

Saying Something or Having Something to Say: Attention Seeking, the Breakdown of Privacy, and the Promise of Discourse in the Blogosphere

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The genesis of this article was my blog posting about an article in the New York Times about Emily Gould's experience as a blogger both on her own and for the Manhattan media gossip website Gawker. In other words, this is an article brought about by a blog posting about an article about a blog. Blogging, or weblogging, as some people call it, is like that. Although easy to do, the implications of blogging are complex and far-reaching. Life in the blogosphere or world of blogging is about making connections between people and ideas and texts; however, as I discuss in this article, blogging is also about attention seeking, the breakdown of the lines between public and private space, and the redefinition of privacy. To be a blogger can mean contributing to the breakdown of discourse by sending superficial texts into society or it can mean participating in the rebirth of public discourse by engaging in reflection and analysis of the world.

Although blogging is generically defined as an online journal, Walker (2007) gives a more comprehensive definition.

"A weblog, or *blog, is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first. Typically, weblogs are published by individuals and their style is personal and informal. Weblogs first appeared in the mid-1990s, becoming popular as simple and free publishing tools became available towards the turn of the century. Since anybody with a net connection can publish their own weblog, there is great variety in the quality, content, and ambition of weblogs, and a weblog may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers". (paragraph 1)

This definition, however, is recognized as not sufficient for capturing the complexities of the blogging experience (Mortensen 2008). Mortensen, who worked with Walker on early academic study of blogging, identifies several characteristics of blogs. The text 1) exists within public space, 2) includes elements of the personal, 3) is a form of publishing, and 4) is characterized by connections between text fragments within the blog and to other online texts.

Blogs originated as lists or logs of websites (hence the term web-log), and some continue to be primarily lists of links to other blogs and websites (Knobel and Lankshear 2006). The practice of blogging, however, has expanded to include a wide range of activities including community blogs, news filters, political analysis, personal stories and journaling, commercial blogs, and educational blogs among others (Downes 2004; Knobel and Lankshear 2006). Blogging also exists within a broad array of digitally based communicative modes such as social networking sites (e.g., Myspace, Facebook, LinkedIn), instant messaging (e.g., AIM), texting and picture messaging (e.g. mobile phones), status postings (e.g. Twitter), photo posting (e.g., Flickr) and video posting (e.g., Youtube).

As predicted by Goldhaber (1997) blogging platforms allow for the integration of these multimedia forms so that a blog can consist of audio blogging and video blogging (vlogging) as well as images and graphics, sound

clips, video clips and links to other sites. However, the content of blogs is not what makes a blog; it is the reverse chronological format, the space for reader interaction through comments, the act of blogging itself (Downes 2004; Mortensen 2008) and the social context in which the blogging occurs that constitutes a blog. For instance, blogging can be an exercise in self-indulgence in which the reader and writer lose distance between the public and private by participating in “oversharing” (Gould 2008a), which is the act of making too much private information public, or “thoughtcasting” (Croal 2008), which is the act of posting or publishing every little event in one’s life or thought that passes through one’s mind. Such acts, I suggest are a reaction to an attention economy (Goldhaber 1997) in which information is plentiful but attention is scarce. Or, blogging can be about creating and building relationships, participating in a community, and reflecting on experience at both the local and global levels. Mortensen (2008) writes that blogging is about connections between individual bloggers as well as connections between texts. Furthermore, blogging transcends space and time in that bloggers and blog readers from around the world are able to share texts, comment on those texts and together build new texts. Participating in blogging is about both compressing space and time (Harvey 1996), but can also be a way to slow down fast capitalism through reflection and making and remaking connections between ideas in order to build and rebuild syntheses that allow us to view the world in new ways and perhaps even to resist the forces of a fast capitalist economy. Finally, blogging can be an entry point into participatory culture (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, and Weigel 2006). That is, it can provide us with a means to move from being passive consumers to being content creators and thus participants in wide ranging public discourse on a variety of topics.

In this article, I explore the world of blogging through three lenses: fast capitalism and the role of the public and private spheres (Agger 2004), the attention economy (Goldhaber 1997), and participatory culture (Jenkins et al. 2006). I argue that whereas the attention economy contributes to the decline of discourse and the loss of separation between public and private space (Agger 2004), participatory culture offers a response to the alienation of fast capitalism. In order to accomplish the above stated argument, I draw on Gould’s essay and the reactions to her work in order to illustrate the tensions that exist within the blogging world. I end by reviewing other forms of blogging that hold out hope for resisting the pressures of fast capitalism.

