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 $\rightarrow$ exorbitant $\rightarrow$ 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

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