

**Media Anthropology Network  
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)  
E-Seminar Series**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

**E-Seminar 63  
The Digital Turn: New Directions in Media Anthropology**

**16 October – 9 November 2018**

Follow-Up of the EASA Media Anthropology Network Panel “The Digital Turn” in Stockholm, Sweden, 15 August 2018

**Position Paper**

**by**

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**Discussants**

**Christoph Bareither**

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**Anna Cristina Pertierra**

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**Paula Uimonen**

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Dear All,

I am very pleased to announce that our 63rd E-Seminar titled "The Digital Turn: New Directions in Media Anthropology" is now open.

The E-seminar is a Follow-Up of the EASA Media Anthropology Network Panel "The Digital Turn" at the 15th which took place in Stockholm, Sweden in August 2018.

Our Network co-ordinators Sahana Udupa (Ludwig Maximilian University Munich), Elisabetta Costa (University of Groningen) & Philipp Budka (University of Vienna), have written the position paper, which you can find online:

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

Over the next couple of days I will allow the commentators - Christoph Bareither (Humboldt University of Berlin), Anna Cristina Pertierra (Western Sydney University) & Paula Uimonen (Stockholm University) - will post their comments directly to the list.

After that I will be opening the discussion to all.

Looking forward to your thoughts, ideas and comments.

Veronica

Dear All,

First of all, I would like to thank Sahana Udupa, Elisabetta Costa and Philipp Budka for organizing a truly inspiring panel. Many questions were raised during the discussions, but here I will focus on only one of them: How can anthropological research account for the particularities of digital media in contrast to non-digital media? This question is not new, of course (see for example the contributions to Horst & Miller 2012, Koch 2016), but the panel demonstrated the importance of an ongoing discussion about what it means for anthropologists to study "the digital". In our research, we often use the term as a clarifying category that includes a broad set of technologies based on binary code. "The digital," however, can also serve as a conceptual tool to better understand the transformations of everyday media-related practices which we currently witness in a large variety of anthropological fields.

For example, the panel included empirical examples for the negotiation of gender relations through both digital and non-digital media. What particular potentials, we might ask, do digital media provide for the reshaping of gendered agency and subjectivities? Or, from the opposite perspective, how can digital media be used for practices of surveillance and control in asymmetric gendered power relations?

Similar questions can be raised regarding online extreme speech: As Sahana Udupa has pointed out, extreme speech is not a new phenomenon, but it takes on new forms and practices as it is enacted through the internet. We might ask: What particular properties of

“the digital” are relevant for these transformations? How do factors such as anonymity, the possibility of easy participation (through comments, sharing, etc.) or the opportunities for visual communication (through Emojis, Memes, etc.) influence the course of political debates?

Among the three sections of the panel, the discussions concerned with “digital visualities” were most directly dealing with these issues. As the organizers ask in their discussion paper: “Which kind of conceptual approaches to the digital can contribute to the analysis of digital visibility?”

I suggest to raise this question about the particular value of conceptual approaches to the digital not only in studies of digital visibility, but also in the research areas of gender and extreme speech, and – quite frankly – in all anthropological fields in which digital media play a constitutive role.

I argue that the conceptual approach of affordance theories, which has been frequently discussed in the Media Anthropology Network in the last years, is particularly helpful here. Analyzing the affordances of digital media, which are always part of complex “assemblages” (Hopkins 2016) or “environments of affordances” (Madianou & Miller 2012), allows anthropologists to consider the particular action-potentials and action-restrictions of such media (Hutchby 2001) and how they relate to everyday practices (Costa 2018) as well as to embodied knowledge and emotions (Bareither, forthcoming). While affordances have often been discussed in media anthropological research, the question about what is particular about digital affordances in contrast to non-digital affordances remains largely unanswered.

Since affordances, especially in anthropological research, are always relational to practices and embodied knowledge, there is certainly not one answer to this question. A digital medium or technology can afford very different practices, depending on who uses them and in which situations. However, for anthropological research this is not a hindrance. Rather, it provides an opportunity, because it is exactly this relational character of affordances, their entanglement with everyday practices and embodied knowledge, that makes anthropological research perfectly suited for discussing the particular affordances of “the digital”. This is, in my opinion, a crucial aspect of what a “digital turn” in anthropology can entail: to use the strengths of anthropological research for the study of situated practices to better understand what “the digital” is. The panel “The Digital Turn” made some promising steps in this direction.

References:

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Hopkins, Julian (2016): The Concept of Affordances in Digital Media. In: Heidrun Friese, Gala Rebane, Marcus Nolden, Miriam Schreiter (eds.): *Handbuch Soziale Praktiken und Digitale Alltagswelten*. Living Reference Work, continuously updated edition. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 1–8.

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17 October 2018

Dear all

I'd like to thank Sahana Udupa, and the EASA medianthro group, for inviting me to comment upon this paper. Offering a follow-up e-seminar to the panel in Sweden does alleviate the sense of FOMO (fear of missing out) among those of us who couldn't attend the 15th EASA conference, and I am pleased to have had a chance to read through this paper and learn of the array of rich ideas and projects that were shared.

As the opening sections of the paper discuss, most anthropologists interested in media have shifted their attention to digital technologies in recent years. In some cases, they are simply following a natural transition of the practices they were studying: in my own research on television consumption, I have had to follow my research participants' transition from largely watching free to air broadcast television, to increasingly engaging with multiple platforms and networks to access their preferred television content. But other anthropologists have also critically considered the rise of digital technologies as potentially creating much deeper kinds of transformation – both to social practice and to social theory. By bringing together the range of papers at the EASA panel, this paper and many of the panellists seem to be engaging in this second, deeper kind of questioning.

Does the “digital turn” require any rethinking of media anthropology's purpose? Does it really constitute a “paradigm shift”? Has the ongoing acceleration of digital technologies' presence in the media ecologies or everyday landscapes of people and their communities disrupted any of the founding principles of our ethnographic work? These are productive questions, but my answer to each of them at this stage is “no – which is good”. I think this is borne out by the careful and considered work in the paper but I do invite other list members to respond.

Across the three sub-themes, the researchers show that understanding their topics of research requires an ongoing attention to matters of materiality, of structure and of power. With the rise of visual elements in digital technology, it is clear that scholarship in visual anthropology and material culture studies offer important insights. But just as important is the acknowledgement (an old one in media anthropology) that economic and cultural contexts shape great differences in how “visual” digital media can be. Smartphones remain elusive for many low-income mobile users, at least for now, and video-heavy downloads require high-speed connectivity. Differences in access and in opportunity lie within as well as across communities, and along these lines the sub-theme of the gendered dimensions of digital media research was correctly described as filling a gap that has not been sufficiently explored.

Transforming or expanding the options for communication seems, at least at moments, to

offer new opportunities for people to try out new ways of expressing, resisting, or avoiding preferences and expectations. But in their individual acts of expression, resistance or avoidance, users may not necessarily be uprooting social norms (as Costa observes). Still, the capacity to communicate in a wider range of ways does seem to “give voice” to less powerful people and groups. This is seen not only in the case of women discussed by Costa and Tenhunen, but also in the case of people engaged in online extreme speech as studied by Hervik and Udupa.

