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Contents

Editorial

The theme of this issue is ethnographic research on media. The contributions showcase the wide variety of approaches to media ethnography that characterise the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) 1187 "Media of Cooperation" as an interdisciplinary research endeavour. For the purposes of the research, media ethnography is broadly defined as ethnographic research on the collective and cooperative production and use of media *in situ*. The papers included in the thematic focus explore media *as an* object of ethnographic research and their role *in* ethnographic fieldwork.

The section reports document the interdisciplinary conference "Computing is Work!" Organised by Tom Haigh and Sebastian Gießmann, the conference was held at the CRC 1187 "Media of Cooperation" in July 2017. A think piece written by Sebastian Gießmann is combined with videos of the talks to provide a fascinating intermedia insight into the event.

The editorial team hopes that you will enjoy this issue of Media in Action!

Thematic Focus

Media Ethnography

Media Ethnography and Participation in Online Practices

David Waldecker, Kathrin Englert, Wolfgang Ludwig-Mayerhofer, Oliver Schmidtke

Abstract

In this article, we focus on the issue of participation in online interaction in ethnography in general and in our own research in particular. In the first section, we discuss methodological questions concerning various forms of participation within the ethnography of online practices – practices that connect actors located in several different situations. Linking situations in this way transcends the traditional ethnographic mode of the researcher's physical participation in a situation. In the second section of this article, we portray our approach to these issues in our research project, which examines the media practices of teenagers and young adults: we explore what they consider as an appropriate degree of observability on social media and how they actually use their accounts to gain attention or to stay unobserved. In doing so, we focus on the benefits and challenges of observing the online part of the young people's interaction on and through social media.

1. Introduction

By its nature, social research collects data on whatever it investigates. Ethnography's main method of data collection is *participant observation* (Atkinson/Hammersley 1994); ethnographers aim to establish what is "going on" (Goffman 1986: 8) in a certain culture, organisation or field by being there while things are going on. This also applies to media

ethnography, i.e. the ethnographic exploration of media creation and usage (Bender/Zillinger 2015). What "being there" and "first-hand impression" entail, however, depends on the type of media and the type of activity or culture being studied. This is also the case in the ethnographic study of online phenomena, especially of social media practices. In this article, we focus on the issue of participation in online interaction in ethnography in general and in our own research in particular.

In the first section we discuss methodological questions concerning various forms of participation that can take place within the ethnography of online practices. In the second section, we describe how we approach these issues in our research project B06 "Un-/Desired Observation: Surveillance Society and the Social Field of Media". The project is part of the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC/SFB) 1187 "Media of Cooperation" and examines the media practices of young adults in reference to their observability on social media. In the context of the ongoing debate around privacy and security issues in social media use, we investigate if and how young people differentiate between desired attention and undesired observation in their everyday usage of social media platforms. Teenagers are often seen as particularly vulnerable (cf. Groenemeyer 2014) to the dangers of online interaction. We study how young people themselves judge media behaviour as "right" or "wrong" and which justifications inform these judgements. In this way, our project combines research perspectives applied in the fields of surveillance studies (Ball et al. 2012) and the sociology of evaluation (Lamont 2012).[1]

2. Ethnography and Participation Online

Ever since ethnography was adopted as a method within the social sciences, it has been used to research local cultures. Ethnographers visit areas and people of interest and stay for an extended period or several shorter periods of time. This is still the way ethnography is conducted today, for example by Hochschild (2016) in her portrayal of Tea Party and Trump supporters in Louisiana or by Hannerz (2015) in his study

of the adoption and rise of the punk subculture in Indonesia. Other authors suggest using a "multi-sited" approach to perform an "ethnography in/of the world-system" (Marcus 1998) or a "global ethnography" (Burawoy et al. 2000), enabling the ethnographer to compare sites or to follow a topic, narrative or conflict across several sites. Ethnographers visit various sites – or several places within one site – to take part in and observe interactions between members of the researched field or site. The interactions they participate in take place on-site. While interactions occur that connect individuals on-site with individuals and phenomena off-site, the researcher is interested in the local interpretation and local relevance of the off-site interaction.

As it is (extended) participation that sets ethnography apart from other methods, a useful starting point for the discussion is to elucidate what researchers participate in when conducting ethnographic studies. *The basic unit of participation in ethnography is a social situation in which a specific interaction takes place.* The specific interaction and social situation co-constitute each other. As Goffman (1983: 2) puts it: "Social interaction can be identified narrowly as that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence." However, this definition presupposes that no media are used in the interaction. While the voice, face and body of a participant can also count as media, we restrict the term *media* in our research to those media that facilitate the interaction and communication between absent participants through the transmission of the spoken or written word, sounds and images. Social media platforms are only the latest instalment of this type of medium. But how can we conceptualise the connections established between situations through mediated interaction and what are the challenges ethnographic research faces in these situations?

While Goffman's research focuses on the intricacies of face-to-face interaction, he nevertheless applies the term *interaction* to other domains. His understanding of social situations depends on "response

presence", i.e. the ability to take part in a situation. Often, an actor needs to be present in person to be able to respond. In other cases, media connect people in different locations; to the above quote, Goffman (1983: 2) adds in parentheses: "Presumably the telephone and the mails [sic] provide reduced versions of the primordial thing." Talking on the phone is a "reduced version" of face-to-face interaction, because certain forms of response presence, such as the gaze, are absent. Interaction via media does not take place within one situation, but connects actors located in several different situations. During a telephone conversation, for example, the actors are involved in at least three social situations, according to Hirschauer (2015: 121; authors' translation): they are "present physically in one location (where distraction beckons), audibly at their interlocutor's location (where background noise can be heard) and interactively in the placeless space of the telephone conversation." Hirschauer (2015) suggests the term *intersituation* to conceptualise this connection of situations through mediated interaction. This triad of situations in telephone conversations is supplanted by a myriad of possible constellations in the Web 2.0.

Media ethnography therefore has to contend with the difficulty of participating in a mediated interaction in the same way as in an unmediated one. As Lindlof and Schatzner (1998: 184) phrased it about 20 years ago: "If there is one theme that runs through the differences between FTF (embodied) [i.e. face-to-face communication, the authors] and CMC (virtual) [i.e. computer-mediated communication, the authors] ethnography, it is the problem of participation." While ethnographers can observe a face-to-face interaction, they are unable to observe all of the situations connected by the relevant online interaction simultaneously. That this is seen as a problem for ethnographic methods suggests that the tenet "participant observation" is implicitly understood as physical participation and observation, i.e. it requires the researcher's physical presence in the field; thus "[o]bviously, observation [online] can only take place in a rather reduced and limited mode"

(Wittel 2000: no pagination). Where other methods employ statistics or a strict methodology, in ethnography "the ethnographers themselves are the 'research tool'" (Breidenstein et al. 2013: 37, authors' translation). Accordingly, Wittel (2000) suggests that, due to the lack of physical presence, there is no participation in online interaction: "one cannot observe 'real people' [sic] and this is what participant observation is about." It is therefore not surprising that a number of publications have attempted to provide solutions to the challenges posed by the ethnography of online practices. Varis (2014) lists, among others, the following concepts: "digital ethnography" (Murthy 2008, Pink et al. 2015), "virtual ethnography" (Hine 2000), "cyberethnography" (Robinson/Schulz 2009) or "internet ethnography" (boyd 2008). All of these add a qualifier to "ethnography", which suggests that "digital ethnography", for example, differs from "non-digital ethnography" or "ethnography of the non-digital". What is it that makes "digital ethnography" different from supposedly regular ethnography?

Unlike the term "organisational ethnography" that uses a qualifier to identify ethnographic methods adopted to a certain social format (Ybema et al. 2009), the word *digital*, rather than qualifying a specific social format, relates to the supposed prerequisite for sociality and its ethnographic exploration – physical co-presence – and the supposed lack thereof in online interaction. The term, in this way, suggests a technical modification of social formats. As Boellstorff (2016: 387f.) notes, even authors who suggest that it makes no sense to set online phenomena ontologically or epistemologically apart from non-digital phenomena differentiate between the "real" – offline – world and the "digital", supposedly less real, world of online interaction. Although we would like to avoid delving into ontology, we want to illustrate the conundrum using an often-quoted example: Pink and her colleagues suggest studying online phenomena in context by applying "a non-digital-centric approach to the digital" (Pink et al. 2015: 7):

> *Digital Ethnography* sets out a particular type of digital ethnographic practice that takes as its starting point the idea that digital media and technologies are part of the everyday and more spectacular worlds that people inhabit. [...] In effect, we are interested in how the digital has become part of the material, sensory and social worlds we inhabit, and what the implications are for ethnographic research practice.

This statement only makes sense because it implies that there is a chasm between the "material, sensory and social" world on the one hand and "the digital" on the other. It characterises the digital implicitly as neither material nor sensory or social, as a supposedly substance-less technical realm of its own. A more in-depth reading of the above quote suggests that a physical presence in an interaction is relevant for the differentiation the authors make, because the (non-digital) face-to-face interaction involving the physical presence of the ethnographer and other actors in "everyday and more spectacular worlds" is without a doubt seen as "material, sensory and social". By contrast, the interaction in the "placeless space" (Hirschauer 2015) of the social media platform seemingly lacks these qualities. The description of the digital as somehow immaterial and virtual seems to strike a chord with an everyday understanding of what sets apart digital media, the internet and online phenomena in general from other forms of interaction.

With reference to the higher degree of realness ascribed to situations of physical interaction, Pink and her colleagues suggest examining online practices in context, i.e. by participating in the situations in which digital media are used and employed. "Non-digital-centric-ness" therefore "means that the digital ethnography project should not be prefaced with the idea of needing to use digital methods" (Pink et al. 2015: 10). By justifiably distancing themselves from automatically using digital methods [in this instance: ethnography solely based on both online participation and automated research methods] due to the digital

nature of the research field, they implicitly suggest that ethnographic research of online practices should participate in situations in which the participants are physically present; at least, they do not include a principle of "non-analogue-centric-ness". We therefore want to expand this methodological consideration. Pink and her colleagues argue that "the use of digital methods should always be developed and designed specifically in relation to the particular research question being asked" (Pink et al. 2015: 10). However, we suggest – in order to fully embrace the ethnographic paradigm – that the choice of method and mode of participation in media ethnography should always be designed in accordance with the specifics of the research question and the research field – without setting any type of participation (digital or non-digital, so to speak) as a prerequisite for or central to media ethnography. In this way, media ethnography would follow one of the main tenets of the ethnographic method by focusing on the methodological pressure exerted by the field itself (Amann/Hirschauer 1997: 19).

It seems that the distinction between face-to-face interaction and interaction via media is entrenched in both everyday and ethnographic conceptualisations. Rather than taking this evaluation of online and offline practices for granted and using it as a basis for methodological considerations, media ethnography as a discipline could (and should) investigate how users themselves conceptualise "the digital". We therefore propose to study the "categorical work" (Star/Bowker 1999: 310) that individuals employ when using social media.

3. Ethnography of Evaluations of Online Observability

In the second part of our paper, we lay out the methods employed in our research project in reference to the above considerations. Our research addresses only a small subset of the "categorical work" (Star/Bowker 1999: 310) performed by online users by examining how teenagers and young adults differentiate between undesired observation and desired attention online. We are interested in what these young peo-

ple *do online* and how they *make sense* of what they do; specifically, we want to know what they consider as an appropriate degree of observability on social media and how they actually use their accounts to gain attention or stay unobserved. Rather than examining the interactive processes between the users, their devices and the platform, we focus on the users' interaction in the "placeless space" (Hirschauer) of online communication. Instead of relying on the physical presence of the researcher in situations in which these devices and platforms are used, our approach includes a combination of methods: we tackle the issue in a two-pronged approach, with semi-structured face-to-face interviews on the one hand and online observation sessions on the other.[2] While we focus on the actual media practices during our online participation, we use the interviews to ascertain social media users' theoretical evaluations of their perspectives on online observability. We interview a number of students (aged 16 to 22) from either cities or small towns with different educational backgrounds and ask them during the interview to show us how they use their smartphone and specific social media apps, and how they deal with these apps' privacy settings. Therefore, we also observe the way the interviewees use and show us their devices during the interview. Usually, two researchers are present to conduct the interview and observe the demonstrations of social media use, respectively. For the online observations, we ask the individuals we interview to add one of the researchers' accounts as a contact (e.g. as a "follower" on Instagram) on the social media platforms they use; there, we observe their activities for two weeks. Below, we show how our participation in the digital part of the interaction, during the online observations, illustrates elements of the media practices we are interested in.

As our research focuses on evaluations of observability online, we can also monitor how young people deal with this question in practice. By studying their messages, comments, pictures and overall activities, we are able to see if and how they choose to publish photographs that

show their face and body in certain situations – at home, with friends, partially undressed at a pool or in order to show off their physique –, how they react to comments and if they delete specific items. As our research covers multiple platforms, we are also able to observe differences in the way young people use multiple accounts on several platforms. It is this form of impression management we are interested in. By participating online, through our own accounts, we are able to closely follow their activities: we have enough time to take screenshots or look at a picture in detail, which would be more cumbersome in a face-to-face interaction – this is aptly demonstrated during the show-and-tell parts of our interviews.

In observing the digital part of interactive processes in social media, we participate in situations that enable the actor to access the online interaction physically. Our ethnographic endeavour therefore follows the same steps the individuals interviewed talk about. Like the young people, we have to create and manage profiles on several social media services; we are able to discover how quickly an account can be created – and how complicated it can be to delete one. Just like them, we face choices concerning our profile and privacy settings and spend many hours at home in front of our screens, observing other users' online activities. We are also – at least partially – able to discern how the social media platform observes and reacts to our participation: our activities on the platform initiate algorithmic processes that lead to changes in the interaction with the platform itself, for example, by suggesting lists of potentially interesting profiles based on our location, previous searches, etc. To a certain extent, we therefore include the infrastructure as an actor in our research. By staying at home or in the office, by doing "armchair ethnography", so to speak, for at least a certain part of our work, we can (nevertheless) experience what interacting with other people and their physical presence via social media feels and looks like. Regarding our research question, we can analyse how interaction with the platform is organised by the platform itself and other users in-

volved – something that would be difficult to accomplish by (solely) participating physically in situations in which social media are used.

4. Conclusion

Our ethnography and media ethnography in general share a challenge with the actors that engage in communication via media: they, too, take part in the online interaction via their respective offline situations; they are also unable to see the complete picture of offline and online situations that constitute the interaction.[3] As ethnography focuses on the participants, their perspectives and involvement in interaction, an ethnographer is supposed to participate to the same degree as the actors themselves. Consequently, it should not be considered as a methodological problem (cf. e.g. Wittel 2000) if the degree of physical involvement is partially lower and therefore less "primordial" in online interaction research than in face-to-face research – as this is the case for everyone involved online. The sketch of the online part of our ethnography illustrates, in our view, that it makes sense occasionally to study social interaction in a seemingly "unreal" and "unembodied" way.

In our research, we examine the boundaries that young people set between desired and undesired observation in two different ways. In interviews, we experience the "sayings" of evaluations of appropriate online observability; through online observation and offline observation during the interviews, we capture the "doings" in actual online interactions. In doing so, we are able to comment on a strand of research that suggests that a "privacy paradox" (Barnes 2006) – between a stated interest in online privacy and a practical disregard thereof – is prevalent in online interaction (Lee/Cook 2015). Our preliminary results indicate that the "privacy paradox" is not as ubiquitous as suggested (cf. Englert et al. 2019). Instead, young adults and older teenagers say they exercise caution in online interaction and do follow suit. Many interviewees see social media as an ambiguous field, a view that is often reinforced by teachers, parents as well as the police and "media scouts" –

older students who come to class and talk about the safe use of social media. In their online interactions, the individuals interviewed often solely interact with people they know personally from other contexts; they have become wary of contacts based on social-media acquaintance which they embraced when they first started using social media at a younger age. Now, they prefer platforms that restrict audience access to their content and they often use measures provided by these platforms to this end. However, while they emphasise the importance of privacy options and settings provided by the platforms, they sometimes admit that they consider the surveillance by the platforms as less relevant or reluctantly accept it as a precondition for participation online. Interviewees fully aware of the diverse possibilities of institutional surveillance (and consequently their own loss of information control) note that the "choice" to stop using digitally networked media (in order to regain information control) is no longer an option in the digital age. Our own online participation during our research shows that, for us as everyday users, it is impossible to fully comprehend the data processing of the social media platforms. If research focuses on the participants' perspectives, it is acceptable to leave these processes unexplored. They are, however, interesting from the perspective of surveillance studies. It could also be argued that social media platforms and their algorithms count as participants, too, if Latour (2005) and other post-humanistic authors are taken seriously. It is difficult to observe these data collection processes directly through participant observation, because social media companies consider them as trade secrets. Future research projects – which want to fully grasp the mechanisms beyond everyday users' knowledge and influence – might therefore include reverse engineering (cf. Joler et al. 2016) and other digital methods (Dieter et al. 2018) in order to inspect the black box and back-end of observation online.

Notes

1 This paper focuses on methodological issues in our research; preliminary results have been published in Englert et al. (2017), Englert et al. (2019) and Schmidtke et al. (2019).

2 In our research, we also use group discussions focusing on the sociology of justification (Boltanski/Thévenot 2006) of online practices. However, we will not discuss them in this paper.

3 Their perspectives on the interaction are more fragmented than the perspectives of participants in face-to-face encounters. The latter are fragmented and partial to begin with, as participants usually see the faces of others, but not their own face; however, the participants in face-to-face interactions are subject to the same circumstances and distractions that constitute the situational setting.

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The Story is Everywhere. Dispersed Situations in a Literary Role Play Game

Wolfgang Reißmann

Abstract

This paper draws on the history and development of digital ethnography. The point of departure is that it is characteristic for digital environments to enforce feelings of being there and not being there simultaneously. Instead of invoking digital exceptionalism, however, it is assumed that mediatised ways of acting sensitise research for the fact that all situations are dispersed in one way or another. Acknowledging the distributed character of situations means accepting their fragmentary and nested character. Using the example of a literary role play game, the paper invites the reader to follow selected interconnections between heterogeneous actors, strings of actions and layers of reality.[1]

1. Mediated Presence and Digital Ethnography

Coming to terms with the boundaries and characteristics of what constitutes a situation is a long-standing issue. It is complicated enough even without the involvement of digital media or ethnographic research. Even in face-to-face encounters, the beginning and the ending of action chains, the degree of mutual awareness, and the frames of what happens are contingent, layered and subject to negotiation (Goffman 1974). It is not surprising that further uncertainties arise when technical media or mediating technology enter the equation. In the past 30 years, studies of mediated presence have significantly re-framed the understanding of situations with regard to different types and usage of tech-

nical media. One common trope is the "doubling of place", a phrase originally coined with regard to witnessing public events on TV (Moores 2004). Another trope is "liveness", understood as "a historically mutable concept" (Auslander 2008: 62) of cultural performance and mediation of presence. In addition, research in other fields of trans-local communication, interaction and/or working suggested a re-arrangement of space-time relations. These relations were conceived in different ways, as "intimacy at a distance" (Thompson 1995: 82ff.), "mediated proximity" (Tomlinson 1999), "absent presence" (Gergen 2002), "connected presence" (Licoppe 2004) or "synthetic situations" (Knorr-Cetina 2009) – to name just a few.

Needless to say: it is not possible to transcend the primordial physical location of *one* individual in *one* place – not even in the holodeck. Therefore, metaphorical usages of notions such as doubling of place or third places (in between, across etc.) have their limits. However, even if nothing and nobody is actually in motion, from the angle of mundane experience, media users are cognitively, emotionally and sensorially mobile (Urry 2000). They are challenged to synchronise and synthesise the different sources of experience of what they perceive as 'the situation'. Adding mediating technology into the analysis of situations reveals the relative significance of bounded physical places as shared common grounds. This applies to ethnographers as to anyone else included in situations dispersed in time and space.

When scholars like Baym (1995) began to study "virtual communities", they abandoned conventional field sites and forms of participation "in order to take the setting on its own terms, just as any ethnographer within an unfamiliar culture would do". (Hine 2017: 21) Their methods of conducting 'online-only/first' ethnography suited the early web communities' self-perception as spheres of their own. An undeniable achievement of 'online-only/first' ethnography has been to reveal the various uncertainties and the lack of knowledge and perception arising when communication, interaction and cooperation are de-localised and

shaped by the constraints of the 'channeling' media involved. Subsequently, methodical literature rightly emphasised that the de-localised placement of researchers in 'armchair' settings was a huge challenge. Although ethnography always includes feelings of alienation and ignorance, online interaction lacks the sensual richness of physical co-presence. Naming this feeling, Rutter and Smith (2005) spoke of a "nebulous setting": "The online ethnographer faces the issue of 'being there' while also, in a non-trivial sense, 'not being there'." (Rutter/Smith 2005: 91)

With fading novelty, normalisation and the first wave of so-called social media, various relations between online and offline came (back) to mind. Subsequently, 'online-only/first' ethnography was deemed insufficient. The new common ground was the combination of online and offline field sites, backed by general trends in ethnography promoting multi-sited approaches (e.g. Hannerz 2003) and openness regarding what to follow (things, metaphors, narratives etc.). Postill and Pink (2012), for instance, introduced an understanding of "(digital) ethnographic places" as collections of intertwined things and processes connected, among others, through the ethnographers' navigations and their narrative. Referring to Amit, Hine (2015: 60) stressed the basic ethnographic assumption that a "field site is an artful construction rather than something one simply 'finds'". Another example for overcoming the on/off dichotomy in digital ethnography can be found in the concept of "digital wayfaring" (Hjorth/Pink 2014). Drawing on ethnographic work on location-based service games, visual practices and mobile media, Hjorth and Pink broke with the "network(ed)" metaphors in social media research. Following Ingold's (2007) notion of wayfaring, they explored and defined an anthropological attitude based on sensing the world and articulating experiences 'on the move', which has no (special) place for "online" or "offline".

2. Dispersed Situations as a 'Default Mode'

Obviously, the experiences observed and made in digital environments stimulated research strategies favouring multiple 'entry points' and the contextualisation of the phenomena of interest from multiple angles across online and offline sites. Rich descriptions seem to emerge out of a style that could be described as 'connecting fragments'. To some extent, any kind of ethnographic inquiry relies on this style, but in or across digital environments in particular, following the practice(s) of interest and their traces can turn into solving a jigsaw puzzle.

Giving the debate a further twist, we can learn from the experiences made in digital ethnography by inversion and adopt a perspective in which we consider *every 'social' situation* as dispersed – including face-to-face and physically co-present encounters. Usually, we only understand situations as dispersed or distributed, in which (1) individuals located in different places interact with each other by means of technical media, (2) people 'participate' in distant (media) events or (3) immerse themselves into literary or game environments in order to 'interact' with or empathically follow fictional characters, or to turn themselves into avatars or similar. Broadening the perspective, however, the attribute "dispersed" can equally apply to technically mediated and constituted situations as to special forms of 'non-mediat(is)ed' religious experiences ('to be close to god'), 'distraction' (daydreaming, trance), living with imaginary companions (children are experts in this area) or forms of remembering the ancestors, the dead or long-distant friends. These examples of the 'imagined/felt' distribution of situations in time and space demonstrate the artificial nature of the on-off distinction. Undoubtedly, it is a powerful distinction, deeply incorporated in our self-perception and subjective media theories. Yet, being there and not being there is not only a problem of virtual or digital ethnography or of living in mediatised worlds. It is part of human life. We are 'offline online' as we are 'online offline' in multiple ways.

Distinctions and hierarchies of presence have to be learned and incorporated. If Mead was right, infants are born into a fully animated world of undifferentiated 'intersubjectivity' (Joas 1996). It requires strong efforts of socialisation and enculturation to *de-socialise* and *dis-connect* our emerging "self" from the material world, including our own body. In other words, through socialisation, in thousands of situations, we learn to differentiate the imagined other from the merely distant or the 'really' present other. We learn to differentiate the 'here and now' from 'now, but not here', 'here, but not now' or 'not here and not now'. We also learn to differentiate fact from fiction and to interiorise ontological hierarchies. In modern western socialisation, for example, face-to-face interaction is often considered as more precious than mediated interaction and human others as more 'real' than non-humans. However, an interactionist theory of socialisation is open to change, as it is a theory of practice. Cross-cultural views easily reveal culture-specific differences in "deep role play" (Lewis 2013: 19f.). The factual contents, forms and subjects/agents of interaction are the 'independent variables' of socialisation and enculturation processes. If plays, games, rituals and the ontological mix of reference groups change, the ontological biases also change in the long run.

Methodologically, acknowledging the dispersed character of situations means accepting the fragmentary character of any participation (irrespective of being co-present, technologically mediated, online, offline etc.), being sensitive to heterogeneous types of participating actors and modes of participation, being aware of our own ontological biases and following the efforts which make the dispersed elements' interrelations accountable in practice. What is visible or observable is a current or past fragment, consisting of strings of action that partly cross over and partly run in parallel. Following the strings leads to other fragments and/or other situations, knotted both synchronically and diachronically. The increasing attention given to the dispersed character of situations in media research shifts the focus away from the question

whether online or offline or online-offline is the appropriate form of conducting research. Instead, we should ask the question: what can we learn from the given, visible part of a situation in order to understand its other parts, relations and interconnection with other situations?

3. Digital Team Ethnography in the Context of Transformative Literary Fan Works

The fragments of situations we explore in our research derive mainly from digital platforms, working tools and communication services. Our research objects are transformative literary works in the area of fan fiction and role play. The research background is the CRC's project "Media practices and copyright law" (B07). This project is a joint venture of media sociology and copyright law scholarship. One of the objectives is to elaborate field-specific proposals to enhance copyright law in order to better match the reality of transformative working and publishing in digitised/mediatised social worlds. To capture this 'reality', we conduct empirical research using mixed methods. In its empirical parts, the project combines semi-structured interviews with fan fiction authors, platform and document analyses (e.g. of platforms' TOS, selected forum discussions/threads, commentary), 'offline' observation (e.g. participation in comic/manga conventions, book fairs) – and *digital ethnography*.

For the latter, we have chosen an auto-ethnographic approach. Auto-ethnography emphasises "the embodied and emotional experience of engagement with diverse media, attending to the influences that shape and constrain the experience, and the opportunities and restrictions that emerge" (Hine 2015: 83). The ethnographic participation in B07 is conducted by Svenja Kaiser. Svenja has been a fan fiction author and role player for many years. While she is the one who actively participates, we work as a team in steering and focusing the observation, and with regard to data analysis and interpretation.[2] Based mainly on protocols and screenshots, within the interpretation group, we attempt to 'relive' and reconstruct the cooperative text production. In this regard,

we benefit from the persistence of traces in digital media and the availability of options to record data in-situ. This special arrangement includes continuous mutual alienation. Our starting point is Svenja's experience while participating in-situ. Used as a methodical instrument, the reactions of the interpretation group's members while examining the archived material are equally important. The extent to which the members are familiar with the research subject differs greatly. Figure 1 illustrates the team ethnography process:

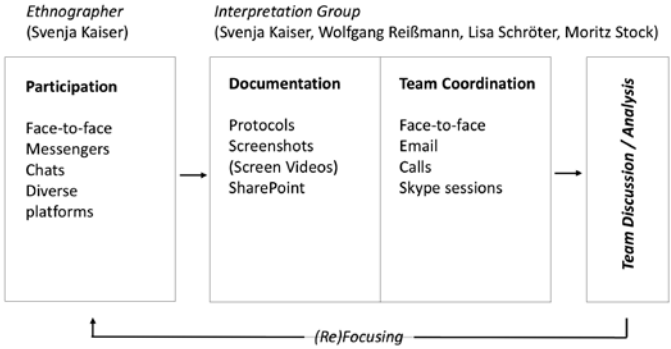

Fig. 1: Team Ethnography Process

Below, we draw on data we collected on *a literary role play game* observed between February and August 2017. Role play (RP) games are forms of collaborative writing or playing, respectively (cf. the classic work of Lancaster 2001). The literary RPs observed are usually performed in chat-like media environments, but also using forum sites and/or instant messenger services. The story evolves from the dialogue between the characters, who pen both narrative text and direct speech. Each player is in charge of one or more characters. The boundaries of literary RP and text-based MUDs (Multi User Dungeons) or pen&paper role plays are fluid. In literary RPs, the emphasis is on character and story

development. MUDs and pen&paper role plays are usually determined by game rules.

4. Seeing with Wraiths' Eyes: A Literary Role Play Game on *Stargate Atlantis*

The RP we observed is part of the *Stargate* fandom and hinges upon the species of the *Wraith*, which is significant in the military science fiction serial *Stargate Atlantis* (5 seasons; 2004–2008). *Stargate Atlantis* is a spin-off from *Stargate – SG 1* (10 seasons; 1997–2007), which itself has its roots in the movie *Stargate* (1994, directed by Roland Emmerich). *Stargate Atlantis* draws on the discovery of the supposedly lost city of the "ancients" in the 7th season of *Stargate SG 1*. The serial describes the expedition into the Pegasus Galaxy which, after a war between the ancients and the Wraith 10,000 years ago, is now dominated by the Wraith. In the original serial, the Wraith are introduced as a permanent threat to the Atlantis expedition.

The Wraith are insect-like beings organised in hives and subject to the strictly hierarchical reign of their queens. While the queens are feminine (only in exceptional cases hive masters are masculine), all other hive members are masculine and divided into "blades" – fighting actors – or "clevermen" – technical-scientific staff in charge of the spaceships and the infrastructure.

The original serial, *Stargate Atlantis*, is told from the human point of view. The humans' knowledge on the Wraith is limited. Often, they depict the Wraith in stereotypical, antagonistic patterns. Compared to the serial, the *role play group fundamentally inverts the perspective*. In the RP, all main characters are "Wraith-OCs", with OC standing for "original character", i.e. self-created and formed figures.

Members of the RP group are Natalie (29 at the beginning of the observation), Mario (31), Nadja (24)[3] and Svenja (27). Mario, Natalie and Svenja are friends and live in a medium-sized German city. Nadja is Canadian and also lives in a medium-sized city. The initial group met

over a RP in the *Star Trek* fandom. After an initial period of observation, Svenja became an active player and writer. The *Stargate* fandom was new to her.

The RP is performed trans-locally in the "virtual rooms" of the chat service *Chatzy* in English. After each RP session, Mario "logs" the newly evolved text corpora in *Sta.sh*, a cache of the fan art platform *Deviant Art*. *Chatzy* and *Sta.sh* are both only accessible for those who get the exact link. In the overall period of observation and participation, around 200 RP episodes were stored and played in different player constellations. The playtime of each episode is around five to ten hours.

5. Connecting Fragments in "The Chatzy View"

RP is performed by players (dis)located in different places, developing stories and characters located in other places/spaces. While RP is clearly an activity of mediatised situational entanglements, we would like to focus on aspects of the dispersion beyond the mere facts of distributed locations. In particular, we want to explore what we call "*The Chatzy View*". The chat service is the most important means of role playing within the observed group. Therefore, participating in *Chatzy* is a core activity both for the ethnographer and the interpretation group during sessions of 'secondary re-living'.

Overall, we identify three action chains in *Chatzy*, attributable to (1) involved characters, (2) involved author-personae and (3) involved players as 'civil persons' (see below). Applying a conventional attitude (and ontology) to our interpretation, we could refer to theories of experiencing narrative worlds (e.g. transportation thesis, initially coined by Gerrig 1993) or to theories of performance and play to describe our observations as different modes of acting (play-perform/non-play) and shifts from one to the other and back. In fact, from the players' point of view, this is one possible and appropriate way of describing the action chains. As a matter of course, Nadja, Natalie, Mario and Svenja *know* who 'they', their author-egos and their characters are. They *know* to use

communicative conventions to distinguish the mode of playing from other modes of (inter)acting.

However, alternative views are equally justified. If we take the situations' fragments in *Chatzy* seriously, in close-reading the documents, we are constantly confronted with *mixed realities*, with participations and mutual influences of actors who dwell in worlds determined by incommensurate ontologies. On the one hand, this is not surprising. *It is a role play*. On the other hand, in *Chatzy*, these otherwise separated worlds are drawn together – they are knotted. At this point, the '*Chatzy* View' differs from research that regards a narrative experience merely as a special action mode (requiring suspension of disbelief etc.). The questions 'who takes which role?' and 'who participates in which kind of reality?' are not easy to answer – at least not from the perspective of the '*Chatzy* View'. To provide some impressions, we connect data collected on Friday, 16th June 2017, the beginning of an RP-filled weekend, with further observations made during the participation.

Chatzy – A gathering point for diverse beings

The gaming situation starts with assembling.

In the afternoon of Friday, 16th June 2017, Svenja receives a link via *Discord*, an instant messaging service. The link is necessary to enter the group's "virtual room" in *Chatzy* and delegates the actors towards the actions' place. Natalie has started an RP episode and invites Svenja to follow the story. Svenja logs in as *Luckless*, the character she usually plays. Having entered the scene, *Luckless* is thrown into an ongoing story. Two characters are playing together, *Diamond* and *Zenith*. Both are new characters. Figure 2 is the first of nine screenshots of this evening. On the right-hand side, *Chatzy* identifies the four actors playing. Besides the playing characters and *Luckless*, Pat is also present. As we know from previous episodes, Pat is not a character. He is an author-persona.

Diamond and *Zenith* are present in *Chatzy* and in the story world at the same time. *Luckless* and *Pat* restrict themselves to "lurking" and

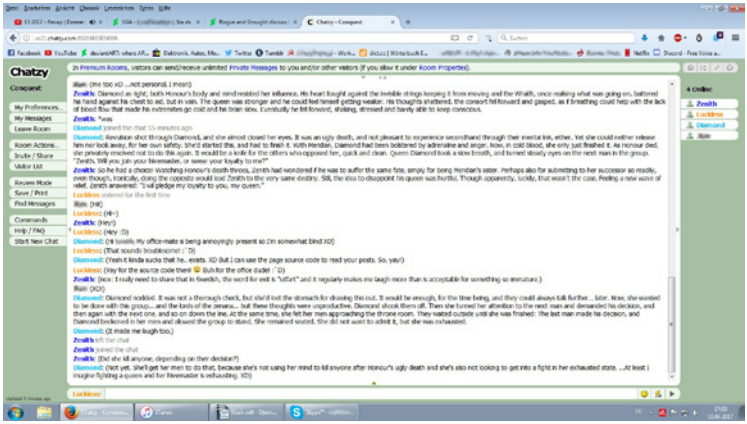

Fig. 2: The first of nine Chatzy screenshots on Friday, 16th June 2017

eventually comment on the story's progression by using bracketing communication. For them, following the ongoing action is comparable to reading a book or attending a performance. As offstage voices, they do not directly take part in the textual performance of *Zenith* and *Diamond*. However, *Zenith* and *Diamond* also often drop their 'roles', using bracketing communication and asking each other questions to coordinate story development. In a sense, *Pat* is the most interesting participant in this assembly of unequal beings. We know it is the artist name of Mario. As 'informed researchers', we also know that RP players never log in with civil identities. Yet, *Pat, as* almost every other 'nickname' used by fan fiction authors and role players, is not just *any* artist name. In most cases, they refer to a fandom, often the one the players or authors used when they first actively participated. *Pat*, as an author-persona, is a hybrid being, relating as much to the writing body ('the author/player as civil person') as to world(s) of fan fiction.

To put it succinctly, just by listing their names, we encounter a diverse gathering of beings in *Chatzy*.

Three beings inhabiting one body

In the story's progression, we find the RP characters in the following situation: some minutes before *Luckless* arrived in *Chatzy*, Queen *Diamond* caused the death of queen *Meridian* and her hivemaster *Honour*. In the first posts of the new episode, Queen *Diamond* considers the attitudes of the defeated hive's Wraith and attempts to submit them under her control. *Zenith* is *Meridian*'s brother (designated as "sister" in the first post, later always as "he") and fears to "suffer the same fate".

As Luckless arrives, *Chatzy* states: "Luckless entered for the first time." *Pat*, *Zenith* and *Diamond* welcome *Luckless* using the bracketing communication style. In doing so, *Zenith* and *Diamond* are present in two different ways: in *their* situation *and* in a welcome ceremony that crosses the different realities of characters and author-personae. Surprisingly, it is not *Luckless* they welcome, but *Serious* (Svenja's artist name). Queen *Diamond* tells her to use "the page source code to read your posts" as "[m]y office mate is being annoyingly present". If you attempt to adhere to the '*Chatzy* View' on the situation, this information is perplexing. As Wraith are telepathic beings, Queen *Diamond* should be able to find more efficient ways of getting in touch with others, while pretending to work. Obviously, this information is an external reference transcending the character's life world. In a sense, *Diamond* forces us to anticipate that characters, author-personae and players can *inhabit the same body* and that, from time to time, one of them is speaking through the mouth of the other. [4]

According to Svenja's protocol, the information regarding the "office mate" was helpful in understanding the relationships between the different beings. As Svenja did not know the new characters yet, the post helped her assign *Diamond* to Nadja or to her author-persona, respectively. While in Germany, it was about 5.30 pm, in Ontario, Canada, it was about 11.30 am. So Nadja was at work. With her, while roaming fantastic worlds, *Diamond* and the author-persona were in the uncomfortable situation of being watched by the "office mate".

The beginning of a journey – Diamond leaves the text world

Although partially sharing bodies, the different beings have an existence of their own. This applies not only to the players and author-personae, but also to the characters. Their natural habitat begins to exceed the minds of their players, the other players' minds or *Chatzy*. On Friday, 16th June 2017, we witness the beginning of *Diamond*'s journey – not in terms of narratology, but in coming alive outside of the story world. At the end of the episode, *Diamond* sends a link to an image uploaded to the file hosting service *imgur*. The image shows herself (see figure 3).

As 'informed researchers', we are able to identify this image as a piece of fan art created by Nadja. However, there are also other ways to grasp the event of linking: the newly born character, *Diamond*, appears in a quasi-physical form and begins to travel. Until this moment, except in minds and bodies of Nadja and her fellow players, *Diamond*'s place was the text-driven performance in *Chatzy*. Now she becomes visible and quasi-tangible. She begins to conquer other environments, appears in *Chatzy and* in *imgur*, here and there… We do not know what else

Fig. 3: Diamond, fan art on imgur by Nadja. Source: imgur page, link is not provided due to anonymisation reasons

Fig. 4: Diamond Brand Coconut Milk. Source: http://www.jctrading.us/assets/product_images/drinks.jpg (4th October 2018)

will happen. One day, will we meet the queen at a convention, a cosplay event or a talk show?

Beings mutually influence each other

With the help of the mental powers of *Razor*, her first watch captain, and the drones led by him, Queen *Diamond* immobilises those refusing her will, then asks the remaining "new officers" to prepare the ship for her inspection. As the characters are new, the episode is accompanied by a lot of metacommunication in brackets, concerning the characters' development and relationships. One of *Diamond*'s posts mentions the name of a character:

> Diamond: (I want Diamond's current hivemaster to be called Brand, solely because every day at work I see this box of "Diamond Brand Coconut Milk" as I got [go to, W.R.] the freezer.)

Diamond, or Nadja speaking through her mouth, refers to a freezer bag with coconut milk (see figure 4). In mentioning this detail, we do not intend to reveal a curious momentum or to conjure up the agency of coconut milk for storytelling. Yet, it is a good example to illustrate that the situations and lives of characters, author-personae and players not only co-exist, but *shape each other*. Nadja's attachment to the product, its name, visual rhetoric and the daily look at it merges with the hivemaster's character.

We have identified many situations, in which players, author-personae and characters act in interdependence (see figure 5). For instance, if one of the active players has to hurry (due to external commitments etc.), it has *direct consequences* on the characters' (inter-)actions and conversations. Characters then are under pressure to come to the point and/or author-personae are urged to adapt the plot and find an appropriate end. Conversely, the characters' situations influence those of the players. The way they conduct their life in *Chatzy* has consequences be-

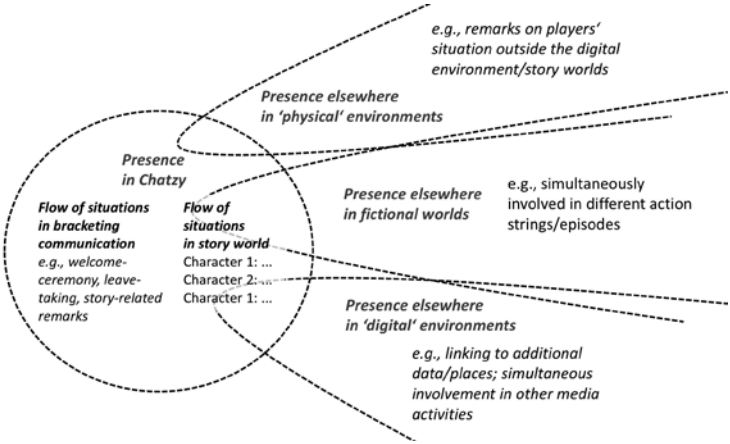

Fig. 5: Synchronic Distribution of Situations in RP

yond tying the players to screens and keyboards. Within the period of observation, Svenja felt tired and exhausted after hours of gaming more than once. However, abandoning the character and consequently immobilising the ongoing interaction was not a viable option.

Author-personae and moderately directional story development

At around 8.20 pm, *Diamond* and *Zenith* decide to "[e]nd RP" and "start the next one with Zenith's turn". Frequently, short sequences of joint planning occur before or at the very beginning of a new episode. In this case, *Diamond* or Nadja's author-persona asks how much prior knowledge should be taken for granted:

> Diamond: (How much do you know about Zenith's backstory? aka how much should I ask)
> Zenith: (I don't really know anything, but I'll make shit up whenever convenient.)

In the observed *Stargate* RP, the style of story and character development is best described as *'moderately directional'*. Most minor aspects and small-scale developments are realised "on the fly": story progression is partly accompanied by intragroup negotiating and, partly, players and characters inform each other about the next steps or players and characters just go ahead in a certain direction. Choosing the hivemaster's name with reference to "Diamond Brand Coconut Milk" is one example for on-the-fly development without seeking consensus. *Diamond* announces the name rather than discussing it first (in general, players respect what others stipulate for their characters – as long as these decisions do not influence their own characters to heavily). The "backstory" question involves more negotiation. Beyond that, moderately directional story and character development includes a *loose planning of event corridors* and/or *obligatory plot points*. This planning occurs before or within certain game sessions. The greater the communicative interaction, the less the planning is documented. The story and its development are evolving in the players' minds. Conversely, short character profiles, fan art images of the main characters and short memos in analogue (post-its) and digital form (e.g. posts in instant messengers) synchronise and stabilise the story's progression. Moreover, each *Chatzy* room gets a short header (here: "Conquest") paratextually indicating the overall topic.

Further observations obtained by accompanying *Nadja* and *Mario* outside *Chatzy* (not on Friday, 16th June 2017), demonstrate the diachronic interconnection of situations more far-flung. *Natalie* and *Mario* share a flat and spend a considerable portion of their lifetime together. Watching series, sitting in a pizzeria, … – possible progressions of the RP and episodes they want to play are permanent subjects of conversation. Again, we observe the peculiar entanglement of the different beings and realities inhabiting the same bodies and wandering through different sites. Of course, we could classify this as an "offline activity", but if you follow the story development, you recognise: the story is everywhere.

From Chatzy to (his)story

After asking the remaining officers to prepare the ship for the queen's inspection, *Diamond* asks:

> Diamond: (And then we do the inspection thing later?)
> Zenith: (Sounds good!)

Within the evening's *first* episode, the actors figure out the main theme of the evening's *second* episode – the inspection of the defeated hive / ship by *Diamond*. The fascination of literary role play games arises from their liveness, from the in-situ experience of not knowing what comes next, from surprising each other with unexpected turns, and from a text which is not predefined, but evolves during role play. However, by *closing an episode*, it becomes *pre-history*. The dialogic interaction ends as a literary text. While the occurrences remain open while playing, they become fixed after the role play ends. Each episode played is adopted into the fan story's "canon". The canon is relevant for all future story strings, which eventually include the same characters, their relations or the events that shape them. Although not obsessed with building an ultra-coherent storyline, the group considers the existing story strings in further episodes. Thus, the in-situ emergence of text is not ex nihilo.

After the first episode (shortly after defeating the adversarial hive) and the second episode ("the inspection thing"), around 9.20 pm Nadja and Svenja decide to play an episode with two other characters (*Blaze* and *Luckless*). *Pat* follows the two characters to the new room, while *Zenith*/Natalie leaves. In the ethnographic protocol, Svenja notes that *Pat*/Mario asked the two players to indicate the exact point in time when the session happened with regard to the overall RP. This question highlights parallel ongoing conversations concerning the editorial and ordering work. The succession of uploads in *Sta.sh* represents the succession of plot points. Thus, positioning influences what has already happened and what can be expected to be part of the fan story's canon.

Logging is not necessarily part of playing RP, but a common practice. In the *Stargate* group, each game situation in *Chatzy* is inevitably associated with downstreamed editing and archiving. This activity is completed by *Pat*. He is the "master of key". On its way from *Chatzy* to *Sta.sh*, the text undergoes a metamorphosis. By identifying the different players (e.g. Zenith: …), *Chatzy* documents the cooperative making of the text. In the *Sta.sh* version, the cooperative making becomes obscured. The content saved on *Sta.sh* is not the characters' dialogues, but continuous epic texts without authorship remarks (except that the *Sta.sh* versions are saved in *Pat*'s account).

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued for an interpretative approach highlighting the dispersed character of situations. Acknowledging this distribution means accepting their fragmentary and nested character. The task is to reveal and describe links between the fragments and the mutual making of strings of action within and across situations. Against this background, ethnography in and of digital environments sensitises participants for the ambivalences of 'being there and not being there', but is not exceptional in that. Using the example of a literary role play game, we have attempted to carve out interconnections between different beings and their realities. Our main site of observation – *Chatzy* – displays an ontologically mixed reality. Writing into being is a mode of existence in digital environments. Each being has to re-embody – no matter whether his or her nature is fictional or not. The fragmentary '*Chatzy* View' helps us to not only rationally understand, but also *feel* this point:

> We experience characters writing their own story.
> We experience author-personae whispering in brackets, often through the mouth of their characters.

We experience characters fantasising on the workplace situations of the beings who lend them their fingers to type and their brain capacity to imagine the reality in which the characters exist.
We experience players, author-personae and characters inhabiting the same body.
We experience the situation of one being producing direct consequences for the others – across and beyond story/text worlds.
We experience the *Chatzy* situation being distributed to past and future.
We experience: *The story is everywhere*.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Lene Faust and Inka Fürtig for their helpful comments on the paper's first draft.

2 Without the great commitment of Svenja Kaiser and the role-playing group's members, this study would not have been possible. We owe special thanks to all of them. Regular members of the interpretation group are (in alphabetic order): Svenja Kaiser, Wolfgang Reißmann, Lisa Theresa Schröter and Moritz Stock.

3 Natalie, Mario und Nadja are pseudonyms. The names of the author-personae (Serious, Pat) have also been changed, as the players use them for publishing other stories. As Svenja is the participating researcher, her name (Svenja Kaiser) is not anonymised. All names of characters are the original names (the role play is not published).

4 In the field of role play, the connection between 'civil persons', author-personae and characters can appropriately be described as a symbiotic relation (Haraway 2016). While this is not the case in the group observed here, characters often have their own websites or *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts. In cosplay, they may come to inhabit the 'real' worlds. Taking into account that in Japan, for example, fictional mascots are wandering through society (Wilde 2018), the boundaries of story and other worlds seemingly begin to blur.

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Co-operation and/as Participant Observation: Reflections on Ethnographic Fieldwork in Morocco

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Abstract

This contribution carves out the co-operative foundations for ethnographic fieldwork, and participant observation in particular, by reflecting on the so-called 'entry to the field' as well as the establishment of rapport between ethnographer and interlocutors. Drawing on my fieldwork experience in the Moroccan High Atlas, I propose to understand the ethnographer's delicate position as being both apprentice and expert simultaneously. Focusing on this relation enables methodological reflections on the workings of ethnographic research, the necessary co-operation of 'researcher' and 'informants', and the involved media practices. To take this tension seriously makes another insight possible: that the ethnographer, too, is being observed and under constant scrutiny. In this light, successful ethnographic research is possible precisely when successful conditions for mutual exchange and interaction can be situatively created and maintained. It is therefore a process of continuous co-operation that is mediated and necessarily involves media and even produces a range of different media practices.

1. Introduction

This is a methodological reflection on the foundations of doing ethnographic fieldwork. It is not, however, another discussion of 'how to do ethnography properly' or a guideline to realise one's own ethnographic

research. Rather, the aim is to explore ethnographic research regarding the aspect of co-operation[1] between 'researcher' and 'informants' as well as the interconnection of co-operation and participant observation. In order to do this, I am drawing on ethnographic material from my own fieldwork in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. I wish to investigate some situations, in which forms of co-operation become tangible in the specific fieldwork context. This paper is also not proposing a contribution towards the question of how to best ethnographically approach 'the media', but tries to proceed the other way round: by describing and reflecting on the situated practices of creating rapport and the mutual creation of what ethnographic research is all about, I also want to draw attention to media and media practices that are both embedded in and co-produced by the ethnographic research process itself.

Ethnography is the primary intention of anthropological knowledge production: the process of arriving at a description of social practices. In order to achieve this, researchers immerse themselves in a society, community or context, produce descriptive data, and render the collected data intelligible for readers or fellow academics. Ethnography involves different types of data and the use of different media formats and technologies. The central question thereby is, how lived social and cultural reality is (re-)produced, maintained and made meaningful. Therefore, ethnographers have to consider everyday situations, practices and interactions, but also discourses, and standards of valuation (cf. Sanjek 1996; Lüders 2010). Ethnographic fieldwork is not a methodologically fixed approach, but rather method and product simultaneously. As a flexible, processual research strategy, it offers researchers the framework to oscillate between their own immediate fieldwork experience and the analysis. Participant observation is inextricably linked to ethnographic fieldwork. It describes neither 'pure' observation nor 'pure' participation (Atkinson/Hammersley 1994). The aim is to generate as much proximity as possible to social phenomena and practices, while at the same time maintaining a necessary distance.

Status and feasibility of observation and participation, as well as their temporal and spatial limitations, have been a topic of ongoing discussions, particularly since the development of digital media technologies and global circulation spheres. A possible divide between a somewhat 'classical ethnography' and a '(digital) media ethnography' is misleading, insofar as it suggests several clear-cut methodological implications, and even differences. In my opinion, this fails to recognise the necessary open and dynamic character of ethnographic research in general and its methodological pluralism-opportunism, which is oriented both towards the relevancies of the research context and the relation of people vis-à-vis the ethnographer. I am inclined rather to follow scholars who suggest not making (digital) media the exclusive focus, but perceiving them as part of people's everyday life and worlds (Pink et al. 2016) to achieve "holistic contextualizations" (Miller 2017). The emphasis of the ethnographic approach resonates with a now pioneering work in the field of anthropology of media, which postulates: it is ethnography that can "help to see how media are embedded in people's quotidian lives but also how consumers and producers are themselves imbricated in discursive universes, political situations, economic circumstances, national settings, historical moments, and transnational flows, to name only a few relevant contexts" (Ginsburg et al. 2002: 2). Practices of engagement may shift, for instance when engaging in participant observation of digitally mediated communities, and the notion of 'presence' has to be brought into question. But if content analysis, usage surveys or macro-perspectives are not sufficient to study media in their situated form, ethnography is the approach of choice.

Moreover, studying social practices, human culture or local worlds inevitably includes media and mediations (Mazzarella 2004). Media and media practices, in turn, become understandable primarily in terms of how they are brought to bear and as something intermediary and mediating; which is why they have to be ethnographically traced *in situ* (Bender/Zillinger 2015). It is in situated practices and engagements that

media are realised and being actualised. In order to arrive at an ethnographic description of media(ted) practices and analysis that takes the complex realities of local everyday life seriously, it is important to 'follow the mediators'. Therefore it is preferable to adopt an open concept of media as a basis, not thinking of media as a fixed object, but as an interlinkage and mediating potentiality (or *agency*) that enables connections and builds relations – also and especially in ethnographic research settings. As such, media cannot be reduced to either 'discourse', 'intermediary', 'signal' or 'information'. Rather, "[b]etween the social, semiotic and technical (and partly naturalised) agencies involved, a cyclical consideration of the co-production of social, technical and personal variables is at stake that make up media and from which corresponding classifications are created" (Schüttpelz 2013: 58, author's translation).[2]

The 'access' to 'the ethnographic field' should be understood as the design or creation of social contexts that make the ethnographic research possible in the first place. Thus, an ethnographer is not just 'entering' ethnographic fieldwork, but continuously and co-operatively producing and establishing the ethnographic research conditions in a mutual manner. Ethnographers and their interlocutors, or more precisely the people with whom they will jointly produce their ethnographic knowledge, enter into a "complex process of cooperation" (Breidenstein et al. 2015: 62, author's translation). According to Charles Goodwin, co-operation can thereby be understood as "public social practices that human beings pervasively use to construct in concert with each other the actions that make possible, and sustain, their activities and communities" (Goodwin 2018: 7). In this way, "building our own actions with the very same resources used by others *we inhabit each other's actions*" (ibid.: 11), which puts co-operation at the very foundation of sociality. Consequently, mutuality and commonality play a central role: in constant dialogue, through the juxtaposition of concepts and by engaging in situated practices, what is relevant and meaningful is mutually made

and mutually shown to each other. This is especially true for the ethnographic research process.

Below, I wish to investigate the practices and procedures that mediate and bring forth mutuality, as a window into co-operation. These are situations, in which two or more people are put into contact or relation with each other. Thus, I aim to shed light on how mutuality, co-operation, and participant observation are connected and similarly constitutive for the ethnographic research process. To do this, I first approach mutuality with the help of the figures of the *apprentice* and the *expert*. Both face each other in alternating dependence and productive tension, which I make plausible by using ethnographic examples. Then, I argue that the participatory observer and ethnographer is also being observed and that this inversion is an often-overlooked crucial part of establishing rapport. At the same time, observation and its inversion are subject to an apprentice-expert relation. This relation as an expression of mutuality and means to establish co-operation, enables us to consider aspects that lie at the heart of the ethnographic research practice. To closely examine these relations and the situated practices that spawn or actualise them provides us with a possibility to grasp the media and media practices that are brought forward in the process of establishing rapport and forging research relations. Through this conceptual detour, some 'media of cooperation of the field' can be identified and brought into view.

2. The Interrelation of Apprentice and Expert

Ethnography is an artisanal endeavour, which also challenges the researcher's own body and biography in a comprehensive way, as it can only be accelerated or sped up to a certain degree. It takes time and commitment, sometimes even sacrifice. Only through time and shared experiences will it be possible to mutually refer to each other, work out commonalities, build relationships and eventually produce ethnographic insights. As ethnography focuses on human action and inter-

action and puts it at the basis of knowledge production, it is in itself a proponent of practice theory (cf. Ortner 1984). This is by no means a process of coincidence. Understanding human practices through ethnographic research means to continuously work on that understanding and negotiate it. In order to understand human practices, ethnographers have to enter into practice themselves – with a mindset that is open, aware, and receptive for mutuality and commonality. It is the ethnographers' to forge cooperation. To examine mutuality, which lies at the heart of ethnography and the establishing of rapport in particular, it is useful to translate it into an apprentice- expert relation. At first glance, it seems obvious that in the course of establishing rapport ethnographers assume the role of an apprentice, as someone who wants to learn language, customs, practices – immersing themselves into 'another culture'. It is therefore the 'informants' and people who basically co-produce ethnographic knowledge together with the researcher that take on the role as experts. However, these roles are neither fixed nor pre-ascribed, but situatively brought to the fore.

Jean Lave dedicated a whole book to the relation between apprenticeship and ethnographic practice. She conceptualises researching *as* learning and as both empirical and theoretical. She goes as far as saying that "we are all apprentices, engaged in learning to do what we are already doing" (Lave 2011: 156). If apprenticeship refers to the processual and relational character of social interaction, it is exactly what mutuality is all about. What Lave does not consider explicitly in her work, but what is equally part of a relational process of apprenticeship, is the role of the expert, the one who teaches, shows or explains to the apprentice how and what to learn. It is therefore this interrelation between the apprentice and the expert that I want to emphasise here. In considering specific research situations along the lines of particular apprentice-expert relationships, one gets a glimpse of the ways in which mutuality is being shaped – as well as how and by which media and media practices it is mediated.

Below, I will illustrate some ethnographic examples of how apprentice-expert interactions might unfold and how they contribute to the research process, in my case in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. I will reflect on my own positionality during the early stage of my extended fieldwork, where I inhabited both roles in different situations, often simultaneously.

"Imiq s-imiq ald tisind" – Little by little you're going to learn it!

When I arrived at the family I stayed with, I faced a problem that I had been theoretically aware of, but that now demanded a practical resolution: how was I supposed to establish rapport or to start creating relationships with people, when I was not yet able to speak the local language properly? I had been learning the Moroccan Arabic dialect (*darija*), but I had only a rudimentary knowledge of some Tamazight phrases. Making conversation and getting to know people for me meant asking about interests and biographical details. Getting to know one another also usually involves sharing information about oneself and about one's personal views. This was not an option, not at the very beginning at least. So obviously everyone became my teacher. The children of the family were indispensable and amazing: they constantly told me stories, although I was not able to grasp all of them, they showed me their toys, shared their favourite songs and the homework they had to do for school. They took me on guided tours through the village, showed me their favourite spots, the family's fields and walnut trees. Also, they were the ones laughing at me when I said something wrong or acted 'weirdly', for instance, when I did not make greetings properly or struggled to eat couscous with my hands. While they explained to me some card games, I showed them some 'magic tricks' with the cards or made coins disappear. These were all ways of how I was able to become a part of everyday life, although still lacking essential language skills.

Simultaneously, most conversations revolved around language itself. As talking about complex topics or exchanging information was

difficult, I mostly inquired about the meaning of words and tried to pronounce them correctly. I was cheered when I remembered typical phrases and used them at the right moment; on other occasions, I was encouraged to study harder when I could not say a word or phrase properly that I had already been taught. When I tagged along with some of the family members' daily routines, such as watering barley fields or herding sheep, I realised that it had become our primary mode of conversation. They would point at something and give me the corresponding vocabulary. In doing so, I learned numerous names for animals, tools, plants and other related subjects, like the weather for instance. I was always carrying a little notebook and pencil to write down new words or pieces of information. Sometimes taking notes was quite difficult as I was told new words faster than I could write them down. Additionally, I learned names for plants or tools that I was not even quite sure how to translate into English or German in the first place. There are only so many trees or tools whose names I can memorise – even in German.

In the café, conversations would proceed similarly. On one occasion, I was sitting there drinking tea by myself, when a man approached and joined me. I had met him briefly before, but so far we had only exchanged typical greeting phrases. Now he obviously wanted to make conversation. We talked for two hours without really talking about ourselves or about anything related to common interests or preferences. I learned new words, taken from our immediate surroundings or everyday life, and some phrases. Despite not exchanging any personal information – that is fundamental in the usual kind of small talk I was socialised with in a German and English speaking context – we were able to create a connection. I was baffled by the fact that, after these two hours, I really had the feeling that I had got to know this man to a certain degree, although I reminded myself that I had not explicitly learned anything personal about him. For him, it was obviously also not an annoying situation he had just endured for two hours. I showed sincere

appreciation in that I kept asking questions and at the same time noted down his answers. In short, I was learning from him and I made him an expert of his language and culture the same way he made me an apprentice in this context.[3] We were able to spend time together and create a common experience, without navigating through conversation topics. Our engagement fulfilled a social and relational purpose and in that reminded me of the interaction that Bronislaw Malinowski once coined 'phatic communion' (cf. Malinowski 1923).

The language issue is quite obvious. However, in the following months, I also found myself in other contexts and situations where I adopted the role of an apprentice. Reflecting on it now, it seems to have been a kind of automatism. The state of being an apprentice was the mode of engaging my ethnographic research, especially because I tried to avoid thinking along pre-fixed theoretical ideas or conceptual structures. Instead, I wanted to be led by the practices and relevancies of the people with whom I did my fieldwork. This necessarily meant considering everything as important and noteworthy.

I learned how to bake bread, prepare tea and cook *tajine*. I learned what it is like to follow the fasting rules of Ramadan and to work in a field harvesting barley under the midday sun, when there is no water. I helped on construction sites and learned how to build houses, erect walls and maintain irrigation ditches. Most importantly, as an apprentice, I was taught how to sing, dance and even beat the drum. The local dance of *ahidus* is an important part of Amazigh culture in the High Atlas that is performed during important festivities. Men and women dance collectively shoulder to shoulder in a huge circle. Each dancer moves and is moved by the others to polyrhythms of drumming and clapping. The songs usually take the form of call and response. One part of the crowd chants the first line, while the other are following call. The drums (*agnza* or *talunt*) are handmade from wood and goatskin. The participants of the dance bring their own instruments. The interplay of moving, singing and drumming constitutes a skilful performance

that has to be learned carefully in resonance with the others. *Ahidus* is therefore an excellent example for the interrelation of apprenticeship, mutuality (dancers) and media involved (language, songs, drums, clothing). Altogether, it puts people in a rhythm and enables them to resonate with one another.[4]

Counting as an expert

Reflecting on my fieldwork experience, with all I wanted and needed to learn, it seemed fitting to me to perceive this research *as* an apprenticeship. Still, while being an apprentice may have been the primary mode of ethnographic practice, there were certain occasions and situations that made me simultaneously an expert – sometimes because of my expertise or biography, at other times because of assumptions.

Coming back to the example of language, initially I was first and foremost a language student. At the same time, being fluent in German and English, I was also a resource for others to learn a foreign language, or at least some phrases. Inquiring about Tamazight words often involved a reciprocal moment, in that my interlocutors would ask me their meaning in English or German. With friends that taught me Tamazight phrases, I had a 'deal', agreeing that I would teach them some English in return. The family I stayed with saw and made me an expert of studying. In the evenings after dinner, I would usually sit in the common living room and revise some vocabulary or take notes about the day. From time to time the children were encouraged to take me as role model and also study hard. They, in turn, would regularly show me their language skills, for instance in counting in English or naming the weekdays, or would take their own schoolbooks and join me in studying.

After meeting a younger man several times at the weekly market (*suq*), he asked me if I would teach him German, now that I was staying for longer. He was a guide and worked all over Morocco and as he told me, he regularly led groups of German-speaking tourists. I did not hesitate in answering that I would, of course, teach him if he was inter-

ested. For me, it was clear that I could learn much by becoming his German teacher – or, to put it differently, taking on my role as a language expert. We met once a week for an hour in a communal room used to tutor schoolchildren. I would write down German words or phrases on a piece of paper and give a translation (mostly into *darija*). He would copy what I had written down and add some remarks for proper German pronunciation. Again, rather than sharing personal information, it was working together on and with language that established a relationship.[5] After a week or two, other interested people that had learned about the 'newly offered' German crash course joined in. So, for several weeks, I taught a class for three to four students.

I conducted my ethnographic research within the framework of a wider project, together with socio-informatics scholars and a local Moroccan NGO, that involved setting up a Computer Club and working with information and communication technology (ICT) in an educational setting.[6] As part of the project, we organised workshops sessions that revolved around the hands-on appropriation and usage of media technology. Even when I only wanted to attend these workshop sessions or do participant observation, I often became involved more actively. Because I was attributed a comprehensive understanding of media technology as I was affiliated with the project that also provided the technology, I was approached with questions on the topic or requests to explain the handling of some devices or software – although I was not there as a trained human-computer interaction scholar, but as an anthropologist. Even outside of the workshops, where it was not necessarily obvious for people that I had this affiliation, I was approached for some technological advice. At first, I was attributing this to the fact that I was from Germany – in a somewhat colonial perpetuation of knowledge hierarchies. However, I learned that people approach other people whom they know or assume can help with certain technical matters. The main reason for this is having a higher education and therefore more (assumed) expertise. For instance, when I was sitting in the café

with friends, those with a university degree were from time to time approached by men to help them with their mobile or smart phone. Some of these requests were about changing the working language of an Android application from English or French into Arabic, to help them activate their sim card or set up their new smartphone. I also was on people's radar for similar questions.

Furthermore, I was able to help the project manager of the affiliated NGO to launch a new website as well as film and edit image videos. I would not describe myself as an expert in these areas, but I had done both for personal use before. Additionally, I had the software and the laptop with sufficient computing power to seamlessly edit films. I had known the project manager since my first visit to the High Atlas, but he had always been the expert – an expert of the language, but also of Amazigh culture or regarding project-related organisation. This role reversal was a fruitful addition to our relationship as equals. It made me feel that I could give something back, in a reciprocal and practical way.

To summarise, there are many ways in which a researcher becomes an apprentice or expert in the process of ethnographic fieldwork. Reflecting on ethnography along the lines of apprentice-expert relations helps focus on instances in which mutuality takes shape. These processes are always specific and situated, and never identical. These situations draw on a variety of media and mediation that enable the apprentice-expert relation: language, body, artefacts, technological devices, playing cards, notebooks, music, songs, drums, and videos.

3. Being Observed: The Participant Observation's Other

Much has been written about the notion of strangeness or radical alterity as an epistemological key feature of anthropological knowledge production. Without wanting to enter this comprehensive discussion fully, I want to use it as a background to argue that the importance of commonality – a specific kind of mutuality, so to speak – should not be neglected, in particular when starting fieldwork. In order to illustrate

my point, I am emphasising participant observation's other, which is *being observed* oneself. Observing and being observed is a manifestation of mutuality and is an essential part of the foundation of both the apprentice-expert relation and ethnographic research in general. As Richard Rottenburg, who is drawing on Fritz Kramer's 'inverse anthropology', puts it: "The basic elementary experience of anthropological fieldwork is that, contrary to one's own intention and self-awareness as an observer and learner, one is initially made the object of observation oneself. In the course of this often destabilising experience, it becomes immediately clear that one's own understanding of difference, rather than through active observation, takes place mainly through the passive experience of being observed" (Rottenburg 2001: 42, author's translation). After all, I was the 'intruder'. Therefore – and unsurprisingly – one is being observed, precisely because there are things that are not familiar or appear strange and different. This – whether it is the crucial epistemological moment of anthropological fieldwork or not – is followed by a mutual search for commonalities. And it is through this search for commonality that rapport is being established and relationships are formed – as well as eventually co-operation.

I want to give some more examples to explain what I mean: all of the examples mentioned above could also be described as moments of being observed – simultaneously while being an apprentice or expert. Before starting my fieldwork I was expecting to go 'into the field' to learn something about a particular set of practices, way of life and culture. Instead, after my arrival I had the impression that, first of all, and maybe to achieve an understanding, it was me who was being observed – and who was got to know. This is not so say that it has to be one or the other. Quite obviously, it is a simultaneous process in which, I might add, the passive figuration of 'being observed' becomes active, and this seemed to be far more important than what I had been taught in methodology classes at university.

During my first evening at the family's house, obviously, all eyes were on me. We were having tea in the living room. Because I was sitting cross-legged on the floor that was covered with carpets and I did not stretch my legs in a more reclining position like the other men, I must have given the impression that I was a little tense, which I probably was. Pillows were handed to me, so that I could make myself more comfortable, which I did or at least tried. The atmosphere was cordial, yet I could also sense a certain nervousness among all those present. This was the very first instance, where I realised that the whole context and situation of 'being there' was not only new for me, but also and quite clearly for all the others; I was new. Consequently, the way I talked, interacted with the children, drank my tea, sat at the table or ate *tajine* were all subject to observation. Learning some recurring important phrases in Tamazight and doing greetings properly were the first essential steps in showing that I was learning and respecting conventions or customs. This also applied to encounters outside the family in the village. By using the proper greetings, with handshakes and salutations, I was able to demonstrate that I was different from the occasional tourists coming through the valley. Later, this applied even more when it came to the *ahidus*. As I was able to join in, properly dressed with a *jelaba*, and sing along with some of the songs, people that I had not really met before congratulated me amusedly for 'knowing' or 'having learned' the *ahidus*.

Another facilitator that helped to get to know each other was football. Children, teenagers and men were equally enthusiastic about football. By going to the café to watch matches of the favourite teams, FC Barcelona or Real Madrid, and participating in the regular matches on the village's football field, commonality through unifying interests was created and maintained. Communal participation is where being observed becomes significant: through the interplay of being observed and mutuality, common interests and connections can be identified that, in turn, enable the development of relationships and the estab-

lishment of rapport. In this, media play a decisive role – media understood in a very broad sense as vehicles for interaction and mutuality. What is more, the relevant objects of ethnographic research and forms of mediation are ultimately co-produced themselves. The interplay of media and media practices involved and the ones mutually being made constitute together some 'media of co-operation of the field'. Participant observation therefore draws primarily on mutuality as well as media and media practices in a co-operative form.

4. Conclusion

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I relied solely on my notebook and took neither camera nor audio recorder to record first encounters and conversations. It felt strange, since documentation is a crucial component of ethnographic research. To a certain degree, I had to calm and convince myself that there was enough time to 'collect my data' and it was more important to respectfully engage with people and build relationships, before asking too many questions or even taking pictures or recordings. A camera or audio recorder changes a situation and influences conversations. People are sceptical. Thus, I felt relieved and somewhat justified in my approach, when people would ask me "Why don't you take a picture?" Making plausible my reasons for being there and giving others time to get to know me has turned out to be key – and beneficial – for my own observations. Ethnography, after all, is a reciprocal endeavour. By its design, it is more than just 'information extraction'. As ethnographic research "is necessarily done in the company of man", the ethnographer "*needs the active cooperation of the people* if he is to succeed in his work" (Casagrande 1960: X, author's emphasis). Ethnographic research is intrinsically co-operative, because the ethnographer is not able to gain insights alone. "Facts are made [...] and the facts we interpret are made and remade", as Paul Rabinow (1977: 150) stated. It could be added that the mutual co-production of ethnographic facts is an achievement of an – often mediated – process of active co-opera-

tion. As I have argued, the interplay of apprentice and expert is a strong image, which epitomises the relationship of mutuality that may lead to this co-operative outcome. It is (not only, but especially) in situations of learning and showing one another that an inversion and dynamisation of observation occurs, which allows us to find or develop commonalities. These social practices are necessarily drawing on media and mutual media practices, as I have tried to show in some of the above situations. Media and media practices are thereby understood in a very broad sense as 'that which mediates' the ethnographic research co-operation or its objects. In this sense, ethnography is always already media ethnography – at least in crucial parts. This way, through the mutual making of the conditions for establishing rapport and conducting ethnographic fieldwork, co-operation is just another word for participant observation and ethnography in general.

Notes

1 In using *co-operation* instead of *cooperation* I am following Charles Goodwin's argumentation and his direction of thrust, which at the same time should visibly distinguish itself from notions from biological anthropology (see Goodwin 2018: 5–7).

2 "Es geht zwischen den beteiligten sozialen, semiotischen und technischen (und zum Teil naturalisierten) Handlungsinitiativen um eine zyklische Betrachtung der Ko-Produktion von sozialen, technischen und personalen Größen, aus denen Medien bestehen, und aus denen die entsprechenden Klassifizierungen ins Leben gerufen werden" (p. 58).

3 To clarify, I do not wish to sketch an ideal-typical version of an 'ethnographer-informant' relationship. Instead, I want to highlight the specific interaction during which we were 'talking' *without* the kind of information exchange usually required to qualify someone as an 'informant' in the first place. Language and much non-verbal communication opened up the opportunity to interact in a meaningful way, although we were not really able to talk about things. Language was not primarily a means to gain 'information' or 'insights', but an option to build social ties. As such, it functioned as a *medium of co-operation*. Not to be

neglected are the power relations and asymmetries underlying the interaction – i.e. me being a white, German, male academic. Hence, and justifiably, there may have been other and more strategic reasons to hang out with me.

4 This, in turn, resonates very well with Goodwin's definition of co-operation as actions produced "in concert with each other" (Goodwin 2018: 7, see above).

5 This is reminiscent of George Marcus' notion of *complicity* as a concept to investigate into rapport and fieldwork relationships: "What complicity stands for […] is an affinity, marking equivalence, between fieldworker and informant. This affinity arises from their mutual curiosity and anxiety about their relationship to a 'third' – not so much the abstract contextualizing world system but the specific sites elsewhere that affect their interactions and make them complicit (in relation to the influence of that 'third') in creating the bond that makes their fieldwork relationship effective" (Marcus 1997: 100). I would like to thank Mario Schmidt, who drew my attention to this.

6 The research project B04 "Digital Publics and Social Transformation in the Maghreb" of the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 1187 "Media of Cooperation" examines how (new) media technologies and the media practices surrounding them can be understood within the wider transformation processes of a mountainous region in the Moroccan High Atlas and what role they play in creating new options for action or participation, generating consensus and dissent, and thereby forming and mobilising publics.

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Ethnomethodological Media Ethnography: Exploring Everyday Digital Practices in Families with Young Children

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Abstract

New media have become an integral part of everyday life. In our research, we explore how media practices are employed in the mutual accomplishment of families and in the way young children grow up. This article considers the particularities of doing ethnography in this context: How can ethnographic research be conducted in a private setting and to what extent are family media practices related to practices of observing researchers? Revisiting our research process, we discuss challenges of establishing the field and maintaining relationships. Further, we focus on our media use in the field as well as briefly after fieldwork. We show how everyday family life involves ethnographers in various ways and how media practices in the field and in research interrelate and are cooperatively achieved. Rather than ignoring or correcting for these forms of involvement, our position is that they allow a better understanding of both everyday family life and media ethnography.

1. Introduction

Digital media have become an ordinary and integral part of everyday family life. Figure 1 shows a father reading a newspaper on his smartphone on a Sunday morning. Often it is difficult for him to actually get around to reading, thus, he gives the tablet to his daughter, allowing her to watch children's videos in the meantime. By sharing this picture

Fig. 1: sent to Erik by the mother

with the ethnographer, the mother is giving us a glimpse into their private family life. She also commented on the picture, referring to our research interest: the mundane use of digital media. In our research project "Early Childhood and Smartphone. Family Interaction Order, Learning Processes and Cooperation", based at the collaborative research centre "Media of Cooperation" (SFB 1187) in Siegen, we are observing media practices in over 15 families with young children up to the age of six.

The emoji 'crying with laughter' included in the mother's WhatsApp message can be interpreted as attempting to normalise and bridge the gap to a potentially moralised situation. The message also implies that ethnographers are, of course, normally absent in such private family situations. By sending the picture, the mother is cooperating in producing observational data and, to some extent, involving us in the family context in which such pictures are shared. The example previews some of the interrelations between everyday family and ethnographic media

practices which will be the main focus of this article. Our key research questions are: how can ethnography be conducted in this kind of private setting and to what extent are everyday media practices related to our media practices as researchers?

Since the early phase of our research, which we will describe in the first section of this article, (new) media practices have been involved in organising and establishing the fieldwork. The second section illustrates how these relationships were maintained. In this process, mobile messenger apps, videos, and pictures were part of an ongoing communication and relationship work. In section 3, we will reflect on our media use during field research, focussing on the role of camera work. Before concluding, in section 4 we will briefly consider the time following on from fieldwork, which includes writing this article. Following the "unique adequacy requirement of method" (Garfinkel/Wieder 1992), research methods cannot be viewed independent of the practices we observe (cf. Bergmann 2006), meaning that they cannot be discussed as independent methodological principles, but are case-specific and have to be developed empirically. Adopting such an ethnomethodological perspective (cf. Garfinkel 1967), we use empirical material to lay a foundation upon which we argue that our involvement and interrelations with the field should not be ignored or seen as a hindrance, but rather reflected in their foundational importance for ethnographic research and practical theorising in this specific context. In the following, we will show how considering ethnographers' involvement allows a better understanding of both digital media ethnography as well as everyday family life.

2. Establishing the Field

> *I already knew Maria[1] and Tom from our mutual involvement in voluntary work some years back. A few months ago, I told them about our research project and my interest in doing fieldwork with them. We arranged a Skype call, in which I want to explain the research and ethical usage of video materials.*
> *On the morning of the planned meeting, Tom rings me up and says that he will not have any time on that day due to work commitments. He adds that it would be okay to explain everything to Maria. Shortly before the call, Maria sends me a text message informing me about a ten-minute delay and asking whether it would be okay to eat during our video call. Therefore, after bringing Frederik – their 18-month-old toddler – to bed, Maria eats some pasta, while I explain my techniques of filming, the importance of writing protocols and data security issues. We also talk about the difficulties I face as both an observer and a friend of the family. Eventually, we arrange for me to stay for one week at their flat in early April and to send a consent form by post. (Fieldnote 1, Jan, February 2017)*

At the beginning of any ethnographic study, researchers have to handle the where, when, and how of accessing their fields, assessing the boundaries and subject area of that field, as well as building relationships and trust with their members (cf. Wolff 2000; for ethnographies in families cf. Müller/Krinninger 2016; and with children cf. Schulz 2014; cf. also Goodwin/Cekaite 2018). Building on the existing friendship with Tom and Maria in the example above made this much easier. However, the process of positioning oneself in the young family's everyday life nevertheless felt unfamiliar to the ethnographer, as the relationship with the parents originally developed before they had children and was unrelated to any research.

The short example highlights some of the shared media practices established before entering the family home, such as chatting via in-

stant mobile messaging, email, video calls, and even conventional letters. These practices relate to the family's own ways of communication and to some of the organisational problems of everyday life itself. Tom has to cancel the Skype meeting due to work commitments, which is framed as unproblematic. In this 'family', as a social collective, one person may speak on its behalf. The requirements and organisational issues of everyday family life also become apparent when Maria postpones the call as she has to bring her child to bed, and uses the time to eat her dinner. This shows that family life is demanding even without an additional observer whose presence and questions need to be fitted into the "daily round" (Goffman 1961: x). These everyday demands can become relevant at any moment during the entire research process and will be reflected throughout this paper. The fieldnote below gives an example from day 4 of the research stay:

> *In the evening, Maria suggests that I take time for writing my fieldnotes in the morning, while she heads off to the playground with Frederik. Around 7:30 am, I get up, while Maria, Tom and Frederik are already in the kitchen. I retreat to the living room to finish writing my observations from the day before. At 9 am, I send a WhatsApp to Maria asking where they are. A few minutes later she replies that they are still at the playground and asks, if I could bring a new nappy. So, I go to the changing table to search there. Equipped with the requested item, I leave the house. When I arrive, I hand the nappy to Maria, who immediately starts changing her son on a bench next to the sandpit. (Fieldnote 2, Jan, June 2017)*

The fieldnote relates to the requirements of making time for writing practices in ethnography while staying with a family for a whole week. However, it also reveals the requirements of everyday family life, which include mundane practices such as eating, cleaning, playing, driving, cuddling, sleeping, joking, scolding, or changing a nappy (cf. Jurczyk et al. 2009). In accordance with Goodwin and Cekaite (2018: 3) we un-

derstand families as "ongoing, unfolding organization of activities." The fieldnote illustrates how – also via media practices – the ethnographer is included in such activities of everyday life. Living in the family house, the ethnographer becomes an active participant, perhaps akin to a babysitter, who the family also contacts via WhatsApp to organise appointments and procedures. In addition to WhatsApp being used as a medium of cooperation, the nappy – like cooking dishes, keys, or a crying child in other situations – also can become a kind of boundary object (Star/Griesemer 1989), along which goals, means, and procedures are mutually accomplished (cf. Schüttpelz 2017).

3. Maintaining Relationships

Fig. 2: *Eva's Hearts*; WhatsApp conversation: mother Martina and Clemens (Dudu)

In the chat log, Martina says that her daughter Eva wants to write to "Dudu" – her nickname for the ethnographer Clemens – to ask him to come and visit. However, for the two-year-old Eva writing is cooperatively achieved with her mother and means selecting different icons and emojis in the opened Chat window. Via WhatsApp, Dudu can receive 'utterances' from Eva, that are framed and commented on by her mother. The chat log includes the response (on the right-hand side), in which the ethnographer also chooses a variety of icons in a single mes-

sage directed at Eva, and then separately addresses the mother. Eva actively participates in WhatsApp family communication and is positioned as initiating the contact on her mother's phone. Her request for a visit also highlights the importance of reflecting on relationships with small children: producing desires and expectations, which do not necessarily fit into the timetable of planned research stays (cf. Coffey 1999 for an extensive reflection of fieldwork relationships and self).

The chat log is an excerpt of ongoing communication with the family and also includes pictures and small videos, which are shared with close friends and family members in a similar way. In a short video from the family's holiday in India, for instance, Eva greets the ethnographer in Hindi with, "Hari Om Dudu". The ethnographer replies, "Hari Om Eva, how is India?" Short videos like these are not only sent, but both mother and daughter repeatedly watch them and the replies they receive. These media practices play an important role in building and maintaining relationships with family and friends, a process in which the ethnographer is included and actively participates. This becomes apparent during the next visit, which takes place a couple of days after the WhatsApp messages.

> *Eva and I are reading a children's book, when her mother Martina comes back from the kitchen, sits down on the sofa with us and places her smartphone next to mine on the table in front of us. After closing the last page of the book, Eva reaches for the two smartphones and starts comparing them. She is holding both displays next to each other when I open the WhatsApp chat with her mother and the chat log becomes visible. Martina asks: "Who was sending Dudu all these beautiful hearts?" Eva looks at her mother and back to my smartphone, on which I start playing the video: "Hari Om Dudu." She watches the video, then looks at me and her mother with her eyes wide open. Her mother asks with a smile: "Where did he get this video? On his phone?" Eva looks at the video again and seems very impressed. (Fieldnote 3, Clemens, March 2018)*

Eva recognizes both herself and the "Hari Om Dudu" video, which she has seen many times on her mother's phone. Sending videos or emoticons to friends and family members and receiving responses are familiar and frequently employed practices for her. At the age of just two years, Eva can be seen as a competent member of the family's media practices. However, these practices usually involve the physical absence of the individuals and smartphones to which the messages are being sent. Being faced with the receiving device constitutes a new and different situation. Eva's assumed competency is called into question by her mother's interpretation of her astonished facial expressions, asking her: How can this video be on *his* phone? How is this even possible?

So far, we have discussed the role of family media practices primarily with regard to the 'content' of media communication. This fieldnote also shows that this communication is not intelligible on its own, but only becomes meaningful in social situations and practices (as McLuhan (1954: 6) already illustrated). The unique perspectives of young children challenge our everyday common sense understanding of media technologies, raising new questions and offering new insights into how meaning is achieved cooperatively. Thus, one could say that the child's perspective almost serves as an ethnographic tool providing insight into the mutual making of our common understandings of (digital) media practices. These media practices also play a key role in maintaining relationships with and within the family.

4. Using Media Practices to Discover Media Practices

Diana and her two children are sitting on the living room sofa, eating fruit and looking at a children's book. The 'comic-strip' (figure 3) illustrates three minutes of this scene. The camera use and the presence of Claudia, the ethnographer, become visible in the material when the older daughter turns around and switches her focus to Claudia. Pointing to her camera, the girl says she *also* wants to take a picture. Guided by her mother, she disconnects the phone's charger to take a picture.

Fig. 3: *Want to take a picture*; film by Claudia Rühle, 'comic-strip' by Erik Wittbusch

Meanwhile, her younger sister watches her attentively. Young children in particular can shift their focus rapidly from one activity to the other and may potentially involve all people present, irrespective of their personal preferences. Although it is sometimes possible to withdraw into a purely observational role (with a camera) in the background, ethnographers and their media are always participating. Their presence is normalised by young children in a specific way, since they rarely differentiate between researchers and other visitors or at least do so in a different manner than adults.

The scene also highlights some interrelations of everyday media practices and the challenges their study presents. The older daughter wants to "take a picture, *too*". Taking pictures and filming are part of her everyday family life and therefore familiar media practices. However, similar to the examples given in the last section, it seems that the ethnographer triggered this situation. It could be argued that the observation is intervening, disrupting, or even corrupting 'natural' family life. However, we view this differently. In our perspective, there is

no objective or natural observation in the first place. Conducting research, particularly with participant observation, always involves the researcher. This applies to our own participation in everyday life and also in "lay sociological reasoning" (Garfinkel 1967: iiv). With reference to Schütz (1971 [1953]), we are interpreting a world already interpreted by its participants and therefore an intersubjective social world. Furthermore, when exploring the everyday activities of family life, participation and personal involvement become necessary as a means of getting access and as situational demands, but also to provide an understanding of the activities in view. The *unique adequacy requirement* (Garfinkel/Wieder 1992: 182) of ethnomethodology stresses this point and uses the field's practices as a methodological foundation. In the example given above, the situation could even seem to be reversed with regard to the 'usual' concerns of fieldwork: it could be argued that we are observing the *adequacy* of the child concerning some of the ethnographers' research practices. The situational context prompts the girl to engage in established media practices of family interaction. Filming, in this sense, is not an independent activity or reserved for ethnographers (cf. also Tuma 2017), but an everyday practice. During research, it therefore can be viewed as a mutual accomplishment with the participants. This is also the case in everyday situations, when parents face the challenge of taking pictures of their children who ask to see the final picture on the phone even before the shot has been taken. However, with digital hand cameras the display can be flipped around allowing the researcher to show the children what is being filmed, as is the case in the following fieldnote.

> *Anna is playing in the garden. Sitting on a small bench with a table, she is using large pieces of wood to build an 'office'. She uses one of the pieces as a 'laptop' and pretends to type. Suddenly, she looks at me and tells me to stop. When I ask her why, she responds: "Maybe I'm on it?" and leaves the 'office', comes around the table and looks at the screen from where I*

> *am standing. I try to explain that, now, when watching the screen from her current position, she is "out of the frame". She goes back in front of the camera and asks: "Can I see? Am I on it again, now?" I turn the screen towards her, and she seems happy to watch herself and starts typing again. The screen now becomes a kind of mirror for her and her activity. When I ask whether I could use the screen for filming again, she responds: "But I want to see!" and continues to watch herself. (Fieldnote 4, Erik, July 2017)*

At nearly three years old, Anna addresses the ethnographer's filming and questions whether she is being recorded. She takes a position alongside the ethnographer to have a look at the screen, seemingly checking whether she is on camera. When she receives an explanation, she goes back in front of the camera and wants to see herself, which is possible by 'flipping' the camera screen. The scene raises ethical questions in relation to filming young children, who assess situations differently and require a lot of sensitivity and patience. Here, however, we will not dwell on these otherwise highly relevant concerns, but on how Anna becomes actively involved in the filming and modulates the ethnographic practice into a part of her game. Erik becomes drawn into her play and finds it difficult not to participate. Participant observation here also includes a participating and interacting camera (cf. Mohn 2013: 176) that plays an active role in the situation. Its use is negotiated and the 'participating camera' can be seen as Erik and Anna's cooperatively produced medium of cooperation. Their shared media practice can be viewed as *playing filming* and constitutes both: conducting media ethnography *and* joining in everyday family life. Using a camera with children can also symbolise something different for parents: instead of play, it can evoke forms of remembering, showing, representing (for example their style of education), and reflecting, which also interrelates with ethnographic questions and practices. This also refers to parents documenting activities, for instance when they send a picture via WhatsApp to the ethnographer, reminding him that he has been filming exactly one year ago.

Viewing filming and its interrelations with family media practices as a mutual accomplishment in a social context also considers frequent situations, which make it 'natural' for the researcher to put the camera aside. For example, when children demand immediate attention, want to be picked up or endanger themselves, for instance, when their head could potentially hit a table. This perspective can also deal with situations when the *field is filming back*, like in the picture taken of Claudia in figure 3. This is also the case in the transcript below, in which Martina and Eva are filming "Dudu":

2 M: wEr Isch da; (-) (**who's there?**)
3 H: dUdU: (**Clemens**)
4 M: jA: [((laughing))] (**yes**)
5 C: [((laughing))]
6 M: was siehst du? (**What do you see?**)
7 H: dUdu: (**Clemens**)
8 M: Ja (.) genAu (.)(**Yes, exactly.**)
da hInten isch da dUdu unD dA isch da dUdu.
(**Over there is Clemens and here is Clemens.**)

Fig. 4: *Filming back*, Martina and Eva filming Dudu/Clemens

A few moments earlier, the ethnographer was filming Martina and Eva dancing to music playing on the smartphone in Martina's hand. Accidentally, she activates the filming function, which in turn becomes a kind of game: *filming the filming ethnographer*. Sitting on the floor in a "nested formation" (Goodwin/Tulbert 2011; Cekaite 2010), Martina starts commenting on the unfolding media practice: "Who is there?", "Dudu", "Yes!" These three lines, accompanied by laughter, end the first sequence. With Martina's comments and Eva's participation, a learning situation is established, which continues as follows: "What do you see?" In this situation, the ethnographer is present in two forms: Dudu is real "over there", but he is also present "here" on the screen, which Martina emphasises by pointing her finger in both directions, as shown in figure 4. Even more is revealed when we take a detailed look at the sequential unfolding of the multimodal order. From the outset,

Eva switches her focus from the screen to the physically present Dudu "over there" and establishes eye contact with him, while answering her mother's question and loudly stating that she sees "Dudu".

Participating in social situations and being in contact with children constitutes doing ethnography in a private family setting. There are no roles that are completely uninvolved, such as internships or high seats, as portrayed for instance in the film Kitchen Stories (2003: *Salmer fra kjøkkenet*). Evidently, we film and analyse a large amount of material, in which the observer seems invisible. However, reflecting on our own media practices as researchers in this article, we argue that these *scenes of involvement* should not be filtered out, ignored, or even viewed as the corruption of data, but rather they enable us to learn about the specific setting of everyday family life with young children.

5. After Fieldwork

> *While I am typing section 4, I look up over my laptop screen and smile at a little girl sitting opposite me at a table in the ICE high-speed train. She is looking attentively at an iPad in front of her, while her father next to her is typing on his smartphone. (Fieldnote 5, Clemens, August 2018)*

The mobility and ubiquity of digital media come into play, when we take a closer look at everyday media practices over the different phases of our research. A few weeks earlier, we wrote a 'fieldnote' of our Skype meeting:

> *On the left side of my screen, I see Eric, Jan, and a small version of myself in the Skype window. On the right, I have my PowerPoint presentation from the CRC workshop in Siegen – "Media Ethnography – Where Is the Action? Cooperative Media Practices in Ethnographic Fieldwork" – with an early draft of this paper open. We are talking about our WhatsApp communication with families, and I refer to the exchange of hearts and*

emojis with Eva (figure 2, above). Jan and Erik relate similar phenomena from their research. Erik mentions a picture of a father and son the mother had sent to him. He sends us the picture, and we discuss whether we could include it in the article (figure 1, above). The father is not wearing a shirt, and the picture also does not fully do justice to the family, whose members use smartphones and tablets in a moderate and considerate way. Could the picture convey a false impression? There are also ethical considerations; we need to obtain consent to use the picture. We conclude that we would like to use the picture, as the absence of the ethnographer raises relevant issues for media ethnography and may even be a good opener. Therefore, Eric will call the family and ask for their permission. Alternatively, we could write an ethnographic description or make a drawing. Meanwhile I drag and drop the picture into the draft and crop the lower quarter of it, so that the bare torso becomes less visible. At the same time, Jan is typing a detailed protocol of our conversation. (Fieldnote 6, Clemens/Jan, June 2018)

This example of ethnographic work 'at the desk' gives a short impression of the media practices involved. In our everyday life, we also rely on WhatsApp and email for organising meetings, phone and video calls; we send and edit images, sort, select and ponder whether we should use some of them for publication. There seem to be many similarities with organising family pictures on a smartphone and considering posting them on Facebook or sending them to friends or even to the ethnographer as in the opening example. Being involved in the private life of these families also implies a responsibility for conveying an adequate image of our participants. By publishing, we are making private affairs public. By including our concerns with the picture as a 'fieldnote' above, we indirectly achieve an appropriate framing and make space to discuss our considerations. In addition, the pictures, films, and sometimes also the written papers are channelled back into the families. In this sense and in our own everyday life, as shown in the example of the

train above, we have to consider that "in an interconnected world, we are never really 'out of the field'" (Gupta/Ferguson 1997: 38).

6. Conclusion

In this article, we have focused on the particularities of ethnography in our research field, whilst exploring the role of digital media in families and in the way young children grow up. We have considered the interplay and interrelations of our ethnographic and familial media practices. In this way, we can empirically show the relevance of new media when becoming and being involved in everyday family life. From making the initial contact with families to maintaining and cultivating relationships at a later stage of the research process, we are actively participating in family media practices. The same applies during fieldwork and not only in cases, in which ethnographic camera work develops into a form of playing filming with children. Conducting fieldwork, in our understanding, can be viewed as an ongoing cooperative accomplishment, in which we and the families "participate in the detailed organization of each other's action" (Goodwin 2017: 7). The various ways in which ethnographers get involved in everyday family life should not be filtered out or ignored, but instead they enable us to better understand this specific field.

Our methodological considerations are grounded in our empirical material which we have examined by focusing on similarities and interrelations. Obviously, our material also shows marked differences to everyday life when conducting ethnography. As Schindler (2018: 103) has argued, observations are "de- and re-contextualized, while they are taken into the sociological field(s)." In the short section "After fieldwork", we did not describe the whole range of rather different sociological sites: situations like reading at a desk (cf. Engert/Krey 2013), presenting at conferences, analysing in data sessions (cf. Meyer/Meier zu Verl 2013), writing texts etc. (for an ethnography of ethnography cf. Meier zu Verl 2018). Our paper has shown, however, that the idea of transfer-

ring "knowledge from one social practice (the observed one) to another (sociology)" (Schindler 2018: 2) can be viewed with a certain amount of scepticism. This also applies to our own research question raised at the beginning of this article, which we can now re-formulate. As participants of everyday life with ubiquitous media practices, rather than insinuating specific differences between family and ethnographic practices, we should ask about their cooperatively achieved embeddedness in social situations. Considering the mediatisation of these forms of cooperation also leads to further reflection on the forms of presenting research results – an issue on which we can only scratch the surface here.

In conclusion, an ethnomethodological media ethnography does not stem from preliminary theoretical or methodological considerations alone, but has to be viewed as the case-specific and context-sensitive result of empirical research. Firstly, the relations of research and everyday media practices should be thoroughly reflected upon, thus taking the continuum of "lay and professional sociological fact finding" (Garfinkel 1967: 76) into account. As we have shown, media practices such as filming and documenting in families are not reserved for video ethnographers, but are also common everyday practices of cooperation. Further, by means of these practices and via photos, films, and text messages ethnographers become involved in the everyday media life of families. Consequently, the practices of the field can be seen as the methodological foundation for an ethnomethodological media ethnography. Secondly, in the context of everyday family life researchers have to deal with the situation that family privacy is partly constituted by the absence of external observation and that adults only have very limited access to an early childhood perspective, with which interviews or what one would usually frame as 'impartial observation' can barely get to grips. Thus, researcher's involvement can be seen both as a field-specific prerequisite and outcome. This is the case both for exploring everyday media practices in families and for employing a child-centred and interactional perspective. In this sense, thirdly, an ethnomethodologi-

cal media ethnography of everyday childhood views these forms of involvement as well as practical research situations as cooperative accomplishment in concerted activities with the parents, children, and everyday media practices involved.

Notes

1 All names have been anonymised.

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Cooperation and Difference. Camera Ethnography in the Research Project 'Early Childhood and Smartphone'

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Abstract

The article examines the fundamental role of cooperation and difference in ethnographic research. We use *camera ethnography* in our research project B05 "Early Childhood and Smartphone. Family Interaction Order, Learning Processes and Cooperation" to reveal the iconographic aspects of media practices and to examine their choreographies in space and time. This enables us to engage with aspects such as embodiment, materiality, and perception in early childhood and learning. Rather than using video technology to produce recordings of a 'reality' assumed to be simply there and filmable, a key methodological premise of camera ethnography is that the visibility of an object of research is not given a priori but has to be generated by media ethnographic research practices. Hence, ethnographic research practices are epistemic practices and constitute "epistemic things" (see Rheinberger 2006; Knorr-Cetina 1999). To discover and investigate media practices in early childhood involves building, shaping, and maintaining relationships of cooperation and difference.

1. Introduction

This contribution introduces and discusses *camera ethnography* (Mohn 2013, 2018); one of the methodologies used within the Collaborative Research Centre 'Media of Cooperation' to conduct research in the field of

media anthropology. *Camera ethnography* proposes a shift from the emphasis in ethnographic research on speech, discourse, and text-based formats to an emphasis on performative, iconographic, and cinematic formats. We use *camera ethnography* in our research project B05 "Early Childhood and Smartphone. Family Interaction Order, Learning Processes and Cooperation" within the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC/SFB) 1187 "Media of Cooperation" to reveal the iconographic aspects of media practices and to examine their choreographies in space and time. This enables us to engage with aspects such as embodiment, materiality, and perception in early childhood and learning. Rather than using video technology to produce recordings of a 'reality' assumed to be simply there and filmable, a key methodological premise of *camera ethnography* is that the visibility of an object of research is not given a priori but has to be generated by media ethnographic research practices. We have to fine-tune our perception and sensibility in order to discover how to make visible and achieve observability – to make it possible to see something "as something". Hence, ethnographic research practices are epistemic practices by means of which "epistemic things" are constituted (see Rheinberger 2006; Knorr-Cetina 1999). As the boundary objects (Star/Griesemer 1989) of new knowledge, epistemic objects cannot simply be recorded with a camera. In the process of learning to see something "as something" they gradually take shape and emerge in and between the filmic images created in *camera ethnographic* research.

When they are understood as a discovery process, filming, cutting, and montage are situated and undertaken differently than they are in contexts geared towards documentation or producing records. The technical media may be the same, but the practices and processes are not. The media ethnographic research practices used in *camera ethnography* thus differ from media practices in other contexts. Hence, using media ethnographic practices to discover and investigate media practices in early childhood involves building, shaping, and maintaining relationships of cooperation and difference. Following a brief intro-

duction to our 'field', this text examines the fundamental role of cooperation and difference in camera ethnographic filming, editing, and the dissemination of results.

2. Cooperative "Sofa Ethnography"

Since 2016, our camera ethnographic research team[1] has established collaborative relationships with 14 families of different nationalities with children aged 0–6 years. We join the families for research sessions with the camera more or less regularly, as conditions (such as location) allow. Most of these sessions take place in the families' homes, partly due to the complications of filming in public spaces regarding the infringement of others' privacy. But living rooms are actually a very good place to start when it comes to studying media practices in early childhood. Pointing a camera at a person, no matter how small they are, is always about negotiating consent. Inviting camera ethnographers into one's home and showing oneself as a parent, family member, or child; allowing images of one's own living room to be made public – such activities mean relinquishing one's own privacy. At this point, our research both instigates and becomes incorporated into practices of "doing public". A special kind of participatory research relationship develops as researchers and parents talk to each other, collaborate to plan their meetings, and consider potential activities or situations of interest. Sometimes this results in scenes reminiscent of improvisational theatre workshops: the initial action may be partly 'staged', but then develop in unexpected ways. In these sessions, we examine how 0–6 year-old children participate in the media practices of their families: we focus on face to face and face to screen constellations; on ways of looking, listening, and touching; we pay attention to how children learn to see themselves and to position themselves in relation to others; to how the development of self-awareness and the creation of a public self evolve hand in hand; to how family members, including children, make themselves present and absent across space and time; to how children dis-

cover their world and the things in it; and how they appropriate, investigate, and begin to utilise analogue and digital media. These are the foci of our long-term study, which breaks new ground with its ethnographic observation of the media practices of a generation that can now watch themselves growing up with the aid of digital media from the very start of their lives. As part of this collaborative process, we share the films we produce with the families involved, who in turn contribute their own photographs and films to enrich our research.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

In Figure 1, father and daughter watch a family video (shown right) together. The family video was later incorporated into the three-channel installation "Face to Face – Face to Screen"[2] (Hare/Mohn/Vogelpohl 2018a), shown in Figure 2. Publishing and presenting our research findings as films, video installations, illustrated texts, or photo essays would not be possible without the trust and cooperation of our participating families. This shows their willingness to contribute an important perspective on a controversial and pressing topic. The use of digital media by children and in families is all too often demonised in public debates that are reduced to hasty warnings of the dangers of addiction or "digital dementia" (Spitzer 2012). The 'Early Childhood and Smartphone' project offers alternative narratives by taking a step back from such sensationalism to study, ethnographically, how families actually use digital media in everyday life, and how children actually grow up in the digitalised world.

3. Situated within a Research Process

The dynamics of knowing/not-knowing and seeing/not-yet-being-able-to-see can be used constructively in the research process by developing a self-reflexive approach to ethnographic research. Fieldwork and laboratory phases, publication and reception phases, as well as application and reflection phases are undertaken at intervals, not necessarily in a set order. Rather than distinguishing separate phases of data collection and interpretation, *camera ethnography* is conceptualised as a continuous process of finding perspectives and viewpoints and using filmic techniques to work on visibility and seeing.

Fieldwork phases:	camera perspectives (*"Blickschneisen"*)
Laboratory phases:	experimental arrangements
Publication phases:	rhetorics of presentation
Reception phases:	experiencing ways of viewing
Application phases:	society as a laboratory
Reflexive phases:	rethinking methodology

These six phases can each be seen as research situations that are characterised by particular kinds of challenges. Hence, ethnographic research practices are – like the practices they study – *situated practices*. They are characterised by their respective position within the research process. Aims and practices when filming, for example, might be to achieve concentration on a certain element, when editing it may be about furthering an experimental exploration. Publication requires taking a particular stance or position, and reception should open dialogue and debate. Fields of application may be shaped and researched anew, on other occasions it may be appropriate to reflect on one's own methodology and how it could be improved (see Mohn 2002 [2016], 2011). Such considerations form the basis of a "situated methodology" (see Mohn 2013: 186). The present text focuses on cooperation and difference in relation to camerawork, cutting, and montage, and the reception of an ethnography that *shows rather than tells*.

4. Difference (and Cooperation) in Camerawork

By shifting the emphasis from discursive to performative forms of knowledge, *camera ethnography* opens up new ways of approaching research objects. Rather than giving precedence to temporal sequentiality (as transcript-based analyses do) *camera ethnography* foregrounds the spatial/iconographic aspects of practices and their choreographies in time and space. In *camera ethnographic* research, filming neither precedes analysis (as the collection of 'raw' data) nor does it follow it (as in the illustrative filming of results). Instead, the camera perspectives chosen at the time of filming already constitute a significant part of the process of making "something" visible and observable. Effective research with the camera requires an ethnographer to "look" rather than "see", and to "point" interestedly rather than "show" what is supposedly already "known" (cf. Streeck 2017). "Looking, seeing, and knowing" (cf. Fleck 1983; authors' translation) is about shaping a process of discovery. Key to this not-yet-knowing but nonetheless directed use of the cam-

era is the formulation of "how" questions, for example, "how is 'remembering' – or negotiating, operating, investigating… – done with digital media in early childhood?" Choosing and varying camera perspectives ("Blickschneisen", Mohn 2013) while filming allows a developing interest in "something" to gradually take shape and become more distinct. This is what ultimately makes it possible to "see" and "show" what has been discovered. The video stills in this contribution from the project 'Early Childhood and Smartphone' show a range of camera perspectives taken while filming, which were carefully selected in accordance with emerging ethnographic "how" questions. Choosing the video stills on a frame by frame basis already represents a further step towards analytical thickness; absolving them of their soundtrack and temporality foregrounds the iconography and socio-materiality of media practices in early childhood.

In the videos they have been taken from, images like those in Figures 3–5 are accompanied by parents' voices saying "Look, that's you!" In Figure 3, the camera frames the child facing his mediatised representation. This kind of "double figure" emerges as a recurrent phenomenon of early childhood with media: once one such figure has been identified, further examples are discovered, which are related to research questions like: How do children practise seeing and recognising themselves – immediately and later? How do they position themselves in relation to others and to themselves? How are data practices and practices of (self-)identification interrelated?

How do the embodied self and the latently public, visible, and communicable self-as-image engage with one another? The formulation and further specification of differentiating questions like these is driven by ethnographers' engagement with difference as it emerges visually in the process of filming and editing.

In Figure 5, the ethnographer's precise framing of smartphone, mother, and child reveals the shape of a triangle. The protagonists' eyelines converge where they meet the phone's display, which beams the

Fig. 3

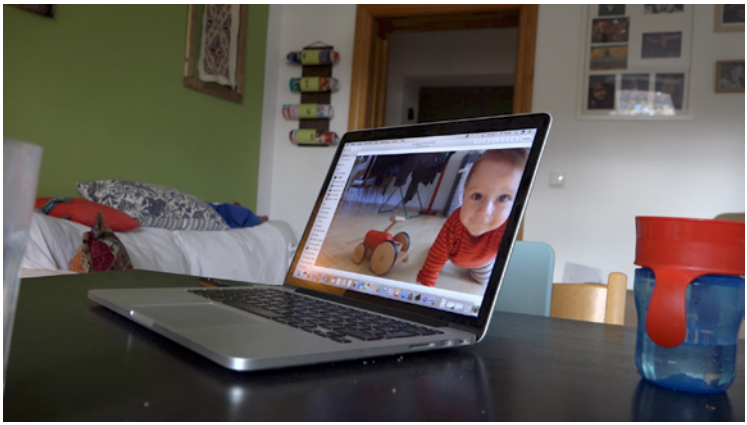

Fig. 4

faces back as a live image. The mother's bent arm stabilises the point of the triangle as the smartphone and faces appear to take turns in positioning themselves for each another: a magical triangle of seeing and showing. What makes this one more magical than other triangular forms that we begin to discover in further socio-material constellations of 'smartphone, child, and other person(s)'?

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

The triangle in Figure 6 is more complex: the eyelines do not meet at the smartphone's display. A video is being shot: the leading character is positioned centre stage and animated to act. Each point of the triangle plays a different role: baby as protagonist, one uncle as animateur, the other as documentarist. The ethnographer views the scene through her camera from another position, adding a third dimension to cre-

Fig. 7

ate a pyramid that encompasses the image-making of researcher and researched.

Communication between family members across continents used to involve waiting for weeks for letters to arrive. Video calling appears to have rendered geographical boundaries obsolete: now everyone can interact with no more than seconds between the dispatch and receipt of signals. But the people and objects made visibly and audibly present by communication technology remain physically out of reach: untouchable. How do people deal with this? How is "being there and not being there" done by children and adults?

One strategy is "show me". Video calling brings forth practices, such as showing, that enable exchanges of give and take where physical contact is not possible. At the same time, video calling imposes framings that need to be recognised and responded to. Multiple triangles emerge in Figure 7 as objects, persons, and gazes are arranged for the screen and webcam. The ethnographers ask further differentiating questions: How do children and other participants establish and intensify contact in face to face and face to screen encounters?

Fig. 8

Figure 8, left: A child with his mother during a video call with his grandmother. Right: the same child sits with his grandmother on a Hollywood swing. In both encounters, bodies are the focus of attention. On the Hollywood swing, the child caresses and hugs his grandmother; when he becomes too forceful he is gently reminded to take care. Via video call, they work together to find noses and eyes: pointing at all the faces in the room, including that of the child himself, his mother, the filming ethnographer, and the grandmother on the phone's display – held in place by the mother. These are scenes of feeling, experiencing, learning. To what extent can 'researching' and 'learning' both be understood as cooperative media practices, what do they have in common and how do they differ? What characterises the everyday practices of families and research teams? What directs the selection and variation of ethnographic camera perspectives that are made as action unfolds? Each act of filming is situated within the overall research process: each camera ethnographer is an individual, subjective person but at the same time a member of disciplinary collectives and fields as a researcher. Ethnographic image-making is thus the result of a synthesis of unpredictable occurrences in the 'field' (or living room) with the specific foci and theoretical framings of a research project. Key to achieving such a synthesis is the ethnographer's sensitivity and reflexive approach to difference.

Figure 9 offers one last example to show the constitutive role of camerawork in *camera ethnographic* research. Consuming entertain-

Fig. 9

ment media together arranges families into differently shaped constellations. Here, "listening together" becomes visible in the wandering gazes that do not converge at an illuminated display. The soundtrack is a fairy tale played from a vinyl record. Seeking a triangle here is fruitful in a surprising way: rather than eyelines that meet, we find three momentary vanishing points. Without a visual medium to entice them into a frame, the empty gazes drift aimlessly of their own accord; yet the bodies are in close physical contact. In the mute video still, the shared activity of listening as a family (cf. "doing family") arranges bodies and eyelines in a very different way than watching does. By choosing and varying framings and perspectives in response to both the situation at hand and the ethnographic research focus, camera ethnographers produce (still and moving) images that reveal spatial-temporal choreographies and the iconography of practices. In this way, camerawork can make practices and phenomena perceptible and observable, and address – or perhaps first find and formulate – questions relevant to the ongoing research project. Selected and edited to create video stills and film miniatures, the results of that camerawork become the building blocks for constructive analysis in collective editing sessions.

Fig. 10

5. Engaging with Difference through Cutting and Montage

The camera ethnographic discovery process continues in the edit suite. Here, the two fundamental practices of film editing both prove productive as analytical procedures. *Cutting* is about selecting and extracting relevant sequences. As a research practice, cutting makes it possible to isolate different practices, find out how they vary, and discover their situated contexts while reviewing, cutting, and sorting the material. *Montage* allows cut elements to be juxtaposed and combined. As a research practice, montage facilitates the identification and trying out of possible interrelations and contrasts, and the exploration of congruence or difference. Neither cutting nor montage are undertaken in order to illustrate the results of analyses; they are analytical processes themselves. In Figure 10, we use montage to place film fragments alongside each other instead of arranging them consecutively (see Farocki 2004). The result invites viewers – including the research team – to examine differently situated ways of "watching".

In Figure 10, the earnestness and intensity of the children's "watching", together with a research interest in nonverbal practices like "looking", "watching", and "observing" led the respective camera ethnographers to choose framings that reveal the tiniest movements of captivated faces. The video material was then cut to produce short, condensed versions. These could then be juxtaposed with other fragments to make trial comparisons possible. The three stills shown are from film fragments that were later included within the three-channel installation *Face to Face – Face to Screen*. Arranging these film fragments along-

side one another and presenting them simultaneously (shown here as three still images) makes it possible to observe and show (cf. Wiesemann/Amann 2019) the diversity of ways in which "watching" can be situated and done as a media practice in early childhood.

Short Forms

The idea to use the 'short form' as a research format is in line with the trend of everyday digital communication formats to become ever shorter, more iconographic, and easily shareable. Moreover, it proves to be a cooperative format: not only can short film fragments be brought into cooperative relationships with one another, short forms also enable teams of researchers to each contribute their own work in the form of observational film fragments, miniatures, and still images for collaborative compilation, ordering, and arranging. One source of inspiration for our use of the short form has been Alexander Kluge, who proposes that "minute films" are a format suited to contemporary times, which can be combined to construct much longer arrangements. We have also been inspired by Harun Farocki's experimentation with "soft" and parallel montage in video installations.[3]

Concisely packed into short forms, video observations of situated practices can be set in specific relation to differently situated practices by arranging them alongside one another in space and/or consecutively in time. This makes it possible to directly differentiate, compare, and contrast practices. The investigation of situations and their practices thus becomes a study of practices and how they are situated. Working together as a team of camera ethnographic researchers, we use editing techniques experimentally as research tools. We cut material to concentrate on specific foci and identify certain practices, and we arrange film fragments analytically to create further observability, comparability, or contrast, and to find out possible interrelations. Figures 11–14 show some further examples from the three-channel video installation "Face to Face – Face to Screen".

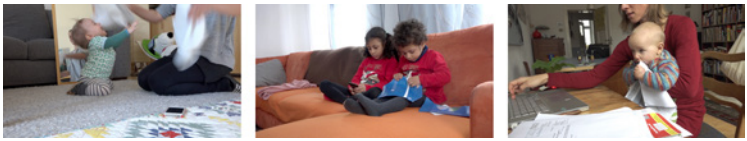

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

At the margins of digital and other cooperative (media) practices, materials such as paper creep in as rivals and fellow players. Paper can be mobilised and reshaped while other family members use laptops and smartphones – or set them aside to join the experiment. Materiality becomes tangible when a roll of kitchen towels is taken apart, an envelope ripped into pieces, or architectural plans are investigated orally. And, as the film fragments in Figure 11 show, when paper and digital devices are brought into interaction with one another. The mother who is working on her laptop adeptly swaps the plans for a less vulnerable pen, the sister who is too concerned with her smartphone to react to her younger sister is rewarded with a shower of paper scraps.

At times, infants are kept away from digital devices, on other occasions they are allowed to take them over, which brings them even closer to the adult operating (and trying to protect) the desired smartphone. As the images in Figure 12 make clear, being together and in close physical contact – sometimes in the form of a struggle – are part and parcel of early experiences with portable digital devices. We discover that operating, sharing, and touching appear together recurrently as a bundle of practices.

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

The juxtaposition of the images above, all of which are concerned with "investigating", reveals that infants investigate and appropriate all kinds of things in similar ways, regardless of whether they are 'digital' or not.

Painted bricks, mobile phones, and wooden spoons can all be utilised to explore the dimensionality of space: up and down, there and back, to and fro. These kinds of investigations are revealed and foregrounded by the analytical arrangement. Creating such assemblages is not only a research method by which we create observability, it also results in a presentation form with which we can invite viewers to participate in such discovery processes. As soon as the audience (as co-researchers) believe they have recognised something "as something", they are confronted anew with a further variation or a different aspect. Watching and re-searching analytical arrangements like these, whether they are juxtaposed spatially or consecutively, or both, sparks new ways of perceiving and seeing.

6. Audience Reception and Difference

Even in the form of texts, books, films, or video installations, research results are never fixed. An integral part of the research process is reception: the performative co-construction of results within social events of textual, image-based, or filmic communication. The audience become co-authors of the ethnographic work, just as the ethnographer becomes part of the work's audience (see Hausendorf et al. 2017; Mersch 2002; Pantenburg 2006). Hence, the conventional view of results and their reception as separate realms is supplanted by one in which reception events become an integral part of the research process. This creates a perfect opportunity for ethnography and public debate to come together. As Kappelhoff and Wedel (2016; emphasis in original) point out in their introduction to their *Cinepoetics* research centre: "Films do not illustrate the reality that surrounds us—and not the world as it 'really' is, and not the way in which it is given once and for all to the individual person. Rather, they are media that make it possible for an *undefinable plurality of all possible people* to manufacture a common world, a shared sensation for the communal world."

Using video to communicate with the public is most effective when audiences are incorporated into processes of ethnographic perception, observation, and discovery. 'Reception as research' instigates practices such as observing, listening, feeling, comparing, distinguishing, naming, alienating, (inter)relating, pausing, questioning, thinking, sharing, evaluating, and communicating. As public 'laboratories of looking', exhibitions enable ethnographic knowledge to be experienced and shared. Installations in exhibition spaces allow audiences to move around, stop and pause, and move on again. Visitors can thus take different positions and view video installations from different perspectives. For the exhibition *"Das bist Du!" Frühe Kindheit digital*, shown in the Siegerlandmuseum, Siegen (September 2018 – January 2019), we experimented as a team with different ways of arranging film fragments alongside and one after another. The exhibition included a synchro-

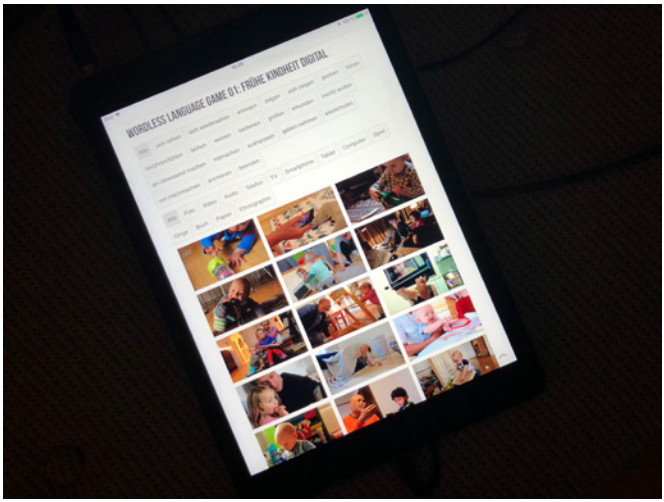

Fig. 15

nised three-channel video installation, a two-channel video installation with loops of different lengths, which produce ever changing juxtapositions, and an interactive video installation on tablets: *Wordless Language Game 01: Frühe Kindheit digital*, which offered 178 film fragments for exhibition visitors to sort and view (Hare/Mohn/Vogelpohl 2018b).

Wordless Language Games

Conceptualising research (at least in part) as a process of arranging rather than deduction enables a specific kind of analysis that draws on Wittgenstein's proposed "language games" ("Sprachspiele", see Wittgenstein 1949–1950: §23) and "perspicious representation" ("übersichtliche Darstellungen").[4] Our (wordless) version of a "language game" (cf. "Werkstatt Wittgenstein wortlos", Mohn 2013) is proposed as an interactive research tool that enables researchers and 'audiences as co-researchers' alike to explore the astounding diversity of practices and

Fig. 16

their situated meanings. The *Wordless Language Game 01: Frühe Kindheit digital* (*Wordless Language Game 01: Digital Early Childhood*) offers a range of terms that can be used to filter the application's 178 film fragments according to 22 actions/practices and 13 media. Filtering enables a viewer to create individual selections and ensembles of film fragments according to specific interests. These can then be watched and studied. The filter terms function as heuristic tools that can be used to establish intersections of doings, devices, and research interests that may help one to become aware, compare, discover, name, and better understand the diverse cooperative practices featured in the film fragments. Yet, despite functioning as heuristic terms, they are never sufficient literally: the closer one looks, the less distinct the terms appear in comparison to the (mostly non-verbal) practices that they attempt to encapsulate. For example, "laughing" in one moment might seem incomparable with another instance of "laughing", while the different possible ways of "negotiating" prove innumerable. This realisation is reminiscent of

Fig. 17

the examples Geertz draws upon to develop the notion of "thick description" (Geertz 1973: 10f).

A "Wordless Language Game" inspires descriptive word-generating processes and calls upon those that 'play' it to look, to verbalise and to write, to discuss and to discover, in order to discern how similar doings undertaken in differently situated contexts can reveal themselves to be far more complex and diverse than they seemed at first glance. (Figures 15 and 16)

Such *camera ethnographic* arrangements have net-like structures that can be expanded, with interconnections that are modifiable. They do not attempt to reconstruct the order of a situation. Instead, ordering and arranging become research practices that generate and choreograph the constitutive differences and interrelations of a "perspicious representation" as proposed by Wittgenstein.

Our first "Wordless Language Game" deals with early childhood and media. Following Wittgenstein, that frame could be opened up to seek out and explore practices and their interrelations in far more diverse contexts. The fundamental question underlying such assemblages would be: "How are certain practices done – or even how *could* they be done – differently (elsewhere)?" Asking this simple question opens potential for camera ethnographic research to further explore and expand upon minimal and maximal contrasts, for example, by comparing

different age ranges, vocational or technological fields, geopolitical regions, lifeworlds or historical eras. This would mean using montage to place situated practices alongside extremely differently situated ones, as in the arrangement of two video stills in Figure 17, which juxtaposes triangular socio-material constellations of viewing in two obviously differing contexts.

7. Conclusion

As we have shown, we seek out difference and also instigate differentiation. Difference is a constitutive and indispensable feature of ethnographic research, which is used productively in *camera ethnography*.[5] This also affects the kinds of roles played by ethnographers as they engage and cooperate with research participants and audiences. As ethnographers, we switch between multiple roles, including those of learners, strangers, guests, friends, experimenters, observers, explorers, members of scientific disciplines and collectives, filmmakers, writers, philosophers, or teachers.

The issue of difference in cooperative ethnographic research will continue to shape our ongoing *camera ethnographic* work. The video installations presented in the exhibition *"Das bist Du!" Frühe Kindheit digital* that have been cited in this text represent variants from a wider range of possibilities: placing one particular observational fragment next to or after another inspires a viewer of the analytically structured result to discover, compare, and combine; discerning similarities, differences, and interrelations that only become visible within the arrangement. When the filmic results of *camera ethnographic* research are publicly shared, audiences contribute further perspectives and yet other ways of seeing.

Notes

1 Since 2016, Bina Mohn, Pip Hare, and Astrid Vogelpohl have been working together as a team to conduct camera ethnographic research within the research project B05 (Principal Investigator Jutta Wiesemann).

2 The installation "Face to Face – Face to Screen" was shown within the exhibition *"Das bist Du!" Frühe Kindheit digital* (Hare, Mohn, Vogelpohl, and Wiesemann, Siegerlandmuseum, Siegen, September 2018 – January 2019).

3 See Kluge (2012) on "Minutenfilme": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=medmyVcsMd0, from 10:30. See also Ehmann/Guerra (2017) and visit the website: http://www.eine-einstellung-zur-arbeit.net/de/filme/ (Harun Farocki GbR 2012 – 2017) to sort and view short single-take films that address the topic of work.

4 "Übersichtliche Darstellung" has been variously translated as, among others, "surveyable representation", "perspicious representation", or "synoptic view". We follow "perspicious representation" (Savickey 2014: 99–123, 2017). See also Majetschak (2016: 65–80).

5 For further publications relating to *camera ethnography* see http://www.kamera-ethnographie.de.

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Hare, Pip / Mohn, Bina E. / Vogelpohl, Astrid (2018b): "Wordless Language Game 01: Frühe Kindheit digital", interactive application on tablets, in: exhibition *"Das bist Du!" Frühe Kindheit digital.*

Reports

Coordinations, or Computing is Work

Sebastian Gießmann

We humans spend most of our waking lives working. Our work includes cultural, intellectual, managerial and emotional labour as well as physical toil. And yet, most research carried out by humanities and media scholars implicitly treats the study of work as marginal, uninteresting or as a "mere" sociological topic. Even the study of "digital practices" rarely engages with the specifics of the workplace, despite the importance of distributed micro-practices such as clickworking, filesharing and collaborative editing. Information technology continues to underpin this transformation of work today, as it has in the past.

For this reason, the contributions to the interdisciplinary conference "Computing is Work!" (Siegen, Germany, 6–8 July 2017) focused on computing as work practice, both on a local or situated and an infrastructural level. Speakers explored different kinds of computing as work, from computerised literary production to computer-based scientific research. In publishing this think piece as a part of the interdisciplinary online journal *Media in Action*, we aim to document this conference in a hybrid and productive way: so consider this think piece as a pathway to the conference talks and the conference talks as pathways to this think piece.

As conference organisers, Tom Haigh and I asked ourselves how to present the recorded videos in the most appropriate way. Rather than merely uploading them to a commercial social media platform, we opted to combine this text with the audio-visual content. The conference videos themselves are available in the Media in Action repository and as part of Siegen University's digital video platform.[1] While we acknowl-

Fig. 1: Conference poster for *Computing is Work!* Graphic design by Matthias Schäfer, Siegen 2017. The photograph depicts a 1979 factory scene at Buderus company in Wetzlar, Northern Hesse. Courtesy of Heinz Nixdorf MuseumsForum, Paderborn.

edge that certain modes of online circulation may be quicker and more popular, we doubt that yet another YouTube talk is a very sustainable way of scientific publishing. We hope that you, as readers and viewers, enjoy this intermedia mode of publication, linking a think piece (instead of an introduction) with academic talks.[2]

A Very Short History of Coordinations

Within the history of infrastructural media, coordination has become a technical term for all practices of organising distributed action since the 19th century (Schüttpelz 2013: 42). The immense need for spatio-temporal coordination that arose during industrialisation is well documented – within both a general history of media and the history of computing and networking. We can draw on classical diagnoses concerning the "control revolution" in North America since the 1860s, when the challenges of distributed production and frontier spaces were met with transport technologies and telegraphic communication. James Beniger's notion of a "control revolution" (1986) and JoAnne Yates' studies concerning new corporate and bureaucratic techniques of information processing (1989; 1994) focused on the coordinative efforts that established physical transport on a wider scale. Thus, coordinative and bureaucratic efforts precede the public availability of infrastructural media innovations. Within the "back office" of railroad companies, banks, factories, publishing houses and nation states, the telegraph and telephone, filing systems, punch cards and other means of registering became coordination mechanisms and, as such, infrastructural media.

A similar development took place in terms of law and standardisation during the "second industrial revolution". Copyrights and technical norms were used as means of international coordination, as shown by Miloš Vec (2006) and Monika Dommann (2019). Florian Hoof (2019), Nadine Taha (2019) and Christine Schnaithmann (2019) were able to demonstrate how micro-coordinative practices became a key to factory floor and management, within the media laboratories of industrial re-

search and via the architecture of office spaces. Taylorism and its variants can be understood as a way to intertwine bureaucratic coordination with the coordinated movement of skilled and unskilled workers. Colonial strategies employed similar dispositions. European colonial powers built infrastructures and created metrologies (Latour 1999) that combined communications media and military means of coordination, leading to "infrastructures of asymmetry"[3] and geopolitical oppression (Diogo/van Laak 2016). Yet, besides the obvious power asymmetries, coordinative practices and techniques of colonisation transformed *all* involved actors, as recent research in global history emphasised (van der Straeten/Hasenöhrl 2016).

Infrastructural expansion and closure, acceleration and blockage of people, objects and signs rely on a bureaucratic-administrative component. It is usually taken for granted or considered as "invisible work" (Star/Strauss 1999). Take for example the early large-scale projects of distributed calculation and measurement, such as meteorological networks in the late 18th century or the computation of logarithmic tables led by Gaspard de Prony in the early 19th century (Schmidt 2011, chap. 11). Without the extensive and frequently failing coordination of data capture and standardisation of instruments, tables and forms, these distributed modes of calculation would not have been possible. The outcomes of this infrastructural work in turn mediated other micro-coordinative practices, serving scientific, civil engineering and military purposes.

Within the entire history of computing, software and programming, embedding computing machinery in organisations and work environments is still (Campbell-Kelly et al. 2018), and again, state of the art. While historian Geoffrey C. Bowker (1994) confronted an epistemology of computing that focused exclusively on cybernetics, reminding his readers that organisational work is key for computer-based information processing, most of today's historians of computing take into account the powers of organisation.

Consider the research on the rise of IBM, the coordination of British wartime computing and deciphering at Bletchley Park (Agar 2003, chap. 6), the "ontology of the enemy" in Second World War radar technologies (Galison 1997; Hugill 1999), the US missile defence system SAGE, the indivisibility of management and corporate computing (Haigh 2003; Ensmenger 2010) and, finally, the scientific and academic coordinative necessities used as arguments for the ARPANET, other research networks and the World Wide Web. In each case, computers were introduced and used as mechanisms for coordinated computation and the coordination of computing. This is also a key issue in the history of computing in the Soviet Union, as Slava Gerovitch (2008) and Ben Peters (2016) have shown. Since computers are structurally open and protean machines that are ontologically underdetermined, it is only through their communities of practice and institutions that they become media. If we take into account this notion proposed by Michael S. Mahoney (2011), the practically accomplished coordinative character of computational media becomes even clearer.

The software-based orientation of computing towards the coordination of work and industrial production was not inherent to digital computers. Yet, in practice, it became the defining element for the application and usage of computers in companies, administrations and nation states (National Research Council 1999). Scientific practices of computing are an important exception from this rule, although (or because) they have laid the technological and epistemological foundations for 'the' computer.[4]

While personal computers (PCs) became also de facto domestic computers and found their way into Western households in the 1980s, they were the dominant medium of both office coordination and household cooperation at the same time (cf. Gugerli 2018, chap. 6). Donna Haraway (1991 [1985], cf. Star 1996) brilliantly captured this double-sided culture of computing in the often forgotten sociological passages of her *Cyborg Manifesto*. According to Haraway, factories, households and markets

were integrated by a new "homework economy", in which feminised domains of work at home became a key component. In the 1980s, micro-coordinative practices transformed the coordination technologies tied to large centralised mainframes, thus becoming a long-term trend that is still driving today's convergence of mobile media use with centralised, cloud-based infrastructures.

On Coordination Mechanisms and Boundary Objects

How can this history of coordinative practices and computing be focused for the purposes of media theory? The most comprehensive and thorough proposals so far, in our opinion, have been made by sociologist Susan Leigh Star and socio-informatics scholars Kjeld Schmidt and Carla Simone (1996). While Star's notion of "boundary objects" primarily addresses cooperative practice between heterogeneous communities of practice (Star 1989; Star/Griesemer 1989), Schmidt and Simone's "coordination mechanisms" focus on all artefacts involved in organising cooperative work. Both terms apply to protocols, forms, tables, files and folders, databases, maps, commonly used objects (from museum artefacts to measuring slides), maps, diagrams, worksheets, timelines, algorithms, software packages and mobile apps. These media of work and production[5] should therefore not be considered as "minor media" (Geoghegan 2016: 810), but as the infrastructural basis of everyday practices and the formation of media agencies.

The coordinative character of boundary objects and coordination mechanisms is based on practices of information processing that integrate multiple agents, thereby creating an elementary order of cooperative work. Even if coordination is the sole responsibility of one person or delegated to a small number of objects, all coordinative practices need to be made "accountable". This means these practices rely on representation, since they must be legible, calculable, visible, audible and partly tangible. This applies to every situation of distributed work and often requires the "re-representation" of relevant information (Star 1995: 92).

It must be possible to address a medium of coordination indexically at every moment of its re-representation. Initially, coordination is therefore an elementary negotiation happening in every community of practice rather than a top-down process: it is a process of agreeing what to do next (in a given organisational context).

Kjeld Schmidt and Carla Simone have proposed the following definition of "coordination mechanisms" that accomplish the mediation of work:

> A *coordination mechanism* is a specific organizational construct, consisting of a *coordinative protocol* imprinted upon a *distinct artifact*, which, in the context of a certain cooperative work arrangement, *stipulates* and *mediates* the articulation of cooperative work so as to *reduce the complexity of articulation work* of that arrangement. (Schmidt/Simone 1996: 180)

Schmidt and Simone base their explanation for tailoring artefacts towards coordination on a terminological difference between "cooperative work" and "articulation work". Anselm Strauss's concept of "articulation work" encompasses all speech acts necessary to manage difficulties in work situations – interaction and conversation required to deal with crisis and problems (Star/Strauss 1999: 10). This work can partly be delegated to coordinative artefacts – take for example a checklist that each person involved recognises and consults as a protocol of their practices. For Schmidt and Simone, this articulation work is not part of cooperative work – yet, I argue that it is difficult to separate the usage of coordination devices and articulation work in action.

Schmidt and Simone emphasise the ordering aspect of coordination mechanisms, when they understand them as "artifactually embodied mediating structures that are used to *constrain the articulation of distributed activities* in cooperative work settings" (Schmidt/Simone 1996: 177). Susan Leigh Star's boundary objects encompass a different

logic of coordination. Boundary objects are, right from the start, configured by the needs of the social worlds that create a boundary object for their heterogeneous purposes. Think of a table or form as an aggregate of practice: it is not primarily characterised by its embedded protocols, since the protocol of a boundary object is mutually accomplished in action.

Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer (1989: 390) characterised this mode of negotiation as translations from "many-to-many". However, although some historiographies of boundary objects in computing exist (Ensmenger 2016), it is not possible to reconstruct an interactional negotiation of an object's mediating qualities for each historical case. This applies in particular to the level of micro-coordinative practice, since this is where the tools at hand are often used in a *bricolage* style. Star (1989) called the outcome of these situations a "structure of ill-structured solutions", in which the preferred choice is not the formally and organisationally "best" solution, but anything that gets the job done. In addition, boundary objects tend to be both vague and adaptable, with their information continually updated and re-worked along re-representation paths.

Object-based coordination happens in an environment full of tensions, affording certain practices while constraining others. This interplay between "affordances" and "constraints", between protocol and local appropriation characterises software use. It can be said that the way organisations use software provides the historical model cases for dealing with coordination problems. IBM's rise to a leader in the computing industry after the Second World War was due to the company's competence and skill at supplying customers with tailored hardware and software solutions for special purpose needs in information processing.[6] The professionalisation of programming as an occupation and business in the USA and the emergence of computer science as an academic discipline relied on the constant high demand of businesses, the military and government administrations. This is evident from a list of typical

applications of the decades between 1950 and 1970: coordination of missile defence and radar (SAGE), internal payroll and accounting, flight reservation (SABRE), cheque and credit card clearance, networked stock exchange, etc. Computer networking projects also recognised the importance of coordination for digital infrastructures, whether implemented in the military, the national economy or in sharing scientific resources in the ARPANET (Gießmann 2016, chap. 9).

The historian of technology David Gugerli (2018) has aptly described the transformation of "How the world got computerized" between 1950 and 1990 and shown the high demand for coordination that arose in fields such as data processing. The period described by Gugerli is characterised by the computer being embedded in institutional ecologies. Organisations willing to adopt computers learned how to use them as coordination devices for work, membership, accounting and production. This development continued even after institutional usage receded into the background with the increasing adoption of personal computers, local area networks, intranets and the mobilisation and miniaturisation of computers since the 2000s. The coordinative organisational programming und software usage has shifted to a micro-coordinative level of logistics software, data warehousing, process management, etc. This business-to-business market is the foundation for the thriving computer services industry, which generates more revenue than computer hardware and software products combined ($955 billion in 2014, cf. Yost 2017: 273) and serves a multitude of micro-coordinative purposes.

Compared to centralised company-wide accounting systems, the local use of PC spreadsheets was a shift towards computing practice in small groups. In fact, a significant amount of software programs – think of spreadsheets, image editing, typesetting, computer-aided design [CAD/CAM], groupware – has pushed team and design work towards continuous micro-coordination (Schmidt 2015). The more functions we delegate to software, the more blackboxing occurs and the more intense articulation work and support become. Computers make us talk, even if

or because users rarely understand all of their technological and organisational protocols. The coordinative use of computational media should not be confused with mere optimisation and process efficiency, even if it is a common goal in coordinative efforts. Automation movements usually create new modes of "heteromation", as Hamit Ekbia and Bonnie Nardi (2017) have argued convincingly.

So how can we understand the relation between computing, coordinative practice and work? Coordination can be characterised by the infrastructural practices of coordination mechanisms and boundary objects. Both are mutually accomplished, translated from many-to-many, customised and circulated; both control the conditions of cooperative work: coordination mechanisms by affording and constraining protocols of work, boundary objects by re-representing information along a given "path of work". If cooperation is the "mutual making of common goals, means, and processes" (Schüttpelz 2017: 24), then coordination can be conceived as ongoing mutual establishment and control of conditions for cooperation.

Yet, even if we take into account these conceptual considerations, computing becomes work in cooperative and coordinative practices. This is why all contributions to the "Computing is Work!" conference emphasised the social processes of work, thus showing an interdisciplinary potential to integrate a variety of historical, social and ethnographic research approaches into a revealing whole. We understand them as case studies that explain the workings of boundary objects, coordination mechanisms and socio-material practices in digital infrastructures. We invite you to join us and become an observer and listener.

Computing is Work! Contributions and Explorations

- Thomas Haigh / Sebastian Gießmann: Opening Remarks: *Computing is Work*

Scientific Workplaces

- Matthew Jones: *Data Mining is Work: Scaling Algorithms, Overcoming Friction, Redefining Knowledge*
- Jens Schröter: *Work will be 3D: Imaginary Workplaces and Volumetric Displays*
- Gerard Alberts: *Archiving is Work, Archaeology Even More Structuring Labor*
- Roli Varma: *Women at Work: Decoding Femininity in Computing in India*
- Nathan Ensmenger: *Documentation is Work: Flowcharts as Temporal Boundary Objects*
- Discussion with Roli Varma and Nathan Ensmenger

Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) as Theory and Practice

- Round table with Erhard Schüttpelz, Volker Wulf and Dave Randall: *On CSCW*
- Kjeld Schmidt: *Coordination is Work: The Problem of Computerizing Coordinative Practices*

Workflows

- Kari Kuutti: *"Muddling through" is Work: A Plea for Workflow Oriented Computing*
- Maria Haigh / Tom Haigh: *Stopping Fake News is Work: The Work Processes of Peer-to-Peer Counter Propaganda*

Institutions and Markets

- Hallam Stevens: *Copycatting is Work: The Diverse Labours of the Shenzhen Electronics Markets*
- Ben Peters: *Networking is Work: How Computing Institutions Matter even When Networks Fail*
- Discussion with Hallam Stevens and Ben Peters

Fun and Games

- Ksenia Tatarchenko: *Leisure is Work: The Making of the Soviet Computing Collectives*
- Laine Nooney: *Games are Work: Notes from the "Little Silicone Valley"* *

Art and Literature

- Fred Turner: *Bohemia is Work: Reimagining Digital Labor inside Facebook*
- Matthew Kirschenbaum: *(Even) Literature is Work! Word Processing and Literary Labor*

- Sebastian Gießmann / Thomas Haigh: Closing Remarks

* Laine Nooney's talk has not been recorded, due to sensitive ethnographic data.

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Notes

1 https://u-si.de/vBDor.
2 For a conference report cf. Martin Schmitt (2017, in German).
3 Cf. Echterhölter, Anna (2016): *Infrastrukturen der Asymmetrie. Vom ökonomischen Handwerk des Messens*. Postdoctoral Thesis, Humboldt University Berlin, 2016, esp. chap. 4 on colonial metrology.
4 Cf. Ensmenger (2010, chap. 7) on conflicts between academic and technical professionalisation of computing in the US.
5 In German: *Arbeits- und Verfertigungsmedien*.
6 When IBM "unbundled" software and service from hardware sales in 1969, an actual market for software and services could develop in the US.

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