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Kill Your Blogs

by Richard Leader

One can tell a lot about a society by the way its citizens try to attract a mate: a decade ago, the most popular career listed by 20 and 30-somethings in personal ads was that of “web developer,” most often a euphemism for being otherwise or underemployed; their peers with real IT jobs were all too busy partying it up in Soho to bother with something as quaint as a personal ad. Today, in the post dot-bomb era, young and not so young people looking for love in a stagnant economy politely refer to themselves as “writers.”

This newfound love for the world of words seems to fly in the face of objective reality. A study conducted by the NEA found that the percentage of Americans who read literature has declined by seven points over roughly that same time period. And the rate of that decline is growing sharply, with men especially turning away from such genres: only one-third of American men still read literature of any sort, even when allowing for the widest possible interpretation of the term. It is also currently much more difficult to be a serious writer, career minded or not, as the internet is no longer a new frontier to be conquered with startling ingenuity but is instead a quotidian fact of life. Those who turn away from the printed page still face the same uphill battles of yore in their quest to challenge and inspire others—effects quite naturally dependent upon the condition of being published. While self-publishing has never been easier, instead of simply contending with editors, writers are now awash in a digital world where no man will budge from the stage and be demoted, if only for a moment, to a mere member of an audience. This development has been widely taken as a good thing, a universal theater for mankind to hurl his defiance at the stars: through a patriarchal lens, dueling tyrants are often confused with democracy.

Our culture is profoundly at odds with itself over the value of ideas. “Information must be set free” and yet somehow the creation of intellectual property must also be the savior of the Western economy, a dream that largely died in the late-Nineties when the advertising bubble burst (an online banner ad once generated over one hundred times as much revenue as it does now). But for one brief moment in history that conflict appeared to be reconciled and capitalism seemed to be doing the right thing. As easy as optimism came in those days, it all came crashing down and the backlash of the artificial Blue Collar ethos came into full swing. Even as ‘starving artist’ and ‘intellectual elite’ have become ironic synonyms—handy now that oil barons have co-opted the ‘everyman’ identity—here in a sea of Bubba-rhetoric and patriotism there are somehow now more men who dream of writing the Great American Novel than those who are even willing to read one, great or not.

The above focus on gender is not unintentional: pseudo-literacy, a literacy limited by the masculine ego’s compulsion to actively generate rather than to relate in any fashion that could be misinterpreted as passive, is the driving force behind the current writing obsession, manifested by the weblog. Frequently truncated down to “blog,” the genre took center stage during the 2004 Democratic and Republican conventions as many of the most popular male bloggers were not only invited to attend (where they often acted out as literary equivalents of nouveau riche, snarling lips and keyboards working to disguise their wide eyes) but also received paid advertising from various parties and interest groups—none of which tended to see female writers and their concerns as appropriately political, conventional wisdom shoehorning them into ‘personal’ genres no matter their content. Bloggers were also credited with the solving the authenticity of various National Guard memos and ending the career of Dan Rather, not to mention a host of more scandalous and increasingly insipid triumphs.

But what is a blog? According to those who have a vested interest in promoting it as a named category, whether they participate in the genre or are journalists trying to cash in on the phenomenon with expository columns of their own, the consensus is that blogs are frequently updated ‘guides’ to the web, exposing links to new content, regularly with annotation by the host: a process that was once vital during the infancy of the internet when websites of potentially pivotal importance were being added every day. Yahoo.com and other such mainstays actually started out doing exactly that before they began to rely on automated software to build their search engines. However, the ascendancy of the word “blog” itself did not take place until the tail end of that process as domains such as Blogger.com first went live in 1999. Even then, the term did not achieve any level of real cachet amongst the most diehard of internet users until at least 2001, with mainstream notoriety postponed until late-2004.

Keeping in mind that the activity itself predates the named-activity by almost a decade, the question of “what is a blog?” can be answered quite differently: a blog is a fascism of format that promises ultimate freedom of the press—a belief espoused by many of the genre’s most recent adherents and proponents—while herding the public into expressing themselves in an externally scripted and socially defined method of interacting. Modern blogs differ from their unnamed progenitors in a few notable ways now that the format has crystallized. Blogrolls, comment sections, and trackback features are all necessary to fully participate in the “blogosphere,” a popular neologism that serves to inculcate an insider-focused dynamic to the genre, even though the content of websites within the blogosphere is not necessarily radically (or even marginally) different in scope or style than those without. But given the social and political currency now awarded to blogs, who wants to be without?

