



## **The Spirit of Paulo Freire in Blogland: Struggling for a Knowledge-Log Revolution**

**Christine Boese, *Independent researcher***

Weblogs and knowledge-logs, or “blogs” and “klogs,” have emerged into the post-dot.com bubble online world as a notable (and often non-commercial) social phenomenon. While some hear echoes of Web homepage voices from the mid-1990s, the blogging phenomenon during the Iraq war may have taken Web cybercultures in new directions. This qualitative and exploratory research considers the viability and social effects of the altered web page phenomenon of blogs and klogs as they affect the lives of information workers, in public Internet spaces, and with implications for private intranets. It combines ethnographic observations from a single case within the Iraq warblog phenomenon with the standpoints and personal observations from the author’s professional experience launching a klog inside CNN Headline News shortly after the war. It seeks to gain insight into the utopian and often unnecessarily technologically deterministic promise of a knowledge-log revolution and find points where the movement falls far short of that promise. While knowledge-logs can appear as efficient groupware tools for organizations, klog interface features allow political openings to change corporate cultures in ways most groupware never intended, with a goal of a dialogic, critical pedagogy through workers helping and teaching other workers outside the realm of “official policy.” Personal blog sites of journalists in the employ of large, knowledge-commodity organizations such as Time Warner release this same tension into public spaces and reveal the very real disruption on a large scale that klogs can create on a small scale. Ideas and models presented by Paulo Freire and Michel de Certeau are used as a lens for one possible interpretation of the events studied from March to November 2003.

**The Other Side: Josh Kucera  
March 09, 2003**

### **An introduction**

Welcome to my blog, all. First, to introduce myself and The Other Side. I am a freelance journalist based in Erbil, in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. I am new to the world of blogging, and I heartily thank Chris Boese, a friend of a friend whom I’ve never even met, for suggesting this to me and for setting up all the technical stuff.

I chose to call the blog The Other Side for a couple of reasons. One, I want to show the other side of the news. I don’t intend for this site to be a substitute for the ordinary media, but as a complement to it. You can get good information from the New York Times, BBC and Associated Press. But you won’t hear unvarnished opinion from a guy on the ground, or what ordinary days are like for the people here: about pornographic movie theaters, tragic love stories or the sunset over Erbil.

Secondly, “the other side” refers to the land outside America’s borders, a big place that most Americans, even well educated ones, are not very familiar with. Reading the news about the Middle East or Indonesia or Venezuela is as about as meaningful as watching a game of Risk if you don’t know what the streets smell like there or what people eat. I hope this blog can be a small substitute for that sort of experience. . . .

That'll be it for today ... soon to come will be more reports, focusing on particular issues, relating particular incidents, etc. Stay tuned.

Posted by Josh at **10:39 PM** | **Comments (16)** | **TrackBack (1)**

Weblogs, or "blogs," like the excerpt above, are a site of online communication that has sprung up in the margins around several forms of mainstream public discourses and professional communication practices, and in some cases become a deceptively powerful and somewhat erosive force in mainstream journalism--erosive in the sense that blogs have a dialogic and unobtrusive way of nibbling at established mass media power bases, sometimes without institutional awareness.

As blogs enter mainstream public consciousness from the margins of the Internet where they originated, they bring a hidden and newly awakened army of interactive participants who may be experiencing the kinds of unsettling (to the powers that be) critical consciousness that is within the goals of an increasingly democratized culture such as Paulo Freire as an educator sought to foster. While blogs are now part and parcel of presidential campaigns, they really came into their own with the warblogs of the Iraq war in 2003.

For the purposes of this paper, a blog is defined as a regularly updated webpage using blogging software which functions as a database-driven, dynamic, content-focused shell (Carl, 2003, p 1, 3). Into that space, single authors or groups can take any number of rhetorical stances and post creative and analytical source material and links, published with a reverse chronological order of most recent postings at the top, linked to a permanent archive through "permalinks." While web pages are static, blogs are intended as part of an ongoing conversation through contextual "comments" bulletin boards attached to each post. Once installed, blogs require next to no technical knowledge to update and maintain. In addition, a social movement has sprung up around blogs, giving the technical artifact meaning in a larger context, in what some call "neighborhoods" or "blog ecosystems."

Klogs are simply blog software interfaces appropriated for company knowledge-management tools as a quick and easy, and participatory, content management system. Some firms may have IT departments build content management tools from scratch, often with uneven results due to usability difficulty. The sheer number of blog users online testifies to the ease of use for blog software, which may speak for their adoption for in-house klogs.

This qualitative and exploratory research considers the viability and social effects of the web page phenomenon of blogs and klogs as they affect the lives of information workers, in public Internet spaces with implications for private intranets. It combines ethnographic observations from a single case within the Iraq warblog phenomenon with the personal standpoints and observations from my professional experience launching a klog inside CNN Headline News shortly after the war. It seeks to gain insight into the utopian and often unnecessarily technologically deterministic promise of a knowledge-log revolution and find points where the movement falls far short of that promise.

The ethnographic methods employed in this qualitative study are informed by insider access to two separate sites. In each case, I participated on some level as a web designer and host and was an interested party in the blogs launched. While this may be seen as compromising the data gathered (in the case of the first site) or the personal observations (in the case of the second site), there is no other way that this information could have been obtained without being one of the parties involved. The stories here would have remained invisible. But my standpoint must be

claimed and foregrounded, from the perspective of feminist standpoint theory as it affects scholarship (Rich, 1984), even while distancing myself from the essentialism of identity politics to embrace a role more as a shifting cyborg hybrid from within the larger Time Warner organization (Haraway, 1991). According to Haraway, cyborgs are invisible and ubiquitous, "illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" (153), without loyalties or origins, "committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity, it is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (151). In adopting such a role, my perspective becomes part of the story.

