Ethnography in the Digital Internet Era
From fields to flows, descriptions to interventions

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Introduction
This chapter exists in this handbook only because we assume there is something distinctive about the digital, something that distinguishes it from other sorts of tools, venues, or phenomena for qualitative research. Ten years ago in the first version of this Handbook chapter, I found the distinction much easier to make. Twenty years ago, when I started studying digital social contexts, the internet was primarily a medium through which people exchanged texts. In an environment where social presence was a technological accomplishment, community, intimacy, and other meaningful experiences seemed an amazing feat of virtuality, prompting such statements as, “We have to decide fairly soon what it is we as humans ought to become, because we are on the brink of having the power of creating any experience we desire” (Rheingold, 1991).

Now, the interfaces of the internet are both more banal and as Christine Hine articulates, more “embedded, embodied, and everyday” (2015). This does not diminish their importance: More and more of our overall cultural experiences are mediated by digital technologies, whether we’re ‘online’ in the classic sense or not. We carry the internet with us in our pockets. It can be woven into our clothing. Information from our voices, movements, and faces can be lifted into what we now call the ‘cloud,’ and combined with other data. Once analyzed through automated computational programs, the results are fed back to us, giving us useful information about our blood pressure, sleep patterns, geolocation, or the nearest retail location to purchase that item we were looking at yesterday on the web. Other entities harvest this information to design personalized advertisements, suggest new friends, or just to keep tabs on us. The internet is so ubiquitous we don’t think much about it at all, we just think through it. It’s no wonder the questions have changed. In 2015, we’re more likely to hear things like “I don’t use the internet. I only use Facebook” or, “Who should I accept as a friend? Everyone I know or just people I like?”

How then do we academics define and encapsulate the ethnographic study of ‘the digital’? It’s not just about what happens in social networking sites, websites, or immersive video games and virtual worlds. It’s also not just the study of digital technology or the way people use social media. At the same time, it’s not just about everyday life in the postinternet era.

I find a particular uniqueness emerging in the way digital ethnographers pose questions and conceptualize the basic premises and processes of how culture occurs. In the past twenty years, we’ve witnessed massive growth in global networked social forms as well as major transformations in economic, political, and social infrastructures. Everyday lived experience...
in this decade is impacted by the convergence of media, the mediation and remediation of identities, and the still-rising interest in quantification and big data.

Social researchers who have acknowledged these transformations have made adjustments to their epistemological and methodological stances for doing social research in this epoch. This complicates almost every aspect of research design: What are sensible boundaries to construct around a cultural context? What constitutes data? What are appropriate ways to collect and analyze cultural materials? Who is excluded and included? Some questions apply to any contemporary ethnographic or qualitative research project, but these and other questions offer peculiar challenges for digital researchers.

Contemporary modalities of interaction compel us to reconsider what methods are appropriate for collecting viable information upon which to build an ethnographic study. In their studies of special interest groups who emerge, grow, and function as stable communities online, scholars like Orgad (2006), Hine (2009), or Gammelby (2014) must continually mark and revise field boundaries. This activity never ends, as the boundaries are built discursively, or through connection, interest, and flow, rather than geography, nationality, or proximity. Despite 20+ years and thousands of studies on such communities, the ethnographer’s basic task of defining the field remains a challenge with no easy answers. Or, we struggle with the questions: how does interviewing and observation work in entangled contexts of flow, exchange, and connection like Twitter or Instagram? What standards or stances should one adhere to when considering the demographic identity or authenticity of participants? Typical criteria for assessing quality or ethical parameters fail to adequately encompass the characteristics, vulnerabilities, and rights of participants in an epoch of anonymity, microcelebrity, photo filters, avatars, and self-branding.

The goal of this chapter is to raise awareness of the epistemological, ethical, and political challenges for scholars seeking to study social life in the 21st Century. Rather than reviewing extant empirical studies in digital or online ethnography or offering extended examples of and suggestions for techniques and tools², I focus on persistent as well as emerging premises of contemporary ethnographic practices in light of the contemporary heightened attention on human-nonhuman or social-technical relations. I admit my aim is broader than just explaining what happens in digital or internet ethnography. Through this chapter, I seek to amplify signals emanating from many disciplines, all indicating a sea change in how we understand and study the social because of the impact of the digital.

Below, I trace certain shifts in how internet research has been conceptualized³ through some basic terminology. I then offer a working heuristic that illustrates research stances toward internet phenomena, which in turn illustrates some of the ways research stances may be shifting. I move to a more concrete discussion of how shifting one’s stance can impact not only one’s methods in the field, but also the outcome and audience of one’s inquiry. I conclude by emphasizing the urgent need to recognize that our scholarship matters in the larger sense, and to accept the opportunity and ethical responsibility to use our research abilities to not simply describe or explain what is or has been, but to speculate about and shape what we ought to become. This is a methodological as well as political decision, which authors of the 2005 and 2010 versions of this Handbook have often emphasized.
Terminology Matters

This chapter is a new version of one I wrote for the 2005 version of the Handbook entitled, “The politics and ethics of online ethnography.” There’s no way I could keep the old title. As of 2016, almost every word in it (and this present version, for that matter) is contested and problematic. In a social world increasingly mediated by internet-based digital communication, researchers struggle to find or adapt terminology to label the technologies that impact social and cultural life in the second decade of the 21st Century, as well as the cultural processes and formations themselves. At the level of method, this same struggle exists as researchers seek appropriate terms to describe the focus of analysis and the overall practice of inquiry in contexts where flow is more relevant than object, physical presence is not necessarily connected to sociality, and time, as a malleable variable, is salient but difficult to isolate, much less comprehend. These issues may have always been relevant, but the internet era has highlighted the extent to which traditional notions don’t quite fit anymore.

The terms below only scratch the surface of such debates. I offer these because they are central to discussions of qualitative inquiry in digitally-saturated social contexts. The list is selective, emerging from my own background in internet studies, my conversations with publishers who struggle with these terms, and trends among the most well known international research community talking and writing about such things: the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR).

Internet: Although ‘The Internet’ classically described the electronic network that connects computers worldwide, the internet in lowercase is a shortcut for various capacities, infrastructures, or cultural formations facilitated by digital communication networks. It describes the outcomes of interactions with digital media software, platforms, or devices. Through its ambiguity, the internet remains a persistent umbrella term, covering many different aspects of socio-technical relations in the era of global high speed networks. It also avoids persistent false binaries that alternative terms might carry, such as online (offline), virtual (real, actual), or digital (analog).

