3.0 RESEARCH BLOGGING

In this chapter I describe my experience publishing a personal weblog and discuss its role as an integral part of my research process. In the first section I introduce my blog, *purse lip square jaw*, and provide a brief overview of how it began and what it has become over the past five years. Started in 2002, as an attempt to move my research notebook online, my blog has become a record of my experiences as a PhD student and the most stimulating space I have had for working out ideas. In other words, my blog has been an incredibly strong force in shaping both my research project and what it means to me to be a sociologist today.

Emphasising how blogging is simultaneously private and public, individual and collective, the second section raises a variety of questions about authorship, audience and authority in contemporary academic knowledge production. Beginning with a discussion of blogging and affective politics, I use excerpts from my blog and the comments people made there to draw attention to the more physical and emotional, financial and political, aspects of intellectual labour. They may be excluded from our formal work, and often even from the classroom, but they can nonetheless find a place online—where we and others can engage them in new ways.

The third and final section addresses the question of audiences and publics, and their connection to 'voice' in online academic writing. In my case, the matter of blogging identity has been dominated by what kind of academic I have wanted to

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become, as well as what kind I have been 'allowed' to become. This is related to the reality that, at least sometimes, I did research *near* but not *with* non-academics—which raises interesting, if unresolved, questions about what it means to do sociology through blogging.

Despite these qualifications, I believe it is fair to say that while my blog has proven indispensable as a research method used to forge new connections and try out new ideas, it has been no less successful in cultivating a professional persona and reputation that has likewise benefited me. "Start a blog!" is the first piece of advice I offer to any new graduate student who asks.

3.1 PURSELIPSQUAREJAW.ORG

I began blogging in early 2002—five years after the word "weblog" was coined by Jorn Barger, three years after Peter Merholz shortened it to "blog" by suggesting "we blog" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog), one year before the word appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, two years before it was *Merriam*

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Webster Online's most searched word, and four years before *Time Magazine*

declared the networked and creative YOU "person of the year."

EXCERPT from *jill/txt* by Jill Walker

http://jilltxt.net/archives/blog_theorising/final_version_of_weblog_definition.html

Saturday June 28, 2003

Final version of weblog definition

A weblog, or blog, is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first. Typically, weblogs are published by individuals and their style is personal and informal. Weblogs first appeared in the mid-1990s, becoming popular as simple and free publishing tools became available towards the turn of the century. Since anybody with a net connection can publish their own weblog, there is great variety in the quality, content, and ambition of weblogs, and a weblog may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers.

Examples of the genre exist on a continuum from confessional, online diaries to logs tracking specific topics or activities through links and commentary. Though weblogs are primarily textual, experimentation with sound, images, and videos has resulted in related genres such as photoblogs, videoblogs, and audioblogs.

Most weblogs use links generously, allowing readers to follow conversations between weblogs by following links between entries on related topics. Readers may start at any point of a weblog, seeing the most recent entry first, or arriving at an older post via a search engine or a link from another site, often another weblog. Once at a weblog, readers can read on in various orders: chronologically, thematically, by following links between entries or by searching for keywords. Weblogs also generally include a blogroll, which is a list of links to other weblogs the author recommends. Many weblogs allow readers to enter their own comments to individual posts.

Weblogs are serial and cumulative, and readers tend to read small amounts at a time, returning hours, days, or weeks later to read entries written since their last visit. This serial or episodic structure is similar to that found in epistolary novels or diaries, but unlike these a weblog is open-ended, finishing only when the writer tires of writing.

In retrospect, I suppose I started blogging by updating my personal website—

purse lip square jaw—daily instead of a few times a year. But when I finished the

first year of my PhD programme, and began preparing for my comprehensive

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exams and thesis proposal, I decided to move my research notebook online. I had

been reading blogs for a year or so at that point, and noticed that many of them

were using an online weblog publishing system called Blogger

(http://www.blogger.com). I knew that if I was going to start publishing my

research notes online with anything close to the regularity with which I had

always written them by hand, I could not be spending so much time and effort

coding HTML and publishing by FTP, and so Blogger seemed like my best option.

The decision to use blog software was also an important part of my identification

with 'blogging' and I began to see myself as a 'blogger' when blogs I read started

to link to mine. Nonetheless, I have always considered myself a writer and

researcher more than a blogger, in part because those are identities I have had for

much longer than I have kept a blog, and I originally saw blogging as simply

another way to do what I was already doing.

In November 2002, *purse lip square jaw* was acknowledged by Blogger.com as a

"Blog of Note" and I became more fully conscious that there was an actual, if

mostly unknown, audience for what I was writing. At the end of 2007 my weblog

contained almost 2000 individual posts and over 500 reader comments. It has

been visited millions of times by thousands of people, and continues to have a

regular readership of hundreds. In late 2007, blog search engine Technorati.com

ranked the site at #30 000 of 112 million tracked blogs, although in the past it

was ranked as high as #19 000. Over 500 people currently subscribe to the site's

web feed, and online social book-marking site del.icio.us (http://del.icio.us/) lists

more than 300 links to the main page, as well as links to over 250 individual

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posts. Everyone from social network analysts to cultural studies scholars could find something interesting to analyse in terms of the actual structure and content of blogs, but in this chapter I restrict my commentary to the role my blog has played in my research.

Like most blogs, *purse lip square jaw*'s content is mostly textual, but images are also posted regularly, video is occasionally embedded, and for a time, audio files (songs) were posted as well. It covers a wide range of personal interests and activities, but primarily I consider it to be a research blog. The first academic blogs I read were Torill Mortensen's *thinking with my fingers* (http://torillsin.blogspot.com/) and Jill Walker's *jill/txt* (http://jilltxt.net/). Mortensen is now Associate Professor at Volda University College and Walker is Associate Professor at University of Bergen, both in Norway, but in 2002 they were 'simply' PhD students looking at technoculture from a humanities perspective. Not only did I enjoy reading their blogs because of our shared interests, but after reading their 2002 ground-breaking article on academic blogging I really came to understand my blog as a:

> tool for focusing, for exchanging information and being part of a discussion which potentially extends beyond the academic community ... [A] tool with which to think about [my] research, its values, connections and links to other aspects of the world (Mortensen and Walker 2002:250-251).

Most importantly, this sense of blogging emphasised the simultaneously private and public, individual and collective, aspects of blogging—thereby raising interesting questions about authorship, audience and authority in contemporary academic knowledge production.

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3.2 AUTHORSHIP, IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC AUTHORITY

Blogs, and other forms of personal home page on the World Wide Web, can be seen to emphasise the presentation of self (Goffman 1959) and performative aspects (Denzin 2003) of writing culture, in particular blurring distinctions between producers and consumers of knowledge, and between public and private as so much personal information becomes publically available online.

> For one group of critics, bloggers are narcissists: endlessly remarking, and in luridly public fashion, on what, to this type of critic, is gravely unremarkable: namely, the blogger's own life. And one gets the sense that critics here are reaching to say that bloggers' lives are 'unremarkable' a priori, as if to imply that they've not earned the right to speak so publicly (Cohen 2006:162-163).

Here we might recall that similar criticism has been directed at reflexive qualitative research in general and auto-ethnography in particular. However, far from being entirely new practices, Bolter (2001) reminds us that the Web may simply be "remediating" more traditional autobiographical genres of writing. Chandler (2000) further describes these online performances in terms of bricolage, where an author essentially appropriates or rearranges other materials (images, text, etc.) to continually reconstruct her online identity:

> The values of the *bricoleur* are reflected in the assumptions which underlie specific inclusions, allusions, omissions, adaptations and arrangements ... [This] may seem to suggest that *bricolage* is a rational, conscious and deliberate practice. But it is seldom like this. Indeed, *bricolage* lends itself to what may be experienced by the *bricoleur* as 'discovery' rather than planning ... Especially in a virtual medium one may reselect and rearrange elements until a pattern emerges which seems to satisfy the contraints of the task and the current purposes of the user. Indeed, no version of the resulting text need be regarded as final – completion may be endlessly deferred in the medium in which everything is always 'under construction' (Chandler 2000).

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Indeed, I have often understood my blog in archaeological terms, seeing both individual posts, and compiled archives, as stratigraphic profiles. The reverse-chronological structure imposed by blogging software evokes vertical or accretive processes, but the hyperlinks embedded within each post carve out a seemingly endless horizontal plane. Given this combination of vertical and horizontal ordering, a reader can enter and exit at any point, effectively re-mixing the content at will. In other words, blogs are both linear and non-linear, and 'excavating' them is not unlike the archaeological task of excavation. Rather than being presented with a perfect layer-cake of information, the archaeologist must ask about the natural and cultural processes that have acted to interrupt and disrupt the accretive process over time. So too scholars of weblogs must look backwards and forwards in time, as well as across different time-scales.

