

Publishing the Confidential

An ethnographic study of young Irish bloggers

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2011

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Abstract

From blogs to social network sites, young people have been early adopters of all forms of Web 2.0 communication. Diary-style blogs have been one of the tools they have used as outlets for creativity and communication, whilst simultaneously bringing into a public forum a genre which was inherently private.

This thesis is the result of a three year ethnographic study of two groups of young Irish bloggers on the LiveJournal platform, which mixes blogging tools with social network facilities. Drawing from Bakhtinian concepts, it proposes a framework to describe and analyse blogs as semiotic artefacts, defined by the presence of a literary space, a social space and a technological space as three interrelated layers within the chronotope of the blog. It also posits the existence of a trialogical relationship between the blogger, the reader and the technology related to the tool and platform.

Whilst the young bloggers from both groups all used their blogs as personal diaries, their relationship with their readers and their engagement with the technology underpinning the platform impacted on the content of the blog and also on their involvement in time. Their management of privacy issues was part of a process, constantly negotiated with the reader, and through the technology and the narrative.

Acknowledgements

Whereas a doctoral dissertation may appear at first glance to be a project of individual research, there is no doubt in my mind that it takes a village to bring it to completion. My village was full of supportive and inspiring citizens. Chief amongst them were my two supervisors, Dr. Francoise Blin and Dr. Minako O'Hagan, an awesome and fearless team, who pushed, prodded, encouraged, kept me going when I stalled, and most of all inspired me with their own passion for research.

When I came back to third level education after a long break, the supportive environment of SALIS nurtured my renewed passion for learning; Maggie Gibbon is to be credited with setting me on the path to research, and for this I am deeply thankful. Around me in the postgrad room were friends and colleagues who helped to get over the humps and shared in the joy and excitement with much coffee and conversations. Online, other PhD researchers included me in their social networks and sustained me as I watched their progress from afar; and my long-time online friends were only a keyboard away. Offline, my friends showed incredible patience as I repeatedly disappeared behind my screen.

At the heart of the village were the young bloggers who kindly allowed me to read, and wonder, and laugh, and spend some time with them in their online space. I thank them all, and wish them many happy blogging years.

None of this would have been possible without my parents, who instilled in me a thirst for knowledge and undying curiosity about the world and words, and my siblings who steadfastly supported my new endeavours. And of course, those who started the

questions through their own inquisitiveness, Moira, Claire, Kevin and Thomas, who can hardly remember a mother who isn't doing a PhD, and who listened to stories about affordances and multimodality without complaint: thank you for your love, your patience, your support, and your insistence that I finish what I started... Fran, thank you for being with me all this way, and for writing with me the story of our continuing adventures.

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List of Conference Papers

Fowley, C. 2008. Studying adolescents' blogs: a multimodal approach ? *The Fourth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (QI2008): Ethics, Evidence and Social Justice, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 14-17, 2008*

Fowley, C. 2008. What are the children telling us? "What do we tell the children?" *Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature sixth annual conference , Marino College, Dublin, 8th-9th February 2008*

Fowley, C. 2007. I've been reading your blog... Methodological implications of ethical issues in the study of Irish adolescents' blogs *Let's Play, Association of Internet Researchers annual international conference, Vancouver October 17-20, 2007*

Fowley, C. 2007. The curious incidence of privacy in adolescents' blogs - *SALIS research seminars, April 2007*

PROLOGUE

When Kate comes home from school, she turns on the computer and logs in to LiveJournal, to check on her friends' blogs, and write what happened during the day. She keeps her mobile phone close to her as always, but also opens up MSN in a window on the screen. She checks if anyone she knows is on at the same time, so she can start chatting. She also reads some fanfiction, and even writes some herself. Her favourite is Harry Potter fanfiction, but she mischievously likes the very bad stories, ridiculous plots and purple prose, which she has soon learnt, are called "Sues". With her good friend Anna, she harvests the worst – or best – of them and publishes them in a special LiveJournal they created together.

Most of the time, though, she checks on her friends from camp, who all started blogs around the same time. Some have not kept up the writing, and just read what others are posting, content to participate only on Bebo. All her friends, from school and from camp, are on Bebo now, and she shares some pictures and funny stories there, but her real life and feelings are kept in her blog. She has too many "friends" on Bebo, where she added all the people she knew slightly, whereas on LiveJournal, only those who also write blogs are on her Friends list. There are two of her very best friends from school, and then her friends from the camp where she goes to every summer. She has gradually added friends of those friends, whom she has subsequently met in town, during one of their camp reunions. She writes often, and if she misses a week or so, she feels she needs to recount everything that has happened to her in the intervening period; she looks at her calendar where she keeps note of everything, and then writes long entries on her LiveJournal. Sometimes, if she is in a giddy mood, she just writes humorous posts, banter really, that she hopes her friends will pick up in the comments section. They

usually do, mostly Anna, and the two of them can hold long conversations, sometimes spanning a few days, on the same entry. Her blog used to be public, but one day, someone from school found it, and Kate felt slightly uneasy, there were some things she didn't want everyone in school to talk about; she liked some of the girls there, but others were not her type at all, and she would rather remain a bit more aloof with them. So she locked her blog, and it is now "Friends Only"; she picked a nice picture in black and white for the first page, with the words "FRIENDS ONLY" at the bottom, and a few humorous lines to explain the reasons why the blog was now locked. And although she has a very good relationship with her parents, she wouldn't like them to read her blog either; she sometimes talks about them, or about her sister, and she also recounts tales of outings and parties which are not meant for their eyes. The rest of her friends can read all her entries; she knows that Anna has created three separate friends lists, and that some can read entries that others can't, but really, she can't be bothered with that.

Over time, her blog has changed. It started as a way to keep in touch with people she didn't see everyday, as well as a way of discussing what happened during the day and sometimes asking for advice, or just some comfort when things were difficult in her life. When she broke up with her boyfriend, everyone on her friends' list left supportive comments, even if it was just to hug her – virtually! Other times, something she wrote would start a flurry of Instant Messages and texts between herself and Anna. But the core group started growing apart, many of her friends stopped blogging, and then stopped going to LiveJournal completely. She keeps it up though, and her entries are more and more like a diary. Anna and a few others still read, but more often though her entries seem to be hers alone, and no one comments on them. Lately, she has started reading over her old entries, and whilst some of them make her laugh and remind her of

good times, in others, she sounds so whiny and immature that she sometimes thinks she might start a new blog altogether.

Chapter 1 Introduction

I came online in 1999, around the time when blogging emerged from its “geeky” confines, and changed from logging and sharing interesting sites to initiating a new practice of life-writing. These were the stories I wanted to read, pieces of personal life narratives moved from their hidden notebooks to the great publishing site of the web.

Whilst blogging is now becoming a mainstream activity, embraced by communities, educators, politicians and marketers, the hidden part of the iceberg is still the personal blog, the offspring of the first online diaries. Moreover, as blogging has become more widespread, witnessed by the emergence of sub-genres in the blog genre, and with the growing popularity of blogs as a space of information, there has also emerged a sliding scale of value in blogs. The A-list is now a well-known phenomenon (Trammell and Keshelashvili, 2005, Du and Wagner, 2006), and amongst other bloggers, an amused condescendence is often directed towards the writings of young people’s diary-type blogs, or journals, often associated with the LiveJournal platform (Gregg, 2006). In order to offset this power relationship between the “good” blogs and the young people’s “ramblings” often relegated to the word “online diary” or “journal”, I have chosen to use the word blog, as a deliberate means to give young people recognition for their writing. Moreover, my presence online and in the blogging spaces will be highlighted by the use of “I” throughout this thesis, situating me within the research.

Similarly, the issue arose of what to call the young people who blog. Are they users, readers, writers? In her doctoral thesis, Jill Walker (2003) reviewed these words used in cybertext research, and decided to use the word “user” for a reader, albeit a reader actively involved in the reading and creating process, as do many researchers in communication studies and Computer Mediated Communication. When it comes to blogging however, “user” does not convey agency, whether for the writer of the blog, or for the readers, who also participate.

What do these writers and readers do? They create their blog spaces, with templates and customization. They mix media and remix culture, inserting music and songs as the soundtrack to their narratives. They write, life-writing being the ultimate aim of the personal blog, they also write fiction and they write their interaction and relationships into being. They have conversations, sometimes in the comment sections of their blogs, and sometimes these snippets of conversations are part of a bigger conversation which is held transmedially, jumping from text messaging to instant messages to telephones to Bebo pages to Facebook walls to blogs, and sometimes face to face. They read, they read blog posts and comments and they also read images and mood icons. The actions are as diverse and varied as the blogs themselves, and beyond these immediate actions are others, of management of relationships, management of privacy, through writing and also through the use of the technology and the realization of the affordances that are imbedded in that technology.

What do they call themselves? Mostly, they call each other “friends”, and for the young bloggers involved in this study, this is quite a strong word, in contrast to the more diluted meaning the word has gained in social network sites (boyd, 2006). Whereas they write their lives, relationships, hopes and despairs on their blogs, when they engage

in metablogging, they write about writing, and reading, commenting, lurking. They call their writing spaces sometimes blogs, more often journals, or even by the name of the platform that most of them are using: Livejournals. All of the young people who accepted to participate in this study had their own blogs, whether active or dormant, and as such I decided to call them bloggers. The thesis will also use the words author, to highlight the literary element of the personal blog, as well as the words: reader, commenter, and friend.

Young people who started their blogs around 2004 or 2005 in Ireland were selected for this study; they can indeed be seen as early adopters in an Irish context; they created their blogs before it became “cool” to be online, before their contemporaries discovered communication through social network sites. They were also all high achievers at school, and many amongst them also had passionate interests which could be served by the use of online sites, like photography, music, and fan fiction. As such, they could be assimilated to “geeks” (boyd, 2008, Ito et al., 2010). Moreover, the sample for this study was kept small in order to achieve a holistic view of the young people’s blogs, and in no way can this research be used to generalize young people’s online lives or even blogging practices. This is a snapshot of two groups of young people blogging their daily lives in Ireland. It is very much their story, the story of how they wrote their blogs, how they communicated with their readers and made use of technological affordances, how they made sense of the technology they were using.

I started reading blogs and online journals very soon after their first appearance on the web. Coming from a literary background, I saw them as a new form of autobiography, a new diaristic genre, and those types of blogs were the ones I tended to read. The ethical necessity of an online presence for my research pushed me into blogging: I

created two blogs. One was hosted on the LiveJournal platform, and was intended as a means of contacting and staying in touch with the young bloggers who were taking part in the study. I also created a second blog, more open, which became my main personal blog, and included items pertaining to internet research in general, as well as more personal posts, detailing some of the minutiae of everyday life. Both of those I consider part of an ethnographic experience. They gave me an insight into the time and commitment necessary to create and keep a blog on a regular basis, and into the engagement with readers, known or assumed. This practice of blogging - albeit in a sporadic manner, for I became an occasional blogger rather than a prolific one - linked to the reflexivity inherent to the ethnographic experience, also strengthened the hypothesis that the reader is the crux, and that their presence, manifested in the text or guessed by the author, highlights the shifting concept of privacy, and the slow realization that this concept does not belong any more to a dichotomous relationship between what is private and what is public.

1.1 Scope

In conversation with colleagues, friends or acquaintances, the question which is most often asked is that of motivation for the creation of a blog. Why would people keep a blog, why would they write every day or every week? This was not a question I asked of my research. Rather, I wanted to know “how”: how young people wrote their blogs, how they interacted with their readers, how they made sense of the technology underlying their practice. This close analysis might throw some light on the “why” question, but it also created a new question, as to how we can study and analyse blogs, at a methodological level and also at an ethical level. Most of all, this research is rooted

in the qualitative tradition. It does in no way intend to be seen as a generalization of young bloggers, even of young Irish bloggers. It is the story of two groups of friends who discovered blogging, and engaged in the practice for several years. It is most definitely “the close examination of small things” (Baym, 2009, p.175).

From this context arose the questions which this research seeks to answer:

1. What is the relationship between the writer, the reader and the technology in young people’s blogs?
2. How do young bloggers manage their privacy and how do they deal with ethical issues regarding others’ privacy?
3. Overarching those two questions is the question of the conduct of ethical research online.

Moreover, this research considers the blog as a three-layered artefact, with a technological space, a social space and a literary space. This conceptualization of the blog required theoretical and methodological tools to account for complex meaning-making activities. Methods were brought together from different traditions or disciplines, although some associations proved at times problematic, such a narrative ethnography and a more structural conversation analysis for example.

Another issue when straddling literary and social sciences studies is the meaning of key concepts: for example, narrative in a literary study tradition is different from narrative in a social sciences tradition. Narrative analysis in literary studies can and is often applied to online texts, and this is done here to some extent, following the work on narrative by Marie Laure Ryan (2004) and David Herman (2004) whose interests are in new media as well as traditional fiction, integrating concepts from Jill Walker’s work, mostly the

concept of fragmented narratives (Walker Rettberg, 2008). However limiting the blog to a literary narrative study seems to overlook the social aspect of blogging, which can be better served by borrowing also from social sciences studies, and their broader conceptualization of narrative as the telling of stories, and accepting that writing narrative inquiry is a valid form of analysis.

Similarly, the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism takes different hues and meanings when adapted to other disciplines such as education studies or social studies. The initial meaning which comes close to the concept of intertextuality is transformed into a concept which implies dyadic communication rather than intertextuality. This thesis will attempt to show that the literary dialogism inherent to blogs which are firmly situated in a cultural context is echoed in the dialogical relationship between the reader and writer. Indeed, following in the steps of educational researchers Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005), it will introduce the concept of trialogic relationship in the digital context of the blog, as a means of re-introducing technology into the dyadic relationship.

1.2 Outline

A prologue and an epilogue figure as bookends to this dissertation, with a view to situating the research amongst the young people who inspired it. The prologue was a composite of several young bloggers who will feature at length in further chapters. The epilogue will introduce Tommy, a young blogger who started blogging in 2009 at the age of 14, and whose blog illustrates some findings and discussion elements drawn from this research, in terms of the management of privacy, and of the trialogical relationship between the blogger and his readers through the technological and literary artefact.

Chapter 2 looks at key concepts in a state of flux. Through a review of current literature on blogs in their various guises, this chapter will situate the study in a sub-genre of blogs, that of the personal blog or diary. The concept of adolescence is also reviewed in light of modern thinking and linked to the new concept of digital native, as well as the critique of this concept. Having thus established the place and actors of the study, this chapter also considers the fluctuating concept of privacy through a review of the literature and will situate this within life-writing and digital spaces.

Chapter 3 presents a theoretical approach to blogs as literary spaces, social spaces and technological spaces, drawing on Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, and drawing on Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) conceptualization of a trialogical relationship between the writer and reader through the creation of a technological artefact. The concept of affordances, from a physical, technological and social point of view is crucial to this trialogical aspect. The concept of space is drawn from Lemke's (2004, 2005b) interpretation of Bakhtin's chronotope, and is applied to digital spaces and time, thus grounding a conceptualization of privacy as a process, which derives from this trialogical relationship.

Chapter 4 introduces methodological issues which emerged from the theoretical viewpoint adopted in chapter 3 and from the crossdisciplinary outlook which ensued. It will outline and discuss the choice of an online-only ethnography, and will then outline the ethical aspect of internet research which is considered here as an overarching process, and which dictated some methodological choices. The chapter will finally discuss the ethical issues and conceptual gaps which are specific to internet research, relating those directly to this research.

Chapter 5 will introduce the blogs, as well as the platform used to create them, and the various other internet spaces which are signalled within the blogs and which the bloggers link to. Within that context, it examines the different tools which are required in order to analyse the three spaces or layers, and calls on the use of bricolage as a methodological solution, which allows the use of methodological tools from various disciplines and traditions to account for the three different layers of the blog.

Chapter 6 is an ethnographic rich description of the blogs and bloggers, separated into two distinct groups, one of younger bloggers who attended the same summer camp and started blogging thereafter, the second following the long dialogue of two friends who attended colleges in different cities and whose blogs sustained their relationship. It tells the story of each young blogger from the conception of their blog to the last days of data collection, with particular reference to their relationships with their friends and readers.

In an effort to question the relationship between writers and readers, Chapter 7 establishes the presence of the readers in the blog, as intended audience in the bloggers' posts, or as participants in an online conversation, as well as the role of the technology in this relationship.

Once the reader is established as a presence or potential presence in the blog, Chapter 8 analyses the process of privacy, from the bloggers' point of view at first, and how their practice changes over time to accommodate their growing conceptualization of readers as participants, lurkers or strangers. In a second part, the concept of privacy is brought back to an ethical issue linked to life-writing in general, and more particularly to life-writing as a permanent, persistent and public action involving unwilling or unaware participants.

Chapter 9 summarises the findings of both empirical analyses and links them to the theoretical reflection, expanding the discussion to the subject of digital literacy as the necessary step to engage in a process of digital creation and communication whilst engaging in the process of privacy.

Chapter 2 Blogging, Youth and Privacy: concepts in a state of flux

“I thought reading diaries should be like reading someone else’s mail: the only words worth reading are ones that should never have been written, loaded with dark confidences and outrageous secrets.” (p. xiii) (Wylie, 1993)

This thesis is firmly situated in an emerging interdisciplinary field, from which it draws its theories and methods; however, internet studies have grown exponentially across many disciplines, creating a wealth of literature from various viewpoints, and some distinct strands are emerging. The focus of this thesis was dictated by the research questions, and hinges on the fields of new media studies, as well as digital humanities, literature and literacy, as well as privacy studies, youth studies and education. The questions, dealing with aspects of life narratives in a new medium, and with the issues of privacy which may arise from personal diary-style blogs, did not lead the research into the areas of communications theory or e-journalism, which are more concerned with professional or journalistic blogs.

Herring et al.(2004) established that 49% of blogs were written by adolescents or emerging adults, and yet, most of the discourse around blogs, both in the media and in academic research, was centred around filter-type blogs typically written by men. Their analysis revealed a correlation between the type of blog, namely diary-style blog or journal, and the gender and age, with young people and notably young girls and women writing the majority of diary-type blogs, and thus excluded from most research.

Whereas the tide has changed, and young people's digital practices have become the focus of many reports and research, there still remain ambiguities as to the key concepts around young people's blogs. The first one is due to a societal change, and to a lengthening of what used to be called "adolescence", as is examined in the first part of this chapter. The second ambiguity was posited by Herring et al. (2005b) with the distinction between different types of blogs; the popularity of blogs has not waned, but the differences between different types have multiplied as their audience has grown; this is examined in the second part of this chapter, which deals with blogs and practices around blogging. Indeed research around blogs had also multiplied, making it very difficult to keep track of all published articles, so that it has become increasingly important to define and identify the types of blog studied, or the "niche practice" considered (Efimova, 2009b) . When it comes to diary-type blogs, or online journals, the public/private dichotomy is often highlighted, as well as the changing nature of this division. However, what exactly we mean by privacy is at best difficult to express, and as the differences between media and academic meanings grow, it is more than ever essential to reflect on the nature of privacy. The third part of this chapter will thus be dedicated to an overview of legal and philosophical definitions of privacy, as well as an overview of privacy as analysed in an online context and more particular applied to blogs and blogging.

2.1 Youth and youth online

2.1.1 From adolescence to youth

The current conceptualisation of lifestages, the scansion of life into several separate yet consecutive stages can be dated back to 800 BC and Greek philosophy. There were

initially two ways of distinguishing between different ages: a seasonal classification of 4 ages from childhood, then youth, and maturity to old age, or seven ages corresponding to the seven planets, and introducing the concepts of early childhood (*infantia*) and adolescence (*adulescentia*) (Deschavanne et Tavoillot, 2007).

Contemporary western society has recently seen the appearance of a new age, which some call post-adolescence (Mortimer and Larson, 2002) or “adolescence interminable” (neverending adolescence) (Deschavanne et Tavoillot, 2007). Societal changes have influenced this new shaping of adolescence, in particular demographic, economic and technological changes, which have resulted in the lengthening of the adolescent transition (Mortimer and Larson, 2002, Valentine, 2004, McNamee, 2000).

How then is adolescence or youth defined in current research on digital practices? Many reports have been commissioned on children/adolescents/young people and the internet, but the uses and classifications of age groups vary from one report to the next. Ofcom research (2008) shows that just over one fifth (22%) of adult internet users aged 16+ and almost half (49%) of children aged 8-17 who use the internet have set up their own profile on a social networking site. For adults, the likelihood of setting up a profile is highest among 16-24 year olds (54%) and decreases with age. Within one single report, the grey area of adolescence is thus obvious. The ages between 15 and 18 are alternatively classified within childhood or adulthood, both decisions creating obvious problems when it comes to analysing results: mixing 8 year olds and 16 year olds in the same group is problematic; they are totally different age groups, at different stage of development, with different concerns. Whereas a close reading of the results uncovers more subtle analyses, and whereas associated qualitative studies can remedy those problems, these very broad categories increase the risks of incorrect or incomplete

reporting in the media, which in turn creates moral panics (Jenkins, 2004). An earlier Ofcom report (Buckingham, 2005) had two separate categories: children and young people, from 9 to 19, and children and young adults from 9 to 25. In a National Endowment for the Arts report (2007) children, teenagers and young adults were considered. Young people were considered adults from the age of 18, which is the legal age of adulthood, however adult age was separated into two groups: 18 to 24, and 25 to 34. Valentine (2003) expressed the problematic amalgamation of different possibilities and lifestyles within a single category: young people between 16 and 25 may be at school or working, in the parental home or in their own place, in their country of birth or travelling abroad, whether for pleasure or for work and study. She calls “boundary crossing” this liminal period between childhood and adulthood, which seems to stretch well beyond the age of legal adulthood. Moreover, not only do the delimitations of various ages and cohorts vary from report to report, but they are matched by variations in definitions and use of terminology. The terms of “youth” and “young people” are framed by a reference to youth as a social and cultural construction, whereas the use of the term “adolescence” refers more to a biological state (Bois-Raymond and Chisholm, 2006). Subsequently, the terms currently used in research in the social sciences, education and the humanities have moved away from “adolescence” and moved towards “young people”, “youth” and occasionally “young adults” (Mortimer and Larson, 2002, Valentine, 2003, Livingstone, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2009, Buckingham, 2005, 2008, , Ito et al, 2008, 2010, boyd, 2008)

2.1.2 Youth online: Demonizing and victimizing discourses

The discourse on youth in digital spaces is framed by two different and opposing discourses, which in turn reflect the common contemporary discourses on youth, and

echo Dionysian and Appollonian notions of the child: a child is seen as wild and unruly, closer to a young animal who needs to be tamed, or as innocent and in need of protection (Valentine, 2004). Discourses on popular culture reflect the assumption that adolescents, or young people are susceptible to pernicious influences, be they from commercial entities or from popular culture of dubious moral values (Buckingham, 2003, Moje and van Helden, 2004).

The assumption implicit in such a discourse – that young people will move from “innocence” to some sort of deviance as a result of their engagement with artifacts of popular culture – reveals what adults believe about both young people and popular culture” (Moje and van Helden, 2004, pp 212-213).

So it is also for young people online, who are represented in popular discourse as victims who need to be protected from dangers like paedophiles, sexual predators and bullying, and whose threatened innocence gives rise to moral panics (Jenkins, 2004, Ito et al, 2008, 2009, boyd, 2008, Livingstone, 2009, Ess, 2009) or they are seen as perpetrators of crimes and misdemeanours, as bullies or vandals, in what Jenkins (2004) calls the “Myth of the Columbine Generation”.

Mainstream media often equate adolescent internet use with danger under various guises. Gross (2004) reports on the commonly held assumptions of Internet use amongst young people, notably increased isolation and levels of depression, incidences of identity experimentation, and usage determined by gender. All these claims, dating from early internet penetration and usage, were refuted by Gross’s study amongst young American adolescents.

Indeed, the popular and media discourses on youth online have been repeatedly disproved by academics and researchers (Lenhart and Madden, 2007a, Ito et al, 2009). By contrast however, academic research has also created a second discourse, where young people are seen as heralds of a new dawn, in what Jenkins (2004) calls the “Myth of the Digital Generation”.

2.1.3 Digital Natives?

The term “Digital Natives” was famously coined by Prensky (2001); this was not the first time that an age cohort had been given a name, in this they were heralded by the baby-boomers born after the war, and Generation X, born in the early 1960s to early 1980s (Ortner, 1998); yet it is important to point out that this generation is now named and defined by the technology they use: in 1998 already, there were hints of this in Tapscott’s Net Generation (Tapscott, 1998), or in the name “screenagers”, introduced by Rushkoff (Rushkoff, 1996, 2006). In all cases, these names refer to a generation which has grown up with digital games and tools pervading their social environment, and as a result, are better equipped to navigate the modern world than their elders. Indeed Prensky (2001a, 2001b) identifies a “discontinuity” in the social and cultural generational process, and claims that young people’s brains have been rewired by their use of technology. Whereas his vision is an optimistic or even utopian one, the same idea is seen in a very different light by others. Bauerlein (2008) describes the digital natives as the “dumbest generation”, and insists that there is “something hard to document but nonetheless insidious happening inside their heads”.

Whereas the term has widely been adopted as an easy way of differentiating between young people whose online lives are intricately intermeshed with their offline lives (Ito et al. 2008, Palfrey, 2008), it is also a concept which has been recently contested, on

several counts. Buckingham (2008) refutes most of all the technological determinism which underpins Prensky's concept of the digital native, and Selwyn (2009) underlines the lack of empirical data to support the claim that there is such a generation. Moreover, the concept is widely seen as ignoring the difficulty in establishing boundaries around a generation (Buckingham, 2006, Jenkins, 2007), and most of all, the term glosses over the very real diversity within a generation, and in this case the reality of a digital divide, which is not only generational as implied, but also social and geographical (Buckingham, 2006, Selwyn, 2009, Livingstone, 2009, Jenkins, 2007, Lehnardt, 2007). Indeed there have been claims that the digital divide is as marked within the so-called digital natives generation as it is between generations (Bennett et al, 2008).

It may be a reality that most young people know more about technology than their parents, a fact which is commonly celebrated by young people themselves, and the power that is thus given to them is rarely seen in other areas of their lives, except maybe for children of diasporic families who master the second language long before their parents (Livingstone, 2009). However, the concept of the adult as a "digital immigrant" has also been criticised, both as a disempowering concept (Jenkins, 2007) and as one which may not be entirely truthful, as some of the spaces and activities attributed to young people only, like games or fanfiction, are in fact also spaces and activities where many adults also engage. Palfrey (2008) introduces the concept of a "digital settler", and adult who engages with technology and the digital age from the start and can thus act as a guide to younger "natives".

The perception of young people as experts, implied in the label of digital native, can indeed give rise to some complacency that Livingstone (2009) warns against. Instead of

branding a whole generation, which in a way absolves adults, both parents and educators, of all responsibility (Walker, 2007), it would be more useful to speak of digital literacy, and different levels of digital literacy which may be observed with a generation, or transgenerationally. Prensky himself, whilst not rebutting his previous concepts of digital natives and digital immigrants, does however take some distance, judging that they might historically become irrelevant, and introduces the concept of “digital wisdom” (Prensky, 2009).

2.1.4 Digital practices and digital literacy

It is increasingly clear however that young people seamlessly integrate their online and offline lives, and that digital spaces become extensions of offline (or Real Life, as some adults would have it) environments (Palfrey, 2008, Ito et al., 2008, 2009, boyd, 2008, Livingstone, 2008) The advent of web 2.0 has brought about socio-technical shifts in practices, with tools for making, remaking, and tinkering, and networks to publish, share and distribute. Young people’s participation in online spaces can be described as either friendship-driven, as in social networks or instant messaging, or else as interest-driven, where young people congregate around some particular aspect of digital practice, such as fanfiction writing or anime subtitling for example, where they meet and interact with like-minded people (Ito et al, 2008). Buckingham (2006) argues that there is an inherent “banality” to most of the new media use of young people, that it is far from an active and participatory model, and that there lay the main digital divide, between active and informed digital natives, and the rest of their cohort.

Whilst there is general agreement on the new skills and peer-led learning for young people in this digital age, there is also a growing awareness that these social skills are

not evenly distributed within the so-called digital natives and that furthermore, they do not necessarily translate into negotiable skills in an educational or work context.

Adolescents have been called “digital natives”, but data suggests that they are both comfortable with new technologies, and yet not always as technically savvy as we collectively believe them to be. (Pewinternet.org, 2009)

A study on ICT in French schools identified three types of skills in schools: instrumental competence was very high amongst the young people, whereas meta-competence was higher in the adults/teachers. As practice and experience increase in both cases, they reach a transversal competence (Cerisier et al, 2008).

It is easy to forget that in Ireland for example, many of the young people whom we routinely call digital natives have only lived online since 2005 or 2006, and have been introduced to online spaces and practices when they joined the social network site Bebo.(founded in 2005, it became Ireland’s most successful website in 2007). If we are to be faithful to the metaphor, Irish digital natives, children who have always seen computers in their homes and have always known mobile phones and video games as an integral part of their own life, may have just entered secondary school.

2.2 Blogs and social network sites

2.2.1 Definition

Blog, weblog, online diary, journal? The terminology is as fluid as the medium. Practitioners use all of those words, in an indeterminate manner. They are bloggers, they write a Live Journal, this is their online diary. Historically, the first attempt at definition, and the most quoted, is that of Rebecca Blood.

Blood (2000) was one of the first bloggers who made a concerted effort at metablogging, and her definitions were refined in essay form. Her most quoted essay, “Weblogs: a history and perspective”, contains one of the first and most often referred to definition of weblogs. She differentiates between the first weblogs, which were in fact a list of links, then links and commentaries, with the most recent blogs, evolved from the emergence of blogging software. These, she says are “an outbreak of self-expression.” Blood makes a distinction between filter-style weblogs, directly derived from the first weblogs which were series of links selected on the web, and blogs, which she sees as “a sort of short-form journal”, leading to the creation of communities, “(the) sidebar an affirmation of the tribe to which they wish to belong”.

Meg Hourihan (2002), early adopter blogger and subsequently owner of blogging business, also tried a user definition:

Blog posts are short, informal, sometimes controversial, and sometimes deeply personal, no matter what topic they approach. They can be characterized by their conversational tone and unlike a more formal essay or speech, a blog post is often an opening to a discussion, rather than a full-fledged argument already arrived at.

She also notes the influence of the reader, although blogging tools did not allow to comment freely yet:

Emails are often rapidly incorporated back into the site's content, creating a nearly real-time communication channel between the blog's primary author (its creator) and its secondary authors (the readers who email and comment).

More recently, French blogger and blog watcher Cyril Fievet (2004) starts with this sentence:

Un nouveau format. Un nouveau terrain d'expression. Une nouvelle forme de communication. Un nouveau média.¹

However, he points out the difficulty, if not impossibility of a comprehensive definition, and after an enumeration of what blogs are and are not, he concludes that a blog is above all a publication format.

Herring (2004) gave a technical definition of the blog as “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence”. This definition is used by Scheidt (2006), with the added proviso that “contents of the weblog may be available publicly or through restricted access”. Walker (2005c) echoes this definition as “a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first”. If all researchers concur with this technical definition, they differ in their attempts to refine it.

2.2.2 A new genre

For Herring (2005b), blogging is seen as many things by many people. For journalists, it is about news from an alternative source, for scholars it is about research and knowledge sharing, but for many private individuals, it is about expression and self-empowerment. Her study endeavours to find the properties of blogs at a moment in time, and categorize them as a new genre, situated with respect to offline genres and the broader genre ecology of the Internet.

The popularity of blogs and blogging quickly spread to the business world, in work blogs or knowledge blogs such as studied by Efimova (2009) or Mortensen (2002), in journalistic blogs written by professional journalists on their newspapers' websites such

¹ A new format. A new field of expression. A new means of communication. A new medium. (my translation)

as the Guardian or Le Monde. It has also seen the rise of the non professional journalistic blog related to current affairs and politics. These, as well as single interest blogs such as cookery blogs, have given new meanings to the word, which are now commonly used in the media. This leaves the researcher – and the practitioner – sometimes struggling with terminology.

It is now argued that the time has gone for the relevance of the word blog (Efimova, 2007, Bruns and Jacobs, 2006). Indeed a lot of the misunderstandings within the blogging world and misinformation in the print media come from an overuse of the word, with no strict definition: newspapers now commonly introduce a blog section to their online editions, and indeed some introduce blog sections to their paper edition. Some predict that the word will soon only be used with a qualifier, as in research blogging, community blogging, or diary blogging (Bruns and Jacobs, 2006), and it is increasingly necessary to define the type of blog which is the object of research (Nowson, 2006, Efimova, 2009). Even though it should be pointed out that having to qualify the nature of a blog could be confining/constraining/narrowing, as not every blog will fit in a discrete category, users themselves tend to qualify their blogging. Certainly on the LiveJournal platform, users refer to “my LJ” (boyd, 2005) or my journal, or simply “here” hinting at the appropriation of the space for their own. LiveJournal is sometimes seen as a slightly apart from other blogging platforms; the LiveJournal site has sometimes been included in the group of social network sites (boyd and Ellison, 2008) through its functionalities, which in some cases heralded those of social network sites (Marwick, 2008), notably with the creation of the “friends list” and indeed the new meaning for the word friend, and the verb coined from it, “friending” are attributable to the LiveJournal platform (Marwick, 2008).

Current research on blogs specifies the field of research and data: professional, journalistic blogs and their influence on the media world, knowledge blogs, blogs written by cancer patients, etc. Blogs have also been heavily researched in the field of education, as possible tools for teaching and learning (Wang, S-K and Hsua, H-Y. 2008, Martindale and Wiley, 2004) notably in second language acquisition (Thorne and Payne, 2005, Thorne and Rheinardt, 2008, Ducate and Lomicka, 2008, Murray and Hourigan, 2008).

2.2.3 Personal, diaristic blogging

The practice of diary keeping, or writing a private journal has sometimes been dated to the end of the Middle Ages in Europe, influenced by the available technology of the time, notably the availability of paper and the invention of the clock at the beginning of the 14th century (Lejeune, 2005). Lejeune (2000) has been studying and researching diaries and autobiography for the past 20 years, has recently turned his writings towards the online practice of the narrative; he uses the term “cyberdiarist” rather than “blogger”, and calls on practitioners to describe their experience; “Être plus que diariste: être l’architecte électronique de sa propre existence.” (p. 19)²

His own reflection establishes his faith in computers as a useful tool for the diarist rather than the noisy typewriter; due to its “fun” aspect and its link to a new space of communication; this new autobiographical form also creates “networked intimacy” (“intimité de réseau”). For Lejeune, the blog is a diary, an online diary; he does not consider any other type of blogging practice. Ferdig and Trammell (2004), in their article on content delivery in the blogosphere, attempt a definition of blogs, linking

² To be more than a diarist: to be the digital architect of your own existence. (my translation)

them to “online personal journals”. In their study of Teenage blogs, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) also start with the idea of the “personal journal”; they then refer to Herring’s (2004) study to point out technological features peculiar to blogs, where the ease of use and of archiving is set on the same level as the opportunity of audience participation and formation of community. Nowson and Oberlander (2005) concern themselves with “personal diary-style weblogs, or blogs”, thus hinting at the existence of other types of blogs.

In their study of successful weblogs, Du and Wagner (2006) stress the aspect of “personal communication”, and the salient feature for them is the creation of networks or relationships with the blogosphere. They do not categorize blogs as different genres, but rather study their popularity, and concentrate on so-called “A-list” blogs.

Anjewierden and Efimova (2006) use Walker’s (2005c) definition, and add the concept of “individualistic expression”, coupled with the community formation around weblogs as salient points.

Michel Braud (2006) makes a distinction between the online diary and the weblog – the latter is seen as external, or “extime”, providing little insight in the self; Serfaty (2004) uses both “blog” and “diary” in the title of her book “an overview of American online diaries and blogs”. For her, however, “online diaries and weblogs are but the latest avatars in the long history of self-representational writing” (p.1). The distinction seems to stem from the length of the entries, a long and carefully written entry belonging to a diary, a shorter entry, consisting of commentary and links, belongs to the blog. However, Serfaty also points out that “The terminology itself is still in flux, and the words diary, journal and weblog are used indiscriminately by practitioners and commentators” (p.22).

Indeed Herring (2004) discards blogs from the LiveJournal and Diaryland platforms from her study because of their avowed link to journals and diaries, even though she does find that the large majority of blogs on other platforms are personal journal, favoured by women and young people. She traces the online journal back to 1995, pre-dating in fact the blog phenomenon, and seen here as a precursor of the genre.

However, Herring (2005b) later notes that journal-type weblogs are now included in the genre; indeed her findings are consistently of “individualistic, even intimate, forms of expression”. The perceived broadening of the weblog genre to include personal blogs is ascribed to the development of blogging software, suggesting that “the technical affordances of the weblog format make it readily adaptable to multiple purposes of use”. She goes further and points out that this fluidity will lead the researchers and practitioners to a point where a definition of the blog as a single genre will become meaningless, and that “weblogs will become a “medium”, or in our term, a socio-technical format, whose convenience and general utility support a variety of uses.”

This common metaphor of the diary, if telling, is also limiting and ignores emergent aspects of the genre, due in a large part to technological affordances; for Walker (2005a) narratives of the self, translated to hypertext “[...] are both “intimate extensions to memory” and complex representations of a collective narrative”(p.2).

2.2.4 Blog audiences and readers

Readers reading

This “distributed narrative” (Walker, 2005a) starts with the presence and action of the reader. Walker (2005b) used blogging as a pedagogical tool, as her own experience taught her that:

In my own blogging it became clear to me at an early point that writing for readers, however few, meant that I took far greater care in my writing than I did when scribbling notes in a notebook for my own eyes only. (p. 114)

Most researchers and analysts point to the presence of an audience as an integral and essential part of a blog, a reminder in a way of Lejeune's (1975) concept of the "*contrat*" or "pact" between the author of autobiographical text and the reader. It is a major point in Scheidt's (2006) work on the unseen audience. Similarly, Viegas (2005) stresses that a relationship with the audience is the most important element of blogging, and it is assessed through the comments, access logs of IP addresses and trackbacks. Half of the respondents in her study felt they knew their audience, yet it was a distorted view, leading to a false sense of intimacy. Viegas then introduced the concept of core audience/periphery audience to explain this phenomenon.

Readers commenting: the conversation

Early work on blogs also looked at online diaries, which were often hosted on specialised platforms, and tended not to offer the possibility to write comments on the entries, leaving instead the reader to write an email to the diarist (Lejeune, 2000, Serfaty, 2004b). These have not entirely disappeared, they are still to be found on the same platforms, such as my-diary.org, or opendiary.com for example. Many online diaries have however followed the road of the blog and integrated comments spaces into the online diaries. Indeed this textual presence of the reader has also been considered by researchers from many different traditions.

Mishne and Glance(2006) evaluated weblog comments in a quantitative analysis, determining that they constituted a large part of the blogosphere, and evaluating their volume as 30% of the weblogs analysed. Comments on blog entries can however be

seen as conversations, bringing elements of orality to the written text (Serfaty, 2004b), but conversation when applied to blogs often means conversation between blogs, as introduced by Blood (2002) who claimed that a blog without links to other blogs was in fact, not a blog. In this case, the conversation is performed through links to other blogs from entries which take up a subject on another blog and bring the topic to their own blog. These conversations can be studied with social network analysis (Herring et al., 2005b). Efimova and de Moor (2005) also include comments in the conversation, and their qualitative study is based in ethnography, as the conversation they study happened in a blogging community in which Efimova was heavily involved. Indeed in her PhD dissertation on Knowledge work and blogging, Efimova (2009b) first outlines conversation as the social aspect of knowledge work, and includes in these passive conversations, where the worker may only listen, and active conversations, where she participates. When these conversations are brought online to blogs, she outlines the difficulty of keeping track of the conversation, which is “distributed” and “fragmented” in nature (p.92).

2.2.5 Young people’s blogs

Writing power

The starting point of the conversation, be it oralized text or technological in nature, is always a blog entry, written by one blogger, which is a literary artefact. Writing and talent, or at least the perception of canonical writing is mentioned by Herring (2004) who finds that the current male-centred discourse on weblogs can be attributed in part to condescending attitudes towards women and adolescents with regards to writing, as they are “assumed to be incapable of “serious” writing”, and Gregg (2006) reports on the phenomenon of “LiveJournal bashing”, which implies mocking the interests of online

journal writers, assumed to be young and uninteresting, or “navel-gazing”. Both the content of the literary piece and the form are thus criticised and found lacking according to unknown and unpublished rules, and these critical discourses echo the common discourses on youth and online youth related above.

Young people’s blogs in Ireland

Early utopian visions of an internet which abolished borders and frontiers have been tempered; whereas it is widely acknowledged that distances have been reduced or abolished online, it is also becoming obvious that geography still matters and will in all likelihood continue to matter notably in terms of culture and communication norms. Many blog researchers are thus grounding their studies in national or local spaces (Tricas and Merelo, 2004, Trammell et al., 2006, Park and Thelwall, 2008). As Ireland came rather late to blogging, academic studies of Irish blogs and blogging are still very few (Cochrane, 2009, Fowley, 2004).

2.3 Privacy

Privacy is often seen as a recent concept, dating historically from the beginning of the 20th century, when the family lost its public role as an economic and educational entity to the benefit of the state, and thus retreated to a more private role, while simultaneously, the home saw an expansion that allowed individual members a certain amount of privacy from each other, with the advent of personal bedrooms in particular (Prost, 1985). Privacy is indeed a historical reality, and differs according to cultures (Aries and Duby, 1985). However, it is difficult to find a definition of the concept. Innes (1992) likens the search for a definition to “exploring an unknown swamp”, where a legal or everyday meaning leads to a chaotic array of literature on privacy, and where

no guiding thread seems to emerge. This, she argues, is due to the forced antithetical meaning of private and public, and can only be resolved first of all by a control-based theory of privacy, in which control would encompass control over information, control over access, and control over intimate decisions.

However, within the idea of a selective control of access lies also the idea of intimacy, crucial when it comes to privacy (Innes, 1992), and crucial also when we apply the concept of privacy to diary-type blogs. The idea of secrecy is also contained in most notions of privacy, and this again is of vital importance when it comes to a now public form of life-writing. Secrecy is indeed the most common understanding of privacy, linked to concealment of information (Solove, 2008b).

Altman (1975) argues that every culture, even those with maximum social contact, have inbuilt privacy regulation mechanisms. He posits that the aim of privacy is the “management of social interaction”, directly related to the establishment of the self and to the progressive establishment of boundaries since childhood. He thus gives a definition of privacy as “selective control of access to the self”. It is a dynamic process, as “In this model privacy is an interpersonal boundary regulation process by which a person or group regulates interaction with others”(Altman and Chemers, 1980 p. 75).

2.3.1 Privacy online

Privacy exercises the minds of lawyers and philosophers, journalists and indeed most ordinary people in this early part of the 21st century, because it is indeed one of the most significant ethical issues in digital media (Ess, 2009). Tavani (2007), after identifying four distinct classical privacy theories: non-intrusion, seclusion, limitation and control theories, rejects all of them, and argues that the theory most suited to

modern digital environments is that of Restricted Access/Limited Control, originally created by James Moor, in 1990 (Tavani, 2007). This however is then used with regards to data-mining and other privacy issues relating to information. Solove (2008b), finding problems in obtaining an encompassing concept of privacy in legal literature, finally resolved to posit that privacy was a cluster of related things, that it is contextual rather than abstract, that it is both culturally and historically contingent, and that it is easier to focus on privacy problems in order to define privacy. As part of a research on design, Nippert-Eng's (2007) empirical study showed that most people conceptualise privacy online as control of access to information and to self. Palen and Dourish (2003) in an effort to define privacy and adapt the concept to interactive technologies, have adopted Altman's definition of a "dialectic and dynamic boundary regulation process" derived from a "selective control of access to the self". Disclosure, Identity and Temporality are identified as the main boundaries central to privacy management in information technology.

2.3.2 Diaries, blogs and privacy

The concept of boundary as essential to that of privacy highlights the importance also of metaphors: the overwhelming metaphor of the internet as space is a structural metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003), where "one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another". However, there are more metaphors at work when we talk about blogs, or online diaries (boyd, 2005), so that metaphors are mixed: the blogging platform is an online space, belonging to the cyberspace metaphor, but the blog is also seen as an artefact, a diary, a journal. Are there conflicting notions of privacy at work in both metaphors, and do these impact on bloggers' practices and expectations?

The diary metaphor is often used, notably in the titles of research articles: “ Blogging as social activity, or, would you let 900 million people read your diary?”(Nardi et al, 2004), or “Oops! I’ve left my diary open to the whole world!” (Moinan, 2006). Both titles play on the implied dichotomy between private and public, or even intimate and public, secret and public. Indeed the diary has often been equated to intimate writing, as evidenced by the French term for diary: “journal intime” (intimate journal) The life-writing theorist Lejeune (2000) tellingly created a new word for online diaries: “journal extime”, using the prefix to mark the opening from ‘in’ to “ex” of a personal text from the inside to the outside, to potential readers. Privacy in diaries is often linked to the concept of secrecy, harking back to the idea of the adolescent paper diary physically locked with a small golden key, and containing the most intimate secrets. However, even in paper diaries, presumably not meant to be shown, the unnamed and unmentioned presence of the reader is palpable in what is not written, and what is not talked about. Indeed it is theorized as coding, in particular in women’s daily journals.

The use of encoding, whether in the form of silences and gaps or foreign and special phraseology, invites us to interrogate the public/private construction of the diarist as well as the truth value and presumed historical objectivity of the diary record”. (Bunkers and Huff, 1996, p.20).

2.3.3 Privacy and the audience

In a study of adult American bloggers, Viegas (2005) found that half of the respondents felt that they knew their audience, yet this vision was a distorted one, leading to a false sense of intimacy. The concepts of core audience and periphery audience were introduced to explain this phenomenon. Similarly, Nardi et al (2004) studied a sample of college students and graduate bloggers in the United States, where most readers belonged to the blogger’s social network ; on the subject of privacy, indifference was

the most common reaction, the existence of a potential unknown audience acknowledged yet downplayed. Yet de Laat (2008) assumes a different type of audience is intended for diary-style bloggers: he contends that diary-style bloggers, who assume trust with their unknown readers, assume in fact that unknown readers will either empathise with them and like their writing, or else will not keep reading and thus will only be a very transitory audience. He identifies three different approaches to privacy: the first one, welcoming both known and unknown reader, implies that the blogger affects some self-censorship as to the content of the entries; the second one welcomes unknown readers but considers readers from “real life” as trespassers into a virtual intimacy not intended for them, and a third approach abandons distinctions between known or unknown readers, and assumes trust towards all readers. These conflicted reports and analyses underline the necessity of defining the context of the research, the type of blog being researched, as well as the demographic and geographical contexts. The American Pew Report on adolescents and privacy in Social Networks (Lenhart and Madden, 2007a) found that for the respondents, context was crucial, as indicated by different attitudes according to the size of town or metropolitan area. Whereas no references to date are available for the Irish context, initial results seem to point towards the importance of the size of the real life geographical population in internet research. The size of the country and of the population may well influence perceptions and conceptions of privacy. Indeed, in the case of Ireland, when it comes to research on very specific populations, it is difficult if not impossible to ensure total anonymity (Whyte, 2006).

2.4 Summary and conclusion

At the start of the 21st century, concepts of adolescence or youth, blogging and privacy are all in a state of flux; a review of current research and literature on young people showed that it is a stage of life which has been lengthened in Western societies, for societal and cultural reasons. When it comes to the influence of digital technology on young people, two opposing discourses were identified, one demonizing young people, and the other seeing them as victims; a third discourse sees them as vastly superior to adults in the realm of digital life; this discourse is not without dangers, as it absolves adults of responsibilities, at a time when issues of digital literacies need to be considered both in the home and in education. One of the main issues of concern in terms of the online practices of young people is their management of privacy issues. The last part of this chapter looked for a definition of privacy which may be adapted to the context of blogs in particular.

Chapter 3 The blog as a trialogic multimodal space, and its chronotope

The previous chapter examined some central concepts underpinning this study, thus situating it in a field of adolescent studies and privacy studies in addition to studies on blogs, which have exploded onto the academic world, each one helping to shed some light on the practice or the artefact. These studies look at blogs through various lenses and viewpoints, depending on the traditions and disciplines which the authors embrace. Whereas this study starts from a literary viewpoint, situating the blog as a literary genre, it is also very much guided by the conception of the author and the reader as participants in the creation of the artefact as well as in the creation of the research. In order to account for this cross-disciplinary approach, I had to devise a theoretical toolbox. According to Lemke (2005b), theories are “simply assemblages of intellectual tools”, and he adds that

the practices of tool-using necessarily enter into the mediated action of an inquiry in ways that require them to be modified and adapted as they are co-ordinated with other practices to get something done, and they are differently adapted in each case (...)(Lemke, 2005b:111).

The process I followed was first guided and inspired by Bakhtinian thought. If we consider the personal, diary-style blogs as distant descendants of the diary, and part of autobiographical writing or life-writing, then it seems apposite to see them in the prism of a theory which was originally conceived by a literary theorist, although Bakhtin

himself considered his work more as “philosophical anthropology”. When it came to literature, his refusal of canons (Holquist, 2002) is evident in the similar importance imparted to primary and secondary speech genres, and his reluctance to oppose literature and non-literature (Todorov, 1984) is a welcome guiding light for an ignored or maligned genre in our contemporary digital culture, that of the blog, and even more so, of the blog written by young people. His work is marked by a social philosophy of language, where meaning is rooted in the social, meaning can only be shared (Holquist, 2002).

In the literary tradition, the blog is a type of life-writing, albeit published online; the convergence of biographical narrative and of a digital space thus needed a theory of time and space, which I drew from Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope and Lemke’s concept of heterochrony. Moreover, I draw on Lemke’s (2001, 2005b) concept of material semiotic artefacts as a link through time and space. The personal blog as descendant of the diary can thus be seen as a literary artefact, albeit a collaborative one, in which the reader takes an active part; to account for this participation in the text, I use Bakhtin’s concepts of heteroglossia as multi-voicedness and dialogism. Situating life narratives online also requires the use of theories of multimodality, and in order to account for the role of the technology in the creation of the literary artefacts, I draw on the theory of affordances, originally created by Gibson (1979) in the field of visual perception, but thereafter refined and used within many fields.

The concept of chronotope is examined in the first part of this chapter, from a Bakhtinian point of view, and as adapted by Lemke; this concept is then applied to the blog, thus considering the blog as a unit in time and space, as well as a dialogical text. The second part of the chapter introduces the concept of affordance, differentiating

between physical, technological and social affordances, which will then lead to consider the text in its dialogical relationship between the reader, the writer and the technology.