Across the projects, we see many examples of what anthropology has long done best: the rooting of analysis in local contexts and existing traditions, while also acknowledging the shifting technological and political dimensions that open up new practices. As the Kupiainen (2016) study quoted suggests, new formations of digital cultural identities might best be understood by considering pre-digital forms of identity construction and visual representation. Hervik emphasises how “a neo-nationalism - neo-racism narrative is what leads people into activism and not the new technology per se”. Close attention to the complexity of actors’ contexts and lives, whether in the selection of emojis or the posting of online extreme speech, obliges us to not assume the technology as inherently transformative, nor to assume the transformation as total. In these and other ways, the work considered across the session shows that the digital turn of media anthropology has not done away with the particular recommendations that anthropologists have long brought to the study of media. So my rather conservative assertion that the digital turn cannot be said to constitute a paradigm shift is far from being a critique of the work presented, and is rather an assertion of the ongoing value of our contributions to interdisciplinary debates in the face of digital transformations.

Some final thoughts: as I was reading this seminar paper I was in Manila, having just participated in a conference on Digital Transactions in Asia. As many of you will be aware, in Manila digital technologies are playing a central role in current political developments. While reading of Mollerup’s discussion of photographers in Aleppo, I thought of the Manila’s “nightcrawlers”, photojournalists who cover the night killings by police and vigilantes that have reached many thousands in the past two years. Online extreme speech too plays a role in the Philippines, where recent research shows that trolling and extreme political debate is often the result of paid and organised economies of political disinformation. In public scholarship, close ethnographic research is playing an important role alongside other methodologies and approaches<<https://drugarchive.ph/post/14-antidrug-dataset-public-info-killings>> in documenting how the digital, while inserted into longstanding political and economic structures, produces real effects in people’s lives (and as Cheryll Soriano observed at the closing of the Digital Transactions conference: the dead also play a role in these digital economies) (Ong & Cabañes 2018<[http://newtontechfordev.com/newton-tech4dev-research-identifies-ad-pr-executives-chief-architects-fake-news-production-social-media-trolling/?fbclid=IwAR352pL6alHbQf-aVH3vaB9hIFYMTRhobn2l\\_NQTfRXV-hmMBoDX9jFZbDw](http://newtontechfordev.com/newton-tech4dev-research-identifies-ad-pr-executives-chief-architects-fake-news-production-social-media-trolling/?fbclid=IwAR352pL6alHbQf-aVH3vaB9hIFYMTRhobn2l_NQTfRXV-hmMBoDX9jFZbDw)>). It is noteworthy that much (if not most) of this ethnographic work is being done in digital media studies, by scholars who are deeply familiar with, but are not themselves, anthropologists. I offer this as evidence that the “digital turn” in media anthropology converges with, and is perhaps subsumed by, an equally significant and well-established ethnographic turn in digital media research.

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17 October 2018

Dear all,

Thank you so much for organizing this e-seminar, as a follow up to the EASA panel in

Stockholm in August.

I have been asked to provide some comments on the position paper, so here we go:

The title of this discussion paper, *The Digital Turn: New Directions in Media Anthropology*, offers a productive provocation. Those familiar with digital anthropology might wonder what is so new about this direction, while media anthropologists may challenge the notion of a digital turn. Without doubting the empirical validity of “the growing importance of digital media technologies in contemporary sociocultural, political and economic processes,” is it really epistemologically justifiable to suggest “a paradigm shift in the anthropological study of media”? Is there perhaps a risk involved that anthropologists fall prey to the hyperbolic polemics that have framed the development of digital media for the last few decades? I mention this here to remind us all that it is perhaps not enough to counter far-fetched claims with anthropological caveats about complexity, but we also need to be self-reflexive of our own positionality in studying digital mediations (cf Boyer 2012).

The paper focuses on three areas of research: digital visualities, gender and digital media, and online extreme speech. Each area is presented with a thorough review of recent research, along with descriptions of ongoing research projects, thus offering the reader a useful survey of the field. These fields are of course interrelated. For instance, investigations of digital visibility from a gender perspective can shed light on online extreme speech, not least sexist ‘net hate’ (yes, we have a word for this in Swedish, *näthat*). These fields can also be ambiguous. While digital visibility is a growing phenomenon, it by no means suggests that images have replaced text or other forms of communication, which are often mixed in intricate ways. At the same time we also need to pay attention to what is visualized without images, as in the recent #MeToo campaign (Uimonen 2019a).

Digital visualities offers an interesting field of inquiry, which is well presented in the paper, summarising various recent and ongoing initiatives. Having co-initiated the Nordic Network on Digital Visibility (2011-2014), I can add that it was the network’s interdisciplinary openness that proved particularly fruitful. Some scholars from this network are now active in the ECREA TWG on Visual Cultures, <https://research.uta.fi/visualcultures/>. While interdisciplinary approaches offer fruitful venues for the study of digital visualities, there is also something to be said for the strengths of anthropology. I certainly agree with the flexibility of anthropological toolboxes and the need to “continuously reassess these methodological tools and theoretical conceptualizations in the light of contemporary digital transformations and entanglements” (page 5). But I would also argue for the continued validity of earlier methods and theories. I am currently involved in *Collecting Social Photo*, a Nordic research project that explores how museums and archives can collect photographs in social media, see <http://collectingsocialphoto.nordiskamuseet.se/>. In this project, museum and archive staff grapple with conceptualising digital photographs in social media in terms of networked assemblages, mixtures of images and words, ubiquitous and ephemeral records of social life, a form of communication as well as memory making in everyday life (Hartig et al 2018). To collect these photographs, memory institutions have to think out of the box: engage with communities, create user-friendly online interfaces and actively participate in social media flows. As an anthropologist, I can contribute with theories and methods that can help make sense of this complexity, from earlier conceptualisations of photographs as relational objects (Edwards 2006) to experimental collaborative research methods, on- and offline. In digital anthropology, I have always appreciated how colleagues use ‘pre-digital’ theory to grasp digitally mediated social processes, a fruitful combination of ‘the old and the new.’

When it comes to gender and digital media, I am delighted by this effort to fill gaps in anthropological research. As noted by the presenters, unlike related disciplinary fields, “the field of media and digital anthropology has not developed any in-depth reflection on the ways in which digital media and technologies are entangled with everyday gendered practices across the world” (page 5). While the studies mentioned in this section mostly focus on women, anthropologists ought to pay due attention to all genders, thus capturing digitally mediated gendering, gendered media practices etc more fully. In addition, anthropologists can also bring forward cultural variations in gendering, thus showing how for instance femininity and masculinity are (re/de)constructed online in different cultural contexts around the world.

The section on online extreme speech outlines an important albeit problematic field of inquiry, which could fruitfully be cross-fertilized with the other streams on visuality and gender, while recognising pre-digital and beyond-digital linkages more fully. I find it quite astonishing that none of the papers or studies mentioned seems to pay attention to gender? Online extreme speech is a highly gendered social phenomenon, which clearly requires a gender sensitive lens, along with attention to racialized and classed dimensions. Similarly, historical contextualisation is a prerequisite in this field. The statement “How critical are digital media for the growth of xenophobic, nationalistic expressions?” (page 7, emphasis added) might come across as a disturbingly ahistorical postulation, not least when it comes to efforts to decolonize anthropology (Uimonen 2019b), while those familiar with its history know that online abusive language can be dated back to the early days of the Internet. I am not at all convinced that emphasising ‘morally neutral transgression’ to nuance current understandings of hate speech “will help to historicize online vitriol” (page 8), but I am concerned that it might depoliticise a phenomenon that begs for ethical positionality. Moreover, while online extreme speech is worth investigating more fully, it is equally important to investigate digitally mediated social movements and other forms of protest that offer alternatives to what might otherwise be reified as contemporary meta narratives.

