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Virtual Worlds, Real Subjectivities: Media Anthropology at the Personal/Public Interface

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Erica Lynn Fontana

Committee in charge:

Professor Keith McNeal, Chair
Professor Thomas Csordas
Professor Steven Parish

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The Thesis of Erica Lynn Fontana is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Virtual Worlds, Real Subjectivities: Media Anthropology at the Personal/Public Interface

by

Erica Lynn Fontana

Master of Arts in Anthropology

Professor Keith McNeal, Chair

The study of media, a relatively new area of focus for anthropologists, draws on traditions of, and research in, both media studies and anthropology. While specifically anthropological and ethnographic approaches to media have put forth valuable insights regarding the culturally specific nature of media and media's integration into the totality of life, much of media anthropology leaves something to be desired in its conceptions of the relationship between the individual, particularly individual subjectivity, and culture.

Providing an overview of media studies generally and studies of new or digital media specifically, I argue that the theories and perspectives of psychological anthropology could bring to media anthropology a more developed understanding of the individual in culture. Furthermore, I argue that psychological anthropology, which like all social science was initially developed in the paradigm of face-to-face, spatially and temporally circumscribed social interaction, could benefit by considering the relationship of existing concepts of personhood, selfhood, identity, and experience to new contexts of mediated communication and interaction.

Introduction

The study of media, and "new" media specifically, is a relatively new development within anthropology. It draws on the traditions of anthropology as well as those of media studies, a highly interdisciplinary area of research intersecting with a diverse array of fields such as computer-mediated communication, science and technology studies, sociology, and cultural studies. Media anthropology is also an increasingly important area of study, as media have become more ubiquitous and have come to affect virtually all human societies in some way.[1]

While anthropology has brought a valuable perspective to the study of new media, problematizing most significantly the distinction between the "virtual" and the "real" or "actual" and bringing studies of media from cyberspace back into the totality of culturally situated human life, the anthropology of new media takes as its starting point the study of culture in the world, and from that vantage point has developed its questions about the individual. It is missing bottom-up analysis beginning at the level of the individual, and thus runs the risk of inferring what Daniel Touro Linger (2005) calls "virtual subjectivities" – generic conceptions of subjectivity that do not reflect the complexity of individuals' lives and experiences. Psychological anthropology, which takes as its starting point the complex relationship between individuals and culture, could come into dialogue with media studies and provide this much-needed level of

[1] Although the notions of the globalized, media-saturated world described by, for instance, Zengotita (2005) and Appadurai (1991) reflect relatively recent trends, media more broadly, understood as "vehicles for the transmission of symbols" (Peterson 2003: 3), are nothing new, culturally speaking. Technological mediation is continuous with, and analogous to, much older phenomena such as ritual and written and spoken language in many ways (Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 3-6; McLuhan 1964; Ong 1982).

analysis by means of its theories of the person and cultural models and its person-centered ethnographic methods. On the other hand, psychological anthropology, which, like all social science, was originally developed in the paradigm of face-to-face, spatially and temporally circumscribed social interaction, could benefit by considering how the new interactional contexts enabled by media both challenge and are consistent with existing concepts of personhood, selfhood, identity, and experience. Offering more questions than solutions, I argue here that psychological anthropology and studies of new media might usefully converge in a mutually beneficial dialogue at the interfaces between individuals and new media in particular cultural contexts.

Defining Media: Contents, Technologies and Contexts

In this section I elucidate the domain of "media" itself and the meanings of the term. I explore definitions of what media is and then distinguish among the technologies, contents, and social and cultural contexts of media.[2] Because this thesis focuses specifically on computer-based digital media, which is typically categorized as "new media," I also examine some of the distinctions between old and new media and characterize what is new – and what is not – about new media.

Media, in the strict sense, includes anything that is "a channel or conduit for the transmission of some kind of communication" (Spitulnik 2000: 148). Some, such as the highly influential media scholar Marshall McLuhan, seem to take up this definition in its broadest possible interpretation. In his book *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan, defining media as "the extensions of man," enumerates each of the specific media technologies available at the time. He details the purported effects of each medium, including among the media spoken and written language, which could be seen as a conduit for the transmission of ideas, meanings, and so on. McLuhan's definition is perhaps a broader one than most people would use, however. It could be argued that oral and written language and the human speech apparatus are media in that they serve as conduits for, and have transformed the character of, thought and communication

[2] Although I have used the two terms more or less interchangeably at points throughout this paper, I prefer the more general term "contents" to describe the messages conveyed in media, because "texts" seems to imply a centrality or predominance of written language in media content.

(Peterson 2003: 3). However, the term "media" as frequently used in media studies and in everyday usage seems to refer to something narrower. [3]

Peterson (2003: 5-6) identifies this narrower sense of media as "technological mediation," or technological transformations of the natural human communicative apparatus and setting in different ways and for different reasons. Central to technological mediation is a separation between message senders and message receivers, which allows for the possibility of exchanging messages with unknown or anonymous interlocutors. As commonly used in media studies, media "is best defined by what it is not – face-to-face communication" (Spitulnik 2000: 148). Mediated communication can be from one person to one (e.g., a telephone call), from one to many (e.g., a radio broadcast), or from many to many (e.g., an Internet discussion forum) (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 453). Mediated communication, like all communication, can additionally be distinguished by varying levels of sociality – a concept indicating the extent to which individuals can fully interact with each other through auditory and visual channels, reciprocity of communication, and presence of social stimuli (Chovil 1991: 143-144). Examples of media include film, television, radio, video, newspapers, magazines, and various forms of computer-mediated communication (e.g., blogs; Internet news sites; chat rooms or sites [Danet 2001]; multi-user domains [MUDs] [Turkle 1995]; and, in some contexts, virtual worlds [Boellstorff 2008][4]).

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[3] See, for instance, Ong (1982). For critiques of the view of language as a "conduit" or "container" for meaning, see Linger (2005) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

[4] Boellstorff (2008) makes the argument that virtual worlds are not electronic mass media, because one can play in them without communicating with other players and because they do not mediate among sites, but are sites in their own right (p. 257). While Boellstorff makes valid points here, I would qualify this assertion. Virtual worlds, when they serve as places of interaction, are technological mediations among

Media research has encompassed research on the contents, the technologies, and the social and cultural contexts of media (Askew 2002). I would further clarify "contexts" to encompass both social/interpersonal and cultural contexts. New, more participatory media in particular show the degree to which media represent communications among individuals as well as the way culture and media influence one another. While all of these facets of media are of course intertwined in practice, they must be distinguished analytically so we can know what we mean, for instance, when we speak of any of the social and psychological changes associated with media. Are we claiming, for instance, that technology is in itself deterministic of social, cultural, or psychological aspects of human life, or that the influence or popularity of a given technology is symptomatic of existing social or cultural processes (Williams 1974)? At each level, media meanings, productions, uses, and interpretations are negotiated and interpreted by partly culturally constituted and situated, yet unique and idiosyncratic, individuals. The distinction is an important one particularly from the standpoint of psychological anthropology, which is concerned with the dialectic between worlds and minds, including questions of human agency, motivation, emotion, information processing, and enculturation.

Media contents or "texts" are the messages of media. Many early studies assumed meaning was found in media's messages and was absorbed unproblematically by passive audiences (Dickey 1997: 414, Spitulnik 1993: 295). According to early models of communication, the communicative process consists of the production,

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individuals, even if not among places. Thus it could be argued that they fall under the definition of media although their interactional component makes them clearly distinct from what are typically called "mass" media (see definition below).

transmission, and reception of messages. Lasswell's (1960) theory characterized communication by determining "*who* says *what* in which *channel* to *whom* with what *effect*?" In Shannon and Weaver's (1949) model, which forms the basis for what has been called the "hypodermic needle" theory of communication, a source encodes a message and sends it via some type of conduit to a receiver, who decodes it (Peterson 2003: 43-44).

In these early models, media, technological or otherwise, serve as conduits for these messages. Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model (2007), which was originally put forth in 1980 and which has been influential in cultural and media studies, theorized a more agentive role for audiences, multiple interpretations of media, and questions of media reception. In Hall's model, communication comprises four stages: production, circulation, use (also called distribution or consumption), and reproduction. Each of these stages is "relatively autonomous" from the others, which is to say that media messages are polysemic but not unlimited in meaning. There is thus room for interpretation, but messages are imprinted at each stage by power relations, and this limits their possible meanings. Media contents and their interpretations are perhaps the most obvious, but not the only, place where meaning is found in media.

Communication via media, defined as communication that is not face-to-face, requires technology. However, media technologies are specific kinds of technologies. Technologies, broadly conceptualized, are artifacts or objects that are manufactured and used by humans (Schiffer 2001: 3). Technological objects are also encompassed by the terms "techne," which indicates any intentional human activity that changes the environment (e.g., Boellstorff 2008: 55) and "technoscience," which unites the concepts

of scientific knowledge and methods and technological objects to show their interconnectedness and avoid privileging one over the other (e.g., Hakken 1999: 217; Aronowitz, Martinsons, and Menser 1996). Media technologies are distinct in that they act as intermediaries between people. Media studies would not, for example, involve a study of the toaster or microwave oven (Askew 2002: 3).