The Attention Economy

The rise of blogging as an online activity has occurred within what has come to be called the attention economy. Goldhaber (1997) argues that the economic laws of the Internet world are different from those of the material world. Specifically, information is plentiful on the Internet, but attention is scarce. He argues that since attention is scarce, the ability to gain attention is a form of power in that the person who has attracted attention can then lead people to perform or act in a certain way. The attention economy, he suggests, is supported by the Internet in the following ways: 1) a rapid rise in the number of people attached to the web and trying to get attention through it; 2) continued growth in the capacity of the web to send out multimedia and capture attention through those means; 3) increased ability of the web for transmitting attention; and 4) increased ease with which to gain attention through the Internet. Goldhaber’s predictions have, in many respects, come to pass, particularly in the world of blogging. The growth of blogs has been almost exponential since Technorati began tracking blogs in 2003 (Sifry 2007). According to Technorati, the number of blogs doubled every 5-7 months from 2004 to 2006 (Sifry 2007). In April 2007, Technorati reported tracking over 70 million blogs and that 120,000 blogs were being created every day (Sifry 2007).

As the blog numbers increase, so too does the difficulty in attracting attention. As Knobel and Lankshear (2006) note, Shirky’s (2003) power law distribution tells us that blogs that were first online are more apt to gain and hold attention than those which arrive later on the scene. As Goldhaber (1997) theorized, given a plethora of information, people must come up with ways to gain the attention of the public and one way to do this is to offer something new. He argues that whereas the material or Fordist economy is based on the easy replication of items, the attention economy demands individualism and originality. Thus, the successful member of an attention economy is the individual or company who shuns repetition and duplication. In the world of blogging, you will not be read if you are not offering your readers something new or interesting.

I suggest that there are two ways in which people respond to this demand for originality within the blogosphere. They overshare as a way to assert their individualism, or they strive to say something that will allow their readers to see the world in a new way. This is not to suggest an either/or existence for blog writers: to do so misses the nuances

of what blogging is, what the purposes of oversharing are, and what the challenges of carving out a space for oneself online consist of. What I contend is that the attention economy pushes people to respond in particular ways, but that with reflection and analysis, we can determine which way is most supportive of our needs as content contributors and as content consumers.

Permeable Boundaries and the Changing Nature of Privacy

In the drive for attention, the media culture pushes into private space and individuals push the trivial and intimate aspects of their lives into the public sphere. This phenomenon is one aspect of what Agger (2004) described as the breakdown of boundaries between public and private space as well as the “dematerialization” of the line between text and the world. He suggests that these boundaries are dissolving due to the media culture and that the dissolution of these boundaries has led to a decline in discourse. The two boundaries in particular are that of the separation between the public and private spheres and dissolution of the line between text (which he defines as writing and acts of figuring) and the world of society and culture. The boundary between the public and private spheres, he argues, has been brought about by the media culture, which has pushed into our private lives through the always-on nature of the electronic and digital world. Business and industry is no longer marked by location and material spaces such as office, but rather by what we do such as responding to email late at night or on weekends. This incursion into private space serves the purpose of capitalism in that it robs us of time to think and reflect, which Agger suggests, causes us to lose our freedom. Because time and space has been compressed (Harvey 1996) we lack the time and distance for reflection and to develop a clear vision of what is going on in within society (Agger 2004). Without distance, he tells us, we are unable to appraise our lives in order to identify that which binds us so that we can cut those bindings (Agger:132).

When discussing the dissolution of the boundary between texts and the world, Agger (2004) argues that texts are casually dispersed into the world and are read in an equally casual manner by people who lack the time and preparation to read carefully. This preparation includes knowing to ask questions about underlying principles, definitions, or grounding assumptions (p. 28). He argues that in the press of time, we have learned to skim and skip over words and sentences and the thus risk losing sense of an author’s meaning and argument. We have become, Agger argues, a literal culture missing the ability to read analogically and metaphorically.

From a New Literacy Studies perspective, what Agger (2004) has identified is a shift in the social purposes of text production and consumption. The New Literacy Studies defines literacy as being a social practice (Street 1995; Street 2003) which means that we read and write for socially meaningful purposes within a community to which we belong (Gee 2000c). Because each community has differing sets of rules for what constitutes socially meaningful, what constitutes literacy shifts across contexts (Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic 2000; Gee 2000c). These rules are, of course, historically, politically, and culturally informed and embedded within the power structures of society (Gee 1999; Gee 2000c; Hull and Schultz 2001; Street 1995). Therefore, as we consider the meanings and purposes of blogging, particularly in relation to a fast capitalist world, it is important to remember the contextual nature of literacy and literate acts as they are embedded within global structures.

The new literacies also refer to how technology “enables people to build and participate in literacy practices that involve different kinds of values, sensibilities, norms and procedures, and so on, from those that characterize conventional literacies. These values, sensibilities, and so forth, comprise the ‘new ethos stuff’ of new literacies” (Lankshear and Knobel 2007:225). The technologies of the new literacies include the hardware and software that contain particular affordances for participation, and as Lankshear and Knobel suggest, the ethos of the new literacies also includes those things we value and the way we think about what we are doing with the technology. Most importantly, they argue, the new ethos is participatory, collaborative, and distributed.

