REDEFINING THE DIGITAL DIALECTIC: THE DIALECTICS OF USER
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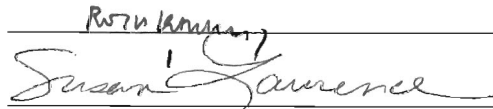
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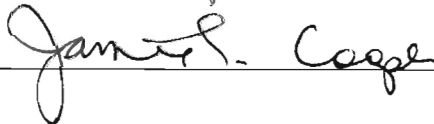_____   Dean, College of Humanities
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Redefining the Digital Dialectic: The Dialectics of User-Generated Media

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts at George Mason University

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ABSTRACT

REDEFINING THE DIGITAL DIALECTIC: THE DIALECTICS OF USER
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This thesis redefines a dialectical model that is appropriate for today's contemporary

technological context, specifically based on the introduction of user-generated

technologies. In the chapter titled "Dialectic Through History" I describe the history of

dialectic up to and including its most recent use in the 1999 essay collection *The Digital

Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*. The following chapter describes the shift from the

Industrial Age to the Information Age, as illustrated through the transition from Web 1.0

technologies to Web 2.0, and then illustrates a dialectical model that is based on its

historical foundational principles described in Chapter 2 combined with today's emerging

technological, social, and economic contexts. The next chapter lists current day

examples of today's dialectical oppositions between the social and economic principles

founded in the Industrial Age versus those emerging during the Information Age.   I then

conclude by discussing the possibilities for the future of dialectic as related to Web 3.0.

1. Introduction

Dialectical reasoning can apply to something as simple as a conversation or be used as a tool to seek larger social and historical truths. Its methodology is rooted in a mode of discourse amongst more than one person for the purpose of reaching a deeper understanding of subject matter. It originates in the dialogues of Plato where it began as a structure for theoretical discourse based on a question and answer format between more than one person. Different philosophers throughout history have referred to Plato's dialectical model, and, in doing so, each philosopher has interpreted dialectic differently and created a theoretical model of dialectic that was appropriate for the circumstances they were applying it to. Though the application and interpretation have adapted, the purpose throughout has remained the same—to juxtapose oppositions in order to seek advancement in understanding and knowledge.

The most recent application of dialectical analysis was in the 1995 essay collection titled *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*, which sought to understand how technological growth was influencing societal change in the late-twentieth century. Since 1995, there has been a rapid development of new user-generated technologies that have served to evolve the Internet into a platform for global discourse, individual invention, and an emerging economic market that is usurping traditional industrial age capitalism. It is my contention that the immersion of these citizen-

controlled technologies into society is signaling an evolutionary step that demands an

updated dialectical model that is appropriate for today's contemporary technological

context.

Ben Agger in *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism* describes why dialectical analysis has been repeatedly utilized as a tool for seeking knowledge:

> A dialectical analysis of the present must show where it came from historically
> and where it may move in the future. . . . Social amnesia leads to a superficial
> understanding of phenomena, a presuppositionless empiricism that fails to
> examine the deep structure underneath the surface of the present. One-
> dimensionality, in effect, obliterates the past in order to keep the future hidden.
> (138)

Dialectic originated with Plato but the philosophers Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl

Marx, and Theodore Adorno each employed it because they recognized substantial social

divisions occurring in their cultures that they sought to clarify through the use of dialectic

as a model for theoretical examination. In the late-twentieth century, the rapid

emergence of technology, specifically personal computers and the Internet, into everyday

life was causing a division between those who supported technological growth and those

who feared it. *The Digital Dialectic* brought dialectic into the digital age by using it as a

tool to examine each side of these oppositional ideas in their time.

Today there is a growing division between the basic principles of production and

communication that were erected during the industrial age and those that are emerging

with the growth of Internet technologies, specifically the different forms of user-generated media. The industrial age was structured around a central point of control (factory owner or heads of production) and top-down information flow. The main focus of industrial businesses was mass-production and dissemination, and the role of industrial age workers was to act as cogs within the larger industrial machine. With the exception of unions, which arose in response to this fact, there was very little, if any, possibility for individuals to communicate with each other or with those in control. Workers lacked the ability to affect the means of production, and, by extension, many aspects of their own lives.

The communication technologies erected during the industrial age mirrored those basic principles and became focused on widely disseminating limited amounts of information through print and electronic media genres. Advertising dollars were the main product that these communication vehicles focused on, and the content of widespread communication was, therefore, entirely dependent upon the size of the audience that it was capable of attracting. Information was allotted to the public through a pattern of top-down, product focused control that emulated the practices of industrial age production.

This pattern of communication has had collateral effects on how people communicate in both educational and professional environments up through today. In *Writing Workplace Cultures* Jim Henry examines composition pedagogy during the twentieth century noting that it focused on the production of writing rather than processes of learning how to write, resulting in the homogenization of communication. Many businesses still do not allow reciprocal communication between itself and its customers;

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their customer service centers are outsourced (sometimes even to third-world countries) and their websites only provide ambiguous, impersonal email contacts that are unreliable.

The user-generated technologies evolving in the information age are beginning to change the patterns of information flow as well as the processes that are involved in the production, consumption and distribution of consumer goods in the twenty first century. The central point of information and production control that was prevalent in the industrial age (the factory owner or the owner of the means of production) is being directly challenged by today's society because information and goods flow freely amongst the population without a governing power. Industrial age archetypal patterns of top-down control currently stand in direct contrast to the free-flowing, complex patterns of communication and distribution emerging in the information age. Users now have the ability to invent online, alter existing data, distribute goods as mediated through technology, and globally communicate with one another. Sites like eBay, for example, give individual users the ability to distribute goods to the greater population. Topically based forum sites allow users who have common interests the capability to gather participate in discourse surrounding those interests. The possibilities for information exchange and goods distribution as mediated through today's technologies provide a discernable opposition to the mindset created in the industrial age.

Today's larger social and historical dialectical opposition is oscillating between the foundations of control and communication that have been used over the last 150 years and those that are beginning to emerge as society becomes networked and communication becomes ubiquitous. As people continue to communicate with one

another information is no longer constrained by a central point of control; it now has the capability of flowing in indiscriminant patterns throughout all online networks. Yochai Benkler, in *The Wealth of Networks* discusses how human to human networks online today are signaling the breakdown of control structures that were erected under industrial economies: "The most important aspect of the networked information economy is the possibility it opens for reversing the control focus of the industrial information economy" (32).

The introduction of different forms of user-generated media into both professional as well as educational environments is creating a platform for reciprocal communication that performs as a process rather than a product. R. Scott Hall, in *The Blog Ahead: How Citizen-Generated Media is Radically Tilting the Communications Balance* discusses how blogging in classrooms, for example, is creating a forum for discourse that students actively participate in because there are less real world social restrictions on their thoughts and ideas (90). Citizen generated video sites, for example, are also opening up outlets for communication media that are not determined by advertising dollars. Some businesses, according to *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, are also using the different forms of user-generated technologies to communicate both internally and externally in order to expand communication and knowledge both within the company as well as between the company and the customers or clients through participatory, continuous dialogue (Levine 20). The conversations occurring online through these technologies do not function like industrialized mass-communication because the communication is reciprocal and continuous. This communication is an ongoing dialectic.

