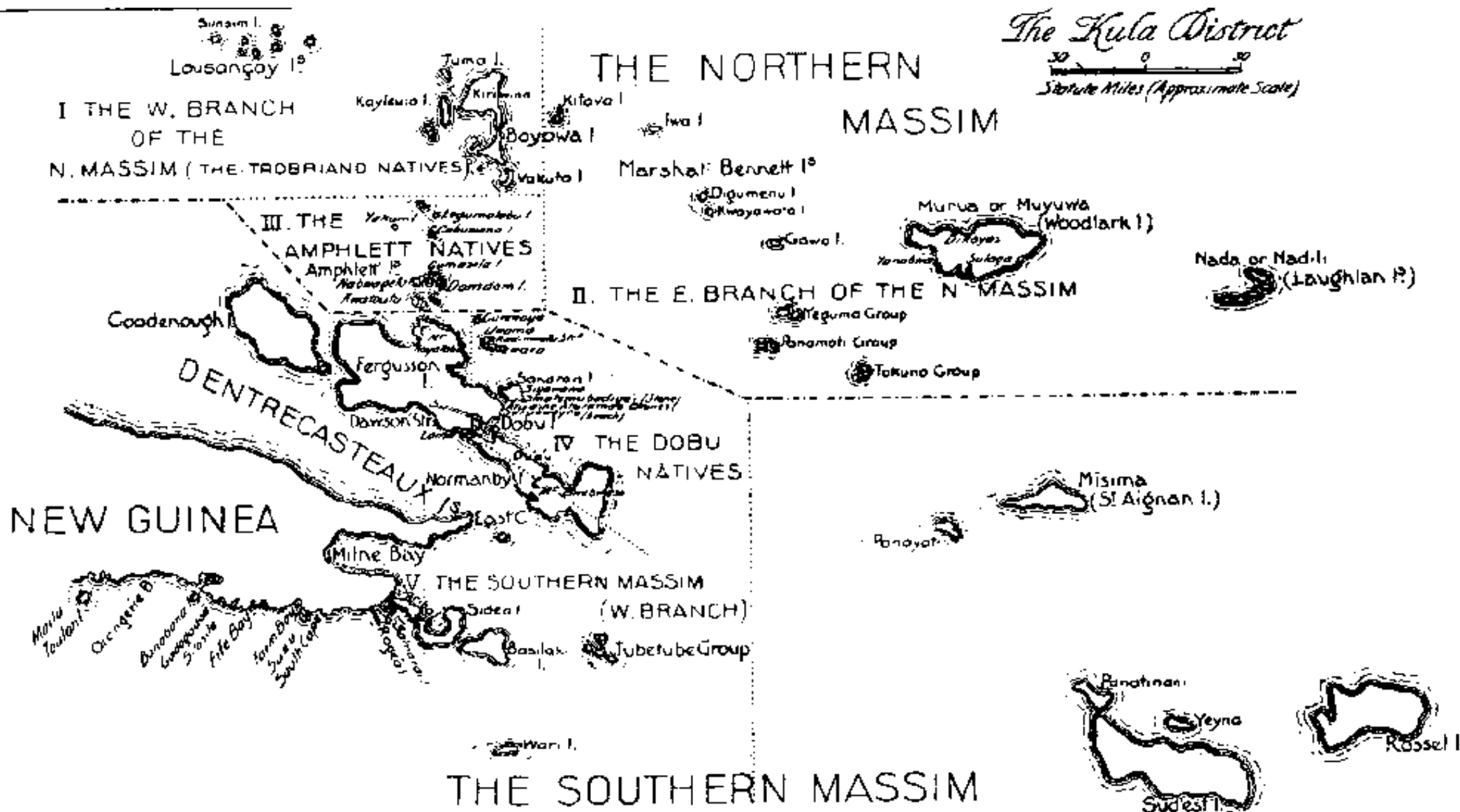


Week 6-7: Ethnography – studying what people do with media



Overview

- **Ethnography: history and development**
- **Ethnographies of media and audiences**
- **Ethnographies of people and things**
- **Preparation for interview with an ethnographer**
- **Interview with Adam Fish**
- **Group research work**
- **Digital ethnography - week 7 class**



Review of methods

- **Semiotics and textual method**
 - Focus on individual texts/images
- **Discourse analysis - saying and seeing; statements and practices;**
 - Explore groups – ‘**discursive formations**’ – of texts/documents/media/images
- **But how to study ways of life, places, individual or group experiences and interactions with and in media?**



Ethnography uses a range of tools and techniques to write, record, draw the 'people, culture, network'

Why?

- Because what people *say/project*, and what they *do* are different
- Because a sensitive, reflexive account can only be made by 'being there'
- Give voice to the other?

How?