Blogging can be seen as an illustration of the relationship between global and local literacies as well as an example of the ethos of the new literacies. An example of this new ethos is Mortensen’s (2004) argument that blogs can individualize the general and the universal. She writes that within blogs, the drama of cultural conflicts become personal, subjective, and understandable and suggest that blogs are “a new narrative: the story of an interconnected world, the tales of a new public sphere, the digital public” (heading 3, paragraph 7). Mortensen goes on to claim that to blog means that you are connecting yourself to something bigger.

By placing Agger’s (2004) concerns about the public/private and text/world boundaries in juxtaposition to

Mortensen's argument that blogging is a way to generalize the specific and make the global specific, we are led to consider whether the nature of privacy and text are changing. Lankshear's and Knobel's (2001; 2007) analysis of blogging and other forms of new literacies suggest that the attention economy results in new definitions of privacy or private space. Drawing on the work of Goldhaber (1997) they argue an attention economy demands that members live an open life. Privacy, they contend, is less a matter of what people know about oneself and is more about avoiding constraints placed by the people who pay attention. Their redefinition of privacy also addresses Agger's (2004) concern about the incursion of the business world into private space. Lankshear and Knobel suggest that privacy includes the ability to filter what comes in as well as controlling what we share. Maintaining privacy and the separation of public/private space becomes an act of balancing the push in of information as well as the need to push out in order to maintain a public presence within an attention economy.

The realization of balancing the public and private is not just an academic concern. Croal (2008), a technology writer for *Newsweek*, writes of his experience "thoughtcasting" (p. 56) using Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, all social networking tools that include elements of blogging. He raises the question of how much and what kind of information to share with the world. To answer his question, he interviewed the creators of Twitter and Tumblr about how they distinguish between what should be public and what should be kept private and were told by each of a set of self-determined guidelines they use before posting online. Croal also informally polled members of his online social network and found that all had similar types of self-checks including "the Mom test" which involves asking themselves whether their posting was suitable for their mother to see. I suggest that Croal's reflective essay indicates that members of online communities are experiencing a growing awareness of the relationship between the public and the private as well as the role of text in creating online identities and spaces for discourse.

As Agger (2004) suggests, the line between the public and private is breaking down, but I argue that as the boundaries break down they reform in new ways that include a growing awareness of how to manipulate the boundaries for the purposes of gaining attention as well as increasing knowledge of how to filter what and how much of the public sphere to allow into the private world. This growing awareness holds hope for resisting the decline of discourse and opening up space for reflection, analysis, and transformation.

Web 2.0 and the Rise of Participatory Culture

Thus far I have discussed the nature of the attention economy and way it pushes people toward originality and individualism as they seek to find attention through the Internet. I suggested this push for originality manifests itself either through "oversharing" and "thoughtcasting" or through reflection and deeper thinking. I also discussed how the drive for attention has contributed to the breakdown of the boundaries between the public and private spheres as well as the dissolution of discourse as people "overshare" and "thoughtcast". However, I also suggested that there appears to be a growing awareness of the shallowness of online discourse and the promise of the Internet being a place where discourse can be reclaimed. In this section, I explore how the Web 2.0 and the advent of participatory culture (Jenkins et al. 2006) may be providing an antidote to the pressures of the attention economy and fast capitalism.

The term Web 2.0 refers not to technological change in the underlying architecture of the Internet, but rather the way people use the Internet (Graham 2005). The term was first applied in 2004 and has since grown as a way to identify the way the Internet has developed into a participatory space rather than simply a space of consumption. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) argue that the difference between the first, pre-21st century iteration of the Internet (Web 1.0) and Web 2.0 is the ethos that guides participation.

Specifically, Lankshear and Knobel (2007) argue that under Web 1.0 content development was very much part of the industrial world whereas under Web 2.0 it is created by users. Web 1.0 is industrial, and Web 2.0 is post-industrial. Most importantly, the ethos underlying Web 2.0 is that creation occurs collaboratively and through a distributed network, and content is created through participation rather than being handed down from an organization. Table 1 demonstrates some of the differences Lankshear and Knobel have identified.

The differences between the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 worlds further underscore the differences between the Fordist and post-Fordist economies. In a Fordist economy decisions are made by industry leaders and handed down for specialized implementation among workers, whereas in a post-Fordist economy, managerial hierarchy is flattened because the fast pace of business requires day-to-day decisions to be made locally based on immediate

need (Gee 2000a; Gee 2000b; Kincheloe 2000). In order to survive in such a world, workers must know how work collaboratively, quickly, and across space and time. If they do not, they risk being limited to low paying, economically unstable service and production jobs. Participation in Web 2.0 practices may be a reproductive avenue for preparing youth for participating in a fast capitalist economy (Jacobs 2006), but it may also be a way of transforming society through membership in a culture of democratic engagement (Jenkins et al. 2006).

Table 1. Web 1.0 Comparison to Web 2.0

Web 1.0 / Old literacies	Web 2.0 / New literacies
Publishing	Participation
Centralized expertise	Distributed expertise
Individual possessive intelligence	Collective intelligence
Individuated authorship	Collaboration
Scarcity	Dispersion
Ownership	Sharing
Normalization	Experimentation
Stability and fixity	Innovation and evolution
Generic purity and policing	Creative-innovative rule breaking
Information broadcast	Relationship
Professional service delivery	DIY creative production

According to Jenkins et al. (2006), a participatory culture is one in which members of a community can easily become participants.

[A participatory culture is] a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another. (Jenkins et al. 2006:3)

It is important to note that participatory cultures are not dependent upon the Internet, and indeed anthropological research literature demonstrates that participatory cultures exist in many communities and are often referred to as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) or communities of learners (Rogoff 1990; Rogoff 1994). These communities or cultures, which are often found in agrarian, artisan, or indigenous populations, have become models for progressive educators and are supported by the learning theories originally developed by Vygotsky (1978) in which learning is seen as the gradual handing over of responsibilities important to the community through guided apprenticeship (Rogoff 1990). Furthermore, the idea of community is central to participatory culture in that the focus shifts from that of individual expression to community involvement and involve the development of social skills developed by those who are engaged as content creators in the Web 2.0 world (Jenkins et al. 2006).

The social skills Jenkins et al. (2006) identify as being learned in a Web 2.0 based participatory culture include play or experimentation, performance which is the ability to adopt alternative identities in order to improvise, simulation

of real-world situations, appropriation which involves taking existing texts and remixing it to create something new, multitasking, distributed cognition which involves interacting with tools to expand mental capacities, collective intelligence which requires the pooling of knowledge, judgment or the evaluation of multiple data sources, transmedia navigation or the ability to follow the flow of text across modalities, networking in order to find, synthesize and disseminate information, and negotiation which requires the ability to move across diverse communities, understand multiple perspectives, and follow alternative norms (Jenkins et al 2006). As Table 2 shows, it is clear that the skills learned by those engaged in a participatory culture correspond with the qualities of Web 2.0 named by Lankshear and Knobel (2007).

Table 2. Web 2.0 Qualities Compared to Skills Learned in a Participatory Culture

Qualities of Web 2.0 / New literacies	Skills Learned in a Participatory Culture
Participation	
Distributed expertise	Distributed Cognition
Collective intelligence	Collective intelligence
Collaboration, Dispersion, Relationship	Networking
Sharing	Negotiation
Experimentation	Play, Simulation
Innovation and evolution	Performance, Transmedia navigation, Multitasking
Creative-innovative rule breaking, DIY creative production	Appropriation, Judgment

Given the differences between the types of engagement and skills that are needed within and developed by the Web 2.0 world or participatory culture, I suggest we need to approach our analysis of what occurs within the blogosphere with an understanding of the ethos that guide those who participate in that world. To apply a Web 1.0 way of thinking to a Web 2.0 world is ineffective. This does not mean we disregard the understandings of the world that have been developed during the course of human history, but rather that we explore the problematic nature of the attention economy, the breakdown of the boundaries between private and public space as well as the dissolution of the line between text and the world through an understanding of the fact that we are in the process of transitioning from a top-down, industrial Web 1.0 way of thinking to a democratic, post-industrial Web 2.0 mindset. This may be difficult given Prensky's (2001) point that those of us, such as myself, who were born into the predigital world have a different way of understanding the world than those who have grown up in a world permeated with digital technologies; however, I believe it is not impossible and will attempt to do so in the next section.

The Byzantine World of Blogging: The Case of Emily Gould

At this point I turn my attention to the online world of Emily Gould, who has been called "the world's most successful blogger" (Barna 2008). This moniker is not meant as praise but rather as a response to her ability to build a public presence. It is important to remember that the world of blogging I am describing here is only one type of blogging. As discussed earlier, there are educational blogs, political blogs, news aggregate blogs and so on. I have chosen to focus on the world of Gould's blogging because it captures so well the issues described by Agger (2004).

Gould was an associate editor at a publishing house in New York and was also keeping a personal blog (<http://www.emilymagazine.com/>). She had built a readership of several hundred people, some of whom she knew in person, but most of whom she knew only through their comments. During this time, she also wrote a young adult book and was an avid reader of the online gossip site, Gawker (<http://gawker.com>). When she was 26, Gould left the publishing house to become an editor for Gawker. In spring 2007, Gould's notoriety grew when she appeared on the Larry King Show to discuss the problem of paparazzi and the Gawker feature, Gawker Stalker, to which people send in text or email messages reporting celebrity sightings in Manhattan. Jimmy Kimmel, a comedian who built his career around a fraternity boy persona, had recently been a target of a Gawker post in which he had been identified as being drunk, guest-hosted the show. During the program Kimmel and his other guests challenged Gould about Gawker Stalker and the issues of privacy and safety. Following Gould's appearance, the clip was posted online (see Youtube). Immediately following her appearance on CNN, comments to Gould's blog postings on Gawker exploded. Since that time, the Youtube clip has received over 1,500 comments and 622,899 views.

In her May 2008 New York Times Magazine essay, Gould reports suffering emotionally during this time, but she continued to work for Gawker and continued blogging. Following a break-up with her longtime boyfriend, she posted information about her personal life on the Gawker site and also started a second personal blog (<http://heartbreaksoup.wordpress.com>) on which she shared more intimate aspects of her life. Although she claims that this blog was supposed to be private, it found readers and become public. Eventually Gould left Gawker, broke up with her new boyfriend, and wrote about the breakup in her blog. Her former boyfriend reacted by writing an article about having his personal life exposed on a blog in the New York Post Page Six Magazine (Stein 2008). Gould's infamy continued to grow and in the immediate aftermath of the publication of her essay, she was the target of scathing remarks about her self-indulgent writing style, her propensity for "oversharing" and for laying bare the details of not only her life but of those around her.

Although little written about Gould has been complimentary, it is clear that Gould has achieved increased public presence and prominence in the online media world. In June 2008, a Google search on "Emily Gould" resulted in 71,600 hits. I examined the first 30 pages of hits, and with one exception, all referred to the blogger, Emily Gould. I closely examined the first few pages of hits and found mostly links that specifically discuss her New York Times Magazine essay. These include online newspapers and blog sites such as The Huffington Post (primarily political news), Silicon Alley Insider (digital technologies news), Gawker (gossip), FishbowlNY (a media blog), New York Magazine, and Blackbook Magazine, articles in the New York Magazine about Gawker and the world of blogging. There is also an audio story on National Public Radio. These sites then lead me to more articles such as the one written by Gould's former boyfriend for the New York Post Page Six Magazine, as well as Gould's two blogs, and postings and stories by and about her that predate New York Times Magazine essay.

Attention and the Worrisome Benefit of Shifting Boundaries

It remains to be seen how long Gould is able to retain the attention she is currently receiving. The circle she currently moves in, referred to as the "creative underclass" (Grigoriadis 2007) is akin to the Algonquin Roundtable of the 1920s with its penchant for sharp-tongued critiques of their fellow Manhattanites and especially of those who hold some level of social, economic and political power. Whether a Dorothy Parker or Robert Benchley arises out of the group remains to be seen[1]. Regardless of Gould's future, I suggest that her current prominence as a blogger is a result of her exploitation of oversharing. In Agger's (2004) terms, oversharing is the result of the breakdown between the public and private sphere. However, where Agger was concerned about the incursion of the public into one's private space, the propensity for oversharing has switched the direction and results in the intrusion of those things once known only by a select few people into the public sphere.

This returns us to Lankshear's and Knobel's (2001; 2007) point that blogging and other forms of new literacies in an attention economy results in new definitions of privacy. This rethinking of privacy is reflected in New York Times Magazine editor, Gerry Marzorati's defense of his decision to run Gould's story. He firmly placed her story within the larger questions that are facing today's young adults.

One of the things we are most interested in at the magazine are those lifestyle issues — what we call Way We Live Now issues — that blend personal narratives with larger political or ethical or philosophical concerns. These are the kinds of things readers are engaged by on Sunday morning (or anytime, in cyberspace). How the Internet is re-describing how we

understand privacy, intimacy and personal history is, I think, such an issue... (<http://www.mediabistro.com/fishbowl/ny/news/2008> paragraph 2, June 20, 2008) [emphasis added]

Marzorati and the New York Times Magazine statement shows an understanding of the changing nature of today's world as brought about by the Internet, and this interest is, I suggest, a move toward building public discourse about the nature of the world in a participatory way.

Gould's story can be seen as encompassing both of the perspectives toward privacy: that of the world pushing in and that of the personal pushing out. For instance, the interview with Jimmy Kimmel, Gould attempted to defend the way the public intrudes into the private world of celebrities through a site such as Gawker Stalker. She argued that the definitions of public and private space are changing and that Gawker Stalker represented "citizen journalism." Kimmel rejected Gould's claim about the changing definitions of privacy and another guest countered Gould's point about citizen journalism by arguing that journalism requires a level of fact checking and integrity that Gawker Stalker lacks. Gould's argument was that in this age of ubiquitous digital media, no one should assume that his or her actions in public are private and that no one expects a site like Gawker Stalker to be fact checked. Kimmel's response to Gould deteriorated into a personal attack on Gould's character.

This exchange, conducted in public on CNN, encapsulates Agger's (2004) point about the boundaries of the public and the private as well as the breakdown of the boundaries between text and the world and the decline of discourse. First, Gould suggested that Gawker Stalker is an example of citizen journalism and that readers do not expect those postings to be fact checked. Although Gawker Stalker is indeed an example of participatory culture in that anyone can contribute, it also exemplifies that unfiltered or at least unconsidered postings do little to add to our understanding of the world and society and instead turn participation into a voyeuristic exercise. The second issue raised in Kimmel's interview of Gould is that of the redefinition of privacy and the intrusion of the public into the private. Kimmel objected to Gould's argument that no one, regardless of whether they are a celebrity or not, should expect not to be a potential target for surveillance when they are in a public place. Whereas Agger is concerned with the way electronic media allows the work world to push into one's home life, Kimmel's and Gould's argument raised the issue of what constitutes the right of individuals in public space. Is private space only within the walls of one's home, or does it extend to one's everyday activities in society? Kimmel argued that it does, and Gould claims that in today's world of digital technologies, it does not. Finally, the inability of Kimmel to sustain a civilized dialog about the issue without descending into a personal attack points to Agger's argument that discourse is declining.

If we examine the issue of privacy raised in the Kimmel/Gould exchange through the lens of Lankshear's and Knobel's (2001) argument that the onus of managing privacy is now on the one who receives attention we see that Kimmel's objection carries little weight. According to the ethos described by Lankshear and Knobel, celebrities in public spaces are responsible for managing how the public sees and approaches them. However, we are also responsible for determining what to let in to those spaces we can control. Sites like Gawker Stalker exist only because we contribute to them and read them.

As stated earlier, maintaining privacy and the separation of public/private space is an act of balancing the push in of information against the seeming need to push out in order to maintain a public presence within an attention economy. At this point, I turn my attention to the issue of pushing the private into the public sphere. This matter was not raised by the episode between Kimmel and Gould, but is the one that is the most salient in Gould's New York Times Magazine essay. I suggest that based on an analysis of her essay and those things that have been written about her and the members of the creative underclass, Gould has gained attention and built her career by masterfully manipulating the phenomenon of "oversharing" or by letting people know intimate details of her life and those who associate with her.

Although she projects an aura of ingenuousness during the Kimmel interview and in the pictures that accompany her New York Times Magazine essay, Gould (2008) is not naïve. She recognizes that oversharing is related to the pressures of the attention economy as well as to the media culture.

It's easy to draw parallels between what's going on online and what's going on in the rest of our media: the death of scripted TV, the endless parade of ordinary, heavily made-up faces that become vaguely familiar to us as they grin through their 15 minutes of reality-show fame. No wonder we're ready to confess our innermost thoughts to everyone: we're constantly being shown that the surest route to recognition is via humiliation in front of a panel of judges. (Gould 2008a:2) [emphasis added]

If this is the case, then the distance and reflection called for by Agger (2004) is antithetical to success in an attention economy. The old ways of gaining attention and building a reputation are too slow in a fast capitalist

world. In her article, Gould notes the different path her career could have taken had she stayed in a job with a traditional publishing house. She writes, “At my old job, it would have taken me years to advance to a place where I would no longer have to humor the whims of important people who I thought were idiots or relics or phonies” (Gould 2008a:3). But she also notes that in her job at a traditional and respected publishing house she would have been mentored and allowed to make mistakes whereas in the world of Gawker, she was given the opportunity for a meteoric rise and the means to attack those whom she once would have had to answer to, but she had to do so under high pressure and without guidance. Of that pressure, she writes,

I was judged solely on what I produced every day. I had a kind of power, sure, but it was only as much power as my last post made it seem like I deserved. Sometimes I worried that I’d been chosen not in spite of my inexperience but because of it. Hiring women in their early 20s with little or no background in journalism was a tactic that worked for the site’s owner twice before, and I expected to be a victim of the same kind of hazing my predecessors were subjected to as they learned how to do their jobs — and how to navigate New York — in public. (Gould 2008a:3)

Although Gould was pushing her private life into the public sphere, she did so as a reaction to the pressure of the attention economy. In her essay, she admits to have exhibitionist tendencies as early as high school, but as a high profile blogger on a high profile website, this propensity was rewarded. She had to write posts that gained attention as measured by page views and by comments, and if her estimation of the impact of reality television and media culture on youth psyche is correct, she had to overshare in order to achieve her goal.

It appears that Gould has managed to gain a level of attention and build a career in an economy where attention is scarce. Her experience almost seems orchestrated to move her career forward. As *New York Magazine* notes,

It’s almost part of Gawker’s business plan to ensure that its young writers, by attracting the attention of those they are sniping at, are able to leap into the waiting arms of the mainstream media before they become too expensive to employ (Grigoriadis 2007:1).

While that may work well in the moment for those young writers, in the long run we need to ask, what are the implications of rewarding such attention seeking and the breakdown of boundaries for society and for the development of a participatory culture in which participation means contributing to the betterment of the human condition rather than the betterment of one’s personal bankroll or ability to get into trendy night clubs?

The reactions to Gould’s essay indicate that her perspective and approach to blogging is not universally valued within the blogosphere. For instance, one critic of Gould worries that readers will consider Gould’s perspectives as representative of all bloggers. An anonymous author writes of the fear “that people will mistake her perspective on the Internet, writing, and fame as the perspective of an entire generation of bloggers” and that “Some bloggers are able to write about things other than themselves (New York Daily Intel 2008:1). This critique of Gould points to a disagreement of the purposes for blogging. As Mortensen (2004) notes, blogging individualizes the universal, but to do so effectively without being overly self-referential requires a distance and reflection. Gould (2008), however, writes that blogging is a way to maintain a record of one’s existence.

I think most people who maintain blogs are doing it for some of the same reasons I do: they like the idea that there’s a place where a record of their existence is kept — a house with an always-open door where people who are looking for you can check on you, compare notes with you and tell you what they think of you. Sometimes that house is messy, sometimes horrifyingly so. In real life, we wouldn’t invite any passing stranger into these situations, but the remove of the Internet makes it seem O.K. (Gould 2008a:2)

Research indicates that Gould’s drive to blog as proof of one’s existence is common (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz 2004). Nardi et al. (2004) found that the primary reasons for blogging among the young, affluent bloggers they interviewed were 1) documenting one’s life; 2) expressing emotions, 3) providing commentary and opinions, 4) articulating ideas through writing, and 5) forming and maintaining community. Consistent with Nardi et al’s (2004) findings and Mortensen’s (2004) argument that being a blogger means being part of something bigger than oneself, Gould (2008a) notes that at first her blogging helped make New York City feel more manageable and that those people who commented on her blog became friends of sorts even if she did not know them personally. I propose that this need to maintain a public record of self and form online communities may be a reaction to the alienation brought about capitalism and the increased pace at which today’s workers are expected to make their mark on the world if they are to maintain their place as symbol analysts and knowledge workers rather than being displaced to the insecure backwaters of the service sector (Gee 2000b). This proposition may be a theoretical leap, but I suggest it is one worth exploring in future research.

Despite claims of the need for community, attention appears to be the prime reason for blogging. Gould (2008a) writes that even being insulted by strangers felt good because someone was paying attention to her. She critiques Julia Allison, another former Gawker and blogger for “naked attention-whoring” but recognizes that this drive for attention becomes addictive even if it is negative or vitriolic. Blogging, she claims becomes an obsession.

The will to blog is a complicated thing, somewhere between inspiration and compulsion. It can feel almost like a biological impulse. You see something, or an idea occurs to you, and you have to share it with the Internet as soon as possible (Gould 2008a:9).

But she also acknowledges that this drive to record every thought results in an unfiltered view of one’s life. In her New York Times Magazine essay, she writes of how “a single blog post can capture a moment of extreme feeling, but that reading an accumulated series of posts will sometimes reveal another, more complete story” (Gould, 2008a:10), and in her Heartbreak Soup blog she writes,

When you write about things as they’re happening — which is what most people do on blogs — you lose perspective, or rather, your perspective shrinks, so that only a tiny slice of your reality gets recorded. The cumulative impact of several months’ worth of posts can lead to an entirely different conclusion than a few snippets taken out of context. This is the danger of blogging and also its seductive charm. It’s so easy and fun to report on your current state of mind and your opinions, especially when you have strong feelings, and strong feelings are also fun to read about....Unfettered self-expression has its drawbacks, though. Like: what if you change your mind? What if you learn some things that make you feel entirely differently about that person, that movie, that guy? The version you recorded is still perpetually available, making you seem wishy-washy or, worse, like a liar if you flip-flop now. Your problem now becomes that the most popular result of a Google search becomes “the truth,” even if you’d like it to be otherwise (Gould 2008b: paragraphs 3-4)

In these two excerpts, Gould recognizes the need for distance and analysis and almost echoes Agger’s (2004) argument about the need for distance. Granted, Gould’s examples are mundane as opposed to a consideration of cultural, political, or sociological issues, but she does recognize what is gained when the reader takes the time to review the whole of an author’s work. The next step then becomes recognizing how a person and their ideas as reflected in their writing develops over time and in relation to the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts in which it was written and in which it is being read.

