

'Being there', phone in hand: Thick presence and ethnographic fieldwork with media

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Abstract *In this article, I explore the notion of presence, especially as it pertains to anthropological notions of 'being there' and argue that studying with media significantly influences our physical presence as we are able to bring distant and not so distant places into our fields. Anthropology was founded on the notion of 'being there' and it is still a crucial claim to knowledge for anthropologists. Digital anthropology has brought new challenges to the concept of 'being there', giving increasing depth to the arguments that physical presence is not a prerequisite for ethnographic studies or even for 'being there'. In order to discuss how media might influence our presence in the field, I develop the notion of thick presence. I take a point of departure in my anthropological fieldwork with information activists and journalists in Egypt in 2012 and 2013 at the height of the revolutionary uprising from.*

KEYWORDS: thick presence; digital anthropology; egypt; studying with media; 'being there'; ethnographic methods

Introduction¹

I am sitting by a table in one of the rooms of the Mosireen office. Lobna and Omar, who are founding members of Mosireen, are sitting on the other side of the table and at the end of the table, respectively. Mosireen is an activist collective, which has grown out of the revolution in Egypt. Their YouTube channel is the most viewed non-profit YouTube channel in Egypt of all time and for the month of January 2012, when I began my fieldwork in Egypt, it was the most viewed non-profit channel in the world. Their videos about police and military violence, unjustly detained people, torture, workers' rights and other issues related to the revolution are shared extensively on Twitter, Facebook and more, and both Egyptian and international media corporations use their videos. I am researching relations between activists and journalists and could not ask for a more relevant place to be. I have arrived at my field; I am finally 'there'! Lobna and Omar each have their computer in front of them and are working intensely without talking. In front of me I have my own computer with my field notes document open. As I listen to their tapping away on keyboards and the incessant honks of Cairo traffic from outside, I wonder what to write on the almost blank page in front of me and my feeling of 'being there' dwindles.

Anthropology was founded on the notion of 'being there', which often implies physical presence (Geertz, 1988; Hannerz, 2003). When anthropologists carry out anthropology without physical presence, such as 'anthropology at a distance' (Mead and Métraux, 2000), they are often critical of their own methods (Peterson, 2015). The notion of 'being there' has been developed and challenged significantly since the days of Malinowski (see for instance Fabian, 1990; Marcus, 1995) and it is being challenged anew by the emerging field of digital anthropology (Miller and Horst, 2012), which is giving increasing depth to the arguments that physical presence is not a prerequisite for ethnographic studies or even for 'being there'

(Boellstorff, 2008; Hine, 2000; Pink et al., 2015). Yet 'being there' is still an indispensable concept in anthropology and a crucial claim to knowledge for anthropologists. My challenge with the silent co-location in the Mosireen office speaks to a significant though not new quandary: we might 'be there' in the sense of having co-location with the people whose lives we are interested in knowing more about, yet this might not enable us to produce the knowledge we are looking for. And simultaneously as 'anthropology at a distance' and digital anthropology has shown, we are at times able to create significant ethnographic knowledge from afar, begging an investigation of the significance and meaning of presence to ethnographic fieldwork. In this article I explore the notion of presence, especially as it pertains to anthropological notions of 'being there' and argue that studying with media significantly influences our physical presence as we are able to bring distant and not so distant places into our fields. I develop the notion of *thick presence* in order to discuss aspects of presence with media, which are not necessarily reciprocal.

The solution to my challenge with the silent co-presence at times became bringing the other side of the table to me – without walking across the room – by logging on Twitter or YouTube. The activists I was sitting next to were contacted daily by journalists, filmmakers, academics and others, who wanted to know what was going on with the Egyptian revolution. They often complained to me about journalists, who wasted their time by asking questions they could easily have found answers to themselves. Naïvety then, was not a useful trick of the trade in this field. Nor was being too insistent at a time when deadly battles were taking place regularly and the activists were busy surviving the violence of authorities, getting people out of jail, going to morgues to make sure murder wasn't concealed with fake autopsy reports, and letting the world know about all of this. In this period, the beginning of 2012, events happened so fast that staying up to date was an hourly exercise rather than daily. Often I felt I could not disturb the activists with questions for a PhD, which was to be years in the making and very unlikely to have substantial impact on the things they were fighting for, when they had so many much more urgent matters to tend to. Yet I quickly found a way to find out what people sitting a meter away from me were doing: looking at tweets, Facebook posts and YouTube videos, I would at times gain knowledge of what was happening on the computer screens across the table or at least what issues they were preoccupied with at the time. This enabled me to ask relevant and informed questions that I did not feel were received as a nuisance, understand implicit conversations and at times even add new, relevant information to conversations. And as I knew how to find out what they were doing, I also started being able to interact relevantly, which afforded me significant ethnographic knowledge.