3.1 Time, space and the text

3.1.1 Time and space online

The concept of space has been linked to the internet from very early on, as the metaphor of cyberspace has shaped the way we think about the internet and what we call digital spaces. Indeed the internet as a social space has often been linked to youth and their use of digital spaces (Valentine, 2004, Ito et al., 2009, boyd, 2008); young people, who are rarely welcome in modern public spaces, are often only accepted as workers or consumers there, and it has been argued that they have retreated to digital spaces, as a kind of virtual mall (boyd, 2008). Less embedded in our thought and conceptualisation of the internet and digital communication is the concept of time.

Yet, time is a major concept in autobiographical writing and indeed in all types of life writing. It is signified first of all by the date in the journal entry, the story thus marked as linked to that particular day, and it unfolds in biographical time (Bakhtin, 1984), one day after the next. Lejeune (2005) marks the difference between those two times, and how their mingling as it were creates the diary:

Un journal est une série de traces datées. La date est essentielle. La trace est en général de l'écriture, mais peut être image, objet, relique [...] Le journal commence quand les

traces en série veulent saisir le temps dans son mouvement, plutôt que le fixer dans un événement source. (Lejeune, 2005:80)³

Online, time is mentioned in most definitions of blogs: they are defined as comprising of “dated entries” in a “reverse chronological sequence” (Herring, 2004, Walker, 2005c, Scheidt, 2006). They follow autobiographical time in their narrative structure, events are told as they unfold or have happened, sequentially. However, this sequence is not necessarily that which readers will follow, as they are unlikely to find the first entry by chance, but rather one to which they may be led by a text search or by following links. Moreover, the digital medium requires the inclusion of another time consideration; whereas the paper diary can be lost or destroyed, there is a more insidious permanence attached to the publication of text on the internet (boyd, 2007c, Walker, 2008). A long-time blogger and commentator, Sarah Wendell, has ascribed the 3 Ps to digital communication: it is “Public”, “Pervasive” and “Permanent” (Wendell, 2009). Blogs do not burn and cannot be lost in various moves; their pages cannot be torn in a fit of rage or shame. Once published on the web, the text is there to stay, sometimes forgotten by an occasional and oblivious blogger. Indeed, the permanence of digital texts is more insidious than many blog authors might realise; they may have deleted their too-personal blog, but the text is still available through cached pages. The permanence of the text is also linked to its pervasive nature: any text can also be copied and replicated by readers. The text is thus preserved through time.

The importance of space and time is thus heightened in the genre of the personal blog. In order to account for these concepts of a space which is not “real” material space and

³ A journal is a series of dated traces. The date is essential. The trace is usually written text, but it can also be an image, an object, a relic. [...] The journal happens when through a series of traces, time is captured in movement, rather than remaining static within a primary event.

of time which is outside our common experience of time, it is interesting to draw on the bakhtinian concept of chronotope, which blends the two elements in one.

3.1.2 Chronotopes: from Bakhtin to Lemke

The concept of chronotope is one of the building blocks of Bakhtinian thought. Bakhtin, born in Russia in 1895, spent most of his life in exile; his work was translated relatively late, but he has become one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century (Holquist, 2002). Even though his work was primarily related to literature, and in particular the novel, which he defended as a valid and worthy literary art form, his philosophy of language can be applied to many other fields, not least of all daily life (Clarke and Holquist, 1984). The word chronotope literally means time/space, and the chronotope is a unit which is used in the study of texts, showing time and space as intrinsically linked, showing their “inseparability” (Clark and Holquist, 1984). Most of all, chronotopes are the “organizing centers” for the narrative events, and thus allow the distinction between different genres. (Bakhtin, 1981).

For Bakhtin, time and space are inseparable, and form particular chronotopes in literature. He gives the example of the genre of Greek romance novels, where adventure-time and foreign places create a chronotope particular to the genre: typically, young lovers are sent to far away places and have to face a series of adventures before they come back to the “real” place of their lives and resume the “real” time of their lives. This chronotope is echoed later in the chivalric romance novels, where time is fragmented into individual adventure events, set in a magical world, creating a chronotope of “a miraculous world in adventure time”. Later, the gothic novels will see the advent of the chronotope of the castle, a “territory” permeated with the time of the historical past – lives of the lords of feudal times, traces of later generations in its

architecture and furnishings. The chronotope can thus involve either a long space, like a road, or a space which is delimited, like the Gothic castle, or the Rabelaisian public square. Indeed Bakhtin examined the concept outside the context of the novel, in what he called the “real-life chronotopes” of autobiographies, introducing in literature the concept of “biographical time” (Bakhtin, 1981) as “a time that discloses character, but is not at all the time of a man’s “becoming” or growth” and where “features of character are themselves excluded from chronology: their instancing can be shifted about in time” (Bakhtin, 1981:141).

Lemke (2004) moves the concept from art to real life, and uses chronotopes to show how events which are distant in time can become linked. Lemke gives the example of a cathedral, where several generations have worked and added architectural details, or the example of a student and his day at school and at home, through activities afforded by the various rooms throughout the house, the kitchen for eating breakfast before going to school, the bathroom for washing, etc. Chronotopes thus describe “patterns of and across activities in space and time” (Lemke, 2004), and allow the use of time and space as semiotic resources.

Heterochrony: a time outside time

Lemke (2004) links to the concept of chronotope the conceptual tool of heterochrony, but rather than a break in time, he sees it as a mixing of timeframes, linking long-term and short-term:

longer-term processes and shorter-term events linked by a material object that functions in both cases semiotically as well as materially.

These discursive-semiotic artefacts, or material semiotic artefacts are thus the objects which link two timeframes together, as they are present in both, or indeed several

timeframes and “carry meaning for us” (Lemke, 2005b:112). One example of such a material-semiotic artefact, the pupil’s notebook, links several timeframes: the time when notes are written in that notebook, and the various times when the notes are read from the notebook.

This can be applied to the autobiographical project of the blog built as a sequence of short narrative events/texts in the form of dated entries and dated conversations, within the longer-term biographical narrative; the blog as virtual-semiotic artefact links those times.

Heterotopia: a place outside habitual places

Chronotopes can also be linked to Foucault’s heterotopias, which are “other” spaces, set apart from contemporary space (Foucault, 1984). These can be transitory spaces, such as a train or a boat, a street or a cinema. Heterotopias are real spaces, but outside habitual social spaces: a graveyard, a prison are seen as heterotopia, as “other spaces”. This concept is particularly suited to the digital space, which is in a way a metaphoric space: words like cyberspace have shaped our conception of the internet as a place. This concept is highlighted by boyd (2008) when she points out that, for American teens, the internet is akin to the social public space of the mall, and it has become a “hanging out” place for teens who are deprived of habitual social spaces by adults who fear for their safety. Similarly, Gee (2003) sees online spaces as benefiting the “psychosocial moratorium” principle for young people; Erikson (1977) highlighted the concept of “psychosocial moratorium” as an important developmental stage in adolescence, when the young person can try out various roles without yet committing to one. Gee (2003) sees online spaces as places where young people can play out this psychosocial moratorium, and experience risks with a much lower scale of consequences than in the

real world, thus benefiting their psychological and social development. In this case, the online spaces are obviously heterotopias, different – and safer – spaces for young people. These “other” times and “other” spaces will be linked in the chronotope of the blog.

3.1.3 The chronotope of the blog

The timespan of the blog is indeed potentially undefined, unbounded, as there is no end until the author stops writing, or contributors stop commenting. Even then, if the narrative has stopped, time continues, dictated by the permanence of digital writing and communication, unending unless the action of the author deletes the blog and it exists no more. Within this large timespan is the smaller, sequential timeframe of the entries, each representing a day, but potentially recounting a narrative which spans the days between entries.

The place of the blog initially belongs to an online space, accessed through the medium of the computer and the keyboard. In the experience of its users, that space becomes a meeting place where narratives are written and shared and conversations happen. As Lemke (2005) notes, “When space is filled with social meaningful affordances, it becomes a place”.

The chronotope of the blog could then be a matrix of space, or rather a personal place on a digital platform, and the autobiographical time of the narrative of the self, and this chronotope then defines the genre or sub-genre of personal diary-style blog, following Bakhtin’s definition of the chronotope as having “intrinsic generic significance”(Bakhtin, 1981:84). This matrix is illustrated in Figure 3-1 below, where the online space axis, which is itself unbounded, contains delimitations of bounded,

smaller spaces, like that of the platform, within which the time delimitation of the blog is situated. Within this heterotopia are the smaller, linked spaces of the narrative space and the social space contained within the blog space, with the physical space of the screen linking the heterotopia to the habitual space. Similarly, figure 3.1 illustrates the digital time axis in its permanence, and within this is delimited the biographical narrative time of the blog, within which smaller timeframes of narrative events are present in the form of blog entries. The chronotope can thus be described as the matrix of the biographical narrative time and the online blog space, linking heterotopia and heterochrony.

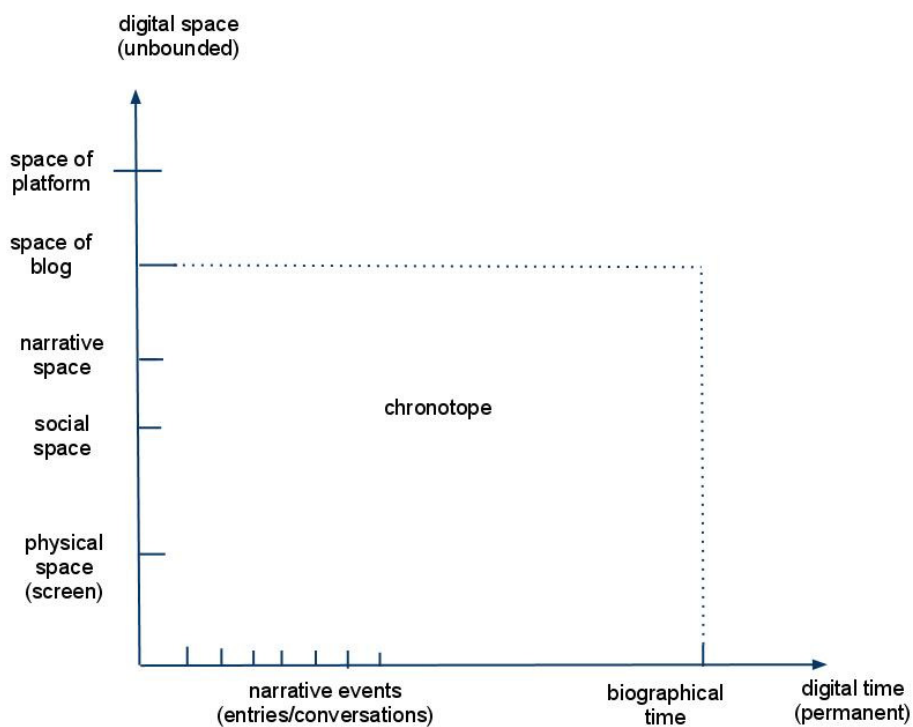


Figure 3-1. : the chronotope of the blog

3.2 From dialogical to trialogical texts

One of the most striking elements of the personal, diary-style blog is the presence of the reader, both as receiver of the text written by the blogger, but also as embodied participant in the text, through comments and links to other blogs. These elements help to highlight the dialogical nature of this narrative of the self (Serfaty, 2004).

3.2.1 Dialogical text

The concept of dialogism comes from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, language is both cognitive and social practice, and meaning is rooted in the social. Social diversity, differences, variety are thus accounted for in his concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony. Heteroglossia relates to the presence of multiple voices in discourse, present in the context of the utterance, and dependant on that context.

The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance. (Bakhtin, 1981:272).

In Bakhtinian thought, there are no monologic texts, as any utterance is by nature dialogic: it is always an answer to another utterance, and it is always addressed to someone. Indeed the utterance, or the text, only takes on meaning when it is shared, and engaged in a dialogue, as explained clearly by Bakhtin, writing as Voloshinov in *Marxism and the philosophy of Language*:

The word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant... As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses the “one” in relation to the “other”. I give myself verbal shape from another’s point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me,

then the other depends on my addressee. A word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor (Voloshinov, 1986:86).

This dialogism can however be either internal or external, and Todorov (1984) posited a gradation of dialogism in literary texts, from polyphonic intertextuality to internal dialogism. The diaristic genre navigates between those, through the presence of an implied reader (Lejeune, 1975), who sometimes becomes an addressed reader. The online journal or the blog allows the actual, textual presence of the reader through comments sections.

The chronotope of the blog allows for a deepening of the spatial element, which can be seen as comprising at least two layers to the blog, one literary, diaristic in nature, and a social layer, conversational in nature, through which the dialogic interaction is represented, as illustrated in Figure 3-2 below.

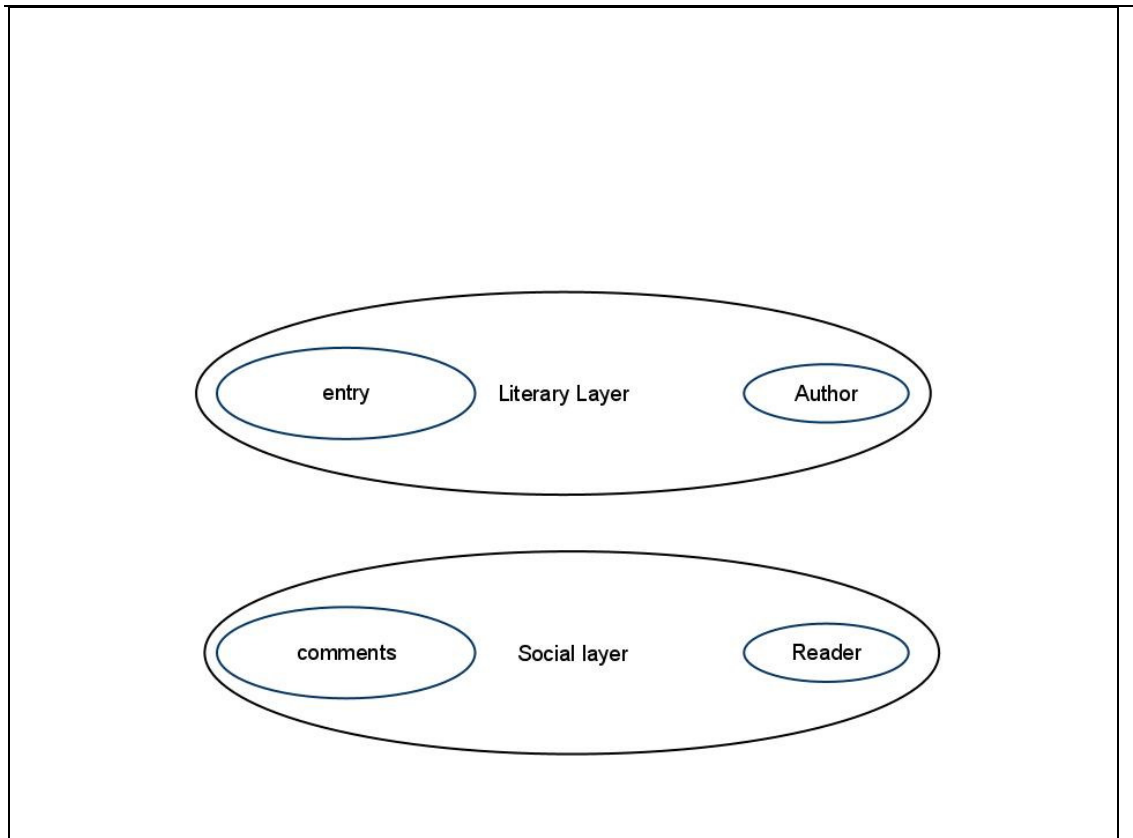


Figure 3-2. Dialogic blog: two layers

The dialogised heteroglossia is first of all at the heart of the blog entry, situated in a very precise context of time and space, with all the inherent voices implied in the time of writing, the biographical time, and the conversational time, but also in the particular “other” space of the online publication and communication. It is subsequently given shape by the presence of other voices, other writers of the shared life narrative, other creators of the semiotic artefact.

These two layers at the heart of the dialogic nature of the blog cannot however account entirely for the relationships between elements of the blog; the texts and layers, both literary and social, are made possible by the technology which underpins the blog and blogging practice.

3.2.2 Trialogical text

The relation between the reader who comments, or between the reader who lurks and the author/blogger can be theorized as dialogical; the social elements, the cultural and sub-cultural elements so obvious in young people's blogs can thus be highlighted through the concept of heteroglossia and its inherent dialogism. However, the context of the text, or of the conversation, has been shifted to a new online space, where dialogism cannot account for all the occurrences of meaning-making activities, as it leaves behind the technological element of the blog. Indeed the presence of the technology in the blog infers more than a mediated dialogism; the technology is also present in the text, in the form of code, which is too often discarded or overlooked (Schmidt, 2007). The literary and social layers are linked by a technological layer, as depicted in Figure 3-3 below.

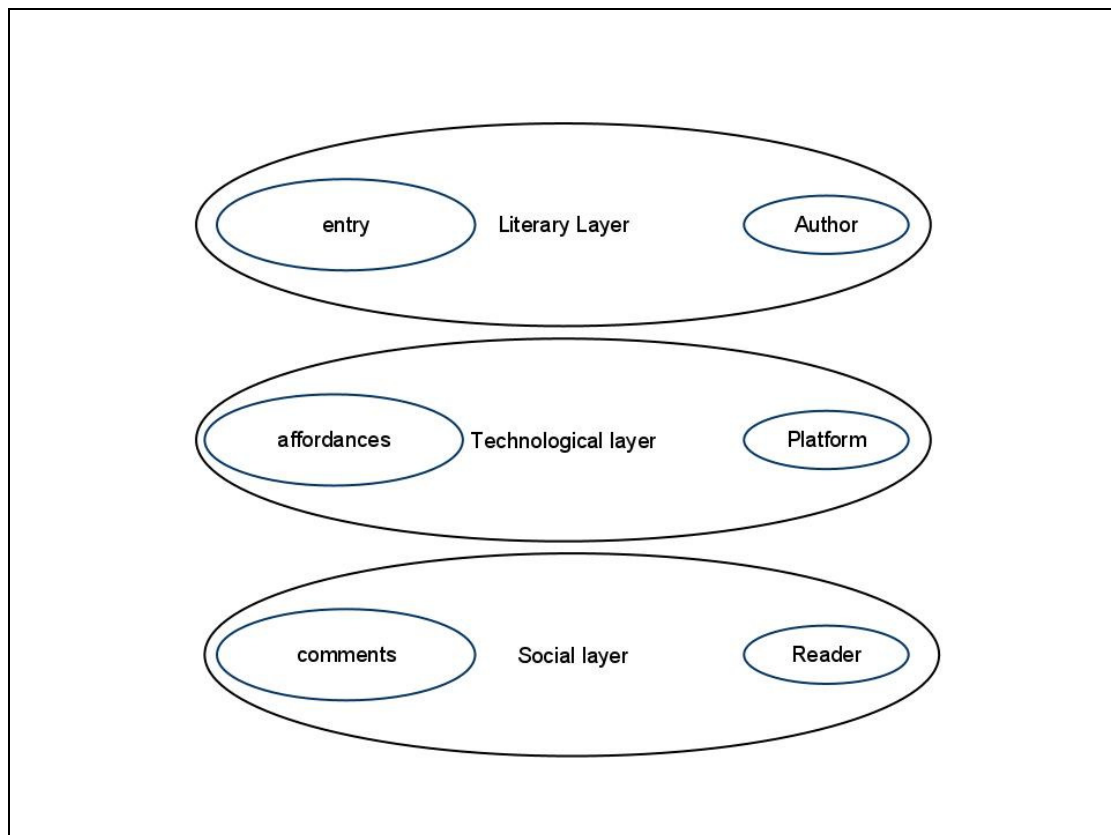


Figure 3-3. Literary, technological and social layers

The technological layer is the space where affordances are realised or ignored, and the presence of this technological layer between the literary and social layers creates the link between the author and the readers or commenters, participants in a conversation within the space and time of the blog.

These three layers thus create a unique genre: there is at first glance a literary layer, which is the daily entry, written by the blogger, and which can be likened to the entry of a diary or journal, or sometimes to an epistolary text. This is however also a multimodal text, where the background, the typeface, the illustrations are all created by the blogger, and where pictures, sound and moving images can be embedded. Then, a social layer, which is notably represented by the comments section of the blog, and which typically, is accessed by a click leading to a different page. This layer is composed of written texts authored by the readers of the blog, and can also include multimodal elements, such as icons, pictures, and links to other internet spaces. These comments vary in length and tenor, and can respond to each other as well as to the blog entry. The third layer is the technical layer, which underpins the blog, where affordances are built in to the design of the platform and software, and those will be taken up or ignored by the blogger and her readers, allowing for example multimodal elements of text to be displayed if the blogger so chooses, or also permitting the realisation of social affordances such as conversation.

In order to account for the relation between these three levels, and for a continuum between dialogic and trialogic interaction, I draw on the work of Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005). In their work on knowledge creation in mediated environments, they posit the presence of a trialogical interaction, which is done through common objects of activity, and which is not limited to interaction between people, or to

interaction between people and environment. Rooted in activity theory, but also in Pierce's semiotic theory, the trialogical approach to learning posits a framework of knowledge-creation: knowledge is not transferred, but created by a trialogue between three "players", the individual, "nature", and the community. Moreover, "in trialogues, the interaction through "shared objects" that are in the process of being developed is emphasized" (Paavola and Hakkarainen, 2009, p.4). These "shared objects" can be material artefacts, but also conceptual artefacts, even ideas and practices, and the creation of knowledge through development of those artefacts is done within a timescale, and happens in technology-supported learning environments.

In the mediated environment of the blog, the importance of technology is often overlooked, so that a trialogical approach, inspired by Paavola and Haikkinen's work, would permit a holistic view of a blog. The trialogical relations are thus realized within as well as through the literary, social and technological layers.

3.3 A multimodal text

The blog is also a space where the reader is engaged through a semiotic exchange, where we witness "dialogic act of semiotic exchange" (Baldry and Thibault, 2006). The easy and user-friendly addition of icons, pictures, sounds and videos, as well as an increasingly simple customization of layout have to be taken into account when the blog is analysed. To this end, the multimodal approach, where various semiotic resources are integrated into a meaning-making analysis, is best suited to a study of blogs and other sites where adolescent bloggers continue their narrative of the self and their communication with readers.

Fairclough (2000) points out that a new conception of language has emerged in recent times, influenced by the Bakhtin school of thought, and this conception of language is centered on change, difference and creativity. Simultaneously, a shift has happened from continuous text to a diagrammatic layout and the multimodal text, most particularly text on screen is read like an image, not like a page (Kress, 2003).

The increasing multimodal nature of text, and in this case digital texts, can only be assessed by a heuristic approach to their analysis. It is no longer sufficient to consider each mode separately, meaning-making occurs at the convergence of all the modes. (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001).

What is a mode? From a theoretical point of view, a mode is a semiotic resource (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, O'Halloran, 2004 and 2003, Baldry and Thibault, 2006) which allows both discourse and interaction (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). As such, these semiotic resources can be linguistic, visual, actional or more (Baldry and Thibault, 2006). Modes are listed as spoken, written, printed and digital media, embodied action, material objects and sites (O'Halloran, 2003), or sometimes more simply related to physical senses, creating word-based, sound-based or image-based meanings (Lemke, 2002). There seems to be some discordances however, as Kress and van Leeuwen point out that sensory channels should not be equated to semiotic modes. Iedema (2003) notes the difficulty in terminology created in multimodality. He gives for example writing, which is often referred to as a mode, but is itself multimodal, containing both a verbal mode and a visual mode, represented by the typography.

The difficulty in conforming to the terminology is emphasized by the overlaps between several modes: colour is both visual and included in design, but most of all, the interactivity and dialogism inherent to adolescents' digital texts and communication

mesh together written and oral modes, as well as written and action modes. Indeed a characteristic of their digital writings is a new multimodality within the written text, which is not necessarily the case for commercial websites. Similarly, action is represented in written or visual modes on the part of the blogger/writer, but is also purely an action mode for the reader/commenter.

The blog page can thus at first glance be seen as comprising several modes, as summarised in Table 3-1 below.

Oral mode	Sound	Music Podcasts Videos
Written mode	Narrative	Profile Posts Comments
Written mode	Visual	Typography
Written mode	Oral	Onomatopoeic text Traces of orality
Action mode	Action	Clicking Commenting (typing)
Action mode	Representations of gestures	Flash animation Icons Textual representation (*hugs*/((hugs)))
Visual mode		Photographs Pictures/drawings Videos Animation Icons Colour
Layout mode		Background Template Customisations Colour

Table 3-1. Types of modes within blogs

In the context of blogs, the visual mode is present in drawings, either original art scanned and uploaded, or original art digitally created, or art copied and pasted from other sites, digital photographs uploaded or copied, icons, created digitally or uploaded, smileys or animated smileys. The visual mode is also present in written text, with titles, names, and the actual narrative, which also comprises oral elements in onomatopoeic words and spellings. Sound can thus be embedded in the text, or sometimes suggested in the written text, as a mention of music currently being played, or more rarely as

digital music embedded in the text. It is however present in videos copied and pasted from the site YouTube. Another mode to be considered is the layout, both in the organization of all the multimodal elements with the web page, and as the colour of the font, the background, etc.

At first glance the screen could be seen as a page and the blog post as a diary entry; indeed we speak of web pages in the context of the Internet, although it can be argued that the word is more a metaphor than a description (Baldry and Thibault, 2006). The visible materiality of the blog page can be seen as enduring, technological affordances can change this perceived stability. The blog background, colour, layout can be subtly altered or completely redesigned with no trace of the previous layout, leaving only the text relatively similar, although this perennality is also an illusion, as the text can also be changed and altered, leaving no traces of the change to a new reader. Figure 3-4 and Figure 3-5 below thus illustrate the visual changes which can be affected instantly by the choice of a new template on a LiveJournal blog, and how the choice of colours can thus change the general aspect of the blog and presumably the perception of the reader.

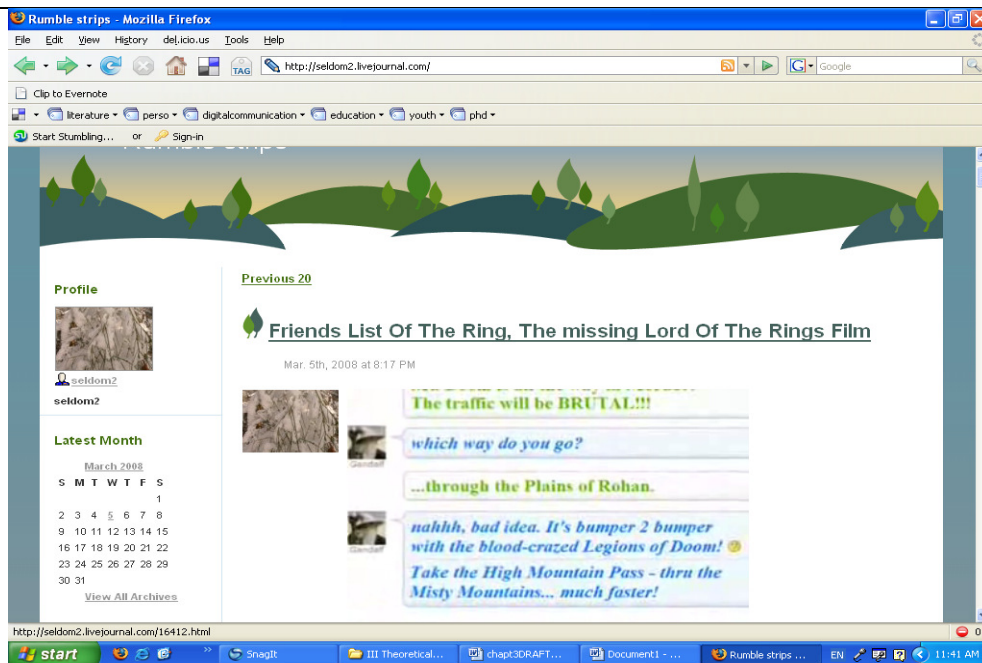


Figure 3-4. LiveJournal blog template

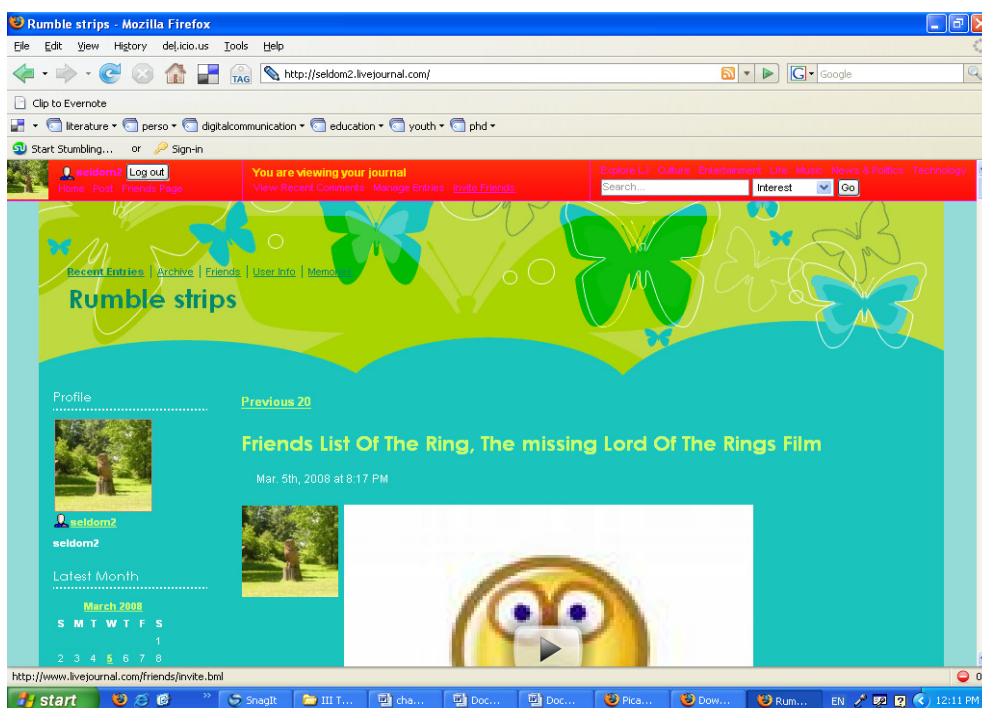


Figure 3-5. Changed LiveJournal blog template

Some of the aspects of digital texts, regardless of their provenance or whether they were user-created, led to the creation of the word “hypermodality”, which Lemke (2002)

claims to take into account the convergence of multimodality and hypertextuality, and this is in part attributable to the medium.

The medium, if linked to modes, should not be assimilated to them. Whereas modes are semiotic resources, the medium they are realized in is material, such as television, computer screen, paint, voice, or nature (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). It is thus related to production, or execution.

3.4 Affordances

When it comes to forms of digital texts, the presence and role of technology cannot be avoided or evaded. Indeed, it causes lines to be blurred between medium and mode, where very clear distinctions are difficult at first glance between the dissemination due to the medium and the representation due to the mode (Jewitt, 2004). Similarly division lines are blurred between medium and genre in blogs (Walker Rettberg, 2008). Some of the physical aspects of the technology are however obvious to the writer and reader of blogs: first of all, the screen is necessary to read blogs, the keyboard to write a blog entry or participate through comments, the mouse to navigate the text. Other aspects of technology are hidden beneath the text. Lemke's concept of a timescale system (2000) is adapted to the organization of the digital text by Baldry and Thibault (2006). They consider the digital text through several levels. The focal level "L" is the level of the text on the screen, the level where occurs the interaction of the user with this multimodal text. Above this level, "L+1" is a level of larger timescales, the level of websites and their links to other sites, situating the text in the context of culture, whereas beneath the focal level, "L-1" contains processes invisible to the user, and with no direct meaning on a human scale. This is the level of bytes, and of code. This hidden

technology is however the support on which the text of the entries and the text of the conversations rests, dependent as they are on the software which is used on the blogging platforms or the blogging tools. It is thus embedded in the text, or beneath it, in the form of affordances.

3.4.1 Definitions of affordances

The word affordance was coined by Gibson in the field of visual perception, to define what the environment offers or provides to the member of a species, irrespective of the use it makes of it (Gibson, 1979). A commonly cited example is that of the stairs, which offers “climbability” (Gibson, 1979, Gaver, 1991, McGrenere and Ho, 2000), or the possibility of climbing for whoever looks at the stairs: where someone in front of stairs sees the possibility of climbing up or down those stairs, the stairs are perceived as “climbable”; this affordance does not take into account the person who will undertake the climbing, and the possible levels of difficulty for climbing are unacknowledged: the affordance of climbability of the stairs remains the same whether the person facing those stairs is capable of climbing them or not. Affordances represent a relationship between the world and people as actors. In the field of design, Norman (1988) subsequently introduced the concept of “perceived affordance”, indicating that displays on the screen are “visual feedback” which highlight the presence of affordances.

Most recently the concept has also been used in the field of education, where Kennewell (2001) also introduced the concept of constraints as linked to that of affordances, and which refers to the actions which are denied to humans by their environment, or more particularly by their technological environment.

3.4.2 Technological affordances

If the concept was originally created in the field of visual perception, and subsequently adopted in the field of design, affordances are now regularly considered with regards to technology. Gaver (1991) recognised it as a powerful concept to examine the relationship between technology and the user. He refined the concept of perceived affordance, making a distinction between two types of cases: when there is an affordance, but no perceptual information, then the affordance is hidden; when there is perceptual information, but no affordance, he introduces the concept of false affordance.

In the field of Human Computer Interaction, or Human Machine Interaction, with the work of Mc Grenere and Ho (2000) and Hartson (2003) in particular, more nuances and distinctions were added to the concept, as the authors introduced the ideas of, cognitive, sensory and functional affordances. Nardi (2000) also introduced the concept of an emergent affordance, which is an affordance identified by users, and which had not been intended or anticipated by the designer of the technology. Her example is the refrigerator, which has been designed as having the affordance of keeping food cold, but which in time also gained the affordance of displaying notes and children's drawing because of its magnetic surface.

Our views of technology, more particularly, it can be argued, of digital technologies and the internet, can vary between a deterministic or constructivist view. Hutchby (2001) uses the concept of affordances to engage in a third way, which intertwines agency and the material functions of technology.

Affordances are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object (Hutchby, 2001:444)

Most importantly, it adds a dimension which can account not only for the empowering functions of technology, but also for the constraints its materiality imposes on the user.

When it comes to various technologies and their associated affordances, whether those are designed within the technological interface or are identified by users as emergent affordances, the take-up of those affordances by users of technology is at the heart of the concept. Gee (2009), in an essay on video games, links the take-up and indeed the perception of affordances to skills acquired through playing, and argues that the affordances can only be taken up according to the skill level of the player. Thus, in the hunting game he is playing, a deer has “skin-ability” if your level of playing includes the ability of skinning. This concept can easily be transferred to other digital practices, and can inform some of the analysis of the relationship between the technological layer of a blog and its social layer, where digital literacy is indeed the link through the take-up of affordances.

3.4.3 Social affordances

A study of user-created texts has to consider the technological affordances made at their disposal by the original designer of the platform, and their use or non-use in the wider context of the practice. Whereas some of those affordances are relevant to the blog as artefact, and influence the quasi-physical, multi-modal aspect of the blog, other affordances are directly linked to communication with others.

Gaver (1996) made a distinction between the physical properties of the environment and the possibilities for interaction in the environment which can be recognised as social affordances. Wellman et al. (2003) give examples of social affordances in digital spaces, which are analysed as “social opportunities and constraints provided by technology”.

The affordances they identify are linked to broader bandwidth, which affords fast and copious exchanges, and constant connectedness, and to portability, which affords personalised communications. Inspired by the concept of technological affordance (Gaver, 1991), Kreijns and Kirschner (2001) define social affordances as properties of the technological environment which “act as socio-contextual facilitators”.

Table 3-2 below illustrates the different types of affordances which have been identified, from the original physical affordance outlined by Gibson, which exists independently of the perception of humans, to perceived affordances, which can also be differentiated between invisible and unexpected affordances, as well as social, cognitive and semiotic affordances.

Name	Year	Material affordance	Perceived affordance	Unseen/unexpected affordance	Conceptual affordance
Gibson	1969	Physical affordance			
Gaver	1991	Affordance (exists independently of perception)	Sequential affordance Nested affordance	Hidden affordance False affordance	Social affordance
Norman	1999	Real affordance Physical affordance	Perceived affordance		
Nardi	1999			Emergent affordance	
McGrenere and Ho	2000		Hierarchical affordance Degree of affordance		
Kreijns and Kirschner	2001				Social affordance
Hartson	2003	Physical affordance = functional affordance	Sensory affordance		Cognitive affordance
Lemke	2005				Semiotic affordance
Gee	2009		Perceived affordance (linked to literacy)		

Table 3-2. Overview of types of affordances

3.4.4 The affordances of blogs

As summarised in Table 3-2 above, there are many variants of the concept of affordances; some, if not all, are particularly useful in a study of blogs. Because this study is conducted entirely online, and as such does not refer to the offline material world, the concept of physical affordance will not be considered, although in a multi-sited ethnography, this concept would be of particular interest when considering the material affordances of the keyboard, screen, and also webcam and microphone. However, concepts of perceived affordance, hidden and false affordances, and emergent affordance apply particularly well in the case of young bloggers, and do the concepts of semiotic and social affordances.

Affordances linked to digital media

Some affordances are not linked to to a single genre or platform, but rather to the digital medium. Mynatt et al (1998) outlined specific affordances related to networked communities, which can however be extended to further digital spaces; these affordances are Persistence, Periodicity, Boundaries, Engagement and Authoring. Sundar (2008) reports on a ten year long research project at Penn State University, in the Research in the Media Effects Lab, where four broad affordances were identified for digital media: Modality, Agency, Interactivity and Navigability. Whereas those four affordances are indeed very broad ranging, other affordances nested or hidden must also be considered, as must those which are more directly linked to the genre and the platform.

Affordances of blogging

Miles (2006) outlined three affordances related to blogs in general: the affordance of writing, of archiving and of networking. These again are broad affordances, and

careful analysis of a blog page will reveal other, related or emergent affordances, technological, semiotic or social. The multimodal nature of the blog page often gives clues as to the presence of affordances, as there may be a close relationship between functionality and affordances in some cases; however, those cues or signs may or may not be perceived by bloggers. Moreover, some affordances relate to the timescales and the space of the blog, notable some narrative affordances which allow the bloggers to amend and change their texts of the past, some to the semiotic nature of the artefact, and some social affordances help or hinder relationships and communication between the bloggers and the readers. However, these affordances are not always perceived, and not always taken up by bloggers and their readers, and indeed some may be contradictory.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical toolkit which I feel is the best suited to my study, looking at the blog as a chronotope; within its layered space, and through interaction between the three layers, a trialogical relationship emerges. At the core of this trialogical process are the technological affordances to be found in the digital space of the blog, and those particular to the blogging platform used by the blogger. This trialogical process will inform the shaping of the text as well as the management of privacy issues encountered. Technological, social and semiotic affordances all offer potential for action, be it writing, presenting oneself, having conversations. Within this study, the uptake of these affordances will be examined, but also the constraints which are the other side of affordances, with regards to the relationship between the reader and writer, and through the creation of the literary artefact, and as to how the trialogical process can thus help to shape the text. This toolkit, drawn

from literary criticism, semiotics and education studies, is thus the lens through which the study will look at how the life narrative is written and/or co-written, and how issues of privacy are managed.

Chapter 4 Methodological issues and proposed solutions

Chapter 3 outlined the theoretical underpinning to this study, and the lens through which the inquiry is undertaken. The multimodal, triological approach to the blog and its chronotope helps to shed a light on the role and place of the reader in an interactive online narrative, and on the management of privacy in a published personal journal. The crossdisciplinary outlook, straddling humanities and social sciences traditions, does however raise some methodological issues. The blog as a literary artefact could indeed be studied from “outside” as it were, in the literary humanistic tradition followed by Serfaty (2004b). However, an emic understanding of the space and time in which the chronotope is situated allows to consider the author’s and her regular readers’ points of view. Moreover, bloggers in this study are not only authors, but participants in the creation of semiotic artefacts. This duality informed a search for suitable methodologies and methods, and led to a dual humanities and social sciences model, within which the use of ethnographic tools became an evident methodological answer to theoretical and ethical issues.

This chapter will first reflect on different types of ethnographies in an online context, and explain the choice of an “online only” ethnography for this study. The second part of the chapter will deal with the ethical issues which arise when research happens online. It will outline the “conceptual gaps” (Zimmer, 2010) between offline and online research ethics, which in turn guided my methodological choices.

4.1 Which ethnography?

The one who understands (...) becomes himself a participant in the dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1987)

Traditionally and typically, ethnographers observed and studied human interaction in natural settings. This became slightly problematic when ethnographies were first conducted online, and many concepts needed to be reworked in order to fit these new conditions. Hine (2000) was at pains to establish virtual space as a valid space for ethnographic enquiry, as opposed to face to face encounters:

(...) the ethnographer could instead be construed as needing to have similar experiences to those of informants, however those experiences are mediated (Hine, 2000:10)

Many studies since have made use of ethnographic techniques online (Kozinets, 2002, Thomas, 2007, boyd, 2008, Ito et al., 2008) and it can be argued that ethnographic tools are indeed necessary to any online research, as expressed by Ito (2008) in the introduction to the McArthur foundation's white paper:

we believe that an initial broad-based ethnographic understanding, grounded in the actual contexts where engagement takes place, is crucial in grasping how youth understand and incorporate new media in their everyday lives (Ito, 2008:7)

Indeed, the use of the word "virtual" to qualify ethnographies conducted on the internet has been questioned as slightly misleading, with fears that the word might imply that communities and contexts online are less real than in the physical world (Kozinets, 2002). Marketing and consumer research have adopted the term netnography, for an approach which they claim is different from academic ethnographies (Kozinets, 2010). For Gajjala (2009), cyberethnography needs to focus on "epistemologies of doing", both

online and offline. There are some uses of the term “cyberanthropology”, and others simply talk of ethnography, or even of “deep hanging out” (Ito et al., 2008).

4.1.1 Blogs and ethnography

When blogs are studied from the point of view of a literary or humanities discipline, the presence of the researcher online is only that of the collector of texts. Lejeune (1998) and Serfaty (2004) indicate that analysis of journals or blogs is not compatible with a relationship with the author. According to Serfaty, in a literary approach, the object of the study is “the internal logic of the text, seen as a self-contained, self-referential artefact” (Serfaty, 2004:10). However, texts, which are thus objects of analysis, can also be seen as reflections of human experience, and as such, ethnographic tools will help to shed a light on the text, not only from the point of view of the outsider, the researcher, but also from the point of view of the creators of the text, and active readers of the text. From their point of view, a researcher who merely gathers texts with no permission and no warning is in breach of some of the unspoken rules of netiquette; someone who reads and does not participate is seen as a lurker, who is an accepted but nevertheless resented figure, and in the world of bloggers, taking and reproducing a text without permission is also frowned upon. Methodological choices are sometimes also ethical choices, as is my choice of an ethnographic presence on the platform where the bloggers write their journals. However, I also made the choice to keep my ethnography to this social digital space, going against the trend of multi-sited ethnographies in internet research.

4.1.2 Online only?

Is there a useful distinction between online social life and the social worlds of ‘real life’? Increasingly, it seems like the answer is no. The two have blended into one world: the world of real life, as people live it (Kozinets, 2010:2).

Questions have been raised as to the suitability of conducting research online exclusively (Hine, 2000), and indeed several studies and reports base their findings on offline interviews (Lenhart, 2006) or find that a mixed online and offline research design is preferable (Orgad, 2009). This trend follows an increasing choice of multi-sited ethnographies. As the internet becomes more enmeshed in daily life, and the demarcations between online and offline relationships become increasingly blurred, many have called for ethnographies which follow the participants offline and online throughout their daily lives (boyd, 2008).

I did not however follow this trend in this research project, where, on the contrary, I ensured that the ethnography remained online only, and this for several reasons. I was guided first of all by ethical considerations, due mainly to the nature of the study and of the age of the young bloggers. When the study started, in 2005, few young people had started blogging in Ireland, and the search for the initial bloggers had to start online. Whereas it may have been easy to move an ethnography project from an offline context to an online context, it seemed ethically dubious to initiate contact with young people online and then attempt to meet them offline. These issues, as many others relating to the conduct of ethical research online, are examined in detail in chapter 4.2.

Kendall (2009) extends the discussion to boundaries which are not only spatial, as implied in calls for multi-sited ethnographies. She identifies several types of boundaries in a research project: spatial, temporal and relational boundaries. She assigns to the spatial boundaries the questions of who or what to study, and where; to temporal boundaries, the methodological issue of the beginning and end of a research project; and to relational boundaries, mainly the relationship between the researcher and the participants. In the case of this study, the research design, drawing on Bakhtinian

concepts, has established the chronotope as a unit of analysis, thus establishing boundaries of time and place. The relational boundaries mentioned by Kendall point to another methodological choice, and once again are linked to an ethical choice, which will be outlined in section 4.2. However, boundaries, whether spatial or temporal, are not the only methodological issues at work in online ethnographies; the questions of what data is, and how digital tools can be used for research also need consideration.

4.1.3 Methodological issues of online ethnography

What is data?

Documents are typically a small part of the ethnographic inquiry, they are considered as secondary data, and collected by the ethnographer as complements to the actual ethnographic study, which relies on spoken word, albeit recorded and transcribed by the researcher, and field notes and observations. Indeed documents are usually only fringe areas of ethnography (Tischer et al, 2000). Online ethnography changes this dynamic. The practices at work on the internet are textual practices, mostly of the written type, and “the ethnographer’s job is to develop an understanding of the meanings which underlie and are enacted through these textual practices” (Hine, 2000:50).

Place and the preponderance of text in online settings do however necessitate a reflexion on the absence of body (Markham, 2005). Even though Web 2.0. settings make increasing uses of representations of bodies through photographs, pictures, avatars, the absence of face to face communication still dominates online relations. The participant is not physically present, and this absence needs to be acknowledged, first of all in the lack of physical cues in conversation, and in the strategies used to palliate this

problem (Herring, 2001). Moreover, the researcher herself is not physically present, and this absence needs to be acknowledged and reflexively considered.

Even if blog entries are mostly written text, all the more in the case of diary-type blogs, there are still several other modes at work within the blog itself. The multimodal nature of blogs leads to a different approach to data and data collection. The questions considered in this study relate to the presence of the reader, to the use of technology and the management of privacy, and the multimodal point of view chosen to interpret them implies that in a blog, everything is data. The text of the entry, the layout and the embedded media, the text of the communication and the emoticons and icons representing the participants are all part of the data collected and coded; similarly, in her ethnographic study of young people's digital literacies, Thomas (2007) includes pictures, paintings and avatars as part of the data helping to understand youth identities and narratives.

More than most qualitative approaches, an ethnography is a reflexive method (Denzin, 1997, Markham, 2009b). For an ethnographic approach to blog research, this involves reflexivity in the field, in the form of the researcher's blog entries, as well as field notes which may not be part of the shared area of the blog. Within the researcher's blog, the communication between the participants and the researcher is also part of the data, as well as the researcher's experience in the field, and all different data will help to shed a different light on the research questions. This reflexivity, as integral part of the research, is also a means of conducting ethical research, and of ensuring the validity of the research (Markham, 2006).

The blog as research tool

Mortensen and Walker (2002) were the first scholars to publish an article about the uses of a blog as a research tool. Whilst both researchers conducted studies online, they started their blogs as a way to keep focus, but soon Mortensen also used her blog as a way of communicating with gamers, who were her target participants and would thus accept her presence – and her research – more readily:

This eliminated some of the mystery and tension related to research, and has on several occasions made it easier to cooperate with online role-players: the weblog establishes an online presence which proves that the researcher is real to the digital space and not just a visitor with no knowledge.(Mortensen and Walker, 2002:250).

In time, their blogs became also a way of communicating with their peers, of organizing and retrieving their thoughts, and also a way of writing as part of their inquiry. Wakeford and Cohen (2008) compare blogs to “field notes in public”, and recognize blogs as a methodological strategy as well as a new research technology. As such the researcher blog goes beyond the ethnographer’s diary or note, and can become an integral part of a reflexive and transparent research.

Writing as inquiry

The first ethnographic texts were typically written from a colonial point of view, by researchers from Western cultures who were studying local and native cultures. This type of ethnography has long since given way to a participatory paradigm, and the narrative turn (Denzin, 2000) has also seen a shift in the writing of ethnographies, where the researcher is now an integral and acknowledged part of the narrative. Following in this tradition, I have chosen not to hide the person of the researcher, through use of the first person, the “I”. In the analysis of the data, my voice is part of the dialogic text, as

well as the young bloggers' voices which are present through excerpts of their journals, comments or communications through my own journal.

The methodological choice of ethnographic tools and methods was a result of the theoretical lens used to approach the study; however, it was also heavily influenced by the ethical approach that underpinned the study.

Consider this tentative axiom: methods first, ethics follow. This axiom focuses attention on the fact that ethics are embedded in one's everyday method of approaching, understanding, evaluating, and producing academic texts about a social phenomenon. To say methods first; ethics follow is to emphasize that all methods decisions are in actuality ethics decisions and that all ethics decisions are in actuality methods decisions. (Markham, 2006)

From early on in the research, and throughout the time of the ethnography, ethical and methodological issues arose together, magnified by the online context of the study.

4.2 Ethical issues in online research with young people

Ethics should be placed within the context of both the problem and the approach and should not be seen as an "add-on". (Greig and Taylor, 1999:153)

The above quote from Greig and Taylor (1999) holds true for any research, but ethics are an even more pressing issue in some types of research, notably for studies which concern children or young people under the age of 18. Pursuing research online uncovers some ethical issues which may not have been anticipated, but are soon revealed when the context is examined.

As Internet research was gradually established as a discipline, whose focus and/or locus is the internet (Rall, 2007), ethical issues came to the fore. These issues, often centering on the shifting concept of privacy, and ownership of text, consider the new practices and

communications online, and increasingly, the conduct of ethical research within various sites on the internet. It is argued that the basic ethical issues remain the same for any type of research, however internet research also raises important questions of authenticity, consent, privacy, and permanence (Ess, 2002) which may at times render previous ethical research rules at best irrelevant, at worse counterproductive. Some legal rules commonly followed in traditional research settings may not be conducive to ethical research online: for example, whereas it may be legal to study texts on public fora on the internet, it may not be ethical to do so without first consulting the authors of the texts (Elgesem, 2002). Indeed this very situation is also covered by the emerging netiquette of bloggers, which would condemn the use or republishing of blog posts without links to the original blog, or if this republishing is shifting to an offline context, without the express permission of the author and a citation of the blog.

