

Week 7: Ethnography and live methods



Overview

- Media/cultural studies, commercial ethnography and 'live methods'
- Introduction to live digital methods
- Group research projects
- Preparation for interview on ethnographic and live methods with Joe Deville
- Interview



Review of ethnography in media and cultural studies

- **Ethnography as practice of writing about experience of particular place/time ('field site') as lived by people:**
 - Ethnographer's own experience and participation in the **field site** provides the **'data'**
 - Writing transforms 'data' into the **ethnography**
- **2 main approaches**
 - Ethnography as way of observing **how media is used** – by audiences, by fans, by social groups
 - e.g. do into food outlets on campus, and observe how people mix media with everyday social life.
 - Ethnography as study of **how media objects circulate and are transformed**
 - How to do this? (Today: digital live methods?!)



Ethnography as commercial method

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EPIC will celebrate its 10th anniversary by crossing the equator for the first time.

Building Bridges reflects the diverse connections among people, places, industries, and disciplines at the heart of ethnographic praxis. São Paulo invites us to examine the ways in which ethnography and design have affected and been affected by



Ethnography as commercial method

Your Webinar Hosts

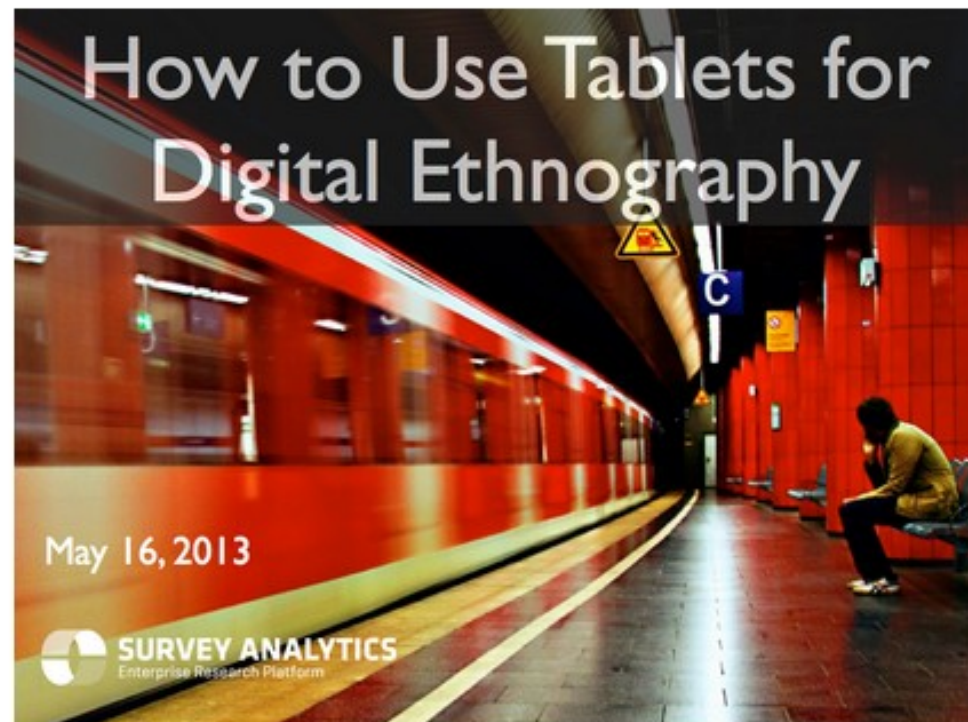


Andrew Jeavons
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Director of Marketing
Survey Analytics

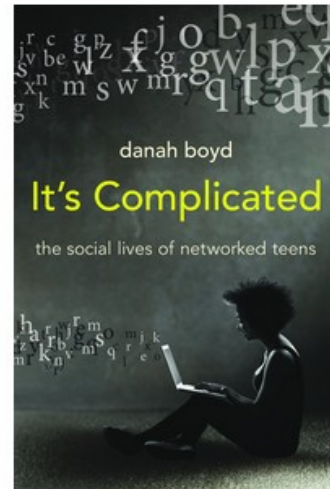
Access the Webinar Replay on How to Use Tablets for Digital Ethnography Research



Sorry we missed you for this webinar. The original air date was May 16, 2013. We have uploaded the video and slides for you to access this presentation at your convenience.