The two sites studied will be described in terms of ideas of "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1973) and "textual poaching" (de Certeau, 1984) in an effort to unpack the complex interplay of events through an Iraq war blog on a large scale and the launch of an intranet klog on a small scale.

## **Blogs as a site for research**

Because 2003 was such a seminal year for blogging and bloggers, there is currently little existing scholarship on blogs or klogs, other than the vast echo system bloggers have created themselves, a system the mainstream media is beginning to cover as a "beat." The blogosphere shrugged itself into existence most notably following the events of September 11, 2001, with a very small but intensely interested audience (Carl, 2003). When regular communications broke down in New York City, personal blogs tracked the concerns of the many laid off or employed tech workers. As war began against Afghanistan, conventions of warblogging also began to emerge. With the crash of the space shuttle and the resignation of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, mainstream media became aware of blogs. Blogs may have fully landed on the scholarly radar in 2003 with the Iraq warblogs and the Howard Dean blogs. Undoubtedly, more articles and collections like this one are in preparation as well.

The usual popular and trade press articles have appeared, evangelizing blogs and klogs as the next hot new thing (Heyboer, 2003; Lewis, 2004; Rosencrance, 2004; Creamer, 2004). At least one master's thesis has been written (Carl 2003). In addition to a careful history of the blogging phenomenon (drawn largely from bloggers' own histories), Christine Carl conducted a significant survey of blogger demographics and practices with more than 1,400 respondents in the United States, analyzing age, race, employment status, income, and education level, among other factors.

Most conference panels on blogs also first appeared in 2003, with papers such as Sybil Nolan's from the proceedings at the Digital Arts and Culture Conference in Melbourne, focusing on blogging's impact on journalism (2003).

Jane B. Singer (2003) may have published the most complete study on the journalistic aspect of blogging to date, focusing not on blogs per se, but on the challenge to journalistic standards of professionalism by online journalists, particularly bloggers. Still, given the general dearth of scholarship on blogging and bloggers, there is more work to be done if blogging remains a significant social phenomenon and not simply another Internet fad.

While also addressing the impact of warblogging on journalism, this paper attempts to situate the movement in the larger context of information workers crafting their products in both public and private work sites, and to look at the political and social ramifications of those actions. As such, it considers all blogs to some degree as knowledge-logs.

## **The Other Side and OJO: Iraq Warblogs**

The primary site studied using ethnographic methods are the Iraqi warblogs of Joshua Kucera and Carolina Podesta. Both journalists worked for several years as foreign correspondents in Bosnia before going together to Erbil, Kurdistan, in Northern Iraq just before the start of the war. I built and hosted these sites, *The Other Side*, and *OJO*, on my domain, serendipit-e.com. Podesta's blog is entirely in Spanish, with a Google machine translation link on the side. Because I don't speak Spanish, my understanding of the zeitgeist of this blog remains rough, although I did sense that something literary and quite transcendent was occurring for Carolina and her legion of fans. I gathered additional data through personal correspondence with both Kucera and Podesta before and throughout the war. Both had laptops and satellite phones, as well as freelance contracts, Kucera with TIME magazine, Podesta with an Argentine news service. While training the journalists to use the software from a war zone, we discussed contingency plans, but decided against outfitting the site for mobile blogging or "mo-blogging" from cell phones. If their laptop access went down, they told me they had access to the Internet at various cybercafes.

Lest you think everyone in the Middle East hates America... I've had the Big Mac there, and it's not bad. This restaurant is in Suleymaniya, there is also a fake McDonald's advertisement in the soccer stadium in Erbil.

Posted by Josh at **12:11 PM** | **Comments (0)** | **TrackBack (0)**

I first met Josh Kucera through a friend at work, and through him also met Carolina Podesta, at the time his partner. I was working for CNN Headline News, writing the afternoon on-screen headline ticker Mondays through Fridays. In the time leading up to the start of the Iraq war, I was watching colleagues prepare for the "embedding process," going to D.C. and completing Pentagon training for chemical weapons and basic military rules in order to travel with the units in which they would be reporting. Remembering the restrictions on reporters during the first Gulf War, I was apprehensive about the embedding process, even with good journalists in the units. I worried that their reports would be censored by restricted satellite phone access, or worse, unconsciously biased.

My reasons for offering to build blogs for Josh and Carolina were personal as much as anything. I wanted to know I had a source on the ground in Iraq that was independent of U.S. military control. I wanted to build their sites because I wanted to read their blogs. At the time I had built several other blogs using Movable Type, and I'd been following the warblogging movement closely. It seemed that the most prominent names among the warbloggers were people in the U.S., processing and reprocessing war coverage at a distance. "This isn't right," I thought, "Independent, experienced reporters in Iraq need to be blogging during this war. That's what I want to read."

About that same time, my employer, CNN, asked video journalist Kevin Sites, already in Iraq, to stop posting to his popular blog. That sealed my decision. Josh asked for permission to keep the blog from TIME magazine, since he had an exclusive contract. TIME said as long as it was non-commercial and he wasn't posting things TIME wanted to publish, he could create the blog. The same company that owns CNN, Time Warner, owns TIME magazine.

My immediate supervisors at CNN Headline News knew I built and kept blogs, but given my on-air anonymity and relative unimportance to the news gathering process within our organization, my extracurricular activities weren't seen as a conflict to the performance of my duties as a ticker writer. I largely refrained from commenting about my employer on any of my personal blogs out of ethical considerations.