There is a period of social and economic adjustment occurring as these technologies supplant traditional conventionalities. Peer to peer (P2P) file sharing networks are challenging copyright laws because people are able to share data over networks without one central point of control. Blogs are becoming a new form of citizen-generated journalism attracting such large audiences that traditional media outlets are in direction contention with them, and, most recently, have had to not only acknowledge the discourse occurring on them but sometimes the discourse actually directs the traditional outlets' news content. Social networking sites like myspace.com and youtube.com have become so popular that vast human networks are forming on them, thus creating a whole new genre for human socialization. The results of this unlimited communication are beginning to have effects on the traditional models of production and consumption because consumers are no longer limited to what is made available to them through industry, and people now have the ability to produce as well as consume. The first measurable results of the breakdown in industrial age production practices can be witnessed in the evolution of online markets that are based on consumer demands, or niche markets.

This thesis will define a new dialectical model that is appropriate for examining the social circumstances arising today due to emergence of the different forms of online user-generated media. I will begin by examining traditional definitions of dialectic up to and including *The Digital Dialectic* in order to illustrate the alterations that it has undergone during its long history. I will then describe the historical and social transitions occurring today that result from the prevalence of user-generated media in society, which

I will then illustrate by examining the theoretical shift now widely known as the movement from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0.

Based on these facts, I will assemble a new dialectical model that builds upon the models described by previous philosophers. I will incorporate certain aspects of each philosopher's interpretations that are applicable to today's circumstances based on the advancement of communication in the user-generated age. I will then argue that the current dialectical opposition exists between the philosophies still rooted in industrial age that believe information should be controlled and regulated, versus the emerging philosophies of the information age that believe emancipated communication will inevitably result in the freedom of information and the erosion of industrial age control practices. The following chapter will list current day examples that best illustrate this dialectical opposition. I will then conclude by discussing what changes are forecasted for the next step in the evolution of communication technologies and what possibilities, therefore, lay ahead for dialectic as society and technology continue to move forward.

2. Dialectic Through History

   The earliest forms of dialectic are illustrated in the dialogues of Plato where it

began as a method of discourse occurring between two or more people for the purpose of

seeking knowledge through participatory reasoning. The main objective of Plato's

dialectic is finding logic through discourse that is not clouded by personal biases, cultural

differences, or any other illogical disruptive element. Francis MacDonald Cornford in

Plato's Theory of Knowledge describes Plato's dialectical method for contemporary

readers:

> He will readily understand that dialectic means a co-operative inquiry carried on
>
> in conversation between two or more minds that are equally bent, not on getting
>
> the better of the argument, but on arriving at the truth. A tentative suggestion
>
> ('hypothesis') put forward by one speaker is corrected and improved until the full
>
> meaning is clearly stated. (30)

The method that Plato's dialectic follows begins with the introduction of a hypothesis

followed by a series of questions and answers between two or more people meant to get

to the core logic of the topic. The initial hypothesis is questioned in order to discover

whether or not it can be disproved and thus determine its true credibility. It isn't

argumentation just for arguments sake, but a discourse for the purpose of reaching truths

that transcend the limitations of individual logic.

Plato's method of dialectical inquiry, also known as the Socratic Method, is meant to reach levels of knowledge and understanding that aren't possible through individual thought or examination and can only be reached through discourse amongst disparate individuals: "That is the thought behind Socratic dialectics: the truth about the human things is contained, albeit confusedly, in the opinions of ordinary men, and can be brought out by analysis" (Devlin 38). Plato's method of oral dialectical inquiry seeks to reach points of similarity between humans, and because the object is to not be diluted by any one individual's personal agenda or cultural proclivity, the syntheses reached through dialectic are truths established through intrinsic human logic.

For Plato, dialectic was a tool for theoretical examination, but, as dialectic has been repeatedly called upon by different philosophers throughout history, the method through which it is applied has undergone some alterations. German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel applied the oppositional principles of dialectic to the progression of human history. For Hegel, dialectic wasn't just a tool for theoretical examination that occurred through discourse; it was an illustration of the path that humanity was taking throughout history towards reaching a state of unification. Alexandre Kojeve in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* describes how Hegel interpreted and applied Plato's dialectic:

> And just as in a Platonic Dialogue, the auditor (who in this case is a historian-philosopher of philosophy) discovers the absolute truth as the result of the implicit or tacit 'discussion' between the great Systems of history, hence, as the result of their 'dialectic.' Hegel was the first of these auditor-historian-philosophers. In any

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case, he was the first to be so consciously. And that is why he was the first who

could knowingly abandon Dialectic conceived as a philosophical *method.* He is

content to observe and describe the dialectic which was effected throughout

history, and he no longer needs to *make* a dialectic himself. (183)

Hegel expanded dialectic from a method of discourse to an illustration of the evolution of

humanity through the oppositions that dialectic presents. His philosophy, he believed,

was the culmination of all philosophies that preceded him that combined to illustrate a

dialectical path—each having an aspect of truth (although some were only temporary) —

but all serving to progress humanity towards an eventual universal understanding.

Hegel's dialectic, or the Hegelian Dialectic, applied dialectical principles to larger

historical conditions, but it is because of the social conditions of the age he lived in that

his dialectic focused on what he believed was a spiritual force that compelled man's drive

forward. Hegel was born in Germany in 1770, in what was then known as the duchy of

Württemberg, during the upheaval of the Holy Roman Catholic church and the

introduction of Protestantism. The spiritual oppositions that Hegel witnessed during his

lifetime between Catholics and Protestants influenced the basic tenets of his dialectical

principles and made the spirit a critical part of his philosophy.   Alec MacHoul and

Wendy Grace in *A Foucault Primer* describe how spirit guided the Hegelian dialectic:

"Its basic tenet was that a form of universal reason existed behind the 'surface' forms of

human knowledge. Thus the 'progression of reason' could be discerned working its way

through history as an immaterial but ever-present *Geist* or spirit" (8). For Hegel,

dialectic's principle of continuous opposition served as an illustration of the teleological

end that he believed was mankind's path. The purpose of history's perpetual opposition, thesis and antithesis, would eventually reach a synthesis that he believed would be a form of universal reason, and this end was inevitable because of the spirit that was propelling it forward. Society's perpetual state of wars and resolutions were the opposing forces of Hegel's dialectic, and all lead towards an eventual synthesis where all oppositions reached a final state of balance.

Hegel was the first philosopher to apply the principles of dialectic to the greater social and historical world rather than to interpret it as a theoretical method, and it was his thinking that influenced future philosophers to also employ dialectic as an illustration of larger social matters. Karl Marx followed Hegel and credited Hegel for providing the basis of his theory:

> Hegelianism was therefore a major theoretical influence on Marxist thinking at this time, since it provided for the basis of dialectical thought: a general principle of historical change, which postulated that any form of thought would eventually transform, not into its negation, but into a synthesis of itself *with* its negation. (MacHoul and Grace 8)

Karl Marx did not utilize dialectic as a method for theoretical examination but as a base principle that represented humanity's overall movement towards a more evolved state of being. The key difference, however, between Marx's dialectical theory and Hegel's is that Marx did not believe dialectic was guided by the spirit but by material, and, therefore, his theory became known as the Materialist Dialectic (Churchich 45).