Ethnography as high-profile method

danah boyd



My name is danah boyd and I'm a Principal Researcher at Microsoft Research and the founder of **Data & Society**. I'm also a Visiting Professor at New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program. I am an academic and a scholar and my research examines the intersection between technology and society.

For over a decade, my research focused on how young people use social media as part of their everyday practices. I wrote *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (2014) to document my findings.

I also co-authored two books - *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media* (2009) and *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era* (2015) to highlight different aspects of that work.

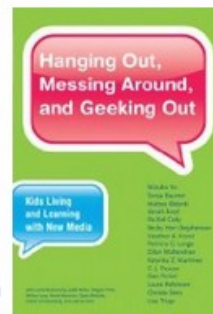
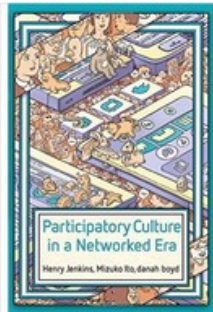
More recently, I have turned to focus on the social and cultural dimensions of the "big data" phenomenon, with an eye to issues like privacy and publicity, data(mis)interpretation, and the civil rights implications of data analytics. This is core to the mandate of **Data & Society**, a research institute that I founded in 2013 and currently run.

Over the years, I have written many papers on topics related to social media, privacy, teen drama, digital backchannels, and social visualization design. I also blog and tweet frequently on a wide variety of topics.

In 2008, I completed my PhD at the **School of Information (iSchool)** at the University of California-Berkeley. My dissertation research was funded as a part of the **MacArthur Foundation's Initiative on New Media and Learning**. My research was supervised by a most astonishing committee: **Mimi Ito, Annalee Saxenian, Cori Hayden, and Jenna Burrell**. My beloved PhD advisor - **Peter Lyman** - lost his battle with brain cancer in July 2007. I miss him dreadfully.

I did my Master's Degree at the MIT Media Lab's **Sociable Media Group** with **Judith Donath** (supervised also by **Henry Jenkins** and **Genevieve Bell**). My master's thesis focused on how people manage their presentation of self in relation to social contextual information in online environments. As an undergraduate, I studied computer science at Brown University, advised by **Andy van Dam**. My undergrad thesis focused on how prioritization of depth cues is dependent on levels of sex hormones in the body and how this affects engagement with virtual reality.

Outside of academia, I have worked at various non-profits and corporations. I'm on the board of **Crisis Text Line**, an amazing organization dedicated to supporting young people in crisis through text messaging. I'm also a Trustee of the **National Museum of the American Indian**, a Smithsonian cultural heritage institution. For five years, I worked at **V-Day**, an organization working to end violence against women and girls worldwide. I helped build an online community to support activists. For a complete bio, click here.



output:

- **danah's blog**
- danah's Twitter feed
- papers, articles, talks, etc.
- **Data & Society**

a few key papers:

- "Six Provocations for Big Data" (with Kate Crawford)
- "The Drama! Teen Conflict in Networked Publics" (with Alice Marwick)
- "Social Privacy in Networked Publics: Teens' Attitudes, Practices, and Strategies" (with Alice Marwick)

recent blog posts:



Exercise: why does media industry like ethnography?

- Briefly explore danah boyd's home page <http://www.danah.org/>
- Why would Microsoft employ her as 'Principal Researcher'?
- How do you think ethnography is used by media companies today?



“Live methods” in media and cultural studies

- **Manifesto - a document that sets out a programme of change in response to standardisation and commercial uptake of methods such as ethnography**
- **“Manifesto for Live Methods” (Back & Puwar, 2012)**
 - Written by media and cultural studies scholars for a broad audience of sociologists and media/cultural studies
 - Seeks to discuss contemporary challenges in doing research
 - Elements of the manifesto:
 - 1.New tools for live/realtime**
 - Avoid the trap of the now – **expand the duration of the study**
 - See the whole without totalizing
 - 4.Make methods more artful and crafty**
 - Develop empirical devices that reinvent relations to social
 - Curate knowledge on public platforms
 - Utilize senses equally
 - Lively words
 - Recover history of inventive craft
 - Take time
 - Engage political and ethical issues without arrogance



Live methods as response

Response to:

- **market/industry research and its resources for survey, interview and ethnographic research**
- **'new coordinated forms of social reality' (Back & Puwar, 2012, 7)**
- **How to do this:**
 - Participation:
 - 'Thus, by participation I refer to amateurs acting together individually, collectively, or with organizations in fields otherwise dominated by gatekeepers or professionals' (Fish, 2013)
 - Re-invention of methods



'Live methods' emphasise:

- Looking outside 'academic methods'
- Re-purposing art/activist approaches
- Re-assessing how digital tools shape our understanding of social life
- Re-ordering the relations between data-gathering, analysis and circulation



Ethnography includes possibility of participation

by making audiovisual media:

- Use of **writing**, including blogs and other social media
 - Use of **photography** and **film**:
 - e.g Adam Fish's videos
- Anthropological film-makers**



Digital methods as expanded mode of ethnography

- Digital media as both object of research *and* research tool
- Smartphones permit use of video and audio as documentation
- Digital devices offer new ways of being present in the field
- New ethical challenges -- how to anonymize?



Further ways to make media as part of research:

- Make images or recordings as **empirical data** to be analysed
 - e.g. photos/videos of city streets
- Make images/videos/recordings as part of an **visual essay**
- **Ask participants** to take photos or make videos, and then look at them together
 - Interview participants about what they made and what it means to them



'Develop new tools for “real-time” and “live” investigation'

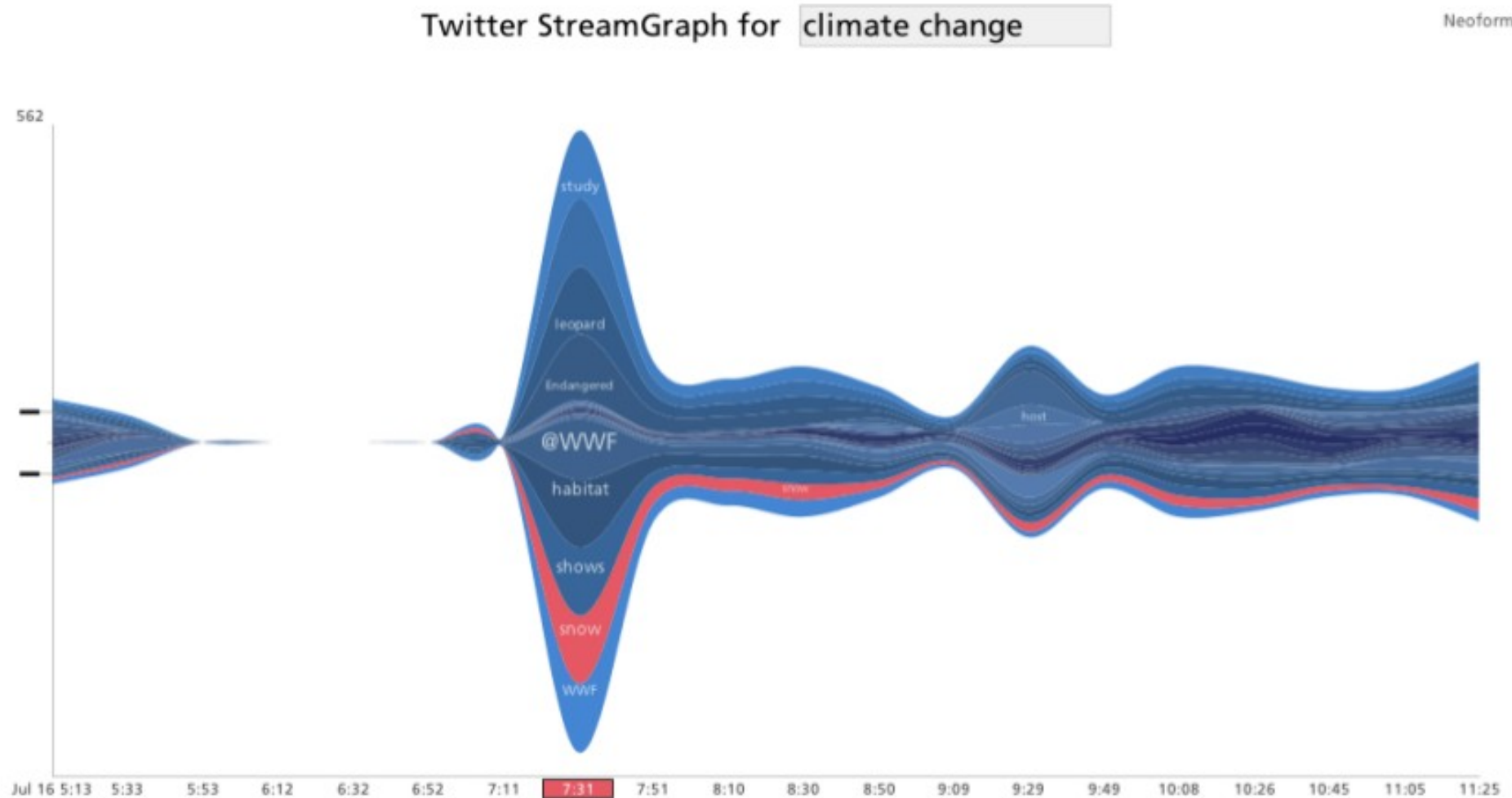


Figure 1: Twitter Streamgraph for keyword 'Climate Change'

'Develop new tools for “real-time” and “live” investigation'

- 'The tools and devices for research craft are being extended by digital culture in a hyper-connected world, affording new possibilities to re-imagine observation and the generation of alternative forms of research data' (Back & Puwar, 7)

- **Marres & Gerlitz (2015)** re-purpose data analytics tools for media and cultural studies

- Marres, Noortje, Carolin Gerlitz, and others. 2015. “Interface Methods: Renegotiating Relations between Digital Social Research, STS and Sociology.” Sociological Review.

<http://research.gold.ac.uk/11343/>.

- **See Digital Methods Initiative (Amsterdam)** for range of work on
 - web, hyperlinks, etc.at

<https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/>

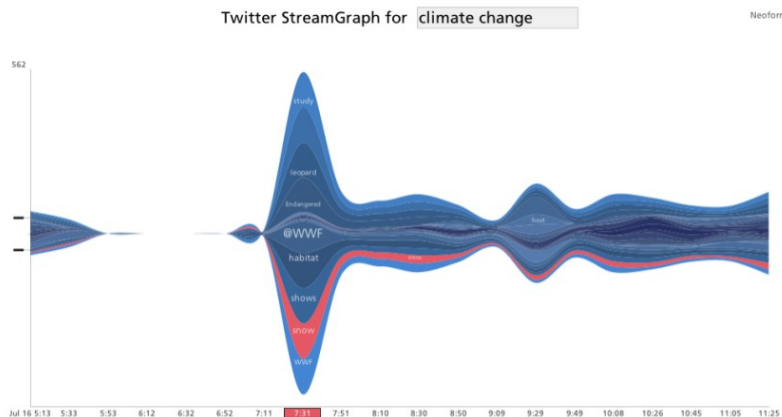


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'Make sociological craft more artful and arty'