## Textual Poaching and Critical Consciousness

This research pulls together two frames, the Marxist radical pedagogical approach of Paulo Freire, who sought venues for dialogic teaching and learning outside traditional classrooms, with the postmodern cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, who wrote on subversive ways ordinary people resist being defined by their workplaces and by a consumer society. I believe these two lenses dovetail, as Freire escapes the often totalizing frame of Marxism with his emphasis on dialogic co-learning, and de Certeau's writing on everyday practices can empower a more contingent style of democratized knowledge-making in blogs, with a liberatory sense of resistance even when workers are oppressed or dominated. Both look at what vibrates outside of areas of rigid control and professional editing.

While weblogs and knowledge-logs can appear as efficient groupware tools for organizations, klog interface features seem to allow political openings to change corporate cultures in ways most groupware never intended, through a goal of a dialogic, critical pedagogy of workers helping and teaching other workers outside the realm of "official policy." Given the unvarnished nature of such in-house knowledge making, institutional controls on worker's minds and voices can be undermined, creating a tension between officially sanctioned controls and policies and contingent and disciplinary knowledge or professional expertise (Friedson, 1986; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Geisler, 1994). Personal blog sites of journalists in the employ of large, knowledge-commodity organizations such as Time Warner release this same tension into public spaces and reveal the very real disruption on a large scale that klogs can create on a small scale. As another journalist covering the war, I was reading warblogs as my own kind of public knowledge-log, to expand my knowledge of the subject I was covering by reading the postings of independent colleagues in the field.

Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, is concerned with workplace practices that live in the margins and engage in a kind of "textual poaching," as he writes:

Reading introduces an "art" which is anything but passive. ...Imbricated within the strategies of modernity (which identify creation with the invention of a personal language, whether cultural or scientific), the procedures of contemporary consumption appear to constitute a subtle art of "renters" who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text. ... Today this text no longer comes from a tradition. It is imposed by the generation of a productivist technocracy. It is no longer a referential book, but a whole society made into a book, into the writings of the anonymous law of production. (1984, p. xxii)

The practices of bloggers seem most clearly described in this quotation. While de Certeau's study has to look hard to discover how the seemingly passive readers find ways to "poach" on the dominant texts as a form of resistance, blogging during the Iraq war seemed to bring the resistance into the open, as a more open rebellion. As a practicing journalist, Josh Kucera was not typically someone in such open rebellion, although many warbloggers outside of Iraq were. As we will see later, he resists becoming a "poster child" for the independent media movement. Even so, with his quiet and observant posts from Erbil, Josh was "insinuating countless differences into the dominant text." Ironically, in my position from inside CNN Headline News, covering the war on the headline ticker at the same time, I was also most clearly implicated and complicit with the "anonymous law of production" de Certeau mentions above. I was part of the dominant text the bloggers were resisting, one of its many authors. Given the contradictions I was experiencing, I had no choice but to turn to Haraway (1991), to see myself as the cyborg hybrid inside the belly of the "productivist technocracy."

## CNN Headline News Knowledge-Log

That cyborg sensibility led me, concurrently, to propose and build a knowledge-log for the Headline News intranet, as a way to share this empowering interface with my colleagues, so that THEY could share contingent knowledge, lore, and professional practices that helped them produce excellent work day in and day out. This is the second site studied in this paper, not through formal research methods, but merely reported from my personal observations as an advocate and klog evangelist. This work could not be called "ethnographic" because I did not have permission to undertake such a study in the newsroom, and even if I had had such permission, I was far too involved as an advocate to be able to step back from it with an ethnographer's eye.

I wanted to plumb beneath the surface of this respectable and reasonable practice of knowledge management in the Information Age to find the contingent practices in a workplace where the "widgets" are information products created by knowledge workers and knowledge-makers, through the shaping and social use of the information products in their workplaces and at large. I wanted to try out the effects of democratization and subversion on this process of keeping a klog, and in doing so, possibly learn ways workplace practices could one day be further affected by the force of these software systems.

I also saw a visible (and documentable) clash of cultures between old and new media—perhaps made even more acute than it might be at more "typical" large corporations because the primary, external "product" or knowledge commodity of Time Warner embodies almost in its entirety the assumptions of broadcast or mass media, often unreflexively, as stated or even unstated truisms. Before coming to CNN, I held certain beliefs about "old media" from my dissertation research (Boese, 1998), which focused on power struggles between the creators of the show "Xena: Warrior Princess" and the interactive online fan community, seen through an ethnography in that fandom culture (populated with active textual poachers as well).

On the other side of the fence, from inside the world of mass media production, I was prepared to have those beliefs challenged. Instead I was surprised to find them reinforced. The mass media model of communication appears so deeply ingrained among so-called "old media" broadcast writers that it is nearly unheard of in the newsroom to question issues relating to "good news judgment," "lowest common denominator" programming, and demographic assumptions about 18- to 35-year-olds. Perhaps I was naïve. Scholarly literature seems well aware of a "tension between the news media and the discipline of cultural studies," according to Sybil Nolan (2003). I had left the field of journalism to spend 15 years in academia. Perhaps because I'd changed over the years, I assumed journalistic assumptions about audiences and interactivity would have changed also.

These are my personal observations, however, and not part of a formal study of newsroom cultures. I made these observations as I studied the audience for the klog I was building, as part of the design process. And in the end, these observations were reinforced when I went on to launch the klog. The most startling thing I found was that these broadcast writers (the klog was primarily to serve newsroom writers and copyeditors) envisioned viewers as passive recipients of media products, and they also constructed THEMSELVES as passive recipients of media products, despite the fact that they were actively writing and shaping those media products every day at work. The anonymity of the "voice" with which they were conditioned to write seemed to preclude finding a voice with which to speak up on a klog.

