

The 21st century's exhibitionists

Spaniards air their lives on the Internet through a growing number of webs and photologs

IKER SEISDEDOS, Madrid

In the past, people hid their diaries in drawers or under their pillows, bound them under lock and key and valued them as one of their most intimate and private possessions. In Spain, a nation of self-conscious and at times haughty people, leaving a written record of one's most innermost secrets was even considered in bad taste. After all: What was confession for?

Times have changed, however, and in the 21st century a growing number of Spaniards have no qualms about airing their problems, hopes, fears and loves to anybody willing to read, hear or even view them. The blog revolution has also swept through Spain.

Every night Maribel López types out all the details of what she calls her "struggle for maternity." She sits before her home computer and writes a new chapter of the story of her seventh artificial insemination treatment in her 14 years of marriage. Up to now, each attempt has failed.

When she is done with her emotional outpouring, rather than erasing her words or saving them in a hidden folder, she hits enter, making her particularly intense period pains, the results of her pregnancy tests, her hopes and disappointments available for millions of web surfers to read.

Her writings (found at www.lacoctelera.com/fuegoazul) make up just one more in the vast ocean of 19 million personal Internet diaries — also known as weblogs or blogs — that are updated regularly around the world, according to the Technorati website. According to this website, the number of weblogs doubles every six months, and in Spain, where this trend has taken longer to take hold, this rate could be even higher.

The website Blogometro has been one of the first to try to

According to Blogometro there are currently 110,000 weblogs in Spanish

trace a map of the Spanish-language blog scene. According to the site's data there are currently some 110,000 personal diaries in Spanish on the web. When compared to the number of Spanish speakers (over 330 million worldwide) the figure is modest, but there is no doubt that the blog and photoblog formula is gaining followers.

"Many people see them as a soap opera with real life characters and written in first person," José Luis Orihuela, a professor at Navarre University and a jury member of the 2005 Best of the Blogs Awards, explains.

Publicist and blog expert Alberto Knapp Bjerén agrees. "It's tough to get hooked to au-



In soypoeta, Guillermo Spottorno shares his passion for poetry and photos of his trips to places like the Namibian desert (above).



Dog on the blog. Maggie on A. Knapp Bjerén's photolog. / www.lacoctelera.com/maggie

tobiographical blogs, but once you are, it's equally tough to let go," he says. Knapp is the mastermind of La Coctelera (www.lacoctelera.com), one of the most successful blog editing and publishing tools in Spanish. His web manages some 8,000 Internet diaries. The secret of its success, he says, is simplicity and its ability to "create a sense of community."

"The website is designed for people who don't have a clue. People without hang-ups who simply want to communicate and want an easy means to do so," Knapp says.

He himself is a blogger, or at least one by proxy, because for the past five months he has

been in charge of updating his dog Maggie's increasingly successful photolog.

"I'm an orphan, have long legs and I'm very fast. I work sporadically for a consultancy firm and am one of the many dogs who have been abandoned by people who are not people," says Maggie. Next to her message there are snapshots of Maggie behind a computer, munching a cookie, and running on the beach, among other activities.

"It all started out as a joke in the office where Maggie lives," Knapp says. One day, as the two of them went for a walk in the park, a blogger recognized the canine blog star. "It was mind-

blowing, and now having her appear in EL PAÍS makes this whole project a lot more fun and absurd," he says.

On the blog scene everything goes. "When you enter the blogosphere you start thinking in blog terms," Judit, who runs her own weblog, explains. "Any excuse is good for a new posting," she says. A solar eclipse, for example, a new job, or the life of a stray dog...

What nobody knows for sure yet is what transforms any other diary into a crowd-drawing phenomenon.

Almudena Montero, for instance, a 30-something from Madrid, became a sudden blogosphere star. A TV scriptwriter, Montero started publishing her diary and that of her dog Baldo on the web. Her blog became so popular that soon Aguilar publishers contacted her to come out with a print version of her stories. *Mi vida perra* (A dog's life) is the result of it. Following this success, Almudena's blogging activity came to a standstill.

"Basically I realized I was unable to remain anonymous and, then people started to insult me and sabotage my page," she explains.

Professor Orihuela dares to venture some of the factors that contribute to a blog's success. "Its longevity, the quality of its contents, how frequently it's updated, the author's reputation within the blogosphere, the number of links and its reputation among its peers, are all factors that contribute to a blog's success," Orihuela says.

What there is little question about is that blogs are an incredibly democratic tool that help people build up their careers or simply vent their anger and share their hopes. Weblogs, concludes Chilean journalist and blogger Miguel Paz, "democratize exhibitionism as a result of talent."

US movie takes top awards at Sitges Fantasy Film Festival

M. TORREIRO, Sitges

The movie *Hard Candy* by US director David Slade was the big winner at the Sitges Fantasy Film Festival, which ended yesterday in the Catalan resort town.

The story of the stormy online relationship between a 14-year-old girl and a 32-year-old man was awarded prizes for Best Film and Best Script.

The special jury award, as well as the critics' award, went to musical comedy *The Wayward Cloud*, by the Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-liang "for its bold aesthetic and moral discourse against sexual alienation."

For the second year running, Hong Kong's Johnny To made off with the Best Director award for his violent feature *Election*, a story about a democratic election held within an organized crime society.

The Best Actress award went to Lee Yeong-ae for her performance as a bloodthirsty avenger in *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*.

The Sitges festival, which specializes in fantasy cinema, has been held in this beach resort since 1968. Past winners of the Best Film award include Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* in 1997, Pitof's *Vidocq* in 2001, and Takeshi Kitano's *Zatoichi* in 2003. Last year's winner was Chan-wook Park's *Oldboy*.

Arditti Quartet inaugurates new auditorium at Reina Sofia

ROGER SALAS, Madrid

The prestigious Arditti Quartet on Monday inaugurated the new auditorium at the Reina Sofia modern art museum in Madrid, which has recently undergone a major extension.

The group performed pieces by contemporary Spanish composers, including Cristóbal Halffter. In its more than 30 years on the stage, the quartet has earned worldwide renown for its performances of contemporary and early 20th century music.

The auditorium is located in the new wing of the Reina Sofia, designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel, and is in fact divided into two separate halls, one with a seating capacity for 425 people, the other for 215.

Both halls will be devoted to contemporary music, said Jorge Fernández Guerra, director of the Centro para la Difusión de la Música Contemporánea, whose headquarters are located inside the museum.

These new venues will enable organizers to bring other prestigious contemporary music ensembles like the Kronos Quartet, the Ensemble Avanti from Finland and the French Diotima Quartet.