

media ethnography

Global Media Management
Research Skills 2015

media ethnography

... a way of thinking about and theorising media culture in everyday life

... a set of methods for exploring and interpreting media culture in everyday life



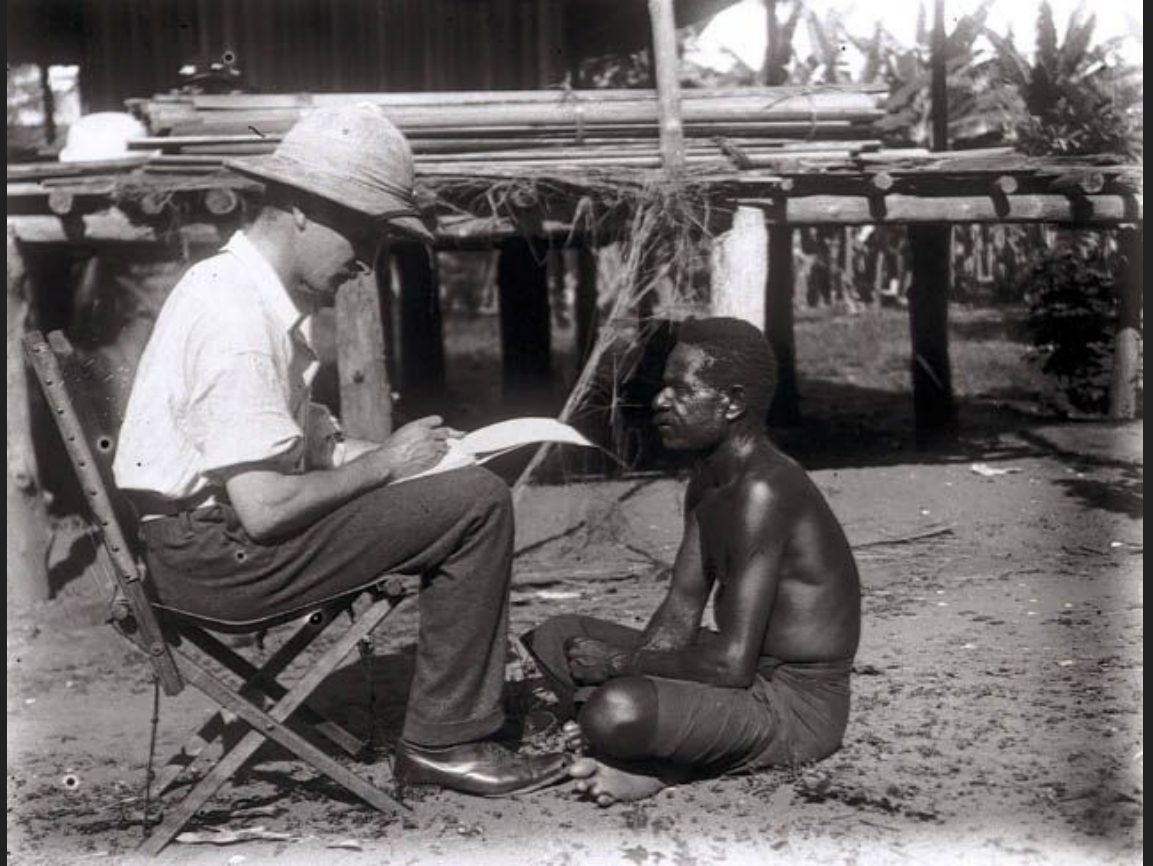
media ethnography

... a set of methods for exploring and interpreting media culture in everyday life

... for academic or commercial reasons: to better understand contemporary culture, attitudes, beliefs, behaviour, relationships, experiences...

... can be used for audience / marketing research, but asks different questions and generates different answers

ethnography and anthropology



ethnography and anthropology

THE FAR SIDE® BY GARY LARSON



“Anthropologists! Anthropologists!”

ethnography and anthropology



media ethnography

methods you can use on GMM:

- participant observation
- focus groups
- open-ended interviews (face-to-face or online)
- visual ethnography (photography, video)
- autoethnography
- virtual ethnography (more on this next term)

media ethnography

methods you can use on GMM:

- open-ended interviews (face-to-face or online) - see this week's reading by Michael Bull

media ethnography: interviews

Mobility, fluidity and flux are the condition of subjectivity in contemporary urban experience [...] Users commonly describe themselves as bereft without the mediated auditory presence of their iPod. Experience unadorned by the immersion of experience through the intimate sound world of the iPod is often described with apprehension:

It [the iPod] removes the internal dread. For example, when I needed to do yard work I used to become depressed because my mind would wander. Now, with the iPod, yard work is a positive experience because I know I have hours of uninterrupted listening, exercise, fresh air, and no business worries . . . Sertab Erener's 'Everyway that I can' stirs me for some reason. As a consequence, when I confront larger problems, I play it several times in a row and it seems to help. Also, Coldplay's 'Clocks' has a strange, positive effect upon me when I play it. (Sam)

Non-mediated experience creates a sense of vulnerability in many users. This sense of vulnerability refers to the perceived uncontrollable nature of their own streams of consciousness and the cognitive states associated with it.

media ethnography: interviews

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Note the two different modes of writing: the researcher / author and the quotes from his participants

media ethnography

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- focus groups: like open-ended interviews but with a group of people. The researcher guides the discussion. Often used in market / audience research.

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you will be trying these out with Rohit and Jeremy today...

media ethnography

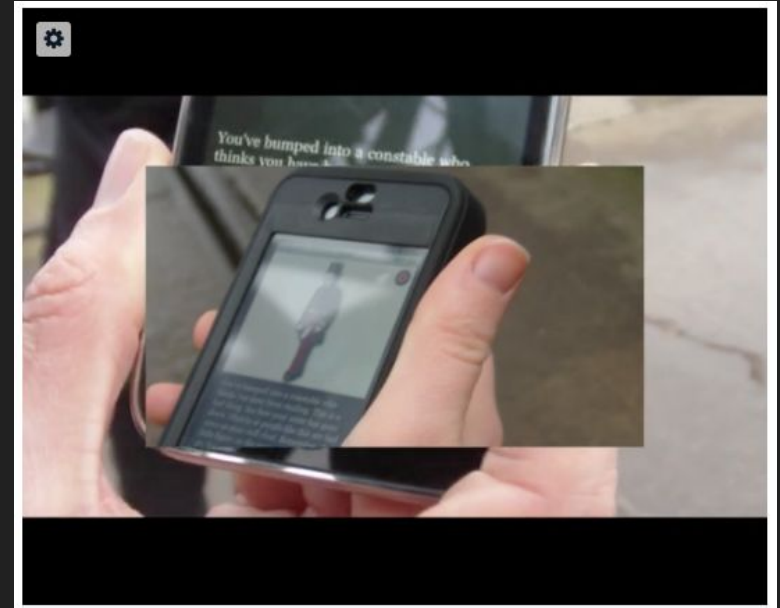
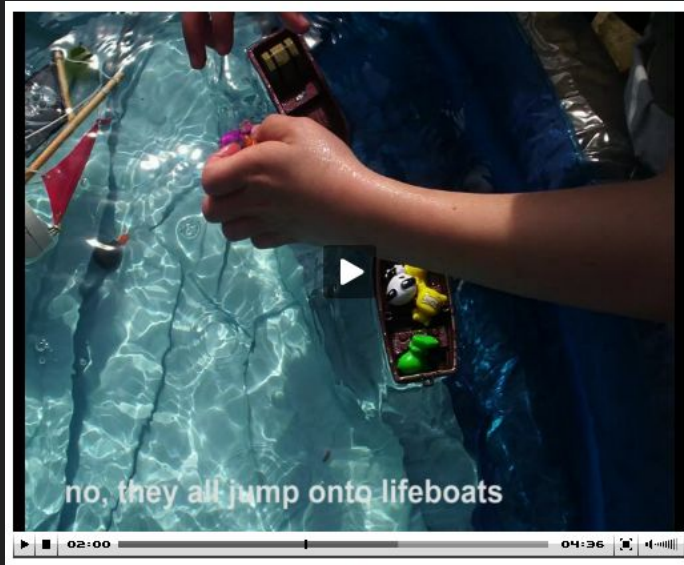
methods you can use on GMM:

- participant observation: observing or getting involved in the media activity being researched. E.g. playing a videogame with other players, studying fans at a pop concert or club, discussing TV programmes or films.

media ethnography

methods you can use on GMM:

- participant observation: some examples from my research...



<http://www.audiovisualthinking.org/videos/mrhappy/>

media ethnography

methods you can use on GMM:


- participant observation: you can study media *production* as well as consumption.



The video player shows a man in a red shirt sitting in a chair, holding a white smartphone and pointing at the screen. He is looking at the phone with a focused expression. Another man in a blue t-shirt with a yellow graphic and the text "THINK UP KNOW" and "SUPER INTER" is standing next to him, looking towards the phone. The background is an indoor setting with a staircase.

Settings

01:01

 **Matt explains DanceTag**
from Seth Giddings [PLUS](#) 1 year ago

Short clip of Matt at Mobile Pie explaining how the beta version of the DanceTag app game works.

media ethnography

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this an excellent way to get a rich understanding of media practices and experiences, but capturing research material (making notes, recording audio or video) can be challenging.