To further compound matters, in the case of research blogs, both performance and representation may also be seen to:

> straddle the boundaries between publication and process, between writing towards others and writing for oneself. A weblog is always both for oneself and for one's readers. If it were only for oneself, a private diary would be more useful. If it were only for readers, and not a tool for oneself, a more polished and finished form of publication would probably be more appropriate (Mortensen and Walker 2002:256).

In other words, blogs are hybrid genres of performance and representation that are well suited to productively engage equally hybrid research subjects.

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EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2003/06/are-scholar-bloggers-public.php

Thursday, June 5, 2003

Are scholar bloggers public intellectuals? Or do I just write for myself?

Obviously I see the value of blogging - it helps me keep track of my dissertation research and has allowed me to get brilliant inter-disciplinary feedback. My blog also serves as a type of open field journal, allowing myself, and anyone else who cares to read, access to my broader intellectual and personal interests and influences. This type of activity became hugely appealing to me after reading Malinowski's A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term - the posthumously published field journals of an anthropological icon. Some anthropologists said that his personal notes should never have been published, not least because they revealed Malinowski to be more than a bit of an asshole, but subsequent scholars have found great merit in these writings for understanding the history of anthropological thought and the production of scholarly knowledge. While I have no desire to either compare myself to Malinowski, or to suggest that my research and personal thoughts are utterly compelling, I do think there is value in exposing myself as I think and work. (As an aside, my research is funded by Canadian taxpayers and I think they should have every opportunity to see what I'm up to. This provides one way, although I remain rather skeptical as to how successful I have been in this regard.)

But blogs are not field journals in the sense of Malinowski's journals; he quite obviously never expected his notes to be published, let alone read by others. They were written as private documents. My blog is not. Many others have noted that one of the primary differences between blogs and earlier forms of personal publishing, like Usenet, is that blogs are inherently moderated by the author, allowing content, tone and general *voice* to be controlled. In other words, I get to choose which parts of me are made public in my blog. To some extent I can control my image, and those readers who have met me in person are probably better able to judge the "truthfulness" of my self-representation, while others might, after reading my posts over time, decide how much (or how little) they trust me.

The answer to the questions I posed in the post title is "neither and both". Scholar bloggers are not public intellectuals in the same way that French academics, like Pierre Bourdieu, write for national newspapers, or American scholars like Noam Chomsky, make documentary film. A part of me thinks that for a scholar to be a public intellectual, she must be able to offer social and cultural criticism that has the ability to reach the masses and change their minds. But maybe that is too much to ask. Yet, scholar bloggers are public intellectuals in the sense that they may offer access to research that has long been kept from non-academics, in places like journals and closed conference settings. Scholar bloggers are public intellectuals in the sense that they may allow readers to publically comment on their work in progress. And both activities have the potential to change traditional power relations in academic discourse.

But scholar bloggers also write for themselves. Some even claim that their blogs are private (although I've never really understood how that can be so if they are publically available online.) At the same time, they perform particular personas and positions not

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entirely for private consumption. But, most scholar bloggers do not write detailed accounts of their private lives or deepest, and perhaps darkest, thoughts. And, at least in my case, I *do* write for myself. I chose early on to sacrifice mass readership (as if that were an option!!) in order to write about what interests *me* and furthers *my* research goals ... (And honestly, since my position is inherently selfish, I have always been rather amazed that *anyone* else finds what I write about interesting.)

posted by Anne at 09:16

2 comments

Biella said…

> I have thought a lot of the private vs public dichtomy of blogging and the role of the scholar as blogger too. And there is actually a small relationship between the two for me. On the one hand, I feel like I am creating a very public persona-- certainly the things I write I via my blog--my blog enteries are not personal in the same way that my private journal is and since blogging I rarely write in the private journal.
>
> But at the same time, one of the things that I like about my blog and those of my friends is that some of the private, usually hidden parts of life are slightly exposed, even if only in a partial, piecemeal, and controlled fashion, the effect of which is that it is hard to reduce a person to "a scholar," "a priest," "a programmer." etc, that is their professional public self.
>
> While those parts (like our professions) of our very public identity are so much part of our identity we can't be reduced to that either or at least we can expose how other parts of lives influence those most public or professional forms of our lives.
>
> So that though I think too that blogs are not personal in the way that my private journal is, I still let bits and pieces of my more closed self whether it is musings about illness or the mundane details of my life out into the world. It is thus a reminder that the private exists, that it is important to our public selves all the while we keep the private primarily not totally hidden.

Anne said…

> Biella - nicely put! I hadn't thought to articulate blogs in terms of slippage or flow, but if I understand correctly, that's exactly what you're getting at and I couldn't agree more. Thanks for pushing me in such a nice direction, but now I have more to think about ;)

In my case, the question of blogging identity has been dominated by what kind of

academic I wanted to become, and how this has played out in personal and public

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terms. In terms of authorship, I brought to blogging a pre-existing commitment

to writing as a method of qualitative inquiry, and so blogging became part of my

methodological bricolage. As Richardson (1997:298) asks:

> How does the way we are supposed to write up our findings become an unexamined trope in our claims to authoritative knowledge? What might we learn about our 'data' if we stage them in different writing formats? What other audiences might we be able to reach if we step outside the conventions of social-scientific writing?

Blogging very quickly became, for me, a way of being (and not just becoming) a

'good' academic in the sense conjured by Richardson's questions. I blogged, in

other words, as a way of exploring how sociology could be done. I saw that the

inherently iterative quality of blogging encouraged me to live Foucault's famous

challenge:

> There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all ... In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? (1997:113).

I have treated my blog as a place to think out loud, to talk with others and to

bring people and objects and ideas together in new ways. Not only did blogging

afford a bricolage of my self identity, but also a bricolage of—and for—my

research subjects.

As hinted at above, not only can academic blogging be seen as political in its

reconfigurations of authorship, authority and accountability, but also in its

witnessing of professional development, both of which have been elegantly

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described by Melissa Gregg in her article, *Feeling Ordinary: Blogging as*

Conversational Scholarship, worth quoting here at length:

> It is precisely the 'mid-range' between disciplinary insularism and public intellectual practice that best characterizes blogging ... Blogs reveal the mind of the critic as impressionable and open to persuasion, for the writer is rarely able to sustain the confidence and assurance of a fixed position. Such a function contrasts with conventional modes of academic performance premised on expertise and mastery. It is to admit the hesitancy involved in the difficult task of thinking about the world.
>
> [...]
>
> The participatory nature of writing, response and counter-argument on blogs allows for ongoing debate, critical refinement and thinking-in-process. In this sense, what is rarely acknowledged about blogging is how much it *contributes to* and *mirrors* traditional scholarly practice rather than threatening it. One of the main reasons graduate students have taken them up with such fervour is that blogs offer solidarity out of isolation, especially on long projects. They create the conditions for collegiality, brainstorming and frank, fast feedback while also generating and maintaining interest, enthusiasm and motivation. Even the best supervision in the most convivial university department cannot offer this kind of support on a regular basis. The persistence with which established academics condemn blogging as a distraction preventing graduate students from timely completion and participation in their desired career does a disservice to the many instances whereby blogs are utilized as a sophisticated research tool. It also wilfully ignores the wider economic and political circumstances making the potential for a tenured academic career increasingly unlikely for a new generation of graduates.
> [...]
>
> Blogs are a modest political tool in that they can help overturn the hierarchies of speech traditionally securing academic privilege ... Blogs allow us to write in conjunction with non-academic 'peers' and 'colleagues' who not only value and improve our ideas but practice their own rigorous forms of assessment, critique and review. Blogs are counter-heroic in that they expose the life of the academic as banal. They help lay bare the fallacy of the ivory tower scholar secluded from the concerns of the 'real world' (Gregg 2006:153-158).

Since this public performance of what has long been private work can be seen as a

distinct tactic on the part of academic bloggers, it should come as no surprise that

it has been treated as a problem and a threat by critics like the pseudonymous

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Ivan Tribble (2005a and 2005b) in widely-read academic fora like the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

> Job seekers who are also bloggers may have a tough road ahead, if our committee's experience is any indication. You may think your blog is a harmless outlet. You may use the faulty logic of the blogger, "Oh, no one will see it anyway." Don't count on it. Even if you take your blog offline while job applications are active, Google and other search engines store cached data of their prior contents. So that cranky rant might still turn up. The content of the blog may be less worrisome than the fact of the blog itself. Several committee members expressed concern that a blogger who joined our staff might air departmental dirty laundry (real or imagined) on the cyber clothesline for the world to see. Past good behavior is no guarantee against future lapses of professional decorum (Tribble 2005a).

