

Blogs  
and the  
Return of  
Authorship

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# Blogs are recognised

- People are using them
  - over 4 million blogs (Perseus)
  - they're not just blogs about blogs
    - political polemics
    - confessional diaries
- They have a profile beyond that user base
  - 25,665 news stories listed on Factiva
  - blogs are hot for journalism, politics, education, and outside institutions



# Why is blogging recognised?

- It's an innovative cultural form
  - it's new
  - it seems to be live
  - it's connected to network culture
- It's also a conservative cultural form
  - text is attributed to an individual author's voice
  - automatic archive generates cohesive narratives
  - predictability creates authority & cultural capital



# Testing futurist predictions of hypertext theorists

- Some theorists anticipated global hypertext would produce major cultural transformations
  - Impermanence of electronic text would threaten canonical authorship (Bolter)
  - The contest between writers & readers would become visible & more even (Bolter)
  - Hypertext's non-linearity will transfer power from authors to readers (Landow)
  - Authors move from the centre to the margins in networked culture (Poster)



# Critiques of Authorship

- Barthes: 'Death of the Author'
  - Who speaks? 'The text is a tissue of citations...'
- Derrida: 'there is no outside the text'
  - supplement → exorbitant → abyss
- Foucault: Author-function
  - the author's name is different from a proper name:  
it defines the edges of the text



# Author as boundary abstraction

- the person who does the writing work
- the name on the book cover, in the catalogue & on the list of course readings
- the absent voice & face that readers encounter
- receiver of copyright royalties & subject of defamation writs
- a mythical figure whose intentions are inscribed in & ascribed to the text
- ideological ideal: possessive individualism, Romantic genius (metaphysics of presence)
- always an ambivalent figure



# Blogs refrain Authorship

- Blog software distinguishes the writer from designers & programmers
- Blog software secures the identity of writers with owners, permissions, display names & passwords
- Blog software maintains visual consistency, temporal cohesion and stability of links
- Comments reconstitute marginalia as belonging outside the central text
- Blog culture defines norms & hierarchies of value



# Rearticulations of authorship

- Names have more ways of working
  - user names and passwords make sense to both human & machine
  - they wait in database indexes, ready to be invoked
- The Author grows as distance increases
  - blog owners become Authors when journalists write stories about them
- Proliferation of hybrids
  - few pure authors are left in the wild



# Return of Authority

- Blog genres refrain the conventional division between public and private
  - Political blogs claim the public sphere
  - Diary blogs inhabit the private
- Not depth, but connection
  - nodal authorship displaces Great Authorship



# Learning from free software

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A seminar hosted by Arts Informatics at the  
University of Sydney on June 2, 2005, 6-8pm

<http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/informatics/?page=events&id=infosem2005>

Free if you RSVP by May 30