Some of the differences between research offline and online comes from issues which arise of the multidisciplinary nature of internet research, and these will be examined in the first place; some subtler differences have been identified as “conceptual gaps” by Zimmer (2010) and these will be examined in chapter 4.2.3. I will then review the current recommendations available to internet researcher, and finally outline my own ethical choices.

4.2.1 Multidisciplinary issues

The interdisciplinary aspect of most internet research brings its own ethical issues, due to the difference in the approach to ethics from various disciplines, such as social sciences, which take their model from medical science, or literary studies, which considers people as authors and treats them as such (AoIR ethics, 2002). These

conflicting frameworks should be acknowledged in the case of a cross-disciplinary research project.

Social sciences ethical norms

Social sciences ethical norms are derived from the medical field ethical norms arising in turn from the aftermath of the Second World War. The basic ethical principles are seen as autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Greig and Taylor, 1999). One of the main issues is that of informed consent of participants in a study, and of the duty of the researcher to do no harm. Whereas the basic ethical principles of research cannot be denied, the advent of a new cultural context has led to the belief that:

Online research is marked as a special category in which the institutionalized understandings of the ethics of research must be re-examined. (Hine, 2005:5)

Humanities ethical norms

Bruckman (2002) argues that the “semi-publishing” of material online offers new challenges and requires new approaches to ethical dilemmas.

Serfaty (2004b) contends that a literary approach to blogs frees the researcher of certain ethical considerations, as the text is studied rather than the author, and is in fact a “self-contained, self-referential artefact”. She also decided to avoid any contact with the diarists she studied in order to avoid any possible relationship, which she sees as detrimental to the quality of the research, as she feels that informing the participants “ultimately amounts to granting them the right to oversee the research project”.

The literary approach to studying online texts considers the participant in internet communication as an author (Ess, 2002), and the text as a published literary artefact. A

social sciences approach to the same study will consider the author as a participant in the research project, and as such will grant her some protection in ethical guidelines.

Either approaches are also subject to emerging netiquette, and sometimes heralded by the use of Creative Commons convention in blogs. Indeed bloggers in general follow emerging rules of netiquette, which do not allow for copying or republishing without crediting the original author, by name and through hyperlinks to the text quoted. Similarly, when a blog post is picked up by print media and the content is used offline, it is seen as plagiarism if the blog is not quoted as the original source. This has led some bloggers to insert a Creative Commons license in their blogs, which allows sharing and non-commercial use with attribution.

Both approaches are complicated by several other issues if the participants/authors are children or young people, who warrant increased protection.

Ethical considerations in youth research

Not only does internet research uncover new ethical issues, but also the authors of the blogs in this study can be regarded as a vulnerable group by social sciences, where research involving children and young people is governed by its own set of rules (Greig and Taylor, 1999). Mixing these two aspects brings out a third set of ethical issues, particular to the study of young people online, which merits special consideration.

Recent developments in youth research have changed assumptions about transitions between youth and adulthood, and notably led to the gradual replacement of the terms “adolescence” and “adolescents” by the terms “youth” and “young people”, as well as the introduction of the new term of “young adult” (du Bois-Reymond and Chisholm, 2006). This trend is notably echoed in literature, which now discerns between

children's literature and the newer genre of young adult fiction. (see 2.1.1). It is now accepted that youth encompasses a wide range of ages and stages of development, and that it extends into ages which had previously been considered as adult; this longer youth period tends to mix within the same category people of very different ages and psychological and psychosocial development: a ten year old child does not have the same understanding as an twenty year old woman. However, some young people, albeit not children, remain legally minor, and ethical issues regarding them occupy a grey area.

Informed consent is one of the main issues in research with children and young people, who are traditionally represented as vulnerable groups in social sciences.

Obtaining consent from young people is a relatively new notion, as children for a long time were considered mere objects of research, reflecting their historical place in society (Greig and Taylor, 1999). However, within the past decades, it has been recognized that children should have a say in research that involves them.

Researching youth also brings research ethics— a professional challenge—to the forefront in considering how young people can and should be informed and included as active research subjects in studies about youth. (Chisholm, 2006)

The Declaration of Helsinki (1964) states that not only is consent to be sought from a legal guardian, but also from children themselves. Informed consent from adolescents seems to be a grey area. In England, the Family Law Reform Act of 1969 states that, in the medical field, children from 16 to 17 years old are presumed to be competent to consent to treatment, and a similar situation exists in Ireland. When it comes to consent online, the office of the Irish data commissioner's website advises that

The minimum age at which consent can be legitimately obtained is not defined in the Data Protection Act, 1988.

Section 2A(1) of the Acts states that consent cannot be obtained from a person who, by reason of age, is likely to be unable to appreciate the nature and effect of such consent. Judging maturity will vary from case to case.

It goes on to refer to the General Practice Information Technology (GPIT) guide in the medical area, which defines the age of consent at 16. The Office of the Data Commissioner adds that for marketing purposes, 14 can be considered as a reasonable consent age, and that companies should ensure that the individual understands the implications of giving consent.

4.2.2 Directives and guidelines

Elgesem (2002) refers to the guidelines published by the body for research ethics in Norway, regarding ethical research in social sciences and the humanities, which identifies two broad categories of conflict of interest: those dealing with the integrity of the research process, and those dealing with the integrity of research subjects. Elgesem posits that online research ethics can be drawn from offline research ethics, with some proviso, which refer to the problematic private/public dichotomy. The presence of a fragmented audience online is a major difference, due to the specificity and specialization of communication and texts, and thus the expectation of a “limited and homogeneous audience” (Elgesem, 2002:202) even when the fora are not password-protected. The issue of privacy, which has been deemed irrelevant for published texts (Serfaty, 2004) thus becomes an issue of perceived privacy.

AoIR recommendations

The Association of Internet Researchers published in 2002 a set of guidelines from their ethics working group, guidelines which have since become a major source of information for Internet researchers. Whilst they acknowledge the existence and validity of various ethical frameworks, they also highlight some major questions relevant to internet research, amongst which the various venues which can be found and researched and the different ethical expectations which their users may have. Similarly, they advise to ascertain whether the participants in the project should be considered more as authors or as research subjects, as this perception also carries different ethical expectations. Whether offline or online, children should be afforded increased ethical protection, and this is also reflected in the AoIR guidelines.

Research Ethics Committees

Markham et al (2008) conducted research in the perception of internet research ethical issues amongst Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in the United States. Most have no guidelines whatsoever on Internet research (62%); in the qualitative study carried out along with the questionnaire, the need for education of IRBs was a recurring theme; issues of data security and consent were most problematic for IRBs, and most frequently mentioned were consent and privacy issues which are difficult to comprehend in a new space. Some initiatives have been led by educators and researchers in an effort to adapt guidelines and recommendations to the study of online communities: a program led by Bruckmann (2006) had thus enabled undergraduates to learn how to conduct ethical research in online communities, with an emphasis on the protection of human subjects.

European universities seem to encounter the same problems in adapting to new contexts of research, and some have issued specific guidelines: University of Bristol, UK Kids Online in the London School of Economics for example have guidelines for internet research and internet research with children and young people.

Researchers in practice:

Different approaches are taken by researchers from different disciplines and traditions. In their studies of blogs, Serfaty (2004b) and Efimova (2009) differ in their approach to ethics, although both include an ethical reflection in their research. Efimova (2009), in her PhD research, considers bloggers as public intellectuals; she points out the fundamental difference between the knowledge or professional blogger and the academic, in which the blogger cites other blogs and links back to them, thus creating a web of knowledge, whereas the academic anonymises sources. Efimova treats the bloggers from her study as public intellectuals, and thus asks no permission, but disseminates the results of her research through her blog, while linking to the bloggers cited. This ethical approach, following ethnographic sensibilities, is in contrast to that used by Serfaty (2004b), where bloggers are seen as authors, and thus exempt from consent according to humanities and literary studies tradition, yet she also acknowledges their identity as potential participants, only to deny their participation as threatening the research integrity. However, in an online space where authors are amateur and not professional authors, and thus do not have access to professional legal or contractual representation, I feel that the author should also be treated as a participant in the study, and thus humanities and social sciences ethical traditions should be consulted and adapted. This is even more necessary when the bloggers are young people, and could be seen as vulnerable in a moral sense if not in a legal sense.

If different disciplinary ethical viewpoints can collide in internet research, and if the issues of researching children are amplified by the online context, most of the differences between online and offline can actually be set into four different categories, identified by privacy scholar Zimmer (2010) as “conceptual gaps”.

4.2.3 Conceptual gaps in research ethics

Indeed as an internet researcher attempting to fill in the required forms for my university’s Research Ethics Committee, I came across those conceptual gaps, relating to the issues of consent, anonymity, harm and privacy. As outlined by the AoIR recommendations, researchers are guided not only by rules, recommendations and best practices, but also by their own moral compass, and their knowledge of the context in which their research is based. I will thus use the idea of conceptual gap identified by Zimmer (2010) and correlate it with my own ethical choices.

Consent

There are two problematic aspects to the issue of consent in internet research. The first is linked to the issue of authenticity, and the other one to access to the offline identity of the participant. The oft-quoted New Yorker cartoon states that on the Internet, no one knows if you’re a dog. Indeed, if bloggers for example have chosen to blog under a pseudonym, it can be difficult, time-consuming, and sometimes impossible to ascertain the “real” identity of the author; naturally, no one knows how old you are either, at least in theory. However, young people in particular tend to be mostly truthful in the representation of their age (Scheidt, 2006). Indeed most young people now live their lives both online and offline, and their experience is that of the “seamlessness of life in, out and around technological spaces” (Thomas, 2007:164); their network of friends

follows them from one space to the other (boyd, 2008, Ito et al, 2008, Palfrey and Gasser, 2008). The age of the young bloggers can thus often be ascertained, however their identity remains that which they have chosen, under the pseudonym they have created, and if they have chosen to link their blog to an email address bearing a similar pseudonym, only their online identity can be verified, and only their online identity can give consent to take part in the research.

This problem is naturally more acute in the case of online only ethnographies, and in the case of this study, it was amplified by my reluctance to request personal information. I felt that such an attempt would be contrary to best practice and indeed to current recommendations to parents and children or teenagers, who are advised never to reveal any personal information to a stranger on the internet. This was also the reason for the methodological choice of an online only ethnography: I had found these young peoples' blogs online, and thus all communication remained online. This choice of course also implied that I would not have access to their parents for consent, which in turn influenced the data sampling, as I chose not to interact with anyone under sixteen without parental consent. The permanence of the digital text meant that I did however have access to some parts of the blogs written at an earlier date, when the writer was under sixteen, in the case when the blog had been started before that age, with the consent of the now-sixteen or eighteen year old blogger.

Anonymity

It should first of all be noted that the participants in this study are anonymous from the outset, as they do not blog under their own name, nor do they usually reveal their full name or address.

However, a pseudonym, or here LiveJournal name, is often used on different fora and is as such part of the online person (Bruckman, 2006); the use of this pseudo within the research and in writing it up can thus be seen as a failure to anonymize the research by the participants. I decided to use double pseudonyms, and asked the bloggers if they wished to choose a new pseudo themselves, so that they could retain some power over their texts and their presence in the research. Some decided to create their own names, others did not answer the message sent to them, and were randomly allocated a new pseudonym (see 5.4.5). As the research progressed, it became apparent that, in their texts, the bloggers used both pseudonyms and real first names. Those were also anonymised through the use of pseudonyms (see 5.1.3). The particular characteristics of the LiveJournal platform, which mixes blogging platform with social network site facilities (see 5.2.1), meant that the participants are named on my LiveJournal profile page, under their LiveJournal names. Whereas communications through comments on my blog are protected, as I locked the blog from the time I started interacting with the bloggers (see Chapter 5.4.5), the names remain visible through the always public profile page. This issue is resolved by deleting the LiveJournal research blog from the time of thesis publication. All material therein will be stored in the Nvivo software tool (see chapter 5.4.6) for three years thereafter.

However, it could be argued that anonymity is not always possible, even if the bloggers use pseudonyms, as their life stories contain elements relating to events, places and people which may help to identify them. If Lally (2009) is aware of the “tyranny of distance” linked to internet research, in my case, I was very much aware of the tyranny of proximity; Ireland is a small country, with a small population, where the famous “degrees of separations” are fewer than in more populated areas. Whyte (2006) points

out that, when it comes to research on specific populations, it is practically impossible to guarantee anonymity in Ireland. This local issue amplified another anonymity problem online, due this time to the power of search engines. If texts are quoted in a publication, these excerpts can be entered in search engines and the blog from which they were selected can thus be found. A significant number of the quotes in this study are taken from blogs which are no longer publicly accessible. When excerpts from the blogs were chosen for the dissertation, or for articles, papers or presentations, if these came from public entries, the bloggers were told of which part of their text was being cited in case they wished to lock the relevant entry. Even though in more conventional settings, this might be construed as perverting data, in an emergent social space where younger people can lack adult guidance, it should be a moral imperative for the researcher to educate and protect the young participants in a study.

Harm

This concept, and its adaptation to online spaces, can be linked to the concept of privacy, anonymity, and space. Some sensitive information, some texts of a very personal nature, when taken out of context, can be met by a public for which they were not intended. This breach of the expectation of privacy could indeed lead to harm for the participants, in the case for example of young people who may be openly gay online, but not offline.

Another ethical issue, this time of concern to the researcher, is the possibility of encountering disturbing texts. These could possibly be relating an obvious danger for a blogger, such as depression, risk of suicide, incidence of abuse or even relating the possibility of danger to the public, suggested by rantings and threats of violent action. Bearing in mind that information posted on Internet sites is not always truthful, and that

in some cases the text belongs more to fiction than autobiography, some practical steps are however possible: contact with the platform security officer is the first step to take, as the companies have requested personal details when the blog/social network page was set up. If the matter is more urgent, contact should be attempted through the platform with the named friends of the adolescent who are likely to know her in real life, or to have access to personal information such as telephone number or address, and they should be requested to contact the person, their family, or a relevant official body. These issues are being discussed regularly amongst Internet researchers, and some propositions have been made in the US for an anonymous online support forum for young people. Neither situation applied to this thesis, but the possibility was nonetheless envisaged.

Privacy

The AoIR recommendations highlight the concept of *expectation* of privacy in various online spaces. As outlined in Chapter 2.3.1, the binary private/public concept is no longer of use when it comes to the internet, and this issue is at the heart of many moral panics and many misunderstandings. Different venues carry different expectations, some fora are open, others require registration and password and as such are *felt* as more private. The motivation of the writer can also influence this perception and expectation of privacy: whereas some bloggers consider blogging as a form of publishing, expecting to be cited as authors, others regard their blogs as personal artefacts which they expect a small selection of readers to share. In knowledge blogs, the aim is dissemination of knowledge. For diary-style blogs, the content is different, as is the intent, and instead of publication of “one to many”, the aim is for “one to some”.

Contextual integrity

Nissenbaum (2010) introduces the concept of “contextual integrity” to account for the puzzling issue of privacy in public, but which can be adapted to the area of internet research:

The underlying thesis is that social activity occurs in contexts and is governed by context-relative norms. Among these, informational norms govern the flow of information about a subject from one party to another, taking account of the capacities (or roles) in which the parties act, the types of information, and the principles under which this information is transmitted among the parties. We can think of contextual integrity as a metric, preserved when informational norms within a context are respected and violated when they are contravened. (Nissenbaum, 2010:14)

Contextual integrity calls for the *appropriate* flow of information, in a context-sensitive manner, reminiscent of the call of the AoIR Ethics working group for sensitivity to the expectations of the digital venue. An ethical reflection does not however stop at the design stage of the research, or the choice of relational boundaries. All through the research process, there appear instances and events which call on the researcher to reflect again and again on the ethics of her research. In my case, these questions did not all find answers, and there remain some grey areas.

Grey areas

One of the grey areas comes from the nature of the blog as life-writing. Whereas authenticity may not be an issue in young people’s blogs, too much truth may be one. Ethical issues online are often played around the complex and shifting concept of privacy, which in blogs can be linked to life narratives. Eakin (2004) reflects on the ethics of life-writing in relation to others:

because we live our lives in relation to others, our privacies are largely shared, making it hard to demarcate the boundary where one life leaves off and another begins. (Eakin , 2004:8)

While our lives are increasingly on display in public, the ethics of presenting such revelations remains largely unexamined. (Eakin, 2004:1)

These issues are examined in Chapter 8.3, where the bloggers' management of their own privacy is contrasted to their management of the privacy of others, who figure as subjects of their stories, and sometimes co-authors of the text. They do however also impact on research: whereas I asked for consent from the bloggers that I had selected, and I kept an open communication channel with them, I was also conscious of the presence of others in the text, and my own text has changed the names of anyone mentioned, as well as place names which might make the bloggers and their friends identifiable. The grey area is that of the active readers who comment on the blogs; it would have been practically impossible to contact each and every one of them and ask them for consent; consent was only sought from the blogger, the "owner" of the place as it were. As for the commenters who are not part of the sample, their names are thus replaced by pseudonyms, but their comments are nevertheless quoted. Any other issues pertaining to privacy or ethics are woven in the rich descriptions and the analysis chapters of this study in chapters seven and eight.

4.3 Summary

This chapter outlined the broad methodological choices which were dictated by the context as well as the subject of the research. This dissertation is thus based on an online-only ethnography, or virtual ethnography, in order to study the blogs as semiotic artefacts, and as a means of addressing ethical issues which arose early in the research

and indeed remained as emergent issues throughout the time of the ethnography. Internet researchers are faced with ethical issues particular to online spaces and context, which can on occasion present as conceptual gaps, not previously considered in offline research. These sensitive issues were described and linked to issues encountered in this research, along with the methodological choices which ensued.

Chapter 5 Methods and context

Chapter four outlined some broad methodological issues and the choices attendant to those, in terms of ethical research online and virtual ethnography. It made a case for choosing an online-only ethnography, thus keeping the whole research in one digital space. This helped to solve some ethical issues which arose from the start of the research, and continued to emerge throughout the ethnographic project. Chapter four summarized the conceptual gaps which impacted on this research and presented the methodological solutions which were adopted. Moreover, in order to study the blogs as literary semiotic artefacts within an ethnographic project, methods had to be borrowed from humanities and social sciences, and this chapter will present the concept of bricolage as methodological choice, as advocated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Lemke (2005a) amongst other qualitative researchers. Chapter five will first present the bloggers who accepted to participate in the research and situate them in the digital space of their chosen blogging platform, as well as briefly presenting other spaces which are part of the bloggers' trajectories, and signalled in the form of links to through the texts. The research process will then be described, from the identification of the participants, to data collections, analysis and writing, and the toolbox used for the analysis will be presented; as a link to the ethnographic dimension of the study, I will also present a rich description of my blog as a research tool, and discuss the validity techniques and criteria employed in the research.

5.1 Participants:

5.1.1 Sampling

Random sampling was not an option, due to the criteria for inclusion in a study on young Irish bloggers: there were going to be age and nationality restrictions, at least for the main bloggers, as those would not necessarily apply to the people who commented on their blogs. For ethical reasons (see 4.2) the age group of participants was determined as ranging from 16 to 23 years old. However, the nature of blogs as chronotopes, with a distinctive space and time relationship, allowed a retrospective view of the blog/journal. Some of the selected bloggers had started their blogs before the study started, when they were younger than 16 years old. Others, who in 2008 were over 23 years old, had been blogging for 5 years, and thus could fit in the profile, as outlined in Table 5-1. Nationality restriction may at first seem incongruous in a global cultural phenomenon such as the Internet, where frontiers were thought to be abolished; recent development in research in youth internet practices have however led to the realization that offline geography plays an important part in the selection of platforms and social network sites (boyd and Ellison, 2008). Moreover, the question of privacy management is also linked to offline geographical issues, such as the size of the population and the increased risk in a small population of accidentally revealing private information to acquaintances who are also lurkers (see 8.2.2). Finally, ethical and legal reasons demanded that the research be limited to the country of residence of the researcher (see chapter 5).

5.1.2 Initial selection

The initial selection of blogs was done through use of search engines: general search engine (Google.com), specialized search engine (Technorati.com) and finally platform-specific search engine. The initial search was done on Google and Technorati, using age-specific and location-specific terms. Technorati is a blog search engine which also ranks and categorizes blogs according to linking patterns. It is similar to the newest Google blog search facility, which was not available at the time of sampling. Parameters were set as to the age (16 to 23) and the geographic location of the participants, and the terms used reflected these parameters. Words used in the search were drawn from common vocabulary with a strong local emphasis, such as: “Leaving Cert”, the Irish end of secondary school state examination, or names of places frequented by adolescents in Dublin, such as “Wesley”, or “Wez”, a popular teen club. These initial searches revealed that most of the available blogs were to be found on the LiveJournal platform. LiveJournal has a platform-specific search facility available to paid account holders. The research blog was thus set up on LiveJournal and a paid account was purchased, which enabled me to access the internal search function, where the parameters available were geographical. As of September 2008, the number of Irish LiveJournals had reached 14090. This number does however include non-active journals, as well as journals labelled Irish which do in fact belong to bloggers from other countries. Each of the returned journals had to be perused, as it soon became apparent that some American adolescents were using an Irish label, possibly for family reasons, if they were from Irish extraction, or possibly to avoid being found on their own state label. As the Irish economy continued to flourish in 2006 and 2007, and attracted more and more immigrants from Eastern Europe in particular, an increasing

number of Russian or Polish bloggers also started using the Irish label for their journals. All those were discarded. Within the Irish blogs identified, the criteria of age had to be met: a close reading of the blogs would reveal the age of the blogger, sometimes very quickly, if a date of birth or an age was posted on the profile page, sometimes a little more slowly, when stories were posted about school and university. Initially, five journals were thus selected. Snowball sampling was then used to increase the number of participants while enabling a closer study of networks and friends groups or communities formed around the use of LiveJournal.

Even though the journals were public, ethical imperatives demanded that permission be sought from the authors, following the AoIR best practice recommendations (see 4.2.2). Several adolescents refused permission to use their journals, some simply ignored the request, and thus, the final selection included only adolescents who accepted that their journals be included in the study, and who also spontaneously expressed interest in answering any questions I might have (see 5.4.5).

5.1.3 Final participants

Group 1 centred around one main blogger, Saila, a 17 year old secondary school student, who is linked to a core group of seven consistent bloggers who accepted to take part in the study, and are listed in Table 5-1 below. These adolescents started their journals in 2005, when they ranged in age from 14 to 17, and all but one were still writing at the time of the last data collection, on May 30th, 2008. Disco only kept her blog for a short amount of time, and did not seem to keep up with her friends' blogs when she stopped her own LiveJournal. The core group of bloggers were known to each other offline, even though they did not all go to the same school or live in the same area, as they met through a summer school. This accounts for the fact that their ages are

also relatively varied, Saila being one of the youngest of the group, whereas Fry, Planet and Disco are three years older.

LJname Pseudonym	First name Pseudonym	Gender	Date of birth	Blog start date	Blog end date
Brightears	Conor	Male	1989	2005	Continuing
Corcra	Orla	Female	1989	2004	Continuing
Disco	Aisling	Female	1988	2006	2007
Homi	Sarah	Female	1990	2005	2009 (new blog)
Fry	Brian	Male	1988	2006	2008
Planet	Laura	Female	1988	2005	2008
Saila	Ciara	Female	1991	2005	2009 (new blog)

Table 5-1. List of participants, group 1

Group 2 is composed of two friends, Jen and Myriam, who wrote and interacted consistently since 2004, when they were 19, and are listed in Table 5-2 below. Jen and Myriam are childhood friends who attended the same secondary school, and subsequently went to different universities – Myriam went to university in England and Jen attended university in Dublin. Their group of friends/commenters is not always the same, as it gradually includes friends from their respective universities. They also jointly created a LiveJournal group related to Harry Potter fan-fiction, where they collected and commented snippets of bad fan-fiction.

LJname Pseudonym	First name Pseudonym	Gender	Date of birth	Blog start date	Blog end date
Jen	Caroline	Female	1985	2004	Continuing
Myriam	Hannah	Female	1985	2004	Continuing

Table 5-2. List of participants, group 2

5.2 Online spaces

5.2.1 LiveJournal

LiveJournal was funded in 1999 by an American computer science student, Brad Fitzpatrick; like many of its competitors, it was a personal initiative initially meant for friends and colleagues, and like other blogging platforms, LiveJournal grew exponentially and was sold in 2005 by Six Apart. In 2007, the Russian Internet company SUP bought LiveJournal from them and formed the company LiveJournal Inc., based in San Francisco. Even though the platform has been in use from the time of the creation of the first blogs, it was at first discounted as an online diary style, not to be included in the blog genre (Herring, 2004). However, as the definition of blogs was broadened and became more inclusive, it was accepted as a blogging platform (Herring, 2005b), albeit with a strong adolescent cohort.

This initial discrepancy could be explained by LiveJournal's early adoption of the social network model, and indeed its front page expressed the duality of its mission: publication and networking : “Express Yourself, Share Your Life, Connect with Friends Online” is the first sentence on display in its home page, which lists the aims of the blog, to “express and share”, to write and publish, as well as the aims of the now ubiquitous social network sites “ to connect with friends online”, as illustrated in Figure 5-1**Error! Reference source not found..** The platform thus performs as a host for online diaries, where you “express yourself” and “share your life”, and a social network site, where you connect with friends.

This dual mission is not only expressed, but also illustrated by its front page, where a picture of a globe and stylized “people” signifies the opening to the world and global

friendship possibilities, whereas the picture of a stylized diary with a lock indicates the private writing place of the journal, as illustrated in Figure 5-1. Indeed the LiveJournal platform is one of the most privacy-conscious blogging platforms, with many functions for various privacy settings built in the design, as will be examined in detail in 8.2.



Figure 5-1. - LiveJournal platform

An important feature of LiveJournal, and one which is linked to the social network side of the site, is that of “friends”. Long before this concept was taken up by social network sites such as Bebo or MySpace (see 5.2.2), the word had passed into usage on LiveJournal, with a very different connotation to that used offline. (Fono and Raynes-Goldie, 2006). Friends on LiveJournal are essentially people who are linked to you, through a social link (they are your friends) and a technological link (their names on your profile page is in fact a hyperlink which leads to their own profile page); they will be the only people allowed to read your journal if you decide to lock it, and they also automatically receive a RSS feed of your entries on their “friends page”, thus keeping them always informed of what is being written by their network of friends. The “friends” are listed on the profile page of the blogger, thus forming a de facto network

of bloggers who all read the same blog, and this list is often replicated throughout the network.

LiveJournal also offers the possibility of joining “communities”, which fall into the category of “interest-driven” communities (Ito et al, 2008), in that they centre around an interest ranging from interest in grammar to chocolate, or around a practice, such as fan-fiction, gaming, knitting or baking. It is through those communities that some online friendships can be created, and after visiting another member’s LiveJournal, a blogger can ask to be “friended”. This interest-driven participation is matched by friendship-driven participation: an offline friend or acquaintance who joins the LiveJournal platform and starts blogging will also ask to be added to the online “friends list” of her friend/acquaintance. Some young bloggers have exceedingly large friends lists on their LiveJournal, leading to a great volume of RSS feeds, which in turn explains the regular culling of friends lists (see 8.1.5).

The “home page” of a blogger on LiveJournal, as seen in Figure 5-2 offers various possibilities from the start: posting an entry, reading messages in the inbox, or looking at the RSS feed for the blogger’s friend’s LiveJournal updates. It even suggests topics to cover in the blog in case of “writer’s block”. It also outlines the latest comments left on the blog, which when clicked on will be seen in the context of the blog entry.

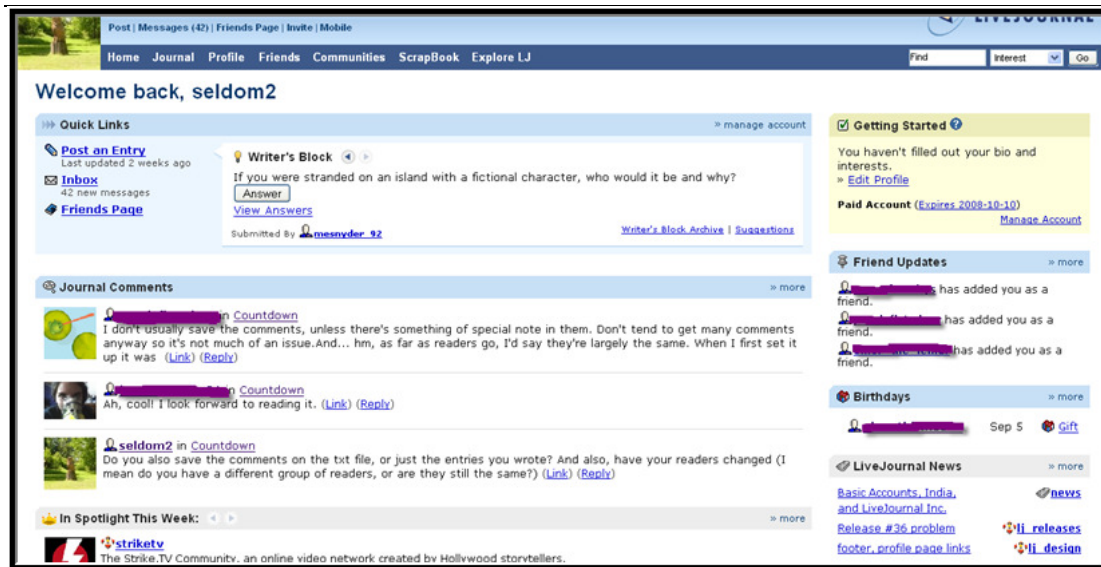


Figure 5-2. Home Page on LiveJournal

The other important page on LiveJournal is the “Profile page”, which can be accessed by readers, as seen in Figure 5-3. This page lists all the personal information that the blogger has made available, including email address, schools attended, date of joining LiveJournal, number of entries and date of last entry. It also importantly holds the list of friends listed by the blogger, as well as “mutual friends”, which is a list of the people listed as friends who also list the blogger as a friend on their own blog. The other list in this profile page is one of the communities that the blogger has joined. In the image below, taken from the researcher’s profile page, a very small number of communities are listed, including “fanthropology”, a group dedicated to research in fan-fiction, “grammar_whores”, a community where members record bad usage of grammar, often in public signs or print publications, and “loltheorists”, an offshoot of the famous lolcats image production.

The screenshot shows the profile page of a user named 'seldom2' on the LiveJournal website. The page layout includes a top navigation bar with links like 'Home', 'Journal', 'Profile', 'Friends', 'Communities', 'ScrapBook', and 'Explore LJ'. Below this, the 'Profile' section is titled, followed by a note about editing personal information. The user's details are listed: 'User: seldom2 (6519869)', 'Name: seldom2', 'Location: Ireland', 'E-mail: cathy.fowley@dcu.ie', and 'LJ Talk: seldom2@livejournal.com (Jabber)'. There are sections for 'Pictures' (over 10 public), 'Interests' (baking, being bilingual, chicklit, children's literature, chocolate, detective fiction, detective novels, fan fiction, granny weatherwax, internet, knitting, procrastination), 'Schools' (None listed), 'Friends' (12: daily_sportie, 4: fanthropology, li_maintenance, loltheorists, news, 1: vkcd_rss), 'Mutual Friends' (8), 'Member of' (5: compiling, fanthropology, grammar_whores, loltheorists, paidmembers), 'Account type' (Paid Account, expiring 2008-10-10), 'Date created' (2005-03-21 10:21:08), 'Date updated' (2008-08-11 11:52:02, 2 weeks ago), 'Virtual Gifts Received' (0), 'Journal entries' (61), 'Comments' (Posted: 57 - Received: 40), and 'Posting Access' (4: compiling, fanthropology, grammar_whores, loltheorists). The footer contains various links like 'About', 'Help', 'Legal', 'Store', 'LJ Labs', and a 'Change language' dropdown set to 'English'. A copyright notice at the bottom reads 'Copyright © 1999-2008 LiveJournal, Inc. All rights reserved.'

Figure 5-3. - Profile page on LiveJournal

However, the first page encountered by a reader is usually that of the current blog entry; as depicted in Figure 5-4, as blogs entries are displayed in reverse order, the most recent first (Walker, 2005c). If the blog is not public, then the first page is that created by the blogger to indicate this fact (see Chapter 8.2.2).



Figure 5-4. First page, January 2005, Jen's blog⁴

The arrow on Figure 5-4 above points to the number of comments on that particular entry. Clicking on such a link leads the reader to a different page, in the social space, where the reader's comments are a part of the text, as illustrated in Figure 5-5 below:



Figure 5-5. Comments page, Corcra's blog⁵

⁴ The screenshots are blurred to protect the bloggers' privacy.

⁵ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity.

5.2.2 Other sites

The principal phenomenon under scrutiny was blogs written by young people, yet the time of the research has seen a proliferation of social network sites, and their use by young people is now well documented (boyd, 2007c, 2008, Lenhart and Madden, 2007a, 2007b). Ireland was no stranger to this mass participation in social network sites, and indeed some of the participants' blogs have links to other sites, Bebo in particular. Boyd (2008) controversially claimed that social network sites now echo American class divisions, and that the upper classes tend to use the college-led Facebook platform, whereas middle and lower classes and Latino users tend to prefer MySpace. This analysis might not have been valid in an Irish context, where the division seemed to occur more on the basis of age: young people initially joined Bebo, regardless of their social class, and whether they belong to a local or exclusive fee-paying school. Some subsequently migrated to Facebook after their first years in college, depending on their social network. This was the case for the first few years of social network adoption by young people in Ireland. However, Facebook has since overtaken all other social network sites in Ireland as in most western countries.

Some of the young bloggers displayed links to their social network sites from their LiveJournal blogs, as Saila did for her Bebo page as shown on Figure 5-6 below.

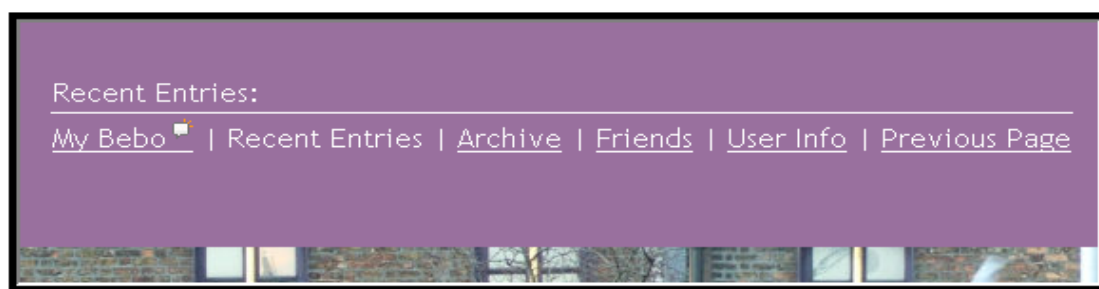


Figure 5-6. List of links (Saila's blog)

Boards.ie

Boards.ie, which most of the participants use regularly, is a discussion board specific to Ireland, which covers all age groups and all interests. It was of particular interest to one of the groups of bloggers, as one forum in particular was created by someone who had attended the same summer camp as they did, and all users of that forum were thus young people who were currently attending the camp or had attended it in the past.

Bebo

Bebo was originally founded by Michael Birch as a picture-sharing site in January 2005, and subsequently relaunched as a social network site in June 2005. According to the internet company Crunchbase, Bebo had over 34 million registered users in early 2008, and 7 billion monthly page views. (Crunchbase.com, 2008). Not only was Bebo the social network of choice in the UK, Australia and New Zealand (boyd and Ellison, 2008), it was also the preferred social network site for Irish young people, at least from 13 to 18 and beyond. Secondary school-going young people were “on Bebo” even if they sometimes migrated to Facebook during their college years. However, the following years saw a mass migration from Bebo to Facebook, which became the social network of choice in Ireland, for all ages, as evidenced in their place in the Alexa.com rankings for Ireland, where they slipped from most visited site in March 2007, to 43rd place in August 2010.

Research has mainly focused on Facebook and MySpace sites (boyd and Ellison, 2008) due to their longer history and popularity in the United States and Canada. There is a body of research on the social aspects of the sites, and the “friending” phenomenon (Thelwall, 2008, Ellison et al., 2007, boyd, 2008) as well as on privacy issues (Gross

and Acquisti, 2005, Lehnart and Madden, 2007). Research centred more specifically on the Bebo platform is scarcer, despite the overwhelming media coverage of the phenomenon: from December 2006 to December 2008, major Irish publications (Irish Times, Irish Independent, Sunday Tribune) have mentioned Bebo in 661 articles. Early articles expressed wariness, but later articles may simply use the word “Bebo generation”, as an implied acceptance of the overwhelming presence of the social network site in young people’s lives.

Bebo, like other social network spaces such as Facebook, built its base of users around the schools or colleges they attend. Young people had to join Bebo, to become a member in order to obtain their profile page, which they called their “Bebo page”. This is where they gave information about themselves, uploaded pictures, listed their favourite bands, and most importantly, their 16 best friends. Facilities then included creation and posting of various quizzes (Dowdall, 2006), and commenting or writing on “the wall”. Layouts were all important, and regularly changed, according to the mood or the season; creation of layouts (or “skins”) became status-enhancing, as evidenced by the popularity of “skin” creators.

The participants from the first group of LiveJournal bloggers were all using Bebo as a social network, sometimes in addition to several other interest-driven sites (Ito, 2008). The slightly older bloggers from the second group had migrated to Facebook during their college years, and no longer used their Bebo accounts at the time of data collection.

Their use of skins or layouts changes regularly as does the inclusion of profile pictures, which can be personal pictures or pictures found on other sites and appropriated with copy and paste. Bebo pages require scrolling rather than clicking in order to access

different facilities and options, such as the message board, the picture gallery or the friends list, as shown in Figure 5-7 below. Scrolling allows viewing the interactive options, and the embedded media, as shown in Figure 5-7. There, the obvious subdivisions are spaces for: 16 top friends (represented by their pictures), What I'm listening to (embedded audio), Video box (embedded video), Arcade (links to games), Photos, Blog (created by the user) Bands, Groups (with links and photos) Polls, Playlist, Quizzes, (created or more commonly copied from user to user) and elements where the interaction with friends happens: The Wall, Whiteboard and Comments.

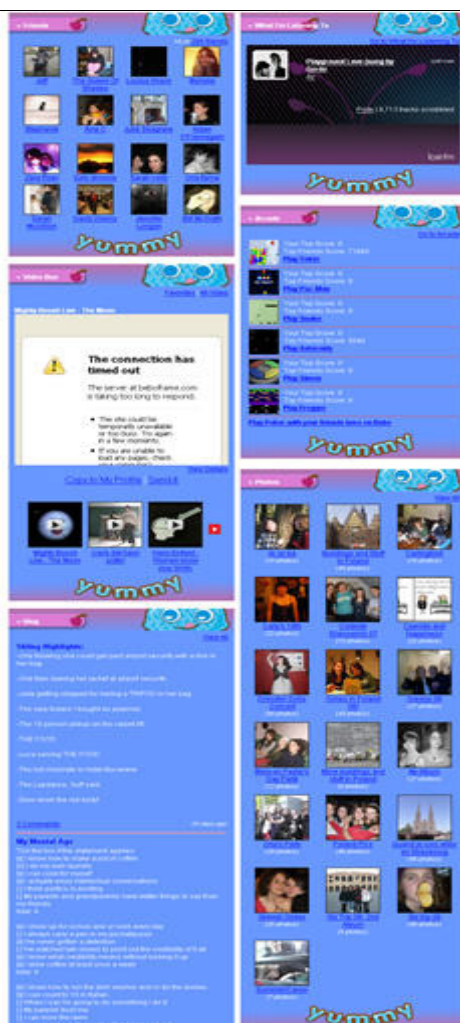


Figure 5-7. Saila's scrolled Bebo page⁶

The first screen to be viewed is the profile of the young person on Bebo, with title, name, picture, and description, typically of favourite films, favourite music or bands, and/or favourite food.. In Saila's June profile, as illustrated in Figure 5-8 below, she thus lists her favourite things, following the alphabet, as:

Excerpt 5-1: Corcra/Bebo

Asparagus, Bed, Chemistry, Dawson's Creek, Eating, Friends, Galway, Hyperbole, Irregular Choice, Jeff, Knitting, Letterland, Music, Nineties, Olga de Polga, Poland,

⁶ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity

Quilts, Roganjosh, Sundays, Topshop, Urban Outfitters, Violin, Water, Xing Cousins, You, Zumo.



Figure 5-8. Saila's Bebo page (June 08)⁷

Facebook

Social network sites and other internet spaces where young people tend to go to, such as gaming platforms or fan-fiction sites, can be divided into two main categories: friendship-driven sites, where young people meet their offline friends and add online interaction to their relationships, or interest-driven sites, where “geeks” and “nerds” tend to congregate amongst kindred spirits, guided by their interests either in gaming, artistic endeavours, fan-fiction etc. (Ito et al, 2008). Whereas Bebo and Facebook are social network sites which can be categorized as friendship-driven, the following sites which appeared in links on the LiveJournal blogs are primarily interest-driven sites.

⁷ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity

DeviantArt

DeviantArt is a space for sharing photographs, paintings, sketches, various items of visual art which are then commented upon by friends. Several of the young bloggers from the first group had an account with DeviantArt and posted their art quite regularly.

LastFM

LastFM is a social network which is built around music; users create their pages, list their favourite music, listen to music, and LastFM was used by several of the young bloggers, as a means of listening to music and of sharing their favourites tunes and albums with their friends.

Picture sharing sites:

There are many picture sharing sites, but those used by the participants were Flickr, where the bloggers most interested in photography, like Brightears, started storing their pictures early on, and more generally Photobucket, which was initially linked to the LiveJournal platform, and allowed the insertion of photographs in the blog posts. It is however also a picture sharing site, and each member can thus share their pictures with their friends or with everyone.

5.3 Research Process

The process followed for research for this thesis is illustrated in Figure 5-9. It starts before data collection, and before first contact or entry in the field, with the act of reading various blogs in order to ascertain their suitability for inclusion in the data (5.1.1), which can also be associated to the act of lurking (5.4.5).

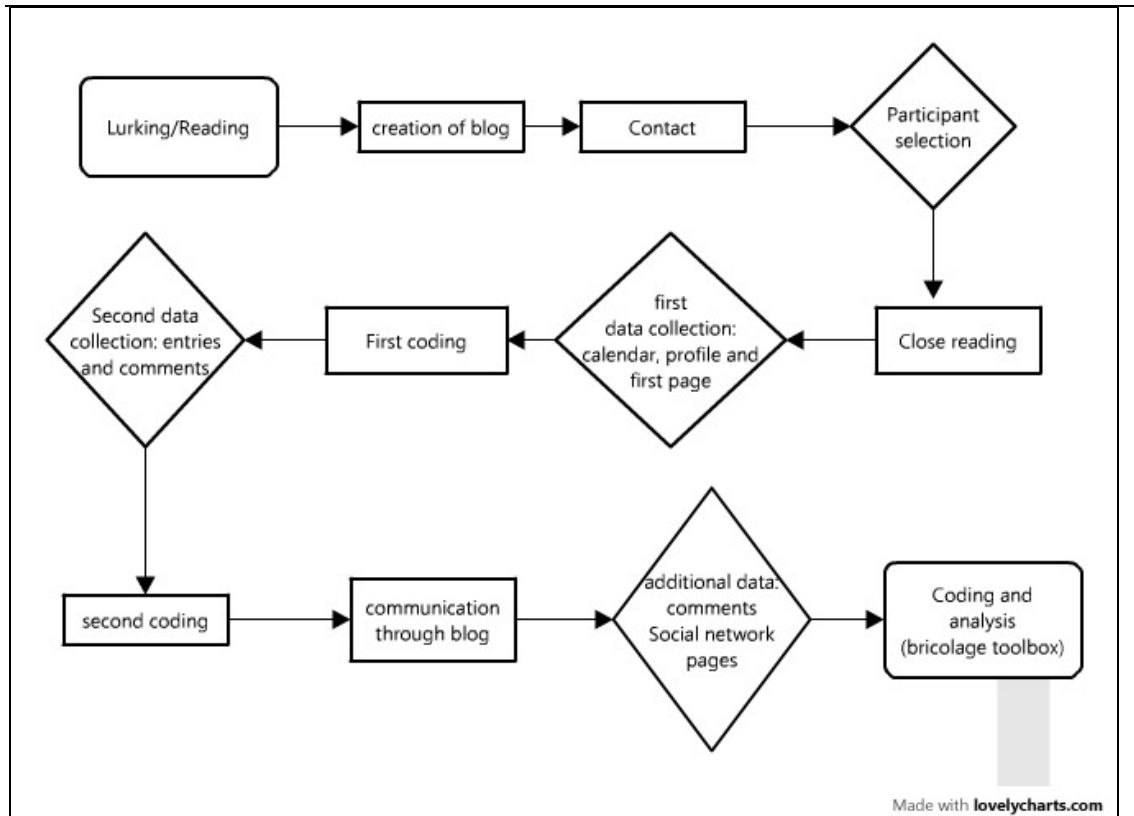


Figure 5-9. Research Process

5.3.1 Unit of analysis

The chronotope is used as unit of analysis:

For the purposes of this study, blogs are conceptualised as literary and semiotic artefacts, which operate in a self-contained space and time, the space being a digital space of the blog, and the time being linked to a diaristic time, where past and present mix and collide, and which does not necessarily correspond to the lived space and time. In order to consider the blogs in their entirety, the blog as chronotope is thus the unit of analysis.

5.3.2 Data selection

The data collection took place over time, as indicated in Figure 5-9 above, and in three steps, as follows:

First data collection

A first data collection was done immediately after the participants were contacted and they agreed to participate. This preliminary data consisted of three main categories for each blog: the calendar views, with all entries for each month: the data included their titles if applicable, and showed also the number of comments for each entry; the profile page, with contained personal information, the list of LiveJournal friends for each blogger, and also any communities they may belong to (see Figure 5-3 above), and a screenshot of the page which any reader sees when looking at the blog: in some cases, this was simply the blog posts for a few days, as well as the customized page including pictures, layout and colours, and in other cases it included the “Friends Only” page signalling a locked, private journal.

Second data collection

The unit of analysis is the blog itself as a chronotope, an artefact which is self-contained in space and time; all the blogs differed nonetheless in terms of length and in terms of the bloggers’ outputs. Some bloggers, like Saila, were prolific from the start; others only dabbled at blogging for a while and subsequently stopped, having only written a few entries. The amount of data over three and more years was in some cases very sizable, so I selected blog entries for the first six months of the blog, and the blog entries of the last six months of the blog if this occurred before the end of data collection, or in most cases the last six months before I stopped data collection in May 2008. These could witness any changes in the approach to the blog as a diary, and the blog as a means of communication, as well as highlight any changes in the ways the technology was used and how this impacted the practice. A first analysis of the blog entries and the list of entries showed that some of the entries had no comments, others

had a small number of comments, and a smaller number of entries seemed to attract a flurry of comments, either from a number of readers, or sometimes caused a long conversation between some readers and the author. These posts were all added to the data, and were coded as busy entries for all the blogs. This second data collection was coded at entry into the analysis software (see 5.4.6), under “early entries”, “late entries” or “busy entries”. In the cases where an early entry was also a busy entry, it was coded under “busy entry”, as the date which figured in the file name could easily mark it as an early entry.

Additional data

Throughout the time of the research, my LiveJournal blog was used as a means to keep the bloggers informed and also as a means of eliciting comments on specific issues (5.4.5). These comments were entered into the analysis software as additional data, as were any other communications with the bloggers, in the form of personal messages on the LiveJournal platform. Also included were comments from another LiveJournal blogger whom I had originally contacted, but whose blog was not included in the data for ethical reasons. However, her participation in the conversations about issues related to the research was regular and extremely pertinent, and thus included as additional data. Her contributions are attributed to Dervla, a pseudonym she chose herself.

5.3.3 Cruces

In order to illustrate the analysis and research findings, I have selected excerpts of the young bloggers’ entries and comments. Some longer excerpts are also analysed in detail, and were chosen mostly because I considered those as critical incidents, disruptive moments in the text which I felt would help to understand the usual practices

and emerging norms in the textual practice and in the conversational relationships. In this, I was guided by the concept of *cruces* used in discourse analysis:

One selection strategy which has much to recommend it is to focus on (...) “*cruces*” and “moments of crisis”. These are moments in the discourse where there is evidence that things are going wrong. (Fairclough, 1992, p.230)

These moments of crisis can be the appearance of an unknown reader/commenter, a sudden disagreement between readers or between the blogger and one of the readers which changes the structure of the conversation, or they can relate to the content of a blog post: a traumatic event, a cry for help. The identification of these *cruces* does naturally rely on a deep involvement of the researcher with the data and also an ethnographic prolonged contact in the space and context where the text is created; in the case of young people online, it rests on what danah boyd (2008) calls “deep hanging out”.

5.4 Bricolage toolbox

The concept of *bricolage*, was adapted to qualitative research by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), who claimed that the qualitative researcher needs to become a *bricoleur*, and that “if new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:4). The word, in its French form, is the equivalent of do-it-yourself; “*bricoleurs*” makes use of the tools available to them in order to achieve their aim. This strategy is used in qualitative research in order to apprehend phenomena from various perspectives, and as a result “adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:5).

This concept of methodological and theoretical bricolage holds particularly true in cases of new genres and new research situations, where only a mixture of traditional methodological tools can reach the complexity of the area or phenomenon under scrutiny. Indeed Lemke (2005) advocates an assemblage of tools to approach research; Markham thus describes the start of her research: “I dump my toolbox upside down and try different approaches” (Markham, 2009:149). Van Dijk (2007) uses the image of a “shoebox” as a conceptual tool to study digital memories. The toolbox used in this thesis took into account the three layers identified in chapter 3.2.2. For the analysis of the textual layer, in the form of blog entries, methods were drawn from discourse analysis and multimodal analysis. The social layer of the comments consists in a series of short messages written by the readers of the blog entry, usually relating to the subject or form of the text. These are interspersed with messages from the blogger, responding to one or several of the readers’ interventions. This complex interaction amongst the readers, and between the readers and the blogger, was analysed in a first instance with techniques borrowed from conversation analysis, as well as discourse analysis. The interaction between the textual and social layers and the technical layer was studied through the identification of various technical affordances used by the bloggers and their readers, either in their communication or in the management of their privacy. These were identified through multimodal or discourse analyses.