Popular press and editorial articles like the one above tend to reduce discussion of academic blogging to career risks and benefits, and connections between blogging, intellectual labour and collective action have only recently begun to be explored by researchers.

3.2.1 Blogging and affective politics

Moving beyond a simple careerist perspective on whether or not to blog—arguably of interest only to particular kinds of academics—Gregg (2007) further contextualises early career blogging practices within broader cultural and labour concerns. While some of what she describes may be exactly the kind of "dirty laundry" that Ivan Tribble and his colleagues fear, it also allows for the possibility that the more affective aspects of blogging serve as critique or a 'modest' form of political action:

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For those entering the academy today, the natural order of succession and class reproduction that once applied to their vocation is changing at a macro level. Diminished opportunities for tenure and the casualisation of the academic workforce pose fundamental problems for the model of patronage and initiation that typified the profession earlier.

[...]

That those in tenured positions did little to resist casualisation or the increasingly gruelling requirements for tenure are simmering tensions on many junior faculty blogs. However accurate, this is a genuinely felt generational grievance that spreads beyond the blogosphere. It is directed towards senior scholars who are perceived to have had a less brutal experience of professional advancement and failed to protect this possibility for others.

[...]

Through blogging, early career academics are making this unpalatable condition public. They reveal a fast receding loyalty to the promise that the university life was supposed to offer but does not deliver. Having grown up unable to ignore the realities of economic rationalism on their employment fortunes, these bloggers' experiences of becoming professional differ from their predecessors ... This newly marginalised middle-class professoriat blogs to gain support for work and life choices that they feel have been constrained by wider social pressures; they write to retain a degree of credibility from a sympathetic audience.

[...]

By virtue of their positions, junior faculty and PhD bloggers are structurally prevented from influencing many of the decisions immediately affecting their work lives. In this situation, their readership communities offer a form of solace and support as they struggle up the career ladder, while the blogs themselves provide resources for others considering a similar move (Gregg 2007:29-31).

I think that Gregg's account particularly resonates with me because of how deeply I felt my own estrangement and isolation as a PhD student. While I blogged the path my research has taken over the past five years, I also blogged my experience of becoming a professional academic. In treating my blog as a 'room of my own,' I wrote about the difficulties of having to work while studying, about a chronic lack of institutional support, of really not understanding why, after feeling like I had done everything that was asked of me, there were so few rewards in sight. But

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rather than being allowed to wallow in self-pity, these posts encouraged readers

to identify to greater and lesser extents, creating a sense of community where

none existed before.

EXCERPTS from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2006/01/ordinary-madness-of-dissertation.php

Wednesday, January 25, 2006

The ordinary madness of dissertation writing

Today it seems to me that this whole business of dissertation-finishing involves no end of completely arbitrary obstacles in utterly farcical contexts. No really. It's like a fucking Beckett play. With bad music.

posted by Anne at 18:34

5 comments

Finch said...

> Perhaps you could convince your committee that you've already finished, because in our age of potentiality the dissertation only fully exists in the moment just before it is realized. Didn't work for me, though.

e-tat said...

> Simpatico. Absurd farce it is. Arbitrary too. It may help to read a Zippy cartoon.

Anne said...

> Steve - you are so still my hero! And e-tat, it always helps to ready Zippy the Pinhead ;) Cheers

Mathias said...

> "...arbitrary obstacles in utterly farcical contexts..." You forgot to mention the humiliation, politics and insecurity of it all. No real words of comfort, unless the fact that you are not alone might help...

Geist said...

> It's like fucking Beckett. With bad music.

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http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2005/02/on-obstacles-and-small-successes.php

Thursday, February 17, 2005

On obstacles and small successes

My dissertation feels further away today than it did a few months ago. My committee is brilliant, but both my supervisor and my primary reader are at different institutions this year, and I've been without my local support network for eight months now and it's really taking its toll on me. Added to that is teaching two classes, which gives me the responsibilities of a full professor and none of the respect or rewards.

I talked with PT yesterday, and he told me I still need to learn to take more joy in my small successes. Like losing fewer than 5% of the students who originally signed up for my classes. Like teaching courses with no exams that students still bother showing up to every day. Like opening up a new world for just one person. Like finally understanding that one idea. Like being able to apply it to one other idea. Like writing the perfect paragraph. Or sentence. And thanks to some very kind readers, I have also been reminded that what I write here and elsewhere has occasionally been known to inspire.

All of these things are good and true, and I am heartened to know them. Really. But since I feel determined to wallow in self-pity a tiny bit longer, I would like to state for the record that the PhD experience is too often dehumanising and we should be ashamed that we do nothing to deter bright, confident and determined people from feeling utterly alone and defeated.

posted by Anne at 10:34

7 comments

Pat said…

> It reminds me of something that happed a few years back that still makes me laugh when I think about it. I was having an "off" day and came into work, deep-in-thought, frowning, etc. One of our homeless residents took one look at me and said, "Cheer up. It can't be that bad." I thought to myself—look—if people who are homeless, on the street are telling you to cheer up, that's pretty bad…

Anne said…
> Pat, I'm sure we'd all agree that the self-pity of an over-privileged grad student doesn't compare to the suffering of most people ;)

Susan said…

> You inspire the hell out of me!

Christian said…

> Take a bit of joy in the fact that people look forward to seeing your thoughts put up here.

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Nui T. said…

> I read your page regularly through Bloglines. I hope that the pressure doesn't keep you down for too long. There are these ephemeral distant connections through whom you do matter even if it is not felt directly. Cheers!

Erik said…

> I am with you. I find myself more and more identifying with being a grad student as a primary identity, then feeling alone and let down and dumb and hopeless... but it's true that the small successes are rewarding, if you let them be.

Lace Marie said…

> I echo Susan's comment above for succinctness, and add my own voice of thanks for the diverse work you do on your blog. The connections you make multiply even when you may not realize it. Rave on!

Granted these posts were written in the dead of Canadian winter, but the highly emotional or affective dimensions of intellectual labour that they evoke should not be dismissed. In social terms, a temporary community emerged that both confirmed and affirmed my experiences. These posts and comments also begin to hint at the reach my 'work' could take online—something that surely could not be supported as easily offline.

EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2006/12/heres-rub_05.php

Tuesday, December 5, 2006

Here's the rub

I'm not usually very tolerant of other people's whining, but damn it, when I've got my own whining to do it's a different story! Feel free to ignore the following, although commiseration is always appropriate in these situations.

Okay. So I really really dislike having to work two jobs so that I can pay for tuition and rent and food, so that I can finish my PhD, and then the two jobs interfere with getting

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the dissertation writing done, so I end up paying more tuition and still don't finish. I mean, I try not to get upset when people I know tell me how hard it is for them to finish up when that's the only bloody thing they've got to do and their entire committee is down the hall.

Try doing it while working two jobs, I want to cry out indignantly. Try doing it after your supervisor and one advisor leave for other universities before you're done! Try doing it alone, with no support! But then I realise that all this makes me sound like a whiny loser, so I keep my mouth shut and fester internally.

posted by Anne at 12:31

8 comments

MM said...

> *...those who can afford a position in a virgin or whore dichotomy remain largely unaffected by the consequences, whilst those who cannot are asked to give something up...* Don't give up–keep going little salmon!

Collin said...

> There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for all dissertators to be in your kind of situation for a semester as they start. My own situation was a little different, but I was a couple thousand miles away from my committee, and teaching 3 writing-intensive courses, as I finished, and because I left my uni before finishing, I had to pony up out-of-state tuition, driving me deeper in debt. I say this not to compare hardships (because I had some really supportive friends and mentors), but in order to say that, later on, when I had chances at summer stipends and a sabbatical, I knew how much of a luxury they were. Struggling through my diss situation made me a much more productive and efficient writer later on. It doesn't make your present situation any better, I know, but I can all but guarantee that the struggle now will pay off in the long run. In the meantime, good luck with your writing...

Michael said...

> Forget about there is a reason for everything! I believe from what little i have gathered about you that this is a dream that has been set in motion a long time ago. So stay in motion, keep ur chin up! and know that there are people that love you.:)...And then of course there are people who wonder if there are really people like you who like the way you do with such words :)

e-tat said...

> So that's what whiny means, eh? Maybe it seems so to people who are not in the same postion. But from my position, where three part-time jobs *don't* cover the bills, and the writing veers wildly, unevenly between fine and fucked, voicing such thoughts sounds more like an attempt to gain recognition for the realities of the situation. In your case it's clear that everyone loses if you don't finish, and that

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whoever makes decisions about deadlines etc. should have special dispensation for people in your position. Do what you can, and let everything else fall by the wayside, including concerns about whether you finish or not. It's much less distracting that way.