The paper raises some questions, which I hope I have addressed by probing some of the premises for those questions. I look forward to constructive discussions that can enhance our knowledge about the topics addressed in this e-seminar and the EASA panel that preceded it.

Kind regards,

Paula Uimonen

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Uimonen, Paula. 2019b. Decolonising cosmopolitanism: An anthropological reading of Immanuel Kant and Kwame Nkrumah on the world as one. Critique of Anthropology (in press)

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17 October 2018

Thanks, Anna, and MediaAnthro,

I'm curious about the significance of Packer and Jordan's 5 characteristics in their book "Multimedia" (2000) - integration, interactivity, hypermedia, immersion, new forms of narrativity (<https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/2010/05/nudibranch-to-conceptualize-virtual.html>) - as well as presence, for said "Digital Turn." In what ways could coming into conversation with these lead to further developments theoretically?

I'm also curious about the role that an emerging realistic virtual earth might play here - conceptually like Google Street View with TIME SLIDER - and at the cellular and atomic levels too - / Maps / Earth / TensorFlow /all-languages and with realistic human and SPECIES' avatar bots.

For an actual-virtual anthropological example of a beginning realistic virtual earth, visit the Harbin Hot springs' gate (my physical-digital ethnographic field site) in Google Street View here ~ <http://tinyurl.com/p62rpcg> ~ <https://twitter.com/HarbinBook> ~ where you can "walk" down the road "4 miles" to Middletown and "amble" around the streets there, if inclined. And add some photos or videos or computer modeling or text if you have them - a new anthropological method I'm calling ethno-wiki-virtual-world-graphy - <https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/search/label/ethno-wiki-virtual-world-graphy>.

Best regards,

Scott

P.S. Here are some related wiki subjects at MIT OCW-centric WUaS (but which are not yet in other languages) -

- <https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Anthropology>
- [https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Media\\_Studies](https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Media_Studies)
- [https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Visual\\_Anthropology](https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Visual_Anthropology)
- [https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Virtual\\_Worlds](https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Virtual_Worlds)
- <https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Robotics>

- All accessible from here

<https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Subjects> -

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18 October 2018

Dear All,

We will be receiving the authors' response in the next couple of days, and then we will be opening the discussion to all.

all the best

Veronica

**Philipp Budka** [ph.budka@philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

18 October 2018

Dear All,

A big thank you to Anna, Paula and Christoph for providing such valuable comments! Since I was not able to attend the EASA panel in Stockholm and therefore could not participate to the discussion there, I am grateful for this opportunity to dive into some of the questions that have been emerging during this panel and that are discussed in the comments on the position paper. The commentators are mentioning a lot of important issues and relevant aspects in the anthropological engagements with “the digital”, “digitality”, “digital culture” and “digital life”. I therefore split my reply into smaller pieces. First, I am briefly touching upon the more general idea of a (possible) “digital turn” and what this might mean for the anthropology of media.

I completely agree with Paula and Anna that we have to be careful with generously identifying a “paradigm shift in the anthropological study of media” or in calling for yet another “turn” (in the study of this and that). When Sahana, Elisabetta and I were conceptualising the EASA panel, we were well aware of that, but thought that such provocative formulations might be useful to spark discussions and debates. On the other hand, when looking at this network's e-seminar series, for instance, there are hardly any media anthropological studies that are not dealing with “the digital”, in one way or the other (<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>). This, of course, is related to the increasing ubiquity, the growing societal and cultural relevance of digital media technologies. At least for me, the more general question remains: do anthropologists and other social scientists need new concepts, theories and methods to describe and explore digitally mediated life (see e.g. Rogers 2013 for “digital methods”)? Or are pre-digital conceptual and methodological tools just fine? To put it more precisely: (how) do emerging digital fields and life worlds require us to change or modify established conceptual and methodological approaches and tools, particularly in an anthropology of media? Like Anna, I would love to learn more about list members' experiences and thoughts here.

As the position paper and the comments indicate, there are many, obviously helpful, theoretical approaches and concepts – some rooted in anthropology, others from neighboring disciplines – that can be applied to the study of digital media and technologies: from material culture, to practice theory, to affordances. However, as John Postill and Mark Allen Peterson's show in their exchange about “the point of media anthropology” (2009), the anthropological study of media has been quite a conflicted research field. And almost ten years later, I think that it still is. While Postill suggests to draw more attention to the historical dimension in the anthropological (and comparative) study of media, Peterson persists that ethnography and ethnographic research remains “the most common feature” of anthropological research in media (Postill & Peterson 2009: 339). He then concludes that “the point of media anthropology is to broaden and deepen our understandings of human engagements with media through the application of the anthropological perspective – broadly comparative, holistic in its approach to complexity, ethnographically empirical, aware of historical contingency and relativistic” (ibid.). Our understanding of media anthropology, moreover, is (more or less) dependent on our understandings of “media” and/or “mediation” as well as “anthropology”. Consequently, and as Christoph emphasises in his comment, the conceptualisation of “the

digital” contributes to our understanding of media anthropology in digital times. But with Peterson, I suggest that we have to be careful in (re)constructing and “policing” boundaries here (ibid.: 343).

I am looking forward to a lively exchange of thoughts and ideas!

## References

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**Sahana Udupa** [sahana.udupa@lmu.de](mailto:sahana.udupa@lmu.de)

20 October 2018

Dear all

Many thanks to Anna, Christoph and Paula for their insightful and engaging comments. Philipp has already given the context for naming our panel as “the digital turn”, and we are glad it has been a productive provocation so far. Philipp has raised an important question on whether anthropology of the digital needs new concepts, theories and methods. Christoph suggests that the conceptual approach of affordances in relation to practices and embodied knowledge could be one way to advance further (see also Costa, 2018). While the question on how anthropologists should study the digital is an important one, the other question on why and how the digital should be studied using the full range of existing anthropological perspectives is equally important. What does it mean to apply anthropological perspectives – “broadly comparative, holistic in its approach to complexity, ethnographically empirical, aware of historical contingency and relativistic” perspective (Postill & Peterson, 2009) – in studying digitally mediated phenomena? “The digital turn” then not only implies that digital phenomena are a relatively new object of study for anthropologists, but it also signals a new responsibility for anthropologists to intervene in ongoing research approaches to digital transformations. It would be exciting to learn more on this from our list members.

