

Innovation in Digital Culture Research

Internationalization at Home LaCaixa Seminars

Internet Interdisciplinary Institute, IN3-UOC

mediacions research group

Innovation in Digital Culture Research is a set of interdisciplinary seminars and workshops that aims to explore innovative ethnographic and qualitative methodologies of social research in the field of culture, media and digital technologies. Nowadays, ethnography has a wide acceptance among researchers and doctoral students interested in phenomena related with digital culture and network society. However, the spread of ethnography among the social sciences and its relationship with digital media and technologies has brought to the fore challenging debates regarding the epistemological foundations of method in social sciences, and how creativity and innovation is embodied in research practices and objects of study. During these sessions we will have the opportunity to listen to and to discuss with internationally recognised academic scholars different ways of thinking and doing ethnographic research across and about digital media and technologies.

The seminars are open to researchers, scholars and students interested in actualizing and debating about creativity and innovation in ethnographic and qualitative fieldwork, the epistemological and methodological assumptions that we take into the field when studying Digital Culture and Social Media, and the interdisciplinary ways to approach the study of social change, development and technological innovation. Moreover, after the seminars, each visiting scholar will conduct a close-up workshop to discuss in depth concrete aspects of ongoing researches brought out by the participants.

Innovation in Digital Culture Research is addressed to anyone facing the challenges associated with conducting 'fieldwork' in digital environments. This includes participants from either humanities or social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, communication and media studies, political science, urban geography, including design, informatics, and information sciences.

Free attendance, registration at mediacions@gmail.com

November

Open Seminars:

Ethnography for theorising media and change

Dr. John Postill, Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University.

25 Nov. 16:00-19:00

Sala Mitchell, IN-3, MediaTic

Roc Boronat, 117 Barcelona

This presentation will address the question of how to study media and social change ethnographically. To do so I draw from the relevant media anthropology literature, including my own research in Malaysia and Spain. I argue that anthropologists are well positioned to contribute to the interdisciplinary study of media and social change. However, to do so we must first shift our current focus on media and 'social changing' (i.e. how things are changing) to the study of media in relation to actual social changes, e.g. the suburbanisation of Kuala Lumpur in the 1970s to 2000s, or the secularisation of morality in post-Franco Spain. This shift from the ethnographic present continuous to the ethnographic past tense – a move from potential changes to actual changes in the recent past – does not require that we abandon our commitment to ethnography in favour of social history. Rather, it demands new forms of 'diachronic ethnography' that can handle the finiteness of actual social changes.

Bio:

Dr John Postill is Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow at RMIT University, Melbourne (2013-2016), and Digital Anthropology Fellow at University College London (UCL). His publications include *Localizing the Internet* (2011), *Media and Nation Building* (2006) and the co-edited volume *Theorising Media and Practice* (2010, with Birgit Bräuchler). Currently he is conducting comparative anthropological research on new forms of digital activism and civic engagement in Indonesia, Spain and globally. He is also writing a book provisionally titled *Digital Activism and Popular Protest in the 21st Century* and the co-edited volume *Theorising Media and Change* (with Elisenda Ardèvol and Sirpa Tenhunen).

More information at: <http://johnpostill.com>

**Mobile Mediations: An Ethnography of Infrastructure
on the Border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic**

Dr. Heather A. Horst, Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow,
School of Media and Communication, RMIT University.

26 Nov. 16:00-19:00

**Sala Mitchell, IN-3, MediaTic
Roc Boronat, 117 Barcelona**

Mobile phones have come to play an increasingly important role in the social and economic activities of the poor throughout the world. The mobile phone's capacity for storing and sharing information, credit and other forms of value provides many poor and low income individuals with the opportunity to create, shape and transform their social and economic mobility and to participate in a broader palette of state, commercial and financial organizations. Drawing upon ethnographic research among Haitians living on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, this presentation explores the role of mobile phones in cross-border movement. The focus upon the border seeks to make 'ethnographically visible' the continuing salience and subversion of the state bureaucracy, mobile phone companies and related infrastructure that increasingly mediate different forms of movement and migrants' ability to mitigate their experience of poverty and marginality. By integrating the attention to infrastructures with the focus upon users, consumers and meaning that have dominated the past decade of mobile media and communication research, I conclude by highlighting the importance of bringing together the political, economic and symbolic dimensions of mobile mediations.

Bio:

Dr. Heather A. Horst is a Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow and Co-Director of the Digital Ethnography Research Centre in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. A sociocultural anthropologist by training, Heather's research focuses upon new media, material culture, and transnational migration, including two current ARC Linkage projects that examine the role of mobile, social and locative media and the emergence of mobile money across the Asia-Pacific. Her publications include *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication* (Horst and Miller, Berg, 2006), *Living and Learning with Digital Media: Findings from the Digital Youth Project* (Ito, Horst, et al., 2009, MIT Press), *Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with Digital Media* (Ito, et al. 2010, MIT Press) and *Digital Anthropology* (Horst and Miller, Eds. 2012, Berg).