By becoming part of the everyday life of the people, group, **network**



Ethnography – general

ethno: nation, people,
culture
(**things, network**)

graph: draw, write,
(**narrate, record,
chronicle**)

ethnography: writing,
drawing, (**telling**)
about the people,
phenomenon, network

***Ethnography: the
scientific description of
races and peoples, with
their customs, habits and
mutual differences***

**(Shorter OED 5th ed,
2002)**



Ethnography – general

- Main method in cultural/social anthropology; very important in urban sociology, media sociology and cultural studies
- Focuses on one case or place – the 'field site' where an ethnographer does 'fieldwork'
- Sustained personal contact between researcher and people they research
- Looks at the whole situation over time



Ethnography is practice of writing

“The making of ethnography is artisanal, tied to the worldly work of writing” (James Clifford, *Writing Culture*, 1986: 6).

Cultures are not scientific 'objects' (assuming such things exist, even in the natural sciences). Culture, and our views of 'it,' are produced historically, and are actively contested (James Clifford, *Writing Culture*, 1986: 18).



“But **scrupulous, methodological reflexivity is essential**.....the careful, detailed account of the researcher’s positioning allows the ethnography to claim a (modest) *objectivity*, rather than the presumed subjectivism of qualitative work”

Haraway (1988) Situated Knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of the partial perspective



The 'field' site

- Notion of 'field site' develops in late 19 century, based on 'field sciences' (like geology)
- 'the field' in 20th century anthropology usually meant somewhere remote (New Guinea, Uganda, etc.)
- 'the field' in late 20th century ethnography included places close to home
- Actual choice of field site often affected by problems of access (who, where, when)



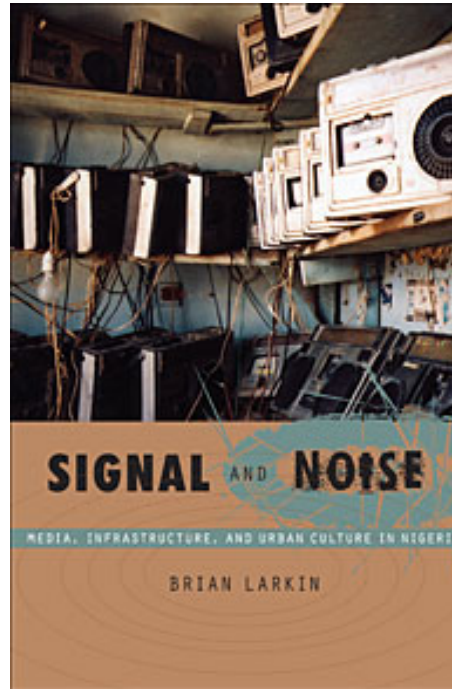
When/where is the ethnographic field site?

- ‘Single’ site studies (e.g. a hospital operating theatre, a newsroom, a living room, a street, a shop)
- Multi-sited ethnography (life world, system)
 - following things, metaphors, conflicts between places
- Digital/virtual ethnography
 - online worlds: “a-sited”, uncertain of time, location, presence
 - But are online/offline worlds not coexistent?



Ethnography as method for studying **media** in the social world

- **2 approaches**
 - Study how audiences make sense of media
 - Study how media circulate and act in the world as things



How people make sense of media

Ethnographic studies of audiences, fans, and users

- **Observe how audiences make sense ('decoding' - Hall) of particular media, and how their sense-making relates to social and cultural identity**
- **Explore how fans closely observe, interpret and transform across media (tv, music, blogs, etc)**
- **Examine how users move across media in 'convergence cultures' as does content (see Fish, reading for today!)**



How to study audiences

- **Earlier studies (1980s on) tend to use interviews that explore how people make sense of media**
- **One-on-one; family; group;**
- **Selection of people to interview will be shaped by what you think is important (class, gender, etc.)**
- **Analysis of interviews - reading and reading; identify different clusters of meaning; link clusters to social or discursive positions**



How to study audiences ethnographically

- **Observe, listen and talk to people as they go about everyday lives**
- **Involves extended periods of time spent in 'the field'**
- **'data' is gathered primarily by taking notes (sometimes photos and audio recording), and then writing notes up**
- **e.g. Daniel Miller & Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*, 2001**



Ethnography and media objects

- Much ethnography focuses on what people do and make (images, objects, etc)
- Study what people do with things (devices, technologies, products) in order to understand social relations and identities.
- More focused on people as 'actors' than as 'audience'
- e.g Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media and Technological Horizons*, 1994