Whereas Hegel's lifetime was entrenched in spiritual upheaval and opposition, the major oppositions that Marx witnessed were between social classes, the poor and socially oppressed proletariat versus the rich and socially dominant bourgeois, which he believed was due to society's capitalist structure. Unlike Hegel, Marx believed that spirituality, or ideological belief systems, were a distraction to the lower classes to prevent them from recognizing and understanding the role that the ruling class was forcing them into. In *False Consciousness: An Essay on Mystification* Guenter Lewy discusses Marx's perception towards ideological thinking:

> Ideological thinking is thinking that is ignorant of the true factors determining history. Ideologies look at the world as shaped by ideas whereas man's thinking is merely an echo of material conditions. In turn, such false consciousness leads to a failure to understand the direction in which history is moving and to ignorance of the correct role that various classes have to play in the historical process. (3)

Marx, like Hegel, believed that dialectic illustrated society's continuous opposition leading towards a final state of synthesis between opposing ideas. However, as industrial technologies began to take over during his lifetime, he believed that the material, tangible products of society mirrored the social conditions of humanity.

Marx accredited Hegel with the application of dialectic to larger social and historical conditions, but he believed that Hegel's focus on the spirit lack rationality. In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* he wrote:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but it is its direct

opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of

thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms it into an

independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only

the external, phenomenal for of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is

nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated

into forms of thought . . . . The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's

hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form

of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it's standing on

its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational

kernel within the mystical shell. (Marx 25)

Marx believed that the imbalance between the classes and that the eventual synthesis of

these oppositions would lead to a state of social and economic balance that became

known as Marxism or socialism. The leaders of industry that held control over the

workers would no longer hold infinite power and social equality would be represented by

a regulation of material wealth and the communal ownership of the means of production.

Dialectical Materialism represents an important shift in the history of dialectic as

it progressed towards *The Digital Dialectic* and the dialectics of user-generated media

because it recognized the importance of material and technology as they relate to society

overall, and this, in turn, caused future philosophers to continue examining how

technology and culture coincided. German philosopher Theodore Adnorno chose to build

upon Marx's theory in his *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno, like Marx, believed that

there was an imbalance in industrialized societies between workers and those who controlled the means of production. He argued that the result of industry was mass-production, mass-consumption, and mass-media that lead to a lack of individual thought and dissention (Adorno 28). Adorno fled from Nazi Germany in the 1930s searching for freedom of thought and expression; however, when he eventually reached America he came to the realization that the oppression he witnessed in Germany was being enacted in the United States just under a different guise—through the control of the media and culture.

Adorno's theory of dialectic, unlike previous philosophers' interpretations, did not have a teleological end. For him there was no permanent synthesis, only continuous opposition meant to delve deeper into the inner-workings of popular society and culture in order to understand and question the controlling forces. He felt that the imbalance, and therefore opposition, was between society and the standardization that technology inspired:

A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs, and movies keep the whole thing together until their leveling element shows its strength in the very wrong which it furthered. It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of work and that of the social system. (Adorno and Horkheimer 121)

Industrial technologies, Adorno argued, only served to standardize humanity and the popular culture of his age was only another representation of thought control and intellectual homogenization.

Mass-media communication technologies in particular, according to Adorno, did not represent society's advancement; they only acted as a vehicle for propaganda. He also noted that as technology evolved into the larger type of mass-media outlets he witnessed in his lifetime (radio in particular) individual thought and control became increasingly even less possible:

> This is the result not of a law of movement in technology as such but of its function in today's economy. The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness. The step from the telephone to the radio has clearly distinguished the roles. The former still allowed the subscriber to play the role of subject, and was liberal. The latter is democratic; it turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same. No machinery of rejoinder has been devised, and private broadcasters are denied any freedom.
>
> (Adorno and Horkheimer 121)

Technology for both Marx and Adorno represented the assimilation of society into a population of passive, de-intellectualized consumers. Mass-production not only resulted in a gross amount of people whose labor afforded absolutely no possibility for individual or analytical thought, but it also resulted in a society of consumers who lacked power and choice.

The communication technologies that Marx and Adorno based their theories on were products of the industrial age. They were all based on a one-way schematic where information and power flowed from the top down, and, therefore, all information and material made available to the general public went through a filtering process that the greater society had little, if any, control over. It wasn't until the invention of the personal computer that views towards technology began to shift.

In 1995, the world was undergoing rapid changes as Microsoft's Windows 95, the first widely used GUI (graphical user interface) operating system, was introduced and the Internet, with features like email and chat rooms that allowed people to connect to one another through technology, started to create a shift in thinking towards digital technologies. *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media* was the first hint of a transition from the Frankfurt School's conventional distrust of technology to school of thought that was beginning to recognize the possibilities for societal change that this new medium presented. *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media* offers four dialectical oppositions that illustrate the duality between the physical world versus the expanding virtual world: "The Real and the Ideal," "The Body and the Machine," "The Medium and the Message," and "The World and the Screen." Each of these topics poses traditional philosophical matters against what was, at that time, contemporary technological subject matter in order to illustrate the dialectical opposition between the traditional critical fears of technology and the possibilities for positive social effects as a result of contemporary technologies.

One of the most illustrative essays in this collection is Michael Heim's essay "The Cyberspace Dialectic" because it examines in depth the critical tradition's attitudes towards technology in the late-twentieth century. Heim categorizes the oppositions as the "naïve realists" and the "network idealists" (33). The idealist, according to Heim**,** "sees the next century as an enormous communitarian buzz. The worldwide networks that cover the planet form a global beehive where civilization shakes off individual controls and electronic life steps out on its own" (37). In contrast to this belief Heim describes the point of view of the naïve realist:

> The direct, unmediated spaces we perceive with our senses create the places
>
> where we mature physically, morally and socially. Even if modern life shrinks
>
> public spaces by building freeways, and even if the 'collective mind' still offers
>
> much interaction among individuals through computers, the traditional meeting
>
> places still foster social bonds built on trust of time spent together. (38)

Heim's essay describes one of the most prevalent twentieth century contentions as technology began to integrate into daily life. Because technology had been so detrimental to society during the industrial age, and was so rapidly becoming commonplace at that time, resistance to its growth was inevitable. This duality outlined the divide between the conventional, untrusting beliefs towards technology versus the emerging argument that technology was no longer depreciating life but extending it into a new age where it would not hinder but expand human experiences.

Bob Stein's essay "We Could be Better Ancestors Than This: Ethics and First Principles for the Art of the Digital Age" describes the late-twentieth century as a period

of time that will be classified by future generations as a tremendous turning point in history, the beginning of a new age. Stein noted an example of how the Internet was beginning to alter the landscape of popular culture. His company released a CD-ROM "First Person: Mamuia Abu-Jamal," which was a documentary from the first person point of view of a Black Panther leader that was about to be executed, and the reaction he received surprised him. Not only was there a greater demand than he forecasted, but there was a stay of execution placed on Jamal that he directly attributed to the CD. His response to this was: "it seems to me that the process of profound changes in the way that humans communicate with each other that we are going through will accelerate the need and possibility for a new social structure" (202). This dialectic offers the possibility that society, when integrated with the capabilities that emerging technologies offer, may begin to operate under a different set of ideological beliefs based on a transformation of communication capabilities. When the larger population's communication is broadened so dramatically, Stein believes there will be inevitably be resulting larger social alterations as well.

Each of the oppositions presented by *The Digital Dialectic* attempt to outline traditional attitudes towards technology's effects on society against possible arguments that indicate technology is no longer detrimental to society and may, in fact, have positive effects in the future. While each of these topics focuses on different aspects of technological growth the one idea that stays consistent throughout each essay is the fact that the time they were writing in was liminal. The late-twentieth century was a threshold for the dawning of an age where technology and information would have drastic impacts

on society, whether they were positive or negative. *The Digital Dialectic* introduced dialectic into the information age by outlining the larger historical and social oppositions that were present during that period of time.