But what was it that enabled me the ethnographic knowledge, which I did not feel I was getting out of the silent co-location? What was it that changed when I read tweets? And how does this relate to discussions of 'being there'? In order to answer these questions I will discuss the anthropological notion of 'being there' with a point of departure in my fieldwork with information activists and journalists in Egypt taking place mainly during two periods of fieldwork in Cairo in 2012 and 2013. Inspired by Clifford Geertz' concept of thick description (1973), I develop the concept of thick presence. Borrowing the term from philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1971), Geertz used the story of an early twentieth century sham sheep raid on the plains of Morocco, told to him in 1968 by the protagonist of the story, to argue that ethnography is thick description. Geertz explained thick description as an interpretive practice, in his example, distinguishing sheep raids from chasing woolly animals out of pastures. That is, thick description is about sorting out structures of signification. Geertz was hardly 'there' at the sheep raid on the Moroccan plain in early twentieth century. For one, he arrived decades after to have the story told to him. Yet his ability to write thick description, which he affirms is always intrinsically incomplete, was enabled by his presence in different 'theres' (1973). Thick presence, I argue then, is a way to distinguish between different forms

of presence, which are all significant ways of creating ethnographic knowledge, which enables thick description. I see thick presence as a triad of 1) co-location, 2) 'the presence of there here' and 3) 'our presence there' and argue that the more corners of the triad we are able to engage, the thicker our presence becomes. In my research, studying with media was crucial to gaining thick presence, both when I was sharing location with the people whose lives I was interested in and when I was physically distant. I will now turn to a discussion of the significance of media in my ethnographic study with information activists and journalists in Cairo.

'Being there', phone in hand

Outside the C28 military complex a crowd of activists and journalists is gathered. It is March 11, 2012 and inside the imposing building a trial is taking place. Not a conventional trial with real lawyers and a real judge – not to mention justice – but a military trial with military lawyers, who do not hold degrees in law, and a uniformed judge, who has been appointed by the military and is subject to the orders of his military superiors (gendered pronoun intended). Samira Ibrahim, an activist who was subject to a so-called 'virginity test' by the hands of a military 'doctor' has pressed charges for the assault. The verdict will be pronounced today. I am here with Shaimaa², who has covered the trial and the story of Samira Ibrahim for her newspaper since early on. As we wait for news to come out from the trial, I read tweets on my smart phone. One is from a television producer who writes that he is inside the military complex, trying to get inside the courtroom where other journalists have already been allowed in. I tell Shaimaa, who moments ago told me journalists are not allowed in the courtroom today. At first she disregards my information. Shortly after I write something down in my notebook, which makes her curious and she asks what I am writing. I tell her my notes are about her relationship with Kareem, an activist she interviewed a bit earlier and the tweets from the producer trying to get inside the courtroom. She volunteers more information about how she and Kareem know each other, but then her attention shifts back to the tweet and she asks Kareem, who is standing close by, to go to the soldiers at the gate and ask if it is possible to get inside. He dutifully goes and comes back to report that it is indeed possible. Moments later, Shaimaa disappears behind the heavy gates.

This was one of the few times during my fieldwork where I had a genuine sense of 'being there'. I was physically present at the demonstration in the way that I have been raised to do with my anthropological upbringing and things were happening around and with me. But somehow it seemed when I read tweets from inside the military complex on my phone I was 'there' differently. It was reading a tweet that enabled me to speak with Shaimaa about the opportunities to get inside. When I had first asked her, she had quickly dismissed it as impossible and made me leave the subject. Reading the tweet gave the struggle of the journalist inside a presence with me and this made me return to the subject and enabled me to discuss it with her again. Shaimaa's reaction to the tweet gave me knowledge about the difficulties of knowing things when one of the methods authorities use to keep people – particularly journalists – under control is making it impossible to know, even things as simple as whether they will be allowed to attend a trial to cover it. Her first dismissal of the information in the tweet made me think that conflicting stories were normal in her work and her reconsideration made me think that uncertainty of the rules of the day was customary. Her reconsideration of my tweet was brought about by my writing notes in my notebook and her attention to this. My notebook, then, returned our conversation from moments earlier to us, but with new significance. Speaking with Shaimaa about the tweet the second time also gave me knowledge about her relationship with Kareem, when she asked him to go talk to the soldiers for her. It told me that the exchanges taking place between them here were part of a

longer relationship that was friendly and targeted, that is, they both had interests in helping each other carry out their work. In this way, the knowledge I got from reading the tweet enabled me to interact with Shaimaa in certain ways, which in turn gave me new knowledge.