1. Continuing along these lines, in our research project, we have sought to extend anthropological perspectives and ethnographic sensibility into the hotly debated issue of online vitriol. One immediate implication has been to ensure that analysis of online vitriol is not framed entirely by Eurocentric concerns. The effort to bring a global focus has inspired at least two departures: First, we acknowledge the variations in context (this includes contexts where regimes misuse the hate speech discourse to quash dissent and regime critical transgression; the Western export of the “hate speech” regulatory discourse that has had varied consequences for media freedoms; and the organized production of trolls using flexible, precarious and outsourced labor in Asia that Anna Cristina Pertierra refers to in her comment). Second, online extreme speech research has helped us to recognize the intermingling of exclusionary speech with new genres of digital humor and local idioms and practices. In both these moves, we problematize the overarching, seemingly self-evident category like hate speech, and indeed actively investigate what political effects such a discourse has triggered in countries beyond the West (as with the “human rights” discourse) or what structures of exploitation are put in place to extract “labor for vitriol” or what new online media cultures enable exclusionary speech. In so doing, extreme speech research draws strength from the true spirit of decolonizing anthropology. Carrying out ethnographic fieldwork among online extreme speech actors and the emphasis to place extreme speech

within diverse socio-political and historical contexts are essential to strengthen our ethical position, and back it with necessary insights into why online actors of extreme speech do what they do and what meanings they attach to these acts. Far from depoliticizing, such a perspective will be a necessary supplement to ongoing approaches to online hate. Connections between digital humor and extreme speech, or contestations around the distinction between civility and incivility online (de Seta, 2018) illustrate how ethnographic nuance can in fact reveal new areas where exclusion is normalized. They open up lines of inquiry that a normative framework might overlook.

2. The role of digital media in the growth (and not emergence) of right wing nationalism, as a historical postulation and a question of media practice, allows us to recognize the continuities and discontinuities in the mediatic contexts for right wing ideologies. Scholars have proposed “neonationalism” as a framework to understand these continuities and discontinuities in Europe (Banks & Gingrich, 2006; Hervik, 2011). In countries like India right wing nationalism with colonial roots has reproduced the central tenets of majoritarianism for a new generation of net savvy users while undergoing changes in the manner in which it articulates a broader aspirational discourse around economic progress. These continuities and discontinuities in the formations of nationalism as well as the nature of online abuse are important to consider while delineating exclusionary speech in relation to right wing nationalism as a deeper socio-political problem.

3. On the need to historicize online trolls and avoid assumptions that trolls have always been alt right “shitposters”, there is an interesting article by Phillips, Bayer and Coleman here: [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/z4k549/trolling-scholars-debunk-the-idea-that-the-alt-rights-trolls-have-magic-powers](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/z4k549/trolling-scholars-debunk-the-idea-that-the-alt-rights-trolls-have-magic-powers)

4. Gender and online abuse is a very important topic indeed, and a number of recent studies have shown that nasty, misogynistic messages and toxic masculinity online need academic attention as well as urgent policy actions (eg: Massanari, 2015). MeToo agitations have also illustrated the potential of digital media to mobilize action against gender based harassment.

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Massanari, A. (2015). #Gamergate and The Fapping: How Reddit’s algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media and Society*, 19(3), 329–346.

Postill, J., & Peterson, M. A. (2009). What is the point of media anthropology? *Social Anthropology* 17(3): 334-344.

Dear list,

a brief comment on Philipp question about the call for new concepts or methods to study “the digital”. Back in the 1980s when media anthropology really took off we studied radio and open-air television broadcasting (we still do). At that time, anthropologists used concepts and theories mainly from communication research but contributed with ethnographic studies on different cultures. Concepts such as myth and ritual we used by communication research way back in the 60s and 70s, as well as ethnographic methods. In other words, researchers at that time tried every tool they could to understand mass communication.

Anthropology came late to this conversation but moved very fast to catch up. So, fast-forward to the Internet era and we’re asking the same, which is very good. The answer, though, remains open. The very purpose of our e-seminars.

Francisco Osorio

Friends,

As Sahana already gave such a thoughtful response to some of the generous comments given here - and especially to those related to the theory of extreme speech - I will only add one quick observation here. I fully support when she says that the digital turn “not only implies that digital phenomena are a relatively new object of study for anthropologists, but it also signals a new responsibility for anthropologists to intervene in ongoing research approaches to digital transformations.”

Indeed, when we started working with debates on extreme speech (or whatever designation we choose to give this diverse class of phenomena), these debates were still largely dominated by a kind of political science/masscommunications/legal studies-oriented approach to what we perceived to be one of the most important emerging trends in digital cultures globally. Moreover, as she mentioned, this work was dominated by a kind of legal-normative framing of the problem. Why this is the case is of course easy to understand. It is good to remember that just a few years back there was both a real need to know both \*what was going on\* with the rise of violent online extremism and hate speech online (such as the debates around the refugee crisis) but also to respond to the broader question that was asked from research \*about what should be done about it.\* The debates have somewhat changed since with especially most of the extreme violent material now removed quickly from social media (at least in the Western context)– but a few years ago it literally was the Wild Wild West out there.

The VOX-Pol network that I have been involved with, for instance, was doing a lot of empirical research on different manifestations of violent extremism online; research that automatically drew the research closer to the orbit of policy engagement given the contemporaneity of the topic and its legal and security implications. So for somebody who works relatively nomadically across disciplines, the concept of extreme speech, I suppose, thus provided an excellent theoretical trojan horse to intervene in these debates in a way that would bring a more critical ethnographic sensibility to the table and foreground critical methodological elements that have been the bread-and-butter of media anthropology for

years. For anthropologists this may have been preaching to the converted; but outside anthropological circles, there was much that needed to be done as the focus was (and still is) more on quantitative methods and big data.

With this preamble in mind, in response to the questions posed about extreme speech, I suppose there are two different versions of extreme speech that we could perhaps differentiate in our discussion about the digital turn. On the one hand, there is its more theoretically promiscuous cousin that was developed as an intervention to debates outside anthropology. Because of this, (for me at least) extreme speech could be seen as much an intervention inspired by media anthropological methods to debates outside anthropology as it is a "new" theory (I am still not sure it ever needs to become a fully-fledged theory at all but rather remain a deconstructive strategy, but that is an entirely different debate). In this sense, the concept has been successful at least in the limited sense academic concepts ever are. The questions we posed I believe are now easier to ask outside anthropology as well, or at least there is a vocabulary to talk across the table.

But, on the one hand - given its media anthropological roots – there is also the relationship of extreme speech to anthropological theory itself. In other words, now that the concept has done its detour to debates outside anthropology, it can perhaps safely return “home” and begin engaging in a more sustained dialogue of what it means for anthropological scholarship and where it could be developed further. This, I believe, has been given an excellent start here and I thank Sahana for addressing in detail the many timely questions raised and driving this forward.

Best regards,

Dr. Matti Pohjonen

**Philipp Budka** [ph.budka@philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

23 October 2018

Thank you Francisco!

Your comment reminds me of the interdisciplinary volume "Media Anthropology" edited by Eric Rothenbuhler and Mihai Coman (2005). In their introductory chapter they discuss what they call the "promise of media anthropology" and what anthropological concepts and methods can contribute to the interdisciplinary field of media studies. They argue that media anthropology "prepares media studies for more complete engagement with the symbolic construction of reality and the fundamental importance of symbolic structures, myth, and ritual in everyday life" (Coman & Rothenbuhler 2005: 1). So among anthropology's contributions are concepts widely used in anthropology such as culture, ritual, religion, performance or myth as well as the method and idea of ethnography - or to be more precise ethnographic/anthropological fieldwork, I would add. So for Coman and Rothenbuhler (2005), one of the "promises of media anthropology" is the exploration of new application areas for these concepts and methodological approaches, which have been part and parcel of anthropology for more than 100 years.