It would be more than a little unreasonable to declare a mode of communication fascist just because of the mode's popularity and inevitable self-propagation, thus driving other styles to extinction, but in the case of blogging (to use the fashionable gerund) popularity is often everything; hence the "blogroll." While the dynamics are complex, the definition is not: a blogroll is simply a long list of hyperlinks to other blogs, sometimes those that are similar in nature to one's own and sometimes not. These lists form webs of association and are often created opportunistically, in that the goal is sometimes as much to win reciprocal links in the blogrolls of others (hopefully those more famous than one's own) as it is for the more mundane reason for the blogroll's existence: a way for the creator of a blog to conveniently keep tabs on the other blogs he or she reads; that is, a personalized centralization of utility.

In the early days of the internet, such centralization would be described as a "homepage," where one kept a copy of a résumé, a list of interests and assorted links to other pages, the obligatory pictures of the family pet, and often commentary on various issues. Indeed, the only difference between the homepage of yore and the blog of today is the automated infrastructure—most bloggers can now rely on software to post their comments rather than meddling with the code themselves—and the imposition of chronology, each entry bearing a time and date stamp, although most homepages reflected that as well to a certain extent.

If the homepage was femininely personal in nature, the blog is paradoxically solipsistic and yet expressly external—and hence masculine—in focus: the average blogroll is growing ever longer, to the point where many bloggers rely on special software to continually update their lengthy lists that have outgrown their basis for existing. If the stated purpose of the blog is a time saving device, users filtering the content they judge as worthy of seeing and then presenting it to their peers for their convenience, the imposition of

so many filters (often focused on redundant content) becomes a stumbling block when considering the validity of that alleged basis. In other words, if someone could not possibly read all of the websites on their blogroll on a regular basis, any etiology of the phenomenon must therefore lean towards social factors—factors that have made the homepage a relic of the past while spiraling its reinvented (yet practically identical) progeny, the blog, into a sexy buzzword.

Besides turning the internet into the equivalent of a high school popularity contest amongst those who participate in the blogosphere, conveniently duplicating the social hierarchies of external reality, the blogroll has had devastating consequences for the websites left out of the new order due to the way many search engines rank content through a process of link popularity. For most sites, achieving a link from a third-party remains a coup of sorts: in the past, there was little incentive for anyone to ever link to a site with even the second-best information on a particular subject, as the best site was usually sufficient. Blogs and their sprawling lists of links, always prominently displayed on the front page—something that search engines reward and more traditional websites are disinclined to do, as they tend to focus on their own content rather than that of others—short circuit those ranking algorithms, driving up the value of words and phrases included in blogs at the expense of sites who do not follow such a socially-oriented design ethic.

Socially-oriented might be a misnomer, given the tendency towards solipsism, but a concentrated focus on just what "social" entails becomes necessary in the face of a barrage of claims supporting the revolutionary nature of the blog—and the promise of not just free but *equal* speech that comes with it. This claim especially appeals to young males who are encouraged to believe that they are entitled to possess meaningful or even dominant voices in society, but nevertheless tire of having to wait their turn and for their elders to step aside. Female bloggers are certainly receptive and sympa-

thetic to that same rhetoric of equality, but they frequently lack the same expectations concerning their own voices. So while the rhetoric is available to women—and often coincides with feminist ideals—the lack of expectation is often matched with a lack of result; hence women tend to participate less in the various blog pranks that their male peers tend to view as revolutionary ‘speech-equalization’ measures.

Taking advantage of their format’s privileged place among many search engines many bloggers have engaged in a process now commonly known as “Google Bombing.” This is done through a premeditated campaign of reflexive hyperlinks within participating blogs: in short, by using various keywords to misdirect the software that scans websites for content, they can drive the relevancy of an irrelevant page to the point where it begins to overwhelm real information. One notorious example is that a Google search for “weapons of mass destruction” will return a page with a joke about U.N. inspectors. Many young men see the privileged position of blogs in search engines as a prosperity doctrine, recompense for their current, if temporary, placement on the lower rungs of patriarchy; a way to strike back at everything from *Rolling Stone* to *The New York Times*, or any institution from which they feel their voice is excluded. However, Google Bombing and other such stunts—even just the significant boost in audience that can be garnered from the development of the blogroll—will never displace such institutions, only those people who are less able to exploit the new (and almost-mandatory) format for electronic communication, a group composed largely of women.