The ethnographic perspective described in chapter 4.1 encompasses all three layers identified in the blog, weaving through the various techniques used in the design of the research, as described in Table 5-3 below.

textual layer	technological layer	social layer
Discourse analysis Multimodal analysis	Multimodal analysis Identification and take up of affordances	Conversation analysis Discourse analysis
Ethnography - reflexive, ethical considerations		

Table 5-3. Bricolage: Layers and methods

5.4.1 Conversation Analysis-

Whereas conversation analysis has typically been used to study spoken language, some of the tools were very useful in order to reveal the structure of the social interaction in the comments space, coupled with a study of technical functionalities and social or technical affordances. Whereas turn-taking for example might be a concept designed for spoken conversations, when different people take turns in speaking one after the other, or interrupt each other, I used it in order to reflect on the influence and constraints which emerge from the thread function in the comments section of the blogs (see 7.3.2). Similarly, repair in conversation occurs when a speaker goes back to a word or utterance and rectifies what she meant; this concept was particularly useful in the context of the chronotope of the blog, where it would be possible for the author to amend the text of her entries throughout the time of the blog, as well as in the social space of the comments, where such a change is not possible.

5.4.2 Multimodal analysis

Multimodal analysis was used with regards to blog layouts, considering the blog page as a “visual-spatial unit” (Baldry and Thibault, 2006:114) containing visual elements and technological elements pointing to “trajectories”, links from one digital page to another. Indeed these links were also assessed as semiotic affordances, which were or were not

taken up by the blogger who created the digital space and the readers who visited it. Other visual elements were also included in this multimodal analysis, such as icons or avatars

5.4.3 Discourse analysis

The texts of the blog posts, as well as the texts written by the readers in the comments section were analysed in terms of modes, identifying “spokenness”, “netness” and “writtenness” (Thomas, 2007:153) as part of the triological relationship between the social, literary and technological aspects of the blog. Particular attention was given to written representations of action which infused the text with multimodal cues.

5.4.4 Affordances

As part of the multimodal analysis, the discourse analysis and ethnographic analysis, social, semiotic, or technological affordances were identified, as well the patterns of realisation of those affordances throughout the blogs.

5.4.5 The LiveJournal blog as a research tool

Other researchers have written ethnographic studies of LiveJournal communities that they belonged to and in which they were active participants (Marwick, 2008, Hodkinson, 2007, 2008). This was not the case for me: most of young bloggers involved in this study are not part of online communities as such; the driving force which caused them to create and continue their participation in this online space came initially from their offline community; for some, it was their affiliation to a summer camp, for others it was school, friendship, which were subsequently brought online. We are not of the same generation, a fact which I made very clear by references to my own children on my blog, where they are aptly named “the Little Brother”, “the Big Brother”, “the Big

Sister” and “the Very Big Sister”. and references to music or other cultural divides in comments or messages (*Leonard Cohen was the backing track to my teenage years, and I will always love him ;)* (Cathy/CathyMay11_07) The LiveJournal blog I created, and which is illustrated in Figure 5-10 below, was thus not my own personal journal, but rather an ethnographic tool for research purposes.

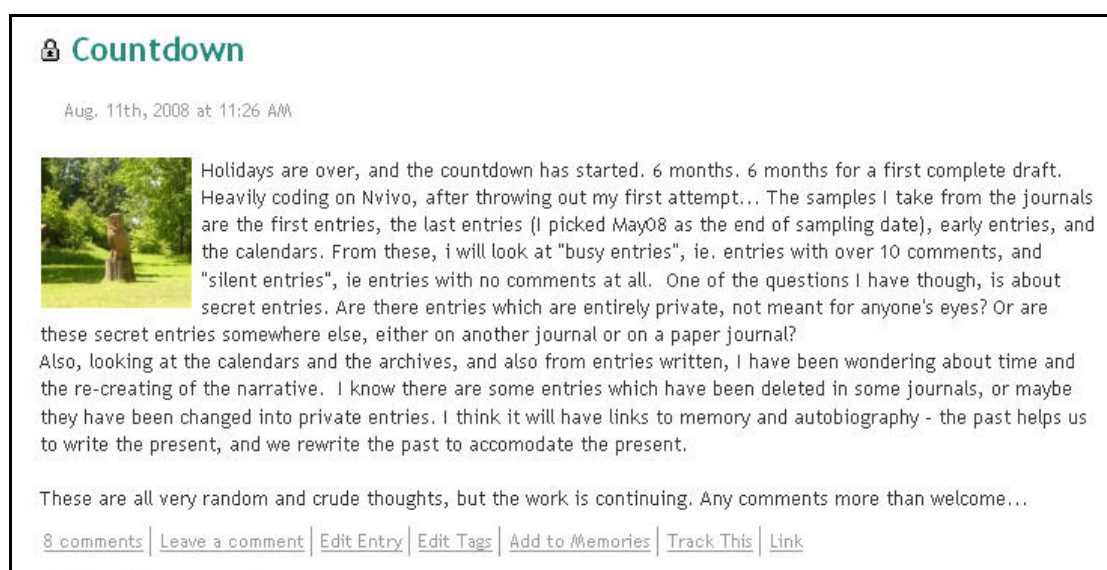


Figure 5-10. An entry from my LiveJournal blog

Nevertheless, I created it as a diary-style blog, and wrote it as such, first introducing myself as a researcher in Dublin City University, but also as the mother of four children, some of them teenagers or young adults, the same age indeed as the young bloggers, as a homeowner whose bathroom needed renovation, as an internet user interested in memes and quizzes.

In autumn 2005, I had identified LiveJournal as the place where I was most likely to find young Irish bloggers. My Masters thesis in 2004 had concentrated on some linguistic aspects of blogs written by young teenagers from France and Ireland; when it came to a new sampling for this research however, the sites had been abandoned by those young writers, and blogs discontinued. The previously popular diaryland.com

counted no Irish blogs any longer, and it proved extremely difficult to find blogs hosted on the Blogger platform or on personal sites. Some of the blogs I had studied in the past had now migrated to LiveJournal, which offered an internal search engine. In October 2005, I created a blog on LiveJournal, and wrote my first entry. This was a public entry, as would be all the entries I would write until I selected the blogs for the study. The first entries were thus personal reflections on my budding research, and little stories about my children or domestic misadventures; I had simultaneously created a second blog on the Blogger platform, and for the first year, I simply published the same posts on two different platforms. Saila's blog was the first blog I started reading, eventually navigating from her posts to her readers' blogs, following the links embedded in their user-names. I also started reading Jen's blog, following links to Myriam's blog. Throughout this phase of the research, the act of reading a blog became laden with meaning which I had not envisaged, more similar to the act of lurking than reading, as I was to discover when I started communicating with the authors. The word "lurking" entered the internet language very early on, from the time of MOOs and MUDs and discussion boards, and refers to the act of reading without notifying the others of your presence. This "reading alone" act is seen at best as very bad manners, at worst as slightly sinister or threatening to the author or the group. It does also signal texts on the web as a conversation, where all protagonists should make themselves known and participate. The blogs I discovered through the search engine and that I started reading were all publicly available to readers, but although I read, I did not comment until late in November. In November 2006, I wrote an entry on my blog which explained my presence on the platform and referred to my research and planned research questions. The same week, I commented on a number of blogs, from both groups, asking the

authors if they would like to participate in the study, with a link to the explanatory blog entry. Whilst in ethnographic terms, this was an entry into the field, to the young people whose blogs I had been reading, it felt like de-lurking. The reactions to my presence varied: Saila and Corcra, whose blogs had a mixture of locked entries and public entries, agreed immediately to participate in the study, and both of them engaged in some conversation with me; Saila sent me an email immediately, and I responded through email as well, Corcra responded on her blog, but also gave me her email address in her response, so that any further conversations could take place outside the blog. Both wrote about their participation and about the study itself. In the event, I chose not to correspond by email, but to keep all communication on the same platform, through the LiveJournal internal messaging function. I very rarely commented on the blogs after this first contact, so as not to intrude in personal conversations between the bloggers and their friends. Instead, all communication about the thesis and questions related to the research were posted on my own LiveJournal blog, I followed those entries with private messages to the young bloggers, with a link to the entry in question. In the first group, Saila and Corcra responded to all the messages, which were often ignored by the other bloggers. Homi's blog was also a mixture of private and public, and she also gave me access to all her entries, but she kept this initial communication in the comments section of her blog. All of them also included me in their Friends lists, thus granting me access to their private, locked entries. Planet, Disco and Brightears, whose blogs were public, engaged as well in their responses, and left their settings unchanged, as well as Fry, whose blog was mostly public. The two girls who form the second group both accepted immediately and gave access to most of their private

entries, although Jen did point out that “anything really personal is squirreled away in filters anyhow”, from which I assumed that some entries were not meant for my eyes.

These final participants were not however the only bloggers whom I initially contacted. Within the group of friends named on profile pages, a further seven either declined or declined to answer. Two gave negative responses, both in answer to my comment; one explained that she had links to my university, and immediately locked her journal, posting a “Friends Only” page, with a black and white picture and the words “ I am a private person, this journal is now Friends Only”. Another girl simply answered “hem, no thanks”, but left her journal setting public. Five bloggers ignored the comment and request and never answered, either on their comments page or on my blog. One girl did not answer, but locked her journal, with no announcement on the first page. One boy did not answer me directly, but instead locked his journal and posted a “Friends Only” page, which consisted of a black rectangle with two white letters: F. O., which I took to be a message to the researcher who had caused him to lock his journal. One other boy ignored the message, left his old public entries as they were, but subsequently set all other entries as private, and the last three bloggers ignored the message and continued as they had before. I never included any of their entries in the study, yet their behaviour on first contact caused me to reflect deeply on ethical issues in research and also on the question of privacy, which became a crucial question in this research. Whereas none of the bloggers who agreed to participate in the study changed their privacy level after being contacted, as outlined in Table 5-4 below, this was not the case for those who refused or ignored my request: four of those remaining seven bloggers changed their settings, “locking” their journal or part of their journal, as outlined in Table 5-5 below. This reactive take up of the privacy affordance seemed from the start to signify the

emerging digital literacy of the young people involved, who had known about the lock facility but had not identified or seen the need for the privacy affordance until the sudden appearance of my comments and messages, seen as the intrusion of an unwanted reader.

Name	Gender	Public/private entries	Response	Public/private entries after contact
Saila	F	Mixed public/private	Yes	No change Private entries opened to researcher
Homi	F	Mostly private	Yes	No change Private entries opened to researcher
Brightears	M	Public	Yes	No change
Planet	F	Public	Yes	No change
Fry	M	Mixed public/private	Yes	No change Private entries opened to researcher
Disco	F	Public	Yes	No change
Corcra	F	Private	Yes	No change Private entries opened to researcher

Table 5-4. GROUP 1 - Public/Private settings before and after first contact

Name	Gender	Public/private entries	Response	Public/private entries after contact
LJSweet.	F	Public	No	Private
LJBigSam	M	Public	No answer	Private
LJSparrow	F	Public	No answer	Private
LJLuciakiss.	F	Public	No answer	No change
LJBalin	F	Public	No	No change
LJStevenSmith.	M	Public	No answer	No change
LJBudda	M	Public	No answer	No change for old entries. Private for new entries

Table 5-5. Group 1:Public/private settings after refusals

My presence, not only as a researcher, but as an adult, and a stranger, had relents of voyeurism. Even the most enthusiastic participants asked me where and how I had

“found” them. The explanation of my selection methods (see chapter 5.1.1) was however accepted as a valid one. Nevertheless, my presence was a catalyst for some, notably those who did not want to participate, as it influenced their privacy levels and indeed changed their expectations of privacy on the LiveJournal platform, if not online in general. I subsequently tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible, refraining from commenting on the blogs, but the question remains of the influence that my silent presence. I have wondered if it influenced Brightears’ writing, as his blog became more and more like a diary and less and less like a photoblog, and he wrote several reflective entries on diaries, journals and blogging. For the remainder of the research time, my blog was locked (see 4.2.3) and accessible only to the participants. I did not post very often, but did so regularly nevertheless, mostly about my research and the research process, good and bad, such as periods of writer’s block and doubt. I also included questions which arose during data analysis, asking for feedback, which I got from a core of bloggers, namely Saila, Corcra, Jen, and also two further young bloggers whose journals are not part of the data. Their informed opinions as practitioners was nonetheless valued and taken into account as additional data.

In the end, like the young bloggers, I wrote fewer entries; my LiveJournal blog followed a chronotope which was very different from theirs. The time was the time of the doctoral research and dissertation, and the digital space on Livejournal was in my case a space of research also, and as such, bounded in time as in space. For Saila, Corcra and their friends, the time and space of the LiveJournal blogs had different meanings, as it did also for Jen and Myriam.

5.4.6 NVivo software for storage and coding

Computer programs and software are now commonly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). There are several options for those, and in my case, the software chosen was NVivo. The choice was based on two reasons, one simply pragmatic, that the software was recommended by the university, which had purchased a number of licences. Moreover, NVivo allowed me to store and code multimodal elements, such as photographs, sound or videos, an option which may not have been available at the time in other software. Even though this facility existed, there were instances when the multimodal nature of the entries did not translate very well into NVivo: all entries were copied and pasted into Microsoft Word, and these Word files were subsequently uploaded onto the software; however, the mix of pictures and words was not always uploaded smoothly, and some hiccups happened, with comments being repeated several times for example. Whereas pictures uploaded as images could be coded in sections, an image imbedded in text can only be coded as a whole. The constraints imposed by these issues were minimal, and even though I would at times have wished for a leaner and more intuitive tool, Nvivo was on the whole a very useful tool for cataloguing and retrieving codes, as well as allowing to create sets matching one blogger with one code for example, or a set of bloggers with a set of codes. All of the blog entries which were part of the data set are thus stored in the Nvivo software. The copies of the blog posts currently stored in Nvivo will be erased after three years, as required by conventional research ethics. However, the blog posts are naturally also available online, and this for as long as the bloggers will wish them to remain.

5.5 Validity of a qualitative project

Many books, articles and conference papers have been devoted to the question, and concepts changed and refined in order to account for the evaluation of the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative data; many were conceived with an implied comparison to conventional, positivist values of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The seminal work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed to replace the quantitative values with a different set of values for qualitative research, changing validity with credibility, reliability with transferability, and objectivity with dependability and auditing. These values, whilst always referred to, have seen many changes, and many new suggestions as to the techniques to employ. Table 5-6 below is adapted from Schwartz-Shea (2006) and Creswell (2007), whilst I have also added a last column to represent a view of internet research (Baym, 2009)

Study	Lincoln and Guba	Myles and Huberman	Brower, Abolafia and Carr	Whitemore, Chase and Mandle	Baym
Year	1985	1994	2000	2001	2009
Criteria and Techniques	<p><i>Credibility</i> Prolonged engagement Persistent observation Triangulation Peer debriefing Neg. case analysis Referential adequacy Member checks Reflexive journal</p> <p><i>Transferability</i> Thick description Reflexive journal</p> <p><i>Dependability</i> Audit Reflexive journal</p> <p><i>Confirmability</i> Audit Reflexive journal</p>	<p>Following up surprises</p> <p>Making if-then tests</p> <p>Triangulation</p> <p>Looking for negative evidence</p> <p>Representativeness</p> <p>Feedback from informants</p> <p>Researcher effects</p> <p>Checking the meaning of outliers</p> <p>Checking out rival explanations</p>	<p><i>Authenticity</i> Detailed description of data collection procedures Thick, copious description Represent natives' views of the world <i>Plausability</i> Description of research methods First person plural pronoun Normalize the atypical Smooth contestable findings <i>Criticality</i> Unique impressions Reexamine taken for granted assumptions Analysis of both front stage and back</p>	<p><u>Primary criteria</u> <i>Credibility</i></p> <p><i>Authenticity</i></p> <p><i>Criticality</i></p> <p><i>Integrity</i></p> <p><u>Secondary criteria</u> <i>Expliciteness</i></p> <p><i>Vividness</i></p> <p><i>Creativity</i></p> <p><i>Thoroughness</i></p> <p><i>Congruence</i></p> <p><i>Sensitivity</i></p>	<p>Grounding in history and data</p> <p>Rigor in data collection and analysis</p> <p>Multiple strategies for obtaining data</p> <p>Perspective of participants</p> <p>Reflexivity</p> <p>Interconnections between internet and real life taken into account</p>

Table 5-6. Validity criteria and techniques in qualitative studies

However, following in the footsteps of qualitative researchers who regard their research as bricolage, as an occupation which requires a toolbox (Markham, 2009), and which is above all a craft skill (Seale, 2002), marking the researcher as a bricoleur and quilt-maker (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), I have been mindful that “we do not have to abandon skills developed under one paradigm because another paradigm has come along” (Seale, 2002). To this end, the research design included validity assessment techniques for the criteria of credibility, authenticity, integrity and transferability. The secondary criterion of sensitivity (Whitmore, Chase and Mandle, 2001) is represented by the overarching ethical imperative in my study (see 4.2). The techniques for validity assessment are thus drawn from the literature on qualitative research as outlined in Table 5-7 below. A question is associated to each technique, and a tool is identified as the means of responding to the question (Efimova, 2009). Furthermore, Baym (2009) suggests a technique specific to internet research, and which asks that interconnections between internet and real life be taken into account; this point, which grounds internet research in the daily life of participants, is inherently covered in this research, firstly by the choice of blogs as data, and more particularly of diary-style blogs, which ground the internet text in the life of the bloggers, and also by the choice of local data, grounding the blogs in a geographical offline space, in Ireland, as well as in an internet chronotopic space.

Technique	Question	Tool
Thick/rich description	Can the reader experience the event?	Writing tool: use of rich description as first analysis chapter
Prolonged engagement	Was rapport established over time?	Ethnographic tool: LiveJournal blog from November 2006 to May 2008 (end of data collection) and further presence in the field until 2010
Member checks	Were the participants informed of the data collection and analysis?	Blog as tool: regular entries on the researcher's blog relating to her research
Multiple strategies for data	Does the data come from several participants or groups, and are there different methods of data collection?	Data collection in 3 stages, and use of blog as additional data collection tool
Reflexivity	Is the presence of the researcher acknowledged, as well as her personal viewpoints and biases?	Writing tool: presence of the researcher in the rich description chapter. Blogging tool: use of first person and personal narrative in the LiveJournal blog. Ethnographic tool: fieldnotes.

Table 5-7. validity techniques and tools

5.6 Conventions

The phrase “in real life” or its acronym IRL/RL are often used in conversations and texts on the young people’s blogs. However, I decided not to use those terms when writing, as they could be interpreted as attributing values of authenticity and truth to offline relationships as opposed to those experienced online. The words “offline” and “online” are thus substituted in my writing for those commonly used by the young

people. Whenever their voices are being heard, their words are kept as they were used online.

In the rich descriptions of the blogs and the bloggers, I, the researcher, tell the stories; the young people's stories are thus told in the third person, highlighting the dialogical element that exists not only between the authors and their readers, but also between the bloggers and the researcher. Moreover, as young authors of life-writing artefacts, their voices are very different, and could not be imitated in the first person. Their text is however nestled within my text. Short quotes from the blogs are thus within the text, in italics, whereas longer excerpts are signalled as such. Whenever an excerpt comes from an entry, and is thus written by the blogger, the name and date will be indicated, i.e. (SailaMarch10_06); when the excerpt comes from the comments section, the name of the commenter will be signalled first, followed by the name of the blogger on whose blog the comment is found, i.e. (Corcra/SailaMarch10_06). If the person commenting is not one of the participants, a pseudonym will replace their LiveJournal username, and will be signalled as a LiveJournal username by the use of LJ in front of it, i.e. (LJQueen/SailaMarch10_06). When the bloggers' narratives involve names of people they know, these names are replaced by pseudonyms (Sinead, Niall, etc.). Some excerpts are drawn not from the participants' blogs, but from additional data gathered on comments on my own blog, i.e. (Myriam/CathyJan06_08) or from communication by email or private message on the LiveJournal messaging function (Brightears/PrivateMsg). The text of the excerpts is exactly as it appears on the blogs, and the typing or spelling errors have all been kept, as well as the formatting of the text (new line, punctuation, etc.).

5.7 Summary and conclusion

After outlining the sampling methods undertaken for this research, and introducing the final participants and the online contexts wherein they navigate, this chapter outlined the research process, from data collection to analysis. It also presented the toolbox necessary to conduct a study of the blogs as chronotopic semiotic artefacts, including tools borrowed from conversation analysis used in the social space of the blog, when analyzing comments and discussions, tools from multimodal analysis in order to consider the blogs as visual artefacts, and which also helped in the identification of technological affordances nested within frames on the screen. This chapter also presented the researcher's blog as a research tool, initially conceived in response to ethical issues, and which also situated me, as a researcher, in the same space and time as the bloggers through the creation of a semiotic artifact, albeit one where the chronotope was not that of their blogs. The chapter then discussed the validity criteria and techniques embedded in this qualitative study, translating criteria in the form of questions, to which techniques and tools were linked in this study.

Chapter 6 Young people blogging

Chapter 5 described and discussed the methods used in the study, which all aim to produce a holistic view of the blogs written by the participants; in a discussion on the validity of qualitative research, it was pointed out that the criteria of authenticity and credibility were best expressed within the question: “can the reader experience the event?” and realized with the use of thick or rich description. Moreover, the deep understanding of the context and the practice gained through the use of ethnographic tools can best be communicated through these rich descriptions. Chapter five also held a description of the researcher as a blogger, through the story of my LiveJournal blog and the interaction with the young people who eventually participated in the study, as well as a short analysis of the reactions of others to the presence of a stranger/researcher within the space and time of their blogs. Chapter six will now present all the young bloggers, in two separate groups: first of all, the group of friends who all attended the same summer camp, subsequently started blogging on the LiveJournal platform, and thus kept in touch through their blogs. The second group is comprised of two very close schoolfriends; they attended the same secondary school, from first year to sixth year, but subsequently attended college in different places. Their blogs thus helped them to keep a long dialogue going through years of geographical separation.

6.1 Group 1, friends from camp and their blogs

The first group of young bloggers is a very diverse group, in age, in geographical location, and in their approach to blogging. They all attended the same summer camp,

several years in a row, but were not necessarily in the same groups due to their ages. They attend different schools or universities, and live in different areas of Dublin or Galway. The summercamp identity is however very strong, it created some strong and enduring friendships, even though the group dynamics lost its power over the years. Saila's journal was the first blog from that group that I encountered, and from there, I started reading the blogs linked to hers. Not all accepted to participate, but those who did are friends or pals who interact within the digital space of the blogs, and recount events where they have interacted offline. Over the years, some shifts appeared, and some bloggers disappeared from the digital space; those who remained however kept reading each other's blogs, even if they did not always comment (see chapter 7).

6.1.1 Saila



Figure 6-1. Saila's blog⁸

Saila is the youngest of the bloggers in this study. She finished her last year in secondary school after taking her Leaving Certificate examination in June 2009.

She started her blog in 2005, one of the first of her group to do so, and also kept writing it longer than most. She was a pupil in a big private girl's school in Dublin, and spent part of her summer in a summer camp for gifted children, which was the basis of the group of LiveJournal bloggers. These students had first started a group on the forum space Boards.ie, which they routinely call "boards" (5.2.2) and on which they spent a lot of time. They then also included LiveJournal blogs as a means of communicating, even

⁸ This screenshot is blurred to protect the anonymity of the blogger.

creating a LiveJournal community, which however never became very active; an attempt was made at communication between all bloggers from the same summer school in 2005, the year Saila created her blog:

Excerpt 6-1. (SCampCommunityJan29_05)

k. so, now that everyone has livejournals, maybe they should all comment on this post to let everyone else know who they are

Instead, several groups were formed around some bloggers, depending on friendship and affinities. Saila's first readers/commenters were mostly from that group, as well as her best friend from school whom she introduced to blogging, LJQueen, who started reading Saila's blog and blogging herself in May 05, 5 months after Saila. They recount staying in each other's houses overnight, and even on one occasion, "borrowed" each other's blog – LJQueen wrote in Saila's blog, and vice versa. However, LJQueen's comments gradually become sparser, and eventually stop; her name is removed from the list of friends, and she eventually deleted her LiveJournal. The act of deleting a journal is indeed a public act, as the LiveJournal name (8.2.1) of the blogger remains on the site, notably in the friends' lists of other journals, albeit crossed out with a black line. There is thus a memory marker as it were of a journal that has ceased to exist, and which cannot be read any more.

In 2009, although the initial group seemed to have dwindled and very few of the original bloggers were still writing and commenting, Saila was still writing entries into her LiveJournal blog, albeit not as often as the first years. Towards the end of the data collection time, in June 2008, Saila was writing diary-like entries, recounting her days, and her only regular commenter was Homi.

Saila was an early adopter of internet communication, participating on the forum boards.ie, and subsequently acquiring membership of Last.fm, DeviantArt, and Bebo. After 2008, she also created a Facebook account and gradually stopped updating her Bebo page.

She may have chosen a template for her blog, as do most of users, but she also edited the html code to add several personal elements: the background of the home page is a photograph that she took and hosted on Photobucket (5.2.2) it is a picture of a building in Dublin city centre, on the quays. It is a tall redbrick building, which hosted a nightclub, and each floor of the building has a long purple sign with golden lettering. The picture is repeated three times in order to cover the whole background of the blog, and is partly hidden by various text boxes. However, in the interstices between the boxes, some text can be read: *“hot white walls, black shadows, the aroma of strange eastern spices, of sandalwood and cloves, music and drums”* Saila kept the purple theme for some of the text boxes, notably the set boxes containing general information. These boxes all have titles, white letters on purple as is the rest of the text. The topmost box, covering the width of the screen, is a narrow rectangle: the left hand side is taken up by the title and subtitle of the blog, and the right-hand side is a list of internal links to recent entries, archives, friends list, user Information page, and navigation to the previous page, as well as one external link to Saila’s Bebo page. The screen is then divided into several boxes: on the left hand side are the information boxes, one with the profile picture, which in Saila’s case is a multicoloured fractal in various shades of green, with hints of purple and red. Underneath this picture is Saila’s real name, although no family name. Under the name is her LiveJournal alias, linked to her profile page. The box underneath is slightly smaller, entitled: *“Blurb”*, with the text *“Herein*

lies the drivell of a product of the MTV generation". Underneath is another box, entitled "Links" with 7 links to various sites: one link to a Boards.ie forum, three links to webcomics, one of which is drawn by a friend of Saila and includes her as one of the characters, a link to a blog (now private, required identification), and finally another link to Saila's own Bebo page. The following box is a summary of the pages, and finally the last one contains a calendar. The boxes containing the text of the entries are on the right-hand side of the screen. They have a white background, with black letters, and the text is contained within another box, delimited by purple lines. Each entry is thus contained in a box, and the internal links to the comments page bear the following words: "*What have you to say for yourself?*" If a comment is added, then a second link is added, with "*I adoring fan*".

The layout for Saila's blog has been left unchanged since she first created and customized it, as has the background picture. This should be compared with Saila's use of her Bebo page, which she regularly changed, using different graphics, colours and backgrounds, which Bebo users call "skins"; indeed creating Bebo skins is a favourite and valued pastime, shared by some of her friends.

The blog home page is a "Friends Only" page: Saila locked her blog a year after she started writing it, when she realized that she could be found by people she knew offline.

She started her blog on LiveJournal on the 5th January, 2005, when she was 13. She was already a technophile, knowing that her first post was called an entry, and referring to conversations on MSN with her friends. She gives a physical description of herself, her age, height, hair and eye colour, where she lives and the name of her school, "*the boring stuff*", according to her. She then talks more about school, where she doesn't like the other students except for a few girls in her year who are her best friends. She lists

her favourite subjects (history, French, English) and those she doesn't like; amongst the things she does, "*hang around town*" with her friends is her favourite, after talking to them on MSN, to which she attributes her bad marks at school recently. Neither activity seems to have her mother's seal of approval. Her last sentence is a reflection on blog writing, and whether she will keep up the blog.

The first entry makes use of the mood and music options, as well as the animated GIF images available to users. Her first mood is "contemplative", and the image she chose was of a small blue "turnip" with a thought bubble slowly appearing, which contains a question mark and ellipses represented by three full stops.

The first comment on Saila's blog appears at the end of the month of January, and is from an unknown reader who has found a link to the journal from boards.ie. A day later, a friend comments on an entry about a planned school disco. Then, on January 23rd, Saila meets her friends from camp in town, where they go to the cinema; she recounts the afternoon in an entry:

Excerpt 6-2. (SailaJan23_05)

First of all I saw everyone today at the reunion which was brilliant fun as they always are. We went to see Team America- World Police. Myself and A. were laughing at all the parts no-one else was laughing at, twas hilarious.

This entry gets a first comment from LJNessa, who also has a LiveJournal:

Excerpt 6-3. (LJNessa/SailaJan23_05)

hell yeah, journal mention-ness. us lefties always get the jokes nobody else gets. Yes, they were jokes in the film people, why didnt ya laugh?

lefty high fives L.

Later on the blog, her offline school camp friends comment on a post where she recounts a very bad evening out with girls from her class, feeling different from the

others and isolated. Two friends post supportive comments, celebrating her feeling of being different:

“your year sounds like a lot of immature idiots” (LJNessa/SailaFeb05_05); both commenters also send internet hugs, represented by the use of asterisks before the word:

hugs (LJGarond/SailaFeb05_05)

huggifies the L., sends lovededness (LJNessa./SailaFeb05_05)

The familiarity of both commenters with Saila is highlighted for by a reference to meeting Saila in town “*you seemed fairly vodka-lessly happy today in town though, which was fantabulous*”(LJGarond/SailaFeb05_05) and in the case of LJNessa, by the use of Saila’s real name in the comment.

Their support is also represented by their use of language specific to internet communication amongst young people, symbolizing their “geekiness” in a way, their difference also from Saila’s classmates and their similarity with Saila herself. Subsequent entries often attract comments from Saila’s offline friends, who gradually build a network of LiveJournal bloggers who interact regularly with each other through their blogs.

From the summer of 2005 to the end of 2006, the blog is very active, with many entries and comments every month. From the start of 2007 however, the comments are less numerous, and fewer of the entries are followed by comments from readers.

The tone of the blog gradually changes as the group seems to dissolve, and the entries, while always humorous, are more diary-like in their content, recounting events or thoughts rather than engaging the reader; in the last five months of data collection, from January to May 2008, Saila only wrote ten entries, and only received one comment from

readers; the comment was left by Homi, one of the other constant bloggers, and was not directly related to the entry, but rather to a glitch in LiveJournal technology which had prevented Homi from reading Saila's entries in her LiveJournal RSS feed reader.

In 2009, as Saila's entries became less and less frequent, she also started writing in a group blog on the experience of being a Leaving Certificate student; the blog is open and public, and she uses her real name. The interaction there is with a much broader audience, and revolves entirely around school and the examination.

From the time of first contact, Saila has always been interested in the project and very helpful. When I first commented on her locked page, asking if I could include her blog in my study, I had only intended to use the public posts in her journal. However, she immediately added me to her friends' list, thus allowing access to the restricted entries. Similarly, when I posted a question on Bebo and social networks in general, she responded immediately, and again added me to her friends' list on Bebo. I had asked to take a screenshot of the page, so she originally said she would open the page, make it public for 24 hours so that I could get the screenshot, but subsequently added me to her friends' list. She also reacts in the comments page of any entry on my LiveJournal blog that pertain to the study, but doesn't comment on any other entry. Saila also chose her own alias, a palindrome of the word "Alias".

6.1.2 Fry

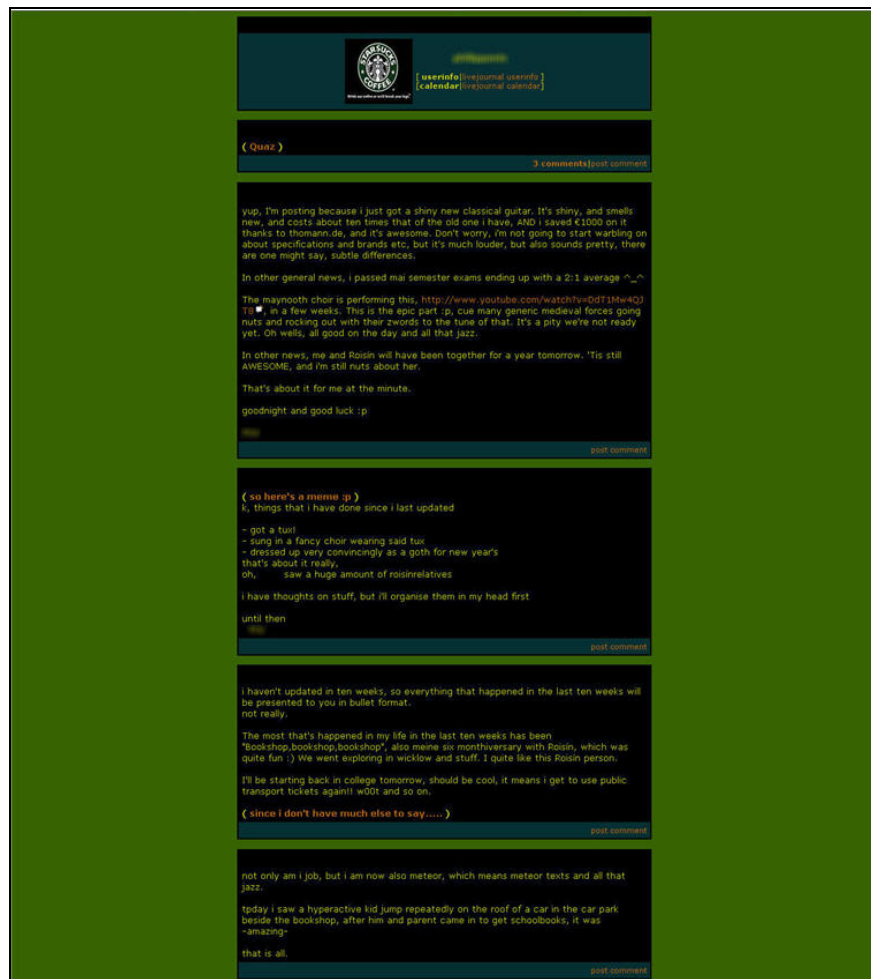


Figure 6-2. - Fry's blog⁹

Fry started his LiveJournal blog in November 2005, and stopped blogging in March 2008. Throughout the years, his blogging was never regular; he often left several months between entries. He did his Leaving Certificate examination at the end of 2006, and went on to college in September of that year, to study arts, and in particular music, which is one of his main interests. He plays classical guitar, and often talks of exams and shows in which he plays. His parents also figure often in his entries, although at first mainly as a source of problems for him, mostly when it comes to technology and

⁹ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity.

internet access: *also in a few words parents will be home soon + i'm not allowed on the internet* (FryDec15_05)

When Fry starts his blog, his writing is unlike that of the others – he writes stream of consciousness text, with very little punctuation and capital letters, and even at one point comments on this. *Yes i just used no capitals, i'm sorry, too lazy to change it.* (FryNov04_06)

At first, the most obvious element of his blog is a great fondness for sexual words (his LiveJournal username contains the word “penis”) and the first entry tells a rambling story or joke about prostate exams. In the same month, he writes an entry about unexpectedly meeting some friends from the group, and then posts one of the numerous quizzes that spread around the blogs; one of the answers is the telling: “*nope..never kissed someone full stop*”, and a little further, as a response to the question “*2 things you want to do before you die*”, he answers: “*have a real live girlfriend*”.

Fry’s blog is diaristic in purpose, the content of most entries is a narrative of the days and the events which have happened since the previous entry, although the style is elliptical: a common feature is the deletion of the pronoun at the beginning of sentences: “*am not really mad though*”, “*rented kung fu hustle out and subsequently watched it*”, reminiscent of note taking or lists, which Fry also uses in his entries: one is a list of “*stuff that has happened (in no real order)*” and “*stuff that may or may not happen*”; another one organizes items in “*good*” and “*bad*”.

The style gradually changes and becomes much more narrative, the entries are separated into paragraphs, and Fry also uses punctuation. In March 2008, he posts a short entry

about his one year anniversary with his girlfriend, a few days later posts a quiz which Homi comments on, and stops blogging.

The layout of the blog is a template which he chose when he started the blog and never changed or customised. The background is green, and two black text boxes are centred in the middle of the screen. The top box, with a dark green background, holds no blog title, only the Fry's LiveJournal name, and beneath it, in small type, the usual list of internal links, to the profile page, the calendar, and the friends' page. To the left of the text is a profile picture, which is a photoshopped picture of the Starbucks logo, where the name of the company has been replaced by "Starsucks". Underneath this small dark green box are the boxes for the entries; each entry is delimited by a box, which all have a black background, and a small banner like line at the bottom in a dark green colour similar to that of the title box. This banner holds the link to the comments page. The titles of the entries are in orange, and the text of the entries in yellow. Nearly all the titles are written in lower case, and most of them do not start with upper-case, thus following the trend for lack of punctuation throughout the text.

Fry's default setting is public, and most of the entries are available to all; he does however lock some of his entries, usually those in which he reflects on his relationship with his friends. Those issues are reflected in the titles: "*Realisations and stuff*", "*soul searthy stuff or something*", although "*w00t college*" did not seem to warrant a private post, in this entry, Fry reflects on his friendships and his fear of losing them now that he is in college.

Fry's blog does not attract many comments, even though one of his avowed goals for the blog is to keep people informed of what he is doing, as expressed in his profile page:

Excerpt 6-4. (Fry, Profile)

I use this to inform people of new stuff in my life, and also to clear my head and ponder stuff in my life

His list of friends comprises 22 other LiveJournal users, most of them belonging to the group from summer camp. One of them is his friend Emma from school, who left a comment on his first entry. She does not comment very often on Fry's blog though, and he does occasionally comment on hers.

Emma, Homi and Planet are amongst the most prolific commenters on Fry's blog, as well as LJBudda, who also goes to the same school. Once Fry left school and started college, comments died down, except for some entries where he posted quizzes and memes, requesting participation of his readers.

As the group lose touch and he leaves school to go to college, these personal references and dialogical texts change and the entries become more diaristic and do not include the reader in the text.

Fry does not use the other networking facilities of LiveJournal, he lists very few interests on his profile page, and never joined any communities of bloggers around a specific interest.

Fry has had very little interaction with me on the research; when I posted a comment on one of his entries, in March 2007, his reply was quick and to the point, with a smiling emoticon: *sure :)*

He immediately added me to his friends' list, as I did for him. This is the only interaction we had, though. Fry never commented on any of my entries, even those where I was asking for feedback. When I sent messages asking if the participants wished to choose their own aliases, he did not answer. His participation on other

people's blogs does similarly die down, and it can be assumed that Fry no longer reads his LiveJournal blog feed, and that his blog is now one of the many abandoned blogs which remain online, forgotten by their authors. In his case, the contact with his friends from summer camp proved to be the main reason for the blog, as it stops when the group grows apart and when he starts a new life in college.

6.1.3 Brightears



Figure 6-3. Brightears' blog¹⁰

¹⁰ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity.

Brightears is a 20 year old young man from the West of Ireland. He went to school in Galway, where he took his Leaving Certificate examination in June 2007; he then took a year off, working in Galway and travelling around Europe, and started university in Galway in September 2008. At the time of data collection, he had finished his first year exams. Brightears' main interests are music and photography, which are his passions, and which figure often and at length in his blog. He is a talented photographer, and also writes and performs music, which he sometimes films and posts on his blog or on YouTube.

The layout of Brightear's blog is extremely simple; he picked a template which he did not choose to customize. The background is white, and the template consists in several boxes delimited by black lines. There is no blog title on the home page. The screen is divided into two distinct parts, on the right hand side is the big text box for the entry, framed in black lines, the top line being thicker than the rest, and forming a banner which holds the date of the entry, white type on black background. The text of the entry is then inside the box, black type on white background. On the left-hand side of the screen is a vertical line of three smaller boxes. The first one, bigger than the others, holds the personal information on Brightears: his LiveJournal name , white on black on the banner, then a list of internal links to the calendar page, the friends page and the user information page, followed by a small icon-sized picture of Brightears, which he has updated recently, after commenting on it:

Excerpt 6-5. (BEMay24_08)

Why do I still have the same user pic as I had like a year ago? I haven't had long hair in...almost a year!

The box below this is a small box, holding the navigation links, and then a third box holds the external links that Brightears has chosen to post on his blog: one to his own website, where he showcases his photography, one to a Photobucket account which he used to use before setting up the website, and one to his DeviantArt page. All links thus lead to online photography spaces. Brightears' own website is under his real name, and has links to the LiveJournal blog and to the DeviantArt page, but also more recent links to a Flickr page and a MySpace page.

He started his LiveJournal blog at 17, in May 2006. His first post started with several photographs of a band, and a short written message.

Excerpt 6-6. (BEMay31_06)

Took some photos at the Eyre Square open air gig on Saturday, above is a few examples, more of them on me page..

The post ends with "*Bye now!*"

His next entry is two weeks later, on June 15th, when he posts another picture, of a cockatiel, and has two written sentences about photography. The only personal item in the entry is the use of the mood icon, a sad smiley with the tag "Lonely". This post elicits a comment from Corcra, complimenting Brightears on the picture.

I contacted Brightears in March 2007, through the comments facility on one of his entries, as I did for all the other bloggers. His first response was positive, albeit a little terse, and indicative it seems of his views on privacy issues on the blog:

Excerpt 6-7. (BEApril17_07/firstcontact)

I'm sure as a PHD student you realise you could use this journal with my permission or not as it's publically available on the internet etc..

If there's some reason you need my permission, or you're just being polite, either way, use away. Don't really post much apart from my photos though :)

However, he later amended the response, which now reads:

Excerpt 6-8. (BEApril17_07)

I dunno if you need permission for publishing or you're just being polite..either way, you're welcome to use to your hearts content!

Brightears does not interact with me on my blog, never posts a message there; he does however answer messages, through the LiveJournal mail facility. He responded when I asked the bloggers if they would like to choose their own aliases for the purpose of the research, and chose his own alias, linked to music: he was listening to music when he read my message, and the album was from the group BrightEyes; he then decided on BrightEars, which probably suited his sense of humour.

After he left school, his blog started to change. Whereas he had first used the LiveJournal blog as another online space to showcase his photography and get feedback from his friends, when he started travelling, text became more prominent, the entries became very long and diary-like, like a kind of travelogue. He regularly reflects on his blog practice and the reasons for it.

Brightear's blog started as a photoblog, with some text pertaining to the photography. He gradually changed the content of the blog, including more and more personal narratives. Even though some of the entries touch on personal and even private issues, Brightears has kept the blog on a public setting.

In 2009, Brightears kept posting to his journal, more regularly and longer posts than any of the other bloggers; whereas he had started his LiveJournal blog somehow reluctantly it seemed, only using it to post photographs, he had however been a regular commenter on his friends' blogs. When the group started to dissolve, Brightears continued posting, and over time started to use his blog as a diary, and a memory aid, recording at first his travels, and then his daily life at work and college, including his romantic life with girlfriends and his activities and hobbies. This may have inspired others, like his regular reader LJSweet, to start blogging again. He also introduced his blog to a new group of friends, some of whom commented under "anonymous" because they hadn't joined LiveJournal and thus did not have a LiveJournal name. His more recent commenters have included a Galway student who also has a LiveJournal blog. Brightears is thus very open to new readers, and to mixing his online and offline lives. Whilst he is very aware that anyone can read his blog, and has had two strangers commenting on his blog, including myself as a researcher, he has kept his blog public, even as he was changing the content from artistic photography to personal narrative.

6.1.4 Disco

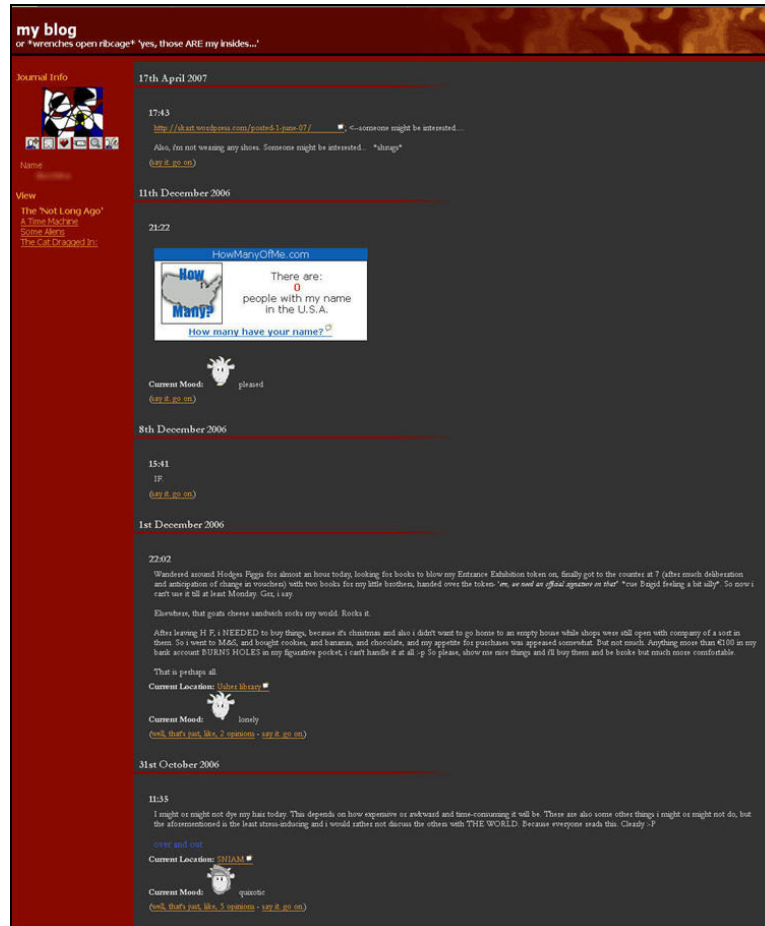


Figure 6-4. Disco's blog¹¹

Disco started her blog in September 2006, as she was about to start college. She however shows some reluctance at the idea of blogging. She has a short list of friends, all of whom are part of the summer camp group. Her profile page expresses her lack of enthusiasm for the blog, which warrants the use of quotation marks, and is compared later on to a “real journal”:

¹¹ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's privacy.

Excerpt 6-9. (Disco/Profile page)

I prefer doing things (or thinking about doing things) to writing about them, so this
'blog' will probably tell you nothing about me, I don't know yet

She has been reading her friends' blogs, and seems to warm to the idea of a diary, but doesn't entirely trust the technology to protect her memories.

She has chosen a template for her blog, and does not seem to have customised it. The dominant colours are red and grey. The top of the page is a banner, with a deep red background and some swirling designs in orange and lighter reds on the right-hand side. In the left-hand side of the banner, the title is in white, bold minuscules. The text of the title echoes the same reluctance as the profile page; whereas Disco is obviously familiar with internet communication and conventions, such as the use of asterisks to signify action, the signification of a blog as an online diary does not sit comfortably, as evidenced by the jocular part of dialogue "*yes, those are my insides*". As soon as she starts her blog, Disco has an ambiguous relationship with her reader, who is meant to understand the humour and maybe participate in it, yet she/he is also cast as a voyeur. Beneath the red banner, the page is divided into two parts: on the left-hand side, a narrow box, with a red background, holds the profile picture and the internal links, which are in orange print on the red. The picture is an abstract picture in blue, black, white and red. The name below is the LiveJournal user name, and below again are the internal links to the calendar, the friends' page and the profile page. These are given names or titles, and the series of links is entitled: The "Not Long Ago" Thus, the link for the calendar is the phrase "A time machine", the link for the friends' page is the phrase "some aliens", and the link to the profile page is the phrase "The cat dragged in". Similarly, at the end of each entry, the link to leave a comment on the comments page is the phrase "Say it. go on.", and if there are comments already on the page, the link to

read those is “well, that’s just, like, x opinions”. The rest of the page is a box with grey background, where all the entries are beneath one another, separated only by a half-line in red. Disco sometimes uses titles for her entries, and sometimes only the time of posting is displayed. The text is white, and any links are in orange letters.

Her first entry, in September 2006, consists in two long paragraphs of typed text, either from a book or in a stream of consciousness text, and typed without looking at the keyboard; Disco doesn’t edit the text, and gives the entry a title, using her real name: “*AISLING LEARNS TO TYPE (like a real person)*”(DiscoSept14_06)

She subsequently writes three entries in the same month, which relate some events in her daily life. At the end of her third entry which relates a visit to the hospital for blood tests, LJBudda posts a message of support, to which she answers jokingly, again with much use of asterisks to qualify her sentences and describe actions, as seen in Excerpt 6-10.

Excerpt 6-10. (Disco/DiscoSept19_06)

Sure thing, boss *tries really hard*
 makes constipated faces
 clenches everything
est voila, j’ai pas des 'diseases' maintenant!
 Ah, que je suis parfait! *happy sigh*

At the end of the fourth entry, Saila welcomes her to LiveJournal, using her real name.

When she stops blogging, Disco will have only written 12 posts, 7 of which were silent posts, and 5 received comments.

The ambiguity which is apparent in Disco’s profile page and throughout her blog was also obvious in her interaction with me. The only interaction we had was through the comments of one of her entries, when she replied to my request to include her blog in

the study, in November 2006. At the time Disco had just started her blog, and had appeared listed as a friend on Saila's and Homi's blogs. Her reaction again cast the reader, and in this case the researcher, in the role of voyeur: "*am i to be nothing but a clockwork orange?*" (Disco/DiscoOct31_06).

Yet a few seconds later, she adds another comment in reply, including internet communication conventions of representation of action, in the dance, the smiling emoticon, and the initials tbh (to be honest) commonly used in netspeak.: "*But sure thing, cathy :-) We're all oranges, tbh *does the fruit dance**" (Disco/DiscoOct31_06)

This short blog, soon abandoned, is a sample of many blogs from young people who start a blog to follow a trend, or on a whim, but lack either the discipline necessary to write regularly, or simply the interest in writing lengthy paragraphs of life narrative. Whereas Disco was internet literate and versed in the conventions of internet communication, this particular medium was not suited to her needs.

6.1.5 Planet



Figure 6-5. - Planet's blog¹²

Planet created her journal when she was 16 years old, in March 2005, at the end of 5th year in secondary school (although she looks forward to the future and refers to going into 6th year, the final year of secondary school). She belongs to the group of friends from the summer school camp, most of whom are included in her friends' list on the profile page of her blog. The names of Saila, Homi, Corcra and Fry are on her LiveJournal friends list, which includes 35 people. In 2005, she was a student in an all-girl private school in Dublin.

In March 2005, as she was staying with her friend Sarah, who had a LiveJournal blog since 2004, Planet created her own blog.

Excerpt 6-11. (PlanetMarch24_05)

Well, theres really not much to say about me. Here I am, sitting in Sarah's, creating a journal.

¹² The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity.

Planet chose a template for her blog, and the next day did some customization, uploading a picture she had taken and setting it as background:

Excerpt 6-12. (PlanetMarch25_05)

I remembered how to upload pictures as backgrounds so now you all get to gaze upon the beauty of the Hundertwasser Haus, as seen by me in Vienna.

