

# rhizomes.10 spring 2005

## The Blog Report: Technologies of Forgetting Craig Saper

“You forgot my blog!” -- Jeff Rice of [Yellow Dog](#) [in an email response to my Blog Report (Winter 2004)]

[1] Proust wrote to remember, Nietzsche to forget. Imagine the visual diagram of the boundary between the structure of remembrances and active forgetting. It does not appear blurry, but rather as a Mobius strip, a Kline bottle: a continuum. Forgetting depends on remembering something to forget. Remembering depends on finding something forgotten. Blogs and blogging now threaten to add yet another twist to this logic.

[2] With the explosion of blogs, everyone wants to archive even the most mundane recollections. Much like an infinite Borgesian library, the abundance of remembering must inevitably lead to forgetting on a scale unknown in the history of memory techniques. It now approaches the impossible point where bloggers and surfers forget more than they have remembered.

[3] In a world beyond “The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” we now forget other people’s memories personal, political, relevant, peculiar even beyond what we have read, transcribed, or eavesdropped. In the movie, the effort to erase the hero’s painful memories of his love affair makes him remember why he does not want to forget. In the blogosphere, efforts to remember allow everyone to forget as the messages literally sink to the bottom archived in an accessible (and therefore not pressing) heap. In the movie, one technician uses the hero’s memories to seduce the heroine (again) as if for the first time. In the blogosphere, seductions and frauds fuel the effort to forget by remembering.

[4] The asymptotic line of flight toward forgetting beyond remembering describes a forever receding and impossible unconscious. The blogs did not create the situation, but they call us into forgetting. Just as Avital Ronnell investigates Heidegger’s acceptance of the Nazis’ telephone call in relation to his theories of technology and what calls us into thinking (how could he not think about accepting the call?), one might start to investigate how technologies call us into a monumental and impossible forgetting. What is called forgetting? What calls us into forgetting?

[5] Barry Mauer’s “Proposal for a Monument to Lost Data,” attached as a [pdf](#) to [his blog](#) begins the related effort to memorialize lost data:

Though we have some cause to celebrate the enormous data storage capacity of digital media, our society has failed to recognize the enormous data loss that accompanies our shift from textual and analog archives to digital archives. This project aims to draw our attention to data loss as a profound problem affecting modern life.

And, later in the same essay, he explains the specific intent of the memorialization:

Though I want people to mourn data loss, I also want them to recognize data loss as a collective experience, not just a personal one. Collective entities—cultures, nations, and institutions—are losing essential data; languages, regional dialects, rituals, oral histories, neighborhoods and buildings are disappearing. Although this data can be recorded by ethnographers and historians, it is nonetheless in danger of being lost as “lived memory” and thus as memory essential to a culture.

With this problem of loss, Mauer seeks to memorialize and publicly mourn and, to thus, accept the inevitable loss (he points out that he does not oppose efforts to recover data, but that ultimately some data can not be recovered). Mourning, in this case, might resemble the acceptance of an individual’s lost limb.

Ramachandran’s research into phantom limbs provides the following insight; although a limb may be missing, it is still represented in the mind. In both cases, phantom limbs and phantom data, we continue to receive feedback about something that is not there. The monument to lost data is a variation on the Ramachandran Method, designed to help us put the loss of our data in perspective and to achieve a more realistic picture of our situation in relation to augmented memory. In the Ramachandran Method, the amputee learns to accept a new body image, and this new cognitive map of the body reduces suffering and increases adaptability. The Ramachandran Method is thus a form of mourning, perhaps a kind of mourning unique to the scientific age.

Mauer includes a conceptual blue-print for his rhizomatic monument:

The monument to lost data will consist of an electronic database accessible anywhere in the world by anyone with an Internet connection; plans call for an architectural component of the monument to be located at the NARA. The design of the monument to lost data is modeled upon the mycelium. The mycelium, the branching organ of mushrooms and other fungi, is to lost data what the museum is to stored data. The monument will attach itself like a fungus to the NARA, the repository of the nation’s data. “Fungi play vital roles in all ecosystems, as decomposers, symbionts of animals and plants and as parasites.” (Dix and Webster, preface) The monument feeds on the decaying matter of our information age, transforming it into something that is ultimately useful. The mycelium serves as the poetic structure for the monument to lost data because it permits a rhizomatic structure of networked passages, therefore permitting new combinations of species—in this case, new forms of memory for diverse data losses.