The second thing I encountered was widespread technophobia or technological ignorance relating to the Internet. One copyeditor told me web browsers still were not on most CNN newsroom

computers in 1996, when a co-worker showed him the Internet for the first time. The newsroom still relies on mainframe-based research tools and writing spaces at the time of this writing in 2004. While I was able to easily teach Josh and Carolina (who speaks and writes basic English, but I speak no Spanish) to use the input form interfaces of their blogs by email from Atlanta to Kurdistan, I struggled to train colleagues face-to-face in the newsroom to feel at ease posting to our intranet klog.

Bruce Garrison (2001) has studied the diffusion of online information technologies in newspaper newsrooms, looking at critical mass and diffusion theory. Although his study pre-dates the appearance of blogs and klogs, I compared his data to the "diffusion of technology" anecdotes shared by my colleagues who had been on site since the early 1990s. It does appear that the Headline News newsroom at least (and anecdotally, the entire Turner building in Atlanta) integrated online research tools somewhat behind the curve reported by Garrison. I also observed colleagues' reluctance to explore online research tools on their own, as evidenced by the slow adoption of the beta "Google News" algorithm tool, as well as slow discovery of the handy Google toolbar, which also blocks annoying pop-up ads.

**War Begins  
The Other Side  
March 17, 2003**

**War Panic in Erbil**

Today is the first official day of war panic in Erbil. Yesterday everything looked much like it has since I got here. Today many shops are closed, there are fewer cars in the street and people tell me their neighbors are fleeing the city for towns further towards the Iranian border. My translator's family all left for their hometown of Koy Sanjak, which is closer to the Iraqi lines but which they feel is less of a target. Shop owners are emptying their stores, putting their stuff in more secure locations in case there are looting during the war.

Most people are afraid of chemical weapons. As you know, this area was attacked hundreds of times by chemical weapons during the Anfal campaign of the 1980s. The most notorious incident, in Halabja, was 15 years ago this weekend. Over 7,000 people died in that one attack. Now people here are afraid that it will happen again. But people aren't preparing much. Very few people have gas masks – other than the foreigners, of course. There is a military market here in Erbil, and I went a couple of weeks ago to stock up. I bought four German-made masks (for me, Carolina, our driver and translator) for \$150, a little out of the range of ordinary Iraqis. The dealer told me the only locals who bought the masks were the richest ones. "The poor people want to die," he said. "The rich people want to live 200 years." One political party today was giving out leaflets on how to make a homemade gas mask. You take flour, coal and salt, wrap it in a cloth and hold it over your mouth. . . .

Posted by Josh at **05:46 PM** | **Comments (2)** | **TrackBack (0)**

Both Josh's and Carolina's blogs began getting heavy publicity during the course of the war. Carolina's site was featured on Argentine TV, so traffic shot up to about 1,000 hits a day after her first week. It eventually developed such an enduring presence (significant hits from areas beyond Argentina as well, particularly Mexican domain names) that when she returned to Argentina after the war, she got a contract to turn it into a book (2003b) and a conference was held with the OJO blog as one of its central topics.

Josh's blog was in English, well written and visual, with respectable citations from other blogs, leading up to the battle of Baghdad. Then it got written up in The Boston Globe (Bray 2003), as

the stories of the Baghdad Blogger, Salam Pax, and the Back to Iraq blog sites put the issue on the national news agenda. The Boston Globe article appeared to mock TIME, suggesting that the writing and topics on Josh's site were more immediate and compelling than what TIME was publishing from him.

The day after that article came out, March 25, 2003, TIME demanded Josh stop posting to his blog, just as CNN's Kevin Sites had also been forbidden to post to his blog as it started gaining popular acclaim during the war. The screenshot below shows Josh's two final posts on the permanent site archive.



**Figure 1: The Other Side, Joshua Kucera's weblog. <http://www.serendipit-e.com/otherside>**

Many may remember the flurry of blog stories on the eve of the "Battle of Baghdad" in 2003. Salam Pax had stopped posting at Dear Raed and many blogs echoed the fear that something had happened to him (he later re-emerged, safe). Kevin Sites and Joshua Kucera had been asked to suspend posting (after the conclusion of the formal part of the war, Kevin Sites left CNN and is once again posting to his blog). Sean Paul Kelly at Agonist.org was accused of plagiarism. The cessation of Josh's active posting was a disappointing development. Josh's style of first-person observation about the price of gas or the porn movie houses open in Erbil had ruined me for the rehashing and linking styles of many of the US-based warblogs. Traffic on Josh's site shot through the roof as its closing was written up prominently in The Wall Street Journal, on the MSNBC site, and in a depth analysis article in The Chicago Tribune (Rose & Cooper 2003, Femia 2003, Ryan 2003). Both MSNBC and the BBC had embraced the warblog movement and were hosting warblogs by their own correspondents on their official sites. For Time Warner, and CNN,



a division of that company, it was as if the warblog movement did not exist, despite perfunctory news coverage of warblogging as a “gee whiz” tech story.

So while I was putting in six-day weeks, 10-hour days as part of our intensive Iraq war coverage, I was also caught up in the ongoing drama that saw mainstream media’s war coverage challenged by this upstart blog phenomenon. The challenge was to try to make meaning from conflicts between the two different universes of discourse, one severely restricted by mass media assumptions about the patriotic attitudes of US audiences, and the other, in the blogosphere, situated much more firmly in the discourse of international media coverage, which differed significantly from U.S. war coverage in its skepticism toward the U.S. point of view.