The ability of third-parties to post instantaneous comments to most blogs is the primary aspect of the genre’s appeal, as are various “trackback” features that allow the owner of one blog to inform owners of other blogs that they are being discussed, perhaps rallying them (and all of their readers) as potential audience members. While ostensibly another social aspect of blogs, this must be

weighed against the evidence concerning conventional notions of literacy: the explosive popularity of blogs is in no small part due to the fact that men can actively express themselves not just in their own blogs, but in those of others, reading only so much as they need to in order to form their own rebuttal—which one can imagine to be quite a meager amount of reading indeed. *Writing has become the new reading*, subject to the “if a tree falls in the forest” effect: reading as an activity only possesses efficacy when it can be proven, empirically, by immediate material benefit. This is something that renders blogs exceedingly valuable to the masculine mind beset by doubt. Despite our gender’s happy illiteracy, we have always managed the lion’s share of letters to the editor in other venues as well; here, the rewards for being a ‘reader’ have never been so enticing.

A certain amount of crosspollination has occurred, given that more traditional journals and news agencies have discovered that allowing comments is an easy way to both draw more readers—principally male ones, of an age and demographic favored by advertisers—and to keep them coming back to older content in order to view further comments perhaps influenced by their own. Alternet.org, a liberal news portal, got off to a rocky start when entering the world of blogs with their Peek: its initial blogroll included only male writers (other than Wonkette, which will be discussed below) causing a fair amount of consternation. The list was emended and one of the feminist writers they added, Trish Wilson, was later approached by one of the Alternet editors to compose a full fledged article for their website. Her “Solomon’s Solution,” an argument against presumptive joint custody of children in divorces, naturally proved controversial, although it is impossible to tell how many of the commentators were themselves readers of Alternet (and presumably liberal males) or were just chronic hecklers of Wilson, following from her own mention of the article in her blog—though there she had some measure of control over what responses could remain posted.

Although direct reader comments are also enabled for some of the more famous syndicated columnists who appear in Alternet, their words appear elsewhere and can be seen without the venomous retorts joined at the hip. In some respects, Wilson's article has more authority than the anonymous contributions that trail after, though that authority is not absolute: while headlines and bylines as artifacts continue to be privileged (just as conservatives rankle that they still fail to possess academia and its canon of 'dead white male' geniuses, even as they declare the world of higher education to be trivial and out of touch with real American values), the limited authority that Wilson is afforded does not necessarily exceed the greater risk and effort it took her not only to write the article but even to make the radar of Alternet in the first. Yet those who wanted to oppose her view and affirm that of patriarchy needed only a temporary-email address to register at the site and counter her, without fear of consequences; a product of the so-called democratic and equal speech granted by the new dynamic of read-to-writers fostered by blogs.

The presence of third-party commentators also invalidates the genre's *raison d'être*: if blogs are proof that the press finally belong to the people, what does it mean when one can be comparatively better published by posting one's best thoughts inside the margins of a more popular blog (through commenting) than crafting one's own work at home? Yes, given the mercurial nature of the internet, fame can come swiftly and without warning (and depart just as fast), but those patterns of success typically follow those of the world at large, reduplicating the same prejudices that proponents of blogs swore would be abolished. A blog's worth is not just in its content but in its pedigree—which does not necessarily make the content itself more credible or authentic—whether the proprietor is a student at Harvard, a professional writer, a faded celebrity, or even just an attractive face in a webcam photo; so-called 'readers'

can jealously attach themselves to those legacies through the possibilities afforded to them by their own comments to the elite's blog, a process more immediate and gratifying than being a more passive consumer of such cultural legacies as people have been in the past.

Now that the constraints of physical space no longer act as a barrier to sycophancy, even the stereotypical young-radical finds himself at an impasse when railing against elite institutions, given how he sometimes shares vicariously in them to his advantage when courting fellow bloggers and the entangled web of social dynamics that such activity entails. This aspect of blogs also obviates against social change, where liberal and conservative straight white males of age can rail against each other in their dialectics only to call it a night and share a beer with another, metaphorically or in all actuality, while those outside of that norm lack the same freedom to "agree to disagree" since those disagreements tend to run ramshackle over their identities, forcing them into an ontological oblivion.