The ‘internet’ accurately focuses on the means by which digital technologies have become a central feature of 21st Century social life. It describes the actual backbone of transmission, which facilitates the coordination of computers and information processing devices and the growth and complexity of networks. The early internet provided new possibilities for community. The contemporary internet is the foundation for more diverse and naturalized forms of mediatization, transmediation, and remediation than we would have seen prior to the mid 1990s, when the world wide web made the Internet more publicly available and commercialized. This backbone supports platforms that in less than a decade have converged almost all forms of media production, distribution, and use. Without the internet, digital forms would not have such spread and impact. Whether or not the term “internet” remains a common and central term in the future, it currently suffices for authors and publishers in the broad area of work that studies the intersections of internet-based technologies and social life.

Digital: is almost equally problematic. While we might use analog as the counterpoint to digital, this distinction makes little practical sense in an epoch when these two modalities are tightly interwoven. Even in regions where digital technologies are not used directly, the
global fabric of digital technologies and infrastructures influences these individuals, households, and communities.

At the most basic level, the digital is “everything that has been developed by, or can be reduced to, the binary— that is bits consisting of 0s and 1s” (Horst & Miller, 2012, p. 5). In the 1990s, ‘digital’ emphasized how computers mediated interaction and transactions. Horst and Miller’s discussion reminds us that mediation is not new, but simply takes a different form with the digital: “creating new possibilities of convergence between what were previously disparate technologies or content” (p. 5). Replicability, scalability, and persistence are primary characteristics of these new convergences (boyd, 2011; Baym, 2015). The digital, then, becomes a concept to indicate no more or less than the situation of the contemporary. To understand the complexity of what this might mean, we can draw on Negroponte’s 1995 work, Being Digital. Being digital is more than just living in a situation where these characteristics exist, but a process of becoming through and because of our ongoing “acquaintance over time” with machine agents who understand, remember, and respond to our individual uniqueness “with the same degree of subtlety (or more than) we can expect from other human beings” (1995, p. 164).

Ethnography: Whether or not scholars call their work ethnography or ethnographic depends on their discipline, training, and attitude. I don’t rehearse the details of longstanding debates about what counts as ethnography, what it focuses on, how it is best represented, and so forth. Other scholars represented in this Handbook provide excellent detail about the critical, performative, narrative, and reflexive characteristics of what we might call an ethnographic engagement with the world.

No matter how deftly certain academic communities practice and conceptualized ethnography, the term has become a widely used generic label for any study that involves people, interview research, case study research, user interface testing, or qualitative research in general. The subtlety of the practice of ethnography is somewhat butchered when “rapid” or “quick and dirty” are acceptable modifiers. The term is thus highly problematic, in that it carries both power and baggage.

I’m situated in a European science and technologies faculty and trained in interpretive ethnography. For me, ethnography is an approach that seeks to find meanings of cultural phenomena by getting close to the experience of these phenomena. I generally find myself looking at the details of localized cultural experience, through a range of techniques intended to get close and detailed understandings. I then try to represent what I think I’ve found in ways that resonate with readers or members of that cultural context. Most of us who practice this type of ethnography do it from a standpoint, which situates cultural knowledge in particular ways, as feminist scholars have long argued (e.g., Harding, 1986; Haraway, 1988). It involves close engagement and, as Clair (2011) reminds us, drawing on a long lineage of interpretive ethnographers, “the ability of the researcher to be reflexive and sensitive to multiple and changing milieu” (p. 117).

Our ethnographic attitude doesn’t change when we study the digital. But the digital is transforming what it means to be social and human in the world. As we enter the era of nanotechnology, embedded sensors in everyday material objects around us, automated
tracking of our every movement, and algorithmically-determined information flows, it is important to situate ethnography as a worldview, stance, or attitude, rather than a set of techniques or methods. In this way, the sensibility of ethnography can remain while the techniques may adapt. Although many researchers will continue to describe or explain situations through more or less traditional ethnographic notions of emplacement, for example, where the field is a place within which people organize culturally, an anthropology of the contemporary calls for attention on movement, flow, and process and an intentional effort to move away from thinking about the field as an object, place, or whole (Markham, 2013a, p. 438). In this way, ethnography is being flexibly adapted to what it means to live in informational as well as physical ecosystems.

*Online:* This term was used in the title of the 2005 (Markham) and 2010 (Gatson) versions of this chapter. It was a central term in research of digital media contexts throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. For the past decade, we’ve witnessed more embedded notions of technology, internet, and everything we might have once called ‘online,’ so that the overall lens of ethnography of is less and less modified by adjectives like “online” or “virtual” (Postill & Pink, 2012; Horst & Miller, 2012; Hine, 2005; 2015). While the online is still relevant, of course, it is not the only site or concern of inquiry in this arena.

**An Ecological View**

Given the enormous breadth and variety of scholarship that might call itself online, digital, or internet ethnography, we can delineate ‘ethnography in the digital era’ as the study of cultural patterns and formations brought into view as we ask particular questions about the intersection of technology and people in the post internet age. This ecological view is quite appropriate, in that it explores social and cultural dynamics and personhood in a way that is inextricably intertwined with communication technologies (Anton, 2006). An information or media ecology view enables us to think about (eco)systems emerging from interactions and relations across what multiple and/or para sites (Marcus, 1995). More broadly, we can use ‘ecology’ as Gregory Bateson did, to be open to dynamics rather than essences of processes of what we end up labeling ‘self,’ ‘other,’ and ‘the social.’

By wondering how to enter a field that only exists as a shifting flow, we start to experience fields as temporary or momentary assemblages. Scholars in science and technology studies or actor network theory can help loosen the grip on persistent premises that individuals or groups must comprise the object of analysis; that there is such thing as a whole to be described or explained; or that the boundaries of a situation can be identified (e.g., Latour, 2005; Law, 2002, 2004; Mol, 2003).

