

EASA Media Anthropology Network e-Seminar Series

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

E-Seminar on Erkan Saka's working paper "Blogging as a Research Tool for Ethnographic Fieldwork"

(May 19 - June 1, 2008)

Abstract:

This presentation argues that blogging emerges as a new research tool for the ones conducting ethnographic fieldwork. Moreover, I argue throughout my paper that new media with a particular emphasis in blogging will have even larger consequences for the discipline of anthropology. In order to substantiate my main argument I focus on these issues:

- a) Blogging might be a remedy to the anxiety of being in "after the fact" that is shared by many anthropologists. Blogging takes place in the present tense while actively engaging with "the fact";
- b) blogging brings immediate feedback
- c) not only from the limited scholarly circles but from a wider public/audience
- d) which exposes the ethnographer to a much more effective issue of accountability. Moreover,
- e) blogging urges to see motives in a more regular sense, thus creates a strong sense of regularity
- f) that forces the ethnographer to produce on a regular basis
- g) with a constant appeal to narrate what would normally remain fragments of fieldnotes.

In addition to depending on scholarly sources of interest, this paper exploits the presenter's own experience of blogging during his fieldwork.

From: sbh at hi.is (Sigurjon Hafsteinsson)
Date: Mon, 19 May 2008 09:15:18 -0000 (GMT)
Subject: [Mediantro] E-seminar opens

Dear All

I'd like to welcome you to our 22 EASA media anthropology e-seminar. The seminar will run on this mailing list for two weeks from now until Monday June 2. The working paper, by Erkan Saka (Rice University, USA) is titled: Blogging as a research tool for ethnographic fieldwork and you've still got time to read the PDF version available at <http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

Erkan Saka Erkan is a PhD candidate in anthropology department at Rice University and he expects to defend this thesis his Fall. In the mean time, after working in the Media and Communication Systems department at Istanbul Bilgi University as a teaching assistant, he was offered a lecturer position in Public Relations department at the same university.

The discussant will be Mary Stevens (University College London) who has an extensive experience of blogging during her research for her PhD. See <http://marystevens.wordpress.com/>. Mary has an impressive publication record which can be seen at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uclfmis/Publications.htm>

Tomorrow morning (Tuesday), Mary will be posting her comments directly to this list, after which Erkan will respond. The discussion will then be open to all. Please bear in mind that these sessions can only work if we have wide and sustained participation, so all contributions are very welcome. To post, please write directly to medianthro at easaonline.org, i.e. not to me.

Thanking our presenter and discussant for their efforts, it's over to Mary now!

All the best, Sigurjon.

From: sbh at hi.is (Sigurjon Hafsteinsson)
Date: Mon, 19 May 2008 10:35:02 -0000 (GMT)
Subject: [Mediantro] Further info while you gather your thoughts

Dear list,

While you are gathering your thoughts about Erkan's working paper I take the liberty to tell you a bit more from my opening statement about Mary Stevens. Enclosed is a short bio.

Mary Stevens recently completed her PhD at University College London (UCL) in the department of French Studies with secondary supervision in Anthropology. The title of her thesis was 'Re-membering the Nation: the Project for the /Cite nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration/'; her research was based on 18 months fieldwork in Paris, tracking the development of this new museum of immigration. During this period she wrote a research blog <<http://marystevens.wordpress.com/>> which was read widely by her informants and has also been used as a teaching resource. She has also contributed to group blogs such as Material World <<http://blogs.nyu.edu/projects/materialworld/>> and The Attic <<http://attic-museumstudies.blogspot.com/>>. She is interested in the application of ethnographic methods to the field of cultural heritage studies and is currently working as a post-doctoral research associate in the School of Library, Archive and Information studies at UCL on a project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council entitled 'Community Archives and Identities: Documenting and Sustaining Community Heritage <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slais/research/icarus/community-archives/>>'.

Mary will post her comment to the list tomorrow morning. Then Erkan will respond and after that the floor is open to the list.

All the best, Sigurjon.

From: mary.stevens at ucl.ac.uk (Mary Stevens)
Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 08:38:38 +0100
Subject: [Mediantro] comments on Erkan Saka's paper

Dear all,
Here are my comments on Erkan Saka's paper. They are attached in pdf form but I have also copied them into the main body of the text in case anyone on the list has trouble with the attachment.

I look forward to continuing the discussion,
Best wishes,
Mary Stevens.

Comments on Erkan Saka's paper: 'Blogging as a Research Tool for Ethnographic Fieldwork'
Mary Stevens (University College London), 19 May 2008

It is perhaps a measure of the reach and topicality of Erkan's modestly titled 'field diary' that I was first alerted to it not through Anthropology blogging circles but through the website of a friend who is a Brussels-based freelance web designer and the author of a blog on European politics. My friend is one of Erkan's many regular readers and cites him as a reference on a range of topics from the Internet as a resource for political campaigning to 'EU politics and plenty more besides.' There is no question that Erkan, perhaps more successfully than any other anthropologist-blogger, has escaped the trap described by Strong of Savage Minds (and cited by Erkan in his paper) of anthropology bloggers as 'writing for an audience of anthropologists online.' I do not know whether Erkan has any sense of the professional breakdown of his half a million plus visitors since July 2005 (not the same as readers - in most cases every visit is counted, so Erkan's fans returning for a regular fix will boost the numbers) but I have a strong suspicion that these days at least, anthropologists are probably in the minority. Indeed, Erkan's forced decision to shift his blog from his university servers and on to a commercial platform in August of last year because of the sheer volume of traffic could be seen as mirroring his own journey from the academy out into the broader public sphere. What sort of anthropology he has taken with him is a moot point; Erkan posts an average of about three times a day (how does he find the time?) but posts appear in the 'Anthropology' category only about once a week so the criticism that bloggers are 'not generally communicating anthropology to non-anthropologists' (Strong again) might still apply (Erkan, arguably, is primarily communicating Turkish and EU politics).

On a personal note, as a once prolific and now lapsed blogger myself (against whom the same objections could also be raised, except for the fact that I never saw myself as affiliated primarily to Anthropology) I am in awe of Erkan's blog: the regularity of his posts, the range of his links and the technical specification of the site, not to mention the advertising revenue he must now be generating are all very humbling. His paper however belies only limited signs of this huge success; it would have been good to see Erkan use this opportunity to engage in a greater degree of reflexivity about, for example, the implications of his site becoming a prominent vehicle for adverts from businesses operating in Turkey and seeking to reach an international, English-speaking audience. This surely merits some serious thought given Erkan's research interest in the way international relations are mediated by both traditional and non-traditional information media? In this paper he touches on the extent to which, through his blog, he has become a more active participant in the world he is seeking to study, but the implications of his changing status (and growing celebrity) are not really explored in any depth.

The reason for this is that, sadly, it would seem that Erkan's exemplary professionalism as a blogger would appear not always to extend to his engagement with his peers. I realise this is a serious reproach, but it is not

without justification. When I started writing my own blog I looked around for anthropologists who were engaging with blogging in a reflexive, critical fashion. At that time I came across a paper Erkan had written for a conference of the Association of Internet Researchers, which took place in Brisbane, Australia in September 2006. The paper has been publicly available as a Google document since then. The two papers share well over ninety per cent of their content. The abstracts and the structure are identical and there is only one new reference, an article from Inside Higher Ed by journalist Andy Guess (the text of the paper contains references to two of his articles however, suggesting that Erkan could have been more thorough here). Erkan's failure to revise the paper even makes it genuinely misleading in places; when he refers to 'last fall' he doesn't mean 2007 he means 2005 and his blog stats are also two years out of date. Nearly two years is a very long time in cyberspace and the both the technology and the debate have moved on significantly since Erkan wrote this paper. For example, while I was writing this response I received my first 'friend' request on a social networking site from one of my informants (nearly nine months after leaving the 'field', I should add). When Erkan wrote his article and I started blogging this technology just didn't exist: what are the implications for key issues such as rapport, 'being there', trust and so on? How do these new virtual friendships shape our real world encounters? Does Erkan have a second life avatar, and if so what happens when s/he meets his informants in other guises?

Using the same material for different audiences can in certain circumstances be acceptable; the real problem is failing to acknowledge this. Nowhere in this paper does Erkan mention the fact that this piece was originally prepared for the Brisbane conference. Admittedly the Brisbane paper is self-published, and was not therefore subject to the same constraints of peer review (although the online text is sufficiently polished to make me suspect that the conference organisers must have requested the submission of full papers and that the article may well have been circulated to participants). In Erkan's conclusion he notes that 'the role of blogging and new media in general is still contested in terms of academic authority.' His own views on this debate are not made explicit, but it is not unreasonable to presume that he sees suspicion of blogging as a regrettable conservatism. There is no doubt however that the Internet, with its opportunities for free selfpublication, is chipping away at the old structures of disciplinary authority. The consequences of this are potentially very exciting; there is perhaps more scope for the emergence of radical ideas. But the purveyors of the new radicalism also need to be stricter with themselves if they are to preserve the credibility of their chosen medium; self-plagiarism does little to make the case for the move online and gives credence to those who argue that the old ways may still have their merits.

To turn nevertheless to some of the substantive issues raised by Erkan one of the most interesting issues remains the way blogs extend the field and facilitate access for researchers. I fully recognise Erkan's experience of the blog opening fieldwork doors; in my case potential informants often checked out my blog before meeting me for the first time (often accessing it through the link in the footer of my emails) and the wealth of information and links it contained helped me demonstrate my seriousness. But it would have been interesting to read more about the consequences of this unusual publicness. In my experience self-censorship contributed as much to my authority as self-publication: informants saw the fact that I didn't write about them, or divulge confidential information, as proof of my trustworthiness. Demonstrating my willingness to withhold information was a way of guaranteeing the quality of the information with which I was entrusted. The anthropologist-blogger may enjoy greater visibility in the field, but this may not always be an advantage. What opportunities has Erkan's blog caused him to miss out on, I wonder? And what other risks are associated with blogging? How does gender affect both the blogging persona, and its reception? In Erkan's field environment would his self-exposure be equally acceptable if he were a woman? And what of language? Erkan writes exclusively in English, but many of his readers are presumably Turkish-speakers (I had the same issues with French). Does his language choice enable him to write about certain topics more freely than others, and how does it invite or restrict access to the public debate Erkan wishes to encourage?

The extent to which blogging remedies the 'after the factness' of writing is also worthy of more exploration. I suggest that what blogging offers does not in fact bring forward the time of analysis, it just makes it public. The difference between the post and the field memo is its readership and its inter-connectedness (through hyperlinks). But it is not necessarily its substance.

To conclude, Erkan's field diary is a fascinating example of the potential of new technologies for anthropological research. It merits a sustained reflexivity, particularly in relation to the impact of the blog on Erkan's relationships with his informants, and on the exclusions as well as the inclusions it may generate. But, for the reasons set out above, this piece fails to rise to this challenge. I cannot help wondering whether Erkan has 'gone native' in cyberspace and substituted the Internet's more questionable standards of authority and authorship for those of his discipline.

<<http://marystevens.wordpress.com/>>

From: sbh at hi.is (Sigurjon Hafsteinsson)
Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 08:58:42 -0000 (GMT)
Subject: [Mediantthro] Over to Erkan

Thank you Mary for your comments. Its over to Erkan now!!
All the best, Sigurjon.

From: sakaerka at gmail.com (Erkan Saka)
Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 18:12:56 +0300
Subject: [Mediantthro] Erkan's reply

Thank you Mary for your comments and thank you all for bothering to read and discuss the paper.

Hmmm, about the self-plagiarism case, I never intended to hide the presentation in the google docs. It was a paper in progress and still is. Retrospectively thinking, maybe I should have added that the paper was prepared for that conference but could not be presented as I could not go and i thus never included that presentation in my CV. When I was asked for a paper, this was an opportunity to work on it although i could not provide a radical revising. If that presentation occurred and if i got feedback from my peers, then i could have provided a much more different paper. Maybe that will happen after this discussion. So this is the very first time, i might ever get some kind of peer review.

In other issues:

1. Yes, I do not write much about anthropology but I promote myself as an anthropologist. I am there, an anthropologist blogger, and I do not necessarily need to write about anthropology itself. It is more important to talk to others in their own fields - I know, this is all fuzzy but i hope i convey what I mean- I think that worked so far. However, I would like to discuss more on anthropology per se in future. Just because I like to do that, not because of a duty. Maybe because Turkey and EU affairs and other field attractions are more urgent at the moment. I will keep on what I do.

2. I am glad to know that my blog had some success, but in terms of revenue generation, it did not. It has a very humble ad revenue. In terms of design, the blog is not very attractive. There is too much text, information loaded-all against new media literacy...

3. Mary's is a very good point: There are not always advantages of being publicly visible. However, in my own case I have not met an explicitly hostile case. I believe my own political standings may irritate some of my informants. I have become more hostile against some mainstream newspapers since the assassination of Hrant Dink last year. This also brought some negative publicity from more nationalist circles. Still

a) my celebrity is not that big and offline networks still rule. Whatever the reason when Oktay Eksi, the head columnist of Hürriyet refused to talk to me, I asked help from his friend, Prof. Haluk Sahin and I got the appointment. Prof. Sahin who seems to be one of another regulars gradually disliked my politics, but this did not prevent help.

b) but whatever the approach from informants, some celebrity is good because they take you more seriously. This point can be linked to study-up issues. Why should they take me seriously otherwise?

4. The use of English. Well, I am better at writing English, since high school my education language is English, and my very first audience was people from Rice Anthropology. Practical reasons. But also by using English I eliminate some of the banal nationalists who do know English. But this does not mean I use English because i am politically afraid of them. At the moment the worst/the most threatening anti-Westernists are found among the best educated circles in Turkey and I know some follow the blog.

According to all feedback i could gather in four years, I know that most of my regular readers are not Turkish speakers.

Self-exposure. If you link this to gender and Turkish society, I will think you are a bit orientalist in your approach to Turkish society. There are many female Turkish bloggers out there doing more self-exposure than I ever did. In the very small but emerging Turkish blogosphere, female bloggers are represented fairly well.

5. I spend a good deal of time daily. Probably all content gathering needs at least one hour. But as you know more about new media, you find out advanced tools to make your life easier. I take advantage of all those tools.

Let me stop here. I know i did not answer all questions but i promise to deliver more!

Cordially,
Erkan

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Erkan Saka
* Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Anthropology in Rice University,
Houston, TX
Field diary: <http://erkansaka.net>
* Instructor at the Faculty of Communication in Istanbul Bilgi University,
Turkey

From: sbh at hi.is (Sigurjon Hafsteinsson)
Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 17:10:12 -0000 (GMT)
Subject: [Mediantro] Ongoing E-seminar: The floor is open!

Thank you Erkan for your response. The list is now open for all to discuss Erkan's paper and the discussion so far.

Please bear in mind that these sessions can only work if we have wide and sustained participation, so all contributions are very welcome. To post, please write directly to medianthro at esaonline.org, i.e. not to me.

All the best, Sigurjon

From: o.wiltshire at gmail.com (Owen Wiltshire)
Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 14:32:54 -0400
Subject: [Mediantro] Erkan's awesome paper

Dear Media Network,

Thanks for engaging such an interesting topic. I've been following Erkan's blog for the past semester, and I'm happy to make an attempt at contributing to this discussion.

In her response, Mary discusses a very important issue to my own research, "There is no doubt however that the Internet, with its opportunities for free self publication, is chipping away at the old structures of disciplinary authority. The consequences of this are potentially very exciting; there is perhaps more scope for the emergence of radical ideas. But the purveyors of the new radicalism also need to be stricter with themselves if they are to preserve the credibility of their chosen medium; self-plagiarism does little to make the case for the move online and gives credence to those who argue that the old ways may still have their merits."

The old ways have merits, but I would argue that the issue is not the preservation of credibility in the new medium, but the creation of credibility. As Thomas Eriksen states, in an interview with Lorenz Khazaleh, "the symbolic capital associated with the Internet and Internet publishing is fairly low. It should be a political cause for academics to heighten it, both through using the Internet for one's own publications and by increasing the prestige of the Internet by using it actively".
(<http://www.antropologi.info/blog/anthropology/index.php?p=1278&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1>)

Have things changed enough in the past few years that we can truly say blogging is generally considered a credible space? That it could lose credibility reflects some big changes over the past few years.

Another interesting point I might contribute: Is it truly a trap to blog for anthropologists? There are two perspectives here - one that anthropology needs to change and become more publicly engaged, which leads to the reasoning that writing only for anthropologists is a "trap" of sorts. But blogging is also a way to expand boundaries within the discipline of anthropology as well. In this way, and I discuss this a little in my blogging mini ethnography (a class assignment, and barely readable), blogging works to open up a space for all levels of the anthropology hierarchy to discuss and share ideas. It's very popular with graduate students for example, who would not previously have had a space to share ideas. This fits in with the work Michael Wesch is doing
(http://www.cea-ace.ca/media/en/AntiTeaching_Spring08.pdf), turning his classroom into a business-like team where he manages the production and students produce ideas. It is an empowering reversal of the traditional hierarchy (coming from a radical student perspective anyways). So I think theres a lot to be said for both "Public Anthropology" and "Anthropology in Public" (see the discussions on Openanthropology.wordpress.com and [savgeminds](http://savgeminds.com) that Erkan links to).

When we discuss these boundaries of private and public, where do journal publications fit in? Aren't they public as well? Are there really such drastic changes involved in writing on a blog, or in published form? It comes down to who we are trying to speak to, and who we welcome into the discussion. I may be writing to anthropologists, or myself on my own blog, but I certainly welcome criticism from anyone. Can the same be said of journals? I'm just wondering why blogging is considered more public than other published formats... as a sort of rhetorical question to fuel my own research). In some way are journals considered private? Whats the relation between "closed access" and "private" and "open access" and "public"? Okay ranting here... will try to focus. This is just to say theres nothing wrong with blogging to anthropologists.

Another issue that might be of interest - there are access controls in blogging as well. Blogging in the classroom for example works to

promote engagement between students, it encourages openness with ideas, and it avoids these pitfalls of public exposure by making the material only accessible to the students in the class. This kind of blogging is a way of practicing writing for a broader audience. So we could incorporate degrees of publicness. (which Erkan points to with his discussion of Douglass's (2005) article.) Another example of this would be LiveJournal which allows subscription based logins, so only members access material. These kind of controlled publics are quite interesting.

Finally, and sorry to not filter these ideas, I think blogging plays a very important role in developing new forms of collaborative anthropology. It allows anthropologists to deal with current and relevant issues in a timely fashion. Erkan writes "Blogging could provide an immediate engagement and powerful immediate feedback can shape the output in a much more productive way." and "Responding to emergencies is a challenge for the fieldworker who normally postpones more analytical interpretations to the write-up period." In this way, I think its a huge change in the way research is done, and maybe the most important aspect of blogging as a fieldwork tool. It allows participants to engage the issues while the research is going on. In this way, analysis is distributed - and the anthropologists opens up his position as "expert" to others. It can be annoying, in that by sharing your work along the way people will contribute to it and it becomes hard to produce a work filled with ones own analysis - but think this is awesome, and builds on our ability to share ideas through conversation. But it certainly becomes offensive to anthropologists who feel that only the anthropologist should be the one doing analysis.

I think you could be a little more provocative with your final remark "In this suggestive paper, I do not mean blogging to substitute any existing methods or practices." - especially when blogging created the avenue for you to self-publish this paper in the first place! But then again, I love controversy... And perhaps blogging will turn into the road to publication (but I prefer the idea that it IS a space for publication.. but anyways I blame my radical attitude on Dr. Forte, and he runs an e-journal so he probably disagrees with me).

I also think perhaps the paper is trying to do too much, trying to capture so many aspects of blogging, but in doing that it leaves room to criticisms of "what about this and this etc". I only say this because its the trap I fell into writing a class assignment on blogging). I think that based on the title of the paper, you could remove discussions on the technology itself (ie blogging software...), since this is covered elsewhere. Then again, as an outreach to get anthropologists blogging, it's probably an important thing to do. For more tangent ideas that could be incorporated, I highly recommend engaging Alexandre Enkerli who I consider a blogging mastermind - he focusses on freeing "thought" from disciplinary boundaries on his blog "enkerli.wordpress.com" - and he suggested some amazing ideas for future research in his comments on my paper. (<http://nodivide.wordpress.com/2008/05/12/why-do-anthropologists-blog-2/#comments>)

Hope this helps in some way, I'll be sure to think and post more on this as ideas pour in! And hello to everyone on the list!

Owen Wiltshire,
radical obnoxious student,
Concordia University
nodivide.wordpress.com

From: dddumitr at ucalgary.ca (dddumitr at ucalgary.ca)

Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 16:07:51 -0600 (MDT)

Subject: [Medianthro] questions for Erkan

Hi all:

While not an anthropologist, I found the paper interesting as an attempt to construct the legitimacy of blogging as a research tool. I agree that blogs do contribute to the ongoing blurring of the private/public boundary, but I also wonder to what extent blogging can be linked to a public field diary. As the author points out, the blogger is (or should be aware) that the blog is also a public space; the notes or thoughts posted there are - to a certain degree - already refined for an external audience. There is a certain element of awareness that one is acting in the public space which may shape some of the self-reflection process.

My second question is: assuming blogs are a research method, then are the posts considered as data to be further analyzed (and how) or are they rather the bits and pieces of the analysis? In other words, what happens once you use blogging in terms of the research process.

Thanks,

Delia

Delia Dumitrica
PhD Candidate & Sessional Instructor
Faculty of Communication and Culture
University of Calgary

From: giu_bat at hotmail.com (giulia battaglia)
Date: Wed, 21 May 2008 09:42:50 +0200
Subject: [Mediantthro] Ongoing E-seminar: The floor is open!

Dear All,

It is great pleasure to take part of a debate that is somehow very connected to my current fieldwork experience. I am having problem with internet connection so please read this comments in response of Erkan and Mary's comments only (I will read now the rest). Before contributing with my comments, queries and doubts I would like to clarify my position at this point of my life and work; and I would like to apologize for the long comment.

I am a media anthropologist at the moment on fieldwork who is constantly trying to balance in both life and work, the potential of new media technologies and technological ways of communicating, with the traditional and - for me still - necessary face-to-face relationships with individuals. Without denying the potential of new technologies but without getting overtaken by them, I live my life and my work on the border between the two. And I believe that disciplines such as anthropology should always be prepared to re-invent themselves and their traditional approaches according to social, political and technological changes.

Having said this, I would like to say that from my own perspective there is not much difference between a web-log and a virtual community discussion like this that we all are sharing. Perhaps this kind of community needs a stronger effort because is more virtual than a blog and cannot exist without immediate responses from the participants (or at least will die soon!). Rather blogs are virtual (but visible) 'rooms' in which posting information that will have possibilities of interacting with a large audience but that can also stay there without any acknowledgment.

Excluding from my comments all blogs that are run without a strong commitment or without getting much response from the audience (I don't know how many times I went across people running blogs as life-diaries with - at least at the beginning - 0 responses), I would like to make a parallelism between blogs with a strong commitment and virtual mailing-communities with a strong commitment.

I don't see many differences between the two apart from the responsibilities of

'running' a blog (e.g. keep it updated, keep answering and so forth), and the freedom of actively participating in it. In fact in terms of potential debate and content the two are very similar (or perhaps the virtual-mailing-community can be stronger than a blog in terms of content because the participants had to decide to participate without 'bumping' into it by chance while surfing the web, and without getting attracted by any images).

In this respect, I would like to comment:

1) The usefulness of a blog in anthropological fieldwork. According to Erkan's paper one of its most useful aspects is to 'break' the dichotomy between fieldwork time and writing up time and to create more immediacy between 'what has being collected' with a community of anthropologists as well as a community of locals - that is, taking the 'process of reflection' into the fieldwork itself. Now, in my own experience this kind of 'break' (the word has not been used by Erkan but it's my reading) happened/is happening by actively participating at virtual mailing communities such as this Media-Anthro (getting feedbacks from other 'theoretical' experts) and virtual mailing communities of locals connected to my topics of research - 'documentary filmmaking and media activism' - (getting feedbacks from 'specialised' locals). The possibility of breaking the dichotomy and of intensifying the fieldwork with deeper reflection (not to be postponed to another stage of research) with a larger community is for me necessary in the contemporary time where everybody is more and more exposed to general issues (including anthropological concerns and debates!). This is partially what collaborative projects try to do and what I also try to do. However, I don't see this as a credit to the 'blogging universe' but rather as a credit to different forms of 'new media communications'. Moreover, blogs cannot limit consume and participation of people (which is somehow good if in line with Negri's idea of 'multitude'), and cannot limit perspectives. The function of the person who runs the blog becomes of a moderator which has to deal with whatever forms of opinion from whatever field that come into it. Now, since every blog-runner has his own political agenda, the moderation will be done according to his-her personal political view and will automatically take away a potential range of active-consumers (at least after few displeasing answers). The democratic aspect of blog becomes then less democratic than a virtual-mailing-community in which everybody has a peer relationship with everybody and where a moderator has to moderate a discussion not according to his political agenda but according to issues of discussion that come from the group itself. In this respect, I found the latter (despite blogging) a great potential for the process of reflection throughout the anthropological fieldwork research.

2) The usefulness of blogs. I rather see the usefulness of blogs in terms of participation. As an anthropologist in the field, to find a blog or a virtual community of people that like to talk about topics connected to my research is very challenging and productive. By participating in debates (and not running any blog), you - anthropologist - can constantly put yourself on the ground with your achieving and ideas by discussing them with others in the process of collecting data. Some people are more likely to respond critically to you in this way rather than during an interview; and some other issues that you may have not considered may come out in those discussions and make you reflecting on your research topic in other ways.

3) Virtual vs Face-to-face. Finally, I don't think blogs (and other forms of virtual communication) can replace entirely fieldwork research (and if I am not wrong this is also Erkan's position) but they can enlarge possibilities of collecting data. Though, again, I find the idea of running a blog a little bit weak if compared to other forms of mailing community discussions. Fieldwork is a limited period of anthropological research. And running a blog is a job that can take lots of time. It is a matter of balancing how much time to give to an online based interaction and how much to a face-to-face interaction. In his response Erkan said that he needs only one hour per day to update his blog, quoting:

I spend a good deal of time daily. Probably all content gathering needs at least

one hour. But as you know more about new media, you find outadvanced tools to make your life easier. I take advantage of all thosetools.

I personally don't know how-whether this is possible. My concern is not the aesthetic and technical part of the uploading process ect, but the content part. Personally speaking, I need time to reflect and respond to other people and to issues connected to my research.

If I decide to take advantages from these new technologies I believe I HAVE to take it seriously as much as I would take seriously to write a paper after my fieldwork time for a conference. Perhaps I am exaggerating but I believe that if the moment of reflection becomes an 'immediacy' (which does not take much time and not much reflection per se) the all idea of usefulness of sharing your notes and ideas for a better fieldwork for me vanishes. If rather this process takes more time, then it will take time off from the face-to-face necessary fieldwork interactions. This happens to me constantly: everyday I have to balance my needs and organize my time according from these two aspects of daily fieldwork experience. Though, by not running a blog but by participating at virtual mailing community discussions (also within blogs), I have the freedom of organizing my time according to my face-to-face interactions and not according to my blog's needs. Again, my own experience makes me use my time in a productive way (at least up to now) which does not scarify any important part of my limited fieldwork time.

I apologize again for the long response, but this discussion is very close to my experience and daily doubts and practices that I felt to share all the above comments with you.

I hope some of you will found them useful. I will be happy to spell out some of the concept mentioned in connection of my research later on. I did not feel to go in details in this occasion.

Best wishes
Giulia

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From: gabyvargasc at prodigy.net.mx (Gabriela Vargas-Cetina)
Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 23:52:34 -0500
Subject: [Medianthro] Erkan's paper

Hello all. I enjoyed reading Erkan's paper, and don't mind the fact that he presented it (or didn't) somewhere else, since he has not published it yet in an open journal or any other journal.

Blogging is becoming an important way of communicating ideas and linking people, so it is good to see some initial reflections on how it can impact anthropology -and academia in general. I don't agree with Erkan that anthropologists should write necessarily for non-anthropologists; there are many different types of blogs, and they may all have different purposes. I blog for a readership that seems to be composed mainly of anthropology students and professors and do not need to make my blog readable for a larger public, or necessarily make it multilingual (I usually write in Spanish, with the odd posting in English). It meets well the functions I wanted it to meet.

It never occurred to me to use a blog as a field diary, until I saw Erkan's when he sent invitations out to mark 1 million visits to his blog. Erkan's blog is quite amazing, for the reasons Mary Steven's has outlined, and it will probably start a trend among anthropologists who want to share their

field diaries with their peers. As a diary it does not have all the shortcomings of the old field diary: most anthropologists use their diaries in a limited way because they usually record only what the anthropologist saw, heard, experienced or somehow learned about, and it is only later that each specific entry can be put in a larger context so as to create a unified narrative in a paper or a book. Through his blog Erkan is always putting his entries in the larger current context, through links and through the comments his readers post. This semester I have started an experiment getting my students to post their diaries through facebook, so we all know when someone posted something, and it has worked very well so far. Facebook allows some of the features of blogs, while maintaining a higher level of privacy, since you can control who accesses your page, and allows you to share your delicious account. I think facebook is a major tool for the anthropology of the future, along with blogs, google (scholar, code search, docs, gmail and other services) and delicious. Furthermore, when zotero opens up its server service, the potential for research collaboration will increase exponentially.

There are still all the dangers Derrida warned of all those years ago: more information is being shared, and very likely more is being produced than ever before, but the loss of the archives is a constant problem. This is something I think Erkan along with the rest of us should probably reflect on: What is the future of fieldnotes, including blog field journals? I know I cannot access my fieldnotes from ten years ago because the OS I used then and the disk slots have disappeared. As of five years ago I have gone back to regular notebooks to prevent this from happening again. But maybe fieldblogs are a way to re-cast fieldnotes conceptually as perishable, contextual documents to be discarded when they have met their purpose (the writing of articles and books, and the creation of lecture notes).

I still don't see how Erkan's claim that the 'after the fact' effect is eliminated through his blog can be true, since at some point he is going to write his dissertation, after having blogged for all these years. He posts mostly after the fact, like all of us did when we wrote private field journals, although sometimes he is initiating something through his posts.

Most of Erkan's references are to internet sites and to articles that can be downloaded. This reflects the new trend I've noticed among students and scholars in general, who are going less to the physical library and using more online information and downloads. Maybe universities should change to accommodate this new situation. Should we do away with dissertations altogether, or at least with book-form dissertations and switch to online dissertations in the form of webpages with lots of links?

On a final note, the March 2008 Anthropology News (the newsletter of the American Anthropological Association) has a discussion on blogs, facebook, plagiarism and the fact that many of the groups among whom we do fieldwork now have online presence. Maybe some of the authors of those pieces are part of this group and want to contribute to the current discussion?

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina

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From: ethnographic at earthlink.net (Jay Ruby)

Date: Wed, 21 May 2008 07:40:04 -0400

Subject: [Mediantthro] Comment on Saka's Blogging Paper

Comment on Saka's Blogging Paper

By

Jay Ruby

I found this paper most interesting and agree with the author that blogging while conducting fieldwork is an excellent idea. With a blog you can stay in touch with your colleagues and if the community under examination is computer literate you can get feedback from them.

My initial experience with blogs was not a positive one. The blogs I first examined were superficial, poorly written and in fact, not worth my time. I therefore stopped looking at blogs until recently after an email discussion with Kerim Freidman who runs the Savage Minds blog. When he pointed out the oblivious to me - namely that I have had a blog since 2000, I realized my error.

For six years I was engaged in an ethnographic exploration on an upper-middle-class suburb of Chicago - Oak Park. As the community members are well educated and computer literate, I decided to avail myself of the internet as a research device. I establish a web site The Oak Park Project at <http://astro.temple.edu/~ruby/opp> in which I placed various statements about myself and the project. I updated the web page on a regular basis with quarterly progress reports and copies of papers I gave about my work at conferences, interviews of me and articles from the local press. At the same time I created a listserv for Oak Parkers and others interested in my research. About 100 joined. I announced any additions including a new progress report through the listserv. I regularly received comments about the web site from listserv members. As there are over 150 university professors living in Oak Park some of the comments were from social science colleagues. I realize that this community is very different from those usually studied by anthropologists.

I found the discipline of having to write a progress report every three months extremely useful. Some of what I wrote I later used in my publications (See <http://www.der.org/films/oak-park-stories.html> for details. Likewise the email comments sometimes caused me to start an email conversation with some Oak Parkers.

I am convinced that field blogs should be a commonplace device for ethnographers. While I am now retired, if I were not, I would insist that my students maintain field blogs while doing their dissertation fieldwork. It would enable the students' committee to observe their progress.

So while I completely agree with Saga's paper, I must end with a note of some anxiety. How does one keep up with all of the blogs and other information floating around the internet? Perhaps it is my age but I cannot. If I add in all of the material at a site like Youtube then chaos erupts.

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"We are all generating more media that we can consume. The amount of photography, recorded material, text, the cloud of metadata that we are all leaving behind, is overwhelming." Clay Shirky, NYU, Interactive Telecommunications Program.

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From: odonnc at rpi.edu (Casey O'Donnell)
Date: Wed, 21 May 2008 15:51:49 -0400
Subject: [Mediantro] Erkan's Blogging Paper Thoughts...

I had several reactions to Erkan's paper, which I enjoyed reading.

The first reaction was that it read like a blog post (not a criticism, it is kind of refreshing), rather than an essay that I would encounter in a journal. The citation style alone makes it apparent that there is something different about the essay, and perhaps in this it is performative. But it also performs what so many blogs (I'm not saying all) are not good at, which is drawing connections outside of the blogosphere or online domain. Why no reference to *Writing Culture*, or the essays contained within? Why no attention to the voluminous amount of writing that has been done about ethnographic form and fieldnotes? The essay is making a methodological argument and yet doesn't converse with the material which borders it in anthropology.