It was no accident that tomfoolery such as Google Bombing was promptly renamed "memes" (a "transmitted unit of cultural information," after the Greek *mimēsthai*) by the men who perpetuate such deeds, the borrowed academic jargon affording legitimacy to their actions. Few question the validity of such authority—stemming from institutions more intangible than academia, such as patriarchy—despite the fact that it incontrovertibly undermines the democratic new world that blogs have promised. It is then easy for the words of public revolution to be co-opted by individuals. While those who participated in the "weapons of mass destruction" meme might have felt that they were involved in something grander than themselves, it was still the owner of the WMD 404 Error page itself who received the profits from the sale of branded t-shirts. When thousands of liberal-leaning bloggers pasted a "Fair and Balanced" logo on their websites, was it truly in solidarity with Al Franken and his legal battle with Rupert Murdoch (whose FOX News contested

ownership of the phrase) or in emulation of him? The deference involved only points out the obvious and Franken has sold more books than any of his supporters.

The conservatism and illiteracy of men in general regularly works to their advantage in the world of blogs: not only does the reactionary nature of the format (responding to news rather than reporting it) suit most men's proclivities quite well, the constant struggle between aggressive egotism and indolent Laconism, those who are otherwise often receive more than their fair amount of attention. And while very few men strictly journal in intensely personal and vulnerable ways, compared to the number of females of all ages who engage in such writing (the "confessional" genre synonymous with "chick lit") it is these men who are most rewarded of all for their disclosure. Even as the media creates paranoid fantasies about teenage girls acquiring gifts (facilitated by Amazon.com's "wish list" feature) from lecherous men who feverishly watch their diaries, men themselves stand to benefit even more for their forays out of the political and into the personal: many of the most well read and respected of the "mommy" bloggers are themselves male parents and, on the professional front, not much in chick lit can compare to the success of Dave Eggers and his *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. Even collaborative blogs created for the express purpose of furthering female writers and artists have become launch pads for male pundits to get their start, as they are bound to receive more interviews from the mainstream press than their female peers, given the unique edge that sitting at the "girl's table" affords a man.

Conversely, men with popular blogs are often able to harness women as "guest bloggers," who are granted a larger audience in return for volunteering their work, even as they—due to their gender—become a form of social or political currency to the man who runs the show. Sometimes the politics of this are hard to discern for most readers, as in the case of blogs like Wonkette.com that are cre-

ated purely as a product: Nick Denton, a minor media mogul of sorts, needed to slap a nubile female face on his Wonkette.com in order to make it more marketable than its competitors. Despite being a corporate creation staffed by an entire paid team, the supposed personality of its editor, Ana Marie Cox, had to be inflated to eclipse those other facts—and thus become "Wonkette" herself—to meet the genre requirements of the blog format, banking on the new medium to reap financial dividends in the future. Wonkette is best known for launching Washingtonienne (a twenty-something DC intern's salacious blog recounting bad sex with a variety of barely-veiled politicians) into the limelight, a *Playboy* appearance included in her fifteen minutes of fame. Cox credits herself for discovering the young intern, but for many Wonkette fans, Denton himself remains invisible in his role as puppet master and profiteer.

In a world where private and corporate blogs are frequently blogrolled together indiscriminately as similar or equal entities (in a way that Sue's Homepage.com and Sony.com normally would not be) it is dangerous to allow such hierarchal disparities to remain in the shadows, subsumed in the triviality of genre. It might be more than a little bit brazen to declare blogs the opiate of the people, but they certainly work as an escape valve for creative pressure (creativity not accepted or endorsed by those who run print and other types of media until they can take advantage of it on their own terms), while it allows people the fantasy that hierarchy has been rendered irrelevant in the post-modern era. As the benefits of "independent media" are increasingly advertised to young people, little effort has been made to teach them how to read the fine print to discover exactly how independent many ventures are.

As much as the current popularity of blogs reflects specific goals and inclinations of gendered dominance, in the end, blogs themselves are not the problem: after all, the activity existed long before its more problematic components emerged and the format

imposed itself as an iconic mode of communication. Indeed, many of the first blogs (if not in name) and hyperlink-galleries were created and operated by women, something quickly forgotten in the short memory of contemporary culture. However, given that blogs have become emblematic of the attributed promises of *all* electronic discourse, these promises themselves bear examination as they are either untenable or outright lies. The internet will never be space devoid of sex, race, and class that libertarians demand, thereby normalizing everyone else to their white male standard. Beyond that, however, there are dire implications for the craft of writing. While journalists have lamented that electronic media is hamstringing the spelling ability of teenage girls, given the abbreviated language they must use on various electronic devices (though the effect of the similarly abbreviated taunts that boys use in their videogames are of no worry, given that their parents, teachers, and journalists have not consigned them to the pink collars of secretarial pools), peer-learning has become the dominant form of education. This is manifested not just in school children but even in the writing of middle-aged men who work for various US based technology websites who are now as prone to write "IBM have" as "IBM has," adopting Anglophonic forms from their often more literate peers in Britain. The very fact that their language was so transformed remains unbeknownst to them.