The internet is also embedded in our everyday materiality, most recently through the Internet of Things (IoT), whereby self healing mesh networks and microscopic sensors enable everyday objects to be networked data generators and distributers. An ecological perspective can help us recognize and study structures, codes, and networks as part of this ecosystem (Beaulieu, 2004; van Dijck, 2013). Ethnography in a digital ecology positions (or repositions) technology as centrally as other nonhuman elements and humans in shaping the vectors of non-technological social life.
Much of this influence is embedded and invisible. Drawing on Gillespie’s (2010) idea that platforms can be understood figuratively as performative infrastructures, van Dijck notes, “a platform is a mediator rather than an intermediary: it shapes the performance of social acts instead of merely facilitating them” (2013, p. 29). Particular system elements encode our everyday social activities into “a computational architecture” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 29). Often discussed broadly as ‘affordances,’ these elements can be separated, to see how the architecture is constructed, how these might be tangled in larger ecologies, and thereby what possibilities are afforded to us as we use digital and mobile devices in our everyday lives. We therefore might pay attention to such ecological elements as:

*Algorithms.* At the most basic level, an algorithm is a sequence of programming code that instructs a piece of software to make a certain decision based on certain inputs. These snippets of code interact with other snippets of code, sometimes adjusting themselves to work more efficiently, in which case they’re called self learning algorithms. Algorithms “select what is most relevant from a corpus of data composed of traces of our activities, preferences, and expressions” (Gillespie, 2014, p. 168). To put this in more everyday terms, algorithms are the mechanisms that yield personalized results from search engines like Google or Bing, provide specific recommendations on music or video streaming services like Netflix or Spotify, or result in targeted advertisements.

*Protocols.* Formal rules script behavior at deep structure levels of any digital interface. We can look at how these protocols are developed by corporate interests, by for example looking at Facebook’s policies and design choices. Here, as van Dijck articulates, the platform will guide users through preferred pathways. Users must “proceduralize their behavior in order to enter into the interactions” (Bolter, 2012, p. 45). Interface level protocols combine with political and economic protocols to “impose a hegemonic logic onto a mediated social practice” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 31), particularly as the mechanization is buried under apparently seamless interfaces.

*Defaults.* We mostly don’t notice the default settings in interfaces because they are, well, defaults. These entry-level setups offer user-friendly ways to set up our smart phones, read news on tablets, organize incoming and outgoing communication, define our relationships, categorize information, and so forth. Seamlessly. User interface design in the late 1990s began to standardize templates for ‘good’ website design. This includes a top to bottom and left to right orientation, a plain background, and a priority of blue and white. These choices, based on user testing, have become naturalized. Social media platforms likewise standardize the way we see and move through their affinity spaces. Long before this, of course, Apple standardized the way our desktop computers look, with trash cans, arrow shaped pointers, and files that can be dragged and dropped into folders. Standardizing is essential to mechanizing, which is crucial for building effective platforms for us to interact with each other via digital media, from phones to Facebook. Modularity and standardization can help us learn new interfaces rapidly. Default settings also train us to see and think in particular ways, another hegemonic process.

Algorithms, protocols, and defaults are just three of many elements we could include as relevant actors in the study of postinternet socio-technical ecologies. I mention them specifically because they are recent concerns. My broader point is that as we naturalize and
neutralize the media/technologies of everyday communication and interaction, different characteristics and features of everyday life become salient for researchers collecting and analyzing materials in situ. Just ten years ago, the exchange of text was a key characteristic of internet life, and most interactions and transactions occurred at our desks. In 2016, the internet is everywhere. Mobility and convergence present a visual scene where everybody seems to be looking down at their phones, tablets, laptops, watches, and other smart devices. In such contexts, the crucial activities and layers of meaning are invisible, because they occur across platforms, in a multiplicity of globally distributed and diffused networks, and in time/space configurations that may be impossible to capture (Baym, 2013).

An ecological view can help us get beyond human-centric research design to consider both the social and technical as elements in a complex ecology. This is very similar to Deuze’s (2011) compelling ontological argument that these invisible networks of connection and meaning are essentially a new human condition—one in which reality is experienced through, and potentially submits itself to affordances of media (2011, p. 138). This challenges ethnographers to find frameworks and techniques that resonate with and work for hybrid contexts of atoms and bits, since these are often contexts that appear either separate or seamless.

Frameworks Of Focus For Internet Inquiry

Much in the same way internet users might define the internet as a tool, place, or way of being (Markham, 1998), social researchers vary in how they perceive phenomena that are internet-related, which influences how they describe the field, where or on what they focus attention, how they conceptualize ethnographic material as well as what counts as data or non data (and whether or not they elect to choose the term data to describe what they’re generating or collecting), and what becomes part of their explanations. The following heuristic helps me categorize how qualitative internet researchers think about internet-related contexts. This framework is built on the premise that research design emerges as one defines the boundaries of the project. The boundaries of one’s project do not preexist but are constructed, through one’s philosophical, logistic, or experiential orientation toward the phenomenon, by the way the phenomenon seems to presents itself to the researcher, or how a researcher’s questions highlight certain elements. This heuristic includes: 1) internet as a medium or tool for networked connectivity; 2) internet as a venue, place, or virtual world; and 3) internet as a way of being.

These frameworks do not represent a typology of internet-related contexts or even a continuum of conceptualization. To provide further caveat, this framework is not extensive and certainly not comprehensive. Still, it is a starting point to identify how internet researchers distinguish their research perspectives, particularly as these intersect with ethnographic approaches.

1) Internet as tool, medium, or network of connectivity: Ethnographies of networked sociality. Much of the research that falls into this frame focuses on cultural practices in or of internet-saturated contexts. The researcher may be interested in how certain aspects of the internet or the digital influence behaviors, such as how online anonymity might promote bullying, or how videoconferencing may help people maintain relationships across geographic distance. Although the studies of “cultures of connectivity” (van Dijck, 2013) may differ wildly in
shape and scope, a common thread seems to run through this type of inquiry, one that focuses on the centrality of individual and group practices, social relations, and cultural formations, as these are facilitated by some aspect(s) of the internet.

The field site is not necessarily online, but is in some way mediated by the capacities of the internet. More or less stable socio-cultural formations may emerge through shared interest (online special interest groups), common use of certain platform (e.g., Twitter users), or certain discursive tendencies (e.g., Reddit). ‘Networked sociality’ is a recent term used by many scholars to describe such cultural formations, which emphasizes how techno-cultural microsystems of meaning coalesce through the convergence of many elements, including content, technological infrastructures, and use patterns (e.g., Castells, 2009; van Dijck, 2013, and Papacharissi, 2011).

As conceptual frameworks for networked sociality have grown over the past two decades, we see both traditional and experimental methods applied to the study of these social formations. These might combine methods conducted online and offline. The online/offline is less important than interactions among people whose lives are connected to or touched by these networks.