Of course it would have been possible for me to talk about access for journalists to the trial without reading the tweet, but it is unlikely I would have thought of paying much attention to this after her first dismissal of the possibility of getting inside. That is, studying with media helped me make my research more focused. Reading tweets and more gave me invaluable insights to things activists and journalists found important and enabled me to pursue these topics. In addition, reading tweets, watching YouTube videos and more served as a way for me to contextualise. Knowing of the producer's struggle to get inside helped me contextualise her comments about getting inside. Often throughout my fieldwork, reading tweets or Facebook statuses and looking at pictures or videos gave me insights on relevant topics while also providing me with a way to introduce these topics into conversation and a way to contextualise the responses I got.

At times I was sitting next to the people writing the tweets I was reading, at other times I was reading the same tweets they were reading and at other times again having read or seen tweets, videos and more at other times enabled me to engage in ways I would otherwise not have been able to. I was both able to understand my surroundings better – amongst other things the practical difficulties of carrying out journalism in a military dictatorship – at the same time as I was afforded new potential ways to engage with my surroundings, which in turn gave me more insights. At times tweets served as a way for me to contextualise conversations. One day in the Mosireen office Lobna told me her old school was joining a strike. Looking at her Twitter account concurrently, I saw she wrote six tweets about her school joining the strike, providing me more depth of the significance of the school striking to her.

Earlier the same day, I was watching a video they had uploaded on their YouTube channel the day before. I asked Lobna, who was sitting across the table, the meaning of a word in Arabic. She immediately understood it was a word from the title of the video, which she had contributed to, and as she answered, I felt an opening for a conversation, which I otherwise rarely felt. Using the video to start a conversation gave us a mutual point of departure for the conversation and showed Lobna I was interested in the things that were important to her. This is not fundamentally different from the way anthropologists have prepared before going to the field, reading books, watching films and much more. Neither is it different from the way they have always used their surroundings to engage with the people whose lives they were interested in knowing more about. Yet the live aspect of applications like Twitter provided me with a significant presence in the field as I was able to make other concurrent places present with me and the portability and connectivity of smart phones and related technologies meant that I had very broad possibilities of bringing other 'theres' into conversations and situations. I will now turn to an exploration of what it means for our ethnographic presence when we can simultaneously have a presence in different places and different places can have a presence with us. Drawing on discussions of 'anthropology at a distance', particularly in digital anthropology and related fields I develop the concept of 'thick presence' to explain what many times happened to my presence when I had my phone in hand or computer in front of me.

Thick presence

Drawing on Clifford Geertz, Mark Allen Peterson describes anthropology at a distance as 'the

study of cultural systems not through direct participation and observation but through literature, news media, films, music, and other types of expressive culture understood as “stories we tell ourselves about ourselves” (Geertz, 1973) (Peterson, 2015: 66). In this sense ‘anthropology at a distance’, entails the presence of ‘there’ with the anthropologist through different types of expressive culture, but it does not entail the anthropologist’s presence ‘there’. There is a significant distinction between us being ‘there’ and ‘there’ being with us. Yet while ‘anthropology at a distance’ has mainly entailed the presence of ‘there’ with the anthropologist, the ways we can carry out ‘anthropology at a distance’ today are significantly different from the time of the Second World War. Peterson describes his ‘technologically mediated experience of the [Egyptian] revolution’,³ that is, his round the clock viewing of Aljazeera, as well as using email, Facebook and Twitter, as ‘anthropology at a distance’. Yet he argues that ‘contemporary work of this type has been transformed by the temporal immediacy of electronic communication’ (Peterson, 2015: 66). There are two significant differences between Peterson’s study of the Egyptian revolution and the ‘anthropology at a distance’ of earlier practitioners, brought on by the temporal immediacy of electronic communication. Firstly, Peterson was able to study ‘at a distance’ in real time and secondly, he was able to participate ‘at a distance’ even if his participation, as he describes, was not in the major events of the revolution. With the interaction afforded by emails, Facebook and Twitter, Peterson was able to engage with people in Tahrir Square and in this way not just study their stories from afar. Thus, the ‘anthropology at a distance’ of today possibly entails the presence of the anthropologist ‘there’ even if he or she is not physically ‘there’.

