

## **2.0 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter details the research design and unfolding of my doctoral project between 2002 and 2007. The first section is largely theoretical, and stems from the notion of messiness or complexity in social science research, beginning with a discussion of methodological bricolage in qualitative research and moving into a discussion of what might constitute a mobile sociology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Characterised by contingency and indeterminacy, sociality is seen to involve practices that are substantially altered by stable and totalising explanations, compelling more dynamic and contingent approaches to sociological research.

To this end, the second section outlines my multi-sited ethnographic approach to online and offline participant observation. Special attention is given to the selection of research participants, and how my relationships with them evolved over time. Arguing for a situated and embodied case history approach, rather than a distanced and generalisable case study, the complex relations between seeing, doing and writing are further explored. Primarily, this involves a description of my original research plan, and specifically how my trajectories shifted over time.

The third and final section repositions my research project within broader experimental approaches to ethnography, focussing specifically on the guiding role that experimental writing in feminist social theory takes in my dissertation. I then conclude with a brief discussion of the question of interpretive validity in the approaches I present.

## 2.1 THE ART OF BRICOLAGE

In my PhD project proposal I wrote the following:

The approach to research design taken by this dissertation project is best described as experimental, iterative and participatory. Each phase of research will be used to inform the following stage, and in addition to standard theoretical research, I am interested in exploring and evaluating a small set of interdisciplinary and critical methods [including] what might be considered intimate and playful research methods.

This methodological approach is best described as a kind of bricolage (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966; Kincheloe 2001, 2005; Denzin and Lincoln 2005). The French word *bricoleur* refers to a handyman, or someone who uses whatever is at her disposal to get things done. While this kind of ingenuity and creativity may be highly respected and rewarded in domains such as technology design, Kincheloe (2001:680) shares a story that may still be indicative of reactions in the social sciences:

Prepped and ready to answer in detail questions about their methods and research agendas, my students spoke of their theoretical embrace and methodological employment of the bricolage. Much too often for our comfort, search committee members responded quite negatively: "bricolage, oh I know what that is; that's when you really don't know anything about research but have a lot to say about it." Much to our dismay, the use of the concept persuaded such committee members not to employ the students.

[...]

If hermeneutics came to connote the ambiguity and slipperiness of textual meaning, then bricolage can also imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research. Indeed, as cultural studies of science have indicated, all scientific inquiry is jerryrigged to a degree; science, as we all know by now, is not nearly as clean, simple, and procedural as scientists would have us believe. Maybe this is an admission many in our field would wish to keep in the closet. Maybe at a tacit level this is what many search committee members were reacting to when my doctoral students discussed it so openly, enthusiastically, and unabashedly.

Avoiding uncritical support of bricolage, Kincheloe argues that it requires repeated exploration and evaluation precisely because its implicit interdisciplinary may now be the only possible kind of research, and academics should be aware of its strengths and limitations.

My argument here is that we must operate in the ruins of the temple, in a postapocalyptic social, cultural, psychological, and educational science where certainty and stability have long departed for parts unknown. In the best sense of Lévi-Strauss's (1966) concept, the research bricoleurs pick up the pieces of what's left and paste them together as best they can. The critics are probably correct, such a daunting task cannot be accomplished in the time span of a doctoral program; but the process can be named and the dimensions of a lifetime scholarly pursuit can be in part delineated (Kincheloe 2001:681).

This dissertation can be seen as my first step in "a lifetime of scholarly pursuit," an adventure in 'becoming sociologist' during the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Reflecting the incredible diversity of contemporary social and cultural experience, bricolage begins and ends as a multi-perspectival and polyvalent activity, a way of asking different questions and allowing different answers:

Bricolage does not simply tolerate difference but cultivates it as a spark to researcher creativity ... Sensitive to complexity, bricoleurs use multiple methods to uncover new insights, expand and modify old principles, and reexamine accepted interpretations in unanticipated contexts (Kincheloe 2001:687).

The work of the bricoleur can also be regarded as important boundary work between disciplines, and even between people of all sorts. Its reach can be seen as more inclusive and with more opportunities for diverse kinds of action. Choosing appropriate tools with which to conduct bricolage research has been part of the

challenge and the journey of this dissertation. As Lincoln (2001:693-694)

explains in her response to Kincheloe's (2001) article:

Kincheloe's *bricoleur* is far more skilled than merely a handyman. This bricoleur looks for not yet imagined tools, fashioning them with not yet imagined connections. This handyman is searching for the nodes, the nexuses, the linkages, the interconnections, the fragile bonds between disciplines, between bodies of knowledge, between knowing and understanding themselves.

And while Kincheloe (2001) suggests that this practice relies on the disciplinary rigour associated with Foucault's (1980) genealogy, Lincoln (2001:694) prefers scholars "who are committed to methodological eclecticism, permitting the scene and circumstance and presence or absence of coresearchers to dictate method"—as so much feminist critique has also come to do. It is this sense of bricolage to which I turn here, one based on the real complexity of the world and struggles for power in the production of sociological knowledge.

