 16–49).

Both Quintilian and Ong understood the public context to be a geographically bounded community. However, emerging media have expanded this notion of community beyond the traditional constraints of geography. Communities have been generally defined by the limitations of space; people joined together as their locations allowed them to meet and interact. However, since the rise of the internet, the idea of community as a spatially based construction has shifted; virtual communities can be easily and quickly constructed in cyberspace, hence defying geographical limitations. Shared beliefs, interests, and social bonds define internet communities (Hampton and Wellman 2003, 278; Stavitsky 1994, 22; Wellman and Guilia 1999, 168). Virtual communities bind physically distant individuals, instill a sense of camaraderie among otherwise disparate people, and provide the opportunity for collective identity and voice.

New media technologies have contributed to the fragmentation of traditional audiences and reconfiguration of wired audiences, allowing many to participate in socio-political discussions in immediate and complex ways. Fundamentally, these technologies have altered the relationship of individuals to their communities. For example, traditional news was a primarily linear process controlled by professional journalists who reported from sources to audiences after the event; web news allows audience members (functioning as citizen journalists) to become involved at any stage of news creation in a process that is viral or rhizome-like (Burnett 1993). Media users can contribute to news formation and even change its direction, introducing threads that can reorient the discussion. Online journalism demonstrates the growing complexities of community as a social construct since professional journalists who represented specific audiences are now pressured by informal channels of information managed by disparate, untrained amateurs in a world of shifting or illusory boundaries (Alterman 2003, 83; Singer 2007, 28).

In the Soltan case, citizen journalists instigated various news tangents such as discussions of the authenticity of the cell phone images, the identity of the shooter, the physical beauty of Neda, and the role of women in the Iranian protests. Many users posted poetry, personal tributes to Neda's bravery, and other memorials. The forum for discussion was not bounded by traditional definitions of newsworthiness but expanded to encompass the trivial, the banal, and the irrelevant, often preferencing reports of individual experiences. Much of the internet chatter was concentrated on the individual and the present moment. And, individual news reports often co-opted the internet for political and personal purposes (Keren 2006, 126). Many of the reports were erroneous as well.

One particular segment of emerging media that exemplifies the preeminence of individual experience is the prevalence of citizen journalist blogs (short for web logs). According to Technorati, a search engine tracking them, a blog is created every 7.4 seconds. The total number of blogs rose to 8 million in early 2007; it has more than doubled since then. They reached approximately one-quarter of all internet users from 2007–2008; many of these users reported that the internet was their primary source for news (Coren 2007; Rainie 2008). A recent Nielsen Company report concluded that social media use increased 82 percent worldwide during the past year with social websites such as Facebook and blogs the most common sites visited by users. The report concluded that social media is "a trend that is not only here to stay, but one that is growing at a mind-boggling magnitude" (NielsenWire 2010).

For nations such as Iran whose population is mostly below 30 years of age, internet use is even higher than average.

Even so, the influence of citizen journalists on traditional news sources is indirect and compounded among other things by the informal nature of such commentary as well as the personal tone, frequent lack of source verification, and the ephemeral nature of their content. Such commentary is expressive, formulaic, and immediate, as was the oratory of their Greek and Roman predecessors in the public forum. As Jane Kirtley, University of Minnesota professor of law and media ethics, concludes: "Blogs are not intended to be objective. They are supposed to be opinionated, snarky and in your face . . ." — clearly not the role of traditional journalism (Hull 2006, 65). For example, a song, "United for Neda," recorded entirely on cell phones to pay homage to the Iranian protesters, circulated widely on social media during the weeks following her death (Baron and Serena 2009). The overwhelming pathos of the song, ostensibly written and recorded by Iranian protesters living outside Iran, appealed to bloggers, but would probably not have met the standards for traditional news.

Citizen journalists freely mix opinions with news, often without checking facts. Former "locations" of opinion such as editorial or commentary pages have long established a sense of objectivity in other parts of newsprint (Reese 1990, 392). Similarly, broadcast news reporting has clearly separated apparent fact from opinion in distinct segments of the broadcast. Citizen journalists do not make clear distinctions among news, opinion, and tirades; all are blended in blogs and other social media forums (Singer 2007, 23). In sum, as citizen journalists invade the traditional province of professional journalism, the relationship of news sources to professional brokers of power has been transformed.

Challenges to Institutionalized Power

Ultimately, the concern of this chapter is that, while emerging media expand access to information, they do not free users from the constraints of power. Rather, power operates at every level of interaction, as Foucault notes:

> When I think of the mechanics of power, I think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures,

> their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people.
>
> (1997, 177–178)

For journalists, power is not simply experienced in obvious ways through editorial oversight or financial influences of institutions, but also in the conventions that govern their reporting, their assumptions about truth, their preferences for language and style, and even in the structure of their social interactions.

Some scholars have predicted a massive revolution in the structure of social interactions because the internet fundamentally has changed human interactions. For example, Alan Hedley argues, "what is at stake are the very thought processes of those dominated. Learning to live with emerging media may require a shift in our understanding of how we interact in our mediated worlds by influencing others—just knowing that we can individually participate directly in global discussions may shift our understanding of what constitutes knowledge and thereby power" (1998, 2). The impact of this influence is articulated by Clifford Christians: "Although technologies have always been used, we are now in a quantum shift to another order of magnitude . . . [that] reorganizes society to conform to their demand for efficiency" (1998, 67). The very nature of human society has been reoriented from the individual to the community as the ubiquitous presence of new media demand participation to be part of this new order. Thus, the individual within the community becomes subject to practices of power. Christians calls for a new ethics:

> [a] sophisticated social ethics to match the power of our instrumental era. Modern technology has introduced such novel scales and consequences that the framework of traditional ethics must be reexamined. Given the explosive and largely unknown effects of technological innovation, for example, consequentialist ethics on the whole are irrelevant. Moreover, the incredible development of technology in the professions is radically transforming their structure and practice. The threat is that moral purpose will be sacrificed to technological excellence.
>
> (1998, 67)

Our current models of professional responsibility built on journalistic and legal strictures do not address the conditions of global communications. We need to explore the ethical practices of new media users like

citizen journalists amid the sociological changes induced by new media. However, while the shift in media may require a corresponding shift in our conceptualizations of power, the fundamental certainty is that power will continue to be exercised, even in a newly mediated world. It will continue to configure our understanding of truth because "it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Foucault 1997, 177).

Thus, the individual, buffeted by vested interests, must generate a way of thinking and living in a world that is immersed in the exercise of power. As Quintilian suggested, this recognition of the human being in the world brings with it a responsibility to behave ethically — to actively create an examined identity for oneself and choose ethical courses of action in concert with that identity. Thus, ethics exists as "a set of truth obligations; discovering the truth, being enlightened by the truth, telling the truth" (Foucault 1997, 178). This is essentially the ethical work of the individual operating within the community — to develop moral conduct that satisfies the obligations of truth and that is an integral part of the self; to understand the power relationships inherent in all life situations, to expect movement or adaptation from the created self in order to survive and satisfy the demands of practical existence (Conway 1996, 201; Leslie 2004, 32). For citizen journalists, this conduct is more than just the verification of facts but also requires sharing the range of human experiences.

Adjusting Ethical Practices

The established codes of ethics and past practices of professional journalists have an enforcement mechanism that depends upon layers of editors, advertisers, and others who regulate what goes into print — a top-down form of centralized authority and control that is codified as standards of practice and sometimes laws. The code of ethics that will arise in the midst of our current technological revolution must engage the user of social media networks who operates in a decentralized environment that does not feature such conventional controls. There are three places that ethical practices should emerge — with the self, with the interaction of self and community, and with practices of power that limit the self.

Ethical Practice # 1: Responsibility of the Individual

While Foucault did not develop a formal system of ethics and, according to Bernauer and Mahon, perhaps would even have opposed such systematization as "universal standards of behavior that legislate conformity and normalization . . . in accordance with a least common denominator," Foucault's formation of selfhood served as an ethical extension of the social constructions of community and power (1994, 153). Like Quintilian's conception of decorum essential to the good man, an ethical self could only arise from personal reflection rooted in a sense of personal identity which functions as a prelude to ethical action. Thus, identity, shaped through self-formation, is a prelude to ethical action.

Self-formation is the process whereby ethics becomes a lifestyle or way of living; it is the practice of living in conformity with one's predetermined ethical goals. This self-formation requires reflection and examination to "define his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decide on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal" (Bernauer and Mahon 1994, 143). In this way, ethics is an inherent part of the individual, exhibited in every lifestyle choice, rather than a set of rules that are arbitrarily applied in given situations. Ethics, for Foucault, are "a lifestyle, a way of thinking and living" (Bernauer and Mahon 1994, 154). Similarly, Quintilian's good man could resist ideas that were faulty, illogical, and antithetical to one's own beliefs because he was grounded in an understanding of self (Quintilian 2002, II v).

In the virtual community, citizen journalists can take or evade responsibility, partially because there is limited oversight and also because blogs are ephemeral, often shifting so rapidly that responsibility, like the source of a rumor, is difficult to trace. In the virtual community, personal identity is not subject to physical verification; it can be created, distorted, or otherwise manipulated. The question of who is the "self" reporting cannot be easily verified. Ultimately, the individual is responsible for representing self in a manner that is ethical.

In the Soltan case, the verification of citizen reporters was limited, not just by the lack of information about the news source, but by fear of government reprisals. In addition, these reports were picked up and circulated by other media sources adding to the potential for mistakes, unintentional or otherwise. In some ways, this form of reporting changed the responsibility of authorship from the individual to the group; everyone assumed the obligation of truth in the reactivation of oral traditions of jointly constructed discourses (Foucault 1969, 134).

The mistakes in the Soltan case were numerous. It might not ultimately matter whether Neda was a student of music or philosophy, or that she died in the arms of a family member, her music teacher, or a stranger, but all of these claims were made. It might make some difference if she were a protester pelting police with rocks or a bystander who had just left a hot car to seek the cooler air of the streets. And, verification of the source of the bullet is potentially most problematic with reports that the gunman was a rooftop sniper or a man riding past on a motorbike or, more ominously, a member of the state security forces targeting protesters ("Young Woman" 2009).

Beyond the annoying contradictions in these citizen journalists' reports, there is the more central question of the accuracy of information and perhaps the trustworthiness of the source of the reports. Citizen journalists tackled these questions as well, discussing whether the video was faked, the desensitization of video viewers due to media dramas saturated with violent deaths, the dominance of beautiful women in the reports from Iran, and the overwhelming presence of media in the private moments of life. Aly Colon, online columnist with the Poynter ethics program, cited an email that argued for a need to distinguish between verifiable facts and rumors. The email concluded: "Just as we tend to take some print and broadcast journalism with a large grain of salt, we'll have to learn to parse what we read online — to develop a hierarchy of trust" (Colon 2009). This email acknowledges that some of the models that we have used in the past to evaluate print and traditional sources of information will continue to be useful. However, the citizen journalist who takes on the responsibility of reporting also assumes responsibility for accuracy and truth. In the final analysis, the contradictions that surface with non-professional reporters perhaps speak to the inherent limitations of knowing the truth rather than the desirability of one media form over another.

Ethical Practice #2: The Configuration of the Community

Commentators suggest that the most interesting part of the Iranian protests was the social networking media in the protests. According to Ali Anooshahr, "Arguably the most fascinating aspect of the protests is how the Internet and social media tools like Twitter circulated images and eyewitness reports to the world" (Parker 2009). The global response to Soltan's death coalesced the cyber-communities of pre-existing and newly formed groups in response to government media sources.

Most of the major candidates in the Iranian presidential election had their own websites, which responded to the death of Soltan. The re-elected government also posted updates regarding her death. Government participation in the online discussion is partly due to the skewed demographics of the Iranian population — 70 percent of Iranians are under the age of 30. They are more likely to use social media than older Iranians. An estimated three or four million internet users in Iran make it among the top ten nations globally in the percentage of internet users and the result is that the internet has opened up Iranian society and culture dramatically in spite of constant government censorship and the threat of imprisonment for those who access it (Vanden Heuvel 2009). Afshin Holavi explains the internet's potency: "The political blogs have a power beyond their small readership because of the reverberation effect: When they break a story or simply spread a juicy rumor, it is immediately emailed to hundreds of thousands of wired Iranians and filtered to the non-wired Iranians through word-of-mouth" (Vanden Heuvel 2009). Paradoxically, while Iran remains a politically closed society, it is wildly open in the blogosphere where an enthusiastic community of users fiercely challenges the traditional government structure and permits the flow of information and ideas that cannot occur through more traditional venues (Vaden Heuvel 2009). The circuitous route most citizen journalists operating in Iran must take to post to the outside world is evidence of their media savvy as well as the constraints under which they operate.

By October 15, 2009, over 6.5 million blogs alone treated the death of Neda Agha Soltan. Dozens of Facebook pages were dedicated to her; more than 50 users changed their names to Neda. In addition to their sheer numbers, blogs were available in hundreds of languages from Chinese to Farsi, reconfiguring traditional news readership into a more diverse group than ever before (Sheikholeslami and Alexander 2009). As News Media Index, a site that measures activity on the internet, noted for the week of June 22–26, almost half (47 percent) of all internet traffic involved discussion of either the death of Michael Jackson or the shooting of Neda Soltan, who was rapidly becoming the powerful symbol of the protest movement. Together these two stories accounted for most of the links to traditional press news sites. According to Tweetmeme, which tracks links embedded in tweets across the globe, the death of Soltan represented 64 percent of all news-related links (New Media Index 2009). Tweetmeme concluded that the death of Soltan became ". . . the latest demonstration of the power, both emotional and political, of the many-to-many nature of social media" (New Media Index 2009).

Online communities may reflect more diverse ideological themes because they are not operating within geographical constraints, but rather, can attract a self-selected audience that holds similar beliefs. For example, the Western viewpoint of many U.S.-based bloggers surfaced in the repeated reference to the bravery of the lone student who faced a tank column on Peking's Tiananmen Square in 1989 (Rutten 2009, 23). The comparison awarded Neda the status of a democratic hero. Perhaps for this reason all references to Soltan were censored in China, although alternative sites in English remained accessible. The decentralization of power structures evidenced by the failure of governments to control access to internet sites demonstrates, on the one hand, the increasing fragmentation of communities, but on the other, the shifting nature of communities from geographic space to cyberspace (Kievit 2009; "Video" 2009).

Critics argue that a potential disadvantage of social media is that they encourage the fragmentation of communities because users will access only those sites that reinforce their own predetermined views. U.S. scholars have been especially concerned with this possibility, suggesting that "Americans may lose the shared political vocabulary and experience that is the foundation for representative, democratic government" (Patterson and Wilkins 2002, 248). This tendency, they argue, is exacerbated by the current practices of niche marketing, audience segmentation, and media targeting that predispose Americans to selective exposure to mediated messages. They worry that Americans will identify more closely with their constructed online communities than with their nation.

Did new media add to the polarization of political factions in Iran? While this question is impossible to answer, we can speculate that instead of opening dialogue in search of solutions, new media were commandeered to express hardened positions. In Iran, official government websites and blogs concentrated on defending the election results and blaming "foreign instigators" for stirring up protesters to challenge the legitimacy of the government (Siamdoust 2009). Meanwhile, anti-government sites rarely took a neutral position on the death of Soltan, calling instead for the resignation of Ahmadinejad.

Ethical Practice #3: The Exercise of Power

Ultimately, it appears that no matter which media transfer information or who is using that media system, the access to information reveals the struggle for power. Such a struggle was evident immediately following the death of Soltan. Although cellular telephone networks and internet sites were blocked, protesters managed to get first-hand reports to others outside Iran through the microblogging platform Twitter (Le Favre 2009). From Twitter, information spread through various social and traditional media. Doug Gross reported that the Iranian government responded by cracking down on online networks but citizens managed to stay ahead of government censors. Even so, one correspondent observed during the period following Soltan's death: "There's been a noticeable decline already in the amount of photos and video that's coming down . . . That says that, thus far, the government is succeeding" (Gross 2009). Frustrated Iranian citizen journalists continued to evade government filters by innovative use of third-party servers and alternative media (Khiabany and Sreberny 2009; Saadadi 2009).

This case reveals the tension between traditional power structures and emerging forces that threaten them. The death of Soltan, although attracting worldwide attention, is just one instance of an ongoing power struggle in which the Iranian government has targeted the media use of particular political groups, such as feminist websites (Miller 2009). Jila Kazerounian summarizes the horrific sacrifices by groups of women in the fight against the repressive Iranian regimes: "Throughout the years, the brave women of Iranian resistance have stood up to the most brutal and vicious religious dictatorship of the 20th century . . . Neda and her friends are an extension of those brave women who have throughout the years stood up to the mullahs and who have never given up" (Kazerounian 2009). This struggle pits those who have traditionally been voiceless against the most powerful forces in Iran, evident in the fight over access to information.

We are occasionally seduced by the novelty of new technologies and forget the fundamental underlying structures that they serve. For example, a problem with attributing the Iranian revolution to emerging media is outlined in an online blog:

> Still others want to call this a "Twitter revolution" or a "Facebook revolution," as if zippy new technology alone had inspired the protests. But the truth is that the high turnout was the result of many years of organizational work carried out by small groups of civil rights activists and, above all, women's groups, working largely unnoticed and without much outside help . . . Not Obama, not Bush, and not Twitter, in other words, but years of work and effort lie behind the public display of defiance.
>
> ("Voice of woman" 2009)

In the aftermath of Soltan's death, information was highly inconsistent. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's website and Iranian police sources stated that between 17 and 20 protesters died during the month-long protests. Independent sources posted by citizen journalists concluded that the death toll was much higher with several dozen deaths each day (Fassihi 2009). The day of Soltan's death alone, 457 people were arrested and many had not yet returned to their families in September (Heintz 2009). Almost all reports revealed enormous discrepancies between official sources and citizen journalists (Karimi 2009).

There were also contradictory reports about the treatment of Soltan's family. Some citizen journalists said that her family was forced out of their home by government security forces or that they fled in fear, others wrote that only the family was allowed to attend funeral services, and still others reported that the family was not allowed to display the traditional black banner signifying mourning, and that neighbors, friends, and relatives were barred from visiting the family during the traditional mourning days three, seven and 40 days after her death (Leavey 2009; Samanthajane13 2009). Like the inconsistencies in the number of protester deaths, only the government position remained unchanged, suggesting perhaps the hegemonic nature of the ideology of objectivity that permeated government protectors of power (Reese 1990, 394).

Traditional print journalists often represent global media conglomerates and members of well-educated, middle-income social classes. As such, traditional journalists and their media outlets are most likely to repeat those values that reinforce their financial grounding in capitalist enterprises. It is highly unlikely that other alternative voices will receive attention in traditional media. As Thomas McPhail, who calls this phenomenon "electronic colonialism," concludes, "This group is not about to promote a revolution or seriously question the economic structure of the global economy that is providing them and their firms with a sound financial future" (2002, 159).

Conversely, the power of emerging media is located in the collaborative nature of its construction. In recent years, the popularity of projects like the Firefox internet browser and Wikipedia has revealed the potential of thousands of contributors to create collaborative works. This new collaboration has unleashed a force that is less subject to traditional controls, sometimes resulting in contradictory claims, but realigning power so that it is more broadly shared. The shift in the balance of power invites formerly excluded factions, like women and the politically disenfranchised, to participate in socio-political processes (Davis 2005, 13).

