



## Digital Ethnography

### Digital Social Research: Methods Options - Group A

Academic Year: 2014-15, Hilary Term

Day and time: Weeks 1-4, Day and time to be determined

Location: TBD

#### Course Convenor

Eric T. Meyer, Senior Research Fellow, [eric.meyer@oii.ox.ac.uk](mailto:eric.meyer@oii.ox.ac.uk), Tel. 287218

#### Background for Digital Ethnography

Analysis of qualitative data gathered during the course of social research and the Internet requires both a set of specialized skills and an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative approaches to social research. Ethnographic approaches to research in particular are often employed in the study of ICTs, particularly since they are well suited to the study of leading-edge developments. They also provide a means for complementing more quantitative studies through the collection of in-depth and contextualized observations.

This module will: 1) provide an overview of the ethnographic tradition; 2) explore the new opportunities and challenges the Internet has presented for those interested in carrying out ethnography; 3) examine the more practical aspects of how to go about an ethnographic study; 4) discuss novel methods that are being used to analyse web based data and how using these methods may actually be changing what ethnography originally set out to be; and 5) explore some of the ethical considerations that arise in online ethnography.

This course will have a strong theoretical basis throughout, and is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills to carry out qualitative data analysis of a variety of kinds of data (e.g. text, photos, videos) collected from both online and offline settings. Students will gain familiarity with techniques for using a variety of Internet-related methods, and will understand their challenges.

#### Course Objectives and Outcomes

This course is designed to give students experience both collecting and analysing qualitative data as part of ethnographic research, and to give them a conceptual understanding of the reasons for using ethnographic approaches, the limits of the methods they will be using, and the opportunities and challenges unique to qualitative social research methods and the Internet.

Each week, students will develop their conceptual understanding and analysis skills via the discussion of key academic texts and through working with authentic qualitative data. Starting in week 1, students will be required to start developing and conducting their own small case study using different kinds of qualitative data and participant observation methods.

At the end of the course students will be able to:

- Understand the strengths and limitations of engaging in participant observation of digitally mediated communities
- Identify, gather, manage, and analyse multiple types of qualitative data to support ethnographic investigation
- Understand the ethical considerations unique to participatory qualitative methods

Note that students taking this course who wish to learn advanced techniques for coding and analysing the qualitative data they will gather are encouraged to take the CAQDAS methods module in the second half of Hilary Term.

### Teaching Arrangements

The course will be taught during the first half of Hilary term in four weekly classes, consisting of a mix of lectures, hands-on work, student presentations, and seminar discussion.

Each student will be required to submit formative work throughout the term.

- **Every week** all students should submit two questions raised by the readings for the week via Plato. These questions should be a combination of critical questions on the themes of the reading and questions about anything you don't understand, either in the readings or in the course more generally. These should be submitted by **noon on Monday** preceding the class.
- Additionally, two specific formative assignments are indicated in the weekly reading lists, and are **due by noon on the Monday** preceding the class. These formative assignments should be submitted via Plato.

### Note

Students should note that over the course of the year, small changes may be made to the content, dates or teaching arrangements set out in this reading list, at the course provider's discretion. These changes will be communicated to students directly and will be noted on the internal course information website.

### Summative Assessment

The course will be formally assessed by means of a final report of approximately 2,500 words on the case study project each student has carried out during the course. This report will focus on a short but critical analysis of related literature, reflexive discussion of the fieldwork methods used including their strengths and limitations, a short presentation of findings and suggestions for future work suggested by the project. Additional details about the form, content, and structure of the report will be discussed during class sessions.

The report is due on Friday of Hilary Term Week 5 by 12:00pm, and should be submitted to the Examinations School. The report should also be submitted electronically by 5:00 pm on the same day (Friday of Week 5) to [teaching@oii.ox.ac.uk](mailto:teaching@oii.ox.ac.uk). The report should follow the normal OII formatting guidelines.

Please note that the assessment for this course is different for DPhil students. DPhil students should please refer to the Graduate Studies Handbook for guidance.

### Submission of Summative Assignments

All coursework should be submitted in person to the Examinations School by the stated deadline. All coursework should be put in an envelope and must be addressed to 'The Chairman of Examiners for the MSc in Social Science of the Internet C/o The Clerk of Examination Schools, High Street. Students should also ensure they add the OII coversheet at the top of the coursework and that two copies of the coursework are submitted. Please note that all work must be single sided. An electronic

copy will also need to be submitted to the department. Please note that all coursework will be marked anonymously and therefore only your candidate number is required on the coversheet.

Please note that work submitted after the deadline will be processed in the standard manner and, in addition, the late submission will be reported to the Proctors' Office. If a student is concerned that they will not meet the deadline they must contact their college office or examinations school for advice. For further information on submission of assessments to the examinations school please refer to <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/schools/oxonly/submissions/index.shtml>.