The picture and the background are reminiscent of Saila's blog. The photograph represents a row of houses or apartments, colourful and with roof gardens. The colours vary for each apartment, ochre, blue, white and terracotta. The photograph was taken from the street level, the building filling most of the picture, with vegetation from roof gardens and some blue sky at the top. This picture is repeated twice to fill the screen. In the foreground, two boxes hold the text. The top box is a small purple box with a royal blue banner at the top, which holds the title of the blog in purple type, not very clear against the dark blue. The title is in minuscule letters, with no capitals for any word: "the world is a vampire". This is the title and first line from a song by the Smashing Pumpkins. The purple box holds the profile picture for Planet, it is an icon with flash animation, representing a dejected looking small alien, in a white space suit, head bent, touching the LiveJournal icon which is a blue pen. The animated text changes from "you won't" to "want to read it" to "anyway", all in small letters. Next to this icon is Planet's LiveJournal user name, underneath which are two internal links, one to the profile page, and one to the calendar. The purple text of the entries is contained in royal blue boxes; at the bottom of each box is a small purple banner, with internal links to the comments page; these read "post comment", and if there already are comments on the entry, another phrase is added " x comments". These two links lead to the same comments page.

Planet does not use pictures or photographs in her entries, which consist entirely of text, either diaristic, recounting events or feelings, or communication with her friends, addressing them directly and asking for feedback. The only picture is on her profile page, where she gives information as to the school she attends, giving its name and her opinion on it; beneath the text of her “biography”, she also posts a big picture of herself and some friends at an egg and spoon race in a park: she notes that she is “*the one with the spoon*”. She does some quizzes, as do the other bloggers, but tends not to use the quizzes with pictures, concentrating instead on lists of questions. She writes long entries, with long paragraphs, and regularly uses LJ cuts, a facility afforded by the platform to hide text behind a link to the comments page in order to keep very lengthy entries shorter on the RSS readers of her friends’ journals.

Planet’s first posts are diaristic, she talks about her days, looking for a summer job, going out with her boyfriend, and also about books she reads, authors she likes. She often, although not systematically, starts her entries with a greeting to the reader, in the form of “hello”, although does not use any closing salutations.

For the first few months, Planet blogs regularly; indeed her blog will be updated every month, and several times for most months, until 2008, when her blogging becomes sparser. Her first posts all have titles; some of them are more like small essays, notably her third entry, which talks about the author and naturalist Gerald Durrell. The titles and the first entries sound a little like homework, with a touch of humour: “*My first entry*”, “*My beautiful day*”, “*Gerald Durrell*”.

The first comment on the blog is on Planet’s third entry, by her friend Sarah, who posts her comment under her LiveJournal name, LJSkeptic; Planet does not at first identify her: *Are you Barry?* There is no reply to that question, but Sarah must have contacted

Planet by some other medium, as a few days later, when she comments under her LiveJournal name, Planet answers the comment and uses Sarah's real name.

During the time of her blog, and until May 2008 when I stopped collecting data, 4 of Planet's entries were busy entries, entailing long conversations in the comments page. One of those, in September 2007, deals with the pain of breaking up with her boyfriend, whom she had been talking about since the start of her blog.

Throughout the years, Planet has used her blog as a place to “rant” and be “emo”, a place where she can write about her doubts, sadness, anxieties, making the blog a diary space similar to teenagers' paper diaries; however, she is very aware of her readers, and of their reaction to her emotional and depressed posts: after every one of her blog posts which could in any way concern her friends, she posts an update, reassuring everyone that her moment of depression and sadness has passed: *And that was yesterday, and this is today.* (PlanetDec14_07).

She also openly addresses the issue with her readers:

Excerpt 6-13. (PlanetFeb14_07)

I am officially ok and feeling better than the last time I updated which is probably good. The rantings help, I think I need one once in a while. Just wanted to reassure folks that I'm good most of the time, just now and again weird emotional meltdowns of Chernobyl proportions seem to occur in my brain, its like that fire in reactor number four all over again, and my lj rants are the equivalent of having those sick kids from the Ukraine over to Ireland on holidays. And you're all so sweet that I know you want to listen and talk to me about it, because if you didn't it would be like saying "we don't care that you have cancer, fuck off back to the Ukraine, you mutants". Which you guys would never say. So... thanks

In 2008, Planet slowly reduces the amount of entries, writing what she calls “updates”, which are summaries of the past month or months. On the last day of December 2008, she writes her last post, a summary of the year.

Planet was 18 when I contacted her, and she answered my initial request for inclusion in the study that was posted as a message on one of her entries. Her response seems to be hesitant at first, mimicking the hesitation of spoken language, but then goes on to accept, with some humorous sentences.

Excerpt 6-14. (PlanetMarch20_07)

hmm... ok... I'll let you include me, but as a very strange person I warn you I could warp your entire project with my general oddness. But then again I've always wanted to contribute to science and this seems like the way to go about it that requires the least amount of effort :-P Thank you for asking, I feel rather touched! And yes general anonymity would be good

The last sentences are more natural, and Planet is “touched” to be included. She does want anonymity, even though her blog is public, but never answers my second message, sent as a LiveJournal message and not posted on her blog, where I ask her if she wants to choose her alias. She does not respond to my questions about social network sites, which I assume to mean that she does not want her Bebo or Facebook pages to be included in the study. She did keep up the blog for a long time after those questions were sent in a message, so her lack of response was not interpreted as a change of mind, but rather a lack of interest; there also exists the possibility that she was not aware of the messaging/emailing facility on LiveJournal and that she never checked her messages. She never took part in any comments on my own LiveJournal blog either, again this can be seen either as lack of interest, or as non-use of the friends’ page facility, which would mean that she does not know when the blog is updated or requesting some participation.

6.1.6 Homi

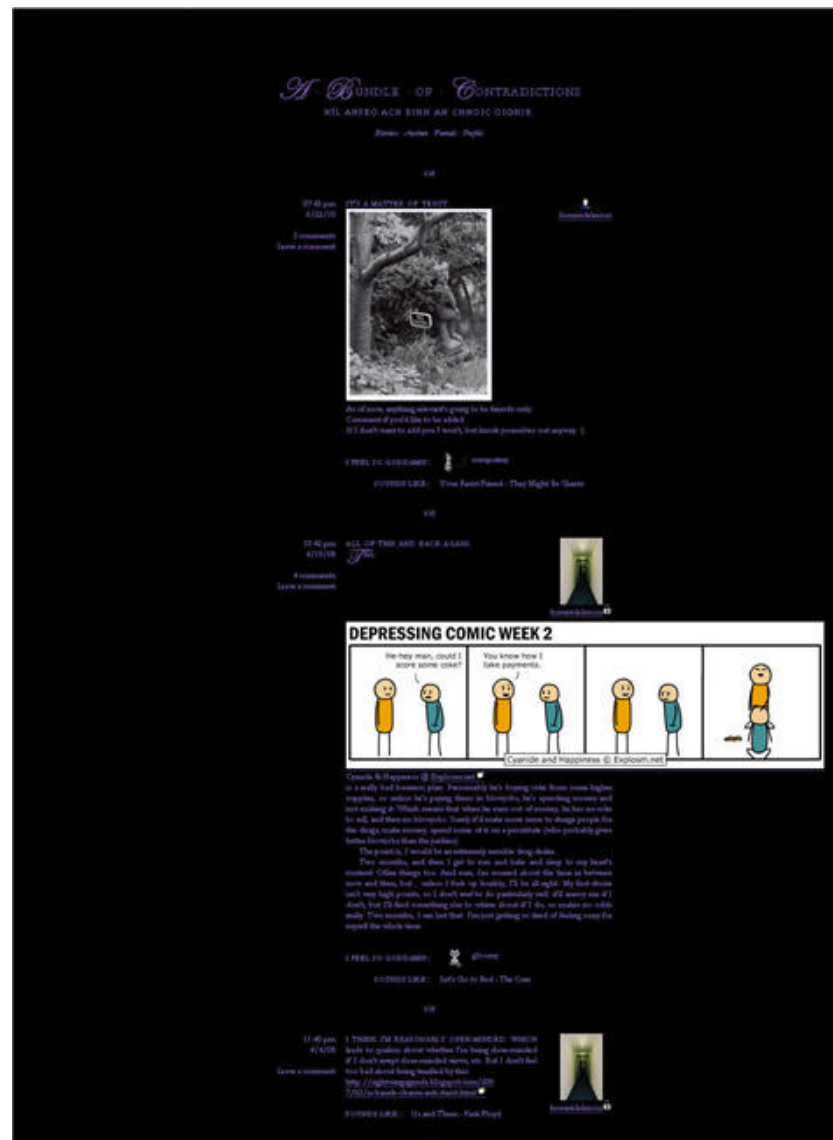


Figure 6-6. Homi's blog¹³

Homi started her blog in January 2005, when she was in 3rd class. She was 14 years old, and had already attended the summer camp where she had met the other bloggers. Throughout the years of her blog, Homi was a regular blogger, updating her blog several times a month, sometimes several times a week. She was a good student in

¹³ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity.

secondary school, and passed her Leaving cert in June 2008; she subsequently went to university to study science. She is a studious and serious student, and also volunteers for a homework club and the charity organisation St Vincent de Paul.

Homi has chosen an unusual template for her blog, and customized it. The background is black, the typeface is purple. The blog is a private blog, “friends only” according to LiveJournal nomenclature. A casual visitor to the blog can only see the title, and the image and text that Homi has chosen to signify the private nature of her blog. In this case, she has chosen to post a small black and white picture in the middle of the black screen. The photograph is set in a park, and represents a stone sculpture, probably a faun; only a part of the back of the faun is visible, the rest is masked by vegetation, various bushes growing behind it. In the foreground is a small rectangular black sign on a pole, saying “No entry” in white capital letters, with a tree with no leaves at the left-hand side, slightly out of focus. The picture was obviously taken in winter and gives a feeling of solitude and loneliness. It is framed with a white border, and situated in the center of the screen, as if it were a normal daily entry: to its left are the date and time, in small purple letters. The date is set at October 2010. This is not an unusual occurrence; many young bloggers who choose a date for their “friends only” page tend to pick a date far in the future. In Homi’s case, if we can assume that she created the locked page within the first year of the blog, she had chosen a date 5 years in the future. Above the picture, in small capital letters, like a title, is the phrase “it’s a matter of trust”. Beneath the picture, more text explains how the blog will be locked. Homi does not give any other reason than trust for locking the blog, however, the use of “as of now” implies that the blog was originally public, and that something happened to make her decide to change the public status to private;

Homi's profile page contains mainly the obligatory fields of journal statistics, list of interests, list of friends. The biography section is minimal, and contains only one sentence, which must not have been changed, as it does not match the sentiment on the main page of the blog, the "friends only" message. On the profile, Homi simply says:

Excerpt 6-15. (Homi, Profile page)

I'm not too godd at being interesting on this. Add me if you like, I like other people's lives, in a non-creepy way.

She does however give her real first name there, although nothing about her age or her school. For her LiveJournal user pictures, she switches between five icons which she has created. Two of those are animated: part of a window covered with rain, where some drops of rain are seen to slowly fall on the window, and an animated drawing from Calvin and Hobbes, where the little boy looks at a starry sky and a big speech bubble appears, with capital letters spelling his shout: " I am significant"; the next frame is another sentence in a smaller speech bubble: "screamed the dust spec". Two of the other icons are photographs, one taken from the film "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind", where the two main characters are about to kiss, and the other is an endless empty corridor. The last picture is taken from a cartoon, and shows two stick people, one asking the other if he is naked. Homi uses all of those at times, with a preference for the stick people and the Calvin and Hobbes cartoon.

From the very first entry, Homi's blog draws a lot of comments and her entries start conversations between her friends and readers in the comments page. The first entry is a long paragraph, recounting a match where some of her friends were playing, and describes the fun they had after the event, "*good times*". The paragraph then runs into homework to be done, and piercings that Homi is contemplating, but that her mother

won't allow. She also contemplates the possibility of dyeing her hair, but she has doubts about her mother's response. The comments do not pick up on those subjects, except for the first one, which responds to a mention in the entry: *Sinead. got a silver medal, go team her! :D So yay, now I'm really happy fort her* (HomiJan29_05). Sinead responds, under her Livejournal name, LJNessa: *Thankee very muchly indeed. I get a team? That kicks serious ass!* (LJNessa/HomiJan29_05).

Homi's blogs attracts a lot of comments: she wrote 160 entries from the time she started the blog in 2005, to the time when I ended data collection in May 2008, and she received comments for 101 of those entries. Moreover, the most frequent were the entries which attracted more than 4 comments, and started conversations in the comments pages.

In a busy entry in February 07, the conversation stems from a meme posted in the entry, and takes the form of direct address/response. The entry is a list of questions, and the first of these is a reference to LiveJournal and the "friending" facility, now common to all social network sites: *"Comment on this entry and I will... 1) Tell you why I friended you."* (HomiFeb07_07). The answers show that the word has a totally different meaning online and offline.

Excerpt 6-16. (Homi/HomiFeb07_07)

because you're Mark's girlfriend, and since I don't see people much lately I'm making efforts to get involved in their lives in other ways. LJ counts. :p

The reason here is more to get more involved in Mark's life, by getting to know his girlfriend, who cannot at this stage be called a friend in the traditional, offline sense, but is thus, by association, a LJ friend. Her response to Planet was similar, outlining the use of LiveJournal as a way of managing and deepening relationships:

Excerpt 6-17. (Homi/HomiFeb07_07)

Because i didn't know you very well, and you seemed worth knowing, and the easiest way to get to know someone better is the good old internet :p

Both were however known in real life, either personally or by association, and both are present in the real life of the blogger. In both cases, she highlights the internet, and more particularly blogs, as a valid form of communication for young people: it “counts”, and even is easier than face to face communication to deepen the relationship. Her reasons to add Fry and Saila as friends on her blog are linked to the practice of blogging; she heard from another friend that Fry had started writing a blog on LiveJournal, and thus wanted to read it, and she was already a reader of Saila’s LiveJournal before she started her own.

In May 07, a new busy entry appears which is in fact the same meme, taken this time from another blog; some of the same people comment, and get slightly different answers; this time, Homi interprets the word “friend” differently, and refers more to offline friendship.

Excerpt 6-18. (Homi/HomiMay17_07)

Assuming RL friends rather than LJ friends: you were one of the people who was always in on Saturday, and you seemed cool. And I started sekkritly lusting after you and texting you, so we got closer.

She goes on to evoke memories of her first meeting or the realisation that friendship was happening for each of her LiveJournal friends who comment. For one of them, the relationship was started online, even though he is part of the group of friends, he was not personally known to Homi at the start:

Excerpt 6-19. (Homi/HomiMay17_07)

Internets! I added you the first time I used MSN, and you were fun to talk to so I did so, lots, and closeness happened.

Thus her friendship management include her blog, and on her blog, friendship and “the group” are also discussed: in February 2007, Homi writes an entry detailing the daily, buying shoes, going to a play with her family, and meeting friends from the group in town. This leads to a reflection on their group of friends, that they feel is dissolving:

Excerpt 6-20. (HomiFeb02_07)

Recurring conversation I've been having with people lately is that 'the group' is dying somewhat, with leaving Cert and first year and all that jazz.

This entry becomes one of the busy entries in Homi’s blog, as the others seem concerned by the issue and want to discuss it. There is a slight disagreement element to this conversation when LJLoais., an occasional commenter (not one of the initial group, but someone's girlfriend) admonishes the others to concentrate on the positive and not to regret the slow demise of the group.: *“Ladies, stop pining for the past and concentrate on making these the 'good old days' you pine for in the future.”*(Loais/HomiFeb02_07). This is received with apparent scorn by Homi: *“Screw you, I'll pine for what I like :p”*(Homi/HomiFeb02_07).

However, the apparent anger denoted by the use of the expletive phrase, “screw you” is tempered by the emoticon which indicates that the text should be taken as humorous, and it is thus interpreted by Loais, who retreats in a way: *Hard to argue with that :)* (Loais/HomiFeb02_07).

There were seven busy entries in Homi’s blog until the end of data collection in May 08, and all but one were written in 2007. The other busy entry is from the first year of the blog, in 2005, and the comments were all written as an answer to a meme, taken from Niall’s blog.

Homi is at ease with the facilities of the platform, she uses tags, profile pictures, the “memories” bookmarking facility and she uses the finest and most intricate privacy settings. Soon after she started the blog, on her 4th entry, she also started to add a “mood” and “music” tag to each of her entries, using a small icon, a cat, to represent her mood. This animated figure is different according to the mood it represents, and its presence is heralded by the words: “I feel so goddamn”. The music is simply the title of the song Homi may be listening to at the moment, and is heralded by “Sounds like”. She uses both tags for most of her entries.

On her blog, she seldom posts her own photographs, but she does post external links to various sites, or embeds videos and cartoons from her favourite online spaces. On one occasion, she also created a poll for her friends to vote on what Niall should study in college, and posted a link to the poll site.

Homi kept writing her blog long after I stopped collecting data, but she stopped in May 2009. She kept the blog online, but started a new blog, also on the LiveJournal platform. Corcra may have deleted some of her old entries, and LJSweet. all the entries from her past before starting over in the same journal, but Homi leaves her LiveJournal name, her alias, and her friends list behind, to start a new journal, under a new alias, with a new template and also, she thinks, a new outlook, more mature and devoid of the “whiny drivel” of her younger years.

Excerpt 6-21. (HomiMay27_09)

I made a new journal, because this one is too full of whiny drivel, and because I really don't like my username. So if you could add T. , I promise it will be very upbeat and full of interesting and exciting doings. (I quite like most of the people I have as friends on here, and like to know how they're getting on, so if you don't add the new account I'll probably just end up using this one to read your journal. I'll feel creepy about it though, so please add it.)

She wants to keep most of her friends list, which would imply that they would add her new name and her new Livejournal to their own lists. She obviously feels the reciprocity is necessary to her ethical outlook, as she would “feel creepy” reading under her old name, as if spying on her friends.

6.1.7 Corcra

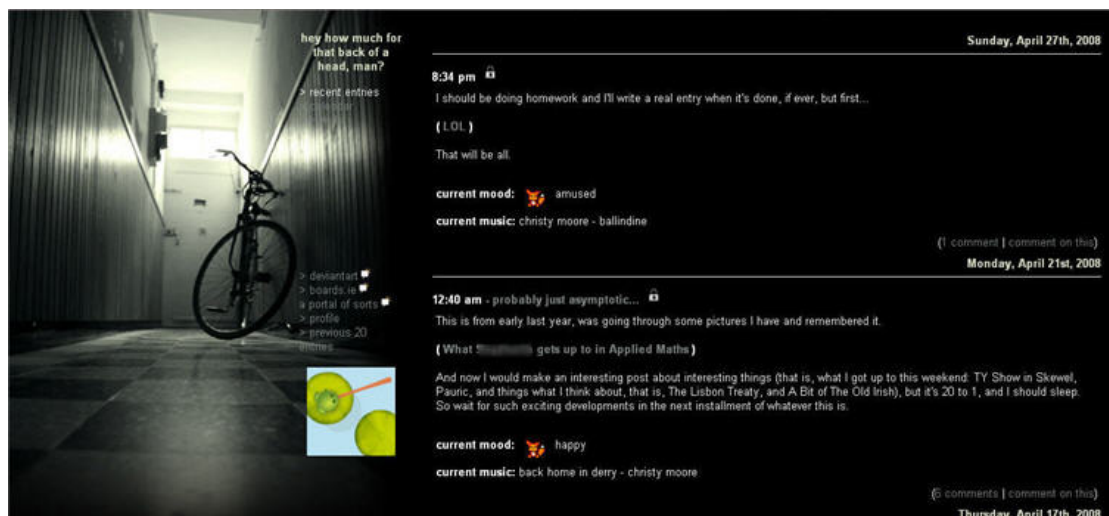


Figure 6-7. Corcra's blog¹⁴

Corcra was the first of the group to start a LiveJournal, she started blogging in 2004, when she was 14. She has kept writing her blog ever since, regularly, and with long entries. However, the most starting element of Corcra's blog is the way she manages the permanence of the medium: she regularly deletes older entries from her blog, but saves them on her own home computer. She wants to keep the journal as a memory aid, however she removes it from public view. Moreover, the public view of her journal is very limited. Corcra's blog is not an obvious “friends only” journal, there is no first page announcing the fact that the journal is locked, no picture and no explanation. In fact, some entries are public, and these are what the casual reader can see. Nevertheless,

¹⁴ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's anonymity.

most of Corcra's entries are locked, and can only be seen by the readers on her friends' list; to them, the locked status of the entry is simply signified by a small lock symbol beside the title.

Corcra's blog is visually very striking: the background is black, with white typeface, and any link is signalled by grey typeface. The screen is divided into two parts, although the division is not marked by any lines. On the left hand side of the screen, unframed, is a static photograph in black and white which subtly blends in to the rest of the screen on the right. The photograph represents a narrow corridor in a house, with wooden cladding reaching high on the wall, which is then painted white. The perspective aspect makes the corridor look very long, at the end of it is an old white door with two old-fashioned locks and topped by a glass window. The floor is covered in a pattern of black tiles and grey tiles, and the only object, which draws the eye immediately, is a bicycle leaning against the wall. At the edge of the photograph, close to the centre of the screen, a series of internal and external links marks a vertical border which separates the picture and the texts of the entries, which scroll down whilst the photograph remains static. On that border space, at the top, is the title of the blog, which will also be found on the profile page. It is in small letters, with no capital letters at the start of the word: *"hey, how much for that back of a head, man?"* This sentence used as a title is in fact taken from a song by Regina Spektor, a Russian-born American singer. Below the title, also in small letters, are a series of links. The first series is a series of internal links, starting with *"recent entries"*, then a link to the calendar page and another one to the friends' page. Further down the screen is another series of links, some internal and some external. Three external links are at the top, one to Corcra's DevianArt page, another to the forum space Boards.ie, and finally a link to a personal web page. This was originally

a page for links to various online spaces where Corcra could be found, like her DeviantArt page, her Bebo page and her LiveJournal page, but she has since changed the content of the page, which now holds a list of books, and some information on her favourite MMPORG (Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game), Team Fortress 2. Below those external links are two more internal links, one to the profile page, and one leading to a page which displays the 20 latest entries. All those links are in grey, and become white when the mouse rolls over them. Beneath the links is the only colourful item on the page, Corcra's LiveJournal icon: in a small square frame, on a light blue background are two lime-green water lily leaves, a similarly green frog sitting on one of them has extended its red tongue, presumably to catch a fly. This looks like a frame from a cartoon or a computer-generated image. On the right-hand side of the screen, the reader can see the text of the entries. These always start with the time of writing, followed in most cases by the lock symbol, indicating that the entry is only available to the readers on the friends' list.

I did not have access to Corcra's early entries, as they have been erased from LiveJournal. Her current blog thus starts in 2007, when she was preparing for the Leaving Certificate examination, in her last year in secondary school. She always was very interested in art, as evidenced by her DeviantArt page. She has samples of her work there, which include drawing, painting and photography. Although she had hoped to study Art in college, her portfolio was not accepted. Corcra also seems to be a very good student, with particular interest in physics: she took part in the International Physics Olympiad. She finally decided to study Theoretical Physics in university. Her interests also include the Irish language, which she speaks fluently and uses occasionally in her blog. She has also long had a very strong interest in gaming,

moving from console games to MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online RolePlaying Games) up to her current fascination with the game Team Fortress 2, which even led her to take part in the game convention held in the UK.

She has gradually evolved a very personal practice for blogging, which has led her to keep up her blog regularly over five years. Although a lot of her entries seem spontaneous, she keeps a paper diary/calendar as a memory aid, jotting down the events of the day; she then uses the paper diary in order to write entries which can on occasion go back over some weeks or even months, so that her blog – and her readers – can “catch up” with her life.

The profile page has kept a trace of Corcra’s first blog entries, in the date of the creation of the blog, in March 2004. The statistics compiled by the LiveJournal platform keep a count of all the comments Corcra has ever written in her friends’ blogs, which amount to 1,461, showing a definite involvement in reading and participating in her friends’ blogs. The platform does not however keep track of deleted entries, or comments in the deleted entries. The figure for the number of comments received is thus much smaller.

Corcra is one of the young bloggers who have had the most interaction with me; she obviously reads any entry I write, and always responds if there is a general question there. She also always responds to LiveJournal messages I may send, notably the message which asked the bloggers if they may like to choose their own alias. Corcra decided to choose her own, and picked an Irish word meaning “purple”, as the word purple is one part of most of her screen names.

6.2 Group 2: a long dialogue

The journals from the first group all have distinct styles; their intersections are dialogical elements: in tone; in subject matter when some common memories are evoked or some group events are recounted; in the comments sections, where different voices appear in conversation. In the case of the two young women of the second group, the dialogical element is intertwined within the blogs; even though many offline and online friends read and comment, the lives and blogs of the two friends follow a common dialogical path. Indeed in writing a rich description of their blogs and their practice, it is sometimes difficult to separate the two, even though their styles and voices are deeply personal. Jen and Myriam started blogging together, and several years later, having been separated by geography and having both established their adult lives, both of them still blog, although more sporadically, and they still read each other's journals and interact in the comments sections.

6.2.1 Jen



Figure 6-8. Jen's blog¹⁵

Jen has always liked reading and writing, and in her late teens, Jen discovered fan-fiction. She created a LiveJournal account in order to comment and participate in a LiveJournal community related to fan-fiction. She did however start using the account as a blog in September 04, six months after her friend Myriam, and cites her influence as the main reason for starting the blog:

Excerpt 6-22. (JenSept11_04)

On discovering that Myriam, who I only know from the Real World, has a PROPER LJ page, I felt ashamed enough to do something about improving this journal.

This is the start of a long blogging story, and a long conversation between two friends, who will soon be joined by some mutual friends from secondary school, and also by friends that each of them will make in their separate colleges, in different countries. At

¹⁵ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's privacy.

first, Jen keeps her blogging separate from her offline life, at least as far as her boyfriend is concerned:

Excerpt 6-23. (JenSept11_04)

My boyfriend knows nothing about any of the above internet geekage, though for all I know he has a secret internet life of his own!

For a long time, the blog posts are used to communicate mainly with Myriam, who has gone to college abroad, and keep her up to date with what is happening in Jen's life, back in Dublin. This dialogue will gradually include different voices, from offline friends who also blog, some indeed follow the two girls and move their blogs from the Diaryland platform to the LiveJournal platform, others start blogging at the instigation of one or the other of the group. These voices sometimes fade, as some friends' blogging practice slows down, and some journals are even deleted. However, the two main voices remain. The non-blogging boyfriend eventually hears about the blog, and joins LiveJournal, mainly as a commenter; the love story eventually ends, yet he remains as one of the readers and sometimes commenter on Jen's journal. Jen's new boyfriend is a dedicated LiveJournal blogger, and his group of friends eventually joins in the list of friends and commenters on Jen's blog.

Jen and Myriam are both involved in communities and groups on LiveJournal. Indeed this was one of the reasons for Jen to join. They are both fan-fiction aficionados, they write, read and critique Harry Potter fan-fiction, and Myriam introduces Jen to the Pottersues community. This is a community dedicated to bad fan-fiction, playing on the name of Harry Potter and the name MarySue, which is a fan-fiction character invented by its author into a known story, and which has connotations of bad writing, and bad characterization; Mary Sues typically represent an idealized version of the writer. Jen

and Myriam so enjoyed the community that they even created a LiveJournal blog dedicated to the poorest and thus funniest examples of fan-fiction narratives. This blog, entitled the Daily Spaggle, as a reference to J.K. Rowling's creation of the Daily Prophet, is kept jointly by Myriam and Jen; both read a lot of fan-fiction, but they are tough critics, and their sense of humour, slightly geeky as they easily admit, is tickled by some of the purple prose sometimes used by fan-fiction writers. This draws other fan-fiction readers and writers, and creates a small community, which subsequently spills over into their journals, as some become "friends" on their personal blogs. Indeed the Spaggle community had as many as 152 friends who received regular updates. By the end of June 2006, offline lives became more demanding as Jen entered her final year in college and Myriam spent a year abroad, and the Spaggle ceased publication. Jen's and Myriam's blogs however remained active.

Jen also discovered a child-free community which drives her to angry outbursts, on her journal, and sometimes on the community's discussion threads, and in turn earns her some online enemies, but those do not bother her on her journal, as she makes full use of the privacy settings offered by the platform.

Jen has chosen a blue template for her blog. The background of the screen is bright blue, and holds a narrower light grey frame which holds the text of the entries. At the top of this frame is a large banner, with a background of blue and white clouds, which holds the title of the blog, and a sub-title: new stuff. In the main box/frame, the entries can be scrolled through, and they are not separated by lines or boxes. They are however signalled by their date and the title that Jen gives them, which appears in the same size as the date and time. The titles and the text are a deeper blue than the background of the first frame, and any links in the text appear in a lighter blue.

Jen has subscribed to a service which takes snapshots of webpages for links. When the mouse rolls over the link, a small picture of the site appears on the blog. Clicking on the link then activates the link and leads the reader to another site. She likes to use all possible functions that the platform offer, trying out new ones as they appear, such as banners which scroll by, and even trying the facility which marks a post as adult-only.

She uses memories as a bookmarking tool, selecting very few of her own entries, and those are mostly related to fan-fiction or fun memes, and selecting several of her favourite entries from her friends' blogs.

Jen uses all the facilities that LiveJournal has to offer in terms of privacy. She creates groups and allocates different levels of access, which allows her to open some of her blog to acquaintances, and to her parents for example. Jen is one of the very rare young bloggers who open their blogs to adults, and adults known in real life. Her parents occasionally write comments on her entries, initially as anonymous commenters, but they soon created their own LiveJournal accounts, and even posted a few entries of their own. Their presence probably made mine easier to accept outright, as the platform's sophisticated privacy levels allowed some entries to remain dedicated to a small number of readers only.

6.2.2 Myriam

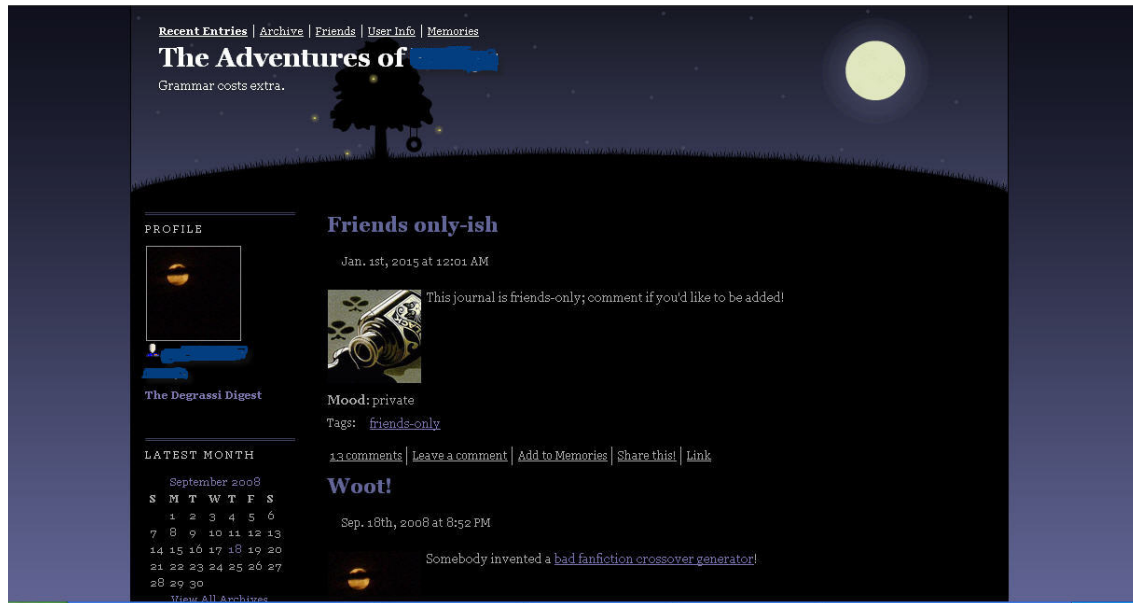


Figure 6-9. Myriam's blog¹⁶

Myriam started her blog on April 26th, 2004, during her first year in college. She had left Ireland in September to study in Cambridge. The start is slightly hesitant, with a general greeting, followed by three dots, and some questions as to her reasons for starting a blog.

Excerpt 6-24. (MyriamApr06_04)

Hi... Ok, well I've just started this and there's not very much to say at the moment...don't even really know why I'm doing this, but why should I let that stop me?

Her first entry immediately gets a comment, from someone who has communicated with her before in a LiveJournal community on fan-fiction, and the same happened on the second day of her blog. The following entry has a comment from Jen, who is already involved in fan-fiction with Myriam, but hasn't yet created her own LiveJournal; all subsequent entries are either silent, or bear one or two comments from Myriam's fan-

¹⁶ The screenshot is blurred to protect the blogger's privacy.

fiction friends. Jen's name reappears in September 2004, when she creates her blog, and thereafter the dialogue never stops. Jen does not comment on each entry, but she is a regular presence on Myriam's blog, throughout Myriam's years at university abroad and subsequently throughout her year in Asia. Myriam's blog, as well as Jen's, starts as a life-writing exercise, a diary written for an audience of interest-driven community; these readers, whom Myriam met online, are slowly joined by Myriam's friends from university, as well as other friends from her school-days, who are in daily contact with Jen and are thus attracted to blog writing. Myriam's situation is similar to Jen's, in that her boyfriend does not know about her LiveJournal; she is thus free to write about him, and eventually about problems in the relationship, and get comfort and advice from her online friends. The end of this romance will also be documented on the blog. Much later, Myriam will meet, offline, another LiveJournal blogger, and he and his friends will thus be added to her friends list.

6.3 Summary and conclusion

This chapter told the stories of the participants in this study, dividing them in two separate groups, one of younger bloggers who met at a summer camp, and a second group of two close friends who started blogging at the same time and whose blogs helped them to keep in touch throughout their college years. From the start date, and from the creation of the blog, the concept of space is implied in the practice of blogging, and in the way the blogs help to manage friendships and relationships between readers and writers. In the case of the bloggers from the first group, the relationship was initially created in a space outside their daily space, a summer camp which was not necessarily attended by their school-friends, and which was not held in their habitual spaces; this relationship was thus brought online, and sustained through the creation of a

literary and semiotic artifact which linked readers and writers to a new space, in a time where they would have gone back to their habitual spaces. In the case of the second group, the two girls were suddenly separated geographically, but again, their relationship was brought online, to a space outside their daily space, and where the friendship and conversation could be maintained in a different time-frame. Those two groups of blogs present slightly different chronotopes, and those are evident in the rich descriptions which span the lifetime of most of the blogs. Even though a small number of the bloggers have kept blogging in the same space, and are thus still within the chronotope of their blog narrative, for some of the others, the chronotope was self-contained within the life-time of the group of friends as a small writing community. When this dialogical relationship with the reader ended, their blogs also died down. This is in contrast to the chronotope present in the blog of the girls of the second group, whose continued friendship and continued blogging was initially anchored by a passion for fan-fiction, and subsequently nourished by the inclusion of offline friends to their LiveJournal community.

Chapter 7 Silences and conversations: interaction between the blogger, the reader and the technology

The previous chapter introduced the young bloggers, their blogs, and their relationships within their small communities of friends. Chapter 7 will concentrate on the relationship between the bloggers, their readers and the technology in a trialogical process.

One of the most salient elements of a blog is the opening of personal writing to an audience, and even more particularly to the participation of those readers. The question though is how the readers leave a trace in the text, whether in the text of the entry written by the blogger herself, or in the comments space, which is a more social textual space, and how they interact with the blog and the blogger, with each other, and with the technology which underpins the writing and social space which is the blog. This chapter is divided into four parts which follow the three layers of the blog identified in chapter 3; the first part and second part will thus consider the literary layer of the blog, first assessing what the blog represents from the point of view of the blogger; it then will look at how traces of the reader appear throughout the text created by the blogger, then part three will look at the interaction between the blogger and the active readers/commenters in the social layer; in the fourth part, I will look at particular affordances and constraints offered or imposed by the technological part of the blog, as

well as whether affordances are taken up by the bloggers and their commenters in their creation of a semiotic artefact.

7.1 Dear LiveJournal: the blog as a diary

Like diarists who write about diary-keeping and record their practice and habits within their diary (Lejeune, 1975), bloggers also engage in what they commonly call metablogging, wherein they write content about blogging within the blog. The young bloggers from both groups all engaged in some form of metablogging, reflecting on the practice of diary-keeping and of blogging. Their reflections fall into several categories, the first of which concerns memory and memories, and the role of the blog as a memory keeper, through its traditional role of diary, but also as a technological memory aid. The second category concerns writing, both in form and content, as the bloggers reflect on what they write or will write, and also on the grammar and spelling within the texts of their entries; this concern is echoed in discussions with the readers in the social space of the comments area.

7.1.1 The blog as a Memory keeper

For Corcra and Brightears in particular, memory plays an important part in the blogging practice and as a motivation for the narrative of the self. They highlight the importance of digital technology as opposed to that of pen, paper, notebook etc. Not all are in agreement, though, and one young blogger in particular, Disco, had reservations from the very start about the practice of blogging, and about the technology of blogging:

Excerpt 7-1. (Disco, ProfilePage)

I also have a fear of forgetting half my life, so I'll probably finally start keeping a real journal to have a hard copy just in case, and then stop posting here altogether, but enjoy, i guess, while it lasts :-p

The mistrust expressed by Disco, who intends to back up what she writes on a paper copy, shows clearly that she has not identified the affordance of permanence of digital texts, and in particular her blog.

Whereas Brightears had first used the LiveJournal blog as another online space to showcase his photography and get feedback from his friends, when he started travelling, text became more prominent, the entries became very long and diary-like, like a kind of travelogue. He regularly reflects on his blog practice and the reasons for it, as he does in his first very long entry on a trip to Egypt:

Excerpt 7-2. (BrightEars, Sept22_07)

I have no idea how many people will read this, but I'd like to have something on the internet to look back on in a few years or whatever anyway.

This is a thought he returns to several times, linking the blog to a diaristic practice,

Excerpt 7-3. (BrightEars, Feb25_08)

I think I'm starting to get into the idea of diaries, well, I always have been but never bothered keeping one, I will be while traveling for the Summer but figure I may as well post every now and again anyway until then :)

and considering the blog as a memory aid:

Excerpt 7-4. (BrightEars, May05_08)

that's definitely some of the point of doing all this - to be able to look back in years to come, no matter what happens, and know that hey, at least I tried!

He does so again later, in a paragraph which deals with the lack of readers on his blog.

He identifies himself again as a future reader within the autobiographical time of the blog.

Excerpt 7-5. (Brightears, May24_08)

these things are awesome to look back on in the future (you know, and wonder why you went through a phase of saying "awesome" every third word for a few weeks)

But he also pinpoints also the particular technology of the blogging platform as a memory aid:

Excerpt 7-6. (Brightears, May05_08)

And I think Livejournal is the best place to write this as everything I physically write I tend to lose within a year or two. And this is a long term investment.

Brightears thus compares his blog to the diary he never kept before, but this anticipated practice and its benefits are very much set in a specific place which is indeed “the best place” and a specific time: the journal is kept “for the future”, “the long term”, “years to come”. The present time is writing-time, the future time which will be reading-time, and those two different times are thus linked by the semiotic artefact of the blog, aided by the permanence of the technology, which will help the “long-term investment” as Brightears clearly identifies his older self as the implied reader of the blog. The blogs can thus be, like the notebooks identified by Lemke (2000) “meaning inscribed material objects that afford heterochrony”, or rather in this case, “virtual objects”.

Corcra, however, has a different attitude; she has identified the permanence of the blog, and it causes her some problems. She started her LiveJournal when she was very young, and those early entries she now finds rather embarrassing. She has taken the unusual step of deleting those, however saves them to her own home computer.

Excerpt 7-7. (Corcra, correspondence)

I take all the old entries offline and archive them though, so it looks younger than it is. :p (And I look less annoyingly 14!)

Even though Corcra has decided to manage her blog so that it doesn't show the earliest entries, she does on occasion compare her 14 year old self to her present self, notably when she devotes an entry to an old quiz which she takes again – leaving her old responses and comparing them to her current ones.

When she decided to archive her old entries, Corcra read through all of them, and that was the time when she mirrored some of the old entries in her new entries. These were quizzes and memes, which she took again, and there is a juxtaposition of her old answers as a 14 year old, and her new answers as a more mature 18 year old, with comments addressed to an unnamed reader: *I sure was a witty 14 year old* or even more clearly, with the use of her name and the present tense, as if the 14 year old blogger and the present day blogger were two separate entities: *14 year oldOrla is so witty*.

Excerpt 7-8. (Corcra, May10_08)

Been deleting more old LJ entries. I went back into my archives and found the first survey I did on my LJ, on Friday, the 20th of August, 2004. And I stole it from LJSpooked, that is to say, LJVictim.
I was so emo when I was 14.

Both memes are reproduced, with original answers and new answers in italics, creating a dialogue with the younger Corcra, from a slightly embarrassed, slightly pleased older Corcra - as if with a younger sister maybe, and reminiscent of Saila's "conversation" with her younger self in her comments page (see Excerpt 7-13).

Excerpt 7-9. (Corcra, May12_08)

Most Trustworthy: I know any of my friends would kill me at the drop of a hat. And I would trust them to this with my life.

I sure was a witty 14 year old.

Excerpt 7-10. (Corcra, May10_08)

I'll leave my original answers in, because 14 year old Orla is so witty. I'll put my new ones in italics, for sake of ease.

For the whole entry, Corcra juxtaposes three different times: answers to a questionnaire/meme from when she was 14 years old, with her current answers, and answers to another meme from when she was 16 years old, with her current answers, the answers from the present time are sometimes a comment on what the younger Corcra had written, a dialogue afforded by the heterochrony which defines the blog.

Excerpt 7-11. (Corcra, May10_08)

What is your favorite lie to tell? Questions eight and nine were already deleted!
Damn, I wonder what questions 8 and 9 were now. Foolish Orla, information is a fragile thing

When was the last time you cried? March/April when someone accidentally overdosed. The pills just slipped into their mouth, suuuuure. *I have no idea what I was talking about there. How strange.*

Tell me something about you that I don't know:

The only time I've been to the hospital was when I got my shoulder dislocated because my mom pulled me off the sofa.

No longer true. Take that, the passage of time..

Corcra then reflects once more on the different timescales at work within the chronotope of the blog, as she anticipates a “further” future in which her older self will read the past entries.

Excerpt 7-12. (Corcra, Jan11_08)

Archiving livejournal entries is interesting and slightly nostalgic. My first livejournal entry was on the 3rd of March 2004. I still have it. I've archived up to September

2006 now. One day I'm going to have a good old read. Maybe further in the future, to increase the potency of the past. And embarrassment.

Here again, the present time of writing and reading is linked to the past time of writing, but the presence of a reader both disturbs the chronotope and informs it: Corcra censors some of the early narrative events, obliterating them from the blog, and yet reintroduces some of them to her present time readers, with a comment from the present time writer. Her relationship as a present reader to the blog posts that her younger self wrote is slightly different. She deleted all of the old entries, and saved them as text files in her own computer, keeping only the text of the entry that she had written. She did not keep any of the layout and she did not save any of the comments either, as she explained in response to a message from me, she only saves comments if “there's something of special note in them”. She also feels that she does not receive many comments, and thus does not feel that keeping them is warranted. However, a comparison with the other bloggers shows that, taking into account the fact that Corcra has deleted two years of her blog, the number of entries and comments is still higher than some of the others.

Saila also revisited her old blog entries, reading them, and adding comments to the younger blogger as her present-day self. In February 2007, Saila leaves a comment on an entry she wrote in February 2005, in order to correct a mistake she had made when writing a sentence in Irish. She addresses her younger self by her real name, and admonishes her for the mistake.

Excerpt 7-13. (Saila, SailaFeb05_05B)

Ciara, this is yourself two years in the future, I'm disgusted that neither you nor your friends noticed the disgraceful grammar error in the Irish there. Instead of "Tá mé bitseach mealltach" it should infact be "Is bitseach meallach mé" But it's ok, in a year and a half you only get a B in JC Irish, so I wouldn't expect you to have known that.

She does not however change the text in order to correct the mistake, but intervenes as a different person so to speak, a commenter rather than the author (see 7.3.3).

Disco, Corcra, Saila and Brightears have all identified the affordance of archiving and memorizing as an affordance of the blog, and have linked it to the affordance of permanence which is hidden in most digital texts (see 3.4.4). They have also identified other hidden, or nested affordances, which are narrative affordances: within the chronotope of the blog, there is an affordance which gives the author a power over the time of the narrative, with the affordance of editing the already-published text. Corcra and Saila in particular have identified this affordance, but neither of them actually takes it up: Corcra deletes early entries, which disrupts the chronotope, but she does not change or modify them to diminish their potential for embarrassment. Similarly, Saila as reader of her own old entries does not change the text of the entry which she now identifies as incorrect. Instead, she modifies it from the social space, situating herself very powerfully as a commenter on her text: she is *not* the original author, but has become a reader, and as such, addresses the author and corrects the mistakes that she has now found in the text. The blog as semiotic artefact has thus linked two very different times, separated by two years (*“this is yourself, two years in the future”*), allowing, within the chronotope, the presence of two different authors, the all-knowing present Saila, and Saila the younger blogger. Corcra’s text sees the same phenomenon, although in her case, Corcra the young blogger is brought to the present time through a repetition of her text, and the old text disappears from the artefact.

Several other bloggers also identify the affordance of narrative change, but they clearly announce any changes. Homi wrote an entry about a problem with her mobile phone provider, and later went back to the entry to amend it with a clear “edit”:

Excerpt 7-14. (HomiMay20_07)

EDIT: I also seem to have lost various numbers. This is irksome.

Myriam had the same problem with mobile phones, and similarly turned to LiveJournal to update her friends, but it was an afterthought, and her entry, which dealt with knitting, was amended accordingly. Myriam uses an internet acronym to highlight the change, where ETA means Edited to Add.

Excerpt 7-15. (MyriamDec10_07)

ETA: Still not receiving texts properly, by the way. I'm going to see if they can sort it out in the O2 shop but if I'm not replying to anyone, that's probably why

The blog as a keeper of memories is one of the themes that emerge from metablogging instances. As such, the written text of the entry seems to appear immutable to the authors, who do not take up the affordance of narrative change. Another blogger, Dervla (see chapter 6.1) commented on my blog:

Excerpt 7-16. (Dervla/CathyAug11_08)

I rarely/never change or edit an entry, except to correct spelling or grammar. I'm not always proud of what I have written, but I meant it when I wrote it. Sometimes I think of coming back to a subject I've written badly about in order to redeem myself, but I hardly ever do

This narrative honesty reflects another aspect of the blog from the point of view of the authors.

7.1.2 The blog and writing practice

Writing, both in form and content, is an important theme which arises from metablogging instances, and is closely related to that of reading – or being read. Thomas (2007) found that a creative use of language and high levels of literacy are important to

young people online, as “the ability to use language well plays an essential role in identity construction and perception” (p. 116).

When each of the bloggers first set up a LiveJournal and started blogging, the main theme of the first entries seemed to be related to writing a blog, or a journal, or a “thing”, and wondering what the content would be. Myriam started with a hesitant salutation to her readers, and a question about the blog, whether it would be boring, and whether she would find something to write.

Excerpt 7-17. (MyriamApr26_04)

Hi...

Ok, well I've just started this and there's not very much to say at the moment...don't even really know why I'm doing this, but why should I let that stop me? :) Only joking. I'll try not to fill this with too much random boring rubbish. Anyway, I'll write again when I have stuff to say.

Jen introduces herself to her readers in her first post, but finished with a guess about the future entries she will write:

Excerpt 7-18. (JenSept11_04)

At this point, I imagine I'll mainly be using this LJ for ranting. Anyway... that's it for the intro. Hope you haven't been put off!

Fry also refers to writing in his first entry:

Excerpt 7-19. (FryNov08_05)

Hello peoples this be brian/bri's blog. read at will and be my friend [...] since this is a blog i'd better write stuff.

Planet has the same problem:

Excerpt 7-20. (PlanetMarch24_05)

I have started a livejournal, as you have probably gathered, and now I have to think of stuff to actually say in it

Saila, like most of the others, introduces herself to her readers, and then reflects on this new blogging practice she is starting, likening it to diary-writing:

Excerpt 7-21. (SailaJan05_05)

So that's stuff about me. I dunno If Ima keep writing in this cos I could never seem to keep diaries when I was younger

Saila subsequently writes frequent and long entries, in which she often reflects on what she is writing:

Excerpt 7-22. (SailaJan11_05)

Wow, just realised how much I've written about my bedroom, but I think it really shows part of people, well part of me anyway, seeing as I spend the time I'm not in town or online in it.

Excerpt 7-23. (SailaApr30_05)

I originally had this entry titled 'Personholic' then I later realised it's more like my life story with friendships then anything else

The reflection on writing, and on the subjects of the entries, does not stop with the first posts. Corcra often refers to her writing and subject matter:

Excerpt 7-24. (CorcraOct10_07)

Less complaining, more thinking of something interesting to say in an entry.

She can also be critical of her subject matter, having internalised the criticism often directed at young people's blogs, and in particular at their LiveJournal blogs (see chapter 2.2.5). Her self-criticism is however tempered by humour in a dialogic text including the reader as both a judge and co-conspirator: she writes about her passion for soup, but also comments

Excerpt 7-25. (CorcraJul25_07)

Jesus, this is almost as bad as the terrifying "dear lj. today I ate a sandwich" post we all fear..

Brightears, who used his LiveJournal as a photoblog for the first few months, reflects on writing, and on the effect it may have on his readers, in his first long written entry:

Excerpt 7-26. (BrightearsApr05_07)

Hopefully this has been of some interest to anyone having similar dilemmas, or simply wondering what I'd write if I ever actually wrote an LJ entry :)

These metablogging reflections are often directed to a reader, implied or expected, as in Brightears' entry (Excerpt 7-26), where he addresses his blog post to "anyone having similar dilemmas", this potential reader is one who would engage with the blog entry, and is in a way expected to participate and become an active reader. Sometimes, the relationship is implied, as when Saila informs her readers of the care and time she took in writing an entry in Excerpt 7-27:

Excerpt 7-27. (SailaApr30_05)

(This update took me over an hour to write)

She also reflects on form rather than content, whilst implying a criticism of someone else's blog, who does not respect rules for writing long entries.