Anonymous said...

Your "whining" - scholarly, reflexive discourse, as I call it - is not lost on many and is entirely justified. Full time job, teaching adjunct at a community college, part-time job every other Saturday, family of four combined with a 37 mile, one-way commute to work all while being 70+ miles from Univ, advisor etc. If you don't already, read www.phdcomics.com - it helps from time to time ;-)

orange. said...

Dunno--I can well understand reasons to not express material difficulties publicly, but if noone ever did it, how would all the others being in comparable situations know that theres people going fighting through similar oddities ? Theres this saying in Germany, *geteiltes Leid ist halbes Leid*, which won't help you, but which says that you help others--I'm sure. And of course you'll make it.

Anonymous said...

Just take it one day at a time, be forgiving of yourself and stubborn. You can do it!

lilly said...

as a first year grad student, i love hearing from other people further along. so far, it seems like the PhD process itself breeds whining from the get go, so i'm sure you're not among the first to do so. ;) i just came across your blog and i really love your writing style. will you presenting any time soon? i would love to hear you present on your research if you will be doing so in the near or not so near future.

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2004/12/student-debt-costs-more-than-money.php

Tuesday, December 14, 2004

Student debt costs more than money

…Right now I'm concerned with how the student loan system disadvantages people as much as it benefits us.

Maybe I shouldn't be surprised that getting a system between governments, universities and corporations to work is easier said than done — but what we have is a mess and I'm not willing to accept that this is the best we can do. Some things are too complicated:

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we're talking about a system with parts that require paper forms, and other parts that only accept electronic submissions. Other things are too simple: we're dealing with a system that requires face-to-face communication, but prohibits individual people from making decisions and taking action. In any case, we've created a system that places all the responsibility on the borrowers and none of the accountability on the lenders.

It doesn't take a PhD to understand that there is something wrong here and that someone needs to change it. If we truly believe — and our current government says they do — that bureaucratic transparency is crucial in a democracy and that a well-educated population is essential to the future social, political and economic welfare of Canada, then we need to seriously and carefully re-evaluate what an education costs, and not just in financial terms. At the end of the day, I'm afraid I will only remember what my government took from me rather than what they gave. And I don't know if I'll be able to live with — and give back to — that country.

Update: I just got news that…this was selected as the CBC Letter of the Day for December 14.

posted by Anne at 10:23

These blog excerpts point to the physical and emotional, financial and political, challenges of being a PhD student and early career academic in North America today. Again, my blog provided sympathetic company and encouragement to continue my course of studies. Being published both on my site and on the national broadcaster's news website, also allowed non-academic readers the opportunity to witness a side to academic life that is sometimes entirely denied, and always hidden in our published work.

But before I overstate the political impact of this kind of affective community, Gregg also recognises the limits of such virtual action and I agree with her blunt assessment:

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> This collegiality and solidarity that exists in virtual space may yet translate offline to form the basis for real institutional pressure, to create better working conditions for junior faculty. But we would be wise to avoid being too optimistic ... Bloggers who are content to leave their work-related complaints in a virtual realm, disconnected from the agents responsible for their plight, only have themselves to blame for a lack of structural change (2007:31-32).

I should also admit that much of the political manoeuvering that my blog has

enabled has been used for personal rather than collective gain. Not quite as bad

as it sounds, I only mean to point out the kinds of gains that Walker (2006:7)

does in reference to her own blog:

> I know that my blogging helped me gain a foothold among researchers in my field, that the regular writing and discussions with readers and other bloggers helped me become a confident writer, and that I had more opportunities to give talks and write in other genres than most of my non-blogging peers. So quite probably, blogging helped me succeed in earning a PhD and getting my first academic job.

At least in my case, it is fair to say that while my blog has proven indispensable as

a research method used to forge new connections, it has been no less successful in

cultivating a professional persona and reputation that has likewise benefited me.

EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2005/07/got-blog-no-job.php

Monday, July 11, 2005

Got blog? No job!

I began writing here to keep track of my research and to present some kind of public but personal "field notes" - and it's been an experiment that has paid off in ways I never imagined. If what people have said to me is true, then my weblog has been directly responsible for invitations to present one conference keynote address, moderate and participate in at least half-a-dozen conference panels and workshops, and submit three articles for publication in academic journals and books. It has provided the foundation for a variety of academic discussions and collaborations, and has been instrumental in getting feedback on my doctoral research. I've even seen my blog posts cited in academic publications and as assigned reading for university courses! And if all that isn't enough, my weblog has also provided for an immensely satisfying on and offline engagement with non-academics, interviews for news articles in Wired and The

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Guardian, and invitations to write for non-academic publications. But all of this feels like bragging, and that's not me. In fact, I think that few of these benefits would have come my way if I didn't reveal some of my non-academic interests and experiences here. After all, I'm a person, not a CV.

posted by Anne at 10:37

The above excerpt was written in response to another academic blogger's call for examples of how blogging had been professionally beneficial rather than detrimental, as a number of non-blogging academics were publically asserting in mid-2005. While the content focussed on what I believed to be 'purely' professional activities, I recall feeling very uncomfortable about posting the equivalent of a résumé for non-academics to read. I felt compelled to remind readers that I was somehow both *more* and *less* than those accomplishments, and I was acutely aware that I was both proud and embarrassed to make such a list. Now, I am reminded of how often I have used my blog to discuss precisely those things I was unsure or ambivalent about. Rather than waiting to be certain about what I thought, I have always preferred to treat my blog as a space to think out loud.

3.3 AUDIENCES AND PUBLICS

Beyond the affective politics of professional development and identity construction outlined above, blogging's reconfiguration of authorship, authority and accountability does rely on collective interaction, so it seems prudent to ask a few questions. While my blog has afforded me the ability to establish and maintain a sense of camaraderie with people physically absent, what are the temporal dimensions of these connections? Does the immediacy of blogging

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encourage temporary solidarity, but not long-term relationships? How does that

affect what we can, and cannot, do together?

Returning to the claim that my blog serves as a partial *record* of becoming PhD,

and as a *method* for doing sociology, it is worth exploring in greater depth what

kind of scholarship is supported. In terms of sociological research, traditional

questions about authors and audiences are revitalised by having to account for

academic blogging:

> Every blogger reckons, sooner or later, with what it means to be 'speaking' to the sometimes anonymous, sometimes chimerical, sometimes homogeneous, sometimes impossibly diverse, sometimes taciturn, sometimes surprisingly large and vocal public that is the Internet. What bloggers do, it seems, is too public (too easily noticed by peevish critics; too easily thought of as pretentious by bloggers themselves), and not public enough (the blogger solipsistically speaking to him or herself; the blogger whose hit count worryingly drops). The difficulty here is due to the fact that blogs sit irregularly between familiar modes of address, never quite addressing a person (dialogue), never quite addressing a crowd (speech, public address), never quite speaking to oneself (diary, monologue, soliloquy)— and no one struggles more with this ambiguity, this awkwardness of address, than bloggers themselves ... [B]logs appear to be shifting the balance of personality and impersonality in the operation of publics and in the production of public subjects (Cohen 2006:164-166).

When I write at *purse lip square jaw*, I never know for sure who is reading. I get

some indication of an audience when readers post a comment or send me an

email, but I have always understood that the majority of web users—despite the

current obsession with online participation—are lurkers. In other words, far more

people read my blog than comment on it or email me. But I have also noticed

changes in audience over time. Early reader-commenters were mostly in the

business of interaction design—mobile and web designers, information

architects, etc.—and they shared my interests in technology and social

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interaction. I have also felt a real sense of online community with other graduate

students and junior faculty around research and teaching concerns—and in many

ways this virtual cohort has been more influential than my 'real' one. During

periods of intense academic writing I have tended to blog less, but more about

academic concerns, and as the thesis moved towards completion I had fewer

general reader-commenters and more academic reader-commenters.

EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2008/01/plsj-reader-survey.php

Monday, January 2, 2008

PLSJ Reader Survey

One of the methodological arguments I've made in my dissertation is that over the past five years this blog has provided me unparalleled means by which to engage people in other places, including outside academia.

I found it relatively easy to describe what I think the blog has offered me, and assess what that might mean for social and cultural research, but I'm not comfortable describing or assessing what the blog has been--or done--for others.

I can't speak for anyone else and standard metrics provided by sites like Technorati or del.icio.us act more like citation indices (not always the best way to measure impact) than the kind of anecdotal conversation that is so often central to blogging practice itself.

Analysing the hundreds of comments that have been posted here is one possibility, but I think there's a simpler and more practical option that I hope that you'll be able to help me out with, please.