McLuhan, however, counts among the media inventions such as the electric light bulb, the motorcar, and clothing, arguing that the objects themselves carry "messages" that are culturally important even if not explicitly communicative (McLuhan 1964). Media, as extensions of ourselves, alter our experience of the world and of the scale of human life. For McLuhan, media need not necessarily contain communicative content to be socially and culturally meaningful. Although McLuhan's definition is broad and perhaps implies technological determinism, a point that can be taken from it is that technologies themselves, not just media contents, are meaningful when studying the ways in which people interact with, and through, media. Thus studies of media must take into account the meanings people make with media technologies as well as those they interpret from media messages.

Research on the social and cultural contexts of media raises questions of who is using and producing the media, and in what types of political and cultural environments. Examples specific to computer-based media are studies that look at the culturally specific ways in which people use and conceptualize media contents and technologies (e.g., Miller and Slater 2000) and studies that show how spaces constructed through the use of media technology are themselves places for emergent culture (e.g., Boellstorff 2008). Examinations of the cultural dimensions of global

flows of people, ideas, objects, and media have been influenced in particular by Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" (1991), Jurgen Habermas' notion of the "public sphere" (1989), and Arjun Appadurai's work on public culture and cultural flows (1991) (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002).

In addition to specific media forms or technologies such as the examples above, media can be categorized by their uses and contexts. Specific categories of media that Spitulnik (2000) identifies include mass media, alternative media, small media, new media, and indigenous media. Mass media – what in popular discourse is typically denoted by the term "the media" – include "mainstream television, film, radio, newspapers, and magazines" (p. 148). The majority of studies of media have focused on mass media. Alternative media may use the same technologies, but are "antithetical to mainstream media" in terms of the content they put forth (p. 148). Small media are alternative media controlled and produced by individuals and small groups; for example, underground publications. Indigenous media are any media technologies "as used by Fourth World peoples," and new media are electronic, digital media, such as CD-ROMs, the Internet, video games, and e-mail (Spitulnik 2000: 148-149).

My focus in this paper is predominantly on what Spitulnik, and many others, call "new media." It is likely significant that these are the only media in Spitulnik's typology that appear to be differentiated primarily by their technologies rather than their content or the contexts or individuals involved in their production. Any statement about the differences between old and new media must of course be qualified. Both traditional and new media are forms of "technologically mediated language and human interaction" (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 454). In this way they share continuities with

one another and, as discussed above, with other human phenomena such as language and ritual. However, there is, undoubtedly, something different about this category of media. What is new about new media – more specifically, what are the characteristics, assumed or real, of these technologies that make them appear to be so different from traditional media?

The way in which new, mostly "digital" media are created and reproduced in contrast to older "analog" media is one source of difference (Shore 1996). While information or content in analog media is replicated by direct, continuous mapping from one medium to another, the digitalization of information, such as that conveyed in media, breaks continuous forms into discrete "building blocks." This facilitates the creation of new patterns, encouraging freedom from preexisting forms and a general orientation toward modularity (Shore 1996: 152-153). Another way in which digital or computer-based media differs from traditional media is that new media tend to be "democratic-participant" media (Dickey 1997). The technologies required to produce digital and computer-based media content are, at least theoretically, more widely accessible and less expensive. The option of actually producing original media content, as differentiated from consuming and making meaning of existing media content, is thus open to more people, and the line between media producers and media consumers is increasingly blurred. Related to this is the decentralized power structure and organization of much new media (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002: 3). In comparison with, for instance, a TV or radio station putting forth broadcasts to an audience from a single, centralized location, the computer networks on which much new media is conveyed are not located in a single place. Computers and servers all

over the world, linked to one another in all directions, carry the networks.[5] With media production power more decentralized, producers/consumers of new media thus have an additional dimension of the media at stake – to maintain a public and a space for discourse, they must ensure that the technologies by which this discourse is made possible are maintained (Kelty 2008).

[5] See Rheingold (2000) for a detailed explication of the Internet's historical development and structure.

A Brief History of Media Studies

Research on media began appearing as early as the 1920s and 1930s. In the U.S., media research began with government and private studies addressing the "effects" of radio and film on consumers (Dickey 1997: 414). The effects or "power" of media were a major concern of these early studies, and have remained a focus of research throughout media studies (Spitulnik 1993: 294). However, many early studies of media operated under the assumptions of the "hypodermic" model of media communication described above, presuming that media's messages were found in media's contents or texts, which communicated uniform messages and were absorbed more or less homogenously by audiences (Dickey 1997: 414-415).

Following these initial studies, research on the relationship of media to culture and society began in fields such as sociology, psychology, communications, film studies, critical theory, literary criticism, and psychoanalytic theory (Askew 2002: 3; Dickey 1997: 414). Some of these studies included those of the Frankfurt School, which viewed mass media (and mass culture more generally) as a vehicle of capitalist hegemony, and film in particular as a medium that objectified viewers and imposed cultural forms on them. Studies influenced by psychoanalysis and deconstructionism, which examined the internal structures of meaning in media texts, were also conducted. The uses and gratifications school of research focused more on audiences than did the other forms of media studies, studying the reasons why people used media (Dickey 1997: 415; Askew 2002: 3).

While much of the earlier research assumed power lay with media producers, who produced content that was unproblematically absorbed by audiences, later work, particularly

that in British cultural studies, questioned this (Askew 2002: 3). Researchers increasingly rejected the model of a single message and homogenous audience in favor of multivocal interpretations of the text and a greater role for audience agency in interpreting messages (Spitulnik 1993: 296). Much of the work questioning monolithic models of media was influenced by the work of Raymond Williams (1974; 1977*),* who emphasized the social and cultural foundations from which media technologies developed, and by Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model of audience message reception (2007). Hall's initial version of the model portrayed viewers as actively decoding meaning from messages in media and either accepting, rejecting, or resisting these messages. Later updates to Hall's model granted audiences even more agency as active negotiators and interpreters of media messages (Dickey 1997: 414-415; Spitulnik 1993: 297; Askew 2002: 5).

Many early media studies retained a focus on media contents and how audiences interpreted them more so than the technologies or contexts of media. This might be explained by the disciplinary orientation of the research. According to Arjun Appadurai, the subject matter of cultural studies is the relationship between the word – referring to any form of textual expression – and the world (1991: 197). While analyzing the content or text of media representations is an important part of the study of media, other aspects of the media communication process, such as media technologies, the cultural, political, and social milieus in which media are produced and

received, and the unique individuals producing and receiving media, must be taken into account. The turn toward audience agency in media studies increasingly problematized the locus of media's meanings and that of the power to create them, pointing out that meaning is not inherent in the text and that audiences have a part in producing it. Media studies and cultural studies underwent a turn toward anthropologically influenced concerns and methods. Although much of the anthropology-influenced research in these fields was not truly "ethnographic" in that it lacked, for example, in-depth participant observation and considerations of the ethnographer's influence, these trends helped to bring the focus of media studies beyond the text and into other considerations of meaning production (Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 1; Spitulnik 1993: 298).

Spitulnik critiques the fact that, despite media studies' focus on the communication process, there seems to be a lack of research on the "language" of media – in particular, the role of linguistic forms in transmitting messages. Most of the research dealing with linguistic form, in media and otherwise, has been in the areas of discourse analysis and linguistics rather than media studies. While media scholars have drawn ideas from linguistics and semiotics regarding the transmission of messages, most have not made use of recent developments in these fields (Spitulnik 1993: 297). Some researchers, as stated above, have included written and spoken language among the media used for human communication. While the definition of media I use in this paper concerns technological mediation rather than linguistic communication more broadly, I would argue that Spitulnik's observation can be extended to point out a

dearth of research on not only linguistic forms, but on certain aspects of media technological forms more broadly.

The question of whether technology is a neutral means of transmitting messages or is in itself socially meaningful is relevant to studies of technologically mediated communication. A few media researchers, such as Marshall McLuhan (1964) and Benedict Anderson (1991), have pointed out the role of technology, arguing that specific media technologies have unique communicative consequences. McLuhan, as discussed above, enumerated the social and psychological effects of each medium available at the time of his writing and its consequences. According to Anderson, print media created unified fields of communication among speakers of diverse dialects of vernacular languages, granted these printed languages a fixity that speech did not have, and imbued these print versions of language with a kind of power. Print media, when combined with capitalism, were thus uniquely important for creating "imagined communities" of people who may not necessarily ever meet face-to-face and thus for creating nationalist consciousness (Anderson 1991: 44-46). Askew cites several additional studies in the tradition of McLuhan and Anderson, which focus on the role of technology in imagining and maintaining communities (Askew 2002: 6-7). The effects of technology on communication occur at the levels of both "primary" and "secondary" mediation. Primary mediation refers to the effects of mediation directly at the level of the communication process itself, such as, for instance, the ability to communicate with more people simultaneously or the decreased availability of nonverbal communications channels. Secondary mediation refers to the effects that stem from the relations of production surrounding media and its technologies (Peterson 2003: 7-8).

Many technological analyses of media have dealt more with the social, political, and economic contexts of media than with the relation between technology and audiences. Many studies of media do not appear to have problematized the power and meaning of media technologies in the same ways or to the same degree that they have problematized the meaning-making process by which audiences interpret media contents. Much of the media studies research that examines the role of technology still assumes the impact *of* technologies on people rather than looking at the agency of both media audiences and technologies in shaping meaning.