Each time that dialectic has been called upon by different philosophers throughout its long history has been in response to a larger historical and social period of change, and today's integration of user-generated media into society is creating another period of change by usurping the foundations of industrial age capitalism and communication. The possibilities that user-generated technologies present for communication and invention are resulting in larger social and economic changes. Today's dialectic is no longer limited to outlining larger social and historical oppositions or trends; today's dialectic is occurring amongst people online in a perpetual cultural discourse, and it is this communication that is resulting in a larger social dialectical opposition between industrial age principles and the newly emerging social and economic standards of the information age.

3. The Dialectics of User-Generated Media

User-generated media is creating a dialectical context that reverts back to dialectic amongst individuals as mediated through technology, but, at the same time, this unlimited online discourse is resulting in a larger social dialectical opposition. Top-down industrial age control hierarchies are rapidly being usurped by a public with the ability to communicate equilaterally without hierarchical constraints. The dialectics of user-generated media describes the perpetual dialectical discourse occurring online amongst users and examines the larger social dialectic that is the *result* of this online communication.

From the Industrial Revolution to the Information Revolution

In the industrial age machinery was invented that began to replace humans as producers of goods, resulting in a workforce without any intellectual capabilities or skills that would make them invaluable to industry. Workers were expendable and completely dependent upon the owners of production for their livelihoods. All information, and therefore all control, flowed from the top-down in industrial businesses, and this pattern has continued on even into non-industrial businesses with CEOs and other corporate figure heads replacing the factory owners as the centers of control.

Jim Henry discusses in *Writing Workplace Cultures: An Archeology of Professional Writing* how industrial age principles of production over process were reflected even in college and university epistemologies up through the late-twentieth century. He notes that writing pedagogies in particular reflected industrialized production focused principles:

> A short version of these correlations goes something like this: in the early twentieth century emerged the first U.S. economies of scale, by which industrial innovations such as the assembly line enabled mass production (and consumption) that witnessed the simultaneous demise of much guild and craft production . . . . Using time-motion studies, workers' movements were standardized, work processes were routinized, and corporate profits hence maximized by the elimination of endeavors that did not apparently contribute directly and unequivocally to the product. Literacy tasks were similarly truncated . . . . Hence the writing demanded of *most* workers was a product that contributed to other products, as managed in the workplace. (2)

According to Henry, the writing that was taught in university curriculums in the early to mid-twentieth century reflected the type of communication actually occurring in industry at the time. Completed projects became the focus of composition pedagogy rather than the processes that were necessary in order to reach that end-state. Because the product controlled the profit, and because the leaders of those industries controlled the workers, the communication that occurred in business was focused on the agenda of production,

and this ideological standard of product over process bled over into the educational curriculums throughout the twentieth century.

This type of top-down, one way communication was also reflected in communication media that evolved during the industrial age. In capitalistic societies, television, radio, and print are primarily funded by advertisers and, therefore, content is generally decided upon based on the size of audiences that it can draw:

> It is critical to realize that for the most part, mass-media in the United States are supported by advertising. Television networks, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, and Web sites produce shows, articles, films, programs, and Web content not for the ultimate goal of entertaining or informing, but to make a healthy profit from the sale of advertising. Media vehicles sell audiences to make money. (O'Guinn, Allen, and Semenik 81)

For mass-media in the industrial age audience was the product that was focused upon, and the content delivered to those audiences was controlled through a hierarchy focused on advertising dollars leaving very little choice or control in the hands of the public. Information was treated as a commodity, and the public was provided only a limited amount over wide audiences, much like the mass-produced goods of this age.

Information age technologies, however, specifically the different forms of user-generated media, are serving to break down the control structures that were erected during the industrial age. Information and communication no longer flow from the top-down because contemporary technologies make it possible for people on all different levels to communicate with one another and thus acquire and share information. The

result is a more equitable pattern of control extended into society overall. Michael

Heim's essay "The Cyberspace: Dialectic" in *The Digital Dialectic* foresaw the collapse

of corporate organizational structures due to mass communication online:

> Once the dialectic no longer swings between the socially oppressed and the power
>
> of big capital, we must ask where and how dialectic comes into play. If our social
>
> developments begin to manifest outside the mode of material production, what
>
> does the mode of information mean for social change? (Heim 40)

The industrial age was immersed in mass-production and hierarchical control, but the

information age is rooted in mass-communication that directly results in a more

communal form of control and production.

Today's technologies are creating communication patterns from unilateral to

bilateral. User-generated media on the Internet are creating networks of people who have

more access to information, the ability to create and distribute content and goods, and the

ability to alter already existing content online. Today's audiences have the capacity to

participate in a continuous, limitless discourse without any cultural or economic

restrictions.

The intellectual capabilities and control that were denied of workers and the

public in general during the industrial age are being delivered back to people through

user-generated Internet technologies. This discourse is increasingly affecting the social

and economic structures of formerly industrialized nations. To return to what Theodore

Adorno stated in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

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The step from the telephone to the radio has clearly distinguished the roles. The

former still allowed the subscriber to play the role of subject, and was liberal.

The latter is democratic; it turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively

subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same. (121)

Adorno's perspective is based on the technologies existent in his lifetime, and he goes on

to note: "No machinery of rejoinder has been devised, and private broadcasters are denied

any freedom" (121). The Internet *is* that machinery of rejoinder, and the control that is

wielded over other forms of media is, at least so far, incapable of being fully exercised

over the networks created through the different forms of user-generated media.

The Internet has gone through a period of evolution that has brought it to its

current stage. When the Internet began to play a role in society it initially adopted the

qualities of industrial age communication media. Individual web pages offered little, if

any, possibility for interaction between users and creators. Business web pages also

followed the same logic. Jay David Bolter in *Writing Space* discussed how the Web

became a remediation of prior media venues for businesses: "Meanwhile, large

corporations have invented a Web genre that combines and remediates a number of

forms, including the promotional ad or brochure, the stockholder's report, and marketing

and sales material" (118). In the beginning the Internet was simply another form of

industrial society's communication media, but, as the technology evolves and new

capabilities arise, current day communication standards are also evolving. The

differentiation between the industrial age form of Internet communication and the type of

communication arising from user-generated media is currently being referred to as the evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0.

The Historical Transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

The distinction between the doctrines of the industrial age and the information age can be directly illustrated by the differentiating factors of Web 1.0 technologies and Web 2.0 technologies. Web 1.0 technologies are based on the one-way communication schematic, but Web 2.0 technologies are deemed such based on their capacity to initiate reciprocal communication between users, creators, and other users. In 1995, *The Digital Dialectic* arose in response to the beginning of the historical transition from the industrial age to the information age as marked by the rapid increase in the use of personal computers and the Internet throughout society, but, within the last ten years Internet use has increased exponentially and the integration of user-generated technologies has transformed the Internet into a new genre for societal communication. Mary Madden of the PEW Internet and American Life Project released a survey in April of 2006 stating that 73% of all American adults, or approximately 147 million people, use the Internet regularly compared to only 15% in 1995, and in 2006 *Time Magazine* named their person of the year as "You" because user-generated media via the Internet was beginning to have such a major impact on how society operates. Ross Mayfield, the CEO of a company called SocialText, said in an article in *Wired Magazine* that "Web 1.0 was commerce. Web 2.0 is people" (Singel). The measurable transition from Web 1.0 technologies to those that are considered Web 2.0 represents the definitive evolution from the industrial

age to the information age. The current most widely used technologies that are classified as Web 2.0 (or user-generated media) are sites that allow for user participation and adaptation of Web content like wiki, social networking sites, and blogs. These types of software distinctly illustrate the dialectic occurring online today.

Wiki

Wiki is considered Web 2.0 software because it allows for all users to continuously alter web page content, and, in doing so, creates a platform for a continuous flow of information sharing amongst the users; it is a form of contemporary dialectic because is a gathering of individuals sharing knowledge for the purpose of reaching a deeper understanding of subject matter. Though this dialectic does not occur through discourse, it does, however, share one of the most basic and important characteristics of dialectic—it acts as a method for reaching the truth through the combined knowledge of a diverse population of users. Dan Gillmor's *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People, For the People* describes the principle behind wiki software: "The crucial element is that any user can edit any page. The software keeps track of every change. Anyone can follow the changes in detail . . . all Wikis are works in progress" (32). Wikipedia is the most widely recognized form of wiki software. It is an online encyclopedia written entirely by the users. People go on and post information on various topics, and other users have the ability to edit and add to the information. This means that the information provided on this site is considered fallible because it does not go through the strict editing processes that traditional encyclopedias are subject to and there

are countless cases of online vandalism to these sites. However, as noted in *Wiki: Web Collaboration,* "The Wikimedia projects . . . enable self-determined work in a sensible project directed at the good of the community. Recognition and the fact that one's own personal contributions are noticed and discussed, motivate participants to continue working" (Ebersbach, Glaser, and Heigl 357). While wiki sites are not currently considered credible for formal citation, the multitudes of users that access the site work to continuously update and correct the information. It is the community of users that act as the editorial process. Essentially, it is a dialectical discourse amongst a population of people who are all bent on reaching the most definitive facts and any disparagement of those facts are eliminated by the larger population that is serious about conveying truths.

Wiki is also commonly used within businesses as virtual message boards or places where documents that are subject to constant revision are kept; this helps to eliminate the partitioning of information that a lot of Web 1.0 databases created. Many businesses, for example, use intranets (information networks that are confined within an organization and began mainly based on geographic location). This structure, however, can cause redundancies and divisions in communication as businesses begin to grow and extend. The principles of wiki are that users can access, contribute to and alter page content so information can be shared through a common site via the Internet, thus creating more collaboration and communication amongst the population of users. It allows for work to be a continuous process rather than one limited by work hours or work places. Like the other forms of user-generated media, wiki is a Web 2.0 technology and a contemporary form of dialectic, because it presents an opportunity for continuous, limitless

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communication and collaboration for the purpose of reaching advanced levels of knowledge and understanding.

Social Networking Sites

The main purpose of social networking sites is to act as a forum for social networking amongst the users, and while this networking does not, by definition, act as dialectic what they do is provide the *apparatus* for a contemporary dialectic as mediated through technology. Dialectic can apply to something as simple as a conversation or something large as social movement. In the case of social networking sites there is an *opportunity* for dialectical discourse, which, in turn, provides the *opportunity* for larger social movement. It is the unrestricted communication that acts as a vehicle for larger social movement. During the industrial age communication was hindered—it was a unidirectional flow of knowledge. This pattern continued into Web 1.0 technologies where typical websites only provide users the opportunity to view data and no opportunity for reciprocal communication. On social networking sites users gather together for the purpose of communication based on social bonds or shared interests; this engenders a modern form of social dialectic because it exercises today's social movement towards freedom of information and communication.

Some of the most well known examples of social networking sites are myspace.com and facebook.com. Users on these sites create online profiles that can include pictures, message boards, chats, blogs and other forms of personalized media like music and art that act as a form of self-representation amongst the online communities.

These sites are engendering entirely new levels of socialization, as well as creation, for upcoming generations in particular because they are growing up with these types of virtual social connections as commonplace within their lives.

Business Week ran an article in December of 2005 titled "The Myspace Generation" that discusses how upcoming generations are accustomed to living their lives online as well as in the physical world. The difference between the older generations and the teens, according to this article, is that older people tend to use the Internet for singular purposes like email, research, or shopping. Teens, however, tend to stay online for longer periods for social interaction: "Although networks are still in their infancy, experts think they're already creating new forms of social behavior that blur the distinctions between online and real-world interactions" (Hempel and Lehman). These sites provide a tangible forum for widespread social discourse and data sharing that is beginning to have larger social and economic implications as they become increasingly commonplace in society.

Blogs

Blogs originally began on the Internet as weblogs or personal journals kept in an online environment rather than on paper, but recently they have also become a widely respected form of citizen-generated journalism and, by extension, an exemplification of contemporary dialectic. They perform as a topically focused discourse for the purpose of combining knowledge and opinion in order to reach deeper, broader understandings of subject matters. When blogs began they too retained some of the industrialized Web 1.0

principles because they essentially acted as individual sounding boards with no expectations of reader participation. As the number of bloggers has continued to grow so have their audiences, and with the principles of Web 2.0 technologies becoming ingrained in blogs through the integration of reader comment capabilities, a discourse, or a contemporary dialectic, has been initiated between users and creators.

Some of the main virtues of blogs, in comparison to other forms of large media, are that they're written by people who may not otherwise have had the opportunity to be heard, they allow the readers to talk back, and their motives are not economically driven. The conversations that occur on a blog are a modern form of continuous dialectic between the blogger and his or her readers. It is discourse amongst wide assortments of people purely for the purpose of learning from and sharing with one another. In some cases the readers are other bloggers who might also introduce the same topic to their own readers, thus continuing the discussion through extended networks of people without any physical, social or cultural limitations.

Blogs are a more appropriate medium for today's Internet than the Web pages of Web 1.0 because they do not remain static like websites that may only be updated as changes occur, and they are not hindered by the same editing processes that print media is subject to. Yochai Benkler in *The Wealth of Networks* describes some of the main components of blogs that differentiate them from earlier forms of user websites:

> What is significant about this characteristic from the perspective of the
> construction of the public sphere is that blogs enable individuals to write to their
> Web pages in journalism time—that is, hourly, daily, weekly—whereas Web page

culture that preceded it tended to be slower moving: less an equivalent of

reportage than of the essay. (217)

Blogs are a topically focused ongoing dialectic between multiple participants, and they

represent an opportunity for collaboration and communication never possible prior to the

advent of user-generated media forms.

Blogs are also helping break down the dichotomies that grew during the industrial

age both within businesses as well as between businesses and consumers. Some

businesses are using blog technology as a way to communicate internally, thus

stimulating a discourse amongst employees that may not have any other opportunities for

large-scale reciprocal communication and collaboration. For example, IBM instituted an

internal corporate blog because they recognized what Chris Barger from IBM termed in

an interview with Dan Karleen from PR Communications "a fundamental shift between

audience and messenger dynamics as an element of blogs which gives them a

democrative nature that gives everyone a voice" (Barger). Businesses have also begun to

create external blogs, keeping a continuous discourse between the public and the

corporation, allowing communication to occur even during the design phases, thus giving

consumers the ability to interject opinions and choices as products and services are being

developed. The opportunities for communication that these blogs create represent a

drastic distinction between industrial age, top-down information flow (and one-way

communication with consumers) fostered during the industrial age.

Because of their journalistic structure, and the opportunities that they present for

continuing dialectic, blogs represent one of the most pure examples of the dialectics of

user-generated media. Where wiki is meant to be driven purely by information sharing and social networking sites focus mainly on socializing, blogs are meant to allow for personal discourse about topical issues—human voices make up their content, and those voices are participating in discourse that is not limited by time, space, or underlying economic agendas. The possibility for multiple voices and ideas that the various forms of user-generated media allow for is one of the first traces of the downfall of the top-down hierarchy left over from the industrial age.

The shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 directly illustrates the historical transition occurring between the industrial age and the information age. Web 1.0 technologies remediated industrial age principles by acting as another form of one-way communication, but the user-generated technologies of Web 2.0 are beginning to break down those hierarchical structures because they offer entirely new ways for the public to create and communicate that weren't possible in previous years. The possibilities for invention, the continuous discourse, the ability to gather and share information on massive scales, and the lack of economically driven rhetoric provide the possibility for a new set of ideological conventions as determined by the conventions of the information age. In order to understand exactly how online communication is causing a shift between previous philosophies and current day philosophies a new dialectical model appropriate for today's social and technological circumstances needs to be outlined.

The Dialectical Model of User-Generated Media

Hegel, Marx, Adorno, and *The Digital Dialectic* each chose to refer to Plato's original concept of dialectic; however, each of them interpreted it differently in order to apply it to their own social and historical contexts. Subsequently, each of these philosophers borrowed ideas and built upon their aforementioned predecessors in order to redefine dialectic as they found appropriate for their social concerns. The dialectics of user-generated media is the next step in that chain of reasoning. It is meant to define dialectic for today's contemporary technological context. It too will adopt the conceptual framework of prior philosopher's definitions, and it will build upon those ideas in order to apply it to today's current state of dialectical opposition that exists between industrial age practices and ideologies and those that are beginning to emerge in the information age as a result of emancipated communication.

Plato's original objective for dialectic was to act as a theoretical tool for argumentation that is meant to reach the inner logic of issues through a participatory dialogue; the dialectics of user-generated media, at its base form, reverts back to those principles of one-to-one discourse. Where Plato envisioned an oral dialogue between more than one person, user-generated dialectics combines orality and literacy in a form of virtual dialogue. The discourse that is occurring on the Internet between the various users is not definitively structured in order to reach an ultimate truth, but it does offer the *possibility* for a virtual dialectic because of the capabilities it presents for communication amongst multiple participants gathering together for the purpose of learning through discourse. The fact that these conversations are happening in a new space over a medium

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that creates a sense of disembodiment allows for the possibility of a dialectic that is less inhibited by real world diversions and, therefore, most closely resembles Plato's dialectic. It is the multiplicity of participants, the range of perspectives, the lack possibility for financial gain, and the purpose of learning through participatory dialogue online that combine to create a form of dialectics that, for the first time in history, exemplifies Plato's dialectic.

Hegel adopted Plato's principle of oppositional ideas posed against one another to reach an eventual synthesis, but he did not utilize dialectic as a theoretical tool. Instead, he used dialectic as an illustrative concept to describe a larger, historical and social movement present in the greater society. While user-generated dialectics does occur online through one-to-one discourse, it also refers to an observation of the larger social and, therefore, historical dialectic occurring in society today as a *result* of the discourse happening online. The dialectics of user-generated media contends that the larger social, historical oppositions occurring today are between the belief systems erected during the industrial age—where information, communication, and goods could be controlled and standardized by central points of power—versus information age ideologies that claim information, communication and goods distribution can be publicly controlled.

Marx also defined dialectic as a larger social and historical opposition as represented by material goods and ownership, and the opposition present in the dialectics of user-generated media still revolves around this duality. Marx believed that in an ideal state ownership of the means of production would be communal, and that, in order to take personal control in the industrial age, people should return to guild and craft production.

Today's dialectical opposition can be seen in the continuous attempts to claim ownership of information. Music files, for example, are one of the most widely shared forms of data on the Internet, and there have been countless attempts to control the distribution of them online. Another example is large corporations that run websites that continue to charge for data that can easily be shared via peer-to-peer networks. The sheer volume of these user-generated sites will only continue to grow exponentially as these communication technologies become more and more prevalent, thus completely undermining large corporations' attempts at controlling the public. This is one of the most illustrative examples of how industrial age practices are sitting in direct opposition to the emerging ideologies that envision freedom of information through user communication.

The dialectics of user-generated media also builds upon the idea originated by Adorno that there is no permanent teleological synthesis because, by its very nature, the dialectic occurring on the Internet represents an un-ending series of oppositions, collaborations, and random dialogues that will continue to occur and evolve as the technology continues to expand. For Adorno, any state of synthesis reached through dialectic was temporary; it was a continuous process of oppositions occurring in society. Adorno believed that communication technologies acted as a tool for those in power to use in order to control the information distribution to those who were not. The dialectics of user-generated media, however, asserts that today's Internet technologies provide an opportunity for communication amongst the masses that usurps the control hierarchies Adorno believed existed by giving people the ability to communicate with one another without a top-down control filter. For Adorno, the dialectical opposition was a series of

un-ending questions. The dialectics of user-generated media presents a material forum that does not fall under the precipices of previous technologies and, therefore, presents an opportunity for that continuous, perpetual dialectic.

The Digital Dialectic was the first theoretical discourse to raise the question of the possibility that technology could have positive effects on society; the oppositions it discussed centered on the opposing viewpoints regarding the possible consequences that technological growth would have on society. The dialectics of user-generated media extends the conceptual base that there are two oppositional schools of thought regarding technological growth, but it redefines these ideologies based on the changes that have occurred in society over the last ten years as perpetuated by digital technologies. The current opposition is no longer rooted in the *possibilities* for change that digital technologies present, but in the *actual* social and historical changes that are beginning to occur as a digital technologies have evolved into a functioning communication and production genre for today's society. *The Digital Dialectic* served to extend and analyze the critical tradition's distrust towards technology in order to present the opposing viewpoint. The dialectics of user-generated media backs away from the critical tradition's distrust of technology and redirects that oppositional discourse to the duality that is applicable to today's contemporary technological context. It is no longer the technologies that are in question; it is the social and cultural effects that they are having that result in today's dialectical duality.

The definition of dialectic has grown and changed throughout history depending on the historical and social context in which it was being applied. The context of the

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dialectics of user-generated media is the integration of technologies into society that act as tools for widespread communication and information dissemination. Today's discourse is amongst networks of people who now have the ability to participate in widespread cultural communication, and that communication is resulting in a larger social dialectical opposition between industrial age capitalism and the capitalism of information production and communication. These oppositions are rooted in the difference between industrial age ideologies that still hold onto the belief that information can be controlled from a single source of power, versus the ideological framework that supports the freedom of information through public communication, which is beginning to emerge in this century. The communicating public sphere will inevitably result in changes in the social, economic and political spheres. However, these oppositions are currently in a perpetual state of duality because the traditional practices of the long withstanding industrial age will not, and cannot, easily give way to the newly emerging archetypes of the information age. These opposing viewpoints will continue to contend against one another without a definitive teleological end point.