Peer-learning has both positive and negative effects, the latter in that it tends to privilege cleverness over elegance or the poetic, but with the imposition of the cult of cool surrounding the blog and the cultural primacy granted to the mode, peer pressure itself becomes a confusing thing when it is next to impossible to define who is or is not a peer: and without knowing that, aspiring to one standard or another is rendered ever more difficult. On the one hand blogs are the champion of the people, especially the young, who are disenfranchised from the printed page. And yet just about every

brand-name magazine or journal is trying to cash in on the phenomenon by hiring paid professionals to work blogs under their aegis. These professional blogs tend to be unimpressive as the author's more original and compelling thoughts naturally get shifted to other, more lucrative and prestigious venues; their blogging remains a diversion at best, a perfunctory public relations duty at worst.

Some professionals cast into the role of bloggers use the novelty of the medium as a chance to act out in ways that would likely have them held to a higher standard of responsibility in other arenas: *The Nation's* incipient blog, ActNow!, penned by Peter Rothburg, promoted a pornographic calendar last December as a windfall for the "political gift giver." Babes Against Bush, a project of one David Livingstone—presumably also a man—and his Orwell Productions PR company, was perhaps a reaction to a similar group in support of the president, only his included nudity and ties to the sex industry itself. An acquaintance of mine wrote a letter of complaint, arguing against *The Nation's* support for the group: even if feminists might sometimes seem divided when it comes to issues of objectification, a more general progressive magazine should certainly be required not to pick sides, especially under the pen of a male writer.

What she received, I am told, was a personal email from Katha Pollitt (despite the complaint being made to a generic address), asking her to recognize that not only is she herself a feminist columnist, but so are Patricia Williams and Naomi Klein, ignoring anything to do with the issue at hand through some kind of self-tokenism. While Pollitt has been critical of blogging in her own writing ("That opinion writing is a kind of testosterone-powered food fight is a popular idea in the blogosphere"), for her own part, even she loses out: while several blogs carry endorsements from her, claiming her as an admiring reader, her statement of support is often listed alongside others from male bloggers, who themselves have

nary a fraction of Pollitt's own influence or success. She had to achieve that much more in life to be worth that blurb.

Yet the elevated status of professionals inflates the value of such work within the blogosphere, winning them spots on blogrolls (aiding their publication as a whole when it comes to internet search engines, generating traffic and revenue, as many advertisers rely on a rather opaque ranking generated by Alexa.com to judge the worth of websites) as amateur writers attempt to court them through the comments they make, perhaps hoping to win a reciprocal hyperlink or even get their foot in the door as a journalist through their new-found connection to a 'real' writer. Authenticity remains the holy grail for bloggers, although possession of it remains divisive, with some bloggers contending that their medium's ability to topple empires (or just Dan Rather) is proof enough of its validity as writers. Such claimants, however, are rarely direct participants in such actions and likely only blogged about those who were involved, typically after the mainstream press had already run with the story. Indeed, the blogs of socialites and political interns where many stories are first broken frequently belong to those privileged both by birth and geography, who grew up in the Suffolk and Orange Counties of the world, who could have just as easily gone the more traditional route in fast-track journalism (and often do): while blogs have most certainly shifted the perception of increased-opportunity amongst writers, the format has been far less successful at actually widening it in any meaningful way.

Others bloggers are less serious about their role, some simply because they are less serious individuals to begin with, while others see themselves as almost or near-journalists, a role they are more than happy to step into given their acceptance of the ethic of pseudo-objectivity professed by print and broadcast news: sensing that the value of blogs is in their over-the-top bias, they believe that taking their work to a higher level would strip it of precisely what

makes it worthwhile. Thus bloggers experience a world of lowered expectations paradoxically tinged with the promise of entering the field as a professional writer—and all the silly cultural baggage the career entails—yet there is no bridge provided to span the gap, other than their own excitement.