The ethnographic stories in the essay are excellent. I'd actually rather see more of the intersections between those stories, the literature and a reduced connection to the blogosphere. You can paraphrase all of that for us and reference it, rather than having the long blog quotes in the text.

The next comment I wanted to make was that there is an assumption about "blogging" which is not mentioned in the paper (hinted at in the "Anthropology in Public" post excerpt, but not really extracted adequately). Why does Erkan have such a following? Why is his blog read in ways that, say another blogger may not experience? The answer has more to do with his list of links to other blogs. What makes "blogging" different from placing fieldnotes online is the activity on other sites. Commenting on other sites to encourage others to read your blog. You wind up entering into communities of practice, which ultimately can become just as insular as any other community. There is an entire set of social activity which makes "blogging" work. I didn't really get a sense of that in the essay. It felt as if it was saying, "if you build it, they will come," which they may not.

Most blogs go uncommented on. They become public journals which are largely unread. Most of my blogging fits into this category. So blogging is about potentiality of engagement. I have a handful of regular readers who mostly think that I'm right on, from time to time they make a comment or two to keep me honest or flag overstatements.

I would also caution us to think critically about any kind of intrinsic value placed on immediate feedback. This is where blogging can become problematic for the ethnographer. Is it our field that we should be paying attention to or our blogging? Are there times when a little less interaction might help us think about our material? To allow us to read and follow connections without wondering about those recent blog comments? Our research tool, or dissemination tool can take over. We need both, feedback and cut-offs from our feedback.

I am moderately concerned about the assumption of accountability. Many bloggers do so behind pseudonyms. Many are thin guises, but there is no reason why it is intrinsically more accountable. It depends entirely upon the ethnographer. He refers to "Rex" in the essay, a blogger at Savage Minds, who makes little attempt to hide his real identity of Alex Golub ("Alex Golub?Rex to [his]my friends"), but that is not innate to the blog forum. It can perhaps be just as or more unaccountable if the ethnographer chooses.

Where I think Erkan is most observant is that blogging forces the ethnographer to "narrate what would normally remain fragments of fieldnotes." This is where the blog I think is most effective for the ethnographer. It is a space where we can do public thinking. I blogged a great deal while doing my fieldwork. I used it as a place to think about events in the field or more broadly. I referred to them throughout the writing of my dissertation. I found that some of my most perceptive analysis occurred in these spaces and the tagging of the blog offered me tools to think with while doing data analysis. Does this mean I got feedback? Sometimes, but I also used it as a way to temper what I was saying. The possibility that it might be read was enough to make me think very carefully about my words.

I think the essay must engage with the anthropological literature more however. I would actually encourage Erkan to keep the "bloggish" form of the essay, but make more connections with the academic literature as well as the blogosphere and anthro-web. I believe you; new media has had (will have and should have) much larger consequences for anthropology. My own thinking with and through videogames as another tool for thinking about the ethnographic gives me a sense that you're right on. You need to think with those previous resources though, this isn't a revolution as much as it is an evolution of an ongoing anthropological "long lasting self-reflexive mood."

Best.
Casey

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From: oxusnet at gmail.com (Kerim Friedman)
Date: Thu, 22 May 2008 08:47:10 +0800
Subject: [Mediantro] Comment on Saka's Blogging Paper

A few random thoughts on anthropological blogging:

"Requiring students to keep a fieldwork blog" - yes! I am trying to do the same, although so far without much success (my students haven't really started their fieldwork in honest yet). New free blog hosting services make it easy to do this (I recommend wordpress.com, but blogger is good too). One can choose to make such a blog public or private, but I encourage students to try to be as public as possible given the subject of their research. And I think it is important to let your informants know about the blog and perhaps even to teach them how to leave comments.

"Self-plagiarism" - I'm all for it!!! One has to be honest, of course - but blogs are a fantastic place to work out ideas. The historical section of the paper I am currently writing was worked out in a series of blog posts on Savage Minds, as well as interventions on Wikipedia.

Genre - For me blogging is a genre much closer to speech than writing. Alex Golub compares it to the talk overheard in the corridors of academia. That's a pretty good analogy, except I hate to say that I overhear a lot more interesting conversations on blogs than I ever heard in any academic corridor. I think the biggest hurdle most academics have with blogging is that they attempt to bring to it the standards of written academic discourse. That's fine - a blog is just a publishing platform so you can be as literary as you like - but I feel that the more casual style better facilitates dialog and discussion both in the comments section of a blog and between blogs. The nice thing is that you can change styles depending on the subject matter and your mood.

"Information overload" - There is no doubt about it - this is a problem. I just unsubscribed from a half dozen e-mail lists I never read. But fortunately there are a lot of powerful tools we can use to get a grip on this information abundance. Google Reader is like an e-mail reader for blogs. Every blog has an "RSS" feed which can be subscribed to in Google Reader, allowing you to see how many unread posts there are. You can easily group blogs into categories and tags, and mark those posts which you want to read more later or share with others. I of course don't read most of the 453 blogs I'm subscribed to on Google Reader - but I have them categorized and I do my best to read those which are most important to me. Also, other bloggers are your information filter. Jay Sosa is now publishing a weekly "around the web" post on Savage Minds (every monday) with highlights from the anthropological blogosphere. The New York Times also had an article about how social websites, like Facebook, FriendFeed and Twitter, are serving as an information filter - bringing together recommendations from trusted sources. Finally, there are some more high-powered technologies out there (like Yahoo Pipes) which let you filter RSS feeds and get updates from custom searches. I think these will get even easier to use over time.

Public Anthropology - On the blog Culture Matters, LL Wynn has an interesting post about anthropologists as public intellectuals.

<http://culturematters.wordpress.com/2008/05/17/anthropologists-in-the-public-sphere/>

In it she points out that editors in the mainstream press often butcher all the complexity out of contributions by anthropologists. Blogging allows anthropologists to be in control of their own contributions to public discourse. Jumping in the fray can be rough (I have scars to prove it), but anyone who complains that anthropology isn't doing enough to make itself relevant in the public sphere has no right to complain if they aren't blogging!

Finally, I wanted to point readers to a blog we are maintaining for an AAA session we proposed for November called Remixing Anthropology. It deals with some of the issues we have been discussing here:

<http://remixinganthropology.wordpress.com/>

Cheers,

Kerim

<http://savageminds.org>

From: j at julianhopkins.net (Julian Hopkins)

Date: Thu, 22 May 2008 09:59:43 +0800

Subject: [Mediantro] Response to Erkan Saka's paper

(Sorry for the rather long reply - I included a pdf for those who prefer that format)

I read Erkan's paper, and the responses, with great interest, as I am doing research on blogs in Malaysia and my blog is an integral part of that research - because I am looking at blogs and bloggers, I also have a blog as the 'participant' part of my participant observation. Erkan has articulated much of what I see are the benefits that blogs can bring to anthropological fieldwork - in particular the ability to record notes and thoughts as you go along in a forum that allows for others to respond to what you are saying. He also stimulated me to do a 'sticky post' asking for feedback that I have been meaning to do for a while - one small blow against procrastination :)

In my case, the focus of my research is English language blogs in Malaysia. Bloggers typically have fairly good writing skills and enjoy expressing themselves online; so, in a way that is not common in anthropological research,

there is therefore very little barrier to the subjects of my research understanding and responding to what I say online (similarly to Jay's example). Hopefully, this will be able to reduce something of the power the anthropologist usually has to define those they study, and remove those definitions to fields beyond their control but which may however affect them significantly (e.g. colonial/post-colonial anthropological definitions of 'native customs', etc.).

However, as Delia suggests, I still have misgivings about how 'honest' I should be in my blog. I worry about influencing bloggers who may be future interviewees and/or survey respondents. My basic argument is that blogs are constructed around concepts of authenticity (something Erkan demonstrates well), but that as more 'problogging' (i.e. commercially oriented blogging) occurs, this 'authenticity' will be challenged (something Mary touches upon too, with regards to advertising). It is a moral question of sorts, relating to putative common values of the blogosphere. Therefore by articulating the aspects of this debate in my blog, I fear that other bloggers may be influenced in that they may ask themselves moral questions that they otherwise wouldn't have; I also worry that I may alienate some potential respondents. Mary makes a good point regarding how *not* mentioning people in her blog increased her credibility - I'm now thinking that I may do something similar by anonymising any analyses I put online.

Ultimately, we perform many roles, and they become more consciously performed when using an asynchronous medium such as blogs. Anthropology is also about reflexively learning different performances. Blogging is, ostensibly, about being 'real'. So I find myself caught in double (triple?) bind: wondering where I need to stop being a blogger and start being an anthropologist, and where I need to put 'myself' in all of this? I guess that's part of fieldwork anyway, and it reminds me of issues raised in an article by Hobart (below).

Recognising the ability of anthropologists to influence those they study is nothing new, but when one is being completely transparent with ideas (which may well change, as Erkan notes) with an audience who is completely able to understand them, it may swing the pendulum too far in the other direction - as Mary says, 'The anthropologist-blogger may enjoy greater visibility in the field, but this may not always be an advantage.' In that context, Erkan says he went to great measures to remain neutral in certain debates - I was wondering why? Is it because he wants to keep on good terms with the different readers, as potential participants in his research; or because that's what he would do anyway? My research differs in that I have to 'be' a blogger; does Erkan see his neutrality as part of the role of the journalist or the researcher? I could add that blogger-journalists typically espouse a partisan position, and I wonder whether Erkan has ever felt the need to do so in order to be a more 'authentic' blogger?

The focus on journalism and blogs is a limitation of Erkan's paper that he recognises, and in my experience also reflects the wider limitation to particular kinds of blogs in blog research which tend to look at the Social-Political ('SoPo')/journalistic side of things. One exception to this are Reed's excellent articles that look at 'personal blogs'; I feel that to understand blogging more research is needed on the personal blogs as they make up the majority of blogs. I guess that the reason why a greater attention is paid to the SoPo blogs is that these are the ones that are more likely to attract attention in the mainstream media; also, it seems to me that within journalism there is something of a territorial battle going on with relation to what is seen as 'proper' journalism.

Just picking up on a comment by Owen - "I'm just wondering why blogging is considered more public than other published formats..." It's a good question, to which the first obvious answer is that you don't need to be a paid subscriber (though there are some decent free journals online, especially in the new media field); the second one is perhaps that blogs are often perceived as being an outlet for reflections and emotions that are usually shared with a restricted circle of close friends, etc- so the juxtaposition between private and public is highlighted and through some process of transference, a blog is seen as more 'public'. A parallel might be a paparazzi picture of a celebrity

on a beach in a bikini: the celebrity was in public at the time of the picture, but putting it in a newspaper can be seen as an affront to her privacy.

I agree with Giulia as to the less democratic nature of blogs. A blog is a 'benevolent dictatorship' [I got this appellation from someone, though I can't remember who right now]: the blogger has the ultimate rights to ban anyone, delete comments, and so on. Although in practice a blogger is expected to allow a certain amount of debate, his/her right to say 'It's my blog and if you don't like it, leave!' is usually recognised by all - or at least by regular readers who will support the exclusion of a commenter seen as disruptive. Having a blog does take up time, and for me a post can take from one to three hours to complete (including formatting the pictures, writing, previewing, etc.).

Finally, I'd like apologise for the long answer, and put it down to the excellent material that has stimulated me. Also, any answers, advice and feedback would be gratefully received.

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From: danieltaghioff at yahoo.com (Daniel Taghioff)
Date: Wed, 21 May 2008 20:16:09 -0700 (PDT)
Subject: [Mediantro] Why Anthropologists need liminality,
and how blogs relate to polyphony

Firstly I would like to thank Karim et al. for the Savage Minds blog, I have really learnt some useful stuff there, especially in the debates about Jared Diamond.

I'd like to pick up on a few points raised earlier.

I think Erkan is partly popular because he is a "good blogger" (I wonder what that means and why- here is my take): He writes regularly, and with a recognizable and accessible voice. I write this from the point of view of a "bad blogger", who writes infrequently, and mostly to work through arguments for his own benefit, that he can refer people who have a special interest to. Unsurprisingly my audience has disciplined me to the margins of the blogo-sphere, even though my blog serves its own narrow purpose.

But Erkan also is (perhaps - I am more exploring a theme than making an assertion) popular because there is a sort of fit between his subject matter: Turkey's entry into the EU, and his medium - blogging.

When I first read Erkan's paper I began to wonder: What is a blog? Is it a genre?

Well discussion of Genre is interesting, but tends to lead back to how such Genres are constituted in practice, which in turn leads back to communities of practice (at least in my work.) So then I got to thinking about how blogging operates as part of a community (or constituting a sense of one, not to assume a stable target of reference.)

Mary's critique of Erkan is instructive in this sense. If you go to Mary's now somewhat discontinued blog, or skim through the comments here (Including Jay

and Kerim's) there is a sense of a blog being a good tool for an apprentice, but something that one might discontinue once fully "in" the professional community of practice, (perhaps due to the time pressures of professional life, but it is still not a priority at this point.)

Which reminds me of Mary Douglas, about in between categories, such as cousins (marry / not marry) or rabbits (eat or pet) though I hesitate to include Erkan in such a list :-)

Or indeed it reminds me of Turner, and in-between spaces or indeterminate spaces where things can be acted out that would not normally be expressed.

Which is a lot of the tone of Kerim's comments about "a place to work out ideas." It is a place more professional than the pub (sometimes perhaps only slightly, to put it from another angle, I have had some very rigorous discussions in the pub) but less formally "Anthropological" than a peer review.

It is thus a liminal space as well as a space that might be associated with a right of passage, or apprenticeship. And this fits nicely with Erkan's subject matter of how Elite commentators deal with Turkey's right of passage into the EU.

It also perhaps explains partly why bloggers get a lot of flack, Mary's critique mirroring how journalists respond to bloggers, in terms of John Lloydian esque critiques of a lack of standards and probity and professionalism etc.

Blogging does destabilise somewhat the category of professional author, blurring somewhat the "what is an author" question in a fairly public forum. So like rabbits, "blogger" takes on a slightly profane tinge, as it destabilises existing categories. I wonder if it is a term already used as a sexual reference?

But this is also part of its use-fulness. To make a link with the writing culture debates, writing culture as a "polyphony of voices" was criticised by Kohn in a Seminal paper as conforming to Collingwood's critique of cut and paste history.

The point being that there needs to be some organising voice in the multitude relating these voices to a line of inquiry and thought. This critique has been levelled at that cousin (not married yet) of blogging, Wikipedia, which has been attacked not as less accurate (that too, somewhat unfairly) but as less coherently authored than say Encyclopedia Britannica (incidentally on the Prospect Blog "First Drafts" - another reference to liminality and apprenticeship in referring to Journalism as the first draft of history.)

So is a blog a liminal space where various communities may explore the task of finding coherent voice in polyphony? Well the Irony is that most blogs are the reverse: Like mine, a monologue seeking a response. But in Erkan's case he has hit a nerve (through lots of hard work and wit also) in (perhaps) being a place where disparate voices in Turkey can try and find narratives about the liminality of their nation.

Which relates closely to fieldwork, and the struggle to find sense in the jumbled warehouse of life. But is this something just for apprentices? This forum here is an example of the same thing online. Is this a more liminal space than a conference, less formal than a seminar. In many ways there are a lot of people attending this event, but in another it is online, so does it count on our CV's?

I think that one of the best outcomes of blogging is indeed this liminality, and a broadening of the definitions of the community of practice one might call "Anthropology" that this might bring. Is Erkan's paper thus unprofessional or broadening professionalism, well that is a good question to work out in such a liminal space. The issue for me is the linkages between these worlds, so that online becomes something more than an exceptional ritual.

Daniel

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From: o.wiltshire at gmail.com (Owen Wiltshire)
Date: Thu, 22 May 2008 21:03:38 -0400
Subject: [Mediantro] Erkan's paper

Hi all,

I enjoy the discussion surrounding honesty and blogging, and I have been thinking a lot about this idea of sharing analysis early on in ones research. As someone with no experience publishing, its quite odd that I go out and write about "the culture of publishing", but this exploration into the unknown has always been part of fieldwork. As I post on my blog, I tend to suffer a lot of anxiety about what kind of idiocy I am promoting. I had a nice dream about being the court jester. Thankfully I also approach my blog as a research tool as Erkan is promoting. As a research tool I'm using my blog as a learning space, where I'm trying to put up bits of analysis, bits of data, and things in general that catch my interest. ie: I've taken some obnoxious positions against journals recently, but this has worked to develop conversation and I'm learning a lot. I also know I need to balance out my knowledge, and by being honest with how much I don't know it sure makes it easier for people to contribute.

I don't think my taking a position has alienated me however, as I have the pleasure of writing from the position of a "student". With some social status next to my name, it would be much harder to perform as court jester. I can just put it all out there, and when I'm completely wrong I can say "hey thanks I didn't know that" whereas perhaps as a professional its dangerous to do that? Maybe the expectation of expertise gets in the way of being open, or of putting up "premature" analysis? Could that be why its being used mostly by 'apprentices' as Daniel points out?

