

IDEAS ONLINE AND PRESENTING RESEARCH: SESSION NOTES 1

Tutor: **Patricia Daniel** **Session 1** 30th October 2007

Objectives:

1. Explore the potential of the internet as a medium for
 - developing writing skills for different purposes and audiences
 - promoting international women's rights and gender equality (and other aspects of diversity)
 - popularising academic research
2. And learn to blog!

Examples: from the **global current affairs** website www.openDemocracy.net and my own work on the website

Writers: Many of the contributors are **academics** (and this was one of the reasons the website was set up – to provide an opportunity / a different medium for academic researchers to disseminate their knowledge and play a wider influencing role in society). Others are established **journalists** like George Monbiot; leading representatives of **civil society** and non-governmental organisations, for example, Oxfam; former **politicians** (Sergio Ramirez, Mary Robinson) or political **advisors** (Sydney Blumenthal) = *elitist ethos* ([look at current front page](#))

Forms:

- Serious journalism, front-page articles, different from academic papers / articles (see my next session) covering a range of global issues.
 - Essays (3000 words) Pat's on Mali: everyone's favourite destination (tell the story) <http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/3531>
 - Articles (1200 –1500) Soldiers without guns (ditto) <http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/4058>
 - Reader participation: Comments on articles, Discussion forums
- Specific themes or debates (as they are called) for example, the Terrorism theme <http://opendemocracy.net/terrorism/>
 - Daily security briefings by page / project officer (right-hand side)
 - Articles by other contributors
- **50.50 initiative:** <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050> ([read the rationale](#) and also the [mission statement](#))
 - Articles (carried on the front page)
 - Blogs
 - Podcasts (NB also used as different medium on front page)
 - **Renga** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renga>

Focus on blogs:

- *widening participation*, space for women's voices and writing, developing confidence (= *inclusive, not elitist, actively addressing equality*)
- opening up new areas for discussion (*topics*) and new ways of writing about them (*forms*) (= *aspects of equality*)

World Social Forum (live blogging from a women's perspective)

<http://womenwsf.wordpress.com>

OpenSummit: Women talk to the G8

(international blog, multiple contributors, in combination with an **open letter** and **articles**)

<http://opensummit.opendemocracy.net/>

Practical work 1 (Pairs) Analysis

Use the Checklist for Applications of Writing: *Language in Context* to analyse one of the blogs, bearing in mind issues of class, race, gender.

Overview of the blogs: Content

1. World Social Forum: is another world possible without a women's perspective?

NB **analysis of findings** <http://womenwsf.wordpress.com/2007/01/25/reflections/>

Topic areas, key points to highlight:

1. What are (African) women saying? What alternatives do they see for the future? = An end to violence, neoliberalism and globalisation of the economy, government corruption
2. To what extent has the WSF process been engendered? Role and participation of women within the WSF process, their contribution to alternatives to the World Economic Forum = the dominant paradigm
3. What next? To what extent will there be follow-up inclusion of African women's concerns in the anti G8 lobby (and global alternatives)

This third aspect was the focus of another blog (see below)

Links: Launch article on front page; podcast / audio-diary contributions before and after; Previous article on the topic by Nawal El Saadawi (Egyptian novelist) drawn on for the introduction http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-world/article_1076.jsp

2. Women talk to the G8

Ditto as above, cross-referencing of areas of common concern

<http://opensummit.opendemocracy.net/2007/06/09/what-came-out-of-the-g8-summit-for-women/>

Review of G8 against key areas of investigation (only one area addressed)

- o Combat economic structural exclusion
- o Reverse the marginalisation of women
- o Address climate change and support a sustainable approach to development
- o Recognising the links between health, HIV/AIDS and women's rights (SRHR) (Combat gender-based violence was the original in the open letter)
- o Education for women's rights and gender equality
- o Peace and security (see gender-based violence)

See **open letter/ call for action**

= an advocacy function (faxed to leaders)

= a common agenda for campaigning

= a checklist for review and assessment

= a research summary of evidence presented to us via the blog (and articles)

<http://opensummit.opendemocracy.net/2007/06/01/open-letter-to-g8-gender-at-the-top-of-the-agenda/>

See original **article** on Angela Merkel's G8: how do women best influence the political agenda – from the inside, the outside or via the worldwide web?

<http://opensummit.opendemocracy.net/2007/05/16/merkels/> click to front page if possible

Clearing the fence pulls together both events afterwards: my own feelings about barriers to change and how to address them, with a focus on social movements

http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy_power/globalisation/clearing_fence

Blog analysis: form and style

The *format* / function of the sidebar and top menu (= not frills)

- **About** pages... provide context, purpose and establish credibility; also clarify relationship with audience (eg contact and invitation to contribute)
- **Blogroll** = list of contacts, contributors, partners, commentators, interested organisations and other **buttons = 2-way collaboration / link** – also establish credibility (and identify type of target audience)
- **More ... List of articles...** references, bibliography, further background reading
- **Categories...** indicate range of topics covered

The *narrative structure* and stages or sections of the blog – roughly:

- (Warm-up) Introduction; research questions; evidence; analysis of findings; conclusion (Wrap-up); Addenda
- Before, during and after the live event; at the beginning, at the end; significant episode/s; milestones (eg the open letter)
- The structure and purpose are flexible, the blog can continue, be iterative, building on what has gone before, change direction, have two directions at the same time (can Ss find any other possibilities?)
- The relationship between the blog and other web forms/ modes – in particular articles which introduce or reflect on the blog / or the events in focus - and podcasts, which can do the same

The *research* aspect: primary research / gathering a range of voices / range of sources, events, interlocutors / analysing, synthesising / review against research questions / further questions?