For details on the regulations for late and non-submissions please refer to the Proctors website at <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/proctors/info/pam/section9.shtml>.

Any student failing this assessment will need to follow the rules set out in the OII *Examining Conventions* regarding re-submitting failed work.

### Topics

1. Introduction to Ethnography On/Offline
2. Entrée and Access to Communities
3. Participant observation and other sources of data: striking the right balance
4. Writing Culture

### General Readings

Pink, Sarah	Doing Visual Ethnography. Revised and expanded 3rd edition. London: Sage.
Horst, Heather Miller, Daniel	Digital Anthropology. 2012. London: Berg.
Kozinets, Robert V.	Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online. 2010. London: Sage.
Denzin, Norman K. Lincoln, Yvonne S.	The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (4 <sup>th</sup> Edition). 2011. London: Sage.
Fielding, Nigel Lee, Raymond N. Blank, Grant	The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods. 2008. London: Sage.
Markham, Annette N. Baym, Nancy K.	Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method. 2009. London: Sage.

### Key to Readings and Assignments

A reading list is given below for each class. Those items marked with an asterisk (\*) are essential reading and MUST be read by all students in preparation for the class. Items which are not marked with an asterisk are additional suggested readings which can be consulted by students with relevant interests.

All assignments shown below should be prepared in advance of the class session for which they are assigned, and submitted to the course convenor via Plato by the deadlines.

## Week 1: Introduction to Ethnography On/Offline

Ethnographic approaches to research are often employed in the study of ICTs, particularly since they are well suited to the study of leading-edge developments. They also provide a means for complementing more quantitative survey research and experimental studies through the collection of more in-depth and contextualized observations.

This session will: 1) provide a brief overview of the ethnographic tradition; 2) explore the new opportunities and challenges the Internet has presented for those interested in carrying out ethnography; 3) begin to introduce some of the ethical considerations that arise in online ethnography (a theme that will continue throughout the course).

### Readings

*	Horst, Heather Miller, Daniel	Digital Anthropology. 2012. London: Berg.  Chapter 1: The Digital and the Human: A Prospectus for Digital Anthropology
*	Kozinets, Robert V.	Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online. 2010. London: Sage.  Chapter 1: Cultures and Communities Online Chapter 2: Understanding Culture Online
*	Burrell, J.	The Field Site as a Network: A Strategy for Locating Ethnographic Research. <i>Field Methods</i> 21(2): 181-199. Available online: <a href="http://fmj.sagepub.com/content/21/2/181">http://fmj.sagepub.com/content/21/2/181</a>
	Marcus, George E.	"Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography." 1995. <i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i> 24: 95-117.
	Creswell, John	Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 2007. London: Sage.  Chapter 4: <i>Five Qualitative Approaches in Inquiry</i>
	Markham, Annette N. Baym, Nancy K.	Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method. 2009. London: Sage.  Chapter 1: <i>How Can Qualitative Internet Researchers Define the Boundaries of their Projects?</i>

### Assignment

Prior to the course starting, students should start thinking of an online community they would like to study. They should bring these ideas into class to discuss. Each student should be prepared to describe the community, explain why the community merits investigation, and outline some of the challenges the study might present.

## Week 2: Entrée and Access to Communities

Gaining access to communities is a question that has been at the heart of ethnography since its founding, and the online environment adds new dimensions of challenges for digital ethnographers. Questions of researcher identity, lurking as method, becoming an insider, and many others face the digital ethnographer, and we will discuss how others have negotiated these challenges, and what students can do to gain access to the communities they are working with.

### Readings

*	Kozinets, Robert V.	Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online. 2010. London: Sage.  Chapter 5: Planning and Entrée
*	Nardi, Bonnie	My Life as a Night Elf Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft 2010. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, Prolog, and chapters 1 & 2 Available online at: <a href="http://www.digitalculture.org/books/my-life-as-a-night-elf-priest">http://www.digitalculture.org/books/my-life-as-a-night-elf-priest</a>
*	Scott, Susie Hinton-Smith, T. Harma, V. Broome, K.	"The reluctant researcher: shyness in the field." <i>Qualitative Research</i> , 2012, 12: 715-734.
	Pink, Sarah Morgan, J.	"Short term ethnography: intense routes to knowing." <i>Symbolic Interactionism</i> , 2013, 36(3) 351-361.
	Williams, M.	Avatar watching: participant observation in graphical online environments. <i>Qualitative Research</i> , 2007, 7(1) 5-24.

### **Formative Assignment 1** (Approximately 1000 words + CUREC)

In this course, each student will design and conduct a small study related to the Internet that uses different sources of qualitative data, including participant observation. For the assignment, write a short paper in which you describe a community for which you have access to a variety of types of qualitative data, identify the boundaries for the case, and describe the types of qualitative evidence you will be able to collect. It is important that you choose a *real* case with data to which you can gain access, because you will be collecting these data and analysing them throughout the rest of the course, and writing up your experience and results in the summative final report. Also, you must fill out a CUREC form for your project.