Also, back to Erkan's paper specifically, I had a discussion with a fellow student yesterday who commented on my paper and said "you talk all about blogging, and never explain what a blog is. I don't know how to blog. I checked out your site but I couldn't figure out how to comment on it". So I take back my suggestion of removing the section on the technology itself, especially if you can find a way to get your article printed so people not already living online can read it.

Sincerely,
Owen Wiltshire

From: davisr at cyllene.uwa.edu.au (richard davis)
Date: Fri, 23 May 2008 10:23:03 +0800
Subject: [Mediantro] Erkan's paper: ethical, legal & epistemological issues

For me Erkan's article raises issues about the possible ethical, legal and epistemological issues of using a blog as field diary.

For example, it would seem to me that the context the blogger writes from could be more important than just adding texture to a blog entry and this calls into question the virtue of writing as a public enterprise. For example, in an Australian context, anthropologists who work with Indigenous peoples can find their notes subject to subpoena. Native title claims (a form of land claim Indigenous Australians can undertake based on national legislation that allows them to do this) are the main domain in which this takes place, but one can imagine many situations that this could occur in, from witnessing violence or being knowledgeable of illegal, subversive activities. So, there are issues of

observation and representation that go beyond the anthropologist's own concerns.

This also raises for me a further ethical issue. I think there is virtue in the conventional field diary, if only because it protects the people an anthropologist is working with from witnessing the way they are represented in a diary. Anthropologists, like any other person, have personal opinions about individuals and groups. A field diary is also the place an anthropologist can hypothesise in the boldest manner without fear of exposure. This is very necessary because it allows an anthropologist the space to develop their ideas and impressions, perhaps naive at first, but gradually more sophisticated as time goes on. A public blog that contained this sort of information could get an anthropologist in great trouble, and would seem to me to necessitate a more conventional field diary that sat alongside the public blog, which then raises the issue of what the public blog is meant to do and what the epistemological status of blog entries amount to. Are they diluted versions of more elaborate notes? How constructed are they? All notes are constructions, never just unimpeded accounts of sensory data, so how much faith can a reader have in them?

No matter what the purpose of a blog is, it sits at the juncture of an unavoidable tension. On the one hand it is the creation of an individual, part of their property, an extension of themselves into a public domain. On the other hand it is open to interpretation and use, quite possibly far beyond the intentions of the blogger. If a blog generates a really insightful discussion and the blogger wishes to use the discussion to inform their own research does the blogger claim the idea as their own or is the blogger obliged to cite it as a collectively generated idea? There are challenging issues of property involved here.

Many thanks for the paper Erkan

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From: alicia.blum-ross at anthro.ox.ac.uk (Alicia Blum-Ross)
Date: Fri, 23 May 2008 16:17:09 +0100
Subject: [Mediantro] further ethical and legal issues raised by blogging

I have been a subscriber to this list for some time, but this is my first (nervous) posting. I am compelled to write because although I can see the potential for blogging as a unique way of mitigating some of the continually fraught issues of power and transparency in research, as well as providing a useful tool for analysis, I find the idea of blogging with my own work wholly problematic.

My research examines young peoples' participation in digital video outreach projects in London, many of which are aimed at 'at-risk' individuals. Working with young people in the UK requires satisfying self- and government-imposed ethical and 'child protection' policies. I have created a system of anonymity within my research to protect the subjects involved, as well as to protect myself.

Given these requirements, and the general ethos of child protection, I

would find it impossible to create a blog about my work. My subjects are mainly teenagers, and more than capable of commenting on my research. Yet in an environment where researchers must consider protection requirements even when conducting a face-to-face interview, I would be wary of creating an forum for unmediated interaction.

Facebook, also listed by some in this group as a beneficial way for interacting with subjects, has proved occasionally problematic in this respect. Some of my informants have found me on Facebook and are now my 'friends.' Again, I can see how this would be useful from the perspective of transparency, but there are still legal issues at play. For example, I would not normally communicate with the young people who take part in my research outside of the context of the fieldsite - i.e. it would be frowned upon to exchange email addresses unless a project worker or teacher had specifically given his or her permission. Yet do you turn down a 'friend' request and risk offending? In one instance a project worker asked me for copies of pictures I'd taken during research and subsequently put the photos on Facebook and Flickr. Normally you need parental permission for any photo of a young person placed online - have I unintentionally transgressed?

I recognise that researching with young people in the UK (and other locations I suspect) requires working within a much more rigid legal framework than in many areas where anthropologists commonly work. However I wonder whether some of these considerations shouldn't also be the responsibility of those who do not have to worry as much about the 'legal' requirements and think about these issues more from an ethical standpoint. Jay Ruby wrote 'I am convinced that field blogs should be a commonplace device for ethnographers' and it seems that from your posts many on this list agree, at least in part. Yet I agree with Richard Davis and others that there are a host of legal and ethical dilemmas to consider before doing our 'public thinking.'

Thanks to all for a thought-provoking discussion...

Alicia

Alicia Blum-Ross
D Phil Candidate in Social Anthropology
University of Oxford

From: interven at inet.uni2.dk (Peter I. Crawford)
Date: Fri, 23 May 2008 18:28:29 +0200
Subject: [Medianthro] further ethical and legal issues raised by blogging

Dear Alicia and list,

This is an important issue. Our students, and staff for that matter, at the Visual Cultural Studies programme of the University of Tromsø in Norway would most probably be unable to undertake any research based on blogging etc. due to the extremely strict ethical standards monitored by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). It would even be difficult if the target group/informants were not at risk. In addition, one has to destroy all the data once a research project is completed almost making any kind of long-term anthropological research impossible. I do believe that there are serious ethical issues we have to deal with, but the rigidity (leave alone the bureaucracy) of the Norwegian system, which I believe is perhaps the strictest in the world, almost renders any research involving the storage of personal data, electronically or otherwise, impossible. The application of these standards are universal, i.e. they apply to any research conducted by any Norwegian research institution/university in any part of the world. What new media open up for, is actually arguing that no matter what we do, traces of it will remain in cyberspace, beyond our control, which would be enough reason for NSD, in principle, to say that that would be against the rules. Recalling Frank Parkin's novel 'Krippendorf's Tribe', it may be time for anthropology to engage only in

fictitious projects with no 'real' people. What a tool blogging could then be.

Regards,

Peter

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From: angela.zito at nyu.edu (Angela R Zito)

Date: Sat, 24 May 2008 07:34:28 +0800

Subject: [Medianthro] blogging in particular

Thanks to Erkan for posting. I perhaps over-identified with his mention of the lone ethnographer wondering what, in the end, one is actually doing here! Having been theoretically trained as an anthropologist, I mostly used that training doing cultural historical work on China. I am now doing field research on collaborative cultural production in documentary filmmaking, photography and performance art in Beijing. I do this in a context of long-term commitment to understanding culture as materially mediated through embodied activity of all sorts. As a new communicative genre, blogging will likely become only more interesting and useful to anthropologists. That said, I have a few comments on its value at the fieldwork stage.

Context: I am working in China in a fraught year. My own website, newly constructed back in New York for this six-month stint, was promptly blocked by the local firewall for unfathomable reasons that seem to have nothing to do with content. To read most blogs from abroad one needs to go through proxies. This puts a material damper on blogging enthusiasm - I offer it only as evidence that the whole enterprise, while feeling seductively virtually 'universal,' emphatically is not. (Not that people on this list probably think that, more that we often end up sometimes still acting 'as if'?)

Readership: seems the potential audience includes the people among whom one is working, other anthropologists, other public intellectuals, anyone who finds it. Erkan himself notes that his own fieldwork among journalists, many of whom also blog, gives blogging itself the imprimatur of 'participation' for him. In many other sorts of fieldwork it would not be so.

My own work stretches across several communities: government cadres in Beijing, themselves cultural producers (with strongly institutionalized ideas about culture, its production and control); independent filmmakers; artists; and local residents who avidly pursue an art practice in their daily lives. I share ongoing projects with several people. For me, blogging in English would automatically exclude virtually my whole local community, most of whom do not speak or read English. Blogging in Chinese is beyond me - perhaps the next life! So much for the pleasures of assuaging the anxieties about transparency and the power gap through blogging for me.

Legality and protection: In the US, anthropologists must file a petition with their universities in order to do fieldwork - the human subject's review. This customarily requires assurances about anonymity for 'informants' etc. Alicia raised these issues very succinctly in relation to work among minors. Richard mentions legal issues about our notes, images etc. Peter describes a situation even more controlled than the US. It is bracing to contemplate the distance between our own commitments to reflexivity and openness and the perception of the field as 'scientific' and thus subject to controls more appropriate to bio-medical research than the sort of work most of us do (which ironically is far closer to journalism). In further contrast, the state's representatives in China, who claim a clear role in cultural management, feel entitled to know about everything I do--just a fact on the ground here. A potent collision of intentions.

What I found most relevant to my own situation about Erkan's optimistically vigorous paper was the spur to writing that blogging would undoubtedly provide. It would be wonderful to be able to write regularly and well, pressing analysis along in real time with more rigor, for a broader public. I know we don't want everyone to just weigh in with: "Well, in my fieldsite...blah blah" and I apologize for offering remarks that are so very particular. But such forums as this encourage the gathering of particular insights toward some emerging sense of direction, I guess. It is interesting to me that old issues of context, publics, and ethics of contrasting legal regimes are even more sharply highlighted in this debate.

As always, thanks for our enjoyable and useful forum - and for giving me company in the field!

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From: danieltaghioff at yahoo.com (Daniel Taghioff)
Date: Sun, 25 May 2008 01:02:49 -0700 (PDT)
Subject: [Mediantro] blogging in particular

I'd just like to add a variation on the interesting theme of the recent comments.

Sometimes the issues of protection get turned somewhat on their heads, as I have experienced. I am researching environmental activists in India and their engagement with public debate. These activists are really not interested in anonymity. They do have information they wish to protect, like their legal and protests strategies, but they also want to get into the media with their accounts whenever possible.

I, however, as a researcher engaging with a politically charged topic wish to keep a low profile, so that I do not encounter visa issues... Now if I blog, should I do so anonymously, letting my informants know about the blog, but keeping it somewhat unclear who the author is to others, although in practice it is likely to be glaringly obvious, I am not a skilled enough writer to disguise my voice. Also, would that be ethical - I am supposed to protect my informants, but do the same standards apply to self-protection, I think that is a more difficult area.

Now in terms of blogging about the activities of activists, there is also the issue that the blog would inevitably get co-opted to their efforts to reach publics, implicating me fairly firmly with my object of study, and also raising practical issues. Already, my informants are (justifiably from their point of view) keen to use me however they can for their cause, asking for photos I have taken for their publications and so on. Now I have asked them not to give my surname in crediting those pictures, but again, tricky ground.

So when you are studying such active interventions in public, doesn't a blog fall somewhere in-between your analysis and your object of study, another liminal public in [media] ethnography?

Daniel Taghioff

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From: sbh at hi.is (Sigurjon Hafsteinsson)

Date: Tue, 27 May 2008 13:26:23 -0000 (GMT)

Subject: [Mediantro] Blog-Post Confidential: What I gained – and lost – by revealing my intimate life on the web...by Emily Gould

Dear List,

As we are discussing Erkan Saka's paper on blogging I thought this article might be relevant for the discussion:

The New York Times
May 25, 2008

Exposed

By EMILY GOULD

Back in 2006, when I was 24, my life was cozy and safe. I had just been promoted to associate editor at the publishing house where I'd been working since I graduated from college, and I was living with my boyfriend, Henry, and two cats in a grubby but spacious two-bedroom apartment in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. I spent most of my free time sitting with Henry in our cheery yellow living room on our stained Ikea couch, watching TV. And almost every day I updated my year-old blog, Emily Magazine, to let a few hundred people know what I was reading and watching and thinking about.

Some of my blog's readers were my friends in real life, and even the ones who weren't acted like friends when they posted comments or sent me e-mail. They criticized me sometimes, but kindly, the way you chide someone you know well. Some of them had blogs, too, and I read those and left my own comments. As nerdy and one-dimensional as my relationships with these people were, they were important to me. They made me feel like a part of some kind of community, and that made the giant city I lived in seem smaller and more manageable.

The anecdotes I posted on Emily Magazine occasionally featured Henry, whom my readers knew as a lovably bumbling character, a bassist in a fledgling noise-rock band who said unexpectedly insightful things about the contestants on 'Project Runway' and then wondered aloud whether we had any snacks. I didn't write about him often, but when I did, I'd quote his best jokes or tell stories about vacationing with his family.

Henry, seemingly alone among our generation, went out of his way to keep his online presence minimal. Now that we've broken up, I appreciate this about him – it's pretty much impossible to torture myself by Google-stalking him. But back then, what this meant was that he was never particularly thrilled to be written about. Sometimes he was enraged.

Once, I made fun of Henry for referring to 'Project Runway' as 'Project Gayway.' He worried that 'people' – the shadowy, semi-imaginary people who read my blog and didn't know Henry well enough to know that he wasn't a homophobe – would be offended. He insisted that I take down the offending post and watched as I sat at my desk in our bedroom, slowly, grudgingly making the keystrokes necessary to delete what I'd written. As I sat there staring into the screen at the reflection of Henry standing behind me, I burst into tears. And then we were pacing, screaming at each other, through every room of our apartment, facing off with wild eyes and clenched jaws.

My blog post was ridiculous and petty and small – and, suddenly, incredibly important. At some point I'd grown accustomed to the idea that there was a public place where I would always be allowed to write, without supervision, about how I felt. Even having to take into account someone else's feelings about being written about felt like being stifled in some essential way.

As Henry and I fought, I kept coming back to the idea that I had a right to say whatever I wanted. I don't think I understood then that I could be right about being free to express myself but wrong about my right to make that self-expression public in a permanent way. I described my feelings in the language of empowerment: I was being creative, and Henry wanted to shut me up. His point of view was just as extreme: I wasn't generously sharing my thoughts; I was compulsively seeking gratification from strangers at the expense of the feelings of someone I actually knew and loved. I told him that writing, especially writing about myself and my surroundings, was a fundamental part of my personality, and that if he wanted to remain in my life, he would need to reconcile himself to being part of the world I described.

After a standoff, he conceded that I should be allowed to put the post back up. As he sulked in the other room, I retyped what I'd written, feeling vindicated but slightly queasy for reasons I didn't quite understand yet.

Oversharing

One of the strangest and most enthralling aspects of personal blogs is just how intensely personal they can be. I'm talking 'specific details about someone's S.T.D.'s' personal, 'my infertility treatments' personal. There are nongynecological overshares, too: 'My dog has cancer' overshares, 'my abusive relationship' overshares.

It's easy to draw parallels between what's going on online and what's going on in the rest of our media: the death of scripted TV, the endless parade of ordinary, heavily made-up faces that become vaguely familiar to us as they grin through their 15 minutes of reality-show fame. No wonder we're ready to confess our innermost thoughts to everyone: we're constantly being shown that the surest route to recognition is via humiliation in front of a panel of judges.

But is that really what's making people blog? After all, online, you're not even competing for 10 grand and a Kia. I think most people who maintain blogs are doing it for some of the same reasons I do: they like the idea that there's a place where a record of their existence is kept - a house with an always-open door where people who are looking for you can check on you, compare notes with you and tell you what they think of you. Sometimes that house is messy, sometimes horrifyingly so. In real life, we wouldn't invite any passing stranger into these situations, but the remove of the Internet makes it seem O.K.

Of course, some people have always been more naturally inclined toward oversharing than others. Technology just enables us to overshare on a different scale. Long before I had a blog, I found ways to broadcast my thoughts - to gossip about myself, tell my own secrets, tell myself and others the ongoing story of my life. As soon as I could write notes, I passed them incorrigibly. In high school, I encouraged my friends to circulate a notebook in which we shared our candid thoughts about teachers, and when we got caught, I was the one who wanted to argue about the First Amendment rather than gracefully accept punishment. I walked down the hall of my high school passing out copies of a comic-book zine I drew, featuring a mock superhero called SuperEmily, who battled thinly veiled versions of my grade's reigning mean girls. In college, I sent out an all-student e-mail message revealing that an ex-boyfriend shaved his chest hair. The big difference between these youthful indiscretions and my more recent ones is that you can Google my more recent ones.

Online Life

In the fall of 2006, I got a call from the managing editor of Gawker Media, a network of highly trafficked blogs, asking me to come by the office in SoHo to talk about a job. Since its birth four years earlier, the company's flagship blog, Gawker, had purported to be in the business

of reporting 'Manhattan media gossip,' which it did, sometimes - catty little details about writers and editors and executives, mostly. But it was also a clearinghouse for any random tidbit of information about being young and ambitious in New York. Though Gawker was a must-read for many of the people working at the magazines and newspapers whose editorial decisions the site mocked and dissected, it held an irresistible appeal for desk-bound drones in all fields - tens of thousands of whom visited the site each day.