Science and technology studies (STS) research, on the other hand, provides a framework for conceptualizing the process as a dialogue *with* technoscience, which is taken to be a dominant form of knowledge constituted by social, economic, and political processes. It questions the assumption that science and technology induce progress autonomously or that they are neutral channels for communication and recorders of truth (Escobar 1994). These assumptions were held even by many early researchers in visual anthropology. Askew gives the example of Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Franz Boas' advocacy of photography as a supposedly neutral method of capturing ethnographic data (2002: 6-7). Because media are a type of technologies, it is likely that ideas taken from science and technology studies, in particular the view of technological objects as socially constructed and partially agentive, could help to further develop an understanding of the relationships between individual human agents and subjectivities and the technologies, in addition to the contents, of media – an area which seems underexplored in both media studies and STS.

Although media research is nothing new, the specifically anthropological study of media is, with a few exceptions, relatively new as a disciplinary focus.[6] The turn toward cultural questions in media studies, in combination with anthropologists' increasing openness to research in North America and Europe and the development of an "anthropology of the present" (Fox 1991), played a large part in opening the way for more media anthropology studies beginning in the 1980s and 1990s (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002: 3; Coman and Rothenbuhler 2005: 1). Anthropology began to focus attention on media at a time when existing media studies research was beginning to pose anthropologically relevant questions (Dickey 1997: 415; Askew 2002). Among the uniquely anthropological contributions to media research is a focus on more in-depth, ethnographic study. Anthropological research also situates media within locally and culturally situated, specific individual lives, and works within a perspective that integrates media into the whole of modern life rather than attempting to study it in itself (Askew 2002: 3; Spitulnik 1993). In addition to this specific conjuncture of theoretical circumstances that paved the way for media anthropology to develop, another possible reason for anthropology's relatively late entrance into media studies is that media and other activities widely considered "leisure" were not seen by many anthropologists as a focus for serious study (Dickey 1997).

[6] Dickey (1997) and Ginsburg et al. (2002) discusses how anthropologists, particularly those from the culture and personality and visual anthropology schools, used media as a way of distally studying cultures they could not directly visit. Films, for example, were studied as cultural documents. Hortense Powdermaker's (1950) analysis of Hollywood filmmakers, *Hollywood the Dream Factory*, and her 1967 ethnography of the impact of mass media in Africa, *Copper Town;* Warner and Henry's (1948) study of radio daytime serials; and Worth and Adair's (1972) study of Navajo filmmaking are also notable exceptions to the dearth of early anthropological research on media (Spitulnik 1993: 298; Ginsburg et al. 2002: 3).

In her 1993 review "Anthropology and Mass Media," Debra Spitulnik wrote that "there is as yet no 'anthropology of mass media'" (p. 293). More than fifteen years later, "media anthropology" as a distinct field remains highly interdisciplinary and is not yet well defined. It represents a point of contact between anthropology, sociology, communication, cultural studies, media studies, and science and technology studies, among other fields. Some (e.g., Rothenbuhler 2008) argue that this interdisciplinarity and lack of definition are a good thing, and that media anthropology should not attempt to coalesce into a separate field. However, as more and more social interactions (at least in places where media and computer technology are widespread) take place not face-to-face but via a computer screen, telephone, or other technological device, and as more of the information we receive comes to us through media, it is important for anthropologists to consider the effects of the pervasive mediation of human interaction, experience, and information acquisition. Many more researchers have indeed done so in recent years; for instance, at least three well-known edited books on media anthropology have appeared within the last few years (Askew and Wilk 2002; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002; Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005).

Going Digital: The Anthropology of New Media

Having given a brief sketch of the history of media anthropology and media studies more generally, I now present a more in-depth review of the anthropology of "new," or digital and computer-based, media and how it fits into the field. There is definitely more to media studies than anthropology of new media. However, I will not attempt to review these studies in this paper, as my argument deals with critiques of scholarship specific to the concerns of new media and with the ways in which media studies informs this area of research specifically. Most reviews of media anthropology include among the scope of their field the anthropological study of digital and computer-based media (Askew and Wilk 2002; Dickey 1997; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002; Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005; Spitulnik 1993). However, in practice, it appears that few specifically anthropological studies deal with new media.

Much media anthropology has focused on the anthropological study of traditional mass media, primarily television, film, and radio (Dickey 1997: 414; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002). In addition to the relatively recent development of media anthropology more generally, one obvious reason for this is that the mainstream use of computer-based media is itself relatively new. Despite the lack of explicitly or specifically anthropological research regarding new media, however, a great deal of research concerned with the sociocultural aspects of new media exists. Much of the anthropological and non-anthropological research on new media has been reviewed by Wilson and Peterson in their discussion of the anthropology of online communities (2002).

New media are like other media in many ways, and thus many of the insights of media anthropology and media studies, as well as the critiques of these fields, apply to them. Both new and old media are, as discussed above, forms of technologically mediated human communication (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 454). Both categories thus differ to varying degrees from the face-to-face, small group or dyadic context that is paradigmatic for human speech (Peterson 2003: 4-6; Goffman 1983). This disconnect between interlocutors has consequences for the communication, both in general and in ways specific to the technologies themselves (Peterson 2003: 6). Due to the fact that specific new media technologies have a tendency to become obsolete rapidly, Wilson and Peterson (2002) advocate a focus on social processes, communicative practices, and general categories of communication rather than specific technologies (p. 453). As these are concerns of media studies more generally, this focus could be extended beyond studies of different new media technologies to comparisons across other types of media, providing links between studies of new and old media.

Still, as described in the previous section, there are a number of issues unique to new media studies. Although new media are theoretically more decentralized and democratic than traditional mass media, there are nevertheless discrepancies in access to the media and power to create content. Research on inequalities in access to the Internet – the "digital divide" – has dealt with socioeconomic and class-based barriers to access as well as the ways in which dominant ideologies inscribed in the languages and technologies of new media may exclude people (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 460). The structure of new media enables more individuals to be active producers of original media content as well as interpreters and negotiators of the meanings of messages in the

mass media. The categories of media producers and media consumers that underlay much traditional media research remain somewhat relevant, but these boundaries have begun to blur in the case of new media (Dickey 1997).

Additionally, online and virtual spaces, frequently conceptualized as potentially egalitarian and gender-neutral places because of their capacity for "anonymous" text-based or virtualized interactions, were seen by many early researchers in particular as offering the potential for infinitely malleable, multiple identities (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 457). While some newer studies (e.g., Miller and Slater 2000; Kendall 2002) have problematized this assumption by showing the ways in which aspects of offline identity such as race, gender, and cultural context enter into and are continuous with online sociality, the nature of online sociality does offer its participants some degree of possibility in the way of anonymity and deliberate identity construction, and these assumptions are still prevalent in much popular discourse.

To understand where new media studies have come from, as well as to set the stage for my argument regarding how they could productively proceed, it may be helpful to look at the history of research in the area. David Silver (2000) organizes the history of studies of online culture, or "cyberculture," between 1990 and 2000 into three stages: popular cyberculture, cyberculture studies, and critical cyberculture studies.

Popular cyberculture work consisted of articles, books, and essays written by journalists and technology enthusiasts during the early 1990s and earlier, when computers were beginning to enter everyday life. These works were generally more descriptive than critical. The term "cyberspace," taken from William Gibson's (1984) novel *Neuromancer,* came to be used for this new context of mediated sociality.

Cyberspace implied a space structured more by cultural symbols and imaginaries, as conveyed through digital media, than by the constraints of the actual, physical world. Popular cyberculture writers used the metaphor of the "frontier" for cyberspace, implying a novel space whose potential was largely untapped and which was for the most part unregulated. Attitudes toward cyberculture in popular cyberculture writings tended toward the extremes of utopian and dystopian attitudes toward the Internet and new media.

Hakken (1999) describes these extreme positive and negative attitudes toward the social changes associated with computers as, respectively, "compputropian" and "computopian" attitudes. He problematizes the assumption of a "computer revolution" that underlay much of the first works on cyberculture and that, despite skepticism from many newer researchers, continues in popular discourse as well as implicitly in some research. "Computer revolution" (CR) thought, whether expressing positive or negative attitudes toward the changes brought by computers, rests on the assumption that "computerization" or the spread of new computer artifacts has directly brought about or will directly bring about dramatic and for the most part inevitable and uncontrollable changes in society and culture (p. 15).

Hakken approaches CR thought skeptically, as a "myth" in the anthropological sense – i.e., a narrative that is often performed and rarely questioned (p. 18). One reason for his skepticism is that much CR thought is characterized by an inflated rhetoric and arises in advertising, which strives to tap into desire and imagination rather than to present fact. CR thought is also characterized by a relationship with "technicism," or the viewpoint which explains social change as primarily a consequence

rather than a cause of technological change. Additionally, its hypotheses have rarely, if at all, been tested by empirical research. Its use of terms such as "Information Society" or "technological" only or primarily to designate only those societies that have been affected by computerization indicates an implicit ethnocentrism. In reality, information and technology are integral to all human societies (pp. 18-20).

As an alternative to CR thought, Hakken proposes adopting an ethnographic rather than a positivist study of cyberspace and conceptualizing computing as a "technology actor network" in which humans, organizations, and artifacts are seen as mutually influential and as constituting one another . Such a perspective would address what he calls the "one-way causation" problem that characterizes some computing and cyberspace research, in which studies address the impacts of computers on society but fail to address society's impact on computer technology (p. 23).