The dialectical model for user-generated media integrates the participatory one-to-one dialogue of Plato in a virtual sphere that combines both orality and literacy, the larger social and historical dialectical movement forward described by Hegel, the material and economic reflections of dialectical oppositions in society of Marx, the lack of synthesis described by Adorno, and the focus on the questions surrounding current technologies as a fundamental social forces in today's society of *The Digital Dialectic*. The dialectics of user-generated media extends those questions into a time where society

is in a period of social transition as a result of today's Internet technologies. In *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy* Gregory L. Ulmer's contends that as society evolves into an electronic communication sphere, and, as people begin to connect to one another online, there will be distinct effects on how the larger society functions. He notes that today's technologies will shift humanity from a population being fed information to a population that has the ability to create rather than simply consume: "As I understand it, the one negentropic force in the world is human intelligence (creativity): we should consider this moment as a time for invention" (5). User-generated technologies have initiated a social and historical circumstance that is delivering information and thought control to the larger public sphere through unlimited communication capabilities. The possibilities for social and economic changes that these capabilities present are just beginning to emerge in the form of today's dialectical opposition. The following chapter will outline current day examples that best illustrate this opposition.

4. Examples of the Dialectics of User-Generated Media

As the different forms of user-generated media become increasingly commonplace in society there has been a continuous stream of situations where the principles of top-down control erected during the industrial age are being challenged by contemporary, citizen controlled technologies. Copyright laws were written for the one-way technologies of the industrial age, and, because Peer-to-Peer (P2P) networks allow users to copy and share data online, industrial age copyright principles are having a difficult time adapting, resulting in a number of high profile copyright infringement cases against sites like Napster and Youtube. Blog popularity has steadily increased, and, in the 2004 presidential election, blogs became widely recognized and respected, resulting in an emerging form of citizen-generated journalism that currently co-exists alongside traditional mainstream media. Social networking sites are opening up communication networks between vast numbers of users creating an entirely new genre for human socialization as well as a new communication platform for the consumer market that is displacing the passive consumerism that stems from the industrial age.

Peer-to-Peer Networks

Peer-to-Peer (P2P) networks are comprised of users communicating with one another and sharing data (music files and movies for example) over a common network.

Essentially what these networks do is allow people to download media for free and thus bypass the traditional forms of media production essentially overstepping the boundaries put in place by copyright laws. The first, and most widely publicized, example of this opposition between traditional industrialized copyright laws and contemporary technologies is the case of Napster in 2000.

In 1999, Shawn Fanning created a file sharing network called Napster that allowed users to share and download music files with other users. By 2000 the band Metallica and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) lead a court case against Napster claiming that the file sharing network was breaking copyright laws. Napster argued, however, that they were not directly infringing on copyright laws because they didn't actually house any of the music on their servers, they were only providing a portal for users to share music with other users that originated on the users' systems. Napster argued that their technology actually supported the sale of CDs by allowing users to sample works, and that their service was no different than that provided by VCRs, which were considered not guilty of copyright infringement in the 1984 case of *Sony vs. Universal Studios*: "It also held that in general VCRs did not infringe copyright because viewers were engaged in *time shifting*, that is, recording a television show for viewing at a later time" (Spinello 106).   Napster was found guilty, however, of contributory copyright infringement based on the fact that they knowingly assisted in the infringement of copyright on behalf of their users. The result of the case was that Napster was shut down and began operating again as music subscription service that charged customers for use.

While the results of the Napster case fell on the side of industrial age ideologies regarding intellectual property ownership, the Internet is not limited to only one Napster and P2P networks similar to it are being created everyday. In an article titled "Napster May Not Matter Anymore" in May of 2000 Rich Taylor, a spokesman for the copyright assembly, stated: "No matter what we do, the crackers will be able to break it" (King). Following the outcome of the Napster case John Perry Barlow, founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation stated "I think the only way to deal with law on the Internet is to ignore it flagrantly. I want everyone . . . to consider themselves revolutionaries and go out and develop whatever they damn well please" (qtd. Spinello 107).

The question of copyright and the Internet is one that has surfaced repeatedly as users begin controlling web content. In March of 2007 Viacom sued YouTube for copyright infringement arguing that "YouTube does little or nothing to prevent users from posting copyrighted videos on its site. . ." (Ahrens). This debate will likely continue because user-generated media is initiating a shift in the cultural norms that were created during the industrial age. Control is no longer wielded from the top down because now the general population has increasing access to information and the increasing ability to share that information.

Blogs as Citizen Generated Journalism

Blogs started on the Internet as personal online journals in the late 1990s, but began gaining attention in the 2004 presidential election because of their growing audiences and the capabilities they offer for public participation. Several democratic

candidates, including Howard Dean, John Kerry and John Edwards, began blogs in 2003

leading up to the campaign. Prior to the 2004 election blogs were recognized but not

readily considered a legitimate source for news because they did not adhere to the

standards put in place for industrial age media where news was only deemed credible

when it was disseminated to the public through traditional media outlets. The first step in

thwarting this notion came just prior to the 2004 election when a citizen's voice imparted

through a blog actually became pertinent news:

> Blogs have been around since the late 1990s but achieved public notoriety in the
>
> United States during the 2003 Iraq invasion when an Iraqi citizen—code named
>
> 'Salam Pax'—began writing about his experiences in the war . . . . National news
>
> media used the blog as evidence to support about U.S. success (or failure) in Iraq.
>
> (Wiese 223- 224)

The public and the mainstream media began to recognize that the conceptual framework

of blogs marked a return to the fundamental principles of journalism—a forum for the

public to participate in, understand, and influence society.

This year the political blog Daily Kos is hosting a 2008 Presidential convention in

Chicago that is being attended by many of the leading democratic candidates. In an

article in *The Denver Post* David D. Perlmutter discusses how rapidly blogs have evolved

into a credible public communication forum: "It is almost unprecedented for something to

become so important so quickly." He goes on to note that "Their craft has also become

as influential as traditional supporters like the NAACP or the AFL-CIO, groups that

struggled for years to achieve significant political power" (Plunkett).   Traditional media

outlets have increasingly begun to recognize the importance of blogs because the

audiences and the networks that support them are increasing in number, thus lending

them credibility in the public sphere. Readers are being drawn to these sites because of

their lack of financial agenda, their capability of creating discourse without any

bureaucratic hindrances, and because readers can participate in the discussion. Though

blogs do not go through the strict editorial processes of traditional media, the readers act

as filters for any false information. It is the public sphere that blogs participate in that

serves as fact checker.

No form of public media prior to the Internet has had the ability to reach such

large numbers of people, and allowed those people to participate in a global discourse,

without some form of top-down control or financial agenda. Blogs are the first example

of topical public discourse that truly surpasses any previous media:

> The networked public sphere, as it is currently developing, suggests that it will
>
> have no obvious points of control or exertion of influence . . . . And it promises
>
> to offer a platform for engaged citizens to cooperate and provide observations
>
> and opinions, and to serve as a watchdog over society on a peer-production
>
> model. (Benkler 177)

The emergence of blogs as an influential and credible form of citizen-generated

journalism signals one of the most significant social evolutions made possible through

user-generated media. The previous generations' industrialized ideologies are being

directly challenged by the public that participates in this collaborative domain. The

current dialectical opposition can be directly witnessed based on the fact that the

traditional media forms currently co-exist alongside this newly evolving form of citizen-generated journalism.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites provide a forum for online networks of people connecting and communicating with one another on scales never possible prior to the emergence of user-generated media online, and the possibilities for social and economic changes that this connectivity is inspiring are just beginning to be felt in society. Sites like myspace.com and facebook.com are becoming permanent fixtures of today's popular culture. Upcoming generations of users are growing up with these sites as one of their most prominent forms of social communication: "Most adults see the Web as a supplement to their daily lives . . . . The MySpace generation, by contrast, lives comfortably in both worlds at once. Increasingly, America's middle and upper-class youth use social networks as virtual community centers, a place to go and sit for a while (sometimes hours)" (Hempel and Lehman). The social lives of today's youth are not limited by location or any other real world constraints. People are able to connect with other people through online networks either through common interests, common connections, or various discussion threads. Online socialization is proving to be an intricate and expanding form of human socialization.