The frame I found most helpful placed these divergent journalistic endeavors as rhetorically epistemic knowledge-making, a macro version with corporate broadcast journalism content contrasted with international warblogs, echoed on a smaller level with klogs, and with the tensions and frustrations in the delayed launch of my intranet klog. The lines were starting to blur, once I considered journalism and professional communication in blogs and klogs as a commodity and site for interactive and contingent knowledge products and knowledge making.

## **Paulo Freire and Empowered Knowledge-Making**

Let’s step back and look at blogs and klogs in terms of this interesting dance with corporate entities, some of which see knowledge management as asset management for the Information Age. Ostensibly, blogs and klogs would seem to help corporate entities to “manage” the “intellectual assets” of a company in an information-based economy, particularly in the context of knowledge workers, but who is managing whom? It has been said that companies are increasingly concerned that the greatest assets of the firm are walking out the door every night at the end of their shifts. The wolf in sheep’s clothing in the dance could be the knowledge-klogs that seek to create artifacts based on those information assets. The contingent knowledge disseminated through both intranet company klogs and more public, journalistic or topical extracurricular blogs of journalists or other experts, writers, and communicators create a kind of knowledge commodity that exists outside conventional economic systems of value. If understood as formal publishing ventures, there is a model for thinking of blogs and klogs, the kind of model that would put TIME magazine in the right for protecting its own publishing venture from a rival or competing publishing venture by shutting down Josh’s blog. But are these formal publishing ventures?

The late Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator wrestling with the problem of how to bring democracy to a colonized and oppressed people who had never in the better part of their cultural memory known anything like democracy. Literacy was not the only problem. Empowerment and responsibility for self-governance had to come from somewhere. Rather than accept traditional models of teaching and learning, Freire saw that those models, such as the “banking model of education,” were actually working against the larger goals of democracy. From these realizations, he developed a Pedagogy of the Oppressed, his most famous work, and also the concept of “critical consciousness” or “conscientização,” the goal of his model of education. This concept involved being an active participant in one’s life, not merely a spectator, making choices rather than oppressed by the illusion of choice. This he saw as a key to an open society (Freire, 1973).

If worker brain power is the warehouse capital of the Information Age, it certainly seems reasonable for a company to develop its own intellectual and knowledge-based assets, also as a way to preserve and document processes and policies developed by employees, the information products of employees, to guard against the loss of these assets should a worker leave the company. Worker intellectual development, continuing education, and collaboration all seem to speak to the value to a company of fostering an active and thinking work force. Intranet klogs, which dialogically explore aspects of one’s work product, team projects, processes, and so on,

would seem to be a valuable tool to refine such workplace assets. It would appear, then, that Paulo Freire's goals and the goals of those creating software to support workplace knowledge management would be in alignment.

While klogs can craft a form of groupware to assist in this knowledge management, they can also appeal to business hierarchies that want to know what their employees are thinking and doing, that may even view these klogs as a tool of company surveillance. Indeed, in both the journalistic articles and the klog discussion groups, this issue is often addressed and cited at times as a reason for a less than enthusiastic response from one's co-workers when it comes to participating in the klog, particularly in workplace cultures where workers are afraid to speak up in their own voices, even if fears of reprisal are unintended by management and not at all overt, as I found with my fellow journalists at CNN Headline News. In a time of recession and constant corporate cutbacks, where many are doing the jobs of more than one person already, most workers keep their heads down and say little because one never knows if an unvarnished opinion may hit some random boss the wrong way. Many in the larger corporate workplace have also witnessed higher paid co-workers in their 50s with considerable intellectual capital for the company jettisoned by cost-cutting managers looking to fill those positions with younger people on smaller salaries. In these situations, it would appear that those greater intellectual assets are not valued.

## **La perruque, or the Wig**

Some companies take possessiveness of worker intellectual products a step further, claiming all items on a worker's hard drive should the employee leave the company, for instance. Marshall McLuhan (1963) demonstrates that a hard drive, like a book, is an extension of the worker's mind. How much of a worker's intellectual activity can a company reasonably claim to own? If telecommuting, can the company lay claim to all writing one does at home? In the case of personal blogs of journalists, we see Time Warner was threatened by the non-professional publishing activities of Kevin Sites and Joshua Kucera, implying that a different economy or scale of value is superceding money in this marketplace. But those are the kinds of instances savvy lawyers might think to cover in a standard non-compete clause. What if Josh were writing letters home to his family, writing many of the same kinds of things that did appear in his blog? Could he keep a password-protected blog, a private and personal intranet, ostensibly for his family and friends (and a few hundred others) to access? I offered to host such a site, but Josh worried he might get in trouble for that and didn't want to risk it. Is it the intellectual content of Josh's brain that Time Warner coveted, or the fact that the publication site allowed him to reach an audience that hurt the future viability of one of the largest media chains in the world? Or was it his point of view, standard for blogs, what we might call "first person idiosyncratic," in such a marked contrast to the depersonalized style of TIME reporting?

Michel de Certeau writes of a diversionary workplace tactic called "la perruque," or "the wig" within the sometimes invisible "arts of practice." Something of a ruse, "the wig" is

...the worker's own work disguised as work for his [sic] employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. ...The worker who indulges in la perruque actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit. In the very place where the machine he must serve reigns supreme, he cunningly takes pleasure in finding a way to create gratuitous products whose sole purpose is to signify his own capabilities through his work and to confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family. (1984, pp. 24-26)

In other words, "the wig" is a form of poaching from the workplace by only appropriating products that are to some extent invisible and unvalued or undervalued in the workplace. In an information marketplace peopled by knowledge workers, the "scraps" that the worker diverts come from the firings of her own mind, just as Josh's blog consisted of the "leftovers" that he perceived TIME did not want to publish. Josh told me that TIME was not so much concerned with getting a first shot at his best observations as much as it didn't want anyone else to be able to see his cast-offs. The reach of Internet publishing through blog software gave these seemingly "gratuitous products" a value outside of the conventional system of money or information economics. The "scraps" Josh used were whatever happened to catch his eye outside of his more formal tasks. At issue are boundaries, partitions information workers would seemingly have to erect inside their own brains between work for their employer and work for themselves. Perhaps a reporter might say, "TIME magazine is renting my eyeballs right now. No one else is allowed to use them for the moment..." New boundaries are coming up for negotiation.