Speaking from the vantage point of STS, Anne Beaulieu (2010) distinguishes between co-location and co-presence, arguing that ‘co-presence foregrounds the relationship between self and other and interaction that achieves presence in a setting. Co-presence is an interactive accomplishment by participants and ethnographers alike’ (2010: 457). Her argument is that ethnographers should aim for interaction (co-presence) rather than physical co-location, building on her own experiences of getting little knowledge out of sharing location with scientists in a laboratory. In Beaulieu’s sense, then, presence is about interaction and her argument is that we can have co-location yet very little interaction and no co-location yet relevant interaction. Hardly many ethnographers would disagree that we should aim for interaction. The very notion of ‘being there’ is closely tied up with the anthropological method of participant observation and participating unavoidably entails interaction. Yet the idea that interaction is not necessarily related to location cuts to the core of the discussions of presence. Let’s examine then the meaning of interaction and the implications of media in this. The meaning of interaction, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is ‘reciprocal action or influence’. Co-location necessarily entails reciprocal actions or influence as we breathe the same air, hear (roughly) the same sounds and move in (roughly) the same space. Yet media technologies allows for actions or influence across time and/or space in ways that are not necessarily directly reciprocal, yet which nevertheless must be understood as significant forms of presence.

Media anthropologist, John Postill’s (2015) work on internet activism and its implications for relationships between the municipal authorities and local residents in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur has lead him to argue that ‘we should abandon once and for all the received anthropological assumption that unmediated physical co-presence is inherently superior to, or more legitimate than, other forms of being there’ (para. 12). He offers four different though not mutually exclusive ways of ‘being there’, of which only the first, physical presence, is dependent on co-location. The three remaining ways of ‘being there’ is remotely (‘via Skype, streaming, chat, pads, and other telematic media’), virtually (‘in a ‘third place’ that is neither our present location nor that of our interlocutors (Boellstorff 2008), e.g. via a mailing list, a web forum, a 3D real-time game, etc.’), and imaginatively (‘before and/or after the fact,

through digital stories or images found on blogs, social media, video-sharing sites, and so on') (2015, para.9). Postill's four ways of being present underscores the possibility of presence that is not reciprocal. Postill's different ways of 'being there' thus points to a distinction between 'our presence there' and 'the presence of there here' that is emphasised by the varying reciprocal affordances of media technologies.

Let me exemplify the varying reciprocal affordances of media technologies. Having conversations on applications like Skype allow our voice and images to appear in distant places while the voices and images of those places simultaneously appear with us. This is a fundamentally different type of interaction than for instance watching a livestreamed battle in Tahrir Square in real time on Bambuser, which allows sounds and images from Tahrir Square to have a presence with us while the only way we have a presence 'there' is through a number in the view counter. This is not to say that a number in a view counter cannot be a significant presence, yet it is a different kind of presence than images and sounds moving through a screen. Videos that are edited and uploaded on YouTube allow similar images to have a presence with us, while our presence is restricted to a number in view counters in different 'theres' than the battle. The affordances of media technologies are significant for media practices. Some media technologies afford both the presence of us 'there' and the presence of 'there' here simultaneously, while other media technologies only afford reciprocal presence over time. The 'theres', of course, are continually changing. Though I might 'be there' with the people who made a video, when I am sitting in Mosireen's office watching their videos on YouTube, this is not the 'there' where the videos were filmed and also not the 'there' where the videos were edited. Other media technologies again hardly afford reciprocal presence. Mediated interaction thus leads to the necessity of a distinction between 'our presence there' and 'the presence of there here'. 'Our presence there' can be images and sounds from us appearing elsewhere, a number in a view counter when we watch a livestream or words we have written in an email or letter that appear in other places immediately or delayed. 'The presence of there here' can be watching television, videos on YouTube or livestreams, hearing music, reading tweets or books, and other things, which makes other places appear with us. 'The presence of there here' can also be brought about by reciprocal media practices such as reading emails and having Skype or phone conversations.