### **2.1.1 Mobile sociology meets mobile methodology**

*In its hard labors in the domain of complexity, the bricolage views research methods actively rather than passively, meaning that we actively construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the "correct," universally applicable methodologies. Avoiding modes of reasoning that come from certified processes of logical analysis, bricoleurs also steer clear of preexisting guidelines and checklists developed outside the specific demands of the inquiry at hand. In its embrace of complexity, the bricolage constructs a far more active role for humans both in shaping reality and in creating the research processes and narratives that represent it. Such an active agency rejects deterministic views of social reality that assume the effects of particular social, political, economic, and educational processes. At the same time and in the same conceptual context, this belief in active human agency refuses standardized modes of knowledge production (Kincheloe 2005: 324-325).*

*If this is an awful mess . . . then would something less messy make a mess of describing it? [W]hat happens when social science tries to describe things that are complex, diffuse, and messy? (Law 2004: 1-2)*

*There is a new 'structure of feeling' that complexity approaches both signify and enhance. Such an emergent structure of feeling involves a greater sense of contingent openness to people, corporations and societies, of the unpredictability of outcomes in time–space, of a charity towards objects and nature, of the diverse and non-linear changes in relationships, households and persons, and of the sheer increase in the hyper-complexity of products, technologies and socialities (Urry 2006:111).*

In the past half decade, concepts of heterogeneity and complexity have characterised social theory to such an extent that the notion of *society* has arguably been replaced with concerns around *sociality*. According to Albertsen and Diken (2000:7-8)

Any heterogeneous social element is defined by its intensity and the affective reactions through which it breaks the laws of homogeneity, as in the cases of excess, delirium, madness and violence. But this is not all; elements that appear to be constitutive of homogeneity can also belong to heterogeneity... [and at the same time heterogeneity] is what escapes, or what flows in and through homogeneity.

Bauman (1998) reiterates the importance of heterogeneity in social theory and also emphasises ambivalence. He locates ethics at the centre of social behaviour, but an organic ethics based on facing ambiguity and making choices, rather than one based on an external rule-set or system. In this way, Bauman (following Levinas) replaces the notion of society with one of sociality, or the interpersonal negotiation of ambivalence and heterogeneity. He is concerned not with what holds us together (society) but with the affective relations that emerge in social interaction.

Bauman (following Simmel) invokes the concept of habitat. Away from society, and towards sociality, habitat is a complex system and the context in which

agency operates. Habitat is where sociality takes place, a territory characterised by indeterminacy and ambivalence. Simmel's (1971:143) stranger "comes today and stays tomorrow... [and is] an element whose membership within the group involves both being outside and confronting it." Bauman uses the concept of the stranger to demonstrate that sociality consists of belonging to more than one category: always ambivalent, contingent, inconsistent and indeterminate.

Neither fixed nor clearly bounded, sociality is seen as hybrid and heterogeneous. Accordingly, for Bauman, the social can only define itself against its strangers.

But the concept of ambivalence is not characterised solely by chaos or complete indeterminacy. Rather, ambivalence suggests a continuum between chaos and order, or contingent mixtures of the two. According to Thrift (1999:33) "the chief impulse behind complexity theory is an anti-reductionist one, representing a shift towards understanding the properties of interaction of systems as more than a sum of their parts." Lessons taken from notions of chaos and complexity include the "primacy of processes over events, of relationships over entities and of development over structure" (Ingold 1990:209).

Along related lines, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that the raw materials of existence—the social, the mental and the physical—are constantly in flux, lacking consistency and making connection difficult. However, by using their concept of the machine we may understand how consistency and order emerge from the chaos, if only in contingent ways. Machines are productive assemblages that connect multiplicities, and machinic relations take place "immanently and

pragmatically, by contagion rather than by comparison, unsubordinated either to the laws of resemblance or utility" (Massumi 1992:192). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) continue to argue that every social phenomenon faces escapes and inversions. It is in these lines of flight that sociality escapes organisation and centralisation, and so it is to these lines that we must look to find the socially meaningful. This de-territorialisation is characterised in terms of nomadic subjectivity, where nomadism is based on freedom of movement, on choice and becoming. Nomadology itself is a line of flight, a process which constantly resists the sedentary and the fixed (Deleuze and Guattari 1986).

These matters of mobility and becoming were also taken up decades earlier by Sartre (1947), in his eloquent description of Alexander Calder's mobiles:

[Mobiles] have to draw their mobility from some source... They feed on air, they breathe, they borrow life from the vague life of the atmosphere. Thus their mobility is of a particular kind. The 'mobile'...never [has] precision and efficiency...[it] weaves uncertainty, hesitates and at times appears to begin its movement anew, as if it had caught itself in a mistake.

[...]

[T]hese hesitations, resumptions, gropings, clumsinesses, the sudden decisions and above all that swan-like grace make of certain 'mobiles' very strange creatures indeed, something midway between matter and life. At moments they seem endowed with intention; a moment later they appear to have forgotten what they intended to do, and finish by merely swaying inanely...It is one [mobile], single and whole. Then all of a sudden it goes to pieces and is nothing but a bunch of metal rods shaken by meaningless quiverings.

[...]

[Mobiles] do not seek to imitate anything because they do not 'seek' any end whatever, unless it be to create scales and chords of hitherto unknown movements—they are nevertheless at once lyrical inventions, technical combinations of an almost mathematical quality, and sensitive symbols of Nature...of that inscrutable Nature which refuses to reveal to us whether it is a

blind succession of causes and effects, or the timid, hesitant, groping development of an idea (Sartre 1947).

Although I was unable to locate any sources that acknowledged Sartre's prescient contributions to this discourse, this kind of philosophical and poetic thinking has found its way into social and cultural theory in a multitude of ways. Notably, Cresswell (2006) argues that mobility and its regulation have always been an integral part of modernity, and Urry (2000:18) seeks to reconfigure sociological practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> century by "develop[ing] through appropriate metaphors a sociology which focuses upon movement, mobility and contