

# CHAPTER SEVEN | REACHING A WIDER AUDIENCE

## INTRODUCTION

**D**ue to this study's interdisciplinary nature, my goal was to write a thesis that could be accessible to a wide audience; both in comprehension and physical access, while simultaneously giving back to the free software community. Here I will describe how I achieved these goals, their impact on the thesis and the making of ethnography accountable to anthropology, myself and my research participants.

## THE THESIS WEBSITE

[www.appliedanthrodesign.com](http://www.appliedanthrodesign.com)<sup>1</sup>

Prior to start of field work, I took the time to concentrate on building a website that would hold the majority of my research materials. The website is divided into the following pages: *Welcome*, *Field Notes (Blog)*, *Research Proposal*, *Thesis*, *About* and *Contact*. All contribute to the dissemination and free sharing of information, necessary under the tenets of free software and provide an introduction to my work. However, the web page with the greatest implication for my thesis is *Field Notes*, which will be discussed in depth below.

## FIELD NOTE BLOGGING

[www.appliedanthrodesign.com/blog/](http://www.appliedanthrodesign.com/blog/)

Blogs (abbreviated from “web logs”) initially existed as a platform for website users to document their Internet explorations and keep track of compelling

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<sup>1</sup> The website is built on Wordpress 3.0 with a free theme framework called Starkers and designed by myself with Adobe's Illustrator and Photoshop.

links found along the way. As blogs are ordered chronologically and meant to be updated on a regular basis, bloggers soon increased the content of their sites to reflect a journal or diary entry (Reed 2005: 220). With Technorati currently listing 1,238,305 blogs in its searchable database, having indexed over 133,000,000 blogs since 2002 (Horowitz 2010), there is great variety to be found. Most bloggers have reached a happy medium between resource sharing and full written entries, making blogs a sensible platform for the communication and production of anthropological field notes<sup>2</sup>.

For practical reasons, an important aspect of blogging my field notes was in its provision to readers on- and offline. In addition to physical access to theses through university systems being difficult, many people do not have the time or patience to read a full ethnography. However, by having my field notes, as well as full thesis and research proposal online, access is made easier and an audience is reached more comfortable and adept at Internet research or browsing.

As my field notes would be online, I embraced the idea of allowing commenting and feedback on any blog entries, as a way for interviewees and nonprofits to review transcriptions or thoughts stemming from my participant observation. This allowed them to make any necessary corrections or additions in the comment sections below the post. More successful in theory than in practice, the blog became functional as an organizational tool<sup>3</sup> for my own research rather than a platform for online engagement and interaction.

The limited number of comments posted on the field note entries were made by: those I had personal contact with in interviews; members of the same online groups; and individuals met at networking sessions, that could directly engage with the content of the post. I realized that due to my field notes containing basic data, with no wider interpretations, they were not relatable to a wider

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<sup>2</sup> The description of, and feelings about, daily events and happenings completed in anthropological research.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 8

audience and most certainly not to those who did not know the significance of field notes for anthropologists.

Regardless, another primary concern was fulfilled through posting my research data online and respecting the goals of the free software and Wordpress community by utilizing the GNU Free Documentation License.

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As more studies in user-experience design and design ethnography emerge, my intention in using this license is to support the use of my field notes as a starting place or information for future studies, as well as for web designers, the Wordpress community and nonprofits looking to understand how access to technology can be improved.

## CONCLUSION: POTENTIAL FOR CONTINUED USE

Through Adam Reed's ethnographic work on the UK blogging community (2005) emerges a discussion on the reception of ethnographic texts. Drawing on Alfred Gell's study of art objects (1998) he more specifically addresses, how texts can substitute for persons in creating social agency. Similar, to ANT for this emphasis on knowing both human and nonhuman actors as capable of building

relationships, Reed's work appends, directs and clarifies this idea of the actant by designating texts an extension of the individual authors or recipients and emphasizing the importance of discovering how texts are known. Reed states that while bloggers may not have exactly mastered the art of reflexivity (brought about by post-*Writing Culture* [1986] anthropology); with claims of "my blog is me" referencing a straightforward representation of life and self, what bloggers have discovered is how within their text (their blog) the growth and use of relationships is manifested (2005: 225).

While anthropologists continue to search for ways to accurately represent their ethnographic subjects, the static nature of texts limit control over the text never being the person it was expected to be; revealing the agency of author or any recipient, at any time, in any form. This agency described in anthropology's reflexive turn and understanding that our texts can be read and interpreted differently by any number of actants, Reed claims is insufficient (2005: 239).

Reed continues to say that the desire of *Writing Culture* to make ethnography accountable to its research subjects is misleading. It allows us to be "honest", but at the same time filling our ethnographies with dominating ideas and practices with the implication often that the ethnographic subject disappears completely (2005: 238). Therefore, we as anthropologists need to further develop our knowledge of the ways in which texts and persons complement each other. He asks us to acknowledge that the meaning of the artifact is never fixed. Anthropologists have the responsibility to contemplate the fate of our texts post-publication and how the actions of readers, recipients and ethnographic subjects are revealed in their interpretations or use of the text.

I would like to take Reed's blog inspired call to anthropologists and respond with blogging itself. While the print-based version of my thesis will stay in the University of Kent's Anthropology Department, the primary and most accessible copy, with associated research materials, will exist online. My website and blogging platform allowing for the continued evolution of text, others capable of joining in at any stage due the presence of archived data and the technical

functionality to allow for comments or criticism. Choosing to leave my website and blog untouched after the completion of this research would be an inaccurate portrayal of the relationship built during the study; as it is only part of an experience that has shaped my academic and professional interests, and one aspect of the evolution of web design workflows, nonprofit access to technology and Wordpress' impact on all involved.

Reed suggests:

...that one might best start by considering that ways in which people hold that texts can act as substitutes or extensions of them. Indeed, I believe we need to more regularly ask ourselves (as we do with most other kinds of artifacts), what kind of person is this text [read: blog]? [2005: 224]

If this work is an extension of myself and the text, I wish to privilege the online version of my thesis over the print-based to allow me to address inconsistencies, incorporate feedback and continue to inform myself and others about changes in this field of study. More specifically, to be a means of respecting and giving back to those who participated in my research, by acknowledging the collaborative nature of knowledge building and providing the opportunity to continue this process of education.