How do we “get at” people’s everyday practices of digital technology?

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What is the difference between traditional fieldwork and “digital fieldwork”?  

Depends on the context but not really much.  

“To observe social life in its natural habitat; going where the action is and watching.”  

Earl Babbie (1995)
John Lofland’s “thinking units”:

Meanings, Practices, Episodes, Encounters, Roles, Relationships, Groups, Organisations, Settlements (societies, neighbourhoods etc.)

Digital fieldwork studies these in an online setting.
Why do it?

- 2013 82% of Australians spent 23.3 hours online/week (Nielson Australian Connected Consumers Report 2013)

- Australian teenagers (14-17 years):

  - 56% (vs US 49%) use a mobile to access internet
  - 69% (vs US 37%) have a smartphone
  - 74% (vs US 88%) use a computer to access internet
Key indicators of Aussie teenagers online, December 2013 (ACMA)
There is a limited time period to observe this great change from a life “off-line” to a life integrated with “on-line.”

Times of change present great opportunities to study meanings and practices, roles and relationships as these are renegotiated.

Huge focus on big data and quantifying people’s behaviours and literacies can exclude thick description.
Getting ethical approval for doing digital fieldwork

The problem:

Ethnographies and social history are stories of the particular and the individual situated in their social, economic and political contexts.

Human subjects committees are focused on protecting individual privacy (as am I) but emphasise de-identification and decontextualisation.
A possible solution:
Think carefully
Create detailed plans
Assess risk
Explain, explain, explain to:
  Participants
  Ethics committee
  Reviewers
Build relationships with participants, your institution, funding agencies.
Data Collection & Analysis

- Cohorts:
  Design modular studies where you can add cohorts as you gain access.

- Be flexible: not everything will go to plan.

- You don’t always know what data you will collect so you can’t always plan your data analysis in advance.

- Write everything down (journal, notebook, in Nvivo...?)
This is a documentary research project with the express intention of retaining all material in a public archive. All participants will understand the purpose of the interview before proceeding. Only first names will be used to identify records and participants may choose to use a pseudonym if they prefer. Due to the ethnographic and documentary nature of the research, true anonymity is not possible. To mitigate risk, participants will be given extensive briefing as to how and where their information will be displayed. If participants choose to review the transcripts and sound recordings, they will be able to do so before the information is published. They will be able to withdraw their data from the research project at any point.
For Participants

I understand that information gained during the study will be published in a public archive and that audio files will be linked to a photograph and a first name. The researcher has explained to me options for increasing my privacy by using a pseudonym and an alternative to a photograph.

I understand that the digital audio files will be placed in a public access archive under Creative Commons Licensing, which means that other people will be able to listen to the stories and use sound clips from it.
Some tools

Welcome To Quadrant! Select a project to continue...

Everyday Digital Lives

Project Created By: Jenny Ostini

Created On: 11/02/2014

Project Description:
This project will study what digital literacy means in practice by asking people to share their stories about using technology. Of interest is the way that people themselves conceptualise and articulate their understandings of the technology that they use.
Welcome to the *Everyday Digital Lives* project!

- **Total project participants**: 24
- **Participant workflow completions**: 0
- **Participants in at least one workflow**: 23
- **Dropped or exited participants**: 0

Participants that are currently in your workflow steps:

| Fieldwork 2014 steps | Total active: 23 | Consent/Enrolment (0) | Interview (23) | Transcription (0) | Analysis (0) | Completion (0) | Completed: 0 |
Teenage girls in Brisbane

17 Year 9 and 10 (15 and 16 year old) girls at a girls’ school.

Original artwork by Isabella Ostini, Studio FiftyThree Paper App
We have to use it out in the kitchen and don't go on games when you're supposed to be doing homework.

Well of course not looking up anything inappropriate and we're not allowed to use YouTube either because we don't have very much download.

I have to get on my phone because I've 3G because quite a lot of the stuff that I like to go on is blocked.

When I have family over I try not to use it, because I find it rude a bit.

I can't play over half an hour a day.

I'm allowed to use our computer whenever I want.

Rules
Reading and contacts


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