Excerpt 7-28. (SailaMarch20_05)

Ok well first things first this will be a loooooong post cos of the Corkness so it'll be in paragraphs because LONG UPDATES WITHOUT PARAGRAPHS ARE A BITCH ON THE EYES (excuse me, I'm in a bitchy mood)

The effect of digital communications on young people is often condemned outright as giving rise to a generation who have no respect for the English language (Crystal2008). Bauerlein(2008) sees in this generation not only the absence of literacy but pride in their lack of literacy, and coins the word a-literacy to define this phenomenon. However, not only do the bloggers in this study reflect on the subject matter and the structure of their entries, but they are also very concerned with issues of vocabulary, anxious to use the

right word: “(*Can assiduous be used in this context or would it be better to say diligent?*)” (PlanetMay26_05). They also worry about spelling “*tangebile (sp?)*” (SailaJan28_05), and revel in the discovery of a spell check function in the platform.

Excerpt 7-29. (BrightearsApr07_08)

That took an awful long time and is probably full of bad grammar and other errors
as it's 5am and I'm quite tired

If some of the entries have a flavour of orality often found in Computer Mediated Communication, others are carefully crafted, and the craft is sometimes playfully highlighted, as Planet does in Excerpt 7-30, or when Corcra playfully mimics fiction writing in Excerpt 7-31:

Excerpt 7-30. (PlanetMay22_05)

I didn't hurtle to my death as I carried the guitar down Dee's slippery staicase in my
stilettos either. Wow. That some exorbitant alliteration there.

Excerpt 7-31. (CorcraMarch05_08)

She then pondered the causes of the bitter rage she felt, before snapping out of
the third person.

Their writing subjects and writing skills are not the only matters that concern the bloggers; some of them also add visual elements to their journal layout, or insert photographs and videos in the text, making their blog a truly multimodal artefact.

7.1.3 The blog as multimodal artefact

By their very nature as digital texts, blogs are multimodal: the page is an image which contains visual elements as well as written text. Customisation is a facility which affords the bloggers the creation of an individual, personal and creative space. However, not all bloggers identify or realise this affordance through the functionalities of the blogging platform.

Some of the most technologically-minded young bloggers make full use of all the technological affordances that they identify on the platform. Jen for example, in Excerpt 7-32, set about customising her layout when she decided to keep a “proper” LiveJournal, and actually write entries; she used colours and pictures to enliven the page:

Excerpt 7-32. (JenSept11_04)

I felt ashamed enough to do something about improving this journal. (I had only started it up so as not to be anonymous on Pottersues any more.) Hence the pretty colours and the Totoro picture.

She obviously felt that her readers would appreciate a nice layout, which also reflected her personality, as she felt “ashamed” of her bare layout. Others may find that the customisation of their blogs is not always very easy: they know about the functionalities offered by the platform, indeed they identify affordances related to them: posting photographs affords representation and personalisation of the blog. From the beginning of her blog, Planet reflects on the practice of blogging, or journaling, and also about her relationship with the technology, sometimes easy and enjoyable,

Excerpt 7-33. PlanetMarch25_05

[...]Now I'm here updating my journal and figuring out how to work this yoke.Its going good so far!

But sometimes more difficult, as when she tries to post pictures.

Excerpt 7-34. PlanetMay26_05

Wow. I'm exceedinly crap at computer thingies. I've been tryiong to upload pictures onto this livejournal thingy for AGES and can I? Nope. They're all too big, or too large, or too... I dunno... the dimensions are too excessive. I might try later with photoshop but until then, I'll complain

The technology is described either as a “yoke” or a “thingy”, a vague entity which frustrates Planet. LJBird, who is on Planet’s friends list, posted her only comment there, agreeing with her and asking for help:

Excerpt 7-35. LJBird/PlanetMay26_05

i dunno how to upload pics either, so you're not the only one. however if u do find out would you please pass info on to me?

Planet does not seem to have received any help, or to have managed to teach herself how to post pictures, or else she lost interest, and her blog is devoid of pictures. She has however used a picture as a background in her layout, in a manner which is reminiscent of Saila’s layout (Figure 6-1) This raises an issue in the acquisition of digital literacy: Planet uses the Photoshop software (Excerpt 7-34), and she managed to insert a picture in the layout of her blog, which necessitated the use of HTML, yet she could not manage to post photographs, and in the absence of help from her friends, seemed to give up on the idea. Homi finds that some aspects of technology are part of a learning process: on her blog, she complains about the difficulty of some of the facilities on her Bebo account, notably for uploading and posting photographs:

Excerpt 7-36. (HomiOct04_2008)

Soul-destroying: trying to upload photos to Bebo. I got my digital camera working specially for Fresher's Week, having resolved to be one of those people who has loads of photos of fun times. Uploading them, though, least fun thing ever.

Myriam and Jen both occasionally change the layout of their blog, and mention it in their entries, but the bloggers from the other group tend to keep the same layout – it is to be noted that this is not the case on their Bebo social network page, where they take great delight in creating and changing the “skins” (i.e. layouts) at very regular intervals. Indeed Corcra comments on it on her blog:

Excerpt 7-37. CorcraMarch05_08

Somewhere after the 75th page of bebo skins, Orla paused long enough to ask herself why she was still there in front of her pc, when there was so much unholy wrath to be exacted upon the world.

Some of the bloggers are thus more concerned by the visual aspect of the blog, and aspire to what Saila calls “pretty” blogs, while others choose very simple templates and do not customise or change them. As illustrated in Table 7-1 below, Fry, Brightears and Disco use basic layouts, albeit with different colour schemes. Jen, at the time of data collection, was also using a basic colour scheme and had deleted her previous layout, which included the cartoon character Totoro (Excerpt 7-32). Both Homi and Corcra have chosen a black background with coloured text, to which Corcra has also added a photograph. Myriam’s layout is also dark and figures a silhouette as a image. Saila and Planet both customised the background of the layout with their own photographs.

Name	Basic layout	“pretty” layout
Saila		Customised with photo
Fry	Basic layout - greens	
Brightears	Basic layout - white	
Disco	Basic layout – grey/red	
Planet		Customised with photo
Homi		Colour scheme includes text
Corcra		Photograph and colour scheme
Jen	Basic layout – blues	Used to include pictures
Myriam		Includes pictures

Table 7-1. - Blog Layouts

Other multimodal elements used by the bloggers are mainly photographs that they have taken, and that illustrate their daily life. They are thus photographs from week-ends

away amongst the friends from the first group, photographs from school outings and occasionally of the bloggers surroundings. These are not regular though, and there is a distinct predominance of textual mode over visual modes within the entries. The bloggers all have social network site pages, first on Bebo, then on Facebook, and these pages are considered as the picture spaces, as opposed to the narrative space of the blog. Jen addresses her readers to ask if some of them if they want her to post photos of a party

Excerpt 7-38. (JenApr09_07)

I got my photos back today, and there are some fabulous ones... they'll be going up on Bebo fairly soon anyway, but would anybody who's not on it be interested in a photo-post here?

Brightears' blog was at first a photoblog, and thus much more visual than written text, but this slowly changed and once he started writing regular entries, the use of photographs dwindled.

One visual element in most blogs is the mood icon, suggested by the technological platform. These icons are animated or static emoticons, which represent the feelings of the blogger at the time of writing. These are furthermore highlighted and described within the entries, sometimes for the picture:

Excerpt 7-39. (HomiFeb20_05)

PS. Ha ha, lookit the penguin go! So much better then SOMEONE's creepycreepy hamsters...

sometimes for what they represent:

Excerpt 7-40. (FryNov21_05)

btw have livejournal increased the number of moods cos i dont remember chipper

The emoticons/mood icons thus become part of the narrative, affording a representation of a feeling through a cartoon character, as depicted in Figure 7-1 below:



Figure 7-1. “Blah” mood icon

Excerpt 7-41. (SailaJan07_05)

I hate these moments of apathy bordering or depressed. It's so.....blah. I wonder if they have an emoticon for blah? *checks emoticon list* Haha, look at that they do!

The use of animated or static mood icons increases the visual elements of the entry, and coupled with the written representation of sound which usually follows; it serves as background information on the state of mind of the blogger during the time of writing, and as such situates the narrative event.

Whether the authors of the blogs are engaged in reflexive metablogging or wondering about their multimodal practices, they never lose sight of their reader(s). The reader can take the form of an implied reader, or a generic reader, or a person or persons who are expected to read, but in any case, the idea of a reader appears within the literary layer, until their real participation happens in the social layer of comments.

7.2 Dear Reader: Who is reading?

Within these multimodal texts in which the bloggers reflect on time and writing, there appear other voices and other characters. If diaries are always written for someone (Lejeune, 1975, 1993, Mallon, 1984), blogs are often directed at a reader, known or unknown, expected or wished for. The texts of the entries can thus bear traces of these real or virtual readers.

7.2.1 Traces of the reader in the entries

Direct addresses to readers

Fry clearly writes for one or several reader, and makes repeated addresses to his readers, either at the beginning of an entry, in an epistolary style: the first entry starts with “*Hello peoples*” and ends with “*smiles and stuff :-)* *stuff*” (signed with real name)”. Indeed Fry signs all his early posts with his real name, Brian, and a string of nicknames that his friends give him. His last posts are still signed, still with his real name, but he stops using the nicknames. Most of his entries end like a letter to a friend, with “*loev*” and signed Brian.

There are many direct addresses to the reader in Disco’s entries: “*so now you know what goes in my subconscious mind*” (DiscoSept14_06), “*I hope you haven’t bothered reading this*” (DiscoSept15_06), “*K, first person to guess where i live gets invited*” (DiscoSept27_06), “*And just to say, for those of you who haven't tried it, group humming is UNREAL*” (DiscoOct19_06). These addresses to known readers become a somehow wry address to absent readers, as evidenced by the use of the emoticon “*:-P*”, which suggests that Planet is sticking her tongue out in jest: “*Because everyone reads this. Clearly :-P*” (DiscoOct31_06).

The last entry is the end of a dialogue with the reader: Disco posts a link to a site where she figures, and bemoans the lack of readers, or the lack of interest of her friends:

Excerpt 7-42. (DiscoApr17_07)

<--someone might be interested.....

Also, i'm not wearing any shoes. Someone might be interested...*shrugs*

There are no comments on this entry, and there are no more entries. Disco addressed her unnamed readers in her last entry, and most of the bloggers started their journals with

addresses to readers, some reminiscent of a generic “dear Diary” or the more technological “Hello World”, like Planet’s “*hello Reader*”; Saila hopes for readers, “*So this is my first entry, dunno if anyones gonna read*” (SailaJan05_05) and others are targeting and expecting some readers. Brightears does not introduce himself, he writes for a group of friends who know him already, so he posts some photographs he took, and ends his first entry with “*bye now!*”

The readers, at least those who are part of the friends list, are also mentioned in the narrative, as they share many life events which are related on the blogs. They are often named with their real names rather than their LiveJournal names, at least in the blogs of the first group of young people; Myriam and Jen and their friends tend to use a mixture of both. (see chapter 8.2.1).

The readers, protagonists in the narrative, are given power over the text when the blogger addresses them with a call for action, which often implies a call for comments. This is the case in the many instances of quizzes or memes which are reproduced in several blogs, copied from one space to the other, as a kind of a game in which both reader and writer participate, creating a truly dialogic text. In Excerpt 7-43, Homi invites her readers to leave a trace of their passage in the comments section, and when she sees who has been reading, she will reply with “something nice”.

Excerpt 7-43. (HomiJun20_05)

Comment here and I'll reply with something nice about you, something which I'd probably never have the guts to say to your face.

Other instances are calls for comments about the entry and indicate very clearly that the blogger wants to start a conversation with active readers: “*What do others think? Does love at first sight actually exist?*” (PlanetAug09_05).

Other direct addresses are calls for action which straddle the boundaries between online and offline, when the blog is used as a means of communication with a particular reader or group of readers, implicitly identified as core readers. The address is made on the blog, but the action is required outside the space of the blog: “*Who wants to be in the band???? Join me!!! All instruments welcome, even if you're crap*”.(PlanetApr04_05B); it can be the start of a conversation which organises an outing: “*Anyone want to go to Bray on Sunday and climb the Sugarloaf, possibly to involve a picnic?*” (HomiAug19_07).

All these addresses to readers, whether they establish the presence of a reader, or call for action online or offline, illustrate the symbiotic relationship between writer and readers; they are not the only times when traces of the reader are obvious in the text of the entries, as all of the bloggers in the study have also made use of their entries to apologise to their readers.

Apologies to readers

A very common form of address to the reader, found in all the blogs, appears in the form of apologies. These apologies are part of the trialogical relationship established within the chronotope of the blog, and concern the creation and upkeep of the semiotic artefact. The bloggers apologize mainly for three reasons: for not updating the blog, not keeping up the creation of the artefact, or for the content or form of the entry, which they feel the reader will find either too long or too boring.

Apologies for not updating could be seen as a common heritage from the paper diaries, where diarists regularly bemoaned their lack of regular writing (Mallon, 1995). Indeed

Planet includes regular blogging in her New Years resolution list, and New Year is also a day which bears some signification in Saila's blog:

Excerpt 7-44. (PlanetJan02_08)

Another new years resolution, of my many: post to this more, I'm bad at keeping regular siaries so I suppose writing here is easier, only a few minutes when I'm online and I'm done. Lets make 2008 a fuckload better than 2007.

Excerpt 7-45. (SailaJan27_08)

I realised I haven't posted in my 3-year-old LJ since new years eve- whoops a daisy!

The apologies directed at an implied reader for Planet and Saila, are aimed at an identified reader, the "flist" (friends list) people in Myriam's case, as she reassures that although she has not been writing, she has been reading their blogs:

Excerpt 7-46. (MyriamApr05_06)

Yeah, really haven't been around much lately. Keeping up with the flist, though. Been at home with not a whole lot going on.

Brightears and Fry also direct their apologetic text at their expected readers, and both texts carry a hint of worry about the content of the entries in any case

Excerpt 7-47. (BrightearsJan23_08)

Hey guys, it's been a long time since I updated this (as always!) so I'll try to recall the last few months in some sort of detail for my own use if nothing else

Excerpt 7-48. (FryJun26_06)

I've decided to finally update as you can see. i had decided not to update during the lc because it would just feature post mortems and *ima go study for next subject* and *tired*.

Concerns about the content of the entries is thus not limited to instances of metablogging (see 7.1.2) but is part of the trialogical relationship; in some cases, the

blogger apologises, and subsequently engages with the reader by giving a summary of what she intended to write, thus including them in the creation of the entry;

Excerpt 7-49. (HomiMay23_07)

I've realised my updates are horribly boring, so rather than give you a blow-by-blow account of my week, I'll just do the semi-interesting points, and maybe some tangents, haven't had a good tangent in a while.

Excerpt 7-50. (HomiMarch30_08)

I could write about study and exams, but it's all I talk about anyway, and people are fed up enough with it as it is.

Excerpt 7-51. (CorcraMarch11_08)

This is starting to get a bit long, so I'm gonna skip the bit where I give out about how terrible school is and how I can't wait to finish the LC because I'm bored of it all now

In other cases, the blogger gives a roadmap of the entry as it were, announcing the boring “stuff”, and advising the reader to skip ahead.

Excerpt 7-52. (MyriamDec02_05)

Rather boring collegey stuff ahead; feel free to skip. I'm sorting my own thoughts out as much as anything else. Anyone who was on my flist last year knows what's coming anyway

Saila apologises from the very start of one entry, as she gives it the warning title “*Looooong updatedness!*” (SailaFeb22_05). In another very long entry, Brightears frames the text by two addresses to the reader, both about the length of the entry. The first one advises the reader to move to the end of the text, and the second one gives a short summary of the entry.

Excerpt 7-53. (BrightearsJan30_08)

But yes, long story short...actually fuck that I'm not doing anything, skip this paragraph if you're not interested in this long story.

Jaysus that was ridiculously long. Ah well, if you're considering whether to read it or not the above contains a summary of my music, social and love life over the last few months, and lyrics of a song thrown in for the craic!

Personal addresses to readers

The entries are also used for personal communication with named readers, and this in most of the blogs. One of the common uses of these personal addresses are the failure of other means of communications, be they the loss of a mobile phone, or a problem with the instant messaging system in use at the time. LiveJournal is in that case the place where the blogger brings the conversation:

Excerpt 7-54. (SailaFeb26_05)

Oh, I have another live-journal apology to make to Niall again, I havent been avoiding you like teh plague!

The personal addresses to readers are also a means of making them protagonists in the narrative, giving them a starring role, as in Excerpt 7-55, with Saila's public thanks to some of her friends in helping her to get a special present for her sister, or as the public apology that Jen offers to her friend LJSpring in Excerpt 7-56.

Excerpt 7-55. (SailaApr01_05)

oooh special thanks to Liam for tellnig me where to get this game my sister wanted and special thanks to Niall for burning me that CD oh and special thanks to Conor for giving me Liam's no.

Excerpt 7-56. (JenDec10_07)

Managed to miss LJSpring.'s ballet, which sucks quite a lot (my missing it, not the ballet) - seriously disorganised of late. Am really sorry honey! Hope it went well!

In both cases, the reader-protagonist became active reader and participated in the conversation, linking thus the entry and the comments within the narrative. This

dialogism within the blog is also echoed by a dialogism throughout the blogs, when words, sentences and themes echo through various blogs.

Fry's early entries, even though they are on a public setting, are written for specific people, using shared references and private jokes. The very early posts are dialogues with his friend Emma, who blogs as LJCcat on LiveJournal. The very first entry hints at a private joke about a "cereal killer", also mentioned in his friend's blog. Emma comments on the entry without logging in under her LiveJournal name, which means that her comment is attributed to "anonymous"; she plays on this in her comment, which is in itself a game played with Fry:

Excerpt 7-57. (anon/FryNov08_05)

hey this is just an anonymous reader. your friend emma. sounds really cool and funny, "cereal killer" what a classic. i am a psychic and i can tell from what you wrote that she is also extremely super intelligent, witty and....just amazing all-round

The reader thus becomes also a writer, and the blogs are linked by a shared narrative. In one entry, Jen sends her readers to other accounts of her party, which she feels will be better told, or have already been told anyway; as for Saila, in Excerpt 7-58, when she and some of her friends thus share a story, she also chooses to let them tell the tale:

Excerpt 7-58. (SailaApr24_05)

I'm not gonna bother writing about all the stuff that happened today and yesterday- we have Sinead, Conor and Alan's journal for that :p

In this, they conform to the concept of blog networks and distributed narratives (Walker, 2008). These distributed narratives are however often marked by technological traces of readers and bloggers, through blogrolls, which are one of the ways that technological traces of readers can be found on blogs.

7.2.2 Traces of the reader through technology: blogrolls, friends lists and

statcounters

From early on, bloggers have converged towards networks of bloggers, or communities of bloggers, which are heralded in several ways: some groups have aggregators, such as Irish blogs which are listed on one site, and that site in return is flagged on individual blogs by a small clickable icon. Others simply make use of the blog roll, which is a list of links to blogs that are read by the author, and to which she wished to be related in some way. It is used on many blogs as a sign of belonging to a genre (a cookery blog will include mainly cookery blogs in the blog roll) or a location (Irish bloggers tend to include mainly Irish blogs in their blogroll). More links to other blogs are found on specific words or phrases in individual entries which refer to other specific entries on someone else's blogs. All those links afford the creation and management of communities and networks, as well as representing the blogger as part of a specific group. However, none of those links to other blogs or sites are used by the young bloggers in this study. Saila is the only one to create a blogroll on her layout, but this blogroll does not include any of her friends' blogs, and once created, was never updated; the blogs she linked to disappeared and clicking on the links does not lead anywhere. One of the reasons for this lack of blogroll is probably found in the structure of LiveJournal, which offer not only blogging tools, but also social network functionalities, such as a list of friends (see chapter 5). Some readers, named in this list of friends, are thus known to the author. The names on the "friends list" are however the pseudonyms chosen by the bloggers as their "LiveJournal names", and these names are also a link to each blog. The readers and commenters are thus a de facto network, and their sense of community can be inferred from a close analysis of comments: the readers

talk to each other, responding not only to the entry, but to other comments, repeatedly (see 7.3.3).

Similarly, the young bloggers do not feel the need for statcounters, did not even consider the possibility. Statcounters are functionalities provided by several companies and platforms which literally count the number of page views for each blog and each entry, and then offer statistics and reports. These statcounters are commonly used on many blogs, which sometimes advertise the fact through a visible counter. Here again, the presence of a list of friends seems sufficient for the bloggers. When they think about it, they sometimes feel that they do not want to know even if their known readers visit or not.

Even though her blog is mostly private, and even though most of the entries are locked, and Corcra thus knows who her readers are likely to be, she still felt that not knowing who reads is a help in writing a blog.

Excerpt 7-59. (Corcra/CathyNov25_08)

in a way, I feel, journals are more sincere when the writer isn't overly aware of being watched. You'll speak more truthfully in an empty room, or what you believe to be one, which is one of the nice things about this medium. You can be more honest than you would be in person, without keeping it entirely to yourself, if that makes any sense.

The way she describes this “empty room” which is her blog shows that she is conscious of a potential audience: she is “aware”, although not “overly”, and the room is “believed” to be empty. Corcra’s sentences, with two clauses in opposition, mirror the ambiguity that she feels in the medium, both private and public. I had posted a question about the availability and use of statcounters on LiveJournal, drawing on my experience of other blogging platforms like Blogger.com, where I had installed a statcounter on my

blog. However, the bloggers who answered all felt that the facility was not necessary; some, like Saila, felt that the fact that their blog is locked negates the usefulness of such a tool, assuming that the statcounter would measure an unknown audience maybe. Corcra's blog is locked, but she feels that she would keep watching the statcounter to see which of her LiveJournal friends visited her blog , as expressed in Excerpt 7-60, and Myriam feels the same, as expressed in Excerpt 7-61:

Excerpt 7-60. (Corcra/CathyNov25_08)

Also, if there was a stats counter, I'd probably end up obsessively watching it like I tend to do with my deviantart account.

Excerpt 7-61. (Myriam/CathyNov25_08)

I went through a phase of obsessively watching how many people viewed my knitting projects on ravelry.com... I think I'm happier not having a counter on my LJ too!

Although all of the bloggers who commented were aware of the technology of statcounters, and its affordances, they did not envisage using them on the LiveJournal platform; two of them use the facilities on other sites: DeviantArt for Corcra and Ravelry for Myriam, but neither of them had thought of using the same facility on their blog.

7.2.3 Perception of the readers

Reflecting on his blogging practice and diary writing, Brightears mentions his readers, or lack of readers, emphasizing that he writes for himself and for his future self. Still, the readers are mentioned: after the thoughts above, in the entry dated 05 May, 2008, the following sentence is slightly wistful, followed by a smiling emoticon: "*It's not like anyone reads this anyway :)*" (BrightearsMay05_08).

In this case, LJSweet comments on the entry, where she and her blog had been mentioned with regards to a poem she had posted in one of her entries. In response to her comment, Brightears expresses great pleasure at having been read:

Excerpt 7-62. (Brightears/BrightearsMay05_08)

Can't believe someone actually read all of that. That's made me happy :)

Two weeks later, at the end of a long entry divided into paragraphs with various headings describing the content: money, girls, etc., Brightears devotes one paragraph to LJSweet¹⁷, although he uses her real name, “Niamh” as opposed to her LiveJournal user name, LJSweet.(Excerpt 7-63). It could be assumed that LJSweet is the only one in contact with Brightears outside the blog, yet in a later entry, he describes meeting Saila in Dublin and being invited to stay with her and her parents.

Excerpt 7-63. (BrightearsMay24_08)

Niamh gets her own paragraph as I'm fairly sure she's the only person who reads this anymore! Hello! I think Sarah used to read it but I doubt it now with leaving cert and all that jazz. Umm, if you're not Niamh. and you read this do leave a comment :) It'd be nice to know I'm not just talking to myself!

With this entry, Brightears caused his readers to reveal themselves to him again: LJSweet, named as his main and constant reader, the only one he is truly aware of, is the first to comment, joking about the lack of readers and using his real name: “*You're talking to yourself again, Conor*” (LJSweet/ BrightearsMay24_08)

However, later that night, LJSparrow also leaves a comment: “*Hey, I read this too! I'm just less likely to comment, it seems.*” (LJSparrow/BrightearsMay24_08). Early the next

¹⁷ LJSweet. was part of the initial group in 2005; I had contacted her like the others, through a comment on her blog, but had never got a response. She had gradually stopped posting on her blog, then, in 2008, she deleted all her old entries and started afresh, in the same space, as a new blog, and has left it open on purpose, for people who chance upon it. According to her, her main reason is to keep a record of her life; her old friends went back to commenting on her blog: Brightears, Homi and Saila mainly

morning, another friend from the same group, LJJupiter also posts a comment, using humour to convey his message:

Excerpt 7-64. (LJJupiter/BrightearsMay24_08)

I never comment.

...see what I did there?

Saila then comments first on LJJupiter's appearance, as he hasn't been commenting in her own blog either. Once again, she uses his real name and not his LiveJournal user name.

Excerpt 7-65. (Saila/BrightearsMay24_08)

Oh God, it appears that Niall. has been lurkin for the past few years!

Then, in the same comment, Saila explains her presence and reading habits, in a slightly apologetic way: she reads her friends' posts in her LiveJournal RSS feed reader, called the "Friends page"; this does not give her the option of commenting, unless she clicks on the title of the post and arrives in her friends' blog page where she can participate. *"Yeah I read my friends' page, but don't post much"*. (Saila/BrightearsMay24_08)

LJLittle-Orc, who has hardly ever commented on the blog, or indeed on any of the other blogs in the study, posts a comment the following day, two days after the original entry was posted. Like her fellow silent reader LJJupiter, she uses humour to announce her presence:

Excerpt 7-66. (LJLittle-Orc/BrightearsMay24_08)

I read all journals.

=D

I KNOW THINGS.

This is the last comment by a reader, whether or not these were the only readers. Even though I am a reader, I didn't comment as the request was made to his friends, not to unknown readers, and my presence, although known by most, might hinder some participation if it was manifested in writing. Brightear's reaction to the comments was slightly ambiguous: he was obviously pleased that his old friends were still interested enough to keep reading, but felt slightly let down that they hadn't reacted more often to his posts.

Excerpt 7-67. (Brightears/BrightearsMay24_08)

Wow, I'm honestly impressed that at least five people actually read this. Also feel a little bit stalked considering none of you comment ever :p

The use of the word "stalk" in relation to his friends, who are his named readers and whose presence should thus be expected, proves that reading without writing can be experienced as a subtle breach of privacy. This feeling was also expressed in LJLittle-Orc's comment, with the emphasis of capital letters in "I know things", which intended to convey a mock scary tone.

Brightear's perception of an absence of readers is not entirely born out by the number of comments on his blog, as illustrated in Table 7-2 below, for the 36 entries that he wrote from the day he started his blog to the date of the end of data collection, 14 were silent entries, and 22 had comments.

0 comment	1 comment	2 comments	3 comments	4 comments or more	Total
14	9	6	2	5	36

Table 7-2. Comments on Brightears' blog posts

In fact, for the first 4 months of his blog, Brightears wrote ten entries, which are mostly dedicated to his photography. Only 4 of these entries have comments, even though Brightears often addresses his readers directly, and makes it obvious that the

photographs are posted for the readers: “*hope ye like*”, “*hope ye enjoy*”, “*I present to you*”, and in the case of an entry written in August, after 4 months of blogging, Brightears actually indirectly requests comments with the title of the entry: “*Does anyone actually look at this?*” He then posts some photographs, and asks more directly for feedback on them: “*Comments still welcome, I havent given up on this just yet :)*” However, the blog subsequently starts to attract more regular comments, even if Brightears does not perceive the presence of the readers. Corcra also, when she deleted her old entries, claimed that there were not enough comments to warrant saving them, although a look at the number of comments on her blog seemed to contradict her perception.

Excerpt 7-68. (Corcra/CathyAug11_08)

I don't usually save the comments, unless there's something of special note in them. Don't tend to get many comments anyway so it's not much of an issue

This perception is however far from the truth; the number of her silent posts (39) is much lower than that of the posts which started a conversation (62).

The perception of readers on the part of the blogger would thus seem to be related to the amount of comments per post, or the lack of busy conversations, and does not seem influenced by the number of named readers who are part of their “friends lists” and as such figure on their profile pages as declared readers. The apparent break in the trialogical relationship due to the lack of activity of the reader in the social space of the comments leads to a false perception of writing in silence.

7.3 The active reader: participant in the dialogue

7.3.1 Silences and conversations

No matter which genre a particular blog belongs to, the presence of a reader and interaction with readers is of primary importance. This interaction may happen as a conversation scattered throughout blogs and blog posts (Effimova, 2009), but it is also sited in the space of the blog itself, facilitated by a technical affordance: clicking on a link to enter a comments space, which thus becomes a social affordance: the conversation. There is however a strong perception that, aside from A-list blogs which carry a lot of traffic and subsequently give rise to several pages of comments per post, the large majority of blogs are part of the “long tail” (Anderson, 2006) and thus garner but a few page views for each of their posts (Lovink, 2008). Young people’s blogs on LiveJournal may however follow a different perspective: Corcra and her friends, Myriam and Jen have an avowed and reasonably faithful readership in their blogging circle of friends; however, not all posts get comments, on any of the blogs, and indeed there is a marked difference between two types of responses to posts: some posts remain “silent” as it were, they do not start any conversation in the comments page, whereas others are the start of a “busy” interaction, when the conversation moves from one or two turns to over ten contributions. Over the course of the three years of the young people’s blogs, the number of posts which elicited comments was nearly always superior to the number of posts which remained silent.

	Entries	Entries with comments	Silent entries
Brightears	36	22	14
Corcra	101	62	39
Disco	12	5	7
Fry	46	17	29
Homi	160	101	59
Planet	136	69	67
Saila	332	184	148

Table 7-3. Group 1: entries and comments

The young bloggers themselves do not always acknowledge this, and sometimes feel that they are writing in a void. Many of their entries do however constitute the start of a conversation, be it a short interaction with one or two readers, or a lengthy conversation. Indeed some entries, which I highlighted as “busy” entries, numbered more than ten comments.

7.3.2 Anatomy of a conversation

On Livejournal conversations are threaded, which means that a reader can choose to comment on the post, or on somebody else’s comment, thus creating easily identifiable threads in the conversation. The comments section in a busy post on Saila’s blog thus looked like a series of conversational sequences, each dealing with one subject, and following a conversational thread and dynamic (see Appendix A). At the core of the conversation, and the whole comments page, is a strong disagreement. This post is the second of two posts written by Saila on the first day back at school after the summer break. The first one was critical of her new timetable for the year, where an obviously disgruntled Saila complained about schoolwork, classes, etc. The second post, later in

the day, is extremely critical of the particular school that she attends, and which, she feels, does nothing to recognise students' individuality; indeed she sees the school and its ethos as encouraging an upper class conformity, accepting for example that the students dye their hair blonde, but not purple; similarly, she chides the general student body for conforming not only in image, but even with their upper class accents, commonly mocked in Ireland as the Dublin 4 accent. Saila obviously sets herself apart from those students, as she likes funky hair colour and exaggerated makeup. One of Saila's faithful early readers is LJQueen, who does not belong to the group who met in summer camp, but rather is a school friend, and indeed considers herself her "one of her best friends in the whole world". LJQueen is very angry at Saila for this post ridiculing the school they attend, and she takes her to task in her first very strongly worded comment.

Excerpt 7-69. (LJQueen/SailaAug31_05)

Hun, I don't want to insult you, really, I don't but...GET OVER IT! It's school, why the hell do you care so much? You claim not to care what the girls in our year think of you and/or how you look, so why do you care that our school have a problem with you wearing heavy eye make-up?

The long comment keeps reprimanding Saila for being unreasonable, "just stupid" and "highly hypocritical". This sequence is continued by a defensive and yet confrontational response by Saila.

Excerpt 7-70. (Saila/SailaAug31_05)

Good for you if those people don't bother you at all, fair fecks, but they annoy the crap outta me.
I'm not sure if this was entirely clear but half of that entry and the picture is a complete pisstake!

This is followed by another rant from LJQueen.

Excerpt 7-71. (LJQueen/SailaAug31_05)

Bot, don't patronize me by telling me that the Hitler stuff was a joke as if I didn't know...I am sick of being patronized by you

However, Saila does not respond to this; instead the next item in this sequence is written by LJAlbi, a reader who is not known to the girls in real life, but has shown up in one or two of the blogs over the past while. He comes to Saila's defence, chastising LJQueen for taking a funny post much too seriously. He does not know either girl, nor is he aware of their real life relationship, and only reads the online fight; thus, his critical response starts with an admonition to LJQueen as a "random person":

Excerpt 7-72. (LJAlbi/SailaAug31_05)

Wow.

Writing a complaining (which I think was quite funny) journal entry is one thing, but you, random person, really need to lighten up and stop taking other people's LJ so seriously

The appearance of the stranger does not faze LJQueen, who moves the fight to his corner, and throws the insult back at him, starting with a highly indignant WHAT in capital letters, which in internet speak convention, signifies a raised voice, as well as the use of double punctuation, a question mark followed by an exclamation mark, as a sign of strong feelings, in this case annoyance and anger.

Excerpt 7-73. (LJQueen/SailaAug31_05)

WHAT are you talking about?! You, random person, need to find out what you are talking about before you reply with an abusive comment like that

She goes on to berate him for making hasty judgements on people and events he doesn't know, making the point that her comment was meant for one reader only: Saila, not for "randomers".

Excerpt 7-74. (LJQueen/SailaAug31_05)

You are right about one thing, this is none of your business, if it was, you would have infact known that my comment was a continuation of a conversation we had had that day, the comment was for her to read, not for randomers to give me abuse about. She understands exactly what I meant in that comment and, to be honest, I don't care if you don't.

She then makes a difference between unknown people “you don’t know me, and I sure as hell don’t know you” and other habitual readers, who would have a better understanding of the context of the comments. There is thus a clear demarcation between the accepted and acceptable readers and commenters, and those who can read but should not intrude on conversations. The sequence ends with an apology from the unknown reader.

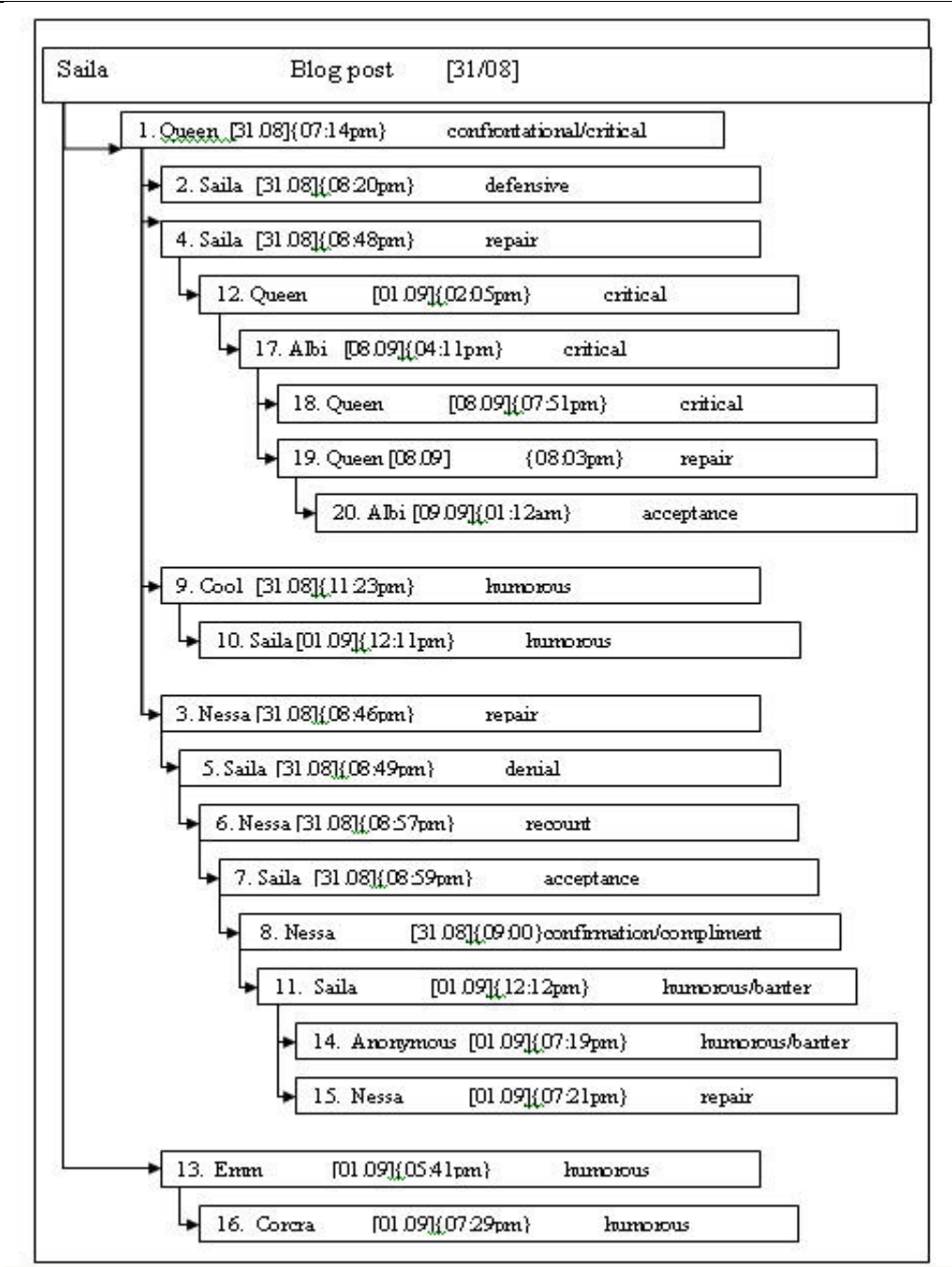


Figure 7-2. . conversation sequences in sequential order

The diagram, and indeed the actual visualisation of the conversation show four very obviously distinct sequences in the long conversation that follows this post. Each sequence has two or three participants, Saila and a reader, or in the case of the first sequence, Saila and a reader, then two readers replying to each other. However, the affordance of this thematic organisation of the conversation, if it makes the reading of

thematic threads or sequences much easier, does in fact hide the temporal reality of the conversation. A closer look at the temporal traces left by the technological artefact reveals a different conversation in real time; if we follow the date and time markings on the comments, the conversation is revealed as a series of intermeshed sequences, each thematic sequence is marked by a colour, and the order of the comments is here chronological, showing that the confrontational sequence, between Saila and LJQueen, and then between the unknown reader, LJAlbi, and LJQueen, does in fact begin and end the conversational thread, but is broken by three other conversational sequences which are not directly related. This can in fact explain the silence of the other friends/readers, who would not necessarily have been aware of the presence of the unknown reader: his comment appears more than one week after the initial post, and exactly seven days after the last comment, which Corcra has left. LJQueen, however, may have been notified of a response to her comment, or she may have been told offline by Saila, who sees her everyday at school. Indeed both of them hold conversations throughout different media, as she pointed out in this sequence, her comment was a continuation of a conversation.

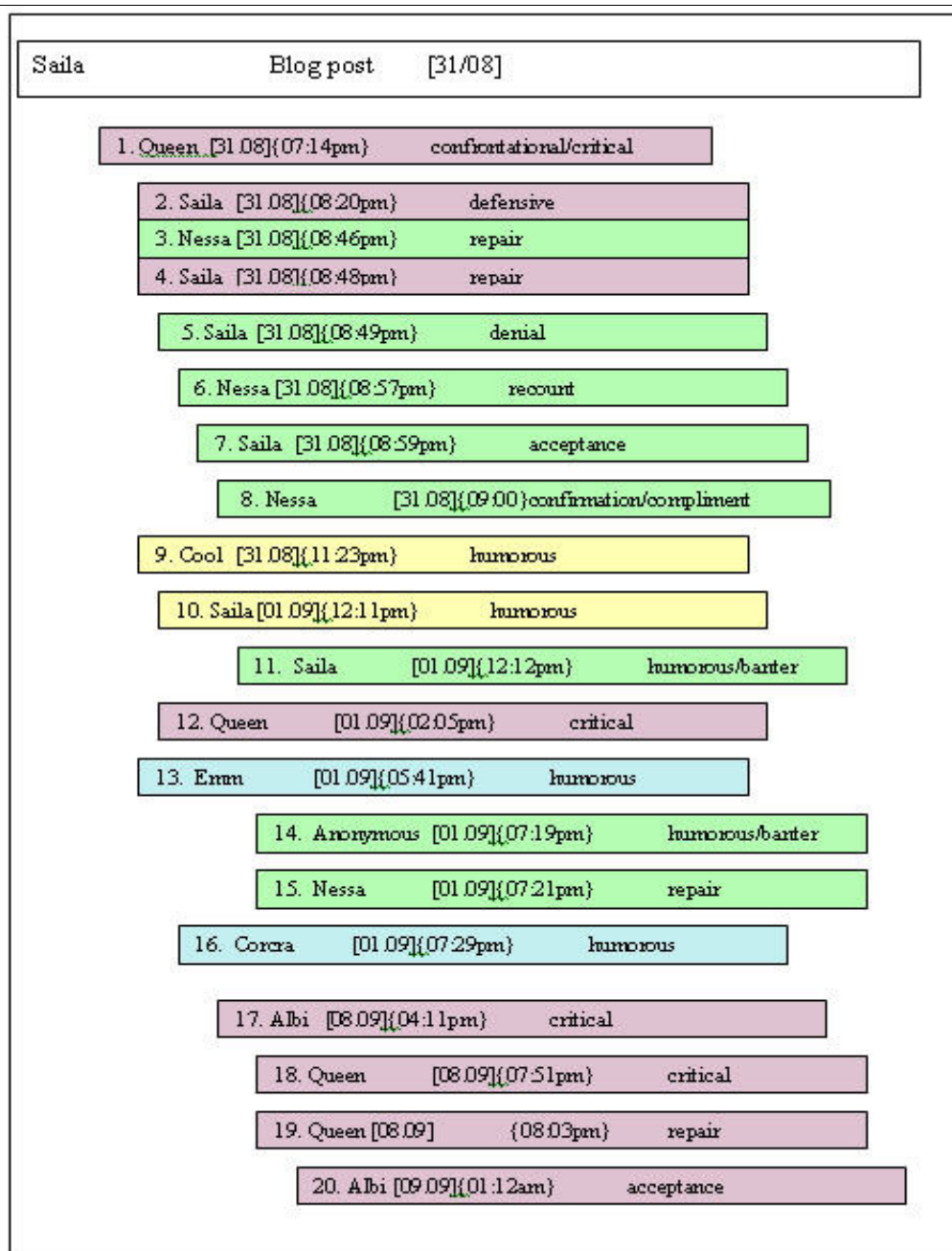


Figure 7-3. conversation sequences in order of publishing

A similar nested conversation happened in a busy post on Planet's blog. . It seems that Gavin, her boyfriend, had changed throughout the years, started drinking, partying, taking some recreational drugs, so that Planet eventually broke up with him, although she was still very much in love. She subsequently had another boyfriend, this time from the summer camp group, who shortly afterwards broke up with her. In this entry, she

pours her heart out and asks for advice about her love life, as she is still very upset from breaking up with her first boyfriend. Indeed there is no mention of the second boyfriend in the text of the entry, which is solely devoted to Planet's feelings for Gavin. The opening sentence of the entry may be heartfelt, but it is also a means of focusing the readers' attention:

Excerpt 7-75. (PlanetFeb11_07)

FUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFU
CKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCK
FUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCKFUCK

This is followed by the words: "*have a rant*", and then a link, which says "read more", to the full text in the comments page. Below the cut is one last sentence that the readers can see on their RSS readers:

Excerpt 7-76. (PlanetFeb11_07)

I just wish I wasn't such a goddamn fucking waste of people's time.

The first paragraph in the hidden text is a long question, with 29 interrogative clauses starting with "why". The next paragraph addresses the readers directly:

Excerpt 7-77. (PlanetFeb11_07)

Guys, I'm seriously not getting over Gavin very well at all. Any advice? Anything at all?

The comments that follow this entry are all very supportive and kind, and some affect a kind of counselling, reassuring Planet that her friends love her, and that she has done the right thing, even if it is painful.

There are also some interesting sequences in the conversation here: whilst all the participants talk about the same thing, which is the main message of the entry, a breakup and feelings of loss and inadequacy that result, there are also conversations

within conversations: a second sequence is intertwined and contained within the first sequence, as a personal dialogue between the blogger and one of her friends about another boyfriend. This is obviously seen as a private matter by the other readers and commenters, who do not take part in that sequence of conversation.

Excerpt 7-78. (Homi/PlanetFeb11_07)

Being honest I was glad it was you who got with Steven. Even though I wasn't exactly thrilled with the situation, I couldn't dislike you for it because there's nothing to dislike about you, you're too good a person, and I couldn't exactly blame him for wanting to be with you.

Excerpt 7-79. (Planet/PlanetFeb11_07)

Sorry about the Steven. thing. Its probably for the best he dumped me, for everyone's sake, I'm sorry anything ever happened, it wasn't fair on you or him or anyone. Bleh. No more boys

Excerpt 7-80. (Homi/PlanetFeb11_07)

And don't be sorry about that. Hey, at least now we can get together.

None of the others intervene, then or later. Until Planet at the end comes back to sequence B conversation:

Excerpt 7-81. (Planet/PlanetFeb11_07)

2007-02-14 10:29 pm Oh general announcement to make. None of the above rant was about Steven, apparently he was rather afraid some of it might have been. But I wouldn't bitch about Steven on livejournal because that would be ridiculous, or at all because to be honest there's not really much of a reason to. He rocks my world despite him not being my boyfriend anymore and always has because he is a wonderful person and friend. So yeah, just thought I'd put that out there and save everyone a lot of confusion.

This seems to acknowledge the fact that two strands of conversation, the two sequences interwoven, one in the other, could lead to confusion for the other participants, not engaged in the dialogic act. It also points at the fact that other means of communication

are concurrent within the timeframe of the conversation (4 days) as Steven. has obviously contacted either the blogger herself or one of the group to express his unease after reading the entry and the conversation (he is only mentioned in the conversation, in the second sequence, and not at all in the entry) he obviously belongs to the LiveJournal blogging group.

The use or non-use of this affordance: direct reply to a participant, changes the dynamics and shape of the conversation. In another busy post on Myriam's blog, on December 06, the conversation is started by the blog post, relating the very scary presence of a scorpion on a plane, when Myriam and some of her friends were on their way back from a working trip in Borneo. The tone of the post is humorous, Myriam obviously delighting in the telling of the tale. This tone is kept throughout the comments by all the readers: the first one to comment does so with references to many songs by a band called The Scorpions, engaging Myriam in a guessing game. The second sequence in the conversation comes from Myriam's old friend, LJMrLinus., who makes reference to a well-known film, which had been released in August: *Snakes on a Plane*.

Excerpt 7-82. (LJMrLinus/MyriamDec18_06)

Dec. 18th, 2006 12:51 pm You should of just said "I've had it with this motherfucking scorpion on this motherfucking plane", shot the window with your gun and then threw the thing out. It's that easy

Nearly a week later, another contributor sees LJMrLinus's comment and replies, but does not use the thread function, and instead posts after the latest comment, although referring to LJMrLinus's LiveJournal name and his comment:

Excerpt 7-83. (LJcpr/MyriamDec18_06)

Dec. 27th, 2006 04:01 am darn that LJMrLinus. for having the same idea and access to the internet before me!!! i was so gonna say that but alas, I figured that someone else got to it first. im really glad you didnt get stung by the brown stringy scorpion. it sounds like an old rag doll. love ya

The conversation is thus kept in consecutive time, each comment following the other, and enabling a new reader to follow the timeline of the conversation rather than follow a thematic reading. In this particular instance, the dialogue affordance is not taken up: the latest commenter, LJcpr, does not make use of the thread function, does not answer LJMrLinus. directly, does not flag her comment as belonging to the same sequence of conversation. In not taking up the affordance, she enables a greater flow of the conversation, thus more similar to spoken conversations where topics and sequences can be interwoven.

7.3.3 Conversations and repairs

Whereas the author of the blog can identify and use the narrative affordance of changing or amending her entries, even a long time after they are written, the functionalities of the comments pages do not allow the same changes. In the comments page, the commenter can only erase her comment, not amend it, and this leads the commenters to add a second comment when they want to change or clarify something in their written contribution. These second comments are best viewed as “repair” comments, in the tradition of conversation analysis. These come under two main categories: some repairs are felt necessary because of grammatical or spelling errors, and can be self-repair, i.e. a reader repairing her own mistake, or repair of someone else’s comment, i.e. a reader correcting another commenter’s or the blogger’s mistake. Other repairs occur because

of technological problems, which are often seen as mistakes occurring within the platform.

Saila participates in a heated discussion on her own blog:

Excerpt 7-84. (Saila/SailaAug31_05)

We don't have Swastika's on our uniform either! I was taking the piss, no I really don't think we are about to be handed out copies of 'Mein Kopf'

Twenty minutes later, she adds another comment underneath her first one:

Excerpt 7-85. (Saila/SailaAug31_05)

*Mein Kampf

This self-repair is however not accepted by one of her readers, who had posted a comment two minutes earlier:

Excerpt 7-86. (LJNessa/SailaAug31_05)

It's not 'Mein Kopf', afaik it's 'Mein Kampf'. yes, I felt the need to say it here, and on IRC. *nods*

It is thus apparent, from LJNessa's contribution, that not only is she "repairing" the mistake in the space of the blog, where it has occurred, but she had also contacted Saila through a chat facility to inform her of her mistake. The two girls proceed to playfully argue as to who was the first one to repair the mistake.

Homi also corrects a spelling error she made, and does so in the comments section, she does not go back to the entry to edit it: "*Just realised I mis-spelt Harry and bus ('nus' 8)*" (Homi/HomiJan21_05). She then adds another comment, for another spelling error, which again she does not edit in the text of the entry: "*Also 'fort' instead of 'for', and 'blinfold'.*" (Homi/HomiJan21_05). This introduces a topic of conversation on texting, and spelling, which takes over from the subjects introduced in the text of the entry.

Most instances of repair of someone else's mistakes are good-natured and sometimes even humorous, as Jen's contribution on Myriam's blog. In this case, she is not correcting the form or spelling of Myriam's sentence, but rather a nonsensical meaning due to a mix-up in words.

Excerpt 7-87. (Jen/MyriamApr11_06)

Sunday was spent, predictably, recovering from the effects of Monday
Yeah, that time-travel'll knock you out something fierce.