Built discursively or through the act of following communication interactions across multiple sites, “the field site transitions from a bounded space that the researcher dwells within to something that more closely tracks the social phenomenon under study” (Burrell, 2009, p. 195). Postill & Pink (2012) say this might be discussed as internet-related ethnography, rather than internet ethnography, since the “research environment is dispersed across web platforms, is constantly in progress and changing, and implicates physical as well as digital localities” (p. 125). Researchers may focus attention to that which occurs offline, or online, or a mix of both. As Burrell notes, the idea of a “field” may be best reconceptualized as a network, whereby research interests are sited (p. 196).

Regardless of how the study is sited, the focal point in this frame centers on how the internet is conceptualized as a tool or medium for communication and connection, or how the social is mediated or impacted by one or more capacities of the internet.

2) Internet as place or world: Ethnographies of immersive environments. Especially in the early 1990s, researchers focused on Cyberspace, a view that emphasized the internet as cultural spaces in which meaningful human interactions occur. Despite the absence of physical architectures, the internet can be experienced viscerally as a place, wherein one has a sense of presence, whether this is sponsored and facilitated by a platform such as a game or virtual world or through one’s discursive activities and movements. Ethnography translates well to immersive environments facilitated by the digital internet. As Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor note (2012), ethnography has always been “a flexible, responsive methodology, sensitive to emergent phenomena and emergent research questions” (p. 6). Fieldwork and associated methods are carried out in similar ways to non-virtual environments.

This frame of “Internet as Place or World” describes work by researchers who consider the dimensionality or placeness to be an important feature for the community under study—and
for most if not all of researchers in this category, there is a fairly well defined lifeworld to be studied. To make this statement, I draw on some of the most prominent researchers in this area, Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, & T.L. Taylor, who note that certain “specificities of these spaces prompt their own set of considerations” (2012, p. 4). They emphasize four key characteristics: First, virtual worlds are “object rich environments that participants can traverse and with which they can interact” (p. 7). Second, virtual worlds are multi-user in nature, whereby the nature of the world thrives through co-inhabitation with others. Third, “they are persistent; they continue to exist in some form even as participants log off” (p. 7). Fourth, virtual worlds “allow participants to embody themselves as avatars” (p. 7), represented textually, visually, or otherwise.

Importantly, within this framework of virtual worlds, “the ethnographic research paradigm does not undergo fundamental transformation or distortion in its journey to virtual arenas because ethnographic approaches are always modified for each fieldsite, and in real time as the research progresses” (p. 4). If we take Boellstorff’s, Nardi’s, Pearce’s, and Taylor’s (2012) distinctions to heart, “networked environments” are not the same as “virtual worlds,” since social networking in itself does not carry the characteristics of ‘worldness’ or ‘embodiment.’ As they acknowledge, platforms may contain virtual worlds within them, like Farmville inside Facebook. Also, first person shooter games might seem like an immersive world to certain users. But unless there is a defined sense of place and persistence of the world when one is offline, the category of virtual worlds would not apply.

Although it might seem easy at first to mark the boundaries of the field based on the platform, such as Second Life or World of Warcraft, a more narrow demarcation is necessary to understand the specificities of the cultural formation under study. First, these immersive environments are large and complex, with membership in the millions. Second, these environments house innumerable cultures and subcultures.

Contexts that are less immersive, such as Facebook or blogs or emailing lists, pose different difficulties. A researcher may find strong cultural formations, or a sense of place may be strongly felt and understood by members, but the construction and maintenance of this community may cut across many different platforms. The choice of where to focus attention can only be determined contextually, in concert with those participants whose interactions shape cultural boundaries over time. Importantly, this distinction does not necessarily correspond to any online/offline or real/virtual distinctions, which are separate matters.

As a consequence, while some researchers may envision the world to be ‘standalone’ and therefore carry out inquiry specifically within the virtualized parameters or regions of the environment, like an island on Second Life, other researchers might find it necessary to study the people of a particular game space both online and offline. In her studies of guilds, for example, Taylor (2006) defines the boundaries of the field within a game environment, but talks to the cultural members in a range of locations, whether through text based chat in the game space or in person at a gaming convention.

3) Internet as a way of being: Ethnographies of the contemporary social world in a digital age. In response and reaction to early internet studies focused on cyberspace or virtuality as separate from so called ‘real life’, anthropologists like Miller and Slater (2000) insisted that if
you want to get to the internet, don’t start from there” (p. 5). Instead, they argued, “we need to treat Internet media as continuous with and embedded in other social spaces, that they happen within mundane social structures and relations” (p. 5).

In this third category, we can see the most recent point on a continuum where the internet recedes into the basic frame for how we see the world. Horst and Miller articulate that digital anthropology “finally explodes the illusions we retain of a nonmediated, noncultural, predigital world.” (2012, p. 12). If the presence of technological mediation is taken for granted, the only way to distinguish this as a category of inquiry might be the type of questions the researcher asks. In other words, if the internet is a way of being, it becomes an almost unremarkable way of carrying out our interactions with others because it is so “embedded, embodied, and everyday” (Hine, 2015). But its influence on the possibilities for interactions and relations is more profound than ever. For many researchers who take this into consideration, there are paramount questions about how people feel --and feel about -- these mediations in their social relations. For other researchers, there may be questions to ask at a level of basic conceptualizations of social life: How should we integrate such a ubiquitous mediator as the internet successfully into our ideas of friendship, authenticity, celebrity, public sphere, and other common categories of meaning and cultural experience?

Embracing this framework allows one to study characteristics of relations as these are-- and perhaps always have been-- embedded within the ‘socio-technical’. Bakardjieva (2011), for example, emphasizes the interconnectedness of internet with numerous other practices and relations. She identifies this shift from ‘cyberspace’ to the everyday as a “marker of the second age of the medium” (2011, p. 59). This becomes possible through an ontological shift, whereby we understand social reality as fully mediated: “Media benchmark our experiences of the world and how we make sense of our role in it. A media life reflects how media are both a necessary and unavoidable part of our existence and survival.” (Deuze, 2012, p. xi).

As mentioned at the outset of this section, a framework of tool, place, and way of being may be a useful heuristic, but should not be read as a typology. It’s also not all-inclusive. I do not include many types of internet inquiry. For example, one can utilize the capacities of the internet to study topics unrelated to the internet specifically. Many people conduct ethnographic interviews online, or collect ethnographic material from sites where groups or individuals interact (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), upload audiovisual material (e.g., Youtube), or present their ideas in some way (e.g., blogs, comment threads, discussion boards). If the researcher positions the internet more incidentally than centrally, it’s not really a part of this framework. I also don’t mention recent terms such as netnography, technography, or trace ethnography, since these are presumed to be included in the framework above as specific approaches or techniques.

Let me finally note that this framework works best as a rough guide or a conversation starter within a broader ecological perspective about the relationship among humans and their technologies in a digital era. This particular iteration is based on my own earlier frameworks for thinking about how we make sense of the internet and therefore live through it or study it as researchers (e.g., Markham, 1998, 2003, 2011). These in turn were remixes of categorizations offered by Chris Mann and Fiona Stewart (2000) and the frameworks that emerged from the curated volumes by Steve Jones in 1995 and 1997. We can see many such
conceptual frameworks in progress, each with slightly different perspectives and ways of cutting into the connections and relations between technology, computers, digital media, and humans.\textsuperscript{10}

**Making Impact: Political And Ethical\textsuperscript{11} Intervention On Our Digital Futures**

When I consider the aims of qualitative inquiry in the digital era, I can’t help but return to the fundamental reason most of us get into this business to begin with: To change the world. I’m much more convinced this is possible now than it was even a few years ago. If we consider how such units of cultural knowledge travel and function in the broader ecosystem, we can begin to recognize that our audiences are no longer just our students or colleagues. Our ideas are much less likely in the 21st Century to sit quietly in books on library shelves. Our research matters, in that every action we take to focus on a phenomenon and then somehow transform our witnessing into something else through the interpretive ethnographic filtering process “reconfigures the world in its becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 396). If this is the case, how can we make a difference that makes a difference?

This is an interpretive challenge at one level: If one accepts that digital internet interweaves with all of social life in ways that cannot be untangled, qualitative inquiry of these phenomena requires shifting one’s lens to better attend to fields as flows and networks, where self-other relations and social forms are temporary informational assemblages. This is not a matter of reinventing the wheel by ignoring or dismissing best practices of qualitative research. Rather, it’s a conceptual turn that looks both above and below method to find innovation. Above method, this is a critical reflection on the political, economic, and disciplinary influences on our research practice, most easily but not exclusively at the level of epistemology. Below method, this is a close attention to the details of how we accomplish our studies through habitual, instinctive, and playful action of the embodied mind.

Innovation comes as we focus on the premises and aims of qualitative method rather than the traditional ways these are actualized\textsuperscript{12}, which can enable methods and ethical practices that better fit the complexity of the context because they are adopted through need, rather than prescribed through an academic discipline. This is more difficult than it sounds, because it requires a constant shifting between medium and meaning, as well as the more typical iterative oscillation between closer lived experience and more distant conceptual framing. For example, in Waltorp’s (forthcoming) studies of Muslim women living in a particular area of Copenhagen, she found that a typical approach to interviewing or prompting conversation didn’t work, despite her close relation with participants and a long term immersion in the community. As she recalled to me, “These women simply didn’t play along. They were not interested in participating in the way that I anticipated they ‘ought’ to from my anthropological perspective” (personal conversation, air quotes original). She was speaking of a particular technique she had tried, which included having participants reflect on a series of photographs in an exhibition: “First of all, none of the participants found the particular aesthetic or process of the analogue disposable photos appealing. They instead brought the (smart)phone with them and showed the pictures, they had taken – they had it on them all the time anyway, and they preferred the instant editing that a digital camera affords.
To get closer, in Geertz’s sense of “experience-near” ethnographic understanding, Waltorp found herself returning time and again to consider the basic premises of her project, to remember why she was doing the research in the first place rather than focusing too much on how she was eliciting information from the women or the field, both of which defied any boundaries she attempted to pin on them. By shifting her attitude to one of invitation (versus studying, observing, or learning), she let them choose how to interact with her. She ended up using a wide range of audio visual means of communicating and interacting with them. By letting go of all the ethnographic methods she had learned, she allowed the methods to emerge as needed. The people she was studying selected these techniques in situ, or she found it necessary to use certain tools because of what she encountered.

I pan over the four women sitting in two black leather sofas, around a glass table. Veiled when in public space, here in the private space of the home, they remove the veil, long cardigans, and the ‘outer layer’ of clothes they’re wearing. This is safe and allowed as long as no men except from the immediate family are present. Nour sits in her black leggings and tight black blouse. She has removed just part of the hijab from her head, and keeps on the inner part that functions like a hairband. Khadija is wearing a short, comfortable dress in jacquard-stretch material and her hair in a ponytail. She is 5 months pregnant and the bump shows clearly now. Jamila didn’t remove her headscarf – “bad hair day” – she sits legs curled up under herself in the sofa, in elegant trousers and a small jacket. Mona arrives late, with a water pipe wrapped in two H&M plastic bags, and arranges it on the table. (Waltorp, forthcoming, p 11-12)

In this study, making sense of the cultural context required close attention to those moments when social media became salient, how various devices or platforms were being used, and how people related to their technology—individually, as a group, in different ways in different moments.

I film lips. Smoke is inhaled and exhaled. Zoom in on a coca cola can. Nour grabs her phone and says: “Come, we do a selfie”. We move closer together, eyes to the tiny lens on her smartphone. The picture she takes is quickly decorated with a few emojis and sent as a Snapchat to girlfriends who are not there with us in the moment. Other pictures are arranged in montages of pictures of the cakes, the fruit that is arranged on the table, and us smiling to the camera. A filter is added and the photo is put on Facebook, receiving comments from friends and acquaintances. On these pictures, the hijab is worn. (Waltorp, forthcoming, p. 11)

In one moment, Snapchat extends their private party to distant locations. The photo disappears only a few seconds after being received, so it’s deemed safely private. In the next moment, these same women wave away the smoke, focus the camera on the food rather than the water pipe, cover their hair, and share the same time but a very different habitus in what they consider the public sphere: Facebook. The ethnographer notes the seamlessness with which they shift from one social media platform to another, the ease with which it is integrated into their social gathering.
At a different moment, Waltorp notices one of the women is playing with her smartphone, flipping it over and over in her hand. It lights up. She quickly glances down, then up again. She cuts her eyes both left and right before looking down again. As she reads a message, her face softens. She types rapidly on the phone. A small smile lights up her eyes as she glances up. Glancing left and right again, her expression shuts and the moment ends. Familiar with this ritual within this and other groups of Muslim women she knows, Waltorp recognizes a clandestine conversation between the woman and a man. Her Danish boyfriend, likely. A highly unsanctioned relationship, not exclusively online, but aided by the constancy and privacy of text messaging.

It’s moments like these when Waltorp realizes the mostly invisible importance of the digital in this analog setting. She continues to struggle with this aspect of her research, because she didn’t start out thinking she would be so focused on the affordances of technology. Over time, she has been compelled to find ways of tracking, understanding, and grappling with ‘the digital’ in these social contexts. These mostly invisible practices matter. But as she and many digital ethnographers have found over trial and error, most of what happens is impossible to witness in any practical manner; meaning is difficult to identify, pin down, universalize, or qualify (personal conversation, December 2015).

This example illustrates far more than a high degree of contextual integrity based on reflexive and careful attention to details. It is the result of several years of experimentation with different modes of fieldwork to try to both inhabit and capture the simultaneous centrality and invisibility of ‘the digital.’ The study is therefore not about technology, but about negotiation of morality. But at the same time, it is all about technology, in that it is through mobile devices and their affordances that these women experiment with the contradictions present in their own lives, as Muslims in a Danish culture. Waltorp is able to find solutions by resisting the trajectory of fieldwork and always returning to the purpose of inquiry and remixing methods as needed. Importantly, this example also demonstrates a keen attention to the everyday practices of method. Once Waltorp released her adherence to traditional—that is, discipline-specific—tools, she opened herself up to an entirely new toolbox that enabled her to get closer to the granularity of lived experience as this manifested in a mix of digital and physical forms across multiple timespaces.

At a level beyond the interpretive challenge, the political importance of such innovation emerges when we recognize our ability to make social change through our efforts to understand what matters in postinternet social ecologies. This ethical challenge involves rethinking why the work of qualitative inquiry gets done in the first place. Here, the political foundations and goals so well developed by early feminist scholarship can help us think differently, to perhaps shift to a different set of strategies.

This can happen on a fine grain scale in our individual work. For the past four years, for example, I’ve been training young people (in their 20s and 30s) in Denmark, the U.S., and Estonia how to become auto-ethnographers of their everyday lived experience, focusing on the way that digital media, specifically social media platforms, play a role in their performance and negotiation of identity. The project began as an experiment with methods; I was trying to figure out how to get more granular detail of lived experience by tweaking interview strategies and by using self-reflection exercises to get at more, and more nuanced,
layers of meaning about how people experience everyday life in digitally-saturated social contexts. I honestly didn’t anticipate that I would be conducting consciousness-raising workshops in the classic feminist tradition. That was the most interesting outcome. Every participant who did these experiments became more critical and conscious of their own tendencies.

I have collected over 1200 multimedia accounts, rich with detail and thick description in the classic Geertzian sense. As these young people learn to dig into their own lived experience with a range of ethnographic and qualitative analysis techniques, they become more conscious and critical of their own social media use. They gain clarity about how they’re being tracked and monitored in a vast and complicated surveillance society. They look curiously at how their intense social engagement online is often accomplished with a silent body and a zombie-like facial expression. They explore their own performances and experiment with different techniques of enacting networked sociality. They analyze how the self can travel through various networks and be transformed by other people or platforms, with or without their permission or control.

The methods that emerged could be described as phenomenological, within a larger auto-ethnographic framework. To begin, I didn’t frame their inquiry as ethnography. I didn’t use the terms data, data collection, field, field notes, or analysis. Instead, I used various ‘as if’ prompts. I encouraged the participants to explore their own lived experience as if they were aliens. I asked them to build accounts of their experiences as if they were doing lived histories. I had them build visual representations of their lives as if they were curating a museum exhibition. I asked them to think about their own social media use as if they were Karl Marx or Mark Zuckerberg. They’ve mapped their online lives, traced their own data usage, and conducted close level analysis of their movements through multiple networks as if they were producing digital archives for future data scientists. They’ve built portfolios of their own lived experience as if these would be material for future archaeologists to explore what life with social media was like back then, in 2012, or in 2015. Armed with the tools of remix, they’ve produced multimedia accounts of everyday lived experience with social media, highlighting and ultimately embracing the complexity of the phenomenon, rather than trying to resolve it.

The outcome? First, I can’t use much of the data, although I have enormous archives of intimate and rich portraiture of everyday life. The accounts are simply too intimate, too visual, and too full of personally identifiable information, which makes them impossible to make publicly available, unless in radically altered form.

Second and more importantly, I have come to realize the research is not for me. It’s for them. In all cases, the participants have become critically conscious of their own social media behaviors, habits, and predilections. Take these statements gleaned from various diaries, video logs, blogs:

*I have a continuous reminder that tells me: “hey, I’m here, you have a life also here on me, OPEN ME!” And you are going to obey to it EVERY SINGLE TIME. Scary, in my opinion.*
I keep almost opening to look for notifications. Why am I reflexively doing this without my own mental consent? They are like little red buttons of evil. I don’t want to look at these notification buttons on my screen. I am sitting in my class. I feel temptation and frustration. Make them go away! Why do I feel this frustration?

I want to save Instagram for when I’m all tucked in in bed. It’s so cosy, I love it. It’s my alone time, where I can dream of all the pretty things I want to make and get inspired by nature pictures.

I edit everything. Even if just a comment, I’ll edit it at least 8 times. If I don’t come up with the exact phrase, I’ll delete it. What a waste of time!

My phone is like an infant. If it cries, you can’t just leave it sitting there. You have to check it.

I didn’t realize I was so shallow.

I look like a zombie!

Scary! I didn’t accomplish anything for an entire hour I just sat there like a zombie and stared at the screen. I know I was chatting and socializing but I don’t look like I was doing anything alive at all!

I nervously touched his chest and the screen opened up on his profile. Should I? Why would I want to do this?

I spend literally hours every day on Tindr. It’s worse than being addicted to television because there’s not even a storyline.

I sleep with my smartphone and laptop on the bed. How pathetic.

The first thing I do every morning when I wake up is roll over and check my notifications. No, not my girlfriend who is in the bed with me. But on Facebook. That’s scary. And Stupid.

I spend the most time clicking on stupid videos. In the past three days, I never once clicked on a news story. I don’t know if that’s always the case. Probably is.

I didn’t know I did that! I obviously know my phone better than the back of my hand because I always pick it up without even looking away from what I’m doing and then when it’s exactly in the right position ready to view I look at the screen.

These verbalized expressions only scratch the surface of the participants’ reflexive analyses. By being allowed to produce data and analyze it for themselves in creative ways without calling it ‘method’ or ‘research,’ these participants found results meaningful to themselves. This is the outcome of a decade of experimentation to try to find methods that get closer to the lived experience in a digital context. I’ve finally accepted that I simply cannot see enough
of it myself. The goal of my research necessarily has transformed to helping people find and analyze their own lived experience through a critical ethnographic lens, using phenomenological methods, auto ethnographic strategies, situational mapping, rhetorical, discourse, and visual analysis, and whatever else might work. I learn from this, through their narrative accounts of themselves. Of course, on another level, I hope they later come to recognize their own blind spots in analyzing and making assessments about the behavior of others they observe.

**Resisting Datafication And Making Change**

Let me shift to an even broader level, where our small choices as individual researchers add up to a paramount political challenge. Throughout this chapter, I’ve focused more on attitude than technique. This is a deliberate choice for two reasons. First, the task of comprehending the massive changes wrought by whatever we deem ‘the digital’ requires ethnographers to return to the premises of anthropology and ask questions about why classical anthropologists invented particular methods in the first place and how we might find appropriate methods in globally entangled information flows. This requires attention to the basic premises and strengths of qualitative, interpretive approaches.

Relatedly and second, we find ourselves in a troubling and swiftly moving worldwide trend toward datafication of human experience. Funding is channeled toward ‘evidence-based’ research design and taxpaying publics demand measurable solutions to real problems. Qualitative researchers everywhere are pressed to respond by changing their vocabulary to match this rhetoric, changing their methods to meet positivist criteria, or doing nothing, which risks further marginalization. The grounds for any alternative response to these three impossible options must be planted at the epistemological level.

Despite the strategic value of claims like “ethnographic data has always been big,” “there’s value in small data,” or “big data needs thick data,” the fact of the matter is that the strength of ethnographic inquiry is not about data, in any sense of the word used by computational scientists, statisticians, or economists. Of course we count things. Of course we can use large datasets to help us think about the cultural formations we study. We use computers to help us sort and manage the materials we get from our fieldwork. But interpretive ethnography is not a data science, and the act of interpretation is—no matter how much it might be aided by machines and machine learning—a human based set of decisions about what matters, or what a wink of a wink means (Geertz, 1973). Especially as the trend toward treating humans (and their data) as data continues, the epistemological that grounds interpretive ethnographer is an important antidote. This requires refocused attention to one’s mindset, attitude, and reason for doing research. This doesn’t mean we have to avoid the term ‘data’, but it does require us to remember to walk a fine line between using the term strategically and using positivist epistemologies that undergird this concept in the first place.

As the past two issues of this handbook have emphasized, the goal of qualitative research involves stepping beyond the interpretive goal of deep understanding and consequent thick description to address such questions as: What is our role in the larger scale and scope of things? What are we producing as part of our intellectual energies and output? As the walls of the academic industry seem to continue to crumble all around us, we find ourselves in the amazing position of speaking to multiple audiences. Resisting the rhetoric of quantification
and datafication may seem a small move. It’s not. The ethnographer’s understanding and depiction of cultural complexity both counters and strengthens the statistical abstraction of computational analysis. Ethnography is distinctive, in that its methods enable us to hear the voices of individuals, learn about intensely localized meanings, and comprehend culture in a visceral and sensory way.

The ethnographic mindset is instrumental in helping those who design our future interfaces and infrastructures understand the complexity of the human experience. How do our methodological and epistemological assumptions about qualitative research encourage particular ways of knowing or ways of approaching and analyzing social problems? How might our products be used as interventions rather than just descriptions, to encourage different structures for social practice? Silverstone (2007) contends that our moral challenge is to get better at seeing the way our research interweaves in larger structures of meaning. This translates directly into an ethic of future accountability. In other words, we don’t use simply ethics as something we’ve learned from past mistakes. Rather, we produce the ethics of the future as we go about our everyday academic lives of producing research.

Ethnography provides an excellent framework to grapple with complex cultural phenomena, to help us build thick descriptions of “what is going on here.” Our findings become frameworks that can shape how users, designers, and other researchers conceptualize the socio-technical ecologies within which we are saturated. The impact is tangible and real: qualitative internet scholars like Nancy Baym and Mary Gray with Microsoft, or Genevieve Bell with Intel, have influenced the way computer scientists design user interfaces, or the way computational biologists might conceptualize and mark racial categories in DNA sequences. Digital scholars like Jenna Burrell, Tricia Wang, and danah boyd take an active, high profile, and critical role in social media, using their ethnographic studies as an academic foundation for real time responses to public issues, crises, and controversies. These are not just examples of applied research, special outreach efforts, or accidents. These are scholars who have made a deliberate choice to find ways to do research that is read by different publics and composed in formats that can be disseminated quickly and understood by people across many expertise areas.

**Conclusion**

At least at present, ethnography in postinternet era is in a stage where many are rethinking the processes and products of inquiry. While strong traditions and legacies ground the best work in this area, innovation and interdisciplinarity continue to remix methods so researchers can grapple with flows and global networked sociality. Within this transformative time, an ecological perspective can help scholars remain flexible and adaptive.

As much as we might feel the pressure to adapt our rhetoric if not our very methods to current trends toward quantification and datafication, however, this has never been the strength or goal of ethnography. Ours is a vital epistemology to preserve as more and more explanations of humans rely on data science. Baszanger & Dodier (2004) remind us that ethnography cannot be deduced from codified elements collected at the time of the study. This is not a small point. Indeed, it may be one of very few wrenches we have at our disposal to throw in the mechanism of data analytics, which produce astonishingly accurate representations of our likes, dislikes, and predilections. The success of predictive modeling points to a near future
whereby computational power and automated data gathering can yield new insights about
disease, which is a good thing. But it has also resulted in the disturbing rise of predictive
policing (Brayne, 2015). This is only possible in a society that believes that lived experience
and humanness can be captured in discrete units of information and analyzed through
computational means. Especially in this environment, it is crucial to resist and counter the
inevitability of this trend. We can only do this by highlighting the basic sensibilities of the
ethnographic approach.

Of course, not everyone who does ethnography in the 21st Century wants to or even should
confront the political challenges mentioned throughout this chapter. But as I mentioned at the
beginning, this chapter exists because there is something unique about the digital. Certainly,
digital technologies influence the shape and practice of what we call culture. But more to the
point of a chapter aimed toward researchers thinking about their methods: Our research can
and will shape the ethics of our future social structures and practices. We play a critical role
in defining what counts as human experience, how it is accounted for, whose stories are told,
and how people are represented in these tellings. Whether or not we intend or seek this
political function or not, our decisions about how to frame and enact our small research
projects matters. To me, living in a time when the entire world continues to hurtle unchecked
into technological transformations that affect everyday social life at both intimate and global
scales, this responsibility to make a better future is both a burden and a gift to embrace.

A small list of recommended starting point readings

• For more on techniques for interviewing and other elicitation methods in digital
  contexts, see James & Busher, 2009; Salmons, 2010, 2014. Still relevant advice can
  be found in the foundational text by Mann & Stewart (2000), especially if studying
  textual or anonymous online contexts.

• For some classic pieces that explore the internet as a tool that mediates social
  interaction or grounds cultural experience, see among others: Baym, 1998; Hine,
  2000; Kendall, 2003; Markham, 1998; Orgad, 2006; or Sunden, 2003. For more
  recent works from a range of perspectives and across digital platforms, see boyd,
  2014; Marwick, 2013; Møller, 2011; or Senft, 2008. One might also find inspiration
  from the work of Stone, 1996.

• For more on studying everyday lived experience when internet is everywhere but not
  the primary object of analysis, see Bakardjieva, 2011; Horst & Møller, 2012; Hine,
  2015; as well as the foundational work by Miller & Slater, 2000.

• For a starting point to learn about key issues faced by ethnographers in digital internet
  contexts, read the contributors to Internet Inquiry edited by Markham & Baym
  (2009). For perspectives more directly situated in anthropology see Digital
  Materialities, edited by Pink, Ardevol, & Lanzeni (2016). Also see the framework
  and cases in Digital Ethnography, co-authored by Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis,
  and Tacchi (2015). For more nuts and bolts discussions of tricky issues for a range of
digital research projects, see the collaborators in Digital Research Confidential
  (Hargatti & Sandvig, 2015). For inspirational recent examples of experimental
fieldwork techniques, consult Criada & Estelella’s Experimental collaborations
  (forthcoming).
• For an introduction to ethnography in online contexts, the *handbook of ethnography in virtual worlds* is a core resource, whether or not one is working in immersive environments (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). These authors have also produced exemplary standalone ethnographies. For an excellent reflexive ethnography of gender in online game contexts, I recommend Sunden & Sveningsson (2011).

• For more on related conceptual and ethnographic scholarship in media studies, gender studies, and journalism, a beginner might begin with the general works by scholars like Sonia Livingstone; Nick Couldry; Jenny Sunden, and Lynn Schofield Clark.

**Works cited**


### Notes

1. This latter statement was made by a U.S. teen talking about Facebook with researchers Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011). The first statement is not actual, but based on
2. See the recommended readings section at the end of this chapter.
3. This chapter closely parallels only one possible trajectory through internet studies over the past 20 years, so others might write this account differently. I and many of my colleagues have witnessed important shifts away from discipline or method driven inquiry, which is ill-equipped to grapple with materiality that is not object oriented; time/spaces that can shift radically and continuously from moment to moment; and distributed personae that cannot be located in a single body of information or isolated as static entities.
4. I also have completely rewritten the chapter, so readers should also consult the 2010 version by Sarah Gatson and my original 2005 version.
5. There’s a persistent debate about whether or not to capitalize it as a proper noun, which I won’t detail here. I would typically keep it lowercase, so if it appears as a proper noun here, it’s likely because the copy editor found it less disturbing.
6. This is a vast oversimplification of ethnographic engagement. My point is meant to be quite general, since ethnography is less a focus in this chapter than the technological/digital. In this particular statement, Clair draws on Geertz (1973), Denzin & Lincoln (2005), Clifford & Marcus (1986), Richardson (1994), and Van Maanen (1988), among others. Readers should consult other chapters in this Handbook for better detail and nuance.
7. For specialists in this area, I note that this use of an ecological metaphor is distinct from a technological determinist, social constructionist, or social shaping view. Rather than focus on the role of technology or humans in the way technology plays out, this viewpoint more broadly returns to the basics of systems theory to explore processes and relations in situ, rather than as they might be codified a priori.
8. For example, the conceptualization of digital as separate from analog tends to play out in the persistent (and wrong) distinction between online and offline. While there may be two distinct venues within which information flows, this distinction mostly oversimplifies the actual situation. At a different part of the spectrum, we can also witness studies that don’t pay enough attention to the ways digital technology influence situations, since the digital is often an invisible element or agent in the situation.
9. To note, very few frameworks or classifications for qualitative internet research exist; this is still a young field that cuts across virtually every scientific discipline. Also, many of us who have been working in this area since the beginning have deliberately avoided compartmentalization, in the interest of diversity and crossover.
10. I am inspired by the distinctly different and inspiring frameworks developed over the years by Christine Hine (2005, 2015), who along with other science and technology studies scholars (STS) have thought about socio-technical blurrings for much longer than I have (e.g., Lucy Suchman, 1987). Similar frameworks have been offered recently by Sarah Pink and John
Postill (2012); as well as the strong research collective following the work of Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000), including Heather Horst, Jo Tacchi, and Mirca Madianou.

11 In this chapter, I zero in on ethics as a political and interventionist attitude, instead of the more traditional notion of ethical decision making within philosophical, regulatory, or political spheres. There are numerous resources for discussions of ethics more broadly. Specifically, the Association of Internet Researchers curates a list of resources, available at ethics.aoir.org. For discussions of phronesis as applied to digital research ethics and decision making, see Ess, 2009. For guidelines of best practices in ethical decision making in internet research see both the 2002 and 2012 versions of the AOIR ethics reports (Ess & The AOIR Ethics Working Committee, 2002; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). For an excellent study of casuistic decision-making in internet research as well as a strong set of case study examples, see McKee & Porter, 2009.

12 This is actually a longstanding and strong tradition among interpretive qualitative researchers, particularly out of the U.S.