### Week 3: Participant observation: striking the right balance

Once one has access to a community, what evidence can the ethnographer collect to bring together a holistic picture of their research topic? In this session, students will be introduced to the range of data they could construct / collect as a qualitative researcher (e.g. text, audio and visual data) both on and offline; and discuss ideas about how to design and conduct a case study using a range of qualitative methods. This session will also build on ideas from the core research methods course, particularly following on from the case study session. Students will also be introduced to a range of techniques and software for dealing with qualitative data in all its forms (e.g. field notes, photographs, audio or video recordings, documents of varying types, archival data). These will include manual methods for organizing digital files to software-based strategies.

#### Readings

*	Denzin, Norman K. Lincoln, Yvonne S.	The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (4 <sup>th</sup> Edition). 2011. London: Sage.  Chapter 28: <i>Observations on Observation: Continuities and Challenges</i>
*	Fielding, Nigel Lee, Raymond N. Blank, Grant	The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods. 2008. London: Sage.  Chapter 17: <i>Fieldnotes in Public: Using Blogs for Research</i> Chapter 21: <i>Secondary Qualitative Analysis: Using Internet Resources</i>
*	Bernard, H. Russell Ryan, Gery W.	Analyzing Qualitative Data: Systematic Approaches. 2010. London: Sage.  Chapter 1: <i>Introduction</i> Chapter 2: <i>Collecting Data</i>
*	Levy, R. I. Hollan, D. W.	"Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation." pp. 333-364, In H. R. Bernard (Ed.), <i>Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology</i> . 1998. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
	Markham, Annette N. Baym, Nancy K.	Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method. 2009. London: Sage.  Chapter 2: <i>How Can Researchers Make Sense of the Issues Involved in Collecting and Interpreting Online and Offline Data?</i>
	Creswell, John	Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 2007. London: Sage.  Chapter 3: <i>Designing a Qualitative Study</i> Chapter 7: <i>Data Collection</i>

## Week 4: Writing Culture

An important part of ethnographic inquiry is the ability to write an engaging and believable narrative about the research. Bringing together multiple sources of evidence to develop coherent conclusions and communicating findings appropriately are two key challenges of qualitative research. Drawing on academic literature, this session will examine how the various kinds of data analysed in the course can be used together to provide a coherent analysis of a study, considering issues of triangulation and crystallisation. How to disseminate the findings in an appropriate way (e.g. how to use quotes, different academic styles of writing up, etc.) will also be explored via in-class analysis of examples in academic journals.

In this session students will also consider the nature of validity and reliability in qualitative research, the ways in which qualitative researchers try to address questions of rigour in their work, and then try to apply some of these ideas to the analysis of their own study. This session will build upon ideas presented in the core research methods course, and will include working with data students have begun to collect.

### Readings

*	Kozinets, Robert V.	Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online. 2010. London: Sage. Chapter 9: Representation and Evaluation
*	Tracy, Sarah J.	'Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research.' 2010. <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i> 16(10): 837-851.
*	Ezzy, Douglas	Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation. 2002. London: Routledge Section 6: <i>Writing about Qualitative Data</i>
	Pink, Sarah	Doing Visual Ethnography. (3 <sup>rd</sup> edition). London: Sage. Section 3: Representing Visual Ethnography
	Seale, Clive	Seale, C., Gobo, G. Gubrium, J., and Sliverman (Eds). Qualitative Research In practice. 2007. London: Sage Chapter 24: <i>Quality in Qualitative Research</i>
	Creswell, John	Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 2007. London: Sage. Chapter 10: <i>Standards of Validation and Evaluation</i>
	Markham, Annette N. Baym, Nancy K.	Internet Inquiry: Conversations about Method. 2009. London: Sage. Chapter 6: <i>What Constitutes Quality in Qualitative Internet Research?</i>
	Maxwell, Joseph	Huberman, M. and Miles, M. (Eds). The Qualitative Researcher's Companion. 2002. London: Sage Chapter 2: <i>Understanding Validity in Qualitative Research</i>
	Flick, Uwe	An Introduction to Qualitative Research (4th edition). 2009. Thousand Oaks: Sage Chapter 30: <i>Writing Qualitative Research</i>

Ritchie, Jane  
Lewis, Jane

Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers. 2003. London: Sage

Section 11: *Reporting and Presenting Qualitative Data*

**Formative Assignment 2** (Approximately 1000 words)

Discuss the role of narrative in ethnographic writing generally, and in your project specifically. While writing ability is important in all academic pursuits, ethnographic studies in particular place an emphasis on the ability to generate a convincing narrative. Your essay should discuss what the strengths of such an approach bring, and what potential problems arise from privileging narrative forms. Also discuss how these issues relate to the study you are doing for the course.