Silver characterizes the next stage of research as cyberculture studies. While much of the discourse of the electronic frontier and computer revolution carried over into this newer research, cyberculture studies research included explorations into cyberspace, focusing in particular on virtual communities and online identities. In addition, much of it was conducted by academic researchers. Silver cites Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community* (2000) and Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen* (1995) as texts that exemplify this stage of research. Rheingold offers a history of the Internet and the World Wide 'Lectronic Link (WELL), an online community. He describes the ways in which this online community offers its members many of the same things – information, emotional support, opportunities to meet and socialize with others – as do real-world communities. Turkle, whose study I discuss in more detail

below, explores identity in online contexts, arguing that computers are "objects-to-think-with" that bring postmodernist ideas about the fragmented or multiple self into everyday life and experience. In the multi-user domains (MUDs) Turkle uses as case studies, users construct not only the space for interaction and the script or text of the interactions, but also, she argues, themselves, as they interact via multiple avatars that are as much like, or unlike, their real selves as they wish.

Both Rheingold and Turkle express positive, enthusiastic attitudes toward cyberspace. This enthusiasm encouraged a utopian view of cyberspace as a place of nearly infinite possibilities for community, identity, and creativity. However, the influx of new scholars from diverse fields, including sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, into the study of cyberculture during this time also encouraged a diverse array of methods, foci, and theoretical standpoints (Silver 2000: 23-24).[7]

Critical cyberculture studies, conducted beginning in the late 1990s, expanded the focus of cyberculture studies by beginning to contextualize online interactions within larger cultural and social systems. Silver identifies four areas of focus: social, cultural, and economic interactions online; narratives about these interactions; socioeconomic, cultural, and political phenomena that enable or discourage access to online interactions; and studies of the technology that enables online interactions and the process of its design (p. 25).

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[7] Silver discusses the development of cyborg anthropology, a new subfield stressing the connections between individuals, society, and computers (p. 24) and emphasizing the ways in which technology has, from early in the history of the human species, been so implicated in human existence as to constitute a core aspect of human being (Hakken 1999: 72). Silver cites as representative studies Escobar (1994) and Downey and Dumit (1998).

Much of critical cyberculture studies and later research on the social and cultural aspects of computer-based media, anthropological and otherwise, has taken place within or been influenced by two traditions: computer-mediated communication (CMC) research and science and technology studies (STS). CMC studies tend to focus on overt communicative behaviors, particularly text. This is because in the early days of the Internet, almost all online communication was rendered through written language. Although this is changing as video and audio technologies become less expensive, more accessible, and more sophisticated, text is still a major component of online interactions, and thus a major concern of CMC research.

However, this focus on text runs the risk of reproducing the excessive textualism that has been critiqued and largely rejected in media studies more broadly. As we know from more recent media studies research, meaning is not made only from the contents of media, but also from the contexts in which it is situated and the technologies through which it is rendered, and – as psychological anthropology reminds us – the individuals who interpret and negotiate it through unique lenses of cultural and personal experience. As for other factors that limited or determined communicative practices online, many of the early CMC studies that dealt with these considerations focused on technology rather than sociocultural context. Although some studies, particularly newer ones, relate CMC work to local contexts, much of the research remains situated in the primarily textual interactions of online communities. Thus, some CMC research, particularly earlier studies, has been critiqued for its lack of attention to culture (Wilson and Peterson 2002).

STS focuses on scientific knowledge and technological artifacts, which are often, as described above, analytically conceptualized as a single system called "technoscience." The focus is on technology more broadly rather than media technologies specifically. A central idea of STS is that technoscience is situated within particular contexts and is socially constructed. Science and technology are not part of an evolutionary or progressive process, but are informed by social processes. The model of change in technoscience is "multipath and multilevel" rather than unilineal (Escobar 1994). STS views the separations among technoscience, politics, nature, society, and culture as constructed rather than natural; in reality, these sets of issues are interrelated (Latour 1993). Actor-network theory, a theory within STS, conceptualizes research and development as a process of interaction between human and nonhuman actors (Escobar 1994: 211-212; Hakken 1999).

Wilson and Peterson (2002) describe a "missing link" between research on social, cultural, and language processes and research on ideologies of technology – a gap that, I would argue, is related to a need for CMC and STS research to enter into a richer and more productive dialogue with one another and with anthropology. These authors argue that anthropological studies of digital media, rather than being confined to an anonymous and separate cyberspace, should be situated within local and global social and cultural flows of information as well as studies of the media technologies involved (2002: 453). Much as it has done with the study of media more generally, as anthropology begins to move into the study of digital media, it is bringing with it a perspective that frames online interactions within a larger sociocultural frame, taking them out of the anonymity of cyberspace and situating them within shifting and

increasingly non-place-bound, yet culturally specific “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai 1991). It is also a perspective that construes human-created cyberspaces as places in their own right and spaces for emergent culture (Boellstorff 2008).

Ethnographies of New Media

In what follows, I briefly describe some of the specific anthropological studies that have been done in the area of digital media studies in order to give an example of their contributions, the scope of issues with which they have been concerned, and the perspectives that have informed them. I also identify some limitations of these studies, particularly with an eye toward how this research could be further informed by the theories and methods of psychological anthropology.

Boellstorff's (2008) *Coming of Age in Second Life* is based on his fieldwork as the avatar Tom Bukowski within the virtual world Second Life.[8] In it, Boellstorff examines the phenomenon of virtual worlds, "places of human culture realized by computer programs through the Internet" (p. 17). Boellstorff's stance is that virtual worlds like Second Life are in themselves places for human activity and culture and not simply reflections of "actual" worlds. Therefore, studies of them need not necessarily reference actual worlds, which Boellstorff defines as places of human culture not realized by computer programs. One of his goals in conducting this project has been to employ ethnographic methods as traditional as possible within this new context (p. 238). While a gap exists between the virtual and the actual, it is not, and should not be analytically treated as, a rigid dichotomy. "Synthesis, artifice, and fabrication" are constitutive of human life and culture in virtual and actual worlds; in many ways, humans have always been virtual (p. 21). The difference is that, in the current era, which Boellstorff (2008: 237) terms the "Age of Techne," we have developed media

[8] Second Life users, when creating an account, create a first name and choose from a list of surnames provided by the virtual world.

that not only do what media have always done – namely, transmit communication and alter the scale of human life via technology (McLuhan 1964) – but which also create complete new worlds that are in themselves places for human sociality. While Boellstorff acknowledges that, as many other studies have pointed out, virtual worlds remain linked to actual worlds, he concludes that "virtual worlds are [also] distinct domains of human being, deserving of study in their own right" (p. 238).

Kendall (2002) conducted an ethnography of a particular multi-user domain (MUD), a type of text-based interactive virtual space, which she calls BlueSky. She uses the metaphor of a "pub" as a way of conveying how this space functions for its members. Participants experience it as a place for socializing with friends, and thus BlueSky and the interactions within it reflect offline identities and interactions (p. 226). BlueSky's atmosphere is one in which gender identities (particularly masculinities, since it is a male-dominated space) are enacted within a particular class and race context (p. 4). A distinctive characteristic of BlueSky is that most participants know each other offline, and that membership is relatively stable. "Newbies," or new members, are frequently met with harassment, and those who attempt to remain anonymous are viewed with suspicion (pp. 133-137). Identity on BlueSky, as in the actual world, is connected with power relations (p. 137).

Kendall finds that BlueSky participants of all genders and sexual orientations generally relate to one another in ways that support an atmosphere dominated by heterosexual masculinity (p. 107), and class and race issues permeate the theoretically anonymous atmospheres of online interactions (p. 216). "Online relations," she writes, "do not occur in a cultural vacuum"– online interactions are grounded in the

assumptions and understandings of offline realities (p. 225). Not only do online relations intersect with positional identities rooted in the outside world, but, Kendall states, participants see themselves and their identities as continuous, consistent, and singular rather than fragmented, and performative aspects of identity online are much like performative aspects of identity in person (pp. 9, 138, 224).

Kelty (2008), beginning with questions arising from science and technology studies, offers a rethinking of notions of publics in a context related to new media, that of the "Free Software" or "Open Source" movement, which is "a set of practices for the distributed collaborative creation of software source code that is then made openly and freely available through a clever, unconventional use of copyright law" (p. 2). Kelty argues that the Free Software Movement signifies more general changes in the structure of power and knowledge. He describes the historically specific phenomena of the Internet and the Free Software movement and introduces the concept of recursive publics to explain their relationship. A recursive public is a public that is "concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public" (p. 3) – i.e., with ensuring that the ground on which its interaction takes place can exist as a free space for discourse. Kelty's project offers contributions at the empirical level as a description of how his informants are interpreting and negotiating the meanings of Free Software. In the area of methodology, *Two Bits* serves as an example of a study of distributed, decentralized phenomena like the Internet and Free Software. At the theoretical level, Kelty refines debates over the nature of concepts such as publics, public spheres, and social imaginaries in a specific context (pp. 18-23).