Sara Ahmed's (2006) work on orientations can help shed light on the distinction between 'here' and 'there'. Ahmed draws on the work of philosopher Edmund Husserl, saying 'Husserl relates the questions of this or that side to the point of here, which he also describes as the zero point of orientation, the point from which the world unfolds and which makes what is "there" over "there"' (p.545). To Ahmed then, 'the starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling' (p. 545). As we move – over oceans or to the other side of the room – the here remains with us, as the where of our body's dwelling changes. 'There', then, can be across the table or across the world, but we are always here, never 'there'. We cannot assume the orientations of the people we study with. Thus we are always in some sense studying at a distance, yet mediation alters the significance of this distant or not so distant distance as different 'theres' becomes part of here and here becomes part of other 'theres' with increasing temporal immediacy. When I was sitting across the table from Mosireen activists, I was 'there', in the office of some of the most influential information activists in the Egyptian revolution, yet I was on the other side of the table. But when opening Twitter on my computer, a part of the other side of the table came to have a presence with me.

With Beaulieu, Postill and Ahmed we can thus establish presence as being about interaction yet distinguishing between 'the presence of there here' and 'our presence there'. In this sense interaction is not necessarily immediately reciprocal or even reciprocal at all. This entails

that presence is not necessarily reciprocal. We can thus identify three significant aspects of presence, namely 'co-location', 'the presence of there here' and 'our presence there'. I argue that this triad of presence is the foundation of thick presence. That is, thick presence emerges in the dynamic interplay between the different legs of the triad.

This is no different from what anthropologists have always tried to do, but the digital media have brought to the forefront that our presence does not always develop in reciprocal, co-locative ways. What was clear to me during my fieldwork in the highly mediated (Hjarvard, 2008) field of information activists and journalists in revolutionary Egypt was that studying with media was indispensable for me in trying to achieve thick presence.

The temporality of presence

Studying with media means the different legs of the triad can have different temporalities. I will now turn to a discussion of how the temporality of presence is significant with and without co-location. Time has always been crucial for anthropological studies and 'being there' in anthropological terms means 'being there for a long time'. Time is an important means for anthropologists to attain thick presence. Yet our temporal engagement with the three legs of the triad of presence is not necessarily straightforward or immediately reciprocal as it might seem or be in a 'typical' Malinowski-style fieldwork. That is, we might at times be able to only significantly engage some of the legs of the triad yet over time this enables us to engage others, enabling us thick presence over time.

The temporality of presence highlights that thick presence is achieved over time. In a sense our presence is usually thin upon arrival (whether our arrival entails co-location or not), but over time as we are present 'there' and 'there' is present with us – simultaneously – we learn to understand what is going on around us and engage with the people around us. With this, our presence becomes thicker.

Let me exemplify the temporality of presence. In the ethnographic examples I have mentioned so far – at the demonstration and in the office – I have shared co-location with the activists and journalists who were the focus of my study and my media practices have mainly helped me gain thicker presence in the places I was in. Yet media was more important to my research when I did not have co-location and had particular importance over time. Between my two periods of fieldwork, I spent about nine months in Denmark in which Egypt and the activists and journalists of my study had a significant presence with me as I listened to audio recordings of interviews with them, read through my field notes, read tweets and Facebook updates they were writing, watched videos they made, read articles they wrote, watched television programmes they made and much more. While 'there' was very present with me it was only on few occasions that these practices enabled me to have a presence 'there'. Sitting in front of my computer in my apartment in Copenhagen following events in Egypt, I one day came across a recent episode of Aljazeera English's 'The Stream'.⁴ Sherief Gaber, a Mosireen activist, was being interviewed on it. Due to time restrictions he was cut off from making a last point in the interview. Interested, I wrote him an email, asking what he had wanted to say. This email correspondence and his unsaid point – that the issue for activists wasn't one of reaching the most people possible, but of changing the relationship between media and publics – inspired us to write a co-authored article about the revolutionary street screening campaigns, *Zaskar Kazeboon* and *Tahrir Cinema*,⁵ both of which he had played a role in founding (see Mollerup and Gaber, 2005).

What is interesting here is that I have spent many hours sitting next to Sherief in the Mosireen office and while we have spoken about these campaigns and many other things, the most significant conversations I had with him started and mainly took place when I was thousands of kilometres away. Co-location does not necessarily enable us to know what questions to ask; indeed we can spend many hours next to someone, even speaking with them, without necessarily knowing what the most relevant things to discuss with them would be. The difference in interacting in co-locative ways and with email, which does not need the temporal immediacy of face-to-face communication, is significant too. As Sherief and I were writing back and forth over hours, days and months, I had the opportunity to look through old notes, compare statements and make my replies relevant in ways I was not always able to when sitting next to people. The shifting temporalities of email conversation allowed me to make previous 'theres' present with me before I replied. The benefit of this is also clear in George E. Marcus and Fernando Mascarenhas *The Marquis and the Anthropologist, A Collaboration* (2005), which is constructed by the authors' ongoing mail exchange about their joint study of contemporary Portuguese nobility of which Mascarenhas is a part. The experimenting book brilliantly illustrates some of the particularities of studying with media.