Toward Reflection, Distance, and the Promise of Participatory Culture

Participatory culture can mean simply tossing casually created texts into the abyss of the Internet and hoping someone will take note, or participatory culture can mean that growing numbers of people are taking the time to think and write about ideas. The reaction to Gould’s essay provides hope that authorial distance and reflection required to achieve this may be occurring. For instance, The Huffington Post (Sklar 2008) quotes one commenter to the New York Times Magazine essay as writing, “Don’t you have important things to do? Don’t you have real issues to write about that might affect your generation and the country generally?” (p. 1), and Haber (2008) of the New York Observer criticizes her for a lack of sociological insight. Gould (2008) herself provides some evidence of philosophical maturation. She writes,

Lately, online, I’ve found myself doing something unexpected: keeping the personal details of my current life to myself. This doesn’t make me feel stifled so much as it makes me feel protected, as if my thoughts might actually be worth honing rather than spewing (Gould 2008a:10).

It is this idea of “honing rather than spewing” that is key to resisting the breakdown of discourse discussed by Agger (2004). In blogs such as Gould’s and websites such as Gawker, texts flow into the world (Agger 2004) without any distance between the initial thought and the publication of that thought. The critics of Gould, and as we can see from the previous excerpt, even Gould herself, are calling for some distance and a renaissance of discourse.

This is not to say that we should eschew the personal if it serves to make concrete the abstract. Literature, regardless of the cultural tradition from which it arises, is at heart voyeuristic but is so for a purpose. The literature that stays with us does so because the human stories that grasp our attention are placed within the larger stage of societal conflicts and questions. What is missing in the self-referential writings that populate the blogosphere is the failure to venture beyond the self to make the connections to the larger world.

Although Gould's story is just a small, specialized snapshot of the blogosphere, the ways Gould manipulated the breakdown of public and private space and the attention economy in order to build a level of notoriety and thus increase her salability as a writer illustrate how blogging (or any Internet tool that provides access to public space) works within a fast capitalist, information based economy. In order to survive, if not thrive, information needs to be shared quickly and without review, vetting, or guidance. Mentoring is almost nonexistent in that those with experience in this fast capitalist, attention economy are themselves young and new to the field. As a result of this pressure, texts, in the form of blogs, are sent out into the world and consumed without consideration of how they fit into the larger picture of a person's life or society. As evidenced by the reaction to Gould's essay, there does appear to be some backlash against this trend. Writers and commenters are calling for deeper thinking and are starting to ask harder questions. We also need to begin to be selective as to what we let into our lives and to take time to consider what we send out into the world.

Lastly, we need to remember that the byzantine blogging world of Emily Gould and the New York media is but one part of the blogosphere. A view of blogging informed by a new literacies perspective shows us that blogs are becoming an increasingly important force within the world of the early 21st century. If we view blogging as a social practice, it has gained meaning in the political world as well as in the personal world. Blogging is growing as a form of dissent in African countries (Barber 2008). In Egypt, Iraq, and China among other countries, bloggers have become such a force that they are being jailed for what they are writing (BBC News 2008). In the United States, bloggers have attained press credentials (Sipress 2007), and brought down media icon Dan Rather for false reporting (Kurtz 2004). Educators are also seeking ways to incorporate blogging into teaching as a way to foster the development of writing skills (Repman 2005), learn languages (Ducate and Lomicka 2005), foster deeper learning (Ellison and Wu 2008; Wassell and Crouch 2008) and rethink and come to new understandings of what authorship and engaged reading means (Wilber 2007). Although educational uses of blogging have thus far proven to be problematic (Downes 2004; Knobel and Lankshear 2006), those educators who see blogging less as a writing assignment and more as a way to engage students in the world may have more success.

"If a student has nothing to blog about, it not because he or she has nothing to write about or has a boring life. It is because the student has not yet stretched out to the larger world, has not yet learned to meaningfully engage in a community" (Downes 2004:24).

Downe's point is one we need to bear in mind, not just for education but when thinking about participatory culture and Web 2.0 in general. The attention seeking behaviors of people like Gould, the lack of reflection and distance evident in the texts floating about on the Internet, and the deterioration of private space can be taken as the individual having yet to learn how to engage in the world of ideas. The emergence of participatory culture allows us to resist the decline of discourse and intellectual engagement, through the affordances of Web 2.0. We can learn to "meaningfully engage in a community" (Downes 2004:24) and mentor those in our communities as a way to resist the alienating forces of fast capitalism and the siren call of the attention economy.

Endnotes

1. The Algonquin Roundtable was a group of journalists, editors, actors, and press agents who met daily for lunch at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City during the 1920s. They were also known as the vicious circle and included writers Dorothy Parker and Robert Benchley who were writers for the magazine, *Vanity Fair*. Parker, who started off as a theater critic, was known for her caustic wit, and was fired from *Vanity Fair* for offending too many producers. She later became a prolific poet and short story writer and published in *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, and *The New Yorker*. She later moved to Los Angeles and became a screenwriter whose accolades include two Academy Award nominations. Robert Benchley was a humorist who wrote for the *Harvard Lampoon*, *The*

New Yorker, and *Vanity Fair*. He also wrote screenplays and received an academy award for the short film, *How to Sleep*. (<http://www.algonquinroundtable.org/> accessed June 27, 2008)

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