7.4 Technological affordances and constraints: "It won't let me..."

7.4.1 Individualisation and semiotic affordances

One of those is the personalisation and customisation of their reading, the "Friends Page", which is in fact an RSS feed reader. A link on the blogger's home page leads her to this other page, which displays all the recent updates from the blogs of her LiveJournal friends. Because this page is situated in the space of her own blog, it bears all the visual and design characteristics of her blog and blog entries. When her friends' blog entries are viewed through this page, they become text only, all the visual elements of the original blog design are gone, and the text of the entry is thus displayed in the style of the reader's own blog, with the colours and images she has chosen as background, blurring the distinction between her own text and the texts of which she is a reader. However, this technological affordance may in fact hamper or disable the social affordance which is the conversation. Moreover, this function deletes the multimodal elements intrinsic to the other blogger's text, thus blurring the distinctions between blogs. It becomes the text of another, but with the blogger's design imposed on it, which Saila regrets:

Excerpt 7-88. (SailaNov10_06)

People have very pretty Livejournals. I'm only realising this now because I always read things on my friends page which is my LJ style so I don't get to see others. It's nice to go to someone's LJ though and see what they have written in the context of the style of their journal and with other posts, it makes it seem more...journaly.

The “prettiness” which is lost for Saila represents all the visual elements which were chosen to make a blog: the colour, the pictures, the general layout, even the title disappear when the text of the entry is read in the RSS reader, the Friends’ page.

A link to the original entry is only activated for two reasons: if you want to see the blog in its context, or if the reader wants to participate in the conversation. This decision necessitates two clicks: one to lead to the original entry, and one to lead to the comments space. The affordance of interactivity is still present, and can be taken up by the blogger; however, in this case, it can be argued that there are two distinct interactivity affordances nested within one another: that of selective interactivity and of productive interactivity (Ryan, 2004). The affordance of selective interactivity, which is realized by clicking on the link, and within or behind that affordance is that of productive activity, a social affordance which creates conversations between readers and bloggers.

In this case, with the use of the reading technological affordance, the dialogical relationship between the reader and the technology hampers the dialogical relationship between the writer and the reader as well as helping it. This affordance reinforces the traditional writer/reader relationship, where one writes and one reads, and ensures that the reader never misses an instalment of the blogger’s entries; at the same time, the affordance thus realised by the reader also hampers the interaction made possible by

the digital space, where one writes, and the reader writes back. The literary scheme is improved, but the social (or epistolary) scheme is broken.

For Homi, it even broke the temporal chain of her reading, when she realised that the RSS feed for Saila's blog was no longer working, and technology has failed her: she reads her friend's blog posts/entries on her "friends page ", and these have not been displayed for the past 2 months - she has missed reading Saila's blog since January, and has had to catch up.

Excerpt 7-89. (Homi/SailaFeb26_08)

You don't appear on my friends page anymore for some reason, and since you hardly ever post I don't check here a lot, so I thought I'd check quickly... And then it turned out I had all of your posts since January to read. God, way to deprive me of sleep, Ciara. -.- (

7.4.2 Social affordances: online communities and links to other spaces

There is moreover a difference between the two groups of bloggers. Saila's group have come to LiveJournal together, or through a LiveJournal community dedicated to the young people who have attended one particular summer camp, throughout the years. It could be seen as mainly "friendship-driven" (Ito et al, 2009). Even though some of the bloggers may have started interacting online, and then met in real life at reunions etc., they are mostly known to each other, or at least are friends of friends in "real life" and have joined LiveJournal and started writing at the instigation of their friends. Their blogs are thus a means of interaction and communication with each other, as well as a diary-style artefact, linked to narrative of the self and memory. The second group however is slightly different. Jen and Myriam are friends since primary school, and have joined LiveJournal around the same time. However, the attraction was initially sparked by their interest in fan-fiction, and more particularly Harry Potter fan-fiction.

They both joined communities related to this from the very start, and gradually joined other communities, having been initiated to these and their culture from the start. This also explains their interest in writing, and their high literacy levels, as their fan-fiction tastes run to the better and more polished works. One of their first creations on LiveJournal was a blog dedicated to gathering particularly bad or funny examples of fan-fiction. By the very nature of their involvement in communities, they started interacting with people they did not know in real life, even if this interaction is at first limited to the communities, and only slowly arrived into their own blogs. Their circle of readers and commenters, which contains many friends from their school and respective college years, also grows to include friends whom they met through LiveJournal and then in real life, when it appeared that they attended the same college.

Excerpt 7-90. (Jen/JenMarch17_07)

Actually, we met on linguaphiles, got talking because of Aine's clearly Irish username and found out we had folks and colleges in common! Didn't work out we had the same birthday until much later.

From the start, their circle of readers is thus less clearly delimited to “real life” friends. It is also a group which changes throughout the timescale of the blog. On one occasion, Jen writes an entry entitled “*Explanation about the dancy stuff*”, where she notes:

Excerpt 7-91. (JenFeb08_07)

Realised that I hadn't explained about the bellydance thing for a while, and there were some new folks reading, so..,

7.5 Conclusion

The trialogical relationship within the blog is not always a smooth one, as hidden affordances are not realized, and constraints, which are the other side of those

technological affordances, are sometimes hampering the relationship. Within the literary layer, which is seen as journal and memory by the bloggers, the affordance of permanence both helps and constrains the creation of the semiotic artefact. In the social layer, the activity or passivity of readers can sometimes be a result of affordances being taken up, such as the affordance of personalised reading which slows down the taking up of nested affordances of participation.

For Jen and Myriam, the high literacy shown in the literary layer of their blog, coupled with dialogism of form and content, is allied to a high digital literacy in the technological layer, as they make full use of most functions, and identify and take up technological, social and semiotic affordances. This balance within a trialogical relationship has helped them to create and maintain their blogs within a long chronotope, fed by constant interaction.

Within the second group, several sub-groups emerged: Fry and Disco, whose entries were not highly literary, and tended towards orality, also showed lower digital literacy levels within the confines of their blogs, affordances were not obviously identified, Disco mistrusting the permanence of a non-material artefact. The social layer of their blog also contained minimal interaction with their readers, and both blogs ended early or with very few entries. For the others, the blogs seemed to reach a natural end, as the end of a biographical era happened with the separation of the group of friends which heralded the dissolution of the group of readers. With no regular and active readers, Homi and Saila moved to create other blogs, creating different chronotopes. Corcra and Brightears transformed their blog into a more personal artefact where the narrative is monologic, and both blogs gradually faded.

In all cases, the concept of time emerged as a constant in the creation and maintenance of the blog, and the maintenance of the group of readers which sustained the blog. As one of the axes of the chronotope, time is thus not only the permanent online digital time which will maintain the presence of the artefact, but within that time/heterochrony are other smaller timescales, that of biographical time of the life narrative and its attendant smaller scale narrative events, but also the timescale of the group/community of readers, linked to the trialogical relationship between blogger, reader and technology.

Chapter 8 Management of privacy

Chapter 7 established the presence of readers on young people's LiveJournal blogs, as well as their interaction with the blogger through technology, in a trialogical relationship which results in the creation of a virtual semiotic artefact. The creation of that life-writing artefact was linked to the concept of time within the chronotope. In Chapter 8, the concept of space of the chronotope will help to consider the management of privacy and the control of information through the trialogical prism.

The ubiquity of the internet in our daily lives has led to a common worry about privacy issues; amongst adults there is the perception that young people are not concerned by privacy issues, and are opening up their private lives in intimate details to the whole world. Lenhart's (2007) study of young Americans' use of social network sites found quite the opposite, and that most young people are actually aware of privacy issues and concerned by them. She reports various views on privacy and various approaches to manage privacy issues, all linked to context and background. However, information flow and information disclosure to known or unknown readers is not the only privacy issue in social network sites, and certainly not in blogging. Our life-stories are necessarily linked to those of the people close to us, and thus life writing brings its own ethical problems, in terms of truth, trust, and privacy (Eakin, 2004). In the context of a diary-type blog, and in the presence of readers, how do young bloggers view and manage their privacy? When it comes to privacy online, we should also highlight the role of the technology, and of the stakeholders in that technology: the commercial element of blogging and social network sites should not be overlooked, as pointed out

by danah boyd (2010), who compares some technology companies to digital paparazzi; it often seems that these companies are pushing the pervasive element of digital communication, making a default setting as public rather than private. Affordances for privacy are thus often hidden, and need to be identified and taken up by users.

This chapter will first look at how the sense of place may influence perceptions of privacy, and how these in turn can be affected by intersections between digital spaces, and between online and offline spaces. The second part of the chapter will consider privacy affordances linked to the platform and how these are identified and taken up by the bloggers, and it will then identify other privacy methods which may be employed throughout the blogs in order to enable the flow of personal, intimate or confidential information. The last part of the chapter will consider privacy issues which may arise from writing and publishing autobiographical narratives which necessarily cross into other people's stories.

8.1 Places and people

8.1.1 A space of one's own

The concept of space is very much linked to that of privacy. Indeed Altman (1975) sees privacy as dialectic, dynamic **boundary** regulation process, and the concept of privacy has also been linked to that of physical isolation (Inness, 1992). If the bloggers in this study all wrote about their blog as a journal or a diary (see chapter 7), they also used metaphors of space or place to refer to the blog or indeed to the blogging platform. It is brought up by participants in the comments on my blog, when they differentiate between **here** (on LiveJournal) or **there**, on DeviantArt, or on Bebo. Bruckmann (2004) notes that the metaphors which we use to conceptualise the internet also shape

our approach to it, notably from an ethical point of view. This conceptualisation of the blog as a personal space carries expectations of privacy (Ess et al., 2002) How the young bloggers perceive the LiveJournal site will influence their approach to privacy and the take up of affordances.

Brightears talks about “*here*” (BrightearsJan30_08) as “*the best place to write*” (BEMay-5_08), Corcra refers to “*this here LJ*” (CorcraMar11_08). When yet another friend from real life opens an account and starts a blog, Myriam refers to the “*vortex*” of LiveJournal, towards which more and more of her friends are being dragged. Planet identifies LiveJournal as the easiest place to keep her diary:

Excerpt 8-1. (PlanetJan02_08)

I'm bad at keeping regular diaries so I suppose writing here is easier, only a few minutes when I'm online and I'm done.).

For bloggers and also active readers, commenters on each other's blogs, LiveJournal is thus a place to write, and indeed a place to “hang out”. On Jen's blog, a reader recognises someone else's name and addresses him directly, coining the word “ljsphere” on the model of “blogosphere”: “*cp, fancy seeing you here! small ljsphere, eh?*” (LJBadger/JenFeb08_07).

A similar incident happens to Myriam offline, which she then related on her blog: she goes to a party where “*everyone there seemed to be from LJ.*” She knew some of the people there under their LiveJournal names, as she had encountered them in conversations in various comments spaces.

Excerpt 8-2. (MyriamApr11_06)

I was introduced under my real name to one guy who looked kind of blank until they told him I was Myriam, at which point he realised he'd actually conversed with me before. Hee.

These two chance meetings show the blurring of boundaries online – where two bloggers find that they have a friend in common, but also the blurring of online/offline boundaries, when friends of friends online become friends offline. Although the two spaces occasionally intersect, LiveJournal is seen as a separate space where the bloggers spend time with their friends. Moreover, the social network aspects of the platform, including the list of friends (see Chapter 7) all point to a “safe” place. Indeed this place is considered as safer than the offline world for some subjects. Jen, who is a dedicated belly dancer, finds it difficult to discuss her passion in real life, where she feels people may get “the wrong impression”. She does however post pictures of her dances on her blog, and concludes: “*but hey, this is LJ, right?*”

8.1.2 Friends, family, and affordances

This sense of a private place can sometimes be revealed as an illusion. One such event happened on Jen’s blog, where she posted a humorous piece on the Irish mythical figure Cuchulain, inspired by a remark from a girl in her class.

Excerpt 8-3. (JenFeb08_05)

What exactly was it about Celtic Civ that she though would count as modern history? The sack of Rome and all that head hunting didn't exactly happen a hundred years ago.

Cu Chulainn sat astride his noble steed, gazing far into the distance with a telescope, and observing his amassed armies milling about on the plains of... er, Leitrim. His brow was furrowed. He adjusted his tri-cornered hat and said to his faithful aide, who stood beside him on a frisky piebald gelding of about 11 hands, "Take this down".

"Yes, sir!" said his aide, and grabbed a notebook and a fountain pen, before remembering that writing wouldn't arrive in Ireland until the Christians came in the fourth century. He threw away the paper and began feverishly committing the great general's words to memory.

The first comment on this piece comes from an anonymous reader:

Excerpt 8-4. (Anonymous/JenFeb08_05)

Hey there, I like your style. But I don't think CuCulainn had a horse (I don't think you Irish Celts had them), only a hurley and a faithful hound (or am I mixing metaphors). He certainly didn't have a hat (check the GPO to confirm). Did CuCulainn fight the Romans??? Now you have me confused...

An hour later, Myriam takes exception to that comment, although in a very subtle and ironic manner, pointing out that the intention of the author had been humorous: “*He didn't have a telescope either...*” (Myriam/JenFeb08_05)

The conversation goes on between Jen, Myriam and another of their friends, LJLittlemouse, who is also a college friend of Jen's. However, in the locked space of Myriam's blog, another conversation continues between the two girls, about the anonymous comment (see Appendix B); they write their own comments there, safe in the knowledge that the anonymous reader won't be able to read or participate in this conversation. Even though Myriam's blog post is totally unrelated to the matter, dealing as it does with the lack of breakfast cereal in her cupboard, Jen posts this comment, some thirty minutes after Myriam's comment on Jen's post:

Excerpt 8-5. (Jen/MyriamFeb09_05)

Did you see the message that anonymous person left me?? WTF is not the word for it.

And what really pisses me off is that I want to snap at them "Of course the Irish bloody well had horses", but now I'm scratching my head and wondering if they did.

The comments on this comment thread, in this safer place, are much different in tone and vocabulary than those addressed to the unknown reader. Myriam agrees and reinforces the very negative view of the anonymous commenter:

Excerpt 8-6. (Myriam/MyriamFeb09_05)

Yeah...what a complete prat. I very nearly told them so, but chickened out.

Having vented their annoyance, both girls proceed to a more general banter, until the afternoon, when Jen comes back, having discovered the identity of the anonymous commenter: her mother. However, she prefaces this revelation with a message from her mother to Myriam, who is well known to the family since she was a child.

Excerpt 8-7. (Jen/MyriamFeb09_05)

Btw, my mam says that Madchen Amick is in ER these days. (And she forgives you for calling her a prat. Tee hee. She was attempting to be controversial. But hasn't forgotten.)

Myriam is suitably mortified, not so much by the presence of Jen's mother, but by her own response to her, not at all indicative of their usual interaction.

Excerpt 8-8. (Myriam/MyriamFeb09_05)

That was her? did you know that when you enticed me into bitching about her?
headdesk

Jen's mother is actually a regular reader of Jen's blog, as is her father. A few days after this incident, Jen's mother decided to open a LiveJournal account; she only posted two entries, but it enabled her to leave comments under her LiveJournal name, no longer anonymous. Jen obviously shared her blog posts with her parents from very early on, as she pointed out that she was showing the post and the comments to her father when her mother revealed that she was the anonymous commenter.

Excerpt 8-9. (Jen/MyriamFeb09_05)

Actually I didn't know until last night when I was showing my dad the damn post, and mam walked in and vaguely said she'd left me a controversial message. She found the whole thing amusing, anyway... I think that was what she was going for. And I didn't "entice" you into bitching about anybody! You're responsible for your own bitching, lady!

Jen subsequently went back to her initial blog post, and took the unusual step of amending her post, adding a note identifying her mother to her other readers. She does however flag the fact that this is a postdated part of the entry:

Excerpt 8-10. (JenFeb08_05)

ETA: The odd person that commented earlier turned out to be my mother. Call off the hounds! (She still maintains they didn't have horses, although we're trying to convince her on the telescope point.)

This episode was thus precipitated by the non-realisation of a technological affordance, through a lack of digital literacy on the part of Jen's mother: her choice of an anonymous comment sparked an incident which pushed both Jen and Myriam to manage their privacy through the use of other affordances of the platform, by using the technological lock affordance, as well as the more social distributed narrative affordance: they took their private conversation to the locked space of Myriam's blog, where only the readers known to both of them could follow the thread of the story, thus avoiding the anonymous commenter's eyes. Moreover, the technological mishap was also repaired in the initial blog post, the post-dated identification of the commenter changing the text of the entry a day after its initial posting.

If Jen seems to be the only one with parents reading, or at least openly reading, there are some brothers and sisters who show up on some other blogs, having obviously been told by their siblings. Saila's sister is also a blogger, figures in the Friends list, and sometimes comments. Myriam has some difficulty with sharing her posts with her own siblings in the early days of her blog:

Excerpt 8-11. (MyriamDec02_05)

I have semi-come-out as a blogger to my brother, but am still chickening out of actually urging him to get an LJ - chiefly because I'd have over 300 entries to trawl

though and refilter anything I didn't want him to see. I think I will once he gets internet at home, though, simply because a journal written by him is something I'd really, really want to read. If any of you home-friends would rather I didn't, though, because you'd find it weird or something, just say so and I won't.

Myriam is thus protecting her friends' privacy, asking for their permission to let her older brother read her blog – and the comments her friends would leave there. The author and the readers are thus dialogically creating rules and norms for the artifact they are creating. In this case Myriam is very conscious of the permeable boundaries between online and offline spaces: she is concerned about her “home-friends” rather than internet-friends, as they share an offline space with this new anticipated reader. In this way, parents are rarely welcome on their children's blogs. Indeed, when it came to asking for permission for using the blog, and for the need for aliases, Saila pointed out that anonymity was important to her as she did not want her parents to be aware of her blog posts.

8.1.3 Strangers in our midst

The most telling event in terms of recognition of a threat to privacy has to be the presence of an unknown and maybe unwanted reader within the comments section. Until this happens, the imagined reader has stayed a blurry image. The presence of an unwanted person has caused Homi and Saila to lock their blogs, in both cases because someone known to them in real life but not expected in their online spaces had suddenly appeared. Myriam understands this possible threat of mixing the real life space and the digital space, when she considers inviting her brother to read her blog. Similarly, Homi had created lists to avoid showing all her entries to people she had added to her friends' list out of politeness. In the early days of their blogs, both Jen and Myriam, who had

invited other friends to create blogs and read their own, kept the journals a secret from their then boyfriends.

The anonymous reader is rarely present as an active reader on the blogs in this study. There are however several instances, which come under three categories: the reader is unknown but not entirely anonymous, as she has a LiveJournal name and is thus linked to a blog or at least a profile page. One such reader comments on Brightears' blog, which she found whilst randomly looking through journals. Her comment is innocuous, and Brightears writes a welcoming response to it. Another such reader is LJAlbi, an Australian blogger who for a while posted comments on Saila's and Planet's blogs. Although Planet can be aware and careful of what she writes (8.2.3), she is however willing to engage in conversation with people she does not know offline, as evidenced with her online exchanges with LJAlbi, who seems to have found Planet and Saila by chance. He appears in Planet's blog in August 05, in the comments section of an entry on love at first sight and the eternal question as to whether it exists or not. Some of his comments have flirtatious or sexual undertones. Much later, in 2007, an unknown LiveJournal user leaves a nice and supportive comment on one of Planet's entries, but she does not engage in conversation.

Another category of unknown readers, who comment as "Anonymous", have been invited by the blogger to read, but do not have a LiveJournal account. These are offline friends, who read the blog and leave a comment. The text of their comment makes it clear that they know the blogger, and that they have shared in the event which is described. They also often sign their name at the end of the comment, or introduce themselves at the beginning.

Excerpt 8-12. (Anonymous1/BrightearsJan30_08)

I cannot believe you made me read all that! you know what Im like! I dont read, often!

Excerpt 8-13. (Anonymous1/BrightearsJan30_08)

I would actually like to do this as-well because so much happens that gets so vague its strange! I might start doing stuff, hm-mm think I'll go eat something now

Excerpt 8-14. (Anonymous2/BrightearsJan30_08)

its me chris.....ehhhhh,preety awesome website ya got goin on her...kinda wierd being inside your mind,but also fascinating!!!...soulja boy dance

The third category of anonymous readers is due to some glitches in the technology or in the use of the technology, when regular readers and commenters fail to log in with their LiveJournal name, and their comment thus appears as anonymous. Those are always the subject of a second, follow-up comment to repair the initial mistake: “*oops, forgot to sign in there*” (Planet/PlanetAug22_05)., “<-- *Eh, that was me there*” (LJBalin/PlanetFeb06_07).

However, the scarcity of anonymous comments does not preclude the presence of anonymous and silent readers, like those whose presence in a space where they were not expected caused some of the blogs to be locked.

8.1.4 Trajectories through digital spaces

One of the first affordances for blogs in general was the creation of links to web pages of interest, blogs being then both a memory aid, a means to find a way back to an interesting page or space, and also a means of sharing those pages or spaces of interest. Only Saila has a list of links on her sidebar, linking to places she found interesting when she started her LiveJournal. One is to her DeviantArt account, another to her Bebo page. Similarly, Corcra links to a central page which holds the links to all her digital

spaces: DeviantArt, LastFM, Bebo. Brightears does not have any static links in his blog layout, but he regularly links to his digital photography spaces, and to YouTube or Bebo. The young bloggers all have much larger numbers of “friends” listed on their social network pages than on their blog, and do not use the spaces in the same way. Bebo was the social network of preference during the time when they were most active on their blogs, and they allowed me to visit their Bebo page. They did not make use of the blogging facility on Bebo, and did not link to their LiveJournal blog from their Bebo page. However, they seemed to use the social network page as a much more multimodal space, posting numerous photographs, and imbedding music videos. The Livejournal blogs sometimes mention that photographs from a party are on Bebo, where the readers are expected to find them. There are thus links to other digital spaces from the blogs, but never from those other digital spaces to the blog. The large numbers of “friends” on Bebo or Facebook are not led to the more narrative space of the blog, and the written narratives are felt to be more personal than the stories told by the photographs.

8.1.5 Circles of friends

The blog, as a narrative and conversation with a few friends, is thus at the centre of concentric circles illustrated in Figure 8-1 below; when all the privacy affordances are taken up, the centre is thus the LiveJournal friends who are also friends in real life, and who have access to all the digital spaces as well as other means of communication – instant messaging, SMS messages, telephone and of course face to face conversations. These close friends, with so much access to the blogger, can be seen as forming what Matsuda (2005) calls Full Time Intimate Communities (FTIC). The second circle comprises of friends of friends found on LiveJournal, or people from communities of

interest to the young bloggers, who are also named as friends, and thus can gain access to locked entries. The next circle would then be online strangers, whose appearance is rarely felt as a threat, and the last circle is made of people known in real life and who are not welcome as readers of the blogs; these are people who hold some power over the young people – teachers, parents, but also schoolmates who are not considered as friends and who might actually be mentioned in some of the entries. Saila for example started her blog with a very close friend from school, LJQueen, with whom she physically writes some of the entries, and with some close friends from camp with whom she can stay in touch thanks to the blog. Another circle is then the friends of those friends, who are also on LiveJournal and are thus “added” to the friends list. Then, a larger circle consists of online readers, LiveJournal members, and another one refers to offline people who come online, and are rarely considered as readers by the bloggers, but are often the ones whose presence is most resented when it is unexpected and uninvited.

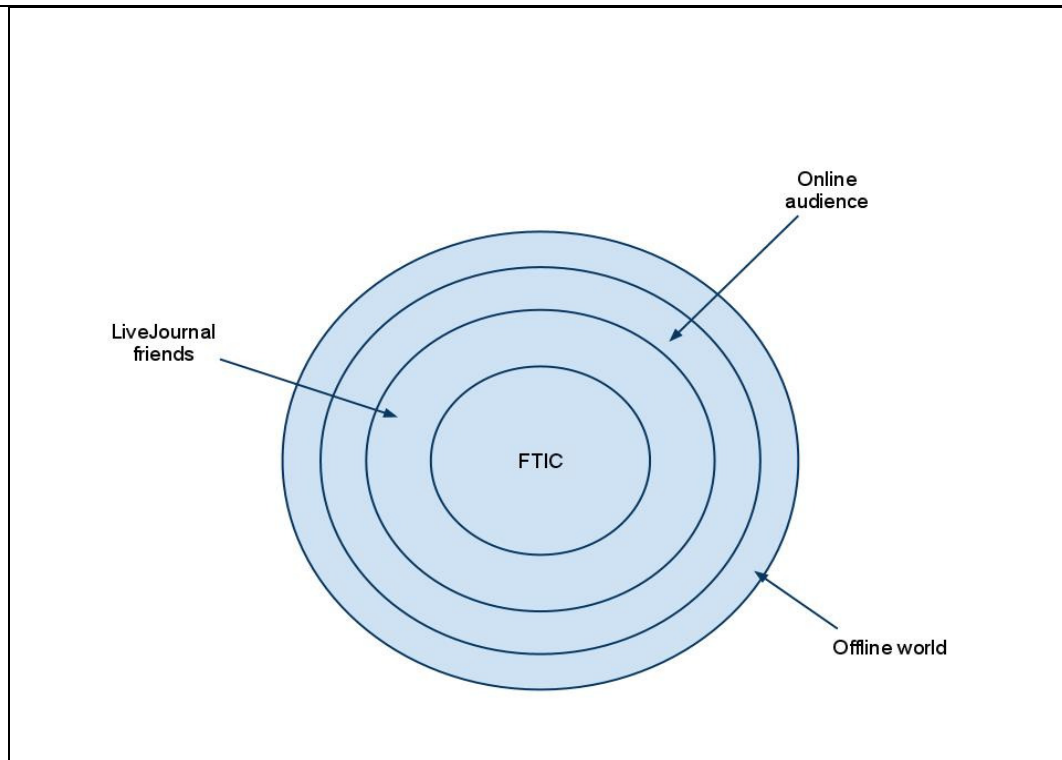


Figure 8-1. Circles of privacy

The boundaries of these concentric circles are blurred at times, and can also change. Friends disappear from the online friends list, others can move from online friend to FTIC if the offline relationship also changes. The blogger can also on occasion decide to amend the list of friends, mostly in the case of LiveJournal friends who originated online, and who were “friended” through their appurtenance to communities of interest. Myriam thus operates a “culling” of her friends list, mostly because she feels that there are now so many that she cannot keep up with all their blogs.

8.2 Locks and keys

Most social network sites or blogging platforms offer some form of privacy settings, even if they are sometimes hidden and automatically set for the highest public setting. LiveJournal has long been regarded as a site with a good range of privacy settings, which are not limited to a binary set of public or private.

8.2.1 Names, usernames and aliases

When each young blogger joined LiveJournal and started their blog, they also chose a LiveJournal user name. Whenever these are used, they identify them as bloggers, and also link back to their blog whenever they leave a comment. These are easily identifiable, as they are preceded by a small icon and always appear in blue, indicating a clickable link, and they are often accompanied by an icon chosen by the blogger to represent them, as illustrated in Figure 8-2



Figure 8-2. Username and icon

Using their usernames, the bloggers thus take up not only the technological affordance of the link, but also a social affordance, as these identify them as bloggers, as members of communities and as friends of other LiveJournal bloggers. Whenever these user names are shown in comments, they are also linked to their chosen icon. Most of the young bloggers use several icons with their names, changing icons even within a conversation. The icons vary from art pieces, like Saila's fractals, or images from favourite films, like Homi, cartoon characters, like Corcra or Planet. However, Brightears has chosen a picture of himself as his icon, as has Jen, who has however used a picture where she is hidden by a soft toy, as if she were wearing a mask, and as such cannot be recognised. Both the LiveJournal name and the icon linked to it are thus carefully chosen, and both afford the creation of an online identity, and the performance of that identity. They do also afford a degree of privacy, masking the offline identity in favour of the online identity.

The username as a cloak

Jen and Myriam are very careful to use each other's usernames in their entries, and even in the comments section: Myriam went as far as deleting a comment written by Jen because she had used her real name in it:

Excerpt 8-15. (Myriam, Feb09_05)

(deleted your other comment cos it had my name in it...prefer to keep that private.
But it made me larf out loud.)

When Myriam happened to meet some people she didn't know at a party, they realised that they had already interacted online when her username was revealed.

Both Myriam and Jen initially used the LiveJournal names of their friends within the entries, whether they were talking about their online or offline friends, thus remaining within the time and space of the blog. However, no matter how cautious they were when they started blogging, they became much more lax in their approach as time went on, and as more of their offline friends joined them on LiveJournal. Whilst still regularly using their readers' usernames, they started mixing those with the real names:

Excerpt 8-16. (Jen, May02_08)

Also, particular yays for LJOther getting the job, not least because I assisted with that one. (You had better remember I danced in front of a large group of people for you, Luke, and I'll be calling that favour in sooner or later.)

From the start of their journals, the young bloggers from the first group use real names only, in text and even in comments. Even though their usernames are shown at the top of the comment, a number of the young bloggers also sign their comments as one would sign an email, with their real names.

In the text, they also use their friends' real names, even though they may be aware of the presence of other readers, who might not be part of their group of friends Brightears

is reminiscing about his first song writing experience a few years before, when Orla was his girlfriend. However, for most of the story, he talks about the “girl”, only revealing her name towards the end:

Excerpt 8-17. (BrightearsMay05_08)

[...] I composed and recorded my first song. I sent it to girl (it's obviously Orla but I'm trying to be vague so as not to confuse possible stranger readers :p)

8.2.2 The locked page: multimodal privacy signal

Perceptions of privacy can differ in various internet spaces: a space such as LiveJournal which offers functions with obvious affordances of privacy, such as the LiveJournal name and its affordance of anonymity can be seen as “private” spaces; similarly, password protected spaces can produce some sense of privacy as evidenced by the vocabulary in use: the word password, linked to the adjective protected, can imply a space which gives a feeling of security. However, on LiveJournal, even though a password and a LiveJournal alias may be needed for commenting openly, it is still possible to any random reader to view any blog which is not locked, and to comment as an anonymous commenter. The platform does however offer a gradual set of privacy settings, illustrated in Figure 8-3 below. These can be applied to the whole blog, or to each individual entry: a totally private setting, where the entry can only be read by its author, a customised setting, where the author selects a group of reader who will have access to the entry, the “friends-only” setting, where all LiveJournal “friends” named on the profile page can read the entry, and finally the public setting, which sets no restriction as to who can read the entry. Those settings are available at the time of writing the entry, as a choice before clicking the button which will afford publishing.

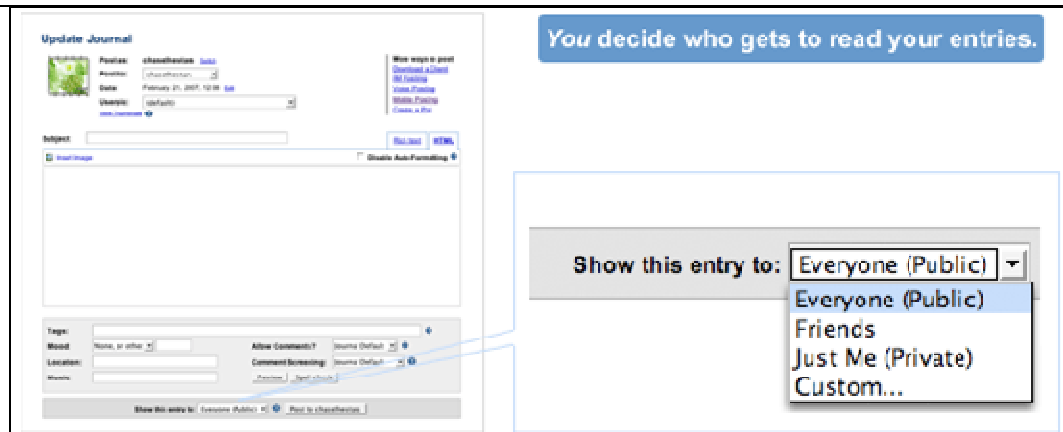


Figure 8-3. Privacy settings for entries

Some of the bloggers in this study have made use of the “lock” function on LiveJournal, and thus protect their blogs from unknown readers: only those who are listed as friends can read the blog. The profile page, however, is available for all to see, as is the list of friends, the list of communities the blogger belongs too, and also the calendar¹⁸.

There are two distinct approaches for the bloggers who lock their journals: some actively advertise the fact that the journal is locked, through the use of striking images and attendant text, which often explains the reasons for the lock, and also suggests that interested prospective readers may comment on the locked page and thus might gain access to the blog if they are considered suitable. The other approach is to cloak the lock so to speak: the journal, although locked, is not advertised as such. Some entries deemed innocuous are left on a public setting, and those are the only ones that unexpected readers would be able to see. The blog, for all intents and purposes, looks like a badly maintained or abandoned blog. Only a close examination of the calendar function can reveal the existence of hidden entries.

¹⁸ Some changes in LiveJournal policies and facilities occurred after the data collection and analysis. Those are not included or considered here

This journal is locked

When Saila started her blog, she left her blog open, on a public setting. All blogs in this study started as public blogs, but for some, the settings were changed reactively, after an incident or event which made the blogger feel threatened or unsafe on a totally public forum, and which brought home to them the reality of unknown and unexpected readers. For some, who are not included in the study, it was my presence as a researcher/reader which caused the change in settings (see chapter 6.1). For the participants, that encounter with a stranger had often already happened.

Saila's home page, depicted in Figure 8-4 below, is a "Friends Only" page: she locked her blog a year after she started writing it, when she realized that she could be found by people she knew offline.



Figure 8-4. Saila's locked page

Her home page thus became a big picture of a road sign (Red no entry sign) and some text: The text itself suggests the presence of an unknown and unwanted reader, shaking Saila's previous conception of the internet ("as we think it is"); She knows she has readers, and addresses them in this warning with the use of the first person plural ("we think"), but acknowledges the presence of unwanted readers, which she suddenly became aware of (she dates her new insight as of "now"). From the rest of the text, we can also infer that she felt the unwanted reader's presence as a threat: she now wants her blog closed to "weirdos" and "stalkers". She thus addresses the reader, known or unknown, wanted or unwanted from her home page, and asks for information on them, as much as they may want to give when they ask for permission to read her blog, to be added as a friend. However, only 6 comments follow this entry, 3 of them are banter between Orla and Saila on stalking, one is my first communication with Saila, and one much later comment from an anonymous reader criticizes the page presentation. Nevertheless, Saila has a long list of LiveJournal friends whom she knows in real life, so it is to be assumed that the communication on opening the blog to them took place outside the platform, in personal communications. Apart from the researcher, no person unknown to Saila attempted to gain entry to the blog through the comments page of the locked entry.

Saila also adopted the unusual practice of posting her entries as public, and later switching their status to private or "friends only" when she posted a new entry. However, in 2008, this changed again and she made every entry private, after an English class in her school where the teacher googled students' names and displayed the results on the wall. Saila felt that her blog wasn't safe any longer, and not only did she lock all the entries, she also removed an entry with her full name, probably not trusting

the locking device completely. In the same entry, she also jokingly welcomed her English class, in case again the locks didn't hold:

Excerpt 8-18. (SailaJan27_08)

but just in case he finds this and put it on the wall:
 HEY THERE ENGLISH CLASS!
 ahem

Saila's approach to privacy matters on her social network site page, on Bebo, followed the same pattern: the page was open to all, but eventually closed, after a specific incident, and it remained closed so that some classmates would not gain access and be able to see specific photographs that she had posted.

Homi's blog is also a private blog, "friends only" according to LiveJournal nomenclature, and signaled as such, as illustrated in Figure 8-5 below.

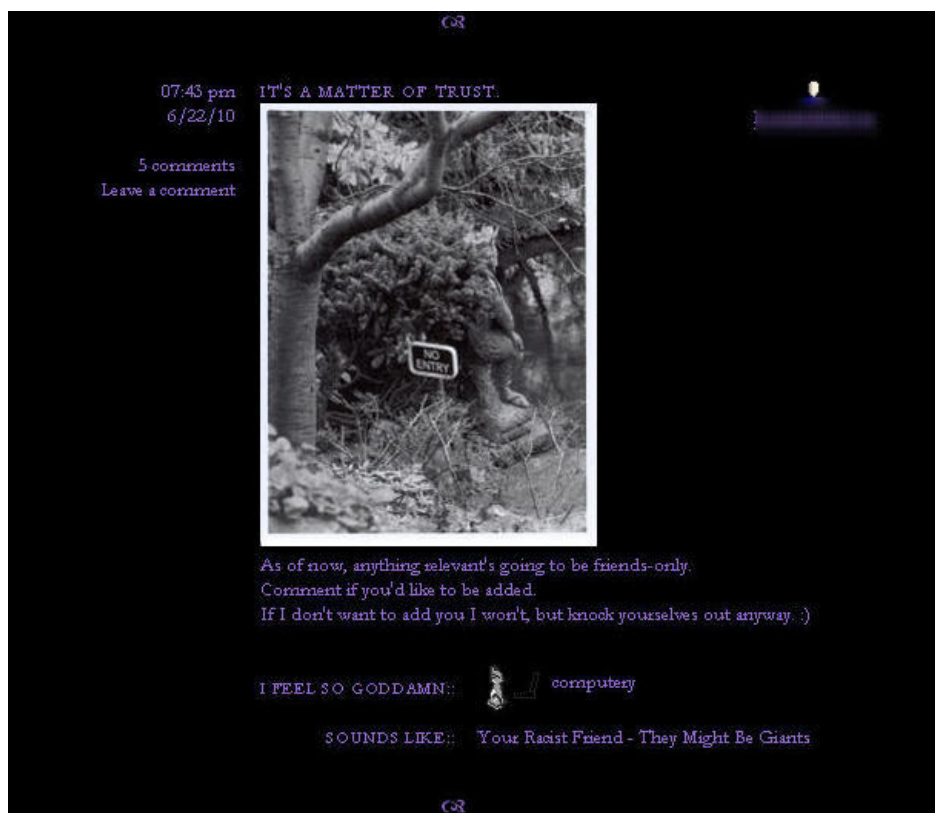


Figure 8-5. Homi's locked page

A casual visitor to the blog can only see the title, and the image and text that Homi has chosen to signify the private nature of her blog. In this case, she has chosen to post a small black and white picture in the middle of the black screen. The photograph is set in a park, and represents a stone sculpture, probably a faun; only a part of the back of the faun is visible, the rest is masked by vegetation, various bushes growing behind it. In the foreground is a small rectangular black sign on a pole, saying “No entry” in white capital letters, with a tree with no leaves at the left-hand side, slightly out of focus. The picture was obviously taken in winter and gives a feeling of solitude and loneliness. It is framed with a white border, and situated in the center of the screen, as if it were a normal daily entry: to its left are the date and time, in small purple letters. Even though the blog was created in 2005, the date is set at October 2010. This is not an unusual occurrence; many young bloggers who choose a date for their “friends only” page tend to pick a date which they consider is far in the future. In Homi’s case she chose a date 5 years in the future. Above the picture, in small capital letters, like a title, is the phrase “*it’s a matter of trust*”. Beneath the picture, more text explains how the blog will be locked. Homi does not give any other reason than trust for locking the blog, however, the use of “as of now” implies that the blog was originally public, and that something happened to make her decide to change the public status to private; in this, she follows the same process as Saila: the presence of an unexpected and unwanted reader is the trigger which leads to the picking up of an affordance, in this case the privacy affordance linked to the lock function. Homi goes further: she invites readers to comment if they want to be added as friends and as such be allowed to read the entries, but does not promise to accept:

Excerpt 8-19. (HomiLockedPage)

As of now, anything relevant's going to be friends-only. Comment if you'd like to be added. If I don't want to add you I won't, but knock yourselves out anyway. :)

Homi's profile page is contains mainly the now obligatory fields of journal statistics, list of interests, list of friends. The biography section is minimal, and contains only one sentence which does not match the sentiment on the main page of the blog. On the profile, Homi simply says:

Excerpt 8-20. (HomiProfilePage)

I'm not too godd at being interesting on this. Add me if you like, I like other people's lives, in a non-creepy way.

Even though Homi is very careful about opening her entries, she does however give her real first name on her profile page, although nothing about her age or her school. Gathering data from Homi's blog, the calendar indicates the blog started in 2005. Indeed some of the entries in 2005 are available (although locked) but some have been given another privacy setting. It is obvious that Homi uses several levels of privacy, and does not make her most private entries available to me. She has in fact created several readers' lists which she uses according to the content of the entry she writes. Most entries are available to all on her friends' list:

Excerpt 8-21. (HomiPrivateMsg)

I had a few screens set up - one to stop people I had added more out of politeness than anything else from seeing personal entries, and one or two so that specific people wouldn't see entries I wasn't comfortable with them seeing. For the most part I just set entries to Friends-only though.

Homi is thus very aware of the reader when she writes and posts an entry, and guards her and her readers' privacy. Homi and Saila advertise the fact that their journal is there, but locked, through the use of the "Friends Only" page, and both use striking

visuals to highlight the privacy element of their blog. The unknown reader is thus informed of the presence of the blog, and refused access, but the known reader, part of the friends list, is aware every time she visits that she belongs to a chosen group, that she is part of the community of readers who participate and thus create the blog as it is. The lock function, thus advertised, comprises two separate yet linked affordances: a social affordance of privacy management, but also a semiotic affordance which in turn allows the creation of a community of readers.

The awareness of a different audience is thus reflected in different semiotic choices in the multimodal discourse of the blog. Whereas the written mode is preponderant in all the blogs, signifying a link to the tradition of the diary or the epistolary genres, the first page of Saila's and Homi's locked journals see a different modal choice. The foregrounded mode is now the visual mode, as a sign of the relation between the author and the unknown readers. In both cases, there is cohesion between the visual mode of the layout and the visual mode of the photograph, in the choice of colours and mood, although the photograph is framed in such a way as to become the "locus of attention" (O'Halloran, 2008). In both cases again, the photograph has symbolic attributes. At the level of experiential meaning, the well-known signs are "no entry" traffic signs, bringing to the fore a spatial experience, and at the level of interpersonal meaning, they represent a denial of text, a refusal of readership. The written mode linked to this foregrounded visual mode also reflects the same meaning, with the use of negatives in the texts: "I may not accept" for Saila's blog, "if I don't want to add you I won't" for Homi's blog.

Hidden locks

Corcra, Jen and Myriam however, do not publicize the degree of privacy of their blogs. A casual reader can thus see a few innocuous entries, but only a long look at the calendar, which bears signs of every entry written, can reveal the length of the blog and number of entries., Jen and Myriam, are using privacy settings, and using them to their full advantage: they have created separate groups which have different levels of access to the blog. This highly literate use of the privacy affordance is often kept secret, or at least not as public as the previous visual pages.

Jen keeps most entries on a public setting, but uses locks and allows different levels of access to different groups, unseen to most but her inner circle of friends who can see everything that she writes. This sophisticated use of privacy settings reflects a dialogical concept of privacy as a process, where each entry is thus assessed and shared with those who merit that particular level of intimacy, and it allows Jen to have various types of friends and family as readers: her Full Time Intimate Community, consisting of Myriam and other close friends from her offline life, are then joined by other circle of friends, some may be friends from college or from various clubs and activities offline, some may be from her online fandom spaces, and some circles also include her family, notably her father and mother.

Fry is aware of the privacy affordances of the platform, and has reflected on privacy issues when he set up his account, as evidenced in his profile page. Through his public profile page, Fry does stress the fact that some entries will not be seen by all, and will only be available to the friends who are named on his profile page. Fry's default setting is public, and most of the entries are available to all; he does however lock some of his entries, usually those in which he reflects on his relationship with his friends. Those

issues are reflected in the titles: “*Realisations and stuff*”, “*soul searchy stuff or something*”, although “*w00t college*” did not seem to warrant a private post, in this entry, Fry reflects on his friendships and his fear of losing them now that he is in college. This clear distinction between public and private entries is one that Fry put a lot of thought into, and expresses in his profile page. He feels that everyday things that upset him, make him feel like “ranting” are of a private nature. If the subject of his “rant” is more important, or has been a subject that has exercised his mind for a long time, he then feels that it should be public.

Excerpt 8-22. (FryProfilePage)

If there is a rant or something and it seems as if the issue is the most important thing to me, check if it's friends only or not. If it is, this is because i view the issue as relatively trivial to everyday things, or INTENSELY personal. And am just feeling ranty and angry:p If it isn't a friends only post, then it will be something actually important, or something i have been thinking about for a bit

However, very few of his public posts deal with general topics, either topical or philosophical, and all are grounded in the daily.

The highest degree of privacy is called the “private” post, and it is one which is only visible to the author. Very few of the bloggers seem to use this facility, Corcra would rather just archive her old entries into her computer, these are the ones she feels embarrassed about and does not want to share any more. Dervla, a commenter on my blog, has followed the opposite process; she used to keep some entries either private or “friends-only”, but as time went by, she felt that the need for secrecy was reduced or even unnecessary, and opened those entries to all. Jen only uses the “private” setting as a memory marker for future posts: this is how she keeps drafts of entries she would like

to write, although she finds that she then tends to forget about them, and they remain there, unread and unfinished. Dervla has at one stage created a separate blog:

Excerpt 8-23. (Dervla/CathyAug11_08)

I started keeping a 'false' journal at one point, maybe two years ago, which none of my friends knew about. It was supposed to be a forum for my deepest and darkest. But as it turns out, I don't have much that's so deep or dark that I don't feel able to write about it as Dervla.

8.2.3 Coded meanings and hidden keys

“Stuff”: announced self-censorship

Self-censorship has often been noted in narratives of the self (Lejeune, 1993). Radner and Lanser (1993) see it in particular in women's diaries, when events which are taboo or seen as shameful are written obliquely, in language which has coded meanings. This code is “a set of signals – words, forms, behaviours, signifiers of some kind – that protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing particular messages (1993, p. 23). Bunkers (2001), in a study of Midwestern American women diaries, identify coding strategies, which include some linguistic strategies of indirection, substitution, and omission amongst others, and which result in the creation of ambiguity within the text. Lanser and Radner also identify two types of coding, one implicit and difficult to identify, the other explicit, so that “anyone reading the diary would know that coding had occurred and hence that there was something to conceal” (Lanser and Radner, 1993:6). The same uses of coded meanings and self-censorship are apparent throughout the blogs from this study.

There are instances when events and happenings within the narrative are not specific, their private nature is signified by the use of generic nouns: stuff, it, what, something.

Excerpt 8-24. (PlanetMay02_05)

Ugh, wish I was able to write about everything here but some **stuff** I just don't want people to know. Damn publicness of journal

Excerpt 8-25. (Saila, March02_05)

Stuff that has been going on for the past week and had me all gracked has been pretty much sorted out I think so that's another thing off my back.

Excerpt 8-26. (BrightEars, Jan30_08)

I'm also going to omit **stuff** for obvious reasons (you know, in case you're talking to me regularly and know I'm not typing something...why that'd happen I know not)

Excerpt 8-27. (BrightEars, Jan30_08)

I really shouldn't get into detail here for obvious reasons but I just felt/feel that **it** was something I needed to do, both for myself and for her

These coded meanings and signalled self-censorship happen throughout the two groups. However, the dialogical element brings out different outcomes: in the first group, on Saila's blog, as illustrated in Excerpt 8-25 above, there are no responses in the comments sections nor are there any for Planet's signalled self-censored post, illustrated in Excerpt 8-24 above. In BrightEars' case, two new readers do comment on the entry illustrated by Excerpt 8-26 and Excerpt 8-27, albeit on a totally different subject, as their comment bears on other parts of the entry, or on the fact that they are reading the blog. The first one starts with "*...and I knew all this stuff already*", (Anonymous, BrightEarsJan30_08)

The entries from the girls, Planet or Saila, elicit no comments at all. They may of course have used different means of communications to continue the conversation, but the other readers have no way of knowing, and the narrative stops with the cryptic entry. Whilst Planet freely talks about her love life, relationships, and heartache, she still feels that some revelations or stories do not belong on her blog, or indeed "*on the internet*";

she does not use the privacy settings on LiveJournal, and instead, in one instance for example, cited in Excerpt 8-28 below, she gives a broad recount of events in her life, asking her friends to contact her if they want to know more, as she would rather tell them the details in person.

Excerpt 8-28. (PlanetMay14_08)

Its quite a long tale and I can't quite remember the order of events but sex, death, and general drama feature highly. So I'm not sure if I want to blather all about it on the internet. So I'll try insert it all into a nutshell of an LJ post and should you desire to hear more I shall enlighten you via the lost art of conversation.

I know/don't know what you're talking about

Some instances of similarly coded entries in the second group show a different relationship with the author and through the blog. Two entries on Myriam's blog elicited numerous responses, pushing them in the category of busy posts. They were both truncated entries, consisting of one word: "*Hm*" (MyriamJun20_06) and one expression: "*It's done*" (MyriamJan04_06). Myriam's coded meanings were meant for some of her regular readers, who knew the context to what she was writing about in both cases, and left numerous comments of support and friendship. The self-censorship was upheld by most of the commenters in the latter case, and the expressions of support and concern remained vague if heartfelt, until one of the readers obliquely alluded to the event which had happened.

One entry in Jen's blog is entirely coded in this way:

Excerpt 8-29. (JenApril27_07)

Wibble

Just took a stand on something. Am waiting for fall-out now. Apologies to anybody getting offended or caught in the crossfire; can only say that I thought (think) it was the right thing to do

This entry is heralded as explicit code by its title, “*Wibble*”, which in netspeak is used to describe meaningless or boring contributions to a forum discussion. Jen’s post about “*taking a stand on something*” met with support and friendship, but also puzzlement; none of the readers who commented seemed to know what the coded meaning was. The first few comments are supportive in a general way: “*Huzzah! (in a supportive manner)*” (LJZakalwe/JenApril27_07) “*I have the height of respect for anyone who risks negative reactions to express what they believe.*”(LJScribbler/JenApril27_07)

The first five comments thus echo each other, one agreeing with the previous. Another supportive comment highlights the coded meaning: “*As per usual I have no idea what is going on, but I'm here if you need anything. Good luck with it.*”

(LJLittleMouse/JenApril27_08)

Thereafter, the other comments will echo this supportive but puzzled reaction. Mindful of the spirit of the entry, none of them request explanations, and Jen does not intervene in the discussion, nor does she clarify her meaning, either then or in a later post. It is possible that her coded message was meant to encourage another form of communication, and that Instant Messages, texts or phone calls followed up; yet within the text, once again the story remains cryptic: “*good on you. i'm curious what it's about.*” (LJBadger/JenApril27_08) “*I'm not sure what's going on either, but good for you. I'm sure things will be fine. ♥*” (LJSpring/JenApril27_08) “*Support for stand-taking, whatever the stand that is taken is for...*” (LJSeanog/JenApril27_08)

This self-censorship is not relegated to the text of the entries, nor to the author of the blog. Readers also use the same type of self-censorship and hint at private communication: “*I'll tell you later*”, writes one of Jen’s readers. When she insists in reply, he gives a short summary of the events in question.

For your eyes only: private jokes and references

Some of the conversations are thus intended to be kept between two participants, or between participants who have already started a conversation earlier. These are peppered with private jokes and references which are purposefully not explained. They also tend to be written in a humorous tone.