Of course, like in Marcus and Mascarenhas case, my initial co-location was crucial in enabling thick presence with an email correspondence. And similar to their case, my email correspondence with Sherief developed into further face-to-face meetings, Skype-conversations, Dropbox-exchanges and more. It was my initial, persistent physical presence in the Mosireen office that enabled me to have a presence when I did not have co-location. That is, when I emailed Sherief asking about his last point, he knew me from the time I had spent in the office and answered me even though I was only one of many trying to capitalise on his time. So even though I spent many days in the office feeling I was not getting much out of my time there and even though I at times felt I learned more reading tweets than sitting next to people, co-location and my media practices enabled me to sustain a presence in the field when I was not physically in Cairo, which in turn enabled me a thicker presence when I returned.

Conclusion

There is a significant difference between the anthropology at a distance carried out for instance during the Second World War and the anthropology we can carry out today with media. The increasingly fast and sophisticated ways close or distant 'theres' can be made part of 'here' is significant to the ways we can create ethnographic knowledge. In this article I have introduced the concept of thick presence to distinguish different aspects of presence, introducing the triad of presence consisting of 'co-location', 'the presence of there here', and 'our presence there'. I have argued that the more we are able to engage the different legs of the triad, the thicker our presence becomes. The concept of thick presence also emphasises the significance of the different temporalities of our presence. Engaging some of the legs at times and at other times other legs, can help us build thick presence over time.

Building thick presence is by no means a new practice to anthropologists. Thick presence is about interaction, participation, that is, what anthropologists have always done to know about the world. What the concept does, however, is distinguish between the different aspects of presence and emphasise that relevant presence for an ethnographer is much more than co-location. Thick presence is by no means defined by studying with media. Anthropologists have been and are able to achieve thick presence spending co-locative time with people without using media significantly, apart from perhaps taking field notes.

However, studying with media at times creates a necessity of distinguishing between our presence elsewhere and the presence of distant (or not so distant) 'theres' with us. The concept of thick presence highlights that the interaction we engage in is not necessarily immediate in time or space in the way it often is when we are sharing location with other people. Thick presence then is not only about 'being there' at a certain time. Thick presence takes time and many different 'heres' and 'theres' to nurture.

In my fieldwork I often found that sitting or standing next to people, I was able to achieve a thicker presence when I had my phone in my hand or my computer in front of me, because I in this way was able to make different, but not necessarily distant, 'theres' part of 'here'. While we might associate distance with long travels across oceans, the distance of a few meters across a table can also pose a challenge for fieldworkers. Doing ethnography with media had significant implications for my ways of 'being there' both when I was close to the people whose lives I was interested in and when I was far away from them. Doing fieldwork with my phone in my hand (and at times my computer in front of me) did not only afford me certain paths to knowledge. Relatedly, it afforded me different ways of acting. What is interesting then for me as an ethnographer is that these different ways of acting in turn afford me different paths to knowledge as my actions yield responses from the world around me. Let me end, then, by emphasising that this by no means is an argument for anthropologists to give up our focus on co-location. But it is an argument for us to pay more attention to other ways of creating presence and particularly for the opportunities to and benefits of enabling a presence of the other side of the table on our side.

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Notes

1. This research has been carried out under the auspices of International Media Support.
2. The names, Shaimaa and Kareem, are pseudonyms.
3. Peterson is referring to the 18 days of protests in January and February 2011, which is popularly called *el-sawra* (the revolution) in Egypt. When I speak of the revolution, it is in line with how the activists and (most of the) journalists who participated in my study describe it, that is, as a process, which did not begin with the 18 days nor end with Mubarak stepping down, but which was particularly prevalent from the 18 days and until some time between 2013 and 2014, when President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi increasingly closed the space for opposition. In this sense the revolution is still ongoing though it has been pushed (back) to the margins.
4. See <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201210292256-0022384>.
5. These names are transliterated in accordance with how they are usually transliterated by people associated with the campaigns in order to make them searchable.

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