ALL PLSJ READERS ARE INVITED TO LEAVE A COMMENT HERE DESCRIBING THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO/WITH THIS BLOG.

ANY AND ALL COMMENTS POSTED BY MIDNIGHT 31 JANUARY, 2008 WILL BE INCLUDED IN MY DISSERTATION EXACTLY AS THEY APPEAR HERE.

posted by Anne at 13:56

20 comments

Darius Kazemi said...

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Hmm. I've been reading your blog for about two years now. I'm not sure what led me here originally--maybe something about psychogeography that caught my eye? Anyway, while I never comment, I've found that I keep reading because I like what you have to say, as banal as it seems. It helps me stay connected to my more academic interests, many of which I don't get to exercise in my day-to-day as a video game developer. Also, I have an emotional attachment to your blog as back in August of '06 I showed your Knitting and Politics entry to my girlfriend Dharia, whose reaction in her blog you then quoted in turn in your blog. It felt really cool to have catalyzed a discussion like that!

heyotwell said...

I also can't recall what brought me to PLSJ first, well, it must have been no later than mid-2002? Possibly earlier. I think it was clear even then that you were offering a particular critical and academic voice to a conversation that needed both. Although you weren't able to come to Design Engaged in 2004, you suggested including a derivé as part of it, which in the end turned out to be the key ingredient. That particular peer group holds you and your work in very high regard, and it was fantastic you could then join us in 2005.

Ms. Jen said...

I have been reading PLSJ for 4 or so years, after I saw Anne either speak at SXSW or Danah Boyd refer to Anne and recommend that folks read her blog. What I like about this blog: Anne's deep thinking but quirky take on life, academia, and her research. This is good. When I was teaching web design and art theory (2000-2005), PLSJ and Danah's Apophenia were a lifeline to me. I also love that PLSJ is striking visually with rich imagery along with the text.

Matt said...

It was odd to stumble, in 2002, upon PLSJ during my first year at Carleton University only to realize that you were not a cyber-person in some far away place, but a student at the very uni I was attending. Since then PLSJ has provided numerous opportunities for me to discover something new, read something provocative, and engage in a live discussion about mobility, tech, theory, etc. Thanks!

Erwin said...

Hi, I have been reading your blog for some 2.5 years. Probably the main reason why I keep reading it is because it in fact provides a perspective rather perpendicular to my normal one. I find it rather enriching, and thank you for it.

Michael Peterson said...

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While your research is quite removed from mine, I've been reading your feed for a long time. I'm interested in space and place, and I have a non-academic interest in technology. As one who teaches and advises graduate students I've also been interested in your comments on grad school and writing process.

Chris said...

Unlike other readers, I *know* how I found your blog: you mentioned Caillois' work in a post, and so few people mention him that it was an instant selling point for me. :) As a game designer, I appreciate input on design issues from outside the industry, where grown ups can occasionally be found... Best wishes!

Darius Kazemi said...

Hmm. Maybe I found your blog through Chris, then!

Peter Merholz said...

I don't know what pointed me to you, but I know when I pointed TO you: http://www.peterme.com/archives/00000317.html

(Christ! It's been over 5 years!)
After reading this blog and corresponding with you, I had the pleasure of meeting you (and your husband-like person) and enjoying all manner of intellectual discourse. As your studies have evolved, they've moved away from matters I find personally relevant (you used to call yourself an information architect!). Still, I enjoy keeping tabs and seeing how your thoughts are developing, and what French critical theorists' names I can drop to sound smart to Stacy's academic colleagues.

egoodman said...

I have a more ambivalent relationship to this blog than other people, I think. When I started blogging about four years ago, I was in between jobs and travelling around the US. At first it was fun, but then I started feeling really isolated. I missed my friends and colleagues in New York, and didn't really have a life established on the West Coast. I had already started blogging, so reading your blog -- and responding to it -- made me feel more connected to a larger community of people thinking and feeling much as I did. On the other hand -- very ironically -- my blogging has fallen by the wayside now that I'm back in school and supposedly doing all this thinking and writing. I'm trying to minimize my time online and have more of a life off-screen. So I don't visit PLSJ as much, because when I read it I end up regretting all the personal (or even school-related) writing I don't seem to find the time to do anymore.

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Jamie said...

> My notes state that I first bookmarked PLSJ on Dec. 10, 2002. Probably, I
> checked it out because the research of a close friend of mine had been
> mentioned therein, or perhaps via a recommendation/link on that person's
> website. Since then, the site has provided me with a voyeuristic glimpse into
> certain aspects of life in academia, from the perspective of an observer &
> participant whose intellectual preoccupations, cultural preferences and
> temperament seem consonant with a lot of people I know and like. Moreover,
> every few months, whenever I Google the search terms of some topic about
> which I or others whom I read are wondering about, I often discover that PLSJ
> thought and wrote about it first, better, more informatively and thought-
> provokingly than almost anyone else. Thanks.

Anonymous said...

> I read your blog from around 2003 I think. Never thought of why. Maybe because
> I like how you make sense in a Brenda Dervin kinda sense. Your blog helps me
> out to understand who I am and what the world around me is and how to find my
> way about it. To be more precise, first and foremost is your personality, your
> attitude, your temperament, judgement. These seem critical for me for
> information permutations.

Nicolas said...

> I think I started reading PLSJ in 2003 when I started a blog (and my PhD). My
> daily musing on the Internets led me there because of shared interests (mostly
> locative media/ubicomp at that time) addressed with a different perspective than
> the one I've been taught (cognitive psychology). I easily remember the moment
> when I stumbled across this blog (and the reading list that spanned from Deleuze
> to William Gibson or Paul Dourish), which made me realize that I was not lonely
> in seeing certain connections. PLSJ and Anne's work contributed to making me
> realize that there are other approaches to dealing with the implications of
> technologies - mostly, through Anne's perspectives and the references she
> brought forward.

Sister said...

> I think I've been reading your blog for about 3 years. What brought me here? It
> was probably either someone else's blogroll or a search for sites about
> technology and culture. What kept me here? I find most of your posts offer
> challenging ideas and/or interesting thoughts that I don't see elsewhere. The
> others give a peak into graduate student life. Why didn't I comment until now? I'm
> a librarian now but once studied sociology, and I'm a soft-touch for anyone trying
> to get a good sample of survey respondents.

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A.S. Galvan said...

> I don't remember how exactly I found PSLJ. One constant in my academic interests was an unwavering devotion to the study of paradigm shifts and if Kuhn's idea could genuinely be applied to social science. I probably found you through some search terms no less than 3? 4? years ago.
>
> One thing I've loved about your blog is that it's hard. I always find myself chasing down links and learning new concepts when I come to visit.
>
> While you don't write about it very often, I've read an entry or two dealing with a sense of frustration with the process of actually getting a ph.d, but you've continued to push through rather than give up. I've been cheering for you for years, for all of us in spaces like that.
>
> I find something like home here, also, in that I had a hard time finding my niche as an academic. I agree with what's already been written that your work seems to voice something long silent. This space has given me great encouragement and hope: I too can study things that might be "fuzzy" to others and help give them focus.

Lynn V. Marentette said...

> Anne, I just found your blog today through a "google alert" e-mail about ubiquitous or pervasive computing. I posted a link to your blog from my Technology Supported Human-World Interaction blog. I'm a school psychologist who returned to school at mid-life to study computers and technology. Last year, I took a graduate Ubicomp class, which inspired me to consider doing research in this area. I don't know why your website never popped up during all of my internet searches over the years, given our similar interests. I'll take some time to read through your posts!
>
> My other blogs:
>
> Interactive Multimedia Technology
> Tech Psych
>
> (I started blogging because it was a requirement for a class, and I never stopped.)

linda said...

> I hesitated slightly before I wrote this. Blogging might be public but reading one is more private.
>
> I first came across this blog in 2003, when I was doing research on ubicomp for a course essay. Since then it's been a constant source of inspiration in my own

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work. I'm an anthropologist myself and we seem to share a lot of research interests and play with some of the same thinkers (such as Deleuze and various STS people). In your posts you've often nailed a thought or argument, which I've been wondering about myself.

I think I also immediately felt "at home" because I recognised a certain anthropological tone in your blog posts. I don't know what it is, but there is something about how anthropologists approach the world, which is instantly recognizable no matter what their research topics or analytical preferences are. I study at an institute where few people do research on new technologies. At times, where I've felt alone and isolated in my everyday academic life reading this blog has reaffirmed my belief that this is a valuable area of research to pursue.

Crab Man said...

disgracefully - an occasional scavenger who always finds something wonderful to slip into a mind pocket - this time the many layers of paint on the single paint chip - reminds me of those Parisian artists who first described the democratic art of posters sites, with layer after layer torn and exposed and accidentally juxtaposed

John said...