Danet (2001) examines the phenomenon of playfulness on the Internet in the contexts of e-mail; Internet Relay Chat (IRC), a primarily text-based context for online conversations; digital greeting cards; ASCII art; and "font frenzy," or an interest in collecting, creating, and displaying typographic fonts (pp. 36-42). Her interest is in expressive as well as informational activities in online communication, an area of research which developed in the 1990s. She examines these phenomena in the context of the notion of "bi-stability" of texts – meaning that communicators look not only "through" the text as an indication of the writer's communicative intent, but also "at" the text as an image, for instance, by perceiving text as symbols and artistic creations (pp. 6-7). The central question of Danet's work, as she states it, is "what happens to patters of usage when writing loses its artifactual nature and becomes digital…what happens to patterns of inscribed communication when it loses its artifactual nature and becomes digital and multimedia?" (p. 13). She also makes the case that some of these practices, particularly IRC art, can be seen as a type of incipient "popular" or "folk" art (p. 348). In addition, she writes that she intends the book to serve as a "time capsule" documenting the pioneering stages of text-based and multimedia internet communication in the mid-to-late 1990s (p. 43).

Miller and Slater (2000) investigate how Internet technologies have been assimilated in the particular context of Trinidad. They problematize the notions of virtuality – "the capacity of communicative technologies to constitute rather than mediate realities and to constitute relatively bounded spheres of interaction" – and cyberspace, which emphasize the ways in which the Internet is a place set apart from "real" life. Instead, they take as their focus the continuities between the Internet and the

local cultural setting, operating on the assumption that "the Internet is continuous with and embedded in other social spaces" (p. 5). In this case, they begin with the need to account for the observation that Trinidadians seem to have a "'natural affinity' for the Internet" (p. 2). Their informants have taken to Internet technology with enthusiasm, using it to integrate family relations although many Trinidadians are living abroad and to enact conventionally Trini forms of chat and sociality. More broadly, this relates to a central problem of studying material culture: the seemingly natural fit of objects within a constructed, historical social order.

Miller and Slater point out that elements of virtuality appear in other technological media and suggest that it is rooted in sociality rather than being new or inherent to the Internet (p. 6). The phenomenon of the Internet in Trinidad cannot be reduced to either "Trini culture" or "Internet culture." In line with studies of material culture and with theories from science and technology studies, they characterize both humans and technologies as active. The Internet, in Trinidad or anywhere else, can only be understood as an irreducible "hybrid" of human and material agents. The authors concern themselves with four dynamics between Trinidadians and Internet technology: dynamics of objectification, or engagement with the Internet as material culture; dynamics of mediation, or engagement with new media as media; dynamics of normative freedom, or engagement with the possibilities of freedom provided by the Internet; and dynamics of positioning, or people's engagement with the ways in which the Internet positions them in global networks and flows (p. 10). "This is not a book about the Internet as a technology that is then appropriated by another thing called

society," they write. "It is a book about material culture, which can never be reduced to some prior subject or object" (p. 8).

In the interdisciplinary tradition of much media research, these studies are informed by anthropology, ethnography, and various experience with and understandings of media, as well as the diverse fields of material culture studies, science and technology studies, linguistics, and sociology. One contribution of the specifically anthropological or ethnographic perspective has been to emphasize the continuity of virtual spaces with offline spaces and the ways in which experience and activity in these spaces blurs together and overlaps. All of the authors, while acknowledging that there is some sort of separation between the virtual and actual worlds, problematize the notion of a rigid boundary between the two. Most choose to focus their studies on the ways in which the two are integrated rather than to examine phenomena in virtual contexts as if they were separate spaces. Even Boellstorff, who makes his argument regarding virtual worlds as places of culture by focusing on the Second Life virtual world in and of itself, acknowledges that his distinction is an analytic rather than an essential one – indeed, as he (and Hakken) assert, humans have always been virtual in their use of technology as an integral part of human life. In taking this perspective, anthropological studies make it apparent that new media and virtual spaces are not merely texts or spaces in a separate, acultural cyberspace, but are embedded within webs of meaning linking them to other social, cultural, historical, and individual phenomena. This is not to say, however, that computer technology and new media merely reproduce more of the same with regards to social and cultural life. Although the technologies and the ways in which they are developed and employed are

continuous with the totality of human life, they are indeed new and historically specific phenomena.

Points of Convergence: Studying the Dialogue between Media and Minds

While interviews with participants in online interaction give glimpses of how they perceive themselves and the media- and technology-permeated and constituted social worlds in which they live, from the standpoint of psychological anthropology, something is lacking. The interviews are sufficient for the authors' purposes but lack the in-depth individual focus of person-centered ethnography and psychological anthropology's understandings of the self, subjectivity, and identity.

A notable exception to the dearth of specifically psychological research is the work of Sherry Turkle. Turkle's *Life on the Screen* (1995) was published significantly earlier than these other ethnographic studies, and additionally has more of a psychological and sociological than specifically anthropological focus than many of them. However, her methods include ethnography and participant observation – she integrates stories of her own experience with MUDs alongside her research findings and her informants' accounts. Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2007: 10) situate *Life on the Screen*, with its emphasis on the changing nature of modern and postmodern subjects, within contemporary traditions of anthropological writing on subjectivity, as it focuses on the subject and subjectivity as "dynamically formed and transformed entities" rather than static or universal forms. Her questions, which are more substantially psychological than many of those asked in the current body of anthropological literature on computer-based media, are particularly relevant to the concerns of this paper. Thus I use her study to lead into the section on how psychological anthropology and digital media studies could usefully converge.

Turkle argues that the personal computer and cyberspace are both tool and mirror, something we use in our daily lives as well as a source of models of self and mind. These new models are characterized not just by experiences on the Internet, but by eroding boundaries between "the real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unitary and the multiple self," in both research and life in general (p. 10). MUDs – multi-user domains – are virtual spaces in which people can navigate, socialize, and create, and they are the focus of Turkle's study. They are a new form of community, a new kind of game, and a new form of collaborative literature. Players not only create the setting, but construct themselves through social interaction (p. 12).

Turkle interviews MUD players who perceive their lives as "cycling through" MUDs and real life. Each identity is contained in a window, and these windows have become a metaphor for the self as multiple, with offline life in some cases perceived as just one more window (pp. 12-14). The appeal of MUDs, chat rooms, and other online forums for interaction includes real-time interaction, anonymity, and the ability to construct an identity as much like, or unlike, one's "real self" as one wishes (p. 14). Computer-mediated worlds are providing "objects-to-think-with" for, and means of experiencing, postmodern theories of selfhood in which the self is conceptualized as multiple and the exchange of signifiers constitutes interaction (pp. 15-17). In addition, computers are also prompting a rethinking of what it means to be alive and to be human, as Turkle's interviews with children who describe "artificial life" objects like robots and creatures in computer simulations as "sort of alive" show (p. 172).

This "postmodern" view of computing is characterized by terms like "decentered," "fluid," nonlinear," and "opaque," and encourages a "culture of

simulation." Simulated computer environments such as cyberspace encourage a focus on learning through surfaces. Such surfaces are not perceived as reducible to the underlying code or data. Simulation contrasts with modernist computing and its "culture of calculation," which is characterized by terms like "linear," "logical," and "hierarchical" and by the presence of understandable, comprehensible depths through which one can come to better understand the computer system (pp. 17-19). While simulations themselves are not necessarily new, simulation as a broader cultural trend seems to have come about only in recent decades. The trend toward a culture of simulation, Turkle writes, encourages several responses: resignation, or accepting simulation on its own terms; denial, or rejecting it as detrimental to education and science; or acknowledging and learning about simulation and using it to develop social criticism (pp. 71-73).

Turkle supports these arguments by including interviews with participants in online communities throughout her book. Many of them describe their experiences with computer technology and how it has affected their thinking. Her work raises important psychological questions – what are the cultural models associated with the proliferation of computers in everyday life, and how might they be impacting the way people understand themselves and the world? Of the empirical studies I have examined here, Turkle's probably comes closest to addressing psychological anthropology's methods and concerns. However, although she asks many of the questions that would be relevant to a study of new media from the perspective of psychological anthropology, there are some ways in which her approach could be extended.

The title of the book indicates that what is being dealt with, or at least the starting point, is "life *on* the screen" more so than the subjectivities of the individuals behind it or an integrated experiential whole that encompasses both. The degree to which Turkle's, and her informants', claims about the self reflect their actual experience is unclear. She has been criticized, for example, for focusing primarily on the multiple and decentered dimensions of experience of the self. Anita Hammer, for example, argues that the multiple identities Turkle describes are not a qualitatively new form of identity, but merely a new way of enacting existing collective activities such as myth and ritual (2005). Additionally, this formulation seems to emphasize the opposition between the virtual and the actual (Turkle 1995: 324), a distinction which many anthropologists studying new media have, as discussed above, problematized.

Many of Turkle's interviews provide fairly detailed information on her interviewees as individuals with unique life situations and psychological motivations rather than simply as participants in online activities (pp. 187-209). There is some description of the cultural context – for instance, Turkle situates her study within the history of computing and artificial intelligence research – although it is not as detailed as that given in many of the other new media ethnographies. However, there seems to be a lack of reflexive attention to the interview process itself. The reader has no way of knowing what kinds of questions Turkle asked her informants, or in what contexts and to what degree the questions and their answers reflect her own categories and understandings versus those of the informants.