One could even argue in a klog context that Freire's "critical consciousness" is a trait that is undervalued in the workplace, along with a worker's ability to make knowledge, to take scraps and develop truths about workplace practices, best professional communication practices, disciplinary practices, and lore. But here is the subversion of unedited and interactive blogs and klogs. They live in a place at the intersections of a number of different border regions, between expert and contingent knowledge-making, between disciplinary boundaries, between populist and elitist systems of access to research or technology or capital or power, boundaries between professional life and home life, not to mention, with telecommuting, physical boundaries between work and home (Friedson, 1986; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Geisler, 1994).

As blogs and klogs enter the mainstream from the margins, they bring along the ruse of "the wig," with dialogic and interactive participants who may be experiencing the kinds of unsettling (to the powers that be) critical consciousness that is within the goals of a more democratized technoculture such as Paulo Freire as an educator sought to foster. Whether journalists are publicly assisting other journalists through their public blogs or workers are helping to train colleagues in internal klog contexts, an active critical awareness supercedes the passive absorption of information or top-down policies.

By design, blogs are oriented toward humanization and textual poaching with active and dialogic co-participants rather than a passive audience. Klogs seemingly appear to allow corporate entities to "manage" the "intellectual assets" of a company in an information-based economy, particularly in the context of knowledge workers. But intranet klogs and some of their more public counterparts such as these knowledge products created by journalists during the Iraq war have the potential to release voices as "humanized" knowledge-makers with a claim on power that can force many institutions to change with the force of awakened and empowered dialogue, creativity, and analytical power, even as other institutions react strongly and resist change (a move both described and discussed by Freire through his experiences in Brazil).

While corresponding with Josh through our several weeks of notoriety before the Battle of Baghdad, he told me something that I came to understand was very important to him. He had worked as a freelancer in Bosnia for several years before moving to Kurdistan to cover the war. After TIME shut the blog down, Josh was clearly disturbed by the anti-mass media ranting and the level of anger against big media corporations in the comments field of his blog. He strongly resisted becoming a poster child for the independent journalism movement. Josh said he had been trained to focus on the story and not to become the story. Still, he said, in four years working as a freelancer overseas, he had not ever gotten as much feedback and interest in his work as he had in the weeks of the Iraq war through his blog. His writing was being published by one of the largest circulation newsmagazines in the West, yet his blog audience cared about him, worried about him, gave his work constant dialogue and feedback. He was blown away by it.

I know I was affected by it as well, but in a different way. I'd never met Josh or Carolina face to face, but as the war moved closer to Erbil, I found myself worrying about them, involved in their stories, in their blogs. If I didn't hear from them by email regularly, I became very anxious. There was a human face, a level of personal involvement, with war correspondents breaking through the impersonal barrier of the affectation of the journalistic voice.

## The Practices of Blogs and Klogs

In developing my intranet klog for Headline News, I turned to helpful klog evangelist sites online such as Phil Wolff's "a klog apart." Wolff has undertaken a form of dialogic, critical pedagogy to help klog evangelists in organizations teach co-workers to communicate in blog-format, also looking at issues involving teaching colleagues to write, not simply with words, but through posting images, diagrams, audio and video clips, etc. In quite a number of posts, he sounds very much like a composition teacher, seeking ways to encourage and empower writers, to help co-workers not feel self-conscious, to help them find their voices. Without teachers and classrooms, the atmosphere for learning and sharing invokes not only Paulo Freire, but also Peter Elbow (1973), in *Writing Without Teachers*.