I had been one of those visitors for as long as I'd had a desk job. Sometimes Gawker felt like a source of essential, exclusive information, tailored to the needs of people just like me. Other times, reading Gawker left me feeling hollow and moody, as if I'd just absentmindedly polished off an entire bag of sickly sweet candy. But when the call came, I brushed this thought aside. For a young blogger in New York in 2006, becoming an editor at Gawker was an achievement so lofty that I had never even imagined it could happen to me. The interview and audition process felt a little surreal, like a dream. But when I got the job, I had the strange and sudden feeling that it had been somehow inevitable. Maybe my whole life - all the trivia I'd collected, the knack for funny meanness I'd been honing since middle school - had been leading up to this moment.

When I started, the site was posting about 40 items per day, and I was responsible for 12 of them. The tone of these posts was smart yet conversational, and often funny in a merciless way. Confronted with endless examples of unfairness, favoritism and just plain stupidity among New York's cultural establishment, the Gawker 'voice' was righteously indignant but comically defeated, sighing in unison with an audience that believed nothing was as it seemed and nothing would ever really change. Everyone was fatter or older or worse-skinned than he or she pretended to be. Every man was cheating on his partner; all women were slutty. Writers were plagiarists or talentless hacks or shameless beneficiaries of nepotism. Everyone was a hypocrite. No one was loved. There was no success that couldn't be hollowed out by the revelation of some deep-seated inadequacy.

Shortcuts

At my old job, it would have taken me years to advance to a place where I would no longer have to humor the whims of important people who I thought were idiots or relics or phonies. But at Gawker, it was my responsibility to expose the foibles of the undeserving elite. I felt liberated - finally, a job where I could really be myself! Never again would I have to censor my office-inappropriate sentiments or shop the sale racks at Club Monaco for office-appropriate outfits. But at the same time, I wasn't quite convinced that the system of apprenticeship and gradual promotion that I'd left behind when I left book publishing was as flawed as establishment-attacking Gawker made it out to be. I'd been lucky enough, in my publishing job, to have the kind of boss who actually cared about my future. At Gawker, I barely had a boss, and my future was always in jeopardy. In my old job, I'd been able to slowly, steadily learn the ropes, but now I was judged solely on what I produced every day. I had a kind of power, sure, but it was only as much power as my last post made it seem like I deserved.

Sometimes I worried that I'd been chosen not in spite of my inexperience but because of it. Hiring women in their early 20s with little or no background in journalism was a tactic that worked for the site's owner twice before, and I expected to be a victim of the same kind of hazing my predecessors were subjected to as they learned how to do their jobs - and how to navigate New York - in public. I'd once heard someone refer to us as 'sacrificial virgins,' which didn't seem too far off.

Then again, being a sacrificial virgin has always had its perks. The career arc of Gawker's popular outgoing editor, Jessica Coen, seemed like evidence that talent could and should trump dues-paying. After college, she worked as an assistant in L.A. and maintained a personal blog. When,

at age 24, she decided to move to New York, she had two career options: Columbia Journalism School or Gawker. She chose Gawker. Two years later, every magazine editor in town knew her name, and she was hired as the online editor of Vanity Fair. Maybe the days were over when young comers were slowly mentored as they prepared to assume their bosses' titles, covering community-board meetings or fetching coffee.

The Feedback Loop

'I tried not to read the comments,' Jessica told me when we met for a drink just before I started work at Gawker. 'Well, I went back and forth. But, you know, you really shouldn't read the comments.' An hour into my first day on the job, I disobeyed her. I needed to know what people were saying about me. Dozens of readers had commented on the post introducing me, some of them dissecting the accompanying photo, some of them talking about how much they already hated me. Every time I wrote a post, the comments would pile up within minutes, disagreeing with or amplifying whatever I just said. Reading the comments created a sense of urgency, which came in handy when trying to hit deadlines 12 times a day.

I relayed some of the choicest bits to Henry, who also thought I shouldn't be reading the comments. But how could I convey to Henry - who sometimes, onstage with his band, played entire shows with his back to the audience - the thrill of delivering a good line to a crowd that would immediately respond, that would fall over themselves to one-up your joke or fill in the blanks with their own suggestions and information?

The commenters at Emily Magazine had been like friends. Now, with Gawker's readers, I was having a different kind of relationship. It wasn't quite friendship. It was almost something deeper. They were co-workers, sort of, giving me ideas for posts, rewriting my punch lines. They were creeps hitting on me at a bar. They were fans, sycophantically praising even my lamer efforts. They were enemies, articulating my worst fears about my limitations. They were the voices in my head. They could be ignored sometimes. Or, if I let them, they could become my whole world.

When Jessica cautioned me against reading the comments, she also told me that the commenters loved it when she revealed personal details. Not only did I find this to be true, I found it to be almost necessary. Injecting a personal aside into a post that wasn't otherwise about me not only kept things interesting for me, it was also a surefire way of evoking a chorus of assenting or dissenting opinions, turning the solitary work of writing posts into something that felt more social, almost like a conversation.

The commenters' compliments were reassuring. And though I was reluctant to admit it, there was even something sort of thrilling about being insulted by strangers. This was brand-new, having so many strangers pay attention to me, and at that point, every kind of attention still felt good. Occasionally, a particularly well-aimed barb would catch me off-guard, and I'd spend a moment worrying that I really was the worst writer ever to work for the site, or unfunny, or ugly, or stupid. But mostly, in the beginning, I was able to believe the compliments and dismiss the insults, even though they were both coming from the same place and sometimes the same people.

Hooked

Like most people, I tend to use the language of addiction casually, as in, 'I can't wait for the new season of 'America's Next Top Model' to start - I'm totally going through withdrawal.' And when talking about how immersed I became in my online life, I'm tempted to use this language because it provides such handy metaphors. It's easy to compare the initial thrill of evoking an immediate response to a blog post to the rush of getting high, and the diminishing thrills to the process of becoming inured to a drug's effects. The metaphor is so exact, in fact, that maybe it isn't a metaphor at all.

When Henry and I fought about my job, we fought on two fronts: whether what I was doing was essentially unethical, and whether I was too consumed by doing it. I would usually end up agreeing with him on the first count - my posts could be petty or cruel - but that only made him more frustrated. It must have been hard for him to understand how someone could keep committing small-scale atrocities with such enthusiasm and single-minded devotion.

My Buddy List

Though Gawker's bloggers often worked from home, I went to the office every day at first. I was used to communicating with most people I knew via instant messenger, but it seemed important to see Alex, my co-editor, in person. I figured that we'd be able to express ourselves more easily by actually turning to each other and speaking words and making facial expressions rather than typing instant messages. But because we were so busy, we continued to I.M. most of the time, even when we were sitting right next to each other. Soon it stopped seeming weird to me when one of us would type a joke and the other one would type 'Hahahahaha' in lieu of actually laughing.

Another person I ended up I.M.-ing daily was one of Gawker's most frequent targets, a blogger named Julia Allison, who, within a year, parlayed a magazine dating column into a six-figure TV talking-head job and then into a reality show, all while updating her blog several times a day. Julia wore skimpy, Halloween-style costumes to parties and dated high-profile men in high-profile ways - her tech-millionaire boyfriend collaborated with her on a blog where they took turns chronicling their relationship's ups and downs. I was initially put off by Julia's naked attention-whoring - 'Attention is my drug,' she often confessed. In thousands of photos on her Flickr feed she posed, caked in makeup, like a celebrity on the red carpet, always thrusting out her breasts and favoring her good side. But in the midst of this artifice she was disarmingly straightforward about how badly she craved the attention that Internet exposure gave her - even though it came at the expense of constant, intensely vitriolic mockery.

I also I.M.-ed constantly with my co-worker Josh, who joined the site as 'after hours editor' a few months into my tenure, which meant that he wrote about parties and restaurants. He was cute, and given the number of hours a day we spent trapped at our desks, the flirtation that developed between us seemed unavoidable. And the medium made it seem harmless - sure, maybe our I.M. avatars wanted to hook up, but our flesh-and-blood selves would be careful to make sure things stayed professional.

In Public

It was 11 p.m. on an April night in 2007, and I was in the back seat of a speeding Town Car on my way home from the CNN studios. I was on the phone with Alex, who was at a bar. 'I don't think I did a very good job,' I told him. I was still full of adrenaline from being on TV, and the noise of the bar in the background as he reassured me made me think it might be fun to join him, but the driver was already headed to Greenpoint, and I was too dazed to give him new directions.

I'd been a guest on an episode of 'Larry King Live,' with Jimmy Kimmel as the host in King's absence. I had been told that I would be talking about 'celebrities and the media.' But Kimmel launched an attack on one of Gawker's regular features, a celebrity 'stalker map' that relied on unsourced tipsters, one of whom claimed to have spotted Kimmel looking drunk a few months earlier. It took me a minute to catch on to the fact that Kimmel wasn't acting out some blustery caricature - he was serious about the idea that Gawker had violated his privacy, and he was genuinely, frighteningly angry.

Back at home, after wiping off the TV makeup, I logged into my Gawker e-mail account and found my in-box flooded. I scrolled through the first of what would eventually be hundreds - and then, as the clip of my

appearance was dissected on other blogs over the course of the next few days, thousands - of angry e-mail messages. I ended up posting some representative ones on my personal blog:

'You got blown away. You looked like a little girl in awe of your surroundings.'

'I just want to tell you how uneducated and STUPID you came off during the appearance on The LKL Show. You truly are a cheap heartless human being, who will one day have to deal with the same kind of SCUM you are.'

'You were this giggling, hyper adolescent that did more to hurt your message, your site and your credibility than even coming close to simply neutralizing the debate.'

Watching the clip now makes me cringe. Called upon to defend Gawker's publication of anonymous e-mail tips of celebrity sightings, I was dismissive and flip. My untrained, elastic face betrayed the shock and amusement I was feeling about being asked, somewhat aggressively, to justify something that I thought of as not only harmless but also a given: the idea that anyone who makes their living in public was subject to the public's scrutiny at all times.

I expected the miniature scandal to flare and fade quickly, but for a while it seemed as if it would never go away. The clip made its way to Yahoo's front page, and a reporter called my parents for comment. After a week or so, the volume of angry e-mail and blog comments subsided, but they stayed under my skin. I decided to try to develop a steely, defiant numbness. I told myself that the strangers who'd taken the time to e-mail me their rants were wrong and crazy, that there was nothing so bad about what I'd done.

There was a harder truth that I refused to confront, though. After all, by going on TV and having a daily blog presence in front of thousands of people, I had put myself in the category of 'people who make their livings in public,' and so, by my own declared value system, I was an appropriate target for the kind of flak I was getting. But that didn't mean I could handle it. A week later, I found myself lying on the floor of the bathroom in the Gawker office (where, believe me, no one should ever lie), felled by a panic attack that put me out of commission for the rest of the day.

I started having panic attacks - breathless bouts of terror that left me feeling queasy, drained and hopeless - every day. I didn't leave my apartment unless I absolutely had to, and because I had the option of working from home, I rarely had to. But while my actual participation in life shrank down to a bare minimum, I still responded to hundreds of e-mail messages and kept up a stream of instant-messenger conversations while I wrote. Depending on how you looked at it, I either had no life and I barely talked to anyone, or I spoke to thousands of people constantly.

Famous for 15 People

I started seeing a therapist again, and we talked about my feelings of being inordinately scrutinized. 'It's important to remember that you're not a celebrity,' she told me. How could I tell her, without coming off as having delusions of grandeur, that, in a way, I was? I obviously wasn't 'famous' in the way that a movie star or even a local newscaster or politician is famous - I didn't go to red-carpet parties or ride around in limos, and my parents' friends still had no idea what I was talking about when I described my job - but I had begun to have occasional run-ins with strangers who knew what I did for a living and felt completely comfortable walking up to me on the street and talking about it. The Monday after my disastrous CNN appearance, as I stood in line at Balthazar's coffee bar, a middle-aged man in a suit told me to keep my chin up. 'Emily, don't quit Gawker!' a young guy shouted at me from his bicycle as I walked down the street one day. If someone stared at me on the subway, there was no way to tell whether they were admiring my outfit or looking at the stain on my

sweater or whether they, you know, Knew Who I Was. The more people e-mailed the Gawker tip line with 'sightings' of me - laden with bags from Target and scarfing ice cream while walking down Atlantic Avenue - the more I was inclined to believe it was the latter.

Oversharing on Gawker

I didn't want to go to Fire Island. The trip would take two hours, and it would involve the subway, the Long Island Railroad, a van and a ferry. For a month, I'd been doing my best to avoid any venture more ambitious than the trip to the grocery store a block and a half away, whose clerks were, besides Henry, pretty much the only people I still spoke to aloud on a regular basis. Whenever I left this comfort zone, I would be seized by one of my irrational, heart-pounding meltdowns, which I would studiously conceal from my fellow subway passengers or pedestrians. The panic attacks were about a desire to be invisible, but if I showed any sign that I was having one, everyone would pay attention to me. It was kind of funny when you thought about it, and if you weren't me.

But Choire, my boss, urged me to attend the staff retreat at a house near the beach so that we could all bond as a team. Henry discouraged me from going - he didn't want me to push myself, and we were comfortable, weren't we, in our sad little world together? He was as surprised as I was when, the morning of the retreat, I managed to pry myself out of bed and get myself onto the subway. Walking into Penn Station, I saw Josh and his stylish duffel leaning against a pillar. He looked up at me and smiled in a way that immediately distracted me from thoughts of how miserable I felt. The freakout I was dreading never came, and over the course of the next few days, I forgot to always be anticipating its arrival.

We each wrote our allotment of Gawker posts in the mornings, and in the afternoons we went to the beach. The water was freezing - it was still early in the summer - and we all ran into the waves together screaming. At night Choire cooked us elaborate feasts, and afterward we played Scrabble and watched bad movies. Josh and I sat together on the couch, and I put my head on his shoulder in a completely friendly, professional way. The next day, I let him apply sunscreen to the spot in the middle of my back that I couldn't reach. As a joke, we walked down the wood-plank paths that crisscross the island holding hands. I also remember joking, via I.M. as we worked, about us wanting to cross the hallway that separated our bedrooms and crawl into bed with each other at night when we couldn't sleep. On our last day, I congratulated myself on having made it through the trip without letting these jokes turn into real betrayal. And then, 20 minutes outside the city on the Long Island Railroad on the way home, Josh kissed me.

The next few weeks eliminated every constant from my life except my job. I moved out of the apartment where I'd lived for four years with Henry, and while I looked for a place on my own, I stayed in a tiny room in a loft full of hippies who brewed their own kombucha tea. I quit smoking pot cold turkey. My parents moved out of my childhood home to a different state because my dad had a new job. My best friend, Ruth, lived a hemisphere away in New Zealand, and though we sent each other epic e-mail messages and talked on the phone, I still felt unmoored in the way you can only feel after a breakup, as if you're the last living speaker of some dying language. But even though this sense of disconnection from my old self and my old life was confusing, it felt mostly good. After all, what was so great about my old self and my old life, anyway?

I immersed myself in my job in a way I hadn't even realized was possible - I thought about Gawker, one way or another, 24 hours a day, thrilling to the idea that a review of the restaurant where Josh and I were eating dinner might find its way onto the site the following day; pillow-talking about the site's internal politics and our hopes and dreams about what we would do next. Just a few weeks earlier, I was scared to walk down my own block. Now I felt totally comfortable posting a picture of myself in a bathing suit on the site, inspiring Josh to do the same. I felt blazingly,

insanely energized, and the posts came more easily than they ever had before.

I was happy, but I also wasn't a complete idiot - I knew that the euphoria I was feeling was leading to a massive crash. I'd been clinging to Henry for months in spite of our differences because, in addition to the comfort and stability he gave me, he was my sounding board - someone with whom I could share my unfiltered thoughts, without worrying about being entertaining. In his absence, I was becoming more and more open on Gawker.

After the first night Josh and I spent together, I woke up as the sun rose and sat down at my desk to write a post that was nominally about a recent New York Times article about the shelf-life of romantic love. My boyfriend and I had just broken up, I revealed, and so I had been wondering whether love really exists. I wrote that I had concluded that it does. We can't expect other people to make us happy, I informed my readers with total sincerity and earnestness, and we should live in the moment and stop obsessing about the future.

I shudder involuntarily when I read this post now. It's like stumbling across a diary I kept as a teenager. It's probably one of the worst things that I've ever written. The commenters loved it.

Gawker had recently added a counter beside each post that displayed how many views it received. Now it was easy to see exactly how many people cared about my feelings. The site's owner didn't like my 'I believe in love' post, he told me, but he said he was O.K. with it because, as everyone could see, more than 10,000 people disagreed with him. Readers e-mailed me their own breakup horror stories and posted hundreds of comments, advising me about flavors of ice cream to eat, and I reveled in the attention. I had managed to turn my job into a group therapy session. 'Emily, I don't really know you any more than I know the people I see every morning walking the dogs,' one of them wrote. 'It's more of an imagined familiarity born out of reading your words for a year. But that took guts, all the way around. And I'm in your corner, inasmuch as a somewhat anonymous, faceless, nameless commenter can be.'