Turkle conceptualizes computer objects and concepts as "objects to think with." However, these objects are objects in the world. As psychological anthropology

reminds us, physical and cultural objects in the world do not unproblematically act as conduits for bringing ideas into the mind. Additionally, she examines the effects of computers and the culture of simulation on the mind, but the opposite side of the question – how individual minds influence or interpret computers and the culture of simulation – is less explored. A psychological anthropology perspective could introduce more focus on the ways in which individual informants come to interpret these "objects to think with" by drawing on their own backgrounds and perspectives, and on how experience with these objects and in these contexts helps to shape their subjectivity.

In any case, Turkle's psychological focus has been the exception rather than the norm in studies of new media. Despite the recent proliferation of anthropological and other research in the social and cultural dimensions of new media, little has been done on the specifically psychological, experiential, and cognitive dimensions of computer-mediated experience. Although identity has been a significant focus within digital media research for some time, much of this research has focused on either the performative rather than experienced aspects of identity or on the relationship, whether continuous or contrasting, between real-world and virtual-world identity (Wilson and Peterson 2002: 407-408). As anthropology enters digital media studies, it is beginning to bring the study of these interactions back from the separate realm of cyberspace and into the totality of human life. This is apparent from the fact that most of the anthropological studies on new media have complicated the virtual/real binary, showing that the two aspects of life blend into one another and are linked to other social, cultural, and historical phenomena. However, anthropology also needs to examine in more depth

how cyberspace experience integrates with its participants' own subjective experience and understandings of their total worlds, selves, and lives.

Psychological anthropology is particularly well situated to deal with this perspective. Psychological anthropology's scope is much broader than just these public, performed aspects of identity. It is also concerned with subjective experience and with the contested, incomplete, and idiosyncratic process by which representations in the world are incorporated into the mind and by which psychological processes in the mind influence overt behavior.

Daniel Touro Linger's concept of "virtual subjectivities," set forth in *Anthropology Through a Double Lens* (2005), may help clarify what precisely studies of the anthropology of digital media may be lacking and could gain from the perspectives of psychological anthropology. Linger posits an anthropology that, rather than operating according to a model that separates the realm of society and culture from that of the individual and privileges the former, looks through a "double lens" at human worlds conceived of as intersecting between public and personal worlds (pp. 12-13). Linger does not argue against the division of public and personal per se, but rather against versions of it that overly reify this distinction, failing to see the interconnections and privileging one over the other. While a focus on culture raises important questions, it tends to treat individual minds and experience as derivative of cultural phenomena. Empirical evidence from ethnography reveals a gap between culture's abstractions and specific individual lives.

Ethnographic "thick description" substitutes the ethnographer's techniques of meaning construction for those of the people being described, reflecting the meaning-

making processes of the anthropologist placed in an unfamiliar environment – with his or her "own particular biographical, emotional, and conceptual baggage" (p. 53) – rather than those of the people who actually inhabit that environment. These descriptions are thus "virtual subjectivities" – that is to say, "no one's subjectivity" (p. 15). Virtual subjectivities represent an account of meaning that fails to take account of real, living people and thus "cannot reliably infer thoughts, feelings, or motivations" (p. 51). The problem with analyses that begin at the level of culture and produce virtual subjectivities, such as Simmel's account of modern urban subjectivity and Jameson's account of postmodern global subjectivity, which Linger addresses in chapter 3 of his book, is that they are resistant to empirical evidence about actual subjectivities. Inferring virtual subjectivity from historical and cultural evidence produces a circular, closed theory that is difficult to refute. "If history and culture make subjectivity, and if subjectivity is inferred from historical and cultural evidence, the circle is closed," Linger writes (p. 74).

To remedy this problem, Linger advocates the use of person-centered ethnography, which uses empirical evidence from in-depth, face-to-face interviews, to look at how unique individuals make sense of their worlds and the public representations in them. "[S]uch research reveals that people affirm, transform, negate, manipulate, and go beyond the public representations that are the objects of conventional symbolic analyses" – that is to say, they reveal a gap between the public and the personal (p. 51). He introduces four terms to help frame his model of human worlds at the intersection of public and personal worlds. These include that of an "arena of meaning" in which public and personal dimensions of meaning are located

and continuously negotiated (p. 16); an accommodating rather than deterministic "bridging theory" to connect understandings of public and personal worlds (p. 17); "singular lives" lived by individuals, which shape their subjectivity and meaning-making processes; and "reflective consciousness," an intrinsic human capability that allows people to turn experience into "objects of reflection and refashioning" (p. 18).

Most research on new media, as stated above in the previous section, has taken technological artifacts and overt communicative behavior as its starting points and major concerns. In the absence of specifically psychologically concerned research, two assumptions, or sets of "virtual subjectivities," regarding the psychology, experience, and cognition of individuals in media can be discerned or inferred. The first is that the cognitive and experiential dimensions of experience with digital media involve dramatic psychological changes among users, on a parallel with the sociocultural changes associated with these media. The second is that, because computer-mediated experience is continuous with and co-existent with real-world experience, it is associated with few or no unique cognitive and experiential changes. From the standpoint of psychological anthropology, making these kinds of assumptions is problematic. In the absence of in-depth research concerning how unique individuals make meaning in the contexts of new media, descriptions of the subjectivities of these individuals may represent virtual subjectivities which are inferred from explicit, observable cultural discourses rather than representing the subjectivities of real individuals (Linger 2005).

The insights of psychological anthropology show us that individuals do not absorb culture from their environments unproblematically. Meaning is not inherent in

cultural symbols or media representations, but is produced and negotiated in the interaction between the world and unique individuals shaped by culture and idiosyncratic personal experience. In addition, information from cultural and personal experience does not wholly constitute selfhood; other dimensions, such as unconscious experience and motivation, are also important. Thus subjectivity cannot be inferred from cultural discourse, but must be studied in itself – as in Strauss' (1997) interviews with "postmodern fragmented subjects," which showed that their individual experiences are neither totally cohesive nor completely determined by pervasive and conflicting social discourses.

While neither of these virtual subjectivities is necessarily an inaccurate categorization of public representations, psychological anthropology must examine both of them for the processes by which they are used and interpreted within singular individual lives. Without supplementing the existing body of anthropological research on new media with studies that begin from the informants' understandings and models, it is difficult to know what their own experiences of the technologies, contents, and contexts of new media really are. Bringing media studies into dialogue with the theories, methods, and perspectives of psychological anthropology will likely show that the subjective dimensions of computer-mediated experience are more complex than they may appear to be from many existing studies.

Broadly defined, psychological anthropology examines the complex relationship between social and cultural forms in the world and the thoughts, understandings, experiences, and behaviors of individuals. Psychological anthropology deals with culture, society, and individuals, and the complex dialectical relationship among them

(Lindholm 2001) and the ways in which cultural forms and knowledge are internalized by individuals and used to make meaning out of experience. It is concerned with the nature of selfhood and personhood, the mind, subjective experience, and processes of identity, and the degree to which they are culturally constituted. It also examines variation and similarity in individuals, both within and among cultures, in regards to these issues.

One important lesson to be taken from psychological anthropology is that culture "in the world" and culture "in the mind" are intimately linked, yet cannot be equated (Shore 1998). Culture is not simply absorbed unproblematically by individuals. Each person internalizes different cultural values and forms to different degrees and with varying degrees of intrapsychic conflict (e.g. Spiro 1978, 1996). Cultural norms, values, and models are linked with individual personality and behavior, but the two are not the same thing (e.g., D'Andrade 1990). Cultural change, such as that associated with the rapid proliferation of digital media, does not directly bring about or simply equate with psychological and cognitive change, just as, according to STS researchers, science and technology do not autonomously induce social and cultural change (Escobar 1994: 211-212). The process is complex and is mediated by cultural context and individual psychology.

It is clear that the individual mind is more than a device for processing information from the outside world. [9] Drew Westen, in a 2001 article arguing for the

[9] However, the fact that many cognitive science models of the mind and of information transfer are drawn from the world of computer science (Westen 2001: 32) is indicative of the degree to which computer metaphors both shape and are shaped by metaphors of the mind.

integration of cognitive science and psychoanalytic perspectives, argues that "we need to recognize that people feel, wish, fear, and think, and any model of mind that fails to integrate all of these processes and their interactions is going to be highly flawed" (p. 33). In addition, some anthropologists have made use of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories to infer the nature of the unconscious mind, as well as how unconscious factors impact conscious experience, how people manage intrapsychic conflict and interpersonal interaction, and what motivates people to behave in certain ways (e.g., Horowitz 1988; Paul 1989; Ewing 1992). The influence of psychoanalysis on psychological anthropology emphasizes meaning, subjectivity, and interpersonal relationships, offering explanations for how and why cultural models come to be internalized, how they come to influence behavior, and how people handle conflicting cultural models (Westen 2001: 36-42). Flieger (2005) argues, counter to the surface-oriented postmodernist theories that have informed much study on computer-based experience and interaction, that psychoanalytic "depth psychology" remains relevant.