Anne, Fascinating to follow this project through, occasionally checking in for the past few years, ever since meeting you at the UChicago DGI Conference. Actually, I think of this as a "model" academic blog. With every visit, I find something thought-provoking, touching on common interests, but from a very different perspective. Good job and thanks.

Zach Chandler said...

I used to read PLSJ sporadically, was inspired by your wonderful mix of thought-provoking academia and personal bits. Now I visit extremely rarely, am somewhat post-blog, paralyzed by RSS-aggregator overwhelm, watching the number of unreads reach their max in every category. I may have been happier (more curious?) when I knew less.

Perhaps most intriguing to me is how particular people only commented when I explicitly requested it. With several exceptions, most of the people who responded to the above post were commenting for the first time. In other words, that particular audience was almost completely unknown to me for up to five

years—and arguably did not even exist as an audience until my post compelled it.

Furthermore, despite their coming together on my blog, it would not be entirely

accurate to consider *this* audience part of the community I described above, and

which could be considered my co-authors or subaltern authors (Quiggin

2006:483). Sonia Livingstone (2005) draws out some differences between

audiences and publics that are relevant here. Recognising that publics are

increasingly mediated technologically and discursively, Livingstone (2005:11)

suggests that an audience constitutes a public when it ceases to be an aggregate of

individuals and becomes a collectivity that engages with texts beyond the

moment of their initial reception. By this definition, my blog has multiple

audiences *and* multiple publics, although the question of participation remains

unclear.

3.3.1 Blogging and voice

Jill Walker (2006) identifies three kinds of academic blogs: public intellectuals

who use their blog for political debate, research blogs (including student blogs)

and pseudonymous blogs about academic life. According to this schema, *purse lip*

square jaw would be located between a public intellectual blog and a research

blog, or in what Walker (2006:5) refers to as a hybrid genre, "the blog that both

discusses the content of research, the ideas themselves, and that also discusses

the process and experience of researching." Such a description of blogging recalls

my discussion in Chapter 2 of participant observation, where blogging emerges

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first and foremost as a way of doing social and cultural research that combines

both online and offline activities.

EXCERPT from *jill/txt* by Jill Walker

http://jilltxt.net/?p=184

June 6, 2003

Not documenting, doing

Yesterday I agreed with Lilia that most researchers' blogs don't document research.
Today while reading a post on David Weinberger's blog I realised that that's completely
beside the point: research happens in blogs, and in the conversations between blogs.
Blogs aren't about documentation, they're about doing, thinking and discussing. And
they're about catching fleeting thoughts and making them explicit: if I hadn't blogged my
response to Lilia yesterday I probably wouldn't have thought about David's post today as
research and wanted to rethink yesterday's ideas as I'm doing now.

Of course blogs can be used as documentation as well, they can be used for almost
anything I suspect, but I don't think documentation is the most interesting aspect of blogs
in research.

Just as anthropological fieldnotes create culture as well as they describe it,

blogging can be seen as a kind of performative assemblage involving multiple

subjects and objects: multiple researchers, multiple audiences and multiple

publics.

EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2003/06/weblogs-as-liminal-spaces.php

Monday, June 30, 2003

Weblogs as liminal spaces
Below is the abstract I submitted for the Into the Blogosphere CFP I mentioned last
week.

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PERFORMING THE PLACES IN-BETWEEN: WEBLOGS AS LIMINAL SPACES

We can view weblogs as enabling revolutionary possibilities for communication, or as merely the latest iteration of more than a decade of online self-publishing. However, following post-structural approaches, and especially those of Deleuze and Guattari, we may shift analysis away from such totalising explanations or representations, and towards notions of decentralised performativity and relationality. This shift forces us to examine the spaces in-between which have traditionally been glossed over as void. Historically, anthropologists have referred to the spaces in-between as liminal spaces, thresholds or transitions from one state or space to another. Accordingly, liminality has been understood to perform boundaries, as well as beginnings, becomings, and similar forms of cultural transition or mobility.

This paper applies notions of performativity and relationality to articulate weblogs as liminal spaces, or spaces of flow. In this way, weblogs may be understood as socio-technical assemblages that negotiate relations between virtuality, actuality, distance, proximity, past, present and future. In other words, weblogs create particular spaces and times in which social activity may, and does, occur. Taking an auto-ethnographic approach, this paper examines the author's own weblog as a social and technological space between online academic and design communities, where boundaries between subjects are blurred, and both individual and collective meaning and identity struggle to emerge. In particular, this paper addresses the role of comments and archives in delineating specific spaces and times of interaction while also creating what might be described as the never-ending weblog.

posted by Anne at 12:57

I never ended up writing that paper, but I had wanted to write about how my blog was a space between my Master's and my PhD, between sociology, anthropology and design, between private and public, individual and collective. I saw, and still see, my blog as *a space of becoming.* What I did not appreciate until recently is the extent to which blogs can serve to bring particular publics into being—and how that impacts not just who the researcher can be but also who can join the audience, or form a public, what the researcher writes.

> When people complain, as many do, that intellectuals are not writing clearly enough, their yardstick of good style often turns out to be not just grammatical or aesthetic but political. After all, they do not want elegance of just any variety ... They want language that will bring a certain public into being, and they have an

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idea of what style will work. The question of style, at any rate, entails a worry
about the nature and duties of the intellectual (Warner 2002:129).

EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2006/04/i-changed-my-mind-autoethnographic.php

Tuesday, April 11, 2006

I changed my mind: an autoethnographic moment

…Online/offline conversations about my research interests with so many non-academics
had forced me to try new ways of communicating, and the role I'd most often felt
compelled to play is what I call the "good academic". You know, against the Ivory Tower,
for the People. I believed that anti-intellectualism didn't exist among intelligent people of
any class. I believed that we could - and should - forge common ground. But over the
past several years I'd become particularly sensitive to accusations of elitism or
arrogance, which are never pleasant but have particular effects if you're a woman. (What
passes as confidence in men is still too often perceived as arrogance in women. And
even when men are considered to be arrogant, strategies of dealing with the 'problem'
are significantly different than dealing with arrogant women. Add to this more individual
or idiosyncratic masculine and feminine reactions to intelligent and powerful women, and
the situation can get quite messy.) In any case, I believed that accusations of elitism or
arrogance indicated my failure to be a "good academic" *and* undermined my status as a
"good woman"….

posted by Anne at 11:26

Returning to matters of voice returns me to the politics of academic blogging, and

to what kind of academic I find myself becoming. The most rewarding, and the

most painful, blogging experiences have been the reactions of non-academics.

Mostly, I have had the pleasure of an audience so supportive that a word like

community better describes my relationship with them. But I have also been

insulted, and expressly dismissed or excluded. Often readers miss my point, or I

fail to make my point, and we talk past each other. More positively, I have been

taken to task by intelligent people and I have been forced to 'get over myself.' I

have been compelled, and perhaps even expected, to find a particular voice on my

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blog. Not the voice of authority, but nonetheless a voice of expertise. A critical,

but not too critical, voice. Not an entirely casual tone, but still a friendly or

convivial one. And never, ever, a voice that falls prey to 'academic-speak.'

EXCERPT from *Adaptive Path Blog* by Dan Saffer

http://www.adaptivepath.com/blog/2006/10/16/saving-situated-technologies-and-ubicomp/

Monday, October 16th, 2006

Saving Situated Technologies and Ubicomp

I have an interest in ubiquitous and situated computing, thus I was pleased recently to lurk on an email list about the topic, which as I quickly found out was almost entirely populated by academics. And…wow. Not only did most of the talk go way over my head, most of it was nearly a parody of academic speak. A sample:

> You mention the "current status of the material object [and] forms of embodied interaction" and I've often thought about this 'return' to the body and the physical after the (failed?) promises of cyberspace disembodiment. In other words, I see a kind of re-embodiment ethos at work right now in research, art and design practice, and a re-newed commitment to the material. In some ways, then, it seems that the pendulum of technological desire has merely swung to the other side.

Me: Unsubscribe.

Now, it's of course entirely unfair of me to pull a random quote out of context like that (No offense to the author, whose work and writing I like and follow.), but there's a lot of discussion on this topic that is like that. Looking over the speakers of this week's Situated Technologies Conference and the recent Ubicomp conference, one couldn't help notice the number of high-level talks by academics with titles like *Exurban Noir* and *Deconstructing Networked Infrastructures and Experience*.