Would anyone still be in my corner if they knew the truth - that I hadn't in fact been dumped, and that I'd thrown myself headlong into a rebound affair with a co-worker? I wished that I could tell my old Emily Magazine readers everything that was going on in my life and ask them for advice. I wanted to organize my stories into coherence and put them out into the world. But the Internet had changed, and my place in it had changed, too: I no longer had the luxury of writing something and imagining that the only people who might read it would be a handful of funny, supportive friends.

The Fork and the Spoon

My oldest and most responsible friend, Farrin, is a 37-year-old executive editor at a publishing house. Over breakfast, she was complaining to me that she had a problem at work: the head of her department had asked her to add a photo to her profile on the department's Web page, and she wasn't comfortable with having a picture of herself posted online.

The table we were sitting at was wide, maybe four feet across, and made of planks like a picnic table. I positioned my fork all the way on the left side of the table. 'So here's the spectrum of Internet self-exposure,' I told her. 'And here's you. You're the fork.' Then I put my spoon at the right end of the table. 'And here, at the other end of the spectrum . . . Julia Allison.'

'So where are you on the spectrum?'

'Well, I used to be here,' I said, moving a toast crust a few inches to the left of my plate, the table's midpoint. 'And now I'm here.' I put the crust halfway between my plate and Julia.

Farrin looked up at me, concerned. 'That's not good. I think you should start moving closer to the plate.'

Instead, though, I kept moving blithely closer to the spoon.

Heartbreak Soup

About a month after I broke up with Henry, my best friend, Ruth, and I created a new, anonymous blog on which we wrote to each other, as we had been doing via e-mail, about breakups and cooking. We named it Heartbreak Soup. At the beginning, we didn't tell anyone it existed, but then we decided to add a sidebar of links to other sites we liked, and a tiny amount of traffic began to trickle our way.

We used pseudonyms for the people we wrote about, but otherwise our concessions to privacy - other peoples' and our own - were very limited. I knew this wasn't smart in the same way that I knew that dating a co-worker wasn't smart, but my curiosity won out. I wanted to know what would happen if I showed myself as little mercy as I showed everyone else. 'I'm bad at describing sex, or maybe everyone is,' I wrote at one point, but I didn't let that stop me from trying! I ratted myself out for being a bad daughter: 'I love my mom more than I love probably anyone else in the world, really. Also, she is more like me than anyone else in the world. But I often want to kill her. The thing that keeps her alive is how incredibly sad I would be if she died.' I described the symptoms and probable causes of a urinary tract infection. And I wrote about how painful it was to pack up my things in my old apartment as Henry - whom I referred to as 'William' - stood over me watching. I puzzled over 'how comfortable I feel around him, in spite of the fact that at this point I basically feel that he's a crazy person who I sort of hate.'

Josh was one of the first people I told about the blog. I wanted him to know everything there was to know about me, after all, and besides, we talked about writing all the time, showing off what we thought were our best turns of phrase. He seemed flattered that some of the posts were about him, but he said he wasn't sure how he felt about how candid I was being - though we'd never discussed it, it seemed like a good idea not to explicitly reveal that we were seeing each other, even though we left the office for makeout coffee breaks and broadcast maudlin love songs on the shared office speakers.

A few weeks later, I arrived home in the early morning hours after abruptly extricating myself from Josh's bed - he had suddenly revealed plans for a European vacation with another girl - and immediately sat down at my computer to write a post about what had happened. On Heartbreak Soup, I wrote a long rant about the day's events, including a recipe for the chicken soup I made the previous afternoon and the sex that I'd been somehow suckered into even after finding out about how serious things were with the other girl. Then I opened another tab in my browser and logged into Gawker to start compiling the morning's gossip. For a few hours, my personal dramas took a backseat - sort of - to news that a Pulitzer-winning author had described his wife's affair with a media mogul in a crazy e-mail message to his graduate students. I used the opportunity of this public figure's indiscretion to pontificate about the idea that all heartbreak is essentially the same, though everyone thinks his feelings are somehow original and special. I was essentially talking to myself.

After Josh and I broke up, I started writing more and more on Heartbreak Soup - about my friendship with Ruth, my family and the weird, sad, terrifying, exciting aspects of being single for the first time in my adult life. Word had spread through my immediate circle of friends about the blog, and it was now getting a few hundred visitors a day - about the same as Emily Magazine before I started at Gawker. I lulled myself into imagining that these Heartbreak Soup readers, like those old Emily Magazine readers, might not even know what Gawker was, that they were

reading just because they liked my stories.

One night, after writing a post about my first summer in New York, I put a link to Heartbreak Soup on my Facebook page under 'Web sites.' By the next morning, this had begun to feel like a very bad idea, and I took the link down. The traffic spike that day seemed ominous.

Not long after, Josh told me he wanted to have a talk with me about how unsecret my 'secret' blog had become. I had started working from home again, but I came into the city, and we stood, smiling awkwardly, outside the Gawker office, trying to figure out what to say to each other. I remembered the fight I had with Henry about the 'Project Gayway' post. This time, I knew, I wouldn't win - but then I hadn't really won the last time either.

I offered to make the posts that mentioned Josh inaccessible by password-protecting them.

'You should be password-protected,' he said, and I laughed. When he went back into the office, I walked to the subway via the alleys where we'd once secretly kissed. At home, I wrote about what had just happened on Heartbreak Soup, and then I password-protected the post, feeling strange and sad.

Losing the Will to Blog

In October, New York magazine published a cover article about Gawker's business model and cultural relevance. I took the magazine from my therapist's waiting room into her office and read aloud from the article because, I figured, why waste any of my 45 minutes by struggling to summarize it? The article painted Gawker as a clearinghouse for vitriol and me as a semisymphathetic na?f who half-loved and half-loathed what her job was forcing her to become. That week, when I walked around at parties, trying to elicit funny quotes from whatever quasi-famous people were there, all anyone wanted to talk to me about was Gawker. How could I sleep at night? someone wondered. I was getting tired of justifying my job to strangers, trotting out truisms about the public's right to know and the Internet's changing the rules of privacy. And I was getting tired of writing the same handful of posts over and over again. At the end of November, I announced my resignation via a post on Gawker.

For a year, I had been getting up each morning at 7 a.m., my thoughts jostling in my head, eager to escape. I wrote constantly, responding to the events of the day in real time, under perpetual pressure to condense everything I thought and read into something readers could consume. But now I was burned out and directionless, and without an audience, I lost the narrative thread. If no one was going to get on my case for not having read and catalogued every gossip item in the morning papers by 9 a.m., why get out of bed? For months, I thought that I hated the commenters who tormented me. Now, sickeningly, I missed them. I wasn't reading The Sunday Times or New York magazine, because what was the point? I wasn't logging into instant messenger. I had terrible writer's block. My grandfather died, and I couldn't even come up with a heartfelt paragraph to read aloud at his funeral.

On Heartbreak Soup, I was reduced to writing about not having anything to write about. I wasn't cooking much, or reading much, or thinking about much of anything besides how miserable and emptied out I felt. When I posted about a week spent wandering around dead-eyed in Florida's artificial beauty the week after the funeral, one reader left a comment recommending specific brands of antidepressants. Soon after that, I lost the will to blog altogether.

The will to blog is a complicated thing, somewhere between inspiration and compulsion. It can feel almost like a biological impulse. You see something, or an idea occurs to you, and you have to share it with the Internet as soon as possible. What I didn't realize was that those ideas

and that urgency - and the sense of self-importance that made me think anyone would be interested in hearing what went on in my head - could just disappear.

Unprotected

Two months after I quit Gawker, Josh wrote an article in the New York Post's Sunday magazine about how violated he felt when I wrote about him on Heartbreak Soup, quoting extensively from my blog posts to make his points.

On the morning that the article hit the newsstands, I made Ruth - who had moved back to New York and become my roommate - read it first. When she finished, she looked stricken. 'Emily, he's so evil,' she said, sounding not at all reassuring.

I slumped to the kitchen floor and lay there in the fetal position. I didn't want to exist. I had made my existence so public in such a strange way, and I wanted to take it all back, but in order to do that I'd have to destroy the entire Internet. If only I could! Google, YouTube, Gawker, Facebook, WordPress, all gone. I squeezed my eyes shut and prayed for an electromagnetic storm that would cancel out every mistake I'd ever made.

'I'm taking it down,' Ruth called to me from the living room, where my laptop sat on a table, displaying our no-longer-so-secret blog.

I opened my eyes. 'Don't delete it,' I managed to say. 'Just make it all password-protected.'

I lay there for a while longer. Eventually I read the article, which was, as personal betrayals go, far worse than I'd thought it could be. But the real power of the article, as Josh must have known when he wrote it, lay in the way that it exposed me to the new Gawker regime, which had already proved itself to be even more vicious than we'd ever been. If the article had been published when I was still working at Gawker, I would have been able to steer the conversation that it provoked. But now I was no longer simultaneously sniper and target - I was just a target, and I felt powerless.

Over the next couple of weeks, I sat on the sidelines and watched as the commenters - on Gawker, on other blogs and even on Emily Magazine - talked about me the same way they once talked about the targets I'd proffered for them to aim at. Many of them explicitly pointed out that this drubbing was my karmic comeuppance - after all, I'd punished other people this way. Now it was my turn. It was only fair.

By revealing my flaws to whoever wanted to look, I thought - incorrectly, as it turned out - that I was inoculating myself against the criticism my Gawker co-workers and I leveled most often. Maybe I was talentless, bad-complected, old-looking and slutty, but no one could call me a hypocrite. I had said that everyone was subject to judgment and scrutiny, and then, by judging and scrutinizing myself relentlessly, I'd invited others to do the same.

But maybe I was a hypocrite after all, because now I was beginning to feel that no one should be subject to that kind of scrutiny. Not Josh, not Jimmy Kimmel and especially not me.

Real Life

If I were going to completely disavow self-scrutiny and unedited opinion-broadcasting, it would mean the end of my life as a blogger. While I couldn't make the Internet disappear, it had always been entirely within my power to shutter Emily Magazine the same way I'd locked up Heartbreak Soup. For about a week after Josh's article came out, I thought about doing so every time I looked at my computer. But then, as panic and sadness faded and anger set in, I started having impulses in the exact

opposite direction: I wanted to defend myself and set the record straight! A few months earlier, I probably would have done it too: typed feverishly for hours perfecting the most cutting blog post possible, aired every sad secret at my disposal in a quest for revenge, published the post as soon as I was finished, then checked back compulsively to see whether it had made things better or worse. But I'd finally realized that some defenses always backfire. True, I had the ability to say whatever I wanted and an audience of people who would listen, but the best possible thing for me to do was to ignore them and do nothing. And that is what I did. For two entire weeks.

Late one night, I unlocked Heartbreak Soup and wrote one last post there. In it, I talked about how a single blog post can capture a moment of extreme feeling, but that reading an accumulated series of posts will sometimes reveal another, more complete story. I talked about how taking the once-public blog and making it private, though tempting, felt like trying to revise history.

Knowing that the worst of my online oversharing is still publicly accessible doesn't thrill me, but it doesn't scare me anymore either. I might hate my former self, but I don't want to destroy her, and in a way, I want to respect her decision to show the world her vulnerability. I'm willing to let that blog exist now as a sort of memorial to a time in my life when I thought my discoveries about myself and what I loved were special enough to merit sharing with the world immediately.

I understand that by writing here about how I revealed my intimate life online, I've now revealed even more about what happened during the period when I was most exposed. Well, I'm an oversharer - it's not like I'm entirely reformed. But lately, online, I've found myself doing something unexpected: keeping the personal details of my current life to myself. This doesn't make me feel stifled so much as it makes me feel protected, as if my thoughts might actually be worth honing rather than spewing. But I still have Emily Magazine as a place to spew when I need to. It will never again be the friendly place that it was in 2004 - there are plenty of negative comments now, and I don't delete them. I still think about closing the door to my online life and locking them out, but then I think of everything else I'd be locking out, and I leave it open.

Emily Gould is a writer in Brooklyn. This is her first article for the magazine.

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From: monteirb at stjohns.edu (Basilio Monteiro)
Date: Tue, 27 May 2008 10:35:54 -0400
Subject: [Medianthro] Ongoing E-seminar: The floor is open!

Hello Everyone!!!

Erkan's paper gives us a good opportunity to raise questions about the euphoria in embracing blogging as an authentic place where spontaneous human interactions are "lived," and thus consider it as a "field" of research in media anthropology.

Allow me to make a few comments.

1- What is ethnography? By definition it is a direct observation of an organization or a small community/society, and the written description produced. The critical element of ethnography is direct observation of the behavior of a social group and producing written description of the observation.

2- What is a blog? It would not be controversial to state that blog is an artificial construct where some individuals (with a few exceptions) compulsively seek gratification from the strangers; blog communication is necessarily mediated communication, and not a natural environment (so critical to ethnographic research). It is a linear expression, and thus devoid of the circularity of human interactions and communication (which is what an ethnographer seeks to observe and study).

3- The phenomenon of blogging deserves serious study; however, blogging as an authentic "field," and as spontaneous interaction reflecting the living/lived experience of a community is, to my mind, suspect.

Basilio G. Monteiro

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From: sakaerka at gmail.com (Erkan Saka)
Date: Tue, 27 May 2008 18:46:46 +0300
Subject: [Mediantro] Responses I

*My sincere thanks. Honestly, i did not expect such a lively discussion. I will try to provide some responses in my own chaotic way. Hopefully before the day ends, i will send all my responses. In order to not to be too late, i decided to send my comments in parts. Here comes the first part. *

The *archive* problem Gabriela Vargas-Cetina mentions:
I believe digitalized data is easier to transmit even if the technology at hand becomes quickly obsolete. There will certainly be an IT place where the data can be recovered. It is of course also easy to lose digital data irretrievably. Probably all of us had some kind of experience of loss. This is a challenge with the coming of digitalization and we are finding new ways of surviving (by backing up). The blog archive is just part of this huge challenge and i believe its existence is more secure than what we personally keep. If one is not exposed to a vicious attack, the servers of the hosting company will keep the archive secure as long as you pay the bills.

after the fact

I still don't see how Erkan's claim that the 'after the fact' effect is eliminated through his blog can be true, since at some point he is going to write his dissertation, after having blogged for all these years. He posts mostly after the fact, like all of us did when we wrote private field journals, although sometimes he is initiating something through his posts. We sometimes initiate things in the field when we ask about something we figured out, through our journals, that we want or need to know. So, in this sense, the 'afterthefactness' is present and sometimes absent in both cases (field journals and fieldblogs).

I take this not as literal as it means. What I had in mind was that to continue to analyze/interpret at the moment of becoming of events that we claim to study. The EU-Turkey are relations developing/evolving right now. No one can really predict what the outcome will be. And I write right in the middle of this open-ended process like experts in other fields. Maybe I produce my angry post *after *the 50th year ceremonies of EU to which Turkey was not invited. But in the larger scene, this is just another moment in the becoming of relations between Turkey and EU.

* Jay Ruby:*

How does one keep up with all of the blogs and other information floating around the internet? Perhaps it is my age but I cannot. If I add in all of the material at a site like Youtube then chaos erupts.

Well, I believe information floating accelerates for a long while and internet can even help us to organize that floating. As one becomes a "new media literate" person, this seeming chaos becomes more ordered. One spends less and less time to recognize what is needed and what is not needed and thanks to digitalization, it is easier to create patterns in this floating.

One gradually recognizes that there is fact too much repetitive reproduction

among this information load. I wish all the floating knowledge/data/information were all new.

In the last analysis, this information flow is a challenge and i like to face it. Life would be dull? I cannot imagine another life maybe i am too much embedded in the new media world. In addition to all other data, i cannot imagine a life without constant new posts in RSS reader, new mails that include table of contents from journals, email inquiries of all sorts and even some of the spam mails! All urban legends, strange human imaginaries all at your hands, always:)

Special thanks goes to Daniel Taghioff and *Kerim Friedman* for their technical/informative posts.

Giulia Battaglia says [emphases added by me]

This is partially what collaborative projects try to do and what I also try to do. However, I don't see this as a credit to the 'blogging universe' but rather as a credit to different forms of 'new media communications'.

Now, since every blog-runner has is own political agenda, the moderation will be done according to his-her personal political view and will automatically take away a potential range of active-consumers (at least after few unpleasing answers). *The democratic aspect of blog becomes then less democratic than a virtual-mailing-community in which everybody has a peer relationship with everybody and where a moderator has to moderate a discussion not according to his political agenda but according to issues of discussion that come from the group itself. *In this respect, I found the latter (despite blogging) a great potential for the process of reflection throughout the anthropological fieldwork research.