Much debate has taken place within anthropology about the nature of the self and the degree to which both concepts and experiences of the self, and the self at both intrapsychic and interpersonal levels (Ewing 1991) vary cross-culturally. Many anthropologists (e.g., Ewing 1990, Hollan 1992, Spiro 1993) have argued that notions of an egocentric "Western" self and a sociocentric "non-Western" self are overly simplistic and dualistic. Selves in all cultures have elements of both egocentricity and sociocentricity. The stability and fluidity of the self have also been debated. Ewing (1990), for example, argues that representations of the self are contextual and culturally shaped, although the self is experienced as cohesive at any given moment. Hollan

(2001a) conceptualizes the self as a multi-leveled "self-system" encompassing the structure of the brain, intrapsychic processes, and interpersonal interactions (p. 539). Holland et al. (1998) have theorized how identities – senses of oneself that are conceived and lived in relation to social and cultural worlds – are formed and affect experience, understanding, and behavior.

In the context of my arguments on new media studies, all of this makes the point that it is both difficult and inappropriate to make generalizations about subjectivity, in relation to media or otherwise. There is no one model of the self as new media participant, nor do new media have monolithic effects. Rather, each person makes meaning of, and is affected by, these media uniquely.

Person-centered ethnography allows anthropologists to understand not just descriptive information about a culture, but also the experience of people living within it. This type of interviewing helps elicit information on the experiences of individuals, local concepts of behavior and experience, and how the two relate (e.g., Hollan 2001b; Levy and Hollan 1998; Levy 1973; Parish 1996). As Linger (2005) states, its purpose is to help fieldworkers "explore how people go about making sense of the world into which they were cast" (p. 51).

A key difference between person-centered interviewing and other types of anthropological interviewing is that person-centered interviewing engages individuals as both informants – "expert witnesses" on some practice, belief, ritual, or other facet of their community or culture – and respondents, or objects of study in and of themselves as individuals with unique perspectives and histories making sense of these cultural forms (Levy and Hollan 1998: 336). While traditional ethnography's descriptions of a

culture, community, or society are primarily from the anthropological observer's point of view, person-centered ethnography focuses on eliciting what is important to the individuals who live within the culture (Hollan 2001: 48). We cannot, Levy and Hollan write, simply equate the private with the mental or internal and the public with the external (Levy and Hollan 1998: 336).

As Linger's (2005) notion of "arenas of meaning" in which the public and personal are negotiated illustrates, the concepts are intertwined and the relationship is complex. For the person-centered ethnographer, the interviewee is both, and equally importantly, an informant – a public persona living according to cultural norms – and a respondent, an individual able to reflect upon, participate in, and contest aspects of culture, sometimes all at the same time. By taking the individual and his or her experience as the starting point, the ethnographer can gain an understanding of the interviewees' own categorizations and values (Hollan 2001: 49). While existing media research has not made much use of the theories and methods of person-centered ethnography, there has been acknowledgement of a need for something like it. Appadurai (1991), for instance, speaking of the increasing need in anthropology for models of global, nonlocal "ethnoscapes" comprising shifting flows of people and cultural representations rather than static and bounded cultures, discusses the growing importance of imagination given that mass media, among other globalizing factors, now allow people to imagine a wider set of possible lives than they had previously been able to. He thus advocates a greater role for the study of individual lives in anthropology.

Discussions of what the psychological dimensions of mediated experience might look like can be found in Shore (1996) and Zengotita (2005). These two authors raise

the possibility that cultural changes associated with media, particularly new media, may be affecting the way people in societies where these media are ubiquitous in everyday life experience the world and conceptualize selfhood and identity.

Both accounts shed light on a particular cultural schema, and associated model of the self, within American culture which, they argue, are related to pervasive media experience. According to this model, people come to view the self as performative, self-creating, and malleable. Rather than having their subjectivity formed and experienced in an environment dominated by one or a few hegemonic, relatively stable, and salient cultural models or schemas, a person who is immersed in media representations throughout his or her life is exposed to a wide array of possible lives. He or she takes up these representations, which are viewed as more or less equally valuable and viable options, as optional aspects of his or her identity. The representations are taken up as, and the identity formed from, discontinuous parts, not bound to existing forms or master narratives. The authors each convey a sense that some human capabilities for meaning production and authentic experience may be lost in this view of selfhood and subjectivity. These two accounts, taking psychological concerns as much of their focus, represent useful starting points for a critique of media anthropology and media studies' lack of research on psychological aspects of media experience. However, the arguments are more abstract than empirical, taken from cultural ideologies rather than accounts of individual subjectivities. Other aspects of psychological anthropology, such as person-centered ethnography, might help to bring empirical research and more cultural perspective to this account of the self, helping to

ensure that anthropology does not invoke virtual subjectivities as it enters the study of virtual spaces.

Zengotita argues that, as media have become more ubiquitous, more and more aspects of human life have come to be represented in, or "covered" by, the media. Multimedia news coverage, for example, allows people in geographically distant locales to have instantaneous knowledge of events around the world. The impression the viewer gets is one of being personally addressed and of actually being there rather than hearing about the event via media (p. 7). Images of more and more aspects of human experience – birth, death, education, relationships, and so on – have been presented in increasing frequency in books, movies, news, reality television, Web sites, and other media. As the use of these media becomes more integral to everyday life, people are thus exposed to, and surrounded by, multiple and diverse models of almost every human experience (p. 9).

Zengotita argues that, for people immersed in these images, authentic, unmediated experience has become harder to access. The real and the representational have become increasingly fused, with the result being an increasing virtualization of the real world from the perspective of the mediated person. The pervasive images "flatter" the mediated person, representing the world as addressed to them rather than existing in and of itself. As a result, the images in media are seen as neither real nor virtual, but as options. People immersed in media representations seem to have infinite options in regards to lifestyles, careers, identities, and other aspects of life. However, because the options are so easily accessed, and because the dominant ethos involves an emphasis on choice among the options rather than committing to, and making meaning from,

realities that must be contended with, the choices are more representational than meaningful. "You are completely free to choose because it doesn't matter what you choose," Zengotita writes (p. 17).

The process of creating and maintaining a mediated identity is lifelong, and people growing up in mediated societies are enculturated into a society that emphasizes external, public performance and surface over the inner self, experience, and depth psychology. The resulting self, which is still a performance but which eventually comes to feel stable and natural, is seen as chosen rather than shaped by circumstance or by cultural and personal experience (p. 126). While the use of technological mediation for communicating and representing the self is nothing new, Zengotita argues that there are not only now more representations and options, but that the increasing fusion of representations and options with reality means that people no longer routinely distinguish between the two (p. 21).

He locates the roots of this trend in the ideologies of modernity more broadly. The narrative of modernity has been one of overcoming the human condition through technology, by consciously shaping the world and, ultimately, ourselves. It has been a story of developing and maintaining the illusion of control, even over what was previously seen as (and is in reality) determined by forces beyond human control, by framing the world as made up of resources for human use. The narrative is one of progress, although in reality we do not know where things are going and where our technologies will take us. The ideologies of modernity, taken to their logical extreme, might look like many of the trends Zengotita describes: a turn toward pastiche as

original experience and thought no longer becomes possible (since everything has been represented and mediated already) and the possibility for literal self-creation.

The "modularity schema" that Bradd Shore (1996) identifies as underlying many aspects of American culture informs a particular model of the self, one that shares many of the characteristics of Zengotita's mediated self. Modularity conceptualizes complex wholes as made up of elementary units that can be recombined into a virtually infinite array of new patterns. Some characteristics of modularity, according to Shore, are that the meanings of complex wholes are attributed to the organization of their "building blocks" rather than to anything essential within them; an emphasis on experimentation and change; a focus on surfaces rather than interiors; and the notion that all configurations are more or less equal rather than one being preferable to another (p. 151). Shore also identifies the modularity schema as associated with ideologies of modernity, having arisen out of industrial production and individualistic Enlightenment ideas (pp. 130-133).

The digital coding used by computers brings the modularity schema into the organization of information and communication. The manipulation of text, as influenced by computer technology, has become increasingly modularized and has given users an increasing degree of control over the information in the text and the way in which it is organized. Speech became linear written text, and text became word-processing technologies which framed language as made up of chunks that could be individually manipulated. Word-processing software eventually paved the way for hypertext, an organizational system which allows the user to be completely free of linguistic forms, organizing information by concepts that he or she finds useful (pp.

139-143). Modularization is further apparent in the "windows" that structure many desktop environments: users can switch back and forth at will between windows.

Shore characterizes this feeling of total control as the "neuromantic frame of mind," a sense of mastery over existence that is consistent with a view of the world as a collection of resources for humans to manipulate (pp. 143-144). Virtual reality, sensory immersion in a world that is completely human-created and completely computer-simulated, represents the most extreme form of this frame of mind – in this reproduction of the world, everything really is modular and designed for human ends (pp. 144-145). The problem with this frame of mind, Shore writes, is that the world is treated as a resource for use rather than something that is just there. Another problem is the potential effects on perception and cognition: viewing the world as made up of fragmented, disconnected pieces rather than complex wholes may challenge the human capacity to integrate experience meaningfully (p. 157).

The concept of the person associated with modularity is one that is malleable and self-created. "Personality," a term that once referred to stable dispositions that constituted a person's inner self, has increasingly come to refer to something more along the lines of self-presentation. While transformation of the self has been possible to some degree in many other contexts, physical and behavioral self-presentation in this model is seen as something that can be controlled and manipulated according to one's own will through the use of self-help techniques, plastic surgery, and other technologies (p. 150). Identity and personality are increasingly seen as a set of configurable, commodifiable collections of surface features (p. 150).