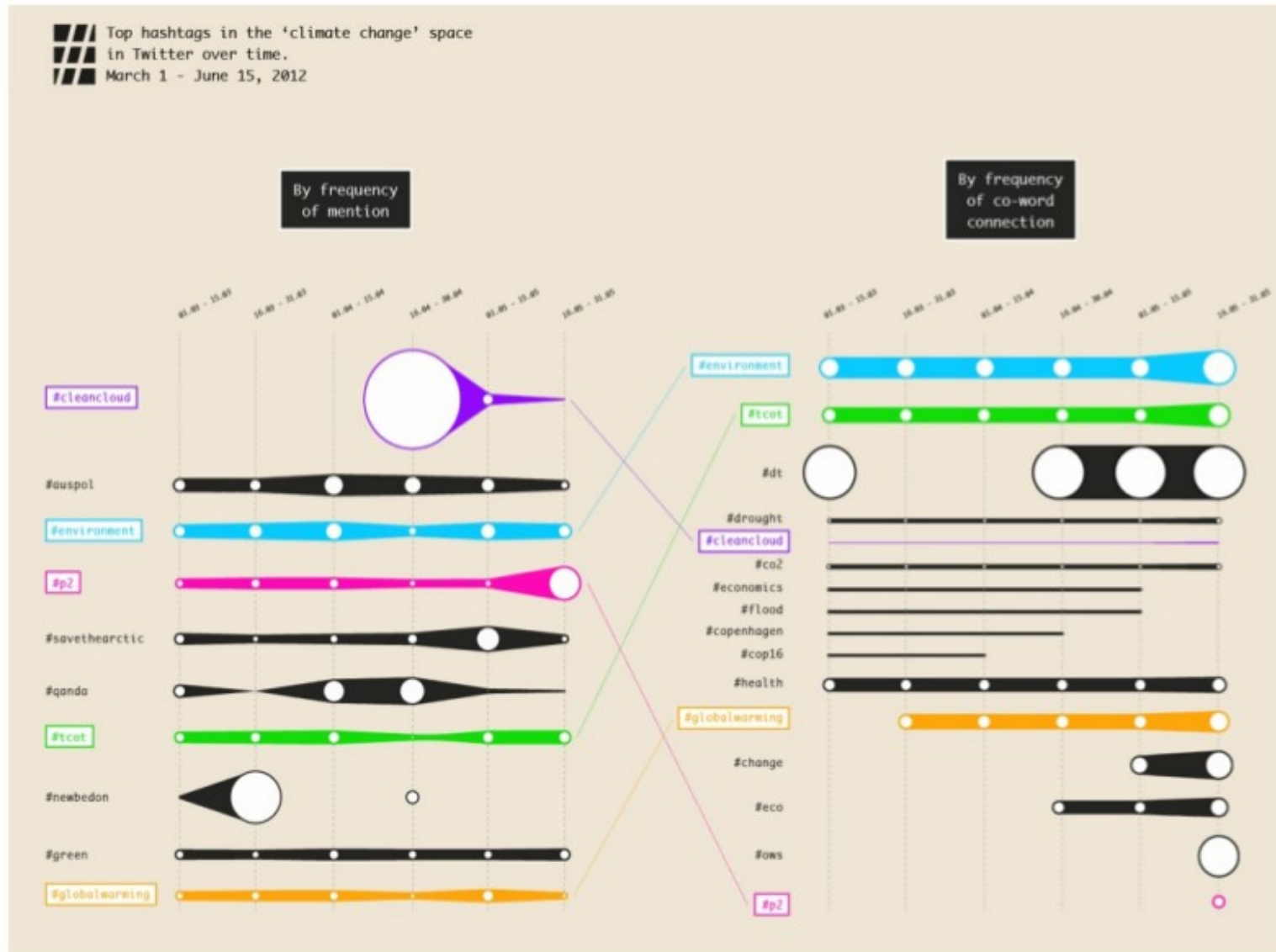


Figure 2: Top hashtags based on word frequency of mention (left) and co-word connections (right) based on six 2 weekly intervals. Dataset: climate change on Twitter.

'Avoid the trap of the now'

- Understanding media and cultural dynamics involves seeing a larger picture.**
 - Methods can do this**
 - Theory also useful for this!**
- 'this requires that one is not lost in the short time frame of the now, captured in real time digital methods, for instance' (Back & Puwar, 2012, 8)**



Group research project: live methods for longer durations

- **Run an Internet Archive Wayback Machine search on an important website for your project**
 - Not a news site – these change too often; best choose a website run by a particular company, fan group, etc.
 - e.g. https://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.starbucks.co.uk/
 - Go through the webpages over time (hopefully 5-10 years) looking for significant changes.
- **Or experiment with the Digital Methods Initiative 'Website' analysis tool on a website important for your project:**
 - <https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Digitalmethods/TheWebsite>
 - This tool uses the Wayback Machine, but allows you to convert all the webpages into images that can be viewed more quickly.
 - Go through the webpages over time (hopefully 5-10 years) looking for significant changes.
- **Write a brief outline (300-450 words) describing some initial observations and findings from this work.**



Interview preparation

- **Following normal practice, construct 3 questions in your research groups that explore:**
 - The challenges of researching digital culture and 'the way digital tools themselves shape our understanding of contemporary social life' (Back & Puwar, 2012, 9)
 - Ways of being attentive to larger scale or longer time frame



Next week

- **Putting methods together in a research design**
- **Essay question**



Exercise: live methods

- **Take one point from the 'live methods' (by Back and Puwar) that relates to your group research project, and discuss it with your neighbour to ensure you grasp it.**
- **Discuss how you might practically actualise that point using equipment, devices, objects or infrastructures you have access to right here in the classroom.**
- **Write a list of the practical steps you would need to do to perform to do it.**