Excerpt 8-30. (Corcra, Jan29_08)

What's the connection between you and the last person you texted?
He wants my knees, and I want his biscuits

They often occur after a day, or an event shared by more than one blogger, or one blogger and her readers. Homi had met the whole group in town one day, and she then wrote a long entry, with sentences which are obvious instances of coding cited in Excerpt 8-31 below:

Excerpt 8-31. (HomiFeb20_05)

[...]Also, UnCiara owns my left leg, and either my jeans or my legs are Laura's country [...]

The event is then narrated on the blog, with dialogic references to what was said or done, which only those in attendance will understand. These entries, followed by comments which continue the conversation, are examples of explicit coding which are picked up by the readers that are involved not only in the living, but in the telling of the tale. They do also signal the fact and thus point to the presence of different groups of readers – those who understand, and are part of the Full Time Intimate Community (Figure 8-1) of the blogger, and others who do not understand but can witness the performance of friendship.

8.3 The privacy of others

8.3.1 Others as part of my story

Whereas Saila and Homi for example have increased their level of control over the information they are publishing with the use of locks and friends lists, Brightears has consistently kept his blog public; his non-use of privacy regulating affordances such as locks or lists is one that he has thought about. Similarly, he has thought about the ethics of writing stories in which other people might figure prominently, but his conclusion has been that he can keep them public:

Excerpt 8-32. (Brightears/PrivateMsg)

I always wonder if I'm talking about someone and they read it could it change anything, for good or bad...and whether I should thus have it set so that they can't read it. But I think there's something kind of cool about it :) I've got nothing to hide and whatnot

Boyfriends and girlfriends

There are many close relationships in young people's lives, and some of them figure in their writings more than others. There are some entries dedicated to family, but those are on the whole restrained, and talk about the family members in a generic way, "my mother", "my mum", "my dad", "my parents", "my sister". Other intimate relationship also figure in the blogs, notably those with boyfriends and girlfriends, which are mentioned when things are happy, but also when things go wrong and advice is needed from friends. From the beginning of her blog, Planet writes about her boyfriend, and even notes that this is what people do in their diaries. She does so notably in an entry in April (Excerpt 8-33), which marks their 5 months anniversary. In the entry, she addresses her boyfriend directly, although he doesn't know she is writing a blog nor is he part of her friends list:

Excerpt 8-33. (PlanetApril04_05)

I love you Gavin.! If you ever read this. You probably know already, since I never stop saying it, but now I've declared it in my Livejournal, to all and sundry. What a funny saying!

In May however, she has told her boyfriend Gavin about the blog, and although he doesn't start blogging, he starts reading her entries, which become covertly or overtly addressed to him.

Excerpt 8-34. (PlanetMay26_05)

Yay I'm talking to Gavin on msn!!! Isn't he great everyone? (now that he reads this thing I have to take the opportunity to embarass him). Wow he's so great.

Excerpt 8-35. (PlanetMay28_05)

But my wonderful boyfriend was there to save me, forst by laughing, and more constructively by giving me a hoodie to tie around my waist, and then some jeans. I love you Gavin!

However, no comments are posted either from Gavin or from any anonymous reader who may be Gavin. After the Leaving Cert, Gavin breaks up with Planet; she is heartbroken, they had been together for 1 year and 8 months, and he featured often in her blogposts. After the breakup, Planet updates more often, obviously finding some solace in her blog and writing. The comments are not however much more numerous, but her friends communicate with her through other means, seeing her in person, or talking on MSN (she goes online every evening). The main entry about the breakup does not so much announce it as explain it:

Excerpt 8-36. (PlanetJuly29_06)

ah the update you've all been waiting for- the break-up. This isn't to appropriate blame or to vent or whine, I just don't want people getting the wrong idea about everything.

Three of her friends comment on this entry, all three extremely supportive; they all write substantial comments, several sentences and paragraphs, and all three finish the comment as they might finish a letter or an email, with a salutation and signing their own names. A few entries later, she checks if her new boyfriend has written an entry about their very new romance; they post comments in each other's journals and Planet refers to him often, until she announces that she has resumed her previous relationship. From the beginning until the end of the relationship, Planet has always mentioned Gavin under his own name, sometimes calling him "my boyfriend", but always reverting to his first name. Brightears does not mention his girlfriend, Corcra, very often in the first years of his blog, although she belongs to the same group and also has a LiveJournal. Corcra appears occasionally in the comments section of his blog in that year, as he does in hers. He sometimes appears in her entries, always under his name, and never his LiveJournal name. In May 2007, she mentions a break-up and getting back together, although no-one picks up that thread of conversation in the comments section. In an entry in January, reminiscing on the year past, she mentions that they broke up in August, although no entry dealt with that event in August, and Brightears wrote no entry at all during that month. The intimate relationship is thus kept apart from the blog, even though they both read each other's journal. Brightears does however mention the relationship to the readers/the others in the group when things deteriorated and they "cut off contact", as mentioned in Excerpt 8-37. Cutting off contact does not however involve reading her blog, although he never comments again, and his name eventually disappears from her list of friends.

Excerpt 8-37. (BrightearsJan30_08)

I cut off contact with Orla about a month and a half ago. I'd say most of you know that but just in case anyone's not clear, it was entirely my own decision, no big

event happened or anything and if there has to be a bad-person (I don't think there is really) it'd definitely be me. I really shouldn't get into detail here for obvious reasons but I just felt/feel that it was something I needed to do, both for myself and for her. I'm not saying it was necessarily the right thing to do, but right now it seems we're both doing grand (well, only judging from her lj, but that's usually a good indication of someone's feelings I think), so it feels like it was right at the moment anyway

The way that Corcra and Brightears have managed their privacy, keeping their relationship outside the chronotope of the blog, has been respected by their friends, who have also avoided mentioning it in the blog conversations. The use of their real names matches the obvious norm for the group, who never use each other's LiveJournal names in their entries or in their comments, and thus avoid using the LiveJournal link facility. Similarly, all in the group use the first names of protagonists in their stories, whether they are part of the blogging group or not.

When Jen and Myriam started blogging, the activity was not revealed to either of their boyfriends, who do feature in the entries under code names: "denim boy" or "the boy". At the time of data collection and of writing, their current boyfriends were part of their current LiveJournal group which includes a big group of offline friends. The boyfriends do comment very regularly on the blogs, and are part of the co-writers of the narrative. When they appear in the entries, their LiveJournal usernames are often used, although the same sentence can see LiveJournal name and real name juxtaposed. Jen and Myriam both adopt the same rules for other friends: friends who are on LiveJournal, and named readers of those locked blogs, are often referred to under their LiveJournal names, affording the social link to their own blog, but they can also be referred to under their real names. Protagonists in the narrative who are not part of the trialogical relationship are mostly given coded or generic names. Brightears does not adopt that rule for his public blog, and uses his friends' real names in his diaristic entries, even

though he wondered about this practice in a message addressed to me, quoted above in Excerpt 8-32: “I wonder if I was talking about some and they read it would it change anything”. He was obviously concerned about this when he knew his girlfriend or ex-girlfriend was reading as part of his friends list, but has decided to take the risk with people who are not his known readers, who do not belong in the space of the blog.

8.4 Conclusion

There is a big variation in the concepts of privacy, even within the sample of bloggers; Brightears’ blog shows a reflected view of privacy, and yet is a public blog; Disco shows an instinctive view of privacy, and yet has a public blog, whereas Jen’s blog shows a sophisticated use of privacy settings, where different groups have different levels of access to the entries. In all cases though, privacy is a process, as is its management, and it is often a trialogical process, negotiated between the author and the readers, and realised through the taking up of affordances and use of technological functionalities on the platform.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

This thesis presented an ethnographic study of young people's blogs in Ireland, and as such, situated itself within the field of internet research, straddling humanities and social sciences traditions. Chapter two examined three concepts central to this study, and summarised the current literature on the subjects of youth, blogging, and of privacy, mostly when applied to online contexts. Chapter three presented a model which would help to view the blogs in a holistic manner, deconstructing them in three layers, literary, social and technological, and introducing the concept of trialogical relationship between those in terms of the blogger, the reader and the technological tools underpinning the blog. It also outlined the concept of chronotope as applied to the blog, thus situating it as a semiotic artefact within a time and space specific to its narrative. In chapter four, some methodological issues were considered, and the choice of an online-only ethnography was outlined, as well as the ethical reasoning which underpinned that choice, whereas chapter five presented the participants in the research and situated them in their online spaces. Chapter five also outlined the methodological choice of bricolage, and presented the tools which were used in the analysis of the blogs. The rich descriptions of chapter six presented the bloggers and the time-span of their blogs. In chapter seven, the creation of the semiotic artefact was analysed, from the point of view of the bloggers/authors and the readers/commenters, as was the role of technology in that trialogical relationship. Chapter eight analysed the ways in which the bloggers manage their privacy whilst creating a deeply personal literary artefact, and how their sense of privacy encompasses the readers.

9.1 Research questions revisited

Whereas chapter six gave a rich description of the blogs and the bloggers involved in this research, encompassing the lifetime of most of the blogs and following their chronotope, the empirical analyses in chapters 7 and 8 told stories of the trialogical relationship between the bloggers, their readers and the technology they used. In chapter 7, the blogs were often viewed as diaristic artefacts, memory repositories, and means of communication with friends. As diaristic artefacts, they functioned on a timeline which followed biographical time, were written at regular intervals, and often contained summaries of the days which had elapsed between entries. The time element between the entries figured heavily in apologies to implied readers, or indeed apologies to real and identified readers, as the bloggers who had failed to keep up a regular posting of entries caught up with the narrative time, as well as renewed the conversation with their friends. The blog as technological artefact was identified as memory repository by some, and the affordance of permanence made it a better diary than the traditional paper diary, in the views of some bloggers. Only one blogger however managed the permanence of her blog, by deleting old entries online and saving them to the more private space of her computer. For others, once the relationship with the blog and the readers was over, the artefact was abandoned online. The presence of the readers also emerged as a major issue in the blogs; the readers are present in the text of the entries, in the quasi-epistolary style of some blog posts, which are directly addressed to implied readers, and sometimes directly addressed to named readers, the blog post then taking the place of a personal communication channel. The active readers are also present in the social space of the comments pages, and often more so than the bloggers realise or remember; for most blogs, silent entries are in the minority. The trialogical

relationship is however not always smooth, and the take up of some affordances, which allow a more personal reading of blogs in the shape of an RSS readers for example, prove to hamper the social element of the conversation. In chapter 8, the bloggers also told the stories of their changing and reactive perceptions of privacy, which became a process managed through technological and literary tools.

Chapter nine will now draw back upon the theoretical viewpoint to discuss the empirical analyses of this thesis and will discuss its strengths and limitations, as well as the possible future work it could herald. In order to do this, each of the three research questions will be revisited in the light of the theories outlined in chapter 3. The concept of chronotope in particular, drawn from Bakhtin (1981) and from Lemke's (2004) interpretation of this Bakhtinian concept, has underpinned the empirical analysis and the interpretation of the data.

9.1.1 Question 1: What is the relationship between the writer, the reader and the technology in young people's blogs?

The first question, which asked about the relationship between the author, the reader and the technology, led to an analysis of the blog as a literary, semiotic artefact, created by the bloggers and their active readers. Throughout the analysis of the relationship between the bloggers and their blog, and the bloggers and the readers, the concept of time was a constant issue, which followed one of the axes of the chronotope as described in chapter three. Time arose as an issue in the bloggers' metablogging practice, where the blog was often compared or likened to a diary, and the affordance which was most identified was that of memory keeper. Some bloggers linked this affordance to the permanence of the digital text, whether to reject it or embrace it. The heterochrony of the blog links the time-span of the autobiographical narrative to the

smaller timescale of the daily or weekly narrative events. It is also situated within the even longer lifespan of the semiotic, diaristic artefact which is sometimes conceived as permanent keeper of memories.

In practice, this heterochrony influences the narrative: it is manifested through the affordance of narrative repair, which the bloggers used in full sight as it were, going back in narrative time to repair the text with addenda rather than changing it, making the blog a true semiotic artefact of this heterochrony. The public nature of the online context firmly attaches the reader to the blog, and the relation to the blogger becomes part of a trialogical relationship which includes the technology of the medium and the platform, through the creation of the semiotic artefact. The chronotope of the blog is thus often linked to the active presence of the readers, and delimited by that presence: Disco's blog for example did not continue when her readers stopped actively participating in the trialogic relationship. Others (see chapter 6) stopped this particular blog and went on to create another one, starting another chronotope with a new trialogical relationship, sometimes because the readers had changed, as the group of friends had slowly dissolved, sometimes because the blogger herself felt she had changed and wanted her new self to participate into this new trialogical relationship, creating a new semiotic artefact. The cases of Corcra and Brightears signal another end to the trialogical relationship, and different outcomes: they both clearly identify their future selves as ultimate readers of the text, returning the blog to an online diary role, but Corcra also removes the technological element from the trialogical relationship, by moving the old entries offline, and she removes the social element of the relationship by not saving the comments and conversations. Brightears transformed his photoblog into a diary-style blog and in so doing identified his future self as a reader; his long diaristic

posts become more and more the silent entries of an online diary. The second group of bloggers follow a different chronotope, where the social element remain strong in the trialogical relationship, and indeed drives the continuation of the narrative.

9.1.2 Question 2: How do young blogger manage their privacy and how do they deal with ethical issues regarding others' privacy?

The underpinning concept in the analysis of the issues of management of privacy emerged as the concept of space, following the second axis of the chronotope described in Chapter 3. Space is naturally linked to the concept of privacy in offline contexts, as privacy is often linked to isolation or closeness both in geographical and relational terms (Altman, 1975, Innes, 1992). The concept of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) can be useful in analysing the conception and management of privacy by young bloggers. Their conceptualisation of the blog as a space is born out by their use of metaphors and images (see 8.1.1). Their blogging space is outside their habitual space, and conceptualised as such. This is also evidenced by the reactive realisation of privacy affordances, which are unseen and unnoticed until geographical and digital spaces collapse, through the presence of a reader who comes from the habitual offline spaces and enters the heterotopia of the blogging space. Then, privacy affordances are seen and taken up, and technological tools are used to protect and divide these spaces. In all the cases examined in chapter 8, the use of locking facilities emerged after the appearance of someone from the geographical proximity of the blogger. Online strangers were not seen as threats meriting the use of technological locks, discussions could be engaged, or they could be ignored, the threat only came from people known offline but considered as strangers online. Indeed the blogging space, once protected, is also valued as a safe space, where things can be written which cannot always be

understood offline. However, the digital space within which the blogs are situated is also seen as a literary space by the bloggers, and as such, linguistic tools are also used in the management of privacy, in the form of ellipsis and codes (see 8.2.3).

9.1.3 Question 3: How do we conduct ethical research online?

The issue of ethical research online was an overarching question in this research. It had been considered from the start, and some methodological steps had been taken to answer some of the most salient issues: the presence of the researcher in the same space as the bloggers, in an online-only ethnography, was dictated by issues of contact, consent and continued feedback as a validity mechanism, as outlined in chapter 4. However, from the point of contact, ethical issues impacted on the research and remained as emergent issues throughout the time of the ethnography, and indeed beyond. For those issues, the concepts of time and space do also play an important role: the appearance online, in the blog space, of a researcher from a university in their geographical space worried and concerned some of the young bloggers I had approached, and caused some of them to make use of privacy affordances they had not previously either identified or identified as relevant to their situation. (see chapter 5 and question 2 above) This intrusion of an offline adult into the heterotopia of their blogging world was tempered for some by my ethnographic presence, by my role as a blogger. Issues kept emerging however, from the question of the anonymity of bloggers, difficult to ensure in a small geographical offline space, to anonymity of the readers and co-creators of the literary artefact. Indeed when the research moves from the online ethnographic space to the offline space of the dissertation and its eventual publication, several more issues arise, extending the time of the research project and its ethical implications well beyond the time which was originally envisaged. Indeed the

affordance of permanence and the social affordance of community identification inbuilt in the LiveJournal platform will force the deletion of my research blog when the research text becomes public, as the list of participants will feature on my public profile page as “friends”.

From these three research questions, there emerged some aspects of young people’s online creation and communications. The concept of space remained central to these, as the young bloggers differentiated between other online spaces and the space of their blogs, which was a narrative space, and also a more personal space, reserved for their Full Time Intimate Communities. This perception of a personal space could account for the reactive take-up of technological privacy affordances, whereas narrative privacy affordances were commonly used in the form of coding. The importance of the technology underpinning this space was evident in those technological affordances, in the case of privacy but also technological affordances with hidden or nested narrative affordances, such as the affordance of narrative repair, which was realised by the bloggers in preference to editing or corrections. It was through the trialogical relationship between the blogger, the readers and the technology, and this across the literary, social and technological layers, that there emerged various forms of digital and at times ethical literacy.

9.2 Strengths and limitations

The conceptual framework outlined in chapter 3 has allowed a deep understanding of the blog as a place, a time, and an artefact. This concept of chronotope, allied to a trialogical relationship within it, has permitted the exploration of elements of life narrative and management of privacy under a new light. This model could be used in

different contexts, in order to study other online spaces such as social network sites, where young people create and share multimodal texts. It could also conceivably be useful in education studies, where new avenues and different learning spaces are explored. The inclusion of the concept of affordances within this model can also help to understand different levels of digital literacy, not only within the cohort of “digital natives”, but also in the larger population, and the yet under-researched older generation. Yet, until these have been tried, the model remains untested.

Ethical issues have also emerged as a crucial element of this research. The participants in this research were young people, and this implied an ethical reflection from the planning stages of the research. However, this became an emergent issue, and remained so. As stated in chapter 4, some conceptual gaps were identified as relevant to this study, but I was unprepared for the myriad of smaller issues which kept impacting on the research, and were intrinsically linked to concepts of time and space. There were indeed methodological solutions to most of these issues, but in the end there were also constraints, not so much in the conduct of ethical research, although there were a few, but mostly in the way I had initially approached it. I started this research with the traditional outlook of the researcher as an objective and neutral observer, and the blog as a research journal was established as a space which, although belonging to the same platform as the participants’ blogs, was however somehow removed; similarly, I never commented on any of their entries, as I felt that it would be an intrusion and would somehow change the data. As I arrive at the end of this project, I have come to realise that a more active, reflexive presence could have been more beneficial to the research and to the participants. My lack of experience as a blogger had created fears and worries that I would now reject; I certainly would use a research blog in a similar

project, but I would use it more, and would blog my writing as well as my questions, granting the participants more involvement in the research. This use of the blog as a stronger communication channel would also add to the type of data, and increase data obtained from direct contact rather than observed data, which would in turn help to triangulate data and give a more complete view of the issues.

9.3 Directions for future work

The participants in this study came from two small groups of young people, who were all high achievers in school and highly literate. This literacy is apparent in their writing, and it does also impact on their social literacy in online contexts, where most communication is done through writing. Some also had high levels of digital literacy, as most were early adopters and taught each other various aspects of blogging and online communications, under the guise of techne-mentoring (Ito et al., 2008). It would be interesting to extend the model developed here to a different cohort of young people, at different stages of the digital divide, and at different stages of digital literacy. One aspect that has only been touched on in this dissertation, and that would merit more work, is the concept of ethical literacy, as linked to literacy and digital literacy, within a triological model.

The deconstruction of the blog into three different layers has been very useful to me recently in the design of a module on blogging and social media for older learners, as part of an intergenerational project, where young people act as techne-mentors to their elders. The use of the three different layers has allowed the students and the learners to slowly come to grips with all aspects of blogging, from a literacy and literary point of view, from a technological point of view, and one of digital literacy, and also from a

social point of view, where aspects of ethical literacy were introduced. This was a pilot project, and some research into the use of this model in third level learning would glean interesting results.

This thesis, as a snapshot of the blogging practices of two groups of young people in Ireland, has opened up the area of internet research on blogging to this particular geographical area, at a time when an increasing number of Irish bloggers have appeared online. Moreover, it proposes a new framework to apprehend the blogging phenomenon from a literary as well as a social point of view by introducing the concept of chronotope and trialogical relationships, and as a means of situating the reader and the technology, as well as the blogger, within the study of blogs.

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Epilogue

Tommy “fell in love with the web” when he met people who shared his passion for James Bond; then, when he was 14, he was pushed into the blogging world by his brothers, who were away and wanted news from home. To say that Tommy’s brothers are technophiles is an understatement. When his eldest brother was in his first year in MIT, he co-founded a company with his younger brother John and subsequently sold it for a sizable amount of money; he is now working on starting up another company, and his brother has just finished secondary school and started in Harvard. Tommy is much younger, and has taken to blogging with great delight, surpassing his brothers in his use of both blog and twitter. No doubt inspired by his passion, Tommy’s mother also started blogging and opened a Twitter account, although his father seems more reluctant to become immersed in online communication. Tommy, his parents and siblings often interact online: on one occasion, John had arrived home from abroad very early in the morning, and published a Twitter message saying that he was at home, eating rashers in a sandwich. Tommy tweeted back immediately, jokingly complaining that he only learnt about his brother’s return on Twitter, and saying that he was coming downstairs immediately. The brothers’ banter is also found in the comments section of Tommy’s blog, which is obviously read by all in the family, even though it sometimes warrants some personal allusions, notably when the youngest blogger in the family is blogging when he should be asleep:

(And as far as my mother is concerned, this is a scheduled entry and I’m not actually awake at 1am in the morning)

The family is also the place where learning takes places in all matters technological. Tommy relies on his brothers to help him with problems on his laptop, his father sorts out some connection problems, and Tommy's mother thanks him publicly on Twitter for fixing her iPhone. This personal rather than private interaction in the public space of the blogs and Twitter, linked without doubt to Tommy's extensive online reading, have led him to engage in some very deep reflections on blogging, privacy and ethics.

Tommy writes often and on many subjects, indeed he even writes fiction, which he also sometimes posts on his blog. He is passionate about both writing and blogging, and gave what seemed to be a very professional presentation to his class on blogging, talking about how and why he blogs, which he called "blogging 101". He also writes very honestly and compellingly on Cerebral Palsy, and the most obvious manifestation of his disability, his beloved cane, which he calls Aislinn and which is a replica of Dr. House's walking stick. Nevertheless, his openness is well thought out, and explained in one of his posts, in true metablogging tradition:

Okay, on the one hand, you know that I was at the zoo last Saturday, or that I'll be at a wedding on Thursday – I'd have no problem saying something like that. Is there a problem with that? It's not embarrassing for me, the zoo isn't some.. I dunno, gentleman's interest club (or if it is, I missed it) so it's not like the zoo is something you wouldn't want your wife to know about.

His reflection on privacy is also deeply ethical, as Tommy is concerned not only about his own privacy, but about his friends'. As a diarist or life writer, he has realised that his story is linked to his friends' stories, and that they may not have the same openness and ease online as he does:

You might notice that I never really go into some details about school. Yes, I had double Business on Friday, but what'd did I do at break? I intentionally never talk about my friends and, no, that isn't because I have none, which has been

suggested, but merely because they mightn't be as comfortable to be mentioned on the web, and that's fine.

Blogging is fostered within the family, and Tommy does appreciate this freedom; a contemporary once asked him for help in setting up a blog, and Tommy was very concerned to hear of the list of rules that the parents were setting up, one of them being that no entry could be posted on the blog until they had read it. So he quipped:

Very communist China, don't you think? They're fond of censorship too.

The young blogger-to-be never was, as he gave up the idea of blogging; this did not surprise Tommy, who only appreciated his parents' support all the more.

Tommy's blog is also a little unusual in that it is read by adults, and that Tommy has become an integral part of the Irish blogging community, despite his young age. Whereas most younger bloggers tend to keep to their own circles and communities of bloggers, Tommy has embraced the larger blogging community, and was rewarded by an award at the Irish Blog Awards in 2008, for Best Newcomer.

Although Tommy is part of the Irish blogging community and recognized as such, his blog can, on occasion, be seen to bridge a gap between an adult blogging practice and language and a young person's. He illustrates this on his profile page, knowingly mimicking an accepted, adult-sounding profile, and immediately switching to a more relaxed language, seeped in netspeak:

Tommy Collison is an award-winning 15 year old blogger from Limerick, Ireland.

switches to first person :) Hello, I'm Tommy! *waves*

His readers, old and young, online or offline friends, all wave back.

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Appendix A - Strangers and disagreements



Ciara () wrote,
@ 2005-08-31 18:38:00

Current mood:  Paranoid

Current music: Filthy Gorgeous- Scissor Sisters

The Jolly Green Giant

Whoever said school uniforms were sexy obviously never saw the Green monstrosity I have to wear. Can I get a Hells Yeah from Ani and Fiona? (Oh wait, Ani actually **LIKES** the uniform, crazy lady.)

There was a Scarlet article on why men like schoolgirls...

Ah here it is: *ahem*

Fantasy #1: Saucy Schoolgirl

What it means: Despite the fact that his idea of a school uniform hasn't been seen since the last *St. Trinian's* film was released, he's got it into his head that school uniforms are fruity. Why? The popularity of this fantasy has little to do with the tautness of teen bodies- it's because teenagers are more inclined to do as they're told. It's mainly a fantasy of your older man because he fears his power's waning. Oh, and whatever he says, he's a touch resentful that he wasn't the one that snaffled your cherry.

How to flip it: Tell him you have a schoolboy fantasy. You'll instantly catapult him back to the days when he would have swapped his entire panini sticker collection for a look at the bra section in his mother's catalogue, while you make him relearn the basics (with the aid of a blackboard, if you like). But be warned, he might see this as the perfect excuse to mong out in front of the playstation and relentlessly wank into a sock.

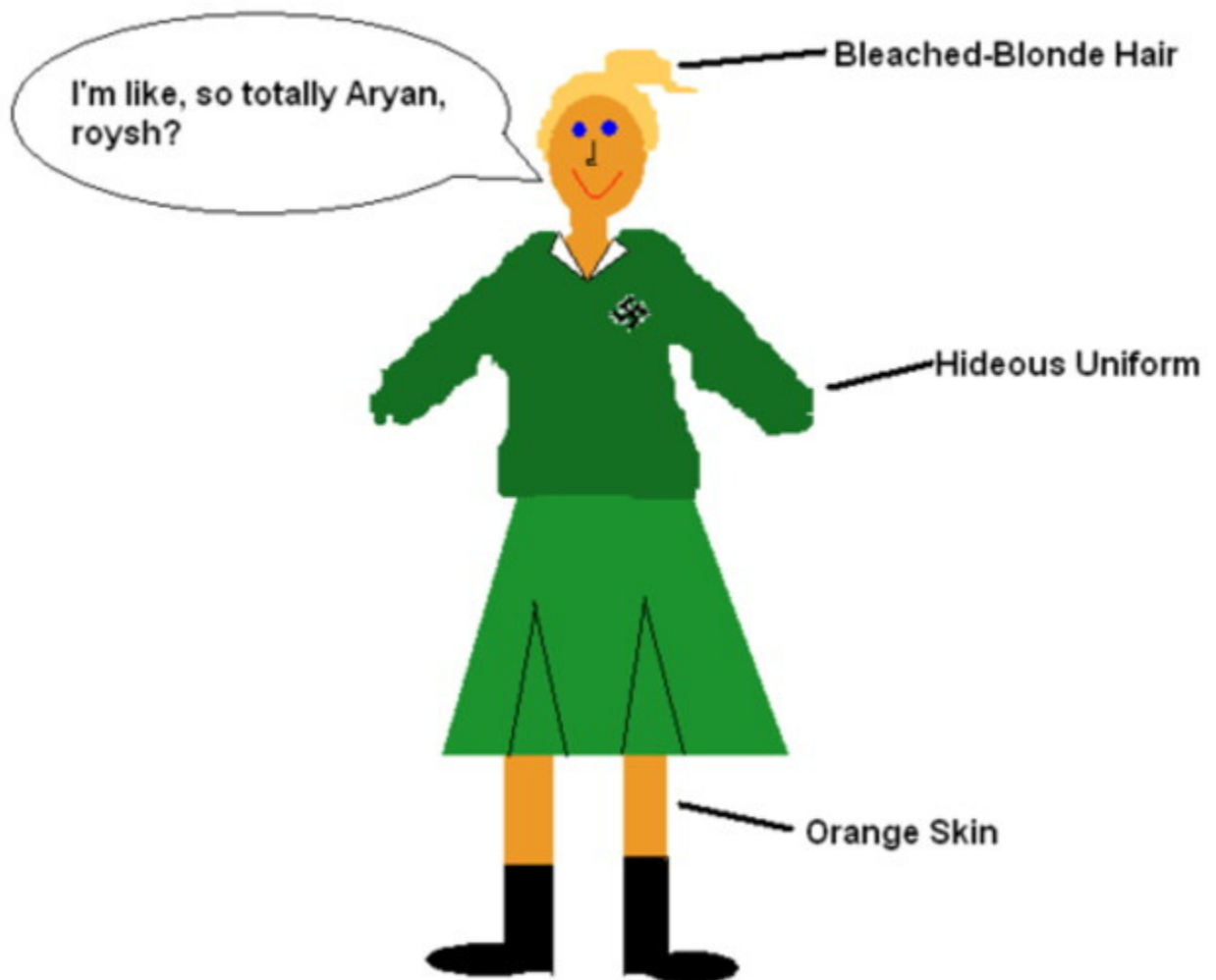
If he really insists... Come home in a schoolgirl outfit, then run straight upstairs and lock yourself in your bedroom. Then get changed into a trackie and talk on the phone to your mate about absolutely nothing for ages. Later, come downstairs wearing makup that makes you look like Coco the Clown at a tranny night, and tell him you're going out and you're not coming back until late because he's not the boss of you.

Does this explain the attraction of school uniforms? Not really, except for a sentence or two there, but it sure is amusing :)

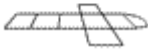
I'm currently working under the theory that my school are Nazis. It's all there, so blindingly obvious and no-one's copped on.

- * They want everyone to look the same
- * No unnatural hair colours- but if you want to dye your hair peroxide-blonde then it's alright
- * So many people have blonde hair and blue eyes
- * So many German teachers have come and gone
- * Almost everyone is of caucasian origin, although we do have a token Muslim, I'm convinced that she is just for show and is really a Nazi herself
- * The school is getting stricter and stricter. No mobile phones allowed during school hours- it's just so we can't call for help when they reveal themselves as true Nazis to us.

Phew, glad I copped on now. I bet it's third year when they really begin the intensive work on turning us into proper little Nazis. I bet there's subliminal messages in the welcome back speech and in the yearbook too.... I think this picture explains it all:



Oh ye gods, my mum walked in a minute ago and I has Scarlet lying beside the computer. I don't think she noticed, and if she did she didn't say anything, but it had 'Sex' in big letters on the front cover. Be more careful, Ciara.



 **LJqueen**

2005-08-31 07:14 pm UTC ([link](#))



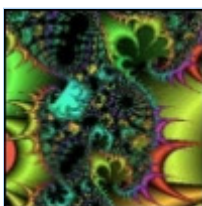
Hun, I don't want to insult you, really, I don't but...GET OVER IT! It's school, why the hell do you care so much? You claim not to care what the girls in our year think of you and/or how you look, so why do you care that our school have a problem with you wearing heavy eye make-up? The hair bit I can understand because you cant just put it on and take it off everyday, but has anything actually been said to you personally yet? and even if it has, do you really think they will enforce it? As for saying that the whole school is full of blond hair, blue eyes and orange skin, I wouldn't blame you for saying that if you weren't infact in the school, but, as a student of TheSchool, you must actually realize that the whole image in completely exaggerated. There are far more girls without the peroxide hair, with their natural complexion showing and, as for the blue eyes bit, thats just stupid, people don't change the colour of their eyes. If you are simply giving out about people who dye their hair and wear make-up then I think, and you must know, that you are being highly hypocritical.

As an intelligent girl Ciara, you know that rules are exaggerated at the start of each new school term, you know that the new strict ways and rules will have lessened or, indeed, died out in the not so distant future.

Again, I don't want you to take this response as abuse but I do think that the image of our school you were portraying was completely unfair, no, strike that, unrealistic. As for the picture, you and I both know that that is not what the typical student looks like, of course there are some girls like that but there is in every school and the percentage of people like that one in your drawing is way below the percentage of those who are not.

You know I don't care much forTheSchool but there is seriously no need to make such a big deal of something as ridiculous as what the teachers said on our first day back. Also, you might want to realize that you could do a hell of a lot worse than our school.

(Reply to this)(Thread)



 **saila**

2005-08-31 08:20 pm UTC ([link](#))



Why do I care so much? Because I spend six and a half hours a day there every weekday during term time. You're right, I dont particularly care what the school

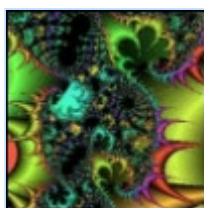
thinks of me, but there is a difference in disliking my eyeshadow and dissallowing me to wear any at all.

Good for you if those people don't bother you at all, fair fecks, but they annoy the crap outta me.


I'm not sure if this was entirely clear but half of that entry and the picture is a complete pisstake! Yes, there are alot of blondes and yes there are an awful lot of brunettes too. That picture was of the type of girl that really gets on my nerves in the school The blue-eyes thing, as I'm sure you'll see if you read the "I'm so Aryan, roysh" was to reinforce the whole Nazi-theme I had running through the update/picture. Guess what- We don't have Swastika's on our uniform either! I was taking the piss, no I really don't think we are about to be handed out copies of 'Mein Kopf' and I'm sure the reasons the German teachers leave so much is not to go off on a secret mission to Germany, don't get so worked up over something that was not meant to be taken seriously.

"you could do a hell of a lot worse than our school."
I could do so, so much better too.

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)

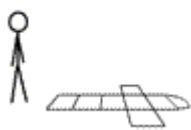


 [saila](#)


2005-08-31 08:48 pm UTC ([link](#)) 

*Mein Kampf

(Reply to this)(Parent)



 [LJqueen](#)

2005-09-01 02:05 pm UTC ([link](#)) 

Bot, don't patronize me by telling me that the Hitler stuff was a joke as if I didn't know...I am sick of being patronized by you. If all of this "was not meant to be taken seriously" then WHY, may I ask, have you written several lj entries and constantly complained to Sylvia and I about it over the last few days?

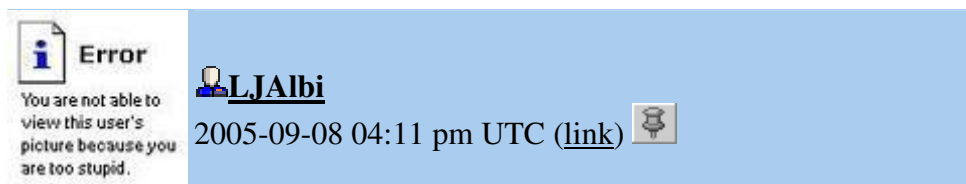
"I could do so, so much better too."

If thats the case, then move or do something productive with your opinion, instead of complaining about it constantly on your online journal and to your friends (yet when someone confronts you about it you say you don't mean it), you could actually try and do something about it like approach a teacher and/or headgirl and try and change some of the "unfair" things that are

annoying you...it would be better than you completely contradicting yourself in such a patronizing and annoying manner.

You know I could not care less about TheSchool and its reputation nor am I worked up but, please, either do something about the things that are pissing you off or get over it and stop going on about it.

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)



Wow.

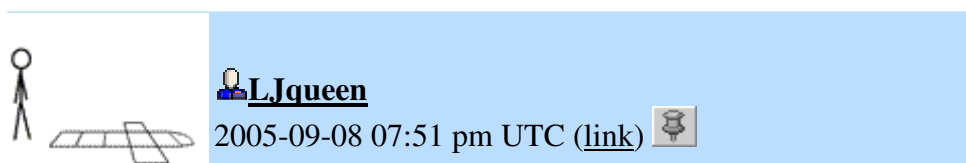
Writing a complaining (which I think was quite funny) journal entry is one thing, but you, random person, really need to lighten up and stop taking other people's LJ so seriously. You don't appreciate being 'patronized' but I'm sure the comments about being 'patronizing' and 'annoying' weren't appreciated either.

If you don't like the complaining, its simple- stop reading and commenting. I'm sure you have plenty of other friends that you could better spend your time with if this girl annoys you that much. And anyways, engaging in character assassination when she wasn't intentionally insulting you at all is simply not on. You said that you didn't mean to insult her and by halfway you are calling her hypocritical. Don't you think that its being a bit paranoid that she's making fun of people with makeup and peroxide hair in general? And even if she was, so the hell what? She has every right to make jokes about whatever the hell she wants, you should dish out as much as you can take. You aren't joking at all, just going for the jugular!

If you're trying to encourage her to do something about it, all you're going to get out of making a comment like you've done is make the other person defensive and disconfirmed, and in the process make you look spiteful and mean to everyone who reads this LJ.

I do realise that this is none of my business, but it really, really irritates me when people are like this online. This stuff isn't for getting picked apart and feeling like you're under attack.

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)



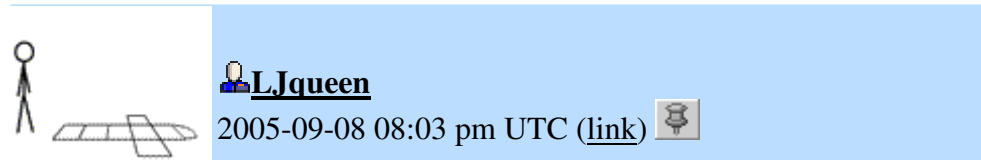
WHAT are you talking about?! You, random person, need to find out what

you are talking about before you reply with an abusive comment like that. Lea is one of my best friends in the whole world and in no way did I put her under attack. You are right about one thing, this is none of your business, if it was, you would have infact known that my comment was a continuation of a conversation we had had that day, the comment was for her to read, not for randomers to give me abuse about. She understands exactly what I meant in that comment and, to be honest, I don't care if you don't.

As for me making myself look spiteful and mean to anyone who reads the LJ,well, maybe you think that of me but you don't know me, anyone who does will know that I love Ciara and that I wouldn't do or say anything to hurt my friends. I don't know, maybe you find it okay to judge a person by a comment they posted(one that you didn't know anything about)on someone elses LJ, a very close friends LJ at that, but I'll just have to hope that other people don't perceive or judge me in the same way that you have. I do realise how the comment may have come across but it was intended for Ciara the person who knew exactly what I was talking about,it was not intended for others.

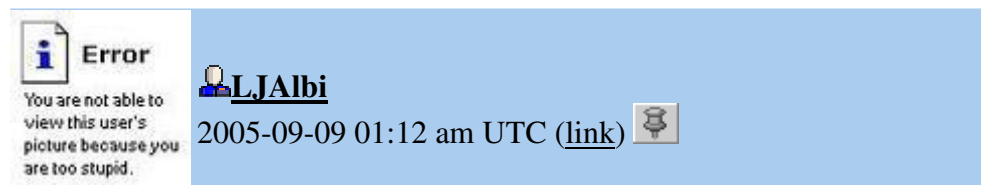
Look, you don't know me and I sure as hell don't know you but you should take this from me, I never set out to insult or put down Ciara, both her and I know that. You said that you should dish out as much as you can take, this is exactly what I did, if you had bothered to find out before writing such a nasty reply, you would have known that.

(Reply to this)(Parent)



Also, please don't send me back an abusive reply, can we just leave it that you misunderstood and, I fully admit, quite understandably, how and what I was saying to my friend during a bit of an argument we were having? I know what I said pissed you off but I hope you now know that I wasn't actually being a cruel bitch, you can even ask Ciara!

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)



Fair enough. All I can tell is from what's written in front of me.

No hard feelings.

(Reply to this)(Parent)



 **L.Jcool**

2005-08-31 11:23 pm UTC ([link](#))



haha, stinger ^^

Also, i never have to go to school again. But yeah, fight the power and all that
(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)



 **saila**

2005-09-01 12:11 pm UTC ([link](#))



Lucky bastard! No pwer shall be fought, I'll just silently resent them from now on (y)

(Reply to this)(Parent)

 **L.JNessa**

2005-08-31 08:46 pm UTC ([link](#))



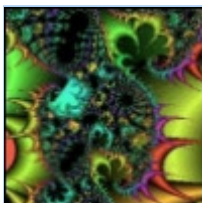
It's not 'Mein Kopf', afaik it's 'Mein Kampf'. yes, I felt the need to say it here, and on IRC. *nods*

And it's school. Get over it tbh. :P

hugs

~Anna

(Reply to this)(Thread)



 **saila**


2005-08-31 08:49 pm UTC ([link](#))



Had it edited by the time that email came through Anna :p

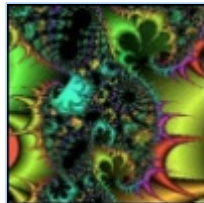
(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)

 **LJNessa**


2005-08-31 08:57 pm UTC ([link](#)) 

pfft, 2 minutes after I posted here, and a bit after IRC. So I win. Yes.

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)




 **saila**

2005-08-31 08:59 pm UTC ([link](#)) 

Fine so, you win, it's strange that comments on Livejournal take a while to be emailed out.

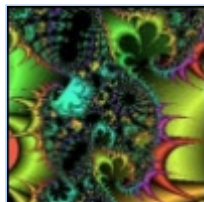
(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)

 **LJNessa**


2005-08-31 09:00 pm UTC ([link](#)) 

'Tis indeed. *nods wisely* Nice work on the correcting, most wouldn't bother. Pedants ftw!

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)




 **saila**

2005-09-01 12:12 pm UTC ([link](#)) 

We sohuld have a Pedants Anonymous group...there's a grammatical error in the last line of To Kill a Mockingbird. Pffft!

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)

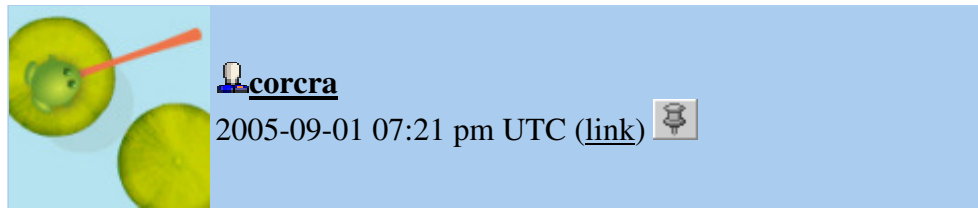
(Anonymous)

2005-09-01 07:19 pm UTC ([link](#)) 

Yarrgh!

Damn book is ruined FOREVER.

(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)



Also, interestingly enough, I am for some reason not logged in.


Except now.

Well, not right now. But when this comment is posted, then.

(Reply to this)(Parent)

On a Lighter note

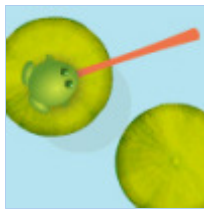
xxxxxxxxxx

2005-09-01 05:41 pm UTC (link) 

SCARLETT! (said in a knacker accent*)

*usually to imply embarrassment

(Reply to this)(Thread)



Re: On a Lighter note



Corcra

2005-09-01 07:29 pm UTC ([link](#))




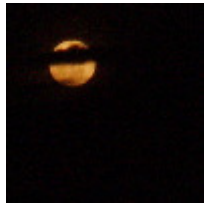
Variants include "Scarleh fer whore!", which can be translated roughly to, "How embarrassing for that girl over there."

(Reply to this)(Parent)

Appendix B - Myriam's blog, February 9th, 2005

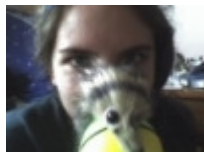
[Previous Entry](#) | [Next Entry](#)

 Feb. 9th, 2005



Why oh why do I always run out of cereal on Wednesday, the day I have a two-hour lecture before lunch? More importantly, why did the remaining little bit of cereal taste sort of like meat?

I'm feeling:  hungry



 Jen wrote:

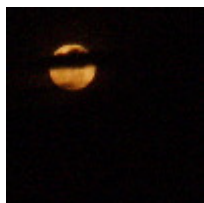
Feb. 9th, 2005 09:04 am (UTC)

Did you see the message that anonymous person left me?? WTF is not the word for it.

And what really pisses me off is that I want to snap at them "Of course the Irish bloody well had horses", but now I'm scratching my head and wondering if they did.

Well spotted about the telescope, by the way... *smacks forehead off desk*

[Link](#) | [Reply](#) | [Thread](#) | [Track This](#)



 Myriam wrote:

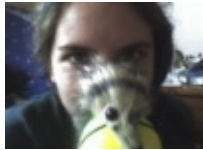
Feb. 9th, 2005 10:55 am (UTC)

Yeah...what a complete prat. I very nearly told them so, but chickened out.

Oh, I thought the telescope was another joke! You know, about all this taking place 100 years ago. That was my way of suggesting to Anonymous Jerk that it was a parody, so it didn't matter if horses were anomalous or not.

And yeah, I can't remember if they had horses either. But *points at previous paragraph* it doesn't really matter.

[Link](#) | [Reply](#) | [Parent](#) | [Thread](#) | [Track This](#)

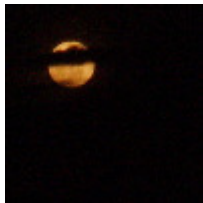


 **jen** wrote:

Feb. 9th, 2005 11:07 am (UTC)

Yep. The telescope was a joke. I was going for a nautical War of 1812 sort of deal... without the whole sea-going bit... but evidently it didn't quite make it there.

[Link](#) | [Reply](#) | [Parent](#) | [Thread](#) | [Track This](#)



 **Myriam** wrote:

Feb. 9th, 2005 11:09 am (UTC)

Well, as the stoner from Clueless says... *I* dug it.

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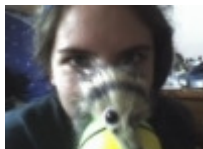
 **LJLittlemouse** wrote:

Feb. 9th, 2005 10:41 am (UTC)

Wednesday = evil day, middle of week, weekend is at its furthest away. The day that everything goes wrong.

Thats my hypothosis any way

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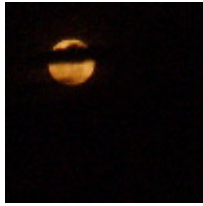


 **jen** wrote:

Feb. 9th, 2005 03:24 pm (UTC)

Btw, my mam says that Madchen Amick is in ER these days. (And she forgives you for calling her a prat. Tee hee. She was attempting to be controversial. But hasn't forgotten.)

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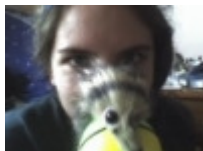
 [Myriam](#) wrote:

Feb. 9th, 2005 03:32 pm (UTC)

That was her? did you know that when you enticed me into bitching about her?
headdesk

Heh, I think I heard about Madchen Amick being in ER, but I haven't seen her... your mum a Twin Peaks fan?

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 [jen](#) wrote:

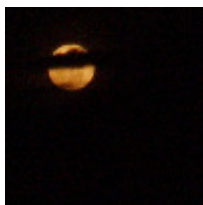
Feb. 10th, 2005 04:47 am (UTC)

Actually I didn't know until last night when I was showing my dad the damn post, and mam walked in and vaguely said she'd left me a controversial message. She found the whole thing amusing, anyway... I think that was what she was going for.

And yes, I think they were Twin Peaks fans... I kinda remembering them talking about it when I was smaller. (Had forgotten, else I'd have let you know. Sorry.)

And I didn't "entice" you into bitching about anybody! You're responsible for your own bitching, lady!

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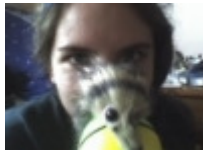


 [Myriam](#) wrote:

Feb. 10th, 2005 12:05 pm (UTC)

So commenting in my journal saying "Did you get a load of that anonymous commenter? WTF?" - if that wasn't enticement, I don't know what is!

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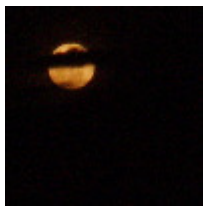
 **Jen** wrote:

Feb. 10th, 2005 02:02 pm (UTC)

Oh, yeah. Forgot about that. Well, you didn't have to take me up on it. *looks sanctimonious*

Anyway, nobody's feelings were hurt, so it's all good.

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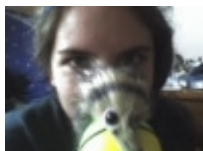


 **Myriam** wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 04:55 am (UTC)

I'm trying to picture you looking sanctimonious, and failing.

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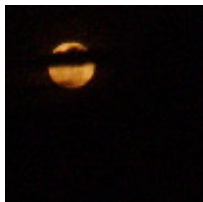


 **Jen** wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 06:40 am (UTC)

Yeah, I'm not quite sure how to do it. That's why I have a Livejournal.

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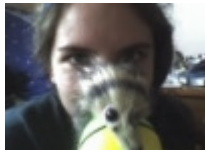
 **Myriam** wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 06:43 am (UTC)

Livejournal...expresses your sanctimoniousness so your face doesn't have to!

(deleted your other comment cos it had my name in it...prefer to keep that private. But it made me larf out loud.)

[Link](#) | [Reply](#) | [Parent](#) | [Thread](#) | [Track This](#)



 [jen](#) wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 06:50 am (UTC)

Oops! What was the comment? I've forgotten. Yeah, Virginitie Marie, you should definitely tell me when I make slipups like that.

[Link](#) | [Reply](#) | [Parent](#) | [Thread](#) | [Track This](#)



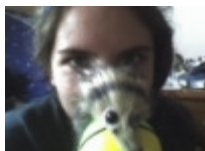
 [Myriam](#) wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 06:51 am (UTC)

It was you pouting and claiming that you can too watch me without supervision!

And what's with the Sue name?!?!?

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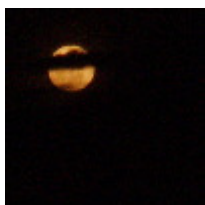


 [jen](#) wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 06:55 am (UTC)

Er, it's your name, Ginnity. Don't tell me you've forgotten your name!
Ok, fine, it's not your name.

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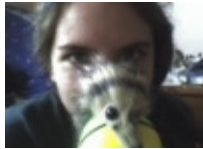


 [Myriam](#) wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 07:00 am (UTC)

And thank goodness it isn't. It's a step down from Chastity.

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 **jen** wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 06:57 am (UTC)

I have yet to come across a Sue named "Virginity". Although... hang on.

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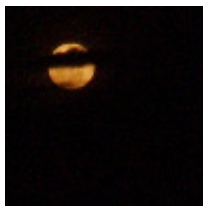


 **Myriam** wrote:

Feb. 11th, 2005 07:01 am (UTC)

I *have* found Sues with my real name in the past...

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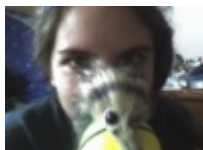


 **Myriam** wrote:

Feb. 14th, 2005 10:17 am (UTC)

Did you find any?

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 **jen** wrote:

Feb. 14th, 2005 11:23 am (UTC)

No, to my disappointment, but it would have had to have been a troll anyway.

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(Leave a comment)