More information at: <http://heatherhorst.com/> and <http://www.digital-ethnography.net/>

Workshops:

Thinking ethnographically about media and change

Dr. John Postill, Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University.

27 Nov. 11:00-13:30

Sala 706 IN·3 MediaTic

Roc Boronat, 117 Barcelona

Dr. John Postill will convene an interdisciplinary workshop with early career researchers and PhD students on the possibilities and challenges of using an ethnographic approach to social science research. Prospective participants are required to submit an outline of the topics they wish to discuss based on their research experience along with their registration by 18 November (max. 500 words).

To register please write to mediaccions@gmail.com

(as space is limited, registration will be on a strictly first come, first served basis)

Making research in a digital world

Dr. Heather A. Horst, Director, Digital Ethnography Research Centre, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University.

28 Nov. 11:00-13:30

Sala 706 IN·3 MediaTic

Roc Boronat, 117 Barcelona

Dr. Heather A. Horst will convene an interdisciplinary workshop session with researchers and PhD students to discuss epistemological and methodological possibilities and challenges of carrying out research in, through and about the digital world. Participants shall send an outline with their topics they wish to discuss based on their research experience along with their registration by 18 November (max. 500 words).

To register please write to mediaccions@gmail.com

(as space is limited, registration will be on a strictly first come, first served basis)

December

Open Seminar

Rethinking Fieldwork in Social Media

Dr. Annette Markham.

Associate Professor, Dept. of Aesthetics & Communication, Aarhus University, Denmark.

Guest Professor of Informatics, Umeå University, Sweden. Affiliate Professor of Digital Media, School of Communication Loyola University-Chicago.

11 Des. 16:00-19:00

Sala Mitchell, IN·3, MediaTic

Roc Boronat, 117 Barcelona

In studies of internet-mediated cultural formations or everyday practices in and around digital culture, qualitative fieldwork is often used as a method of engaging with the phenomenon to gather information/data or to analyze practices in situ. While ethnographic and qualitative fieldwork is the foundation of robust anthropological and sociological inquiry in physical settings, this framework for inquiry does not always fit comfortably in digital contexts. How does one conduct 'participant observation' of Twitter? What counts as observation of a blog? When identity, relationships, and

cultural formations are located in information flows through global networks, where do we demarcate the boundaries of the field? In such a global network, how do we conduct interviews? What strategies do we use to select interviewees and how do we actually conduct these interviews? The seminar will focus on creative thinking in designing methodologies for internet-mediated social contexts, ethical practices in qualitative Internet research, and sensemaking in digital cultural contexts.

These issues are discussed within epistemological frameworks, which value close, local analyses of cultural practice. We expressly confront the need to remain grounded in these frameworks while grappling with complex cultural formations, likely involving corpora of information that could be characterized as 'big data.' This challenge is complicated by a common tendency to oversimplify fieldwork as a set of methods for collecting data, rather than conceptualizing it as a process of generating data and conducting ongoing analyses through the practice of being embedded in or with the phenomenon. In this sense, the discussion of fieldwork involves a discussion of how it is situated within a larger approach to exploring the intersections and interweavings of technologies and people in contemporary global networks of cultural flow.

Bio:

Annette Markham is Associate Professor of Information & Media Studies at Aarhus University and Guest Professor at Umeå University's Department of Informatics. Trained as a communication scholar in the United States, her research focuses on sensemaking and identity formation in digital contexts and more recently, ethical and innovative methodologies for studying internet-mediated social contexts. Her sociological work related to digital identity is well represented in her book *Life Online: Researching real experience in virtual space* (Altamira 1998). Other publications include *Internet Inquiry* (2009, with Nancy Baym) and a range of articles and chapters in edited volumes, handbooks, and scholarly journals. Dr. Markham has a strong background and training in interpretive, qualitative, and ethnographic methods.

More information at <http://markham.internetinquiry.org/>

Workshops:

Digital methods and qualitative research

Dr. Annette Markham.

Associate Professor, Dept. of Aesthetics & Communication, Aarhus University, Denmark
Guest Professor of Informatics, Umeå University, Sweden. Affiliate Professor of Digital Media,
School of Communication Loyola University-Chicago.

12 Des. 11:00-13:30

Sala 706 IN·3 MediaTic

Roc Boronat, 117 Barcelona

In this workshop, we will discuss particular problems encountered by qualitative researchers studying social media through the practice of 'fieldwork'. Participants will present brief, informal statements that explore methods for creative and flexible methodological adaptation, drawing on their own research projects if desired, but specifically focusing on premises and strategies for fieldwork in digital contexts. These informal presentations are intended to spark continued discussion of key issues, key premises of fieldwork, and key adaptive strategies.

To register please write to mediaccions@gmail.com
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