Finally, I don't think blogs (and other forms of virtual communication) can replace entirely fieldwork research (and if I am not wrong this is also Erkan's position) but they can enlarge possibilities of collecting data. *Though, again, I find the idea of running a blog a little bit weak if compared to other forms of mailing community discussions.* Fieldwork is a limited period of anthropological research. *And running a blog is a job that can take lots of time. It is a matter of balancing how much time to give to an online based interaction* and how much to a face-to-face interaction. In his response Erkan said that he needs only one hour per day to update his blog, quoting:

Well, i have no intention to state that personal blogging is based on a sort of democratic decision making. Here I am talking about an anthropologist in the fieldwork. The collaboration starts with his/her initiation. In terms of the development of a project, s/he occupies a central stage and I am fine with that. In fact, I am offering/speculation the blogging tool as an empowering tool to the fieldworker. In the mean time, it does have some real collaborative potential and that's a good part to explore. Meanwhile, every ethnographer has a political agenda in the grand scheme and why a blogger shouldn't have? Secondly, although a personal blog is structured to be less democratic, other new media tools may not be ideally better in that sense. Since when virtual mailing community is democratic? I don't know:)

I do agree with Giulia in his implication of other new media tools and i have no objection at all. Because of the reasons outlined in the paper, it just seems capture a fieldworker's many needs in the field. But that does not prevent using other new media tools.

Finally, the *context *issue will come again. But of course the context of fieldwork is important. As i imply in my own case, my context was especially suitable for such an attempt. As we are taught in method courses (!), one choses tools as they are needed/relevant. if you believe blogging prevents research, don't do it! (Although i cannot see why blogging and other tools should be mutually exclusive in most of the cases)

In the mean time, a blog should not be seen like a professional business operation. It should be time consuming as long as you allow it and it

consumes your time because you believe it is part of your research operation. So far it worked for me and now i actually use my blog experience as a creator of research connections and a writing source...

Delia Dumitrica:

assuming blogs are a research method, then are the posts considered as data to be further analyzed (and how) or are they rather the bits and pieces of the analysis? In other words, what happens once you use blogging in terms of the research process.

That's a good point and that works in both ways. I mean sometimes they are just fragments of data that has to be analysed carefully and sometimes that are subarguments or analyses that structure the basis of a chapter. Honestly, I had thought for a long time if i was just justifying my fun with blogging by declaring that i will use the stuff archived there. I started to write this year and in my 100-200 page draft, I have relied on the blog archive much more than I ever intended!

From: sakaerka at gmail.com (Erkan Saka)

Date: Tue, 27 May 2008 21:39:36 +0300

Subject: [Mediantro] Responses II

I still have something to say for Richard Davis' and Julian Hopkins' points but i am tired. I will send the third part sometime soon but probably tomorrow. But in the mean time, here is the second part:

* Basilio G. Monteiro*

...the euphoria in embracing blogging as an authentic place where spontaneous human interactions are "lived," and thus consider it as a "field" of research in media anthropology....

as far as i understand my own paper, i discuss blogging as a research tool in the field, not itself a field.

[for the definitions]

1- What is ethnography? By definition it is a direct observation of an organization or a small community/society, and the written description produced. The critical element of ethnography is direct observation of the behavior of a social group and producing written description of the observation.

We are already beyond this simple definition which has become misleading.

2- What is a blog? It would not be controversial to state that blog is an artificial construct where some individuals (with a few exceptions) compulsively seek gratification from the strangers; blog communication is necessarily mediated communication, and not a natural environment (so critical to ethnographic research). It is a linear expression, and thus devoid of the circularity of human interactions and communication (which is what an ethnographer seeks to observe and study).

It is in fact controversial to state such a claim on blogs. Produced by reactionaries who have no idea what internet is about.

Casey O'Donnell

Why no reference to Writing Culture, or the essays contained within? Why no attention to the voluminous amount of writing that has been done about ethnographic form and fieldnotes? The essay is making a methodological argument and yet doesn't converse with the material which borders it in anthropology.

The ethographic stories in the essay are excellent. I'd actually rather see more of the intersections between those stories, the literature and a reduced connection to the blogosphere. You can

paraphrase all of that for us and reference it, rather than having the long blog quotes in the text

Absolutely right. This must be the next step.

[interaction with audience]

The next comment I wanted to make was that there is an assumption about "blogging" which is not mentioned in the paper (hinted at in the "Anthropology in Public" post excerpt, but not really extracted adequately). Why does Erkan have such a following? Why is his blog read in ways that, say another blogger may not experience? The answer has more to do with his list of links to other blogs. What makes "blogging" different from placing fieldnotes online is the activity on other sites. *Commenting on other sites to encourage others to read* * your blog. You wind up entering into communities of practice, which* * ultimately can become just as insular as any other community. There is* * an entire set of social activity which makes "blogging" work. *I didn't really get a sense of that in the essay. It felt as if it was saying,.....

Most blogs go uncommented on. They become public journals which are largely unread. Most of my blogging fits into this category. So blogging is about potentiality of engagement. I have a handful of regular readers who mostly think that I'm right on, from time to time they make a comment or two to keep me honest or flag overstatements. "if you build it, they will come," which they may not. [emphases mine]

I am not sure if the first emphasis imply that i get more following because i have entered into a community of practice by reciprocally commenting in out sites. I am not a commenter myself, I rarely comment on others' blog, and you may have realized i get relatively few comments. Most of feedback comes through emails in fact. This is partly because I post too much and this does give opportunity to discuss an issue extensively. I should have encouraged that maybe but instead i acted sort of egotistical and worked on building an archive instead of a more lively discussion space.

But you are right that there is always a possibility of "insular community". Because of fast flowing nature of my posts, this became impossible in my case, and i would think that high volume of traffic occured because of other reasons such as the regularity, a level of professionalism, and the attraction of news...

*
*

[Immediate feedback]

I would also caution us to think critically about any kind of intrinsic value placed on immediate feedback. This is where blogging can become problematic for the ethnographer. Is it our field that we should be paying attention to or our blogging? Are there times when a little less interaction might help us think about our material? To allow us to read and follow connections without wondering about those recent blog comments? Our research tool, or dissemination tool can take over. *We need both, feedback and cut-offs from our feedback.*

I have no objection to that. I think an ethnographer has time for all. And here is the beauty of blogging. You can stop or pause anytime you want. It is you who will decide in what frequency to post etc. Let me repeat myself. It can be a research tool and my intention here is to replace other possible ways to go with blogging.

Accountability

* I am moderately concerned about the assumption of accountability. Many* * bloggers do so behind pseudonyms.* Many are thin guises, but there is no reason why it is intrinsically more accountable. It depends

entirely upon the ethnographer. He refers to "Rex" in the essay, a blogger at Savage Minds, who makes little attempt to hide his real identity of Alex Golub ("Alex Golub?Rex to [his]my friends"), but that is not innate to the blog forum. It can perhaps be just as or more unaccountable if the ethnographer choses.

Accountable in the way that one's ideas are subject to constant testing. Open to a possibly larger audience scrutiny. My primary concern is the intellectual build-up of the research findings. And in the mean time, a regular blogger will eventually be discovered if s/he is not trying hard to hide. As noted, in some fieldwork context the identity of the ethnographer should not be disclosed to larger audiences and one can hide himself/herself and only the ideas will be exposed. but in other contexts, the archive one builds will eventually give clues about the identity. Not to all but to those who attempts to discover the anonymous poster. I remember reading somewhere that blogging in general gives more clues about personality than other new media tools as the blog archive develops...

This brings me the issue of context:

Richard Davis

This also raises for me a further ethical issue. I think there is virtue in the conventional field diary, if only because *it protects the people an anthropologist is working with from witnessing the way they are represented in a diary. *Anthropologists, like any other person, have personal opinions about individuals and groups.

For example, in an Australian context, anthropologists who work with Indigenous peoples can find their notes subject to subpoena.

Angela R Zito

I am working in China in a fraught year. My own website, newly constructed back in New York for this six-month stint, was promptly blocked by the local firewall for unfathomable reasons that seem to have nothing to do with content. To read most blogs from abroad one needs to go through proxies. This puts a material damper on blogging enthusiasm?I offer it only as evidence that the whole enterprise, while feeling seductively virtually "universal," emphatically is not. (Not that people on this list probably think that, more that we often end up sometimes still acting "as if"?)

In the US, anthropologists must file a petition with their universities in order to do fieldwork - the human subject's review. This customarily requires assurances about anonymity for "informants" etc. Alicia raised these issues very succinctly in relation to work among minors. Richard mentions legal issues about our notes, images etc. Peter describes a situation even more controlled than the US. It is bracing to contemplate the distance between our own commitments to reflexivity and openness and the perception of the field as "scientific" and thus subject to controls more appropriate to bio-medical research than the sort of work most of us do (which ironically is far closer to journalism). In further contrast, the state's representatives in China, who claim a clear role in cultural management, feel entitled to know about everything I do--just a fact on the ground here. A potent collision of intentions.

* Alicia Blum-Ross*

Given these requirements, and the general ethos of child protection, I would find it impossible to create a blog about my work. My subjects are mainly teenagers, and more than capable of commenting on my research. Yet in an environment where researchers must consider protection requirements even when conducting a face-to-face interview, I would be wary of creating an forum for unmediated interaction.

...
I recognise that researching with young people in the UK (and other locations I suspect) requires working within a much more rigid legal

framework than in many areas where anthropologists commonly work. However I wonder whether some of these considerations shouldn't also be the responsibility of those who do not have to worry as much about the 'legal' requirements and think about these issues more from an ethical standpoint.

Jay Ruby wrote 'I am convinced that field blogs should be a commonplace device for ethnographers' and it seems that from your posts many on this list agree, at least in part. Yet I agree with Richard Davis and others that there are a host of legal and ethical dilemmas to consider before doing our 'public thinking.'

Peter I. Crawford

This is an important issue. Our students, and staff for that matter, at the Visual Cultural Studies programme of the University of Tromsø in Norway would most probably be unable to undertake any research based on blogging etc. due to the extremely strict ethical standards monitored by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). It would even be difficult if the target group/informants were not at risk. In addition, one has to destroy all the data once a research project is completed almost making any kind of long-term anthropological research impossible. I do believe that there are serious ethical issues we have to deal with, but the rigidity (leave alone the bureaucracy) of the Norwegian system, which I believe is perhaps the strictest in the world, almost renders any research involving the storage of personal data, electronically or otherwise, impossible. The application of these standards are universal, i.e. they apply to any research conducted by any Norwegian research institution/university in any part of the world. *What new media open up for, is actually arguing that no matter what we do, traces of it will remain in cyberspace, beyond our control, which would be enough reason for NSD, in principle, to say that that would be against the rules. Recalling Frank Parkin's novel 'Krippendorf's Tribe', it may be time for anthropology to engage only in fictitious projects with no 'real' people. What a tool blogging could then be. [emphases mine, as usual]*

If one's research will end up producing a public material, one will have to deal with these anxieties in one way or another. I don't know why blogging is necessarily a threat to research ethics or security of researcher or informants. Anthropologists are probably one of the best equipped social scientists to resolve issues of privacy (or are they?). Do you honestly think that i ask you to leak sensitive data in your future blogging? I have a long list of "blacklisted" journalists. I will disclose some of them towards the end of my research, and some will always remain buried. But can there not be a way to talk about your research without trespassing ethical issues? Then how are you going to discuss in the end? Same rules apply maybe with more caution in blogging. Because one has little time to reflect upon them. But these sensitive issues are always there to be resolved.

I am very well aware that context of fieldwork will define the way one uses new media. and new media has a surprising number of tools to innovate.

and i guess every field-site has its own particular problems. one might be exposed to extremely strict ethical standards, one might be exposed to police subpoena etc and let me remind you that i would be exposed to the consequences of coup d'etat (April 2007 Turkish Army "e-warning" to government)....

Cordially,
Erkan

--

Erkan Saka

* Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Anthropology in Rice University, Houston, TX

Field diary: <http://erkansaka.net>

* Instructor at the Faculty of Communication in Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey

From: jestalellaf at uoc.edu (Adolfo Estalella)
Date: Wed, 28 May 2008 16:39:37 +0200
Subject: [Medianthro] Erkan Saka's paper: more than blogging

Dear list and Erkan Saka.

I have read with pleasure the paper on blogging.

I would like to share my own experience using a field blog in my fieldwork as a way for contrasting different uses and raising a few questions at the end.

I have been using a blog (<http://estalella.wordpress.com>) in a 18 month ethnography of intensive Spanish bloggers (so called A-list bloggers) that has involved following bloggers online and offline, reading their blogs, writing my own blog, and attending regularly to meetings (more than two dozen big public events and many other private small meetings).

I decided to write a 'personal blog' focused on myself and blog issues, like many of the bloggers I was interested in. I never intended to write for other ethnographer/Internet researcher/anthropologist (however, some of them lately came to my blog and complicated my position in the field when they argued against my methodological decisions!!).

My blog was conceived from the very beginning as a way for getting in touch with informants in the field, for building rapport and making people being aware of my presence in the field (intending to comply with my ethical responsibility). I didn't pretend to use it for 'academic publishing' or as a 'field diary'; leaving aside the already commented ethical problems, nobody of the people I was trying to reach was interested on my 'field diary'.

It really worked well. And the blog, more than a research tool, became a methodological strategy that strongly shaped many of my decisions in the field and my own fieldwork practice.

Blogging was important in the construction of my field (in different instances such as the selection of bloggers and the access to different non-public events), in the performance of my identity and in my fieldwork practice (blogging was a really time consuming practice from Monday to Friday). Like Julian Hopkins, I tried to be a blogger. However, blogging set me in problems because of the difficulties to draw boundaries between personal/professional spaces, blogger/academic identity (the above mention controversies with researchers in my blog is an example).

One of the objectives of the blog was become visible. In Spain it is not necessary to ask for inform consent in social research, moreover, it is difficult to ask for it to every blogger you read on the Internet. So becoming visible was a way to make people be aware of my presence in the field. The problem in that case is that once you become visible, you make your informants visible too (you have linked to them, they have left comments on your blog, etc.). It was not a problem in my particular case because all of 'my' bloggers are really eager for getting visibility; however it could be a problem in many other cases (Alicia Blum-Ross).

If I should have to draw an analogy for the blog, I would draw it with the camera of the visual ethnographer. Reading recently Sarah Pink's 'Doing Visual Ethnography', the way she describes how the camera takes part in the construction of her identity, or how taking photos was a way for being in certain situations in the field, it made me think in my blog and my blogging activity in the field.

>From my personal experience blogging in my research, I think that incorporating technologies in the fieldwork (blogs or many other digital or Internet technologies) raises many complex issues for the ethnographic

practice. In that way I would like to put blogging (i) in the context of different online methods (or virtual methods, or online research method, whatever name we choose) and network technologies that can be used in ethnography (not only blogs, but many other visualization and Internet tools, search engines, mailing list, etc.), a topic that open a whole set of methodological and epistemological questions for anthropologists, and (ii) relate the use of the blog to other mediating technologies that are used in other anthropological fields, like cameras in the visual anthropology.

Best
Adolfo

--
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From: sakaerka@gmail.com (Erkan Saka)
Date: Wed, 28 May 2008 21:49:33 +0300
Subject: [Mediantro] Responses III

I hope I don't annoy you with long responses. If i am not particularly asked to respond, my responses end here. Many thanks again.
Richard Davis

No matter what the purpose of a blog is, it sits at the juncture of an unavoidable tension. On the one hand it is the creation of an individual, part of their property, an extension of themselves into a public domain. On the other hand it is open to interpretation and use, quite possibly far beyond the intentions of the blogger. *If a blog generates a really insightful discussion and the blogger wishes to use the discussion to inform their own research does the blogger claim the idea as their own or is the blogger obliged to cite it as a collectively generated idea?* There are challenging issues of property involved here.

This is a comment hard to respond. I don't know, is my first answer. Secondly, since a blog is not like a wiki system, and it still brings upon the issue of ownership, the blogger can claim the generated knowledge. Here comes the higher levels of ethics. to what extent one should define the source of one's ideas/knowledge. But is this radically different from the feedback or discussion one gets, let's say in a conference? In the questions and answers section. In my relatively limited experience of conferences etc I had always gotten good feedback and I used them in one way or another.

Julian Hopkins

However, as Delia suggests, I still have misgivings about how 'honest' I should be in my blog. *I worry about influencing bloggers who may be future interviewees* and/or survey respondents. My basic argument is that blogs are constructed around concepts of authenticity (something Erkan demonstrates well), but that as more 'problogging' (i.e. commercially oriented blogging) occurs, this 'authenticity' will be challenged (something Mary touches upon too, with regards to advertising). It is a moral question of sorts, relating to putative common values of the blogosphere. Therefore by articulating the aspects of this debate in my blog, I fear that other bloggers may be influenced in that they may ask themselves moral questions that they otherwise wouldn't have; I also worry that I may alienate some potential respondents. Mary makes a good point regarding how *not* mentioning people

in her blog increased her credibility - I'm now thinking that I may do something similar by anonymising any analyses I put online.

But isn't this a prelude to "collaborative" work? Influencing, interacting the informants etc. I totally agree that there must be some tactical decisions in how to blog etc. But I don't see myself influencing itself is the biggest problem. In fact, in anthropologists' new fields of research, challenging encounters with the informants seem to be inevitable. and in fact- again- a retrospectively looking into the history of anthropological practice demonstrates that fieldworks were more involved than detached in many context despite the rhetoric of detachment... Honestly, if i have the power to influence, then i will feel better:) Apart from this general attitude, there are of course cases that one should tactically move. Maybe we should produce more examples of these kinds....