There are, of course, also emerging digital areas or fields where "old" anthropological concepts and methods can be put to good use. But I would also argue that these new fields require media and/or digital anthropologists to constantly rethink and modify established concepts and methods. Thus (re)considering other disciplinary approaches to the digital.

Best,

Philipp

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**Elisabetta Costa** [e.i.g.costa@rug.nl](mailto:e.i.g.costa@rug.nl)

23 October 2018

Thank you all for your comments.

I add few brief reflections. As noted by Christoph, the panel's aim was to keep the debate on 'the digital' open and ongoing. Technologies are rapidly transforming, and anthropology's goal is to understand how these transformations are contributing to social change. I am currently teaching undergraduate students in Media Studies. The distinction between 'non-digital media' and 'digital media' does not make sense to them. The electronic media they use in their everyday life are digital. Also, as pointed out by Philip and Anna, many media anthropologists are switching their attention to digital technologies, simply because electronic media are now digital.

I have been working on social media and people's everyday life in southeast Turkey since 2012. More recently, I started a new ethnography on social media and Kurdish asylum seekers in Milan. I was based at the Department of Anthropology at UCL, which has a Master Programme and a Centre for Digital Anthropology that build on material culture studies. My PhD, on the other hand, engaged more with the literature on media anthropology, foreign correspondents and journalism.

The technological transformations seem to suggest the need of more cross fertilization between different traditions in anthropology. I am sure that media anthropology could benefit from material culture studies, as well as digital anthropology could enlarge its conversation by taking into account the contribution of social anthropologists who worked on media and the visual. The boundaries between different traditions (media, visual, and digital) are now even more blurred than few years ago, and even less necessary. We can talk of a 'visual turn' or a 'digital turn' in media anthropology, but we can perhaps talk of a 'media turn' in digital anthropology. Or we can avoid the expression "turn" at all. I believe that the best way to expand the conversation on digitally-mediated social change is to intensify the dialogue between different traditions and schools. The panel at EASA and this e-seminar are trying to achieve this goal.

All the best,

Elisabetta Costa

The nature of the digital revolution is that everything will soon be digital.

Elisabetta's comments remind me of a debate by the advisory board of the Film Studies major within our university's Communication Department almost ten years ago.

There was concern among some of the core faculty that some courses that contributed to the major, including mine, included lots of different types of media: anime, advertising, YouTube Let's Play videos and other things they did not regard as film. I explained that as far as I was concerned, "film studies" was the study of moving visual narratives, and that encompassed a lot of ground. Film, after all, is the name of a technology, not a semiotic category or unit, and if they limited themselves to images on cellulose moving through a projector their entire field would be extinct in a decade. Of course, they recognized this, but it led to some real concern they had about where one drew the line on what was encompassed by "film" in our new digital age.

20 years ago the "digital turn" was exciting and novel. Now it is mundane. What is not digital in media studies? Even print newspapers on paper are created digitally and almost all archive digitally and most have digital as well as hard copy distribution. Many news producers are exclusively digital. Movies are distributed digitally and increasingly produced digitally. Radio is digital, television is digital, most contemporary games are digital...the real interesting issues are perhaps about distribution and remediation and convergence.

There's nothing wrong with the mundane. Life is comprised of the practices of everyday life and increasingly these are digitalized in some way or another. And the term digital is still exciting in some arenas. But I suspect that if we tie ourselves too firmly to it as a description of what we do, we will find ourselves challenged a decade from now in the same way my film studies colleagues were as we struggle to define the center of what we do as scholars of the "digital."

I'd like to start out my response with a shameless plug, but it is related to the questions that you have asked, Sahana, Elisabetta, and Phillip, in your wonderful paper on The Digital Turn. I am particularly thinking about your question: "How has this phenomenon been studied?"

LOUD <[https://youtu.be/\\_fcEB6rM6\\_0](https://youtu.be/_fcEB6rM6_0)> is a short work about noise pollution in the Salish Sea and I was working on while reading the paper and first responses.

[https://youtu.be/\\_fcEB6rM6\\_0](https://youtu.be/_fcEB6rM6_0)

The paper and responses in this seminar have been incredibly enlightening. This last response from Mark Peterson really resonated with my experience having started research when digital media/culture was fairly young and stigmatized. I remember a group of very smart grads gathered in Hamburg in the 90's (Media Anthro Summer School) thinking I was a bit crazy to ask them to imagine what digital ethnography might look like in a decade or two. At that point it still seemed for many like digital ethnography would be an oxymoron. Ethnographers would become something other than ethnographers if they started to study digital cultures. We all know better now, but we have to admit that along with taking ethnography to new worlds

and interworlds (digital and analog), we have transformed the working definitions of ethnography in order to do so. We adapted.

Perhaps one change for us as scholars has been the ability to go beyond text and talk in terms of method and dissemination? Not sure how well it relates, but I've been producing music videos along with fellow scholars, musicians, and scientists for environmental partners. All digital, of course. Rather than a departure from ethnographic fieldwork I've been thinking about this digital work as "film-as-fieldwork" (but just now realized that for sake of alliteration I've sacrificed accuracy. It's digital, so not "film.") This is my own odd way of doing ethnography. To be honest, Ecosong.Net is more accurately described as the outcome of a more traditional ethnographic field study that preceded it. But, increasingly the digital "application" of that earlier field research, Ecosong.net <<http://ecosong.net/>>, is taking over and this is how I do fieldwork as well as how I try to make it matter a bit beyond the academy. It matters less as digital artifact than as process (i.e., cat memes are far more important as digital artifacts). Through making these videos we help organize and mobilize community. As many eseminar papers and responders have noted, digital culture makes more sense as a verb, a process of becoming rather than a "thing" to study. Mary Douglas's definition has often resonated in this regard, a "common stock of symbols" and therefore a semiotic process rather than a superorganic thing as Kroeber and earlier generations imagined it (but not forgetting that there are fairly solid political economic and even ecological structures that seem to be somewhat immune to our more creative ability to resignify the world; digital cultures seem no more agentic in that regard than what's come before, perhaps less so if one looks at the Animal channel-style imaginary vs. the material reality of people, pets, and livestock rapidly replacing all other mammals; 4% of mammals live in conditions reasonably conceived of as non-domesticated. No one would say they want that, and few imagine it that way, but it is happening nonetheless).

Ecosong.net and LOUD <[https://youtu.be/\\_fcEB6rM6\\_0](https://youtu.be/_fcEB6rM6_0)> are my imperfect and partial responses to some of the excellent questions posed in The Digital Turn, including how I study the digital. I'd really like to hear others' answers to that question. How has your research changed along with the digital? I hit my limits in regard to what I felt I could know by asking questions and hanging out with informants. I had to start making digital media to understand some of the production processes that interested me. Have a lot of others taken that particular digital turn or have I just accidentally taken an off ramp?

Thanks Sahana, Elisabetta, and Phillip. Truly wonderful work. It was time to synthesize some of the excellent work that's been done in regard to digital culture, such as Sarah Pink's work that you've so effectively addressed here. Like the other Mark P I found it a great think piece for examining my own research as it relates to the field(s).