This is probably to be expected, I suppose. Most of this stuff is fairly theoretical right now, so it should be no surprise that the talk about it is also theoretical. But still. The discussions around ubicomp and situated technologies remind me of the academic papers from the late-1980s/early 1990s in which computer scientists and HCI folks (i.e. the CHI crowd) were discussing and creating their own (fantasy) world of what a global, hypertext system might be like. There were all these fantastical systems of what a hyperlink might look like and such. And of course, the internet came along (and, to an extent, hypercard before that) and utterly ruined their theories and went in totally unplanned directions because, for the most part, it wasn't built by academics. So it will also likely be for the world of ubicomp.

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What I'd like to see is practitioners take ownership of ubicomp and situated technologies. We can't have the voices speaking for them only be coming from the ivory towers.

Those are my words Saffer refers to and, to be honest, I was quite annoyed when I first read his post. But this example is illustrative because a designer took an excerpt from an email I sent to an academic discussion list and posted it 'out of context' on a design blog. This blurring or crossing of domains is so prevalent in online discussion that, arguably, all contexts are 'in' and tensions are inevitable. As someone trying to become a 'good' and 'responsible' academic, I wondered if I could not get away with using specialised language with an 'academic' audience, then when and where I would ever be able to use specialised language? I had also noticed that sociological or anthropological language was considered more egregiously exclusive than other kinds of technical jargon that regularly appear in blog posts—or at least amongst authors that defined themselves in opposition to, or in competition with, academics—and I was unsure how to proceed.

This matter of using 'proper' voice further confuses audiences and publics, and the rest of this chapter will try to unravel some of these connections. After all, online interactions like the one above seem to indicate that, at least sometimes, I did research *near* but certainly not *with* non-academics. And this needs to qualify any claims of collective or collaborative work I attempt to make here.

3.3.2 Blogging as collective and collaborative work

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Warner (2002) describes a public as a self-organised relation amongst strangers, constituted through attention, including the social space created by the reflexive circulation of their discourse, and as Cohen (2006) notes, this is exactly why blogs can seem so personal and impersonal. Again, by this definition, *purse lip square jaw*'s spaces of interaction and audience are indeed public. In fact, I would suggest that over time multiple publics and counter-publics (cf. Fraser 1992; Warner 2002) have congealed and dissolved around particular issues, demanding different modes of discourse and shifting worldviews. For example, when I upheld a sense of public more interested in the fate of all people, I was met by a counter-public that sought to be heard in the particular, demanded to be addressed as such, and never spoken for. Conversely, when I spoke in particulars that would associate me with *a* counter-public position, I was challenged to make it generalisable for *the* public. One of the implications is that when it comes to interaction between academics and non-academics, there is actually no such thing as 'proper' or always appropriate voice either online or offline. It is always already a negotiation.

I have been taught to be aware of academic privilege, but nowhere in my education have I felt as accountable as I do when I blog. Recalling Gregg's (2007) comments on the politics of academic voice, and the examples above, perhaps it would be more accurate to claim that I am held accountable in different ways by different publics. Academic readers expect something different than non-academics, and my dissertation readers may not read my blog at all and simply expect me to exclude it. For example, I remember one of my committee members

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reading parts of my thesis and advising against the inclusion of online writing

that contained "inappropriate" language. Although these concerns are reasonable

and were voiced with the best intentions, I maintain that self-censoring is not a

better solution. I believe that it reinforces boundaries around 'proper' (i.e.

rational) academic speech by excluding affective experience and vulgar (i.e.

common) communication. In other words, whatever political force my blog may

have would be significantly diluted if its content were denied a place amidst the

'real' work of dissertation research and writing.

EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2005/02/rant.php

Wednesday, February 23, 2005

RANT

No sadness today. No self-pity either. Just sheer anger.

(Mum and Dad, please stop reading now because I know the language will be unacceptable.)

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I'll not be able to defend my dissertation by the end of the term. This means I'll need to register for the spring/summer term (and, of course, tuition increases in May) and then defend by the end of August. But my teaching contracts and SSHRC funding run out at the end of April. And even though I have guaranteed university funding for September - when I had hoped to no longer be a student - they won't pay it out over the summer when I will be a full-time student. So not only am I about to lose all my income, but I will have new bills to pay and full-time unpaid work to do.

What the fuck am I supposed to be learning from this experience?! I've been taught how to develop and use the most precise ideas and language to explain and critique these sorts of situations, but every step of the way they remind me that there's little I can actually do. It's like being forced to take it up the ass and then sweetly say "Please Sir, can I have some more?" Fuck them. I fucking hate this shit.

posted by Anne at 16:11

14 comments

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Chris said…

> I'm so sorry. It is absolutely unfair and unjust. From my experience, the first impulse is to give up and move on. But you have too much to contribute, too much real work to do, to think about alternative careers. We who read your blog know and see your passion for the work. That ought not be taken from you.

molly said...

> damn it, anne. i'm sorry to hear this. you are so ready to be done, you deserve to defend it and start the next phase of your life. you really do.

Steff said…

> Very sorry to hear of these unfair complications. The administrative and bureaucratic elements of a university are, of course, adverse to learning & critical discourses. If it wasn't for the students universities would run smoothly, is their unconscious thinking, I assume. Hope you can find some funding for the interregnum months, and finish your diss. in spite of these Kafka-type obstacles. Prolly best not to want to complete out of spite, but for a more pure sense of self-gratification? It's only fair to fucking hate that shit, though.

Daniel said…

> Suck. I second Molly's comment. I'm immediately trying to think of solutions...my nature. They'll only fund you in the spring/fall?!? Obviously taking a break is not doable. How can we get you $$ over the summer? I don't have enough info to process further. If you want to soundboard though, feel free.

Rex said…

> YES. I am right there with you -- we are even defending in similar time frame. This sort of thing is utterly ridiculous and yet also totally common. Funk them. Sympathies.

Janice said…

> Leave of absence- take one! Then re-register in the fall- take the funding- defend-and drop out of contractual obligations. See- you too can stick it to the man!

Lalya said…

> F**king hell! Why does the administration have to be so bloody stupid? I'm so sorry, Anne. Don't give up though, you'll find a way. Is there anything we can do, like sign a petition or anything?

Laura said…

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I like to read your blog very much!! And I agree with what u said about academe: anyone can mess with anybody at any time, and the messee has no or little recourse. I saw that happening, when I was in graduate school. I got my MA in economics after doing literature and various languages as an undergrad. I saw the messing, and I decided NOT to go into academe. I was considered very promising Ph D material, both in comp lit and in econ, but, no thank u! I work for a finance firm and am left alone to do my job! I do it very well. (I'm also married, have one daughter and another one on the way. My job doesn't own me, as it does in academe.)

Linda said…

My sympathies that totally sucks ! I've had a day of disillusion concerning administrative academic stuff as well. Grrr !

tV said…

You know Anne, I always wondered if behind the clean and cool presentation of your work there was something boiling -- and now I know. Good to hear you write the word FUCK. I hate bureaucracies. You are always welcome to become mired in the sheer insanity of McGill, if you'd like, which is byzantine to the end. Time to pull out the barista apron. Good luck. I didn't get paid from a certain large government grant for _6 months_. I became very angry, broke and depressed and was STILL expected to be doing the work as demanded--and often insisted with a complete lack of tact or understanding--by certain academic upholders of the bureaucracy. This was recently. Luckily there were also a few sweet souls who understood. So I am right there with you.

Anne said…

Thank you. I'm sure everything will be fine in the end.

Irina said…

I'm so sorry to hear this. I second (almost) everyone's comments. Strength from the other side of the Atlantic!

Tom said…

Yes, indeed, that sucks big time. I'm sorry that's happening to you. It is unfair and undeserved.   For what it's worth, when I was in grad school, there was a particular class they made me take that I knew I didn't need (I was already teaching the same subject at another school). I protested, but of course that didn't work. So I took the class, and at the first class meeting I met the woman that I went on to marry. So it worked out OK. Here's hoping something good comes out of this for you. Please keep blogging.

Steve said…

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Barl. I'm sorry to hear that, Anne - I hope you can bang some sense into them.

My mother was the first person to post a comment on my blog. I had just installed a separate commenting system to work with Blogger, which at the time did not support comments. Within half an hour of getting the system working, my Mum had posted a note telling me she loved me and was proud of me. I had no idea that she knew I had a blog, let alone read it, and from then on I have written assuming—sometimes even hoping—that my parents are reading. To this day they occasionally leave comments on things they find interesting, although Mum tells me in person that she has a hard time understanding what I write. For some reason, this bothers me far more than do purposely anti-intellectual insults.

But this business of thinking and writing together—with *others*—still seems tricky to me. It may be collective, but it also strikes me as an iterative kind of collaboration where relations of reciprocity are complex.

EXCERPT from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2006/04/at-what-point-does-collaboration-cease.php

Friday, April 28, 2006

At what point does collaboration cease to be reciprocal and simply become appropriation?