When emerging media technologies disrupt the patterns of privilege, they promise increasing social justice. However, to the extent that new media remain within the province of the socially and economically privileged, they serve to replicate the power inequities that pervade current social and political structures (Mossberger *et al.* 2008, 120). These structures operate in the best interests of their stakeholders who may be accountable legally but not morally to their communities (Spinello 1993, 17). The result is that the clusters of power remain mostly unchallenged.

Even though emerging media offer faster, broader access to information, some people will be left out of the technological revolution. In effect, the power brokers may change, but the inequality of access to power will remain unchanged. As Christians claims, "The history of the communications media indicates that they follow existing political and economic patterns; inequalities in society lead to inequalities in technology" (1998, 92). This would suggest that unequal access to news outlets that existed during the domination of print media will be replicated as new forms of news gathering and distribution emerge. Those whose stories have been overlooked in the past — the poor and disenfranchised peoples of the world — will continue to be ignored while powerful and well-funded interests will dominate media.

Emerging media threaten to leave behind millions of people worldwide who do not have the education, financial resources, language, or savvy to access new media technologies. The result may be a global class structure of those who are informed by mediated communication and those who are disconnected, therefore voiceless, in a wired society (Hedley 1998, 2; Read 1992, 213). In this process of exclusion, emerging media may construct a type of electronic colonialism. According to the United Nations Development Program Tenth Report on the Internet and Computer Technology, the technological/information

gap between wealthy and impoverished nations intensified at the end of the twentieth century and is projected to continue (Christians 1998, 93; Miller 1999, A8).

In Iran, power shifted to include young, technologically savvy urban citizens, especially young women (Jezebel 2009; Millar 2009). Their participation energized formerly excluded segments of Iranian society, leading to predictions of a new Iranian revolution (Fields 2009; Sehat 2009). However, rural Iranians, older citizens, and those who did not speak English were less likely to have access to technology and, as a consequence, were often barred from participation. At the very least, it is clear that power was dynamic, shifting its boundaries but still excluding some members of Iranian society.

Marking the anniversary of the protests that followed the anti-government rallies after the June 12, 2009, election, the Iranian government of President Ahmadinejad continues to harass those individuals who post news to the outside world through the internet. His administration uses the state-controlled television station and other media sources to inform citizens that the government monitors individual computers. On condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, one Iranian citizen said, "They clearly want to intimidate Internet users and their families" (Fathi 2010, A8). The threat is not idle; Iran executed five activists in May 2010, bringing its total number of executions to the second highest among world nations (Fathi 2010, A8). Perhaps the final lesson from the case of Neda Agha Soltan is that individuals within communities — local or national, physical or virtual — will continue to respond to the powers that attempt to control them.

Conclusion

Although technology has evolved throughout human history, the magnitude of the current changes facing us promises to have a more enormous impact than any previous transformation (Christians 1998, 67). Emerging media are altering the fundamental relationship of individuals to their social structures, the configuration and interaction of social communities, and the places where power is practiced. The maps that helped us to navigate human interaction in the past are now obsolete and sadly in need of revision.

Responding to the changes introduced by new media technologies, Lanham claims that technological change will certainly affect public decorum, although he notes that technology does not force us to confront decorum more clearly than any other medium (1993, 84). He concludes: "Writing created one breed of seriousness; electronic text is now creating another. The new one is more suited to 'the felt necessities of the time,' and we will have failed as humanists and rhetoricians if we do not employ it for the purposes to which it so cordially invites us" (1993, 84). Among other things, this change invites us to examine the moral function of the person within society, an extension of Quintilian's system of decorum.

Traditional codes of ethics have not kept pace with the rapid growth of emerging media. In the realm of traditional news, the rapid influx of citizen journalists has challenged the established one-way institution-based news-gathering organizations. Existing codes of ethics do not cover the fundamental dialogic nature of online communication. And the result has been a medium that has evolved swiftly while flouting many of journalism's traditional rules. It is through such changes that ethics emerge. So let's approach this new communications frontier with an understanding of the wisdom of our past, remembering that we will be judged by the kind of character we display in the work we do.

Note

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