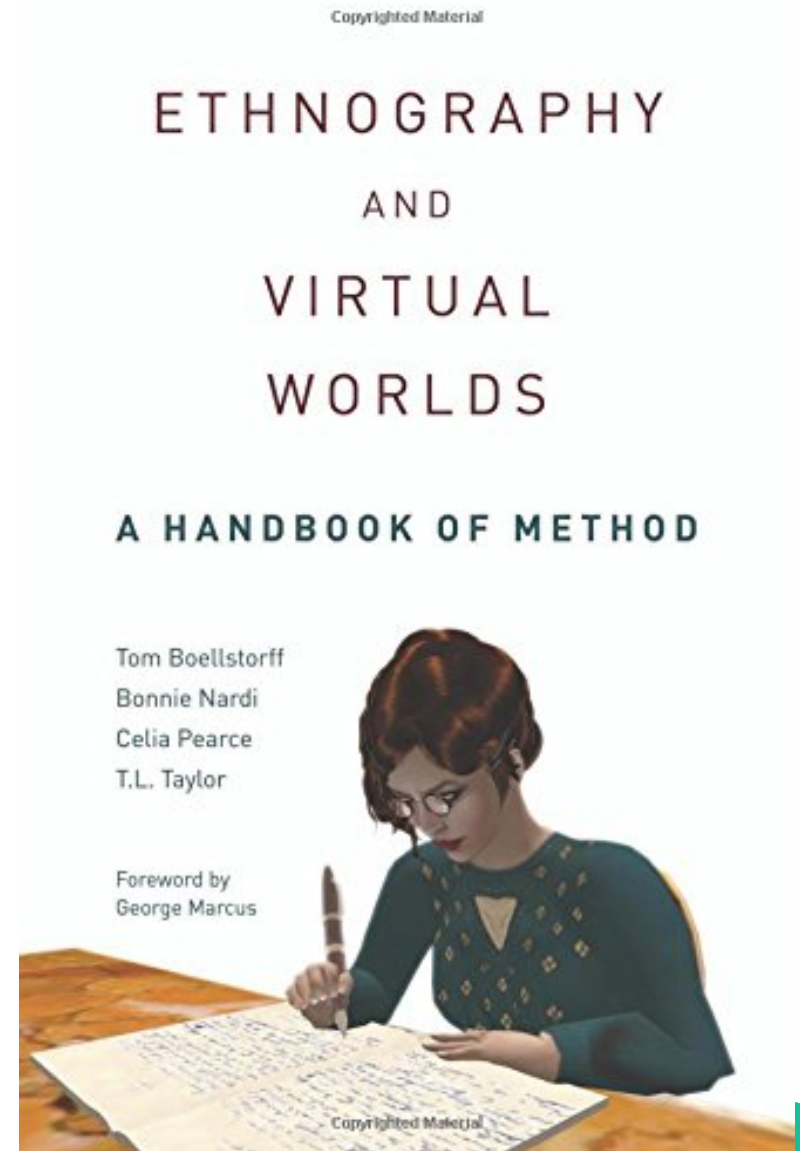
	Introduction	<i>Marcia Langton</i>	xxvii
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- Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media and Technological Horizons*, 1994



How to ethnographically study things like media?

- **Pay attention to where and how media objects engage people: visual form, material form, presentational form**
- **Examine how things and people are co-constituted: look at what is actually done where, and by whom**
- **Track mobility of things and how they are re-contextualised: look at the same thing in different places (public, private)**



Digital ethnography: access new places

There's been a lot of talk about how digital technologies are changing research. My past work was focussed on exploring a transnational Muslim music subculture with a complex, geographically distributed organizational structure (Murthy, 2010, 2012). Because of high levels of Islamophobia in Europe, the USA, and Canada, musicians in this subculture turned to MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter to interact with each other and their fans. Some of the participants of this subculture only engaged in these online spaces due to apprehensions about attending physical events. Others used these online spaces to augment their participation in this subculture.

Murthy, 2013, 26

different platforms with different sub-cultures, etc



Digital ethnography as engagement

My research has also leveraged blog technologies to keep private and public field notes. As I have written about my specific implementation of blogs and e-fieldnotes elsewhere (Murthy, 2011), I will only briefly mention my use of them. Using a WordPress-powered blog[1], I created public entries regarding my research and invited participants to respond via comments to blog posts or via e-mail. I recruited several respondents after their interactions with my research blog. Additionally, the Google Maps/Flickr mashup and the stream of related tweets from Twitter were embedded into the blog. The use of this blog was an important aspect of my combination of digital with conventional ethnographic methods. It is also a prime example of how digital work is not a threat to face-to-face work, but rather can augment the ways in which ethnographic work is publicly disseminated. Importantly, several of my respondents appreciated the existence of the blog as it provided one way in which they could see where my research was going and they felt more invested in the research by seeing concrete manifestations of its progress. I have used my work to highlight some

- **Ethnographers use digital platforms to relate to their field sites**
 - Widen the range of participants
 - Deal with sensitive issues around identity



Digital ethnography as new mode of writing

- **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?**



Exercise: imagining field sites the group research project

- List **three specific places** that you could study (given a few weeks!) as ethnographic field sites for your group research project
- List some of the **people** you would want to meet, talk to and spend time with in these places.
- List some of the **things, artefacts, practices or events** you would want to observe or participate in as an **ethnographer**.
- How would you address the problems of **access** to sub-cultures, elites, niche social movements or marginal/vulnerable groups?
- Write 300-500 words documenting the above.



Interview preparation

- **In your groups, construct 3 questions about doing ethnography, with a particular focus on**
 - How to participate in field sites ethnographically
 - How to study people's relation to each other and to things (platforms, devices, etc.)



Next week (week 7)

- **Adrian is away (Berlin, 'Operative images' conference)**
- **Chance to catch up on Group Work research portfolio for Weeks 1-6;**
- **Week 7 group work exercise on digital ethnography
- see Week 7 slides**