For both Zengotita and Shore, this concept of the person is characterized by an element of choice. Life viewed as optional lifestyles, rather than contending with and making meaning from immutable realities, means that almost nothing is seen as permanent or inherent to the reflective self – that is to say, the entity that makes the choices among the different representations. Identity – one's concept of oneself – is linked with external representations rather than qualities perceived to be inherent to the self (Shore 1996: 150). The view of the "mediated" self is, in terms of content, only a surface representation. Self-representations can be multiple and inconsistent, and one can change who one is perceived to be by changing one's self-representation. Implied, although not directly stated, in this view of the person is a concept of the agentive component of the self, the entity which manipulates the representations. This entity is believed to create identities within a cultural context that represents not a set of possibilities and limits that can be used creatively, but a set of *options*. To reiterate and paraphrase Zengotita (2005: 17), one can choose anything, and yet it does not matter what one chooses.

This part of the self is thus taken to be a self made of pure and unconstrained reflexivity: inherently free of content, perpetually self-conscious, and entirely self-creating. It is a sort of extreme version of the "Western" individualistic self, which Geertz, in his much-quoted definition, described as "a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background" (Geertz 1984: 126).

Shore and Zengotita, considered together, provide a carefully considered outline of a particular model of the self, specific to American culture but useful for thinking about the relationship between the self and media anywhere that media are pervasive. However, only studies of real mediated subjects can help examine the degree to which this public model reflects the subjectivities of individuals. Shore and Zengotita's studies are among a few that deal with the specifically psychological dimensions of digital media anthropology. As such, they serve as provocative and useful starting points for thinking about psychological anthropology questions in regards to digital media. However, neither author has included research on the unique individuals inhabiting their mediated worlds. Research testing these claims – examining whether individuals do in fact experience themselves as fragmented, malleable, and performative – would help to replace the virtual subjectivities contained in these accounts with actual ones.

The problem is that virtually all of the research on new media and anthropology seems to be, to some degree, suffering from the problem of virtual subjectivity which Linger identifies. Many of the existing ethnographic studies provide cultural grounding and context, framing digital media studies as a legitimate object of anthropological study and bringing anthropological perspectives to bear on it, but do not deal in depth with concerns specific to the study of psychology and subjectivity. Turkle's study asks psychologically relevant questions, but could benefit from more of the in-depth consideration of the cultural grounding, and reflexivity regarding the interview process, which characterize much of person-centered ethnography. Shore and Zengotita's theories, based in the traditions of psychological and particularly cognitive

anthropology, are useful as a starting point as they work within the concerns and frameworks of psychological anthropology to outline a particular cultural model of the self associated with pervasive media. However, these studies also suffer from the problem of virtual subjectivities in that they are abstract rather than supported by empirical research with actual people.

While existing anthropological research has brought cultural theory into the discussion of virtual communities, finding culture in both the relation of actual-world contexts to virtual worlds (e.g., Miller and Slater 2000) and within virtual worlds in their own right (e.g., Boellstorff 2008), my argument is that the study of new media needs to encompass not only the social and cultural context in which it is embedded, but also the perspectives of the individuals who interact with it and what meanings they, as socially and culturally situated, unique individuals, make of it. From existing research that begins with understandings of new media at the public level and moves into psychological questions from there, we can gain an understanding of the dimensions of experience with new media that are hypercognized – i.e., culturally standardized, simplified, and public (Levy 1984: 227).

Developing additional research that begins from the experience of individual participants and uses psychological anthropology theories and methods can help us to gain a more complete understanding that encompasses in addition the hypocognized – i.e., personal, tacit, and unconscious – dimensions of the experience of individuals surrounded by new media. As Bock (1999: 1-3) argues, "all anthropology is psychological," because anthropology concerns the activities of, and is carried out by,

individuals varying in personality, self-awareness, perception, motivation, and cognition.

Psychological anthropology, brought into a dialogue with emerging anthropological studies of new media, can contribute a more complex, culturally nuanced, and empirically grounded understanding of the relationship between the sociocultural and the psychological dimensions of the cultural changes associated with digital media. Psychological anthropology can raise questions about, for instance, what motivates people to get involved in (or avoid) computer-mediated interaction. It can help us understand how individuals make use of existing psychological and cultural resources such as cultural models and metaphors to help comprehend new technologies and the associated experiences, as well as how concepts drawn from these new technologies are brought to bear on other aspects of experience. The contributions of psychological anthropology can help clarify the relationship among, and respective roles of, culture, individual psychology, and technology in how people understand, use, and experience computer-based media. It can also help us better understand and theorize the subjective experience of self and sociality from behind a computer screen.

Conversely, studies of the interactions within digital media can also inform psychological anthropology. Much anthropological research and theory, including that of psychological anthropology, has been formulated within the context of face-to-face human interaction and all of its limitations and affordances. Goffman (1983), for instance, identified the face-to-face domain as the “interaction order,” or paradigm for social interaction. Computer-mediated interaction is by definition not face-to-face interaction (Spitulnik 2000) and thus it challenges the paradigm of everyday social

interaction. It is in part a context for fantasy and for imagining possible (and not-so-possible) lives, and in these ways it differs from such social interaction.

Yet it is, undoubtedly, partly analogous to social interaction as well. Digitally mediated sociality, particularly as technology becomes able to constitute worlds that are in themselves places for sociality and culture (Boellstorff 2008), is not just the exchange of information, but undoubtedly also a space for interpersonal and intersubjective interaction. Digitally mediated experience provides a context for projecting one's fantasies onto the screen – for giving embodiment to aspects of oneself that would have otherwise only existed within the mind. It provides a tool for imagining other possible worlds and lives, and in this way it is much like other media. However, the fantasy it enables is both individual and collective. The virtual world is populated with dynamic, unpredictable others. Possible actions, played out within this collective, intersubjective fantasy, have meanings and consequences not only for oneself, but for these others. This is an aspect of new media that is implicit, but does not seem to be explicitly brought out, in much of the existing research. The relationships and emotions described in Turkle's (1995), Boellstorff's (2008), and Kendall's (2005) ethnographic studies of digital media, just to name a few, speak to this.

The question of what sort of interaction or sociality takes place in mediated environments, however, has yet to be answered. There are important differences between these interactions and face-to-face interaction, among the most obvious being, in mediated interactions, the attenuation of nonverbal information and the capacity to communicate easily across space and time. As more interactions take place with varying degrees of technological mediation, psychological anthropology must come into

dialogue with studies of this mediation in order to ensure its continued relevance. How is an anthropologist to understand, for instance, the person-centered interview process as conducted in a text-based virtual environment without benefit of nonverbal interactions – indeed, is it even possible to conduct such an interview in this type of environment?

Given these differences, psychological anthropologists must begin to consider computer-mediated interactional contexts to ensure that their theories can remain relevant in and be adapted to these new interactional paradigms. In addition, they must consider the possibility that new theories about the relationship between psychology and culture can be developed by studying human interaction and socialization within computer-mediated contexts.

Another possibility is that, as media and other technologies facilitate flows of people, ideas, and media representations across geographical and cultural boundaries, the traditional concepts of bounded places and cultures that characterized much of early anthropology are becoming less relevant, and individuals are becoming more important as a locus where these flows intersect (Appadurai 1991). In this case, it could be argued that the locus of social and cultural analysis could most productively be situated at the level of the human being rather than at the cultural or social level. From this standpoint, psychological anthropology, which seeks to understand culture by beginning at the level of the individual, becomes a crucial source of knowledge for social and cultural studies of media.

Media convergence refers to the process of multiple media or technological systems cooperating to deliver multimedia content (Lawson-Borders 2006: 4). I see

convergence as an important metaphor for the future of both psychological anthropology and media anthropology. Rather than existing as separate bodies of knowledge focusing on separate content – one examining culture and the mind and the other looking at culture and media – anthropological studies of digital media and psychological anthropology must come into dialogue to understand not only the sociocultural, but the psychological, processes associated with the proliferation of digital media. The dialogue between anthropology of new media and psychological anthropology is, as yet, largely uncharted territory, and I have likely raised more questions here than I have answered. A theoretical paper such as this one cannot of course directly or definitively answer these questions. In line with an overarching lesson of anthropology, the answers must ultimately be found in particular and local contexts.

The double meaning of "virtual" in this paper – referring to virtual worlds, or places of culture created through computer technology, as well as virtual subjectivities, which are representations of subjectivity extrapolated by researchers from cultural evidence – draws attention to the problem. While the settings created by new media are virtual, we must remember that the people in them are not. They are real, embodied individuals with unique subjectivities shaped by cultural and personal experience. They are caught up in flows of social, cultural, and historical meaning. The boundaries between physical space and cyberspace are blurry, and the two contexts routinely encroach upon one another. In order to avoid populating media anthropology with "virtual subjectivities" that are difficult to challenge by means of empirical evidence, media studies must also come to include research that begins from the perspectives of

these specific individuals as they make sense of, and are influenced by, specific technologies within specific cultural contexts. What I hope to have done here is to put forth here a general outline of the potential points of convergence between psychological anthropology and anthropological studies of digital media, and thus to outline the possibilities of a dialogue between the two fields.

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