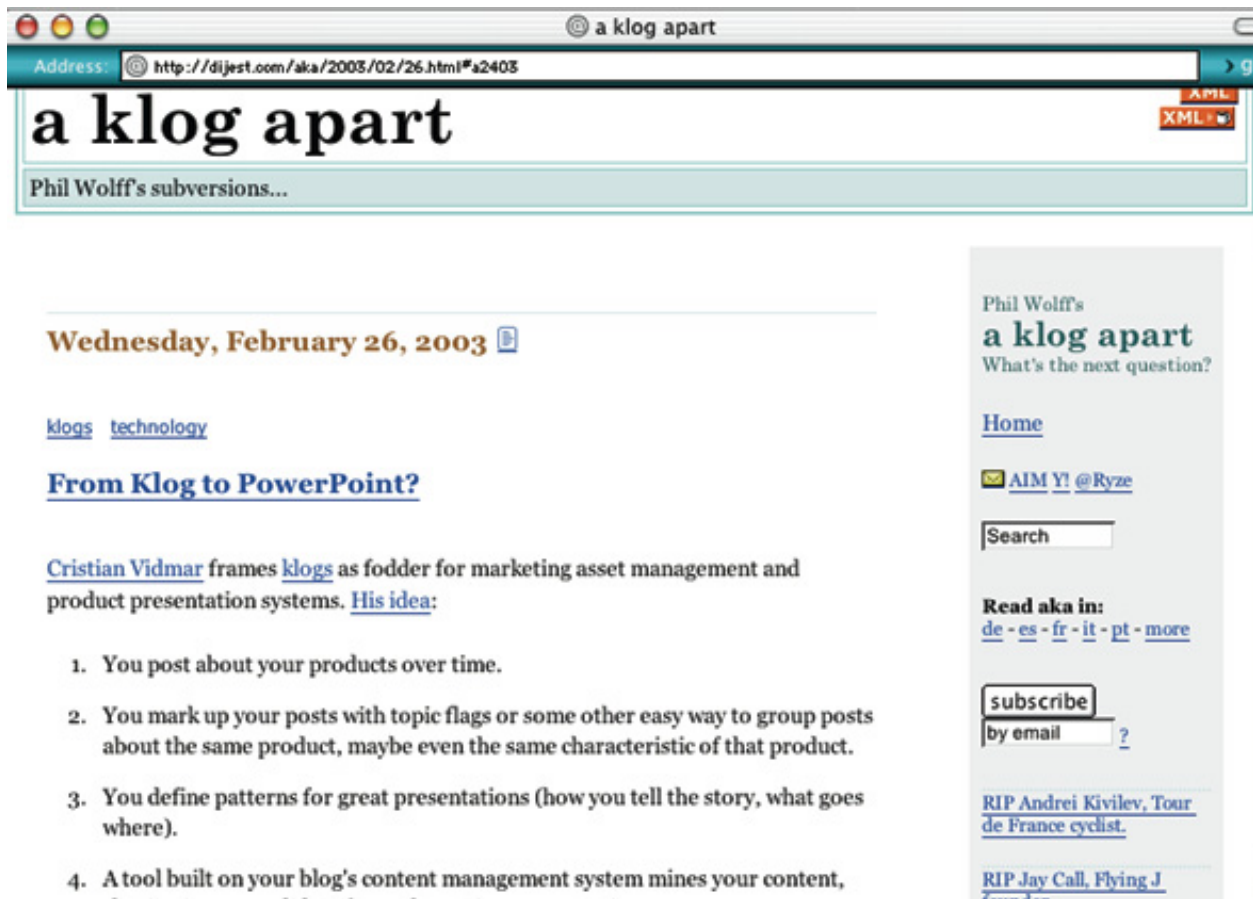


Figure 2: Phil Wolff's "a klog apart" site at <http://www.dijest.com/aka>

Wolff collects tips and tricks and future ideas for use of klog software from his network of correspondents and contributors. These ideas range from the practical to the theoretical to speculative "what if" projections and software wish lists, like one big collaborative klog-brainstorming session. One post suggests klogs can be used to help generate PowerPoint

presentations. Another addresses literacy problems in the workplace. One has tips for would-be writing coaches. Another, ideas for empowering shy writers by developing mixed media klogs with audio clips, video clips, captured white board graphics, etc. with the idea that different thinking and learning styles will express themselves in different ways.

Ethical and workplace power and politics are also discussed quite bluntly on “a klog apart’ and on the klog Yahoo! discussion group, including fears of panoptic surveillance by supervisors (Foucault 1977).

Peter Elbow would likely recognize these klog evangelists as leaders of a dialogic writing workshop without teachers, with co-teachers, outside of traditional classrooms. But this is also something more—something like the Freire model as a response to oppression, a kind of oppression Freire himself would be hesitant to name as such, centered as it is in the overprivileged West. But if spontaneous and dialogic writing workshops are springing up in this medium, is this not what Freire sought to foster outside the socially limiting and often authoritarian spaces of traditional classrooms? As a tool that not only poaches the texts of the mass media and business knowledge-making, but also discourses of the classroom, klogs as envisioned by Phil Wolff have a very auspicious beginning, at least in theory.

On the other hand, I can also describe the difficulties I had once my Headline News intranet klog launched, well after the formal end of the war. Management decided to hold six weeks of writing and script coding seminars conducted by copyeditors, attendance required. I adjusted the klog I had built to specifically support handouts and discussions from the seminars and was given the seventh week in the schedule to hold klog training seminars.

The klog that I launched had anything but an auspicious beginning. Despite enthusiasm from management and my own evangelizing, writers and copyeditors seemed ill equipped to use it for anything except as a passive reference for handouts. I billed the klog as a place to talk about the craft of writing and ways to make our work better. People at Headline News are very ambitious and are always training to move to their next position, often taking overtime, double shifts, or overnight shifts to do it. Even so, they seemed not to have ways to talk about craft, about what made writing good or bad for our particular context and audience. Writers complained orally that copyeditors were unable tell them what they were doing wrong, would instead just say, “this script sucks” and leave it at that. I’d hoped our klog could address these issues in script workshops. These are journalists, I thought. Writing is what they do. Surely they will have a lot to say.

Instead I came to understand the very real barriers against posting to our klog, barriers ingrained in the CNN workplace culture and probably many workplace cultures. It wasn’t just fear of reprisals. People in low-end positions striving to move up can be afraid to speak because it can hurt their chances at promotion, despite honest management encouragement. Most could talk about facts in stories but did not have a vocabulary to talk about writing, across all ranks. These are also people who are exhausted, overworked, dragging themselves through stressful television shifts that push them to the limit. After their show gets off the air, they head out the door or to another training session. Finally, to a person, I could not find anyone who was not intimidated by technology and the Internet, even people who work in the control room or route video through complex series of feeds in the CNN system. To post is to have a voice, however it may be socially constructed, and to have confidence in that voice. I encountered people who froze up staring at the “Post to Blog” button on our klog, and those who thought they would never be able to figure out the blog in the first place, despite working at terminals every day.