In the industrial age the different forms of communication media acted as an outlet for commercial businesses to promulgate their messages to the consumer market, and, at first glance, social networking sites appear to be another outlet for marketing to

consumers. However, the difference between consumers in the information age and those

in the industrial age is that today's consumer now has the ability to communicate

reciprocally both with the businesses as well as amongst the networks of other users.

Industrial age principles of top-down market control are being directly challenged by an

increasingly informed and communicative information age public.

The online communities being formed through social networking sites are

creating a public sphere that stands in direct contrast to those of the industrialized

generations. These sites allow people to create, share, and participate in extended

discourse with one another without outside influence. Businesses that have tried to

extend industrialized principles of marketing into this public sphere have not been

successful:

> In May, P&G set up what it hoped would become a social network around
>
> Sparkle Body Spray,   aimed at tweens. The site features chatty messages from
>
> fake characters named for scents like Rose and Vanilla ('Friends call me Van').
>
> Virtually no one joined, and no entries have comments from real users. . . .
>
> P&G concedes that the site is an experiment, and the company has found more
>
> success with a body-spray network embedded in MySpace.com. (Hempel and
>
> Lehman)

While businesses are able to play a part on these sites they are unable to usurp the power

of actual public discourse. The public has been marketed to in the same way for so long

that these antiquated marketing techniques are not only easily recognized by

contemporary users, but they are also easily ignored because that is what the public has

become accustomed to doing. Social networking sites illustrate one of the most pronounced differences between industrialized societies and information societies, and these changes can be directly illustrated in the emerging changes in the economic market.

The current state of co-existence between traditional production/consumption markets and the growing markets that are based on the demands of consumers exemplifies today's larger social dialectical opposition.   Chris Anderson, editor and chief of *Wired* magazine, wrote an article titled "The Long Tail" in October of 2004, and subsequently published a book of the same title in 2006, that details what he terms is the growing tail of the consumer market that is evolving from online user participation. Anderson argues that the traditional economic market is growing what he calls a "long tail" because of the choices made available through the Internet and because of the capabilities that current technologies offer for reciprocal communication.

This long tail to the economic market does not derive directly from user-generated media because it isn't users communicating directly with other users that inspire businesses to alter their modes of production. This emerging market is, however, the first sign that there are economic changes occurring that derive from the communication occurring on today's Internet. Users are no longer limited to what items are mass-produced and distributed in traditional retail forums or through the limitations of popular culture. These technologies provide an outlet for consumers to search for items that fall outside of the traditional spectrum of production and consumption. These consumer demands are creating the long tail of today's market that focuses on consumer niches

rather than mass-produced goods. This market currently co-exists alongside the

traditional mass-production markets:

> The new niche market is not replacing the traditional market of hits, just sharing
>
> the stage with it for the first time. For a century we have winnowed out all but
>
> the best-sellers to make the most efficient use of costly shelf space, screens,
>
> channels and attention. Now, in a new era of networked consumers and digital
>
> everything the economics of such distribution are changing radically as the
>
> Internet absorbs each industry it touches . . . at a fraction of the traditional cost.
>
> (Anderson 6)

Anderson contends that this emerging niche market represents the future for businesses.

Mass-production, according to Anderson, is in direct contention with this new system of

production and distribution as determined through mass-communication online.

As reciprocal communication online continues to become commonplace within

technologically advanced societies, traditional industrial age standards and practices are

going to be continually challenged. Peer-to-peer networks represent the first free-flowing

exchange of information and data that cannot readily be contained or controlled by one

centralized force. Blogs offer an opportunity for collaborative topical discourse amongst

populations of people who have never had the ability to connect and openly communicate

prior to this age. Social networks create a forum for socialization that is not limited by

any sort of real world spheres, and the results of this unlimited communication are only

just beginning to emerge. *The Long Tail* is the first measurable sign that industrial age

markets are beginning to give way to an economic market that is not controlled by mass-

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production. These current-day examples illustrate how the different forms of user-

generated media are beginning to effect society and break down traditional social and

economic standards that are rooted in a previous age.

5. Conclusion

The different forms of user-generated media are enlivening a global discourse amongst users that opens up all sorts of possibilities for communication, invention, and the alteration of larger social and economic foundations. The freedom of information and the ability to communicate without limitations are resulting in a transition from industrial age capitalism to an entirely new set of circumstances that, so far, do not have a definitive set of social standards or rules in place because they have yet to be determined. As these technologies integrate into society, and, as upcoming generations continue to utilize and expand these technologies, there will be evolving ideologies that are rooted in the capabilities that these technologies present, just as the industrial age instituted its own set of social and economic systems based on the capabilities (or lack thereof) that industrial technologies presented to society.   Industrial age capitalism is currently undergoing a transformation that is actually evolving within the public sphere; it is the users online that are defining the patterns of control, production, and communication that are applicable for the twenty first century.

The transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 directly illustrates the current day evolution of social and economic principles, and the next step in technological development—the move from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0—will continue to perpetuate further social and economic conversions.   Web 1.0 remediated previous technologies by

continuing to make communication one-way, but Web 2.0 technologies (user-generated media) are exemplified by sites that provide reciprocal communication along with the capabilities for user participation and control. Web 3.0, also known as the Semantic Web, is forecasted to create an entirely new level of communication that actually occurs between humans and machines. The Semantic Web is based on the idea of technologies having the ability to understand the semantics of language, and, therefore, the capability to communicate and perform intelligently.

Where Web 2.0 is based on keyword searches Web 3.0 will allow for more specified searches with queries rather than keywords. Rather than typing keywords into search engines that return thousands of random sites containing those words, specific questions can be entered and the technologies, theoretically understanding semantics of language, will return information that specifically answers those questions. Technology, therefore, would have evolved into a state where it would actually be able to directly communicate with people: "In its current state, the Web is often described as being in the Lego phase, with all of its different parts capable of connecting to one another. Those who envision the next phase, Web 3.0, see it as an era when machines will start to do seemingly intelligent things" (Markoff 1). The dialectics of user-generated media occur between people, and that unlimited global communication is effecting larger social and economic changes. The next stage in web evolution will, at least theoretically, open up dialectic between people and technology that will also inevitably also have larger social effects. Chris Anderson's *The Long Tail* is the first indicator that industrial age standards for production and consumption are beginning to advance as a result of the

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communication occurring online between people and businesses. When the

communication lines open to include a discourse that occurs between humans and

technology how will dialectic be affected?

The dialectics of user-generated media serves to outline the evolution of dialectic

from the digital age as described in *The Digital Dialectic* to today's current state of

technological development. As technologies continue to evolve, and, as communication

media open up to include an entirely new genre of communication that occurs between

people and machines, dialectic will continue to evolve as well.   It is imperative that, in

the future, principles of dialectical examination are continuously referenced in order to

persistently strive for deeper understandings of the issues that will inevitably never cease

to arise.

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