Regards,

Mark Pedelty

**Sahana Udupa** [sahana.udupa@lmu.de](mailto:sahana.udupa@lmu.de)

29 October 2018

Mark Pedelty's stimulating comments have raised many interesting questions. As he rightly notes, understanding digital culture as a process of becoming rather than a thing to study is an important point of departure. Studying the digital has indeed made us to redefine the working definitions of ethnography. The challenge is still on, as new technologies hit the scenes even before we have finished making sense of how earlier networking sites had rearranged social

relations. Taking a cue from Mark's shameless plug :), I share our own little experiment with studying the digital by inhabiting the digital. With Ian M. Cook, we started a podcast series Online Gods as a part of our project on digital political cultures. We knew it was not only about the time tested principle of disseminating research, but also something that the digital had enabled us to do. In each episode, after a discussion with a scholar about a relevant concept from anthropology of media and politics, we talk to an Online God – people who have made a difference in public discourse (for good or bad) using digital resources. At first it was just an exciting way to talk about our research, but we saw that inviting people on the podcast had opened up a new way of engaging our research participants. What kind of ethnography would this entail? How can we think of disembodied conversations that come with the knowledge of wider circulation as a way to “enter” the field?

On the one hand, interactive environments of the digital are a new way of doing ethnography and an effort to reach out to communities beyond the academy. But on the other, it is intriguing to see the growing pressure on scholars to become active on digital networks. No doubt this is linked to new trends that tie evaluative metrics with new media visibility – yet another assault on the autonomy of academic practice. What is intriguing is also that media anthropologists sometimes feel they need to be part of digital circulation, without which a certain authenticity of knowledge is not possible. This was never the case when anthropologists studied newspapers or television that involved cost intensive technologies. How much of this felt pressure to produce in the digital sphere a function of the affordability of digital social media? In other words, as media anthropologists, are we drawn to the trap of participation? Should we bemoan or celebrate this?

Thanks and Regards.

**Nina Grønlykke Mollerup** [ninagmollerup@gmail.com](mailto:ninagmollerup@gmail.com) 29 October 2018

Dear all,

Thank you so much for a stimulating e-seminar so far. It is great to broaden the discussion out with comments from many who were not present in Stockholm. I agree very much with Mark Peterson's caution about tying ourselves too firmly to the digital – perhaps this is also a reminder to hold on to the discussion of anthropology's contribution vis-a-vis other fields that engage with the digital (some also ethnographically). And fortunately, anthropologists do still study such un-digital media as graffiti.

Taking a cue from Philipp and Mark Pedelty, I would like to if not describe how I study the digital at least mention some of my challenges with it - not least because this also speaks to how media anthropology intersects with with other fields. I would be very interested in hearing how other list members work interdisciplinarily to study the digital.

To me, one of the most significant aspects of the digital in terms of ethnography is the way the digital can serve to open up places to other places. One of my challenges in studying this in the context of war and conflict has been that I have not properly understood the technicalities behind this opening up – and often violent shutting down – of places. In war times, how does it matter to the connection of photographers in Aleppo that an internet cables runs directly from Aleppo through Turkey and how can the government retain control of these cables if they do not control the areas they run through or surface at? One might question whether this is my job as an anthropologist, but internet connections have at times been a matter of life and death for the people who have in different ways participated in my research,

so something tells me that we ought to pay attention to this and try to understand it even if it means venturing away from safe territory – that is, without turning techies into just another tribe. Can we understand the social significance of such connections without some kind of understanding of how they are enabled and the power struggles this entails?

Fruitful interdisciplinary digital studies are of course also growing out of collaborations between anthropologists and big data scholars. I am part of one such project which is only in its nascent phase, so I wouldn't have many challenges or insights to share at this point, but I would be very interested of such experiences of others.

Cheers,

Nina

**Veronica Barassi** [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk](mailto:v.barassi@gold.ac.uk)

31 October 2018

Hi All,

I don't believe my email made it to the list yesterday, my apologies. We decided to extend the seminar for another week to give you the opportunity to send in your comments and questions. I will be closing the seminar next Tuesday.

all best

Veronica

**Mark Allan Peterson** [petersm2@miamioh.edu](mailto:petersm2@miamioh.edu)

2 November 2018

Three more thoughts suggested by recent posts:

First, when listing the things which we might mean by "digital" I neglected perhaps the most important: digitalization. Matti's comments on extreme/hate speech reminded me that a lot of what fascinated about new digital technologies are the ways they enable, impede and otherwise transform practices. Hate speech used to be a difficult business; bit by bit, since the end of WWII, rules of what could be acceptable said in public space in most countries made hate speech hard to come by, and usually easy to contain, criticize and ridicule when it occurred. New digital forms of communication have made it far easier for those engaged in varying forms of hate speech/ extreme speech to locate receptive audiences, to participate in such speech and to laud those who produce such speech ("speech" here including such semiotic elements as "memes" and "tweets"), This activity certainly appears to be linked to the rise of political actors whose flirtations on the edge of hate/extreme speech open public opportunities for the re-emergence of such speech in public venues from which it had been excluded.

Second, Sahana and Mark Pedelty's comments remind me of the challenges and precarity of digital scholarship. It is increasingly promoted and yet its utility for tenure and promotion is unclear and varies widely across and between institutions. My own web site ([connectedincairo.com](http://connectedincairo.com)<<http://connectedincairo.com>>) was, for about three years, widely listed as a resource for people doing research on the Arab Spring. I have moved on, and only update and post to the web site a few time a year. Yet I have over 500 subscribers and in

excess of 10,000 visits per year. What is my responsibility to continue to curate and archive this resource? What will happen to it when I retire or die and stop paying \$25/year to keep the domain name alive? I have seen a dozen academic projects created, and then decline and die, some with greater rapidity than others. How do scholars access such materials if they become significant decades later? Years ago, when I became interested in the history of media anthropology, I was able to find some of Prof. Conrad Reining's old typewritten newsletters trying to link anthropologists and journalists in DC during the late 1960s moldering away at the Smithsonian. Where will our digital work be archived and how will it be made accessible to scholars decades from now?

Finally, Nina's comments draw attention to the physicality of the digital. Aside from the current work she mentioned, her dissertation was on media during and immediately following the Egyptian "revolution" of 2011, and one of the most interesting events was the physical shutting down of the Internet by the Mubarak regime. Such things remind us that there are physical pipelines and gateways, routes and paths. I've been thinking about this since last summer when I was reading a draft of my daughter's thesis on digital sustainability. Apparently, the cloud is not just a magical vacuum but requires the continual creation of data centers whose ravenous appetite for electricity, and need to be continually cooled, gives them a significant and growing carbon footprint. The devices that access and store digital information require rare materials mined in places like Democratic Republic of the Congo, contributing to Congo's struggles over control of its own resources, internally and externally. To what extent does the physicality of the digital matter to the questions we ask as anthropologists of the digital?

Mark Allen Peterson

**Philipp Budka** [ph.budka@philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

5 November 2018

Dear All,

Thank you for the discussion so far. I would like to comment very briefly on Mark's second thought.