Our klog still has value as a database, a shell to hold training materials, style guides, and official policies. It is more easily searched or cross-referenced than the file on the mainframe that holds these materials. But that is top-down communication. The grassroots empowerment with our

klog never happened. As an alternative, I tried to interest friends in the newsroom in creating personal blogs, offering to help, still puzzled at the reticence of professional writers in developing an outlet for what they did best. My best guess at why so few took up my offer has to do with the learned impersonal tone of mass media journalism, a tone that erases the author's point of view. These are writers who spend every day at work trying to erase their biases and points of view, to make their writing voice sound like the voice of the anchor of the show they are on.

How do groups evolve and contribute when shaping and being shaped by blog interfaces? Partly the answer to that question can be found in the sudden rise to power of the blog movement as a social force as compared to static web pages or pages merely generated from databases, such as I studied in my research into the Xenaverse, the constellation of fan web sites around the television show "Xena: Warrior Princess," (1998). While it may be too soon to tell, given the complexity of forces arrayed within interfaces and cultures, I do believe the interactive interface features unique to the blog social movement deserve a good part of the credit for harnessing dialogic energy on the Web. I am not taking a technologically deterministic stance when I say this, however. The interface features minus the social movement could not create the same force alone, as Phil Wolfe has written of in "a klog apart" and as I found out for myself with the Headline News klog. It seems to be bit of a "chicken and egg" question of which came first, the interactive features or the social movement that rises up and is empowered by the interactive features. Bruce Garrison's (2001) study into a "critical mass" in the diffusion of online information technologies in newsrooms also shows how gradual increases in adoption rate can create a snowball social effect.

The Xenaverse was an empowered social movement that existed before the blog interfaces became available. The connected communities and regular posters and commenters around some of the most popular blogs, like Boing Boing or Kuro5hin don't have to be goaded into participating. They are people who seem to feel they have something to say, and are technically adept enough to see how useful the simple web forms can be. Yet offline groups don't migrate into online spaces nearly as well, no matter what opportunities exist, or how easy they are to use, or even by virtue of the fact that the people in the group are already skilled professional writers.

## **Conclusion**

A Business 2.0 newsletter article considered the viability of "Management by Blog?" (2003) and came to the conclusion that, despite many strong proponents, the klog movement has not caught on yet. The article notes that companies are still more likely to incorporate blog features into public customer service web sites (such as Macromedia has done) than they are to use it as a method for workgroup teams to pool thoughts, progress reports, documentation for projects, etc, as another tool for computer support for collaborative groups, in other words. Why the reticence? It may be because blogging grew up from a grassroots social movement and not necessarily a dot.com business plan seeking venture capital. Blogs didn't show up on business radar until Google bought Blogger. It could also reflect worker resistance to groupware blog tools, as I found at Headline News.

The Business 2.0 article claims that the move of Google buying Blogger alone gives the business knowledge-management klog camp such force that it can only be the next big thing. On the other hand, anyone who follows the often-uncritical hype of Business 2.0 has heard that story before. Many who have tried to launch company intranet blogs realize that a bigger problem can be training and levels of participation with harried and overworked colleagues, issues that Phil Wolff at "a klog apart" is more than prepared to address. I'm not ready to declare such an easy victory for intranet-based knowledge logs primarily because the borders and gates of intranets are still deeply affected by corporate cultures built on information control, and are too rigidly exclusive for concepts of information-sharing, both by turf-guarding employees within

competitive corporations, and by turf-guarding corporations that would rather live with restrictive technology and knowledge management tools than experience a more democratized workplace.

We can see how deeply these interests are threatened by blog interfaces by looking at what Time Warner did to attempt to control the flow of knowledge commodities by its "intellectual assets." Joshua Kucera was a freelancer, not even a full employee of Time Warner, a distinction might have well have been moot, since the issue was about leverage, power, and control of his intellectual "scraps." Also lost are the dialogues, the enrichment, the Freire-style learning and growth that would ultimately improve knowledge products in the workplace because certain topics are so off-limits they cannot be broached in public discourse or on company intranets, except anonymously on "gripe" blogs such as enronsucks.com and the like.

Personal blog sites of journalists in the employ of large, knowledge-commodity organizations such as Time Warner release the same tensions and conflicting issues into public spaces and thus reveal the very real disruption on a large scale that klogs can create on a small scale within organizations as voices enter into dialogues rather than listen to the one-way monologues of policies, of being told what to think, about in-house corporate processes or the role of the Kurds in Erbil. However, as I found with the *Headline News* klog, there are still many challenges to be overcome before off-line groups can successfully migrate to klog-style interactions.

As Paulo Freire set reflection, questioning, and dialogue as ideals in fostering critical consciousness in Brazil, so also does the use of these same techniques within a corporate environment let a genie out of a bottle. Freire discusses how repression and backlash by elites are often the result of the "oppressed" gaining too much power of voice and consciousness. While we are not seeing here a military coup and repression as backlash such in Brazil, I do believe we are seeing and will continue to see a backlash. Even so, the greatest counterforce that keeps the genie from going back into the bottle may be what de Certeau's describes as the poaching technique of "la perruque," "the wig," a worker's own work disguised as work for his employer. This is the site of cultural resistance I will be watching from my feminist cyborg hybrid post as this phenomenon evolves, as a backlash drives some underground, or at least, under the wig.

**March 25, 2003**

### **Goodbye for now**

My editors have demanded that I stop posting to this site until the war ends. And they pay the bills, so what can I do. Thanks everyone for reading, and I hope to be back here soon. Peace, Josh.

Posted by Josh at **10:00 PM** | **Comments (33)** | **TrackBack (0)**

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