Much of the work comes *afterwards* in the logging, analysis, description and interpretation of your research material.

media ethnography

the video material in these examples was written up in articles and books, but can also stand alone as:

- visual ethnography

ethnography

an ethnographer usually studies a small group of people in their own familiar environment (home, village, workplace, etc.). The aim is usually to develop a detailed and textured understanding of these people's everyday culture, relationships, beliefs, behaviours, etc.

Ethnography doesn't 'prove' that people behave in a certain way, or believe particular ideas, it describes and interprets these behaviours and beliefs. It is not 'scientific': the ethnographer must decide what is significant and describe it in detail.

ethnography of the 'same'

ethnography often means studying other (generally tribal, pre-industrial, or modern but marginalised) cultures.

We are interested in our own cultures*, in noticing and describing the everyday and unremarked, exploring how behaviours, attitudes, ideas, emotions and relationships are shaped.

This kind of ethnography seeks to make the familiar strange, to find the marvellous in the mundane.

*though this is not straightforward!

ethnography of the 'same'

ethnography can displace “the dulling sense of familiarity with which the mysteriousness of our own ability to relate perceptively to one another is concealed from us” (Clifford Geertz 1993: 14).

ethnography is used by social scientists and artists,

it is NOT scientific.

It doesn't set out to 'prove' anything (though it may offer strong evidence!)

because they are not making broad general claims,
ethnographers don't necessarily have to study large
numbers of people

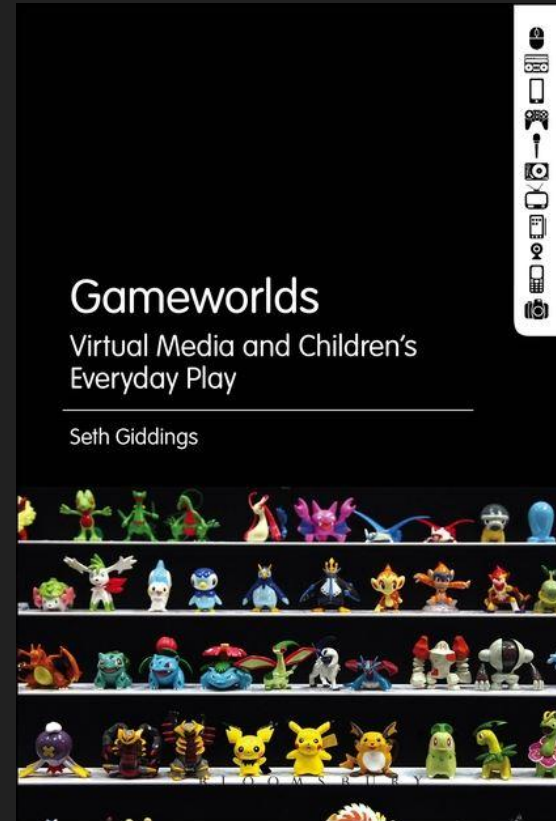
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this book is based on a study of TWO children:



methods: participant observation

recording, describing, and interpreting a media practice or media culture, 'from the inside', as a participant - either taking part directly or watching and discussing during the research

why 'participant observation'...

... and not **surveys** or **questionnaires**? In what ways is ethnography different from market research or audience research?

qualitative not quantitative

holistic, ecological approach: media in everyday culture, experience and behaviour

ethical and critical engagement, blurring the lines between researcher and researched

learn from 'failure'

why 'participant observation'...

... and not **surveys** or **questionnaires**? In what ways is ethnography different from market research or audience research?

allows us to study the gap between what people **say** they do (in interviews and surveys) with what they **actually** do (often quite different)

participant observation is particularly useful in studying new and emergent cultural objects and activities - e.g. digital media

ethnography

“An empirical and theoretical approach which seeks detailed holistic description and analysis of cultures based on intensive participative fieldwork. Qualitative small-scale and detailed exploration of the norms, values and artefacts of culture as they are connected to the wider social processes of a ‘whole way of life’”

(Barker 2000: 384)

methods: interviews and focus groups

open-ended conversations with a small group exploring the issues and objects you are researching. the researcher may also contribute ideas and engage in the discussion

methods: autoethnography

a *reflexive* description and interpretation of your own media practices and experiences

more on this next term...

methods: virtual / online ethnography

participant observation in online games, chat rooms, forums, social media, etc.

more on this next term

methods: memory work

Others however have found following instructions compelling and creative in its own way, the ostensible constraints on imagination affording instead an intellectual pleasure in the process of construction, inseparable from other playful, poetic, and imaginative activities:

My love for model building started when I was about five years old [...] and what excited me most was following the instructions. I loved watching how many small and simple steps resulted in a single beautiful and complicated piece. I found it thrilling that I could take the instructions—simple pieces of paper—and figure out what they were telling me to do. This feeling was similar to the one I got when my sister and I created treasure hunts for each other. We made clues that led around the house but always ended up with a treasure map. Following the map was my favorite part (B).