It is important to consider openness, accessibility and archiving of digital research and data, and to take the necessary steps. This, I believe, cannot be done by utilizing commercial "walled gardens" - as Berners-Lee called it - such as Facebook, Academia.edu or ResearchGate, but by establishing and/or supporting existing open websites, archives and repositories. Such initiatives might not be very visible to the general public, but can be found at (1) institutional or national level as well as (2) on a global level for individual researchers or organizations.

The University of Vienna, as many other universities, is providing a repository for uploading, archiving and using digital content: <https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/> The Internet Archive has been creating a non-profit digital library for more than 20 years: <https://archive.org/> And SocArXiv has developed an open archive for the social sciences to share research and data: <https://socopen.org/>

I am convinced that we as researchers have the responsibility to support such projects and to keep our - often publicly funded - research open and accessible.

Best,

Philipp

P.S. The EASA Media Anthropology Network decided not to move to commercial environments, such as Facebook, long before the latest data scandals. This, of course, requires network supporters to spend more time and energy to keep the open environment, that is the website and activities such as our e-seminars, up and running. It would be nice to see that institutions and organizations not only support offline network activities, but also such digital/online endeavours.

**Mona Abdel-Fadil** [mona.abdel-fadil@media.uio.no](mailto:mona.abdel-fadil@media.uio.no)

5 November 2018

Dear all,

Thank you all so much for this most interesting seminar and for the great comments so far. I will add a few reflections from where I am at.

I would like to second Sahana's point about the importance of contextualizing extreme speech, in terms of both how extreme it is (i.e. in relation to what or whom), and how the proponents of such views themselves, interpret their perspectives on a spectrum from very extreme to mainstream. That said, I think a lot of us struggle with how to – and in some cases – whether to - fairly or empathetically portray extreme views from an emic perspective. I do think it is important to find ways of discussing extreme views, which are not moralistic and judgemental, but at the same time I do not think we should feign neutrality. Many of us working on such themes, have a personal stance that often will not coincide with those we study. I do not mean to say that our research is better if we hold the same views as those we study, I just want to draw attention to how incredibly tricky it is to do both. i.e. both be non-moralistic in our approach to a worldview and at the same time oppose such views at a personal level. Some researchers resolve this by taking a very active stance against such views in their writing, I personally do not believe it is necessarily helpful to define the people I study as 'racist' yet – I find it problematic to feign neutrality. I am not sure that I have figured out how to work this out, but in my research, I often end up on the trying to understand what the online anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim sentiment is 'made of', while at the same time showcasing the type of othering practices its proponents may engage in. I am curious as to how you work through similar tensions, when analysing and writing up your research on extreme views that you may be far from sympathetic to on a personal level.

The ways in which digital technologies are used and shape experiences of war and armed conflict is incredibly important, and I look forward to following your work, Nina. Control of the internet and internet cables has been a pertinent issue in several of the political transitions that are part of the so-called 'Arab spring' and warrants more in depth analysis, inline with the growing scholarship on the use of smart phones among refugees as they flee from war.

I want to draw attention to methodology. There seems to be a trend in media anthropology to follow a media practices and multi-sited fieldwork approach and, while I believe that is incredibly valuable (and have done some of this in my previous- research on Islam Online Arabic), I do not believe it is the only valuable approach. I really think it comes down to you are trying to study. My latest research seems so 'old school' by the new shiny approaches. It is an online ethnography of a huge Facebook group where (amongst other things) xenophobic and Islamophobic ideas are circulated in an attempt to 'protect' Christianity and Norway. With over 100 000 likes, and lots of activity – and a swift shift from rallying for increasing

the visibility of Christianity in the public sphere to 'hating' Muslims – I was interested in the group dynamics and how conflict is performed among the various participants. I found that I kept on gaining new insights, and even found new types of participants, the more data I analysed. So I did not disperse my attention to other empirical cases or other platforms. Because, I stuck to this approach, I was also able to shed light on the at times, uneven emotional labour that may be poured into performing conflicts online. My point is that a virtual ethnography may still have its merits, and I fear that the method will be antiquated (if it isn't already) if we are not more nuanced about WHAT the various methodologies may help us understand. I am utterly convinced that I would not have been able to reach the same insights, had I chosen to study a few of the active participants across multiple platforms or shadowed them. But, I am fairly certain I would have learnt something useful about something else, and probably been equally fascinated. Yet, because I chose to study the intricate ways in which people affectively perform conflict and contribute to amplifying, intensifying, or subduing conflict within one specific online space, and then compared my findings to research done with other methodological approaches, I am now able to develop a more general theoretical framework for understanding the politics of affect in social media, which helps shed light on the work that different emotions do, and how they affect mediated conflicts, and contribute to more extreme speech. Different disciplinary and various ethnographic approaches to digital media may together deepen our understandings of related phenomena (however generic this may sound).

Last but not least, I am very grateful to Mark and other scholars who put together websites like Connected in Cairo, as they can be an invaluable resource to researchers in the field, but I understand that they often rely on individuals to keep them afloat. I have been part of collective of researchers to set up a collaborative blog, and we will hopefully manage to keep it going for years to come. To those of you are working on religion, I encourage you to get in touch if you would be interested in writing for the Religion: Going Public blog which publishes posts aimed at non-academics. Here you can experiment with writing up your research in a more entertaining way. Here is the website: <http://religiongoingpublic.com>

Best,  
Mona

**Sahana Udupa** [sahana.udupa@lmu.de](mailto:sahana.udupa@lmu.de)

7 November 2018

Dear all

Mark Allen Peterson has highlighted the challenges of creating and curating our work digitally. To add to Philipp's list, there is also <https://www.zenodo.org>. I once heard someone remarking that the worst thing you could do to your project is launch a website. Because there are just so many of them. All of us do it all the time, no doubt, and I do believe our effort to start and maintain websites is not without value. But we should now also find the right place to link and curate these different initiatives so we can continue to draw reference and learn.

Mona Abdel-Fadil's dilemma resonates with our experience of interviewing right-wing actors in India and Germany. It is not at all easy to sit down and share the table with people whose views you find unacceptable, and even harder to do any sort of long term immersive ethnography. I have noticed how the scene of interaction changes significantly when they see a researcher like me who does not share any of their identity markers (gender, nationality, ethnicity, race etc.) or fit into their aspired social-political world. In some ethnographic encounters, I have also noticed an effort to normalize the image of right-wing supporters, by

dressing up (usually in a very formal suit), a comportment of reasoned deliberation, and switching between “I will tell you what” sort of confidence and “that’s too political for me to answer” type of evasiveness – a combination of hesitation and defiance in the same meeting. I have found these tense encounters especially productive in understanding the intriguing discrepancy in the politeness they show during in-person interviews and the unabashed rudeness they would display online. I have discussed some of these issues using Goffmanian perspectives and by examining the participatory logics of new media. What is important, I believe, is that we pay attention to the “insider views” by cultivating a “working morality” (Boromisza-Habashi, 2013). This is needed to understand the manoeuvring within the right wing space and strengthen our critique by analysing how actors shape and reproduce right wing ideological formations from various points of entry and exit (Udupa, 2018). An inspiring source of work is Sindre Bangstad’s “Doing fieldwork among people whom we do not necessarily like”. <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/AN.584>

Sahana Udupa

**Nina Grønlykke Mollerup** [ninagmollerup@gmail.com](mailto:ninagmollerup@gmail.com) 7 November 2018

If I may make a last comment, adding to Mark, Mona, Philipp and Sahana's comments on internet archives, I wonder if anthropologists might be in a good position to help address some of the unequal structures that guides this archiving. As already mentioned, the cable systems are extremely important, along with other sorts of infrastructure of course and their (unequal) distribution have important political and geographical histories. In the same manner, the archiving of the internet draws on and reproduces these unequal structures. A recent example materialised for me when I was trying to get around authorities' block of Mada Masr in Egypt - perhaps the most important, critical journalistic media in a military dictatorship with substantial geopolitical significance. I thought [web.archive.org](http://web.archive.org) might provide an albeit delayed and limited way around the block, but found the site was only archived at one level, so I would only get the titles of articles, not the actual articles. For comparison, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, [DR.dk](http://DR.dk) is archived at several levels.