When I started blogging my research four years ago, I remember running into other academics both online and offline who thought it wasn't a good idea to share my findings so freely. I remember thinking how sad it was that they were so attached to the idea of intellectual property and their own career advancement. I've since abandoned such self-righteousness, but stand behind my desire to be the kind of academic who shared everything - what I read, what I thought, what I wrote.

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I wanted other academics to borrow and build on my work. I trusted them to give credit where credit was due, to return the favour by sharing their own research. And you know what? They did. They do. I haven't lost control of my research and I've had the absolute pleasure of getting to work with, and learn from, some really incredible scholars.
But I didn't start blogging just for other academics. I had lofty - if terribly naive - dreams of becoming some sort of public intellectual. I wanted to exceed the fortifications of the Ivory Tower with every post, damn it! I wanted to give back as much as I could to the people who had funded my research. I wanted to be held accountable.

I especially wanted to learn from non-academics, and share with them what I had learned from my own encounters. I was attracted to the cultures of collaboration and sharing I witnessed online. I found kindred spirits and made friends who have been instrumental in shaping my thinking and writing. It's been good, for sure, but I've also learned an important lesson: not everyone understands or values reciprocity in the same ways. In other words, not all sharing is created equal. At first I thought it was simply a case of some people taking more than they give. But now I think it's more than that: I think it's a cultural difference.

I've written many times, here and elsewhere, that I question the kind of reciprocity at work when a small group of people profit from the work of many others. (And don't even get me started on individuals who profit from the not-for-profit work conducted by academics and others, and that includes accumulating and leveraging social capital from recommendations and the like.)

In the past I would have considered these things amongst the ill effects of capitalism, but now I think it's a bit more complicated than that. After all, some of this labour is actually being done for free. Out of love even, like with Flickr or any number of mod communities. The DIY ethic, in fact, is based on the power of creative re-use and re-appropriation. But these terms are now being tossed around in software and hardware development like organisations and companies only care about democratic participation, and not profitability.

Jean Burgess knows much more about mass amateurisation and vernacular creativity than I do, so I hope she can help me out here: At what point are labour and love exploited? When does collaboration become appropriation?

posted by Anne at 07:37

8 comments

Rob said...

> New Term "Venture Academic", as in venture capitalist: So I go to a meeting about generating a collaboration, a "collaboratory" - we have to talk about this term - concerning interactivity and the arts last night and rather than talk about collaboration we were confronted by very enthusiastic proponents of individual projects - what one astute participant outside called "a set of business plans". These were all products in the making - with all the pros and cons to that. So being invited to make a "pitch" for inclusion I reflected on what this might mean for the process of academic or arts grant applications which have become a feature of arts faculty life in so many countries and also what it meant in terms of

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the doing of "research" - and whether research was even possible. In Anne's terms, there was a good sense of "play" in the room, but play between individuals and code, not amongst a group other than the sort of play that gets going between authors and audiences or entrepreneurs and bankers.

Chris said...

Personally, I find you to embody the model of where I wish all academics could be - open, honest, community-integrated. Hell, you even wet your toe in the ongoing nonsense of my blog. Now that's dedication to community! :) If more academics were like you, I wouldn't have left academia after my Masters degree. But, sadly...

Mathias said...

While direct collaboration may not spring from this blog (I dont know) dont forget to take into account the impact on a larger group. Your writing forms part of a larger voice of online writers. By promoting openness you help and form others to do the same. So while this is not direct reciprocal benefit it is, indirectly, creating a better place (wow, that sounds very naive). My real blog is [Wrote](). Keep writing!

mary said...

In a very coincidental (or maybe synthetic, or maybe numinous) way you've said what I've been thinking for the last few days. You've described it much better, though. *The point* is "when a small group of people profit from the work of many others," whether or not that is social or material profit. And how and where this occurs--academia, profit, not-for-profit--is *beside* the point. There is so much in this. Collaboration is a system, yes? Like capitalism. But social status is the cash. Great, great post. Too bad you already have a PhD thesis.

jean said...

There's a whole thing about researchers or designers collaborating with their constituencies and/or with Big Business on behalf of their constituencies, usually in the name of participatory something-or-other. I work in a research culture where such collaborations are highly valued, which is both a welcome challenge and fraught with ethical issues, and I guess I have the same concerns.

When doing the digital storytelling stuff, I've started concentrating more than anything on understanding why participants are there, and what they want to get out of the process; and a lot less on what they will produce and what that will be useful or valuable for. Then again, if I wanted to make money designing a platform for 'participatory media', that would be kind of essential - the participants would be my customers.

Finally (and now I am hopefully actually responding to your point):

"But these terms are now being tossed around in software and hardware development like organisations and companies only care about democratic participation, and not profitability."

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Exactly. Collectively, with our desire to participate, our labour-as-love and our whimsical half-understood urges to create things and share them, we are grist to the Big (new) Media mill. What I've become interested in lately is the question of whether such participation actually add up to anything at all beyond that and/or beyond the accumulation of new media cultural capital for the early adopters of each new development (blogging, flickring, videoblogging, whatever's next).

None of which should surprise me. Software can only ever replicate the social contexts in which it was created, right? The most active citizens of, say, flickr are uncannily similar, not as the result of some conspiracy, but simply as an effect of just who the early adopters are always going to be.

Jean-Louis Trudel said...

Looking forward to a possible collaboration, how proficient are you in French?

Ultimately, I think the question of whether or not blogging can be considered collaborative academic research remains unresolved. Nonetheless I am convinced that the 'work' I did online involved all sorts of known and unknown people who helped me become a particular kind of PhD student, or academic, or person. And if I take the comments included in this chapter at face value, then I believe I can say that I have positively influenced others as well.

3.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter I introduced my weblog, *purse lip square jaw*, as an integral part of my dissertation's methodology and my personal experience of 'becoming PhD.' Research blogging was described in terms of its ability to reconfigure, to greater and lesser extents, traditional sociological understandings of authorship, identity and academic authority—although the political power of these emerging practices and relations should be further qualified. By engaging multiple audiences and

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publics, my blog can also be understood as a form of participant observation that

also raises interesting questions about the differences between collective and

collaborative research. More generally, and perhaps most importantly, research

blogging requires a rethinking of what constitutes sociological 'research' today.

In attempting to summarise this chapter, I know I have left more questions

unanswered than answered—but perhaps that is the very sort of immediate and

emergent quality of blogging that I have attempted to describe. I also want to

emphasise that the analysis of research blogs is in its very earliest stages, and

much work still needs to be done.

> One way of looking at weblogs and emerging forms of scholarly discussion and work is that they are the popularisation of research, or a new form of dissemination. If they allow ideas to be worked through it is in the same way as informal conversations in the breaks of a scholarly conference do, or perhaps at best they can replace or augment the debates that ideally (though usually not really) take place in the question sessions after traditional scholarly papers are presented.
> [...]
>
> Weblogs in their current form can't fully replace traditional publication. They're superficial, quotidian, they're not rigorous enough, one might argue, they are too completely in the moment and encourage fast writing and thought rather than deep consideration and reflection. And yet it is obvious that bloggers tend to revisit the same issues again and again. Many bloggers are adept at linking back to related entries written months or even years earlier, both by themselves and by others. The link itself has become something of an ethics of blogging: link to your sources. If you're not sure of a fact or of the source of your ideas, search the web until you find out more about that and link to it. These foundations are, perhaps, the seeds of a genre that may grow to be as strong as the traditional academic essay (Walker 2006:10).

I agree with what Walker says above—blogs should not be considered

replacements for peer-reviewed research—but I also recall what Gregg (2007)

described as the similarities between blogging and more traditional scholarly

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activities. In many ways, *purse lip square jaw* comprises fragmented conversations between me and diverse others that have lead to this moment of writing my dissertation this way.

Looking back I recognise the many conversations that shaped me and my readers into multiple and contingent publics arranged around particular concerns. I can see—always did see—how my blog has provided a space in which I explore different ideas and identities, negotiate relationships with others (including my personal and professional reputations) and expand and strengthen my, dare I say, cross-cultural communication skills. Blogging was how I found my dissertation cases, and where I connected them to others. In many ways my blog has been my playground, but I can also recall days and weeks when blogging was boring or tedious, when I doubted its relevance for my project, or when I could not care less if I ever posted another word. Yet here I am, *blogger-bricoleuse*, writing my dissertation around and between my blog posts, performing what Zalis (2003) calls a "theatre of recollections" in order to hold it all together.

The following chapter takes up the question of temporality in different but related ways. In Chapter 4, I continue with my experimental text, sliding between blog posts and analysis, in order to begin my discussion of how to understand other emergent technologies.