LEGO models – again particularly the more complex ones – might be seen as more closely connected for some players with the alternative construction toys such as Airfix kits. These require close attention to the rules and their creators generally display the completed model rather than playing with it.

My eldest son, 14, has put together many sets and has kept them displayed on his bookshelf; in contrast to my approach of building and then dismantling after a few days/weeks, he has kept some of these completed sets for 6+ years on display. (R)

Seth Giddings (2014) 'Bright bricks, dark play: on the impossibility of studying LEGO', online at microethology.net

methods: using media in media ethnography

description and interpretation can be conducted through images and sounds as well as writing

methods: using *media* in media ethnography

video

photography

audio

drawing



Robbie Cooper Immersion



Robbie Cooper Immersion



Robbie Cooper Alter Ego



Robbie Cooper Alter Ego

what questions can we ask through ethnography?

we don't *prove* things...

so, we don't ask 'do videogames cause violence', instead we could ask 'how do people play violent videogames?' 'how do they understand them or talk about them?' 'how does violent videogame play interact with other everyday behaviour (media use, domestic relationships)?'

we don't set out to prove that social media are making people less sociable in 'face to face' relationships, but we might ask 'how is social media use (for this particular small group of people) integrated into their daily routines?' 'how do they communicate with friends and family online and offline?'

Then we observe their behaviour, listen to their ideas, describe and interpret them

ethnography is *not* scientific

we don't *prove* things...

media ethnography can be experimental: adapt, hybridise, test different approaches

there are no rules*

any and *all* attention to lived media experience is worthwhile and illuminating

ask yourself: 'what do I want to find out about?', then 'how can I go about finding out about it?'

*beyond ethical guidelines and approval

ethnography is *subjective*

it is subjective, not objective

that's fine - as long as the researcher and those looking at the research are clear
about it

and it's not mere *opinion*: the description, analysis and conclusions have to be
supported by the research material - the notes, video, transcripts of interviews /
focus groups etc.

ethnography is *not* scientific

we are *not* interested in:

'facts'

neutrality / objectivity

linearity (simple relationships of cause and effect)

simple answers and proof

we *are* interested in:

interpretation - subjective, but supported by your research material

non-linear / ecological relationships

experience and complexity in everyday culture

open, ambivalent, creative presentation of ethnography (in writing, video, photography, collage, etc. etc.)

resources

ethnography of contemporary media / culture

Alasuutari, Perri (1995) *Researching Culture: Qualitative methods and Cultural studies*, London: Sage

Barker, Chris (2000) *Cultural Studies: theory & practice*, London: Sage

Pink, Sarah (2014) *Doing Visual Ethnography* (3rd ed.), London: Sage

ethnography of videogames and play

Dixon, Shanly & Weber, Sandra (2011) Playspaces, childhood and videogames, in Seth Giddings (ed.) *The New Media and Technocultures Reader*, London: Routledge

Dovey, Jon & Kennedy, Helen W. (2006) Playing the Ring: intermediality and ludic narratives in the *Lord of the Rings* games, in Ernest Mathijs (ed.) *The Lord of the Rings: popular culture in global context*, London: Wallflower

Giddings, Seth (2009) Events and collusions: a glossary for the microethnography of videogame play, *Games and Culture* 4(2), April. Online at: http://www.sethgiddings.net/?page_id=21

Giddings, Seth & Kennedy, Helen W. (2008) Little Jesuses and fuck-off robots, in Melanie Swalwell & Jason Wilson (eds) *The Pleasures of Computer Games: essays on cultural history, theory and aesthetics*, Jefferson NC: McFarland

Green, Bill Reid, Jo-Anne & Bigum, Chris (1998) Teaching the Nintendo generation? children, computer culture and popular technologies, in Sue Howard (ed.) *Wired Up: young people and the electronic media*, London: UCL Press, pp 19-42

Ito, Mizuko (1998) Inhabiting multiple worlds: making sense of SimCity 2000™ in the fifth dimension, in Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit (eds) *Cyborg Babies: from techno-sex to techno-tots*, London: Routledge, pp 301-316

Sefton-Green, Julian (2004) Rites: a small boy in a Poké-world, in Joseph Tobin (ed.) *Pikachu's Global Adventure: the rise and fall of Pokémon*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp 141-164