The *activism* aspect: provides a soap-box; including / highlighting campaigns; spokeswomen for organisations; the open letter as a concrete outcome; can be partisan

The *free creative* aspect: pictures, variety of posts – length, style, register, discourse, writer, mood etc – and video-blogging!

Other sources of blogs for interest and analysis

Guardian Abroad (readers' blogs) See their classification system and comment on it
<http://www.guardianabroad.co.uk/yourblogs/category/5>
<http://www.guardianabroad.co.uk/yourblogs/blog/353>

Reuters (reporters' and editors' blogs) <http://blogs.reuters.com/us/>

International Rescue Committee (humanitarian aid workers' blog). Emily Holland gave the camera to a Sudanese woman to film daily life in Darfur
http://www.ircblog.org/archives/1930_1321467639/205457

Blogs listed on oD today: George Monbiot, Machine Envy, Black Looks, Feministing...
http://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/jessica_reed/blogging_burma

Global Voices <http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/>

There is a changing dynamic in the media, due to the internet and more specifically because of blogging: see [Jessica Reed's analysis](#)

BEFORE THE INTERNET: THE 'TOP-DOWN' DYNAMIC

Media conglomerates and companies hold television and press rights

(For example, *Guardian Newspapers Ltd*)



Disseminators of information to receivers (readers or TV audience).

The media play a **prescriptive** rôle. The public can intervene in the build-up of

information but most often **a posteriori**

(letters sent to editors with comments on articles or suggestions for topics)

THE INTERNET, SELF-PUBLICATION, BLOGS AND FORUMS:

THE 'BOTTOM UP' DYNAMIC

The receivers become **actors** and can participate in the development and improvement of the media content offered to the people.

Certain bloggers can even enter into competition with traditional media or complement them by offering other perspectives.

(For example, the blog '*Where is Raed?*'¹ - written by an Iraqi citizen about the arrival of the US army in his country – was mentioned many times by a number of newspapers in 2003)



Thus they have a direct influence on the content which is offered by the information industry, who then in turn become more and more interested in obtaining

interactive input from their readers

Translated from Jessica Reed (2006) '*Générations X/ Y: Entre auto-représentations et représentations médiatiques*', page 80

¹ http://dear_raed.blogspot.com/ has now become <http://justzipit.blogspot.com/>
The blogger, writing under the pseudonym Pax Salam, was found by The Guardian for whom he then wrote a column, thus becoming a blogger published by a national newspaper..

Practical work 2 Setting up your own blog

Who's it for? What's it about? What other decisions do you need to take as regards style, register, form etc?

See Technical notes (Blogging Guide)

NB we need to have all blogger addresses to share at the end of the session (and email addresses)

Practical work 3 (Group) Blogging, sharing blogs and commenting

(Out of class, over 2 weeks)

Try and write at least 3 or 4 blog entries yourself.

Also look at your fellow students' blogs. There is normally an automatic comment function. Writing a strong pithy constructive comment is also a skill. Practise writing 2 kinds of comment:

1. on the topic
2. on the effectiveness of the writing (drawing on the key aspects of language in context)

(Pat will also to comment on the blogs later)

Group feedback on the blogging experience (next session with Pat, November 13th)

IDEAS ONLINE AND PRESENTING RESEARCH: FURTHER READING

Allen, Kate (2007) 'It's arrived: the feminisation of the net', in The Guardian, Thursday August 23 2007 (about the latest **Ofcom** report)

<http://business.guardian.co.uk/story/0,,2154494,00.html>

Avaaz is a virtual campaigning group. See 'The Clash', a short but effective campaigning video on the politically driven culture clash in the Middle East, 2007

http://www.avaaz.org/en/stop_the_clash/mb.php

CHANGE Centre for Health and Gender Equality carries out research and advocacy

<http://www.genderhealth.org/>

Electronic Frontier Foundation. Bloggers Rights <http://www.eff.org/bloggers/lq/>

Pambazuka News is a weekly online current affairs website for pan-Africa. It publishes collections of articles on the same theme in book form, also reviews African blogs and carries podcasts. <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/>

RH Reality Check is a US blog reporting on women's sexual and reproductive rights

<http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/blog/2007/09/24/locking-down-womens-rights>

Reed, Jessica (2006) '*Générations X/ Y: Entre auto-représentations et représentations médiatiques*', unpublished 4th year dissertation, Institut d'Études Politiques de Rennes.

(Groundbreaking work on the new blogging generation (self-representation) versus the passive media-dominated era (mediated representation) and the implications for political involvement. In French, but with an extensive bibliography, mainly of English-language work)

Reed, Jessica (2007) 'Bloggers making TV smarter one blog post at a time',

http://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/jessica_reed/bloggers_making_tv_smarter_one_blog_post_at_a_time Jessica Reed's blog, 16 August 2007

Rosen, Jay (2005) 'Bloggers v Journalism is over', paper prepared for the Blogging, Journalism and Credibility conference, Cambridge MA, January 2005

http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2005/01/21/berk_essay.html

spiked! Becky Hogge and others discuss citizen journalist: democratised media or a decline in journalistic standards? <http://network.nature.com/london/events/2007/10/17/2579>

The Virtual Chase, Evaluating the Quality of Information on the Internet. (Look at the three checklists) <http://www.virtualchase.com/quality/index.html>

Who makes the news? Global Media Monitoring Project 2005 (on gender equality in the media) <http://www.whomakesthenews.org/>

www.patriciadaniel.org.uk Just a basic example of a range of publications archived on, or accessible via, the web, including materials for the MA in Writing and

<http://patriciadaniel.blogspot.com> - which is a work in progress