Cheers,

Nina

**Elisabetta Costa** [e.i.g.costa@rug.nl](mailto:e.i.g.costa@rug.nl) 7 November 2018

Just one final comment that builds on Sahana, Philip and Mark's reflections. I believe the digital opens up wonderful opportunities for anthropologists to make their work accessible to the wider audience. For example, the whywepost <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post>> project is a very good example of how digital media and technologies could be used to disseminate research findings beyond the academic community. To answer Sahana's questions, I think we should celebrate this. Digital media offer wonderful opportunities for participation in public debates, but we should also envisage ways not to turn this into a burden for academics, who are already overwhelmed by work load. How can we make sure that public dissemination is taken into account in evaluations and promotions as much as a journal paper? Or, which are the other ways to reward the huge effort and work necessary to make videos, multimedia contents, or podcasts?

Thanks all for the wonderful discussion,

Best,

**Francisco Osorio** [fosorio@uchile.cl](mailto:fosorio@uchile.cl)

7 November 2018

About what Elisabetta Costa said on new ways to share our research, I set up the YouTube channel for the Department of Anthropology at University of Chile. Most of the videos are interviews trying to communicate in common language some content, but I made a 7 min. film about how anthropologists conducted interviews in Chile in the 1970s with the help of students as actors. I need to work on English subtitles but in short the first scene is James Spradley definition of ethnographic interview, second scene is the interview as such and the third scene shows the anthropologists coding with scissors and using colour pencils, just to show the contrast with Atlas.ti.

The ethnographic interview in the 1970s

<https://youtu.be/NkaEc6AB3y0>

Best,

**Philipp Budka** [ph.budka@philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

7 November 2018

Dear Nina and All,

As far as I know, the internet archive's way back machine (<https://archive.org/web/>) is only able to archive websites and their content if these websites allow for being crawled (e.g. <https://blog.archive.org/2014/10/27/archive-it-crawling-the-web-together/>). In addition, I suppose that such tools are also struggling with technical issues when trying to archive content that is hidden somewhere in a complex website/server structure.

You can, for example, access a 13 year old Media Anthropology Network website version including the working papers (PDFs) without problems:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20050309194244/http://www.philbu.net:80/media-anthropology/workingpapers.htm>

I use the archive as a research tool that is potentially able to add historical depth to, e.g., anthropological or ethnographic research in digital culture.

Best,

Philipp

**Scott MacLeod** [sgkmacleod@worlduniversityandschool.org](mailto:sgkmacleod@worlduniversityandschool.org)

7 November 2018

Dear Francisco, Philipp, Sahana, Nina, Mark, MediaAnthro and All,

Thanks for this far-reaching focus on the Digital Turn re Anthropology - and archiving. In support of this conversation, I'd like to contribute the following seeds of resources, (and re Francisco's "a brief comment on Philipp question about the call for new concepts or methods

to study "the digital". beginning this particular thread ...).

A)

Library Resources wiki subject page planned in each of all 7097 living languages (in Ethnologue) & 8481 languages (in Glottolog) at World Univ & Sch (WUaS) [https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Library\\_Resources](https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Library_Resources) - which pages can grow potentially infinitely.

Since WUaS is wiki we can all add online library resources from and in these languages (planned again in all 7097 living languages <https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Languages>). World Univ & Sch donated ourselves/WUaS to Wikidata/Wikibase in 2015 for co-development, and as a consequence got this new WUaS Miraheze MediaWiki above in 2017, where Wikidata/Wikibase (Wikipedia) is in ~300 languages. WUaS's "front end" isn't yet interoperable with our WUaS Wikidata / Wikibase "back end" structured knowledge database.

B)

World Univ & Sch is seeking to facilitate a realistic virtual earth for Libraries - conceptually think Google Street View with TIME SLIDER / Maps / Earth / Translate / TensorFlow + - where we can all add libraries to this. For example, take a video of a physical archive - say an aisle of books in a library - convert this digitally from video to 3D interactivity (program not written yet), and add links to any given book or newspaper to the actual readable printed content. You can see some pictures of how this might work here - <https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/2016/10/cetonia-aurata-how-many-further-ways-we.html> - and here - <https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/2016/12/san-gabriel-wilderness-libraries-in-all.html> and <https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/2015/11/lions-in-trees-all-libraries-all.html> and <https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/2015/11/lilies-in-garlands-can-world-university.html> (and a realistic virtual earth for museums as well).

This new social science method which I'm calling ethno-wiki-virtual-world-graphy - <https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/search/label/ethno-wiki-virtual-world-graphy> -allows for the politics of inclusion+++ , since, like in Wikipedia (with its own developing history of the politics of inclusion), we all in ~300 languages can add resources, for example to Street View, or to wiki World Univ & Sch.

And re Nina's "To me, one of the most significant aspects of the digital in terms of ethnography is the way the digital can serve to open up places to other places. ..."

Nina and all, I'm seeking in this realistic virtual earth to develop actual-virtual, physical-digital direct correspondence as well - e.g. place-wise i.e. actual-virtual place or field site, - so opening physical places to and from virtual ones too - and also e.g. robotics-wise i.e. physical-digital robotics ... and all in ONE realistic virtual earth. This would thus inform robotics potentially too re the Digital Turn in Anthropology. For example, and as a starting place, Lego robots made from Lego WeDo2 and Lego Mindstorms EV3 robotics kits for learning also could be made virtually in Brick Street View and thus in Google Street View (in development). I just gave a talk about this - "HARBIN AND AVATAR BOTS: Robotics and Tourism" - in the UC Berkeley Anthropology department on Fr. Oct 26, 2018 which you'll find here in video and with slides+ - <https://scott-macleod.blogspot.com/2018/10/lewis-river->

[washington-state-uc.html](http://washington-state-uc.html) - if interested.

(I also shared some related thoughts on the Digital Turn in this MediaAnthro discussion on October 17th, which I'm posting below again). How is the related Robotics' Turn in Anthropology taking form re the Digital Turn in Anthropology, I wonder? Thank you for this very timely and topical MediaAnthro conversation.

Cheers,

Scott

**Veronica Barassi** [v.barassi@gold.ac.uk](mailto:v.barassi@gold.ac.uk)

9 November 2018

Dear All,

The E-seminar is now closed. Once again thank you for all your comments, thoughts and insightful debates. I am sorry I did not have the time to contribute, this time around.

If you have a paper ready and you would like to take part to an E-seminar, don't hesitate to contact us, we are always looking for new contributors!

all best

Veronica