Julian Hopkins

Recognising the ability of anthropologists to influence those they study is nothing new, but when one is being completely transparent with ideas (which may well change, as Erkan notes) with an audience who is completely able to understand them, it may swing the pendulum too far in the other direction - as Mary says, "The anthropologist-blogger may enjoy greater visibility in the field, but this may not always be an advantage." In that context, Erkan says he went to great measures to remain neutral in certain debates - I was wondering why? Is it because he wants to keep on good terms with the different readers, as potential participants in his research; or because that's what he would do anyway? My research differs in that I have to 'be' a blogger; does Erkan see his neutrality as part of the role of the journalist or the researcher? I could add that blogger-journalists typically espouse a partisan position, and I wonder whether Erkan has ever felt the need to do so in order to be a more 'authentic' blogger?

A very challenging question. Well, honestly, yes i did try to be neutral because of the prospect of my interviews. As i could manage to gather enough number of interviews, i could be more relaxed in preserving a level of neutrality. But secondly, I had an active activist student life, and i now feel regret to a large extent. I had a personal decision not to be too partisan even when I was extremely pro-EU [and that changed]. Thirdly, because I believe in my social scientific ideals, i was neutral because i did not know what to believe. In this sense, I am very happy that I work on a research project in which there are no ready answers. The field changes quickly and always has unpredictable turns. In the mean time, I don't believe the necessity of neutrality. Well, i guess most of us have gone through post-structuralism. I cannot naively believe the existence of neutrality or objectivism. Once you enter the field, you become a part of the ongoing drama. In the complexities of the field, you tend to be more or less involved but involvement itself seems to be inevitable.

My turning point in all this drama is the assassination of Hrant Dink- A Turkish-Armenian Journalist- in January 2007. Mr. Dink had a lovely personality. A good journalist, and politically conscious person who was by no means partisan. It is a pity that i could not meet him. Not because of my research purposes but because i missed to know a good man in person. Just a week before his murder, I had interviewed a very well known intellectual and columnist. He had said he was expecting bloodshed because of all that ultranationalist political environment. I had thought he was just fantasizing but a week after that interview, a good person was killed. After that I had decided to be more aggressive against ultranationalist tendencies in the mainstream media or politics. In the mean time, I believe in my profession and i still hope i can produce a good dissertation in the end. I don't believe i am acting in partisan way anyway. I just cannot believe in hiding my political conscience to pretend that i am "scientist".

Adolfo Estalella However, blogging set me in problems because of the difficulties to draw boundaries between personal/professional spaces, blogger/academic identity (the above mention controversies with researchers in my blog is an example).

I like the confusion of boundaries. As my ideas above already demonstrates,

i think i believe these confusions are productive in terms of intellectual knowledge production. These are challenging encounters and i very much love to exploit them (!).

--

Erkan Saka

* Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Anthropology in Rice University, Houston, TX

Field diary: <http://erkansaka.net>

* Instructor at the Faculty of Communication in Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey

From: j at julianhopkins.net (Julian Hopkins)

Date: Thu, 29 May 2008 09:04:52 +0800

Subject: [Mediantthro] Ongoing E-seminar: The floor is open!

Hello Erkan & All,

Erkan: thanks for the thoughtful responses to mine and others' comments. It seems that I need to think more about the whole collaborative approach to research. As regards neutrality, I have consciously steered away from the political aspect of blogging in Malaysia, but I cannot ignore it. I also avoid posting on political topics, it's unfortunate, but I do fear being targeted by the government as a foreigner meddling in local affairs. Anyway, I don't feel that I can especially contribute anything useful that is not already being done by a vocal group of bloggers who have now moved to having their voice heard on the national stage; even the late Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir, has started using a blog to voice his discontent with his chosen successor. Still, on the moral question of pervasive commercialisation, I suppose that if I do get some bloggers - especially the younger ones - thinking about it, I suppose I will have done something useful :)

Also: I missed the contribution by Basilio earlier, but I'd like to add to what Erkan said:

"2- What is a blog? It would not be controversial to state that blog is an artificial construct where some individuals (with a few exceptions) compulsively seek gratification from the strangers; blog communication is necessarily mediated communication, and not a natural environment (so critical to ethnographic research). It is a linear expression, and thus devoid of the circularity of human interactions and communication (which is what an ethnographer seeks to observe and study)."

--> I suppose that books could equally be described as "an artificial construct where some individuals (with a few exceptions) compulsively seek gratification from the strangers". Describing blogs as such sets up an artificial polarity between on and offline experiences (is this email not a 'real' interaction because it's done via the internet?); describing bloggers as "compulsively seek[ing] gratification from the strangers" is ignoring the role blogs play in enhancing offline friendships and developing new ones, in improving writing skills for budding journalists and writers, in providing an productive cathartic outlet, in pushing barriers to free speech (recently proving to be especially relevant in Malaysia, for example), and more...

--> What is a "natural environment"? Amongst many young computer literate people nowadays it is completely 'natural' to engage with others via blogs and social network sites. They maintain friendships and explore facets of their social worlds, and in a circular manner adapt their online and offline performances accordingly (Miller & Slater, pp75-9, examine this in relation to homepages and Trini schoolchildren; danah boyd in relation to social network sites).

--> The idea that a blog is a "linear expression" - meaning that bloggers talk into the void, I suppose - ignores one of the most important features of blogs, the comments. While it is true that most blogs have few comments, there are many (10s, 100s?) thousands that will have a regular readership and perhaps 5-20 comments for each post. This dialogic process is what is central to the popularity of blogs, I believe.

"3- The phenomenon of blogging deserves serious study; however, blogging as an authentic "field," and as spontaneous interaction reflecting the living/lived experience of a community is, to my mind, suspect."

--> Yes, it does deserve very close scrutiny. There have been many over-inflated claims of online 'communities'; however, part of the problem is the concept of 'community' itself. As Postill (2007b) argues, 'community merits attention as a polymorphous folk notion widely used both online and offline, but as an analytical concept with an identifiable empirical referent it is of little use' (4). One can find bloggers invoking the idea of community to rally interest around whatever project they have in mind, but in practice everyone's 'community' is different from others'.

--> The idea of a bounded 'community' where all share the same or similar "living/lived experience" is pretty much discounted now. I approach 'bloggers' as a subcultural phenomenon, and agree that approaching blogging purely as an online phenomenon would be missing out essential aspects of the offline context. However, inasmuch as anything is 'authentic', it is a field of social interaction that generates patterns of collective behaviour, the study of which is capable of enlightening aspects of human cultural behaviour in general - and of importance in predicting future trends as more people start to maintain their social life through increasingly mediated online means.

Miller, Daniel, and Don Slater. The Internet. An Ethnographic Approach. Oxford: Berg, 2000.

boyd, danah. "Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?" Knowledge Tree. Date. 27 Sep 2007

<<http://kt.flexiblelearning.net.au/tkt2007/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/boyd.pdf>>.

Postill, John. "Localising the Internet: Beyond Communities and Networks." Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, UK, 2007. 22. 20/9/2007

<http://johnpostill.co.uk/articles/postill_localising_net.pdf>.

Thanks and regards,

Julian

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Blog: www.julianhopkins.net

Skype: julhop

IM: jfprhopkins at hotmail.com

From: danieltaghioff at yahoo.com (Daniel Taghioff)

Date: Wed, 28 May 2008 21:10:59-0700 (PDT)

Subject: [Mediantro] The floor is open!

Dear list

"2- What is a blog? It would not be controversial to state that blog is an artificial construct where some individuals (with a few exceptions) compulsively seek gratification from the strangers; blog communication is necessarily mediated communication, and not a natural environment (so critical to ethnographic research). It is a linear expression, and thus devoid of the circularity of human interactions and communication (which is what an ethnographer seeks to observe and study)."

--> I suppose that books could equally be described as "an artificial construct where some individuals (with a few exceptions) compulsively seek gratification from the strangers".

>> *Well or indeed communication (who really knows their audience that well, we must all have looked up at someone we know well and wondered if we really know them). Or, on reading the comment again, it is a fairly good description of life - artificial in the sense of how we create our own*

>> *stories and I leave it to your imagination to fill in the rest...*

And there is a point to this, why do we consider blogging artificial? To turn it around, what does it take to become "authentic?" Not analytically speaking, we know that that is a dead-end in the land of a-priori, but in practice.

Not that it is safe to speak in general about practice, but are we considering things like the time a medium has existed, the connections to the wider world, its relationship to authoritative sources? If the Prime Minister started announcing government policy via his blog (the idea of Gordon Brown doing so in the UK is slightly amusing, and one wonders what Sarkozy or Berlusconi might do with a blog if set free to do so, never mind Boris Johnson, anyway...) , would this change the "authenticity" of blogging. I still think that the way in which a medium is constituted in social practice is a fascinating topic.

Now here we are trying to performatively constitute blogging as a methodological tool within our profession in a public forum. We seem to be casting around a bit: We can try and locate ethical and practical limits to what we can do, but we cannot easily stabilise the object called blogging. We can agree to talk about it in certain ways, and that it is "good" to use it in certain ways, but forms of communication are objects that are particularly strongly constituted by social practice, so we face a bit of a mobius strip in trying to stabilise it as Anthropologists, we end up looping back on ourselves.

We can talk about a wider politics and try and draw from that ways of talking in and about blogs, and we can draw on discussions in Anthropology. And to my mind it is this broadening out of debate that is one of the things of value about a "public" be it a new one like a blog or an old one like a town hall.

The radical democratic theorists (like Laclau and Mouffe and Alan Keenan and Torfing) have a point in saying that having the "public" (forum of debate) and its terms of reference and procedure open to debate is of value. The substantive point being that it allows the drawing together of the norms of various existing publics in order to broaden debate, as part of the constitution of new norms. And surely blogging, as a relatively new forum, has a freshness that allows this to happen more readily.

And this can only happen in as much as the older forums are populated by people who are also willing to learn. So perhaps it is worth turning things on its head a bit and considering, what can blogging teach us about our existing Anthropological forms and forums (the difference between the two being 'u')?

What does it tell us about field diaries, about the field, about giving informants a voice, about authenticity, about professionalism? This is part and parcel of thinking in the other direction of how Anthropological principles and practice can inform blogging.

But if we try and fix blogging in advance, we are making the conversation one-sided, it has slipped from dialogue to a form of monologue. And this also suggests a way of looking at public forums: When do things become fixed, how, when, by whom, and what does this say about the shifts between dialogue and monologue?

This is a one way of approaching the shifting liminality of forums, as they become more fixed, more of the content and procedure enters into a monological mode, and conversely things can also open up again, especially when things are shifting as in Turkey. Not that monologue is bad in itself, it is useful to know things and not question them for a while, at least to be going on with, but it is also very informative to pay close attention to how this happens.

I apologise that this is not exactly a new thought, but I wanted to articulate the challenge and approach explicitly.

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

Skype: taghioff
Email: daniel at taghioff.info

From: o.wiltshire at gmail.com (Owen Wiltshire)
Date: Thu, 29 May 2008 13:04:58 -0400
Subject: [Medianthro] property, ideas, and blogging

I love this discussion so let's keep Erkan talking :)

Erkan writes:

"But is this radically different from the feedback or discussion one gets, let's say in a conference? In the questions and answers section. In my relatively limited experience of conferences etc I had always gotten good feedback and I used them in one way or another."

Thanks for all this great discussion, and I apologize for my original hasty emails which may have been a bit informal for the standards of this group (perhaps I could have waited to see what kind of discussion was going on before posting). I am currently writing up a section on ethical considerations for my upcoming thesis work, and this is particularly relevant since I do plan on using my blog as a space to generate ideas and knowledge (just as I have for generating a proposal). I would think that blogging might actually be a cure to the problem of giving credit to individuals that one speaks to during the fieldwork process.

Obviously what is posted on a blog should be filtered to some degree, with the expectation of public consumption, and so when people comment on ideas, I believe they are acknowledging that their response will become public. Where I use ideas from responses on my blog, I plan to cite them (going along with the idea that the blog is a publication space, so comments and posts can be cited in such a way?). Would it not be the same for this list, as Erkan points out? Should I ask permission from the posters to use the ideas, even though they are already public postings? But I would certainly not consider the ideas "mine" just because they are written on my blog.

Another point I find very interesting is how one should balance academic and informal tones. As Erkan discusses in his paper, he originally restricted his blogging to his research topic, but he soon branched out to other topics of interest. I am currently at this stage where I am considering branching out and blogging on just about everything - but I may do this on a separate blog. Being an anthropology focussed blog seems to make sense to me, in that it is easier to find communities of similar interest. I was wondering how you felt about the multiple topics on your blog, and if it would be better to separate or blend the topics? (especially when one intends the blog to be a research tool). Do the broader range of topics help you gain rapport, in that you let people see a larger part of you? This fits into discussions of gaining trust that are discussed by many contributors to Christine Hine's "Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet" (2005). Or should a formal tone be maintained on the blog, to maintain distance between you and those involved in the research? Shani Orgad discusses the way she did research using email: "It was thus crucial to act in such a way that would enable me to maintain a certain distance, and allow me to keep a critical approach to things informants said." (Orgad in Hine 2005) So do you feel blogging about football has been beneficial in terms of the research process? Would you recommend isolating the topics that one covers, or branching out?

I also love the article on blogging, and the issue of being "too open". This fits into Mary's comment on maintaining academic standards in the blogosphere. When I first commented on it, I misread it - and now it makes much more sense to me. To make blogging a respectable research tool, certain academic standards must be met, but how does one mix this in with informal blogging on other unrelated topics?

Thanks,
Owen.

From: j at julianhopkins.net (Julian Hopkins)
Date: Sun, 01 Jun 2008 06:31:46 +0800
Subject: [Medianthro] – Doostdar & blogs in Iran

Hi All,

Seeing as no one has mentioned him yet (I think), and to add to the discussion on blog-as-tool-for-fieldwork I thought I'd post an snippet from an article by Doostdar who also used a blog as part of his research.

What follows is an ethnographic study of the vulgarity debate, which spanned approximately two months, from late October to late December 2003. I first took notice of Iranian blogs in February 2003, when I stumbled onto the site PersianBlog.com, the first Iranian weblog hosting service offering free web space and blogging tools to thousands of Persian speakers. In April, I decided to become a member of the community myself by starting two blogs: an English one entitled Persian Blogger Chronicles, and a Persian one entitled Parishaan Belaag (disheveled blog) in which I wrote, alongside the conventional personal notes and political commentaries, my observations and analyses of conversations among bloggers and some of their emergent sociocultural practices. I established relationships with other bloggers by writing about them on my own blog or by visiting their blogs and commenting on their entries. Throughout my research. I had many interesting conversations with Iranian bloggers that were conducted outside the blogging medium itself, mostly through e-mail and instant messaging but also over the telephone. Like Annette Markham in her research on text-based virtual reality (1998), I felt it necessary to experience blogging firsthand and over an extended period of time to acquaint myself with the nuances of communication and social interaction among the community of bloggers and to better equip myself for interpreting and making sense of what bloggers were doing and how they were articulating their actions. This ethnography is, therefore, as much informed (and constrained) by my own experiences as an amateur blogger trying to make inroads into weblogestan as it is by my observation and interrogation of other bloggers' communicative practices and social interactions. (pp652-3)

Doostdar, Alireza. "'The Vulgar Spirit of Blogging': On Language, Culture, and Power in Persian Weblogestan." *American Anthropologist*. 106.4 (2004): 651-62.

Cheers,
Julian

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Blog: www.julianhopkins.net
Skype: julhop
IM: jfprhopkins at hotmail.com

From: sbh at hi.is (Sigurjon Hafsteinsson)
Date: Mon, 2 Jun 2008 07:42:10 -0000 (GMT)
Subject: [Medianthro] E-seminar closed

Dear All

We've come to the end of the e-seminar. Many thanks to Erkan Saka for his paper on Blogging as a research tool for ethnographic fieldwork and to Mary Stevens for her discussant's comments. Many thanks, too, to those of you who've posted.

Our next e-seminar presenter will be Jay Ruby (Temple University, USA) coming September with a working paper titled "A Digital, Multimedia

Future for Ethnographic Film?". Respondant will be Peter Ian Crawford (University of Tromsø, Norway). Enclosed is Ruby's abstract.

Abstract

This working paper is an attempt to demonstrate the potential of digital CD-ROM multimedia ethnographies using 'Rebekah and Sophie: An Oak Park Story' as an example. Oak Park Stories are a series of CD-ROM ethnographies that explore the character of Oak Park, Illinois through three family portraits - an African-American family, a Lesbian Family and an Angle- Saxon family. Text, photographs and video clips are offered in a nonlinear way. So that the viewer can find their own way through the portrait. It is argued that these interactive productions can solve some of the problems experienced when an anthropologist attempts to convey ethnographic insight through his/her film.

All the best, Sigurjon