The internet as we know it was built on the back of such excitement: AOL once harnessed over 14,000 "community leaders" who freely, or for the pittance of a complimentary account, created the value-added content that helped to make the company what it is today. This was perhaps in violation of minimum wage laws as the concept of volunteerism does not apply to for-profit businesses, or so argued Leon Greenberg, a lawyer for many disgruntled community leaders seeking a class action suit. The internet's promise of potential was so strong in people's minds that it outweighed their own indoctrination in capitalism, something the true capitalists were able to exploit to their advantage. Consider the similar situation of Amazon.com and the "reader-reviews" the website is able to offer, useful not just for convincing potential buyers to choose one item or another, but because every word of every review is content for search engines to collate and refer back to their own users. While mainstream journalists have poked fun at authors for anonymously abusing the service to promote their own work or ridicule that of competitors, little attention has been given to the fact that people are all too willing to donate their own time and abilities for the benefit of a massive corporation—one that is not shy in exploiting not just that work but is willing to prey upon ego and insecurity (notions certainly tied up in our society's conception of the art of writing) to ensure that it continues, granting "Top 100" or even "Top 1000 Reviewer" awards to participants. Consider the language Amazon uses to promote involvement in its "Listmania" feature: "It's free, democratic, and fun," the knee-jerk politics of the appeal serving to obscure the financial motivation of no-cost content generation.

Most bloggers must clearly feel that they benefit from their pastime or vocation—however one sees fit to describe it—but so do those who slave away day after day in pursuit of a “Top 100” badge next to their screen-name on Amazon.com; the question of who *really* benefits seems a prudent question to ask, even if it ultimately remains unanswerable. What can be addressed, however, is informed-consent: how much of our excitement in pursuing an endeavor of any sort is genuine, and how much is shaped by external coercion, threats and promises made to guide us into taking that specific course. If making it into established forms of media was not presented to the average writer as even more untenable than it actually is, would they still choose to blog to the extent that they do? Would young people especially continue to dedicate themselves to writing in the most transient of formats were it not for the cult of cool that surrounds them, one fostered by the professionals we admire and long to emulate, even as they themselves begin to slum in our realm of ‘zines and ‘blogs—truncations of longer words that we, not they, are supposed to be too hip, too ephemeral, to say? Put in those terms, it seems doubtful, and this decade’s cause for excitement is less genuine than that of the last, given that the golden-goose of online advertising is cooked: the last time internet-based writing enjoyed a surge of popularity it was backed by cold hard cash. If that excitement turned out to be in vain, current events look far less rosy and might turn out to be equally heartbreaking unless the false promises attributed to electronic forms of communication are dealt with honestly, with the realization that such mythologies were created as political tools.

The promise of unmitigated free speech and the fetish-like appeal of “independent media” is a contract between one generation of males to the next, an impossible pledge of shared power and influence in a zero-sum society. That men both young and old, poor and rich, are able to buy into the fantasy of blogging as an antidote

to all problems endemic to hierarchy, serves to keep males of all sorts in line—and thus ahead of women—herding back those who might rebel against the system. The “democratic-underground” can be an awfully nice sandbox to play at being an adult in, a quagmire that grabs hard, and even though some of the more excessive notes of the blogosphere should cause obvious alarm, most of us have already invested far too much time and energy to renege on it—and patriarchy is calling.

The internet is an idea so powerful that many still demand that the word be capitalized as if it were a brand name that Al Gore mythically invented. Over the course of the past decade, Gil Scott-Heron’s “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” has been gradually replaced by the appropriately anonymous “The Revolution *Will* Be Downloaded” within popular consciousness. Unless that revolution is pornography, it would seem that the arrival of the internet has done little to change the political landscape, only accelerating it: As a society, we have a vast need to imagine that our latest obsession is radically different from the media of the past. The mythology of agency ascribed to the internet, overstating its participatory nature by forgetting that reaction is privileged over action, has only served to disguise how it often functions in similar ways to older forms of communication that we rightly hold in suspicion. While the online world does lend a sense of participation to its users, the true agency of its contributors is often exaggerated, something easily exploited by the corporate interests who still run the show. After all, television viewers have chatted about their favorite sitcoms around the metaphorical water cooler long enough to create the very expression. By relating the scripted events to their own lives, the process of social networking manufactured the meaning of the text after the fact as audiences spoke in languages handed down to them by the medium itself. We must allow for the possibility that the same laws of physics apply today, even to our most darling of inventions.