[6] In the description of the volume, *We’ve Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture* by the Editors of Perseus Publishing, Rebecca Blood explains how the realization of the vastness of the blogosphere and the effort to account for its content and data creates anxiety much like the melancholia Mauer describes in relation to the potential mourning that relieves the anxiety of melancholia:

Once one gets to the heights of trying to describe a general category of blogs, never mind simply trying to remember a few hundred thousand blogs, anxiety appears.

Here is a bibliography of a group of meta-blogs to get you into the mood:

### [Weblog and Blog Bibliography](#)

Tyler Curtain eloquently describes this primary emotion associated with blogs and blogging.

With little exaggeration it might be claimed that the primary emotion associated with popular thinking about blogging is anxiety. The number of bloggers and blogs is unwieldy and amorphous: to my mind a sublimity that is often associated with the innumerable swamps journalistic and other commentators who believe that one must, perforce, make some generalization about blogs, all blogs, every blog. Is there something that could be said about every blog? Where would one start? I imagine it this way: it is as if “the book” was a new technology and the Library of Congress’s contents were published at once. Surely there is something to be said about a phenomenon, practice, or a technology as ubiquitous and consequential as books. Yet most theorists (and certainly most social commentators) don’t feel the need to make sweeping statements about books, all books, every book, though there are interesting things to be said about them as media, as objects. But a blog, any blog, demands such a statement, yes?

He goes on to describe the unmanageable.

A search engine is a periscope on a complexity you can’t imagine. You catch your breath and reach for an archaic language. Isn’t this a vasty deep? One drowns. That game where you try to type into Google a phrase that will bring up one and only one reference, this is the obverse of this anxiety. It is a small, playful way of addressing a concern that is about managing what is, in fact, unmanageable. Take infinity and make it one.

Here’s the link and citation: Curtain, Tyler (2004). Promiscuous Fictions. In Laura J. Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff, & Jessica Reyman (Eds.), *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Retrieved July 2, 2004 from [http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/promiscuous\\_fictions.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/promiscuous_fictions.html).

[7] Rebecca Blood’s blog ([rebecca's pocket](#)) offers a history and perspective of how we got into this anxious situation (7 September 2000). The weblogs’ neurotic forgetting (so far without the Mauer memorialization for public mourning to relieve the neurotic anxiety) also suggests for Blood a double-edged sword with blogs as a resistance to the pummeling from the information explosion from mass media advertising and news sources:

We are being pummeled by a deluge of data and unless we create time and spaces in which to reflect, we will be left with only our reactions. I strongly believe in the power of weblogs to transform both writers and readers from "audience" to "public" and from "consumer" to "creator." Weblogs are no panacea for the crippling effects of a media-saturated culture, but I believe they are one antidote.

Blood, Rebecca. "Weblogs: A History and Perspective", *Rebecca's Pocket*

Blood also has a book on the culture, theory, and craft of weblogs called *The Weblog Handbook, Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog* (Perseus Publishing, July 2002; ISBN: 073820756X)

[8] The blog about current news on blogs has a much more benign mapping of the territory.

My name is Dave Winer and I run the Scripting News weblog, which was one of the earliest and is currently the longest-running weblog on the Internet. Weblogs are often-updated sites that point to articles elsewhere on the web, often with comments, and to on-site articles. A weblog is kind of a continual tour, with a human guide who you get to know. [Weblogs.Com News](#)

To relieve the anxiety of forgetting or being forgotten, we map. The efforts to map the anxiety now seem almost nostalgic, but soon after my last blog report, bloggers were mapping like crazy. Shortly after the Presidential election, headlines began appearing online like "Blogs Fuel Election Fraud Fears." Blogs raised "a ruckus over an analysis of Florida voting results" when "President Bush received a much higher number of votes than the number of registered Republicans in many counties". (Kim Zetter reporting at [02:00 AM Nov. 10, 2004 PT](#)).

[BuzzFlash](#)'s headline put it more forcefully in their headline "Stolen Election. America Hijacked." In the article "A BUZZFLASH READER CONTRIBUTION" Chuck Muziani explained that "there is no logical explanation for the reported result of the election, other than to say the election was stolen. Yes, stolen. Bloggers throughout the web are currently reviewing exit poll results, and comparing them to actual vote tallies. The conclusion amongst the bloggers: there is a disconnect between the two. Why would exit polls be accurate only in paper ballot counties, and not accurate in electronic voting counties in many states? This does not make sense."

A new form of logical or analogical explanation appeared: a way to remember or mourn.

[9] Other sites began to share maps and diagrams to explain the Red State victory. These maps, shared widely on the internet and linked to blogs, showed how nothing had changed since the pre-civil war days. The analogy between current Red States and Slave States offered a troubling explanation: [Free States and Slave States versus 2004 election](#).

With the new analogical explanations for the electoral college maps, many also started to send around the unifying "Purple Maps." [JoeTrippi](#) at "the revolution will not be televised" considered the purple America, a county by county map of the country that demonstrated how the Reds and Blues split the election and how the map was "one of the most interesting maps to come out of this election."

Trippi, in “the revolution will not be televised,” also mentioned a documentary film trying to map the blogosphere in a post titled Blogumentary:

Just got back from seeing the world premiere of my friend Chuck Olsen's Blogumentary at the Oak Street Cinema. It was exciting to see the results of two years of hard work. The themes in blogging are as disparate as the themes in real life, and Chuck did a good job tying them all together. Some of my favorite parts of the film involved bloggers from around the world who did telephone/webcam interviews, or filmed themselves and sent it in for Chuck to use. I hope more people get to see this film. He did a really great job.

[9] From [\*The Mirror and the Veil: An Overview of American Online Diaries and Blogs\*](#), by Viviane Serfaty, who teaches American studies at the University of Strasbourg. From the trip report at [Hypertext Kitchen](#):

“Online diaries: Towards a Structural Approach” was an extremely interesting paper by Viviane Serfaty, in which she proposed a description of the structural characteristics of online diaries or Web logs, based in the four parameters of accumulation, open-endedness, self-reflexivity and co-production.

Jill/txt also mentions Serfaty:

She’s also done work on women’s creation of identity in anonymous diaries and on the Aesthetics of Al Gore’s and George Bush’s Campaign 2000 Websites. She has published a book on internet politics, which grew out of her doctoral thesis, and yet her earlier grad work was in literature. (Filed under:blog theorising — Jill @ 16:40 [ Responses (1)])

The mapping of forgetting, of blogs, of the monumental loss of data, of electoral politics, and the terrain of anxiety led me to an exquisite-corpse-like experiment (simply clicking on the next blog button). It produced the following results:

<http://migraines.blogspot.com/>

<http://afterthepledge.blogspot.com/>

<http://horsehandicappingclub.blogspot.com/>

<http://fagnascar.blogspot.com/>

<http://cvhumanities.blogspot.com/>

<http://avoiceunhearddotk.blogspot.com/>

<http://politicaltherapy.blogspot.com/>

The list seems uncannily like a more concerted effort to apprehend the political anxiety associated with blogs and blogosphere. It also hints at a logic of the blogshere.

[11] The Bloglogic involves an Anacoluthian Process. From the Greek "anacoluthon" (inconsistency in logic), a general term for system processes or methods facilitating self-organization and emergence. In these processes traditional procedures are followed while at the same time they are transgressed, thereby allowing the emergence of something radically new. An example of an anacoluthian process is the crossing-over of chromosomes from both parents in sexual reproduction. An example in a business or institution when people from diverse organizational functions are brought together in a project team, hopefully resulting in the emergence of an innovative organizational structure. Etymologically the term describes a grammatical structure that "does not march together" and hence "does not follow." In rhetoric and in grammar it describes a sentence that interrupts itself in mid-flight and then resumes in a wholly unrelated syntactic way: "*I want to speak today about—can you all hear me in the back?*" Or it may be a pushmi-pullyu sort of syntax, as in ,i>We have to face the problem is that we can't win. It is characteristic of some inexperienced Planned speaking, where its unfinished syntax can sound disarmingly unstudied and sincere, but *anacolutha* (also *anacoluthons*) should not appear in Formal and Semiformal prose.

[12] The blog style disarmingly unstudied and sincere does not march together even within a single site never mind among countless others; efforts to constellate blogs as a pattern creates an anxiety of a loss that has already occurred and continues to reinforce the fading subject even as countless subjects tell the often mundane and trivial details of their lives. In Jungian psychoanalysis, the oceanic moment of recognizing yourself as a speck in the universe becomes key to an abreaction and personal epiphany of seeing your site as part of a larger whole. The blogs and other technologies of forgetting keep deferring the archetypal closure even as it keeps insinuating itself not as the links that connect all of us, but the loss and forgetting in an unstriated space without completion. Some will bemoan the sacrifice. Others will mourn in recounting in real time every absolutely specific detail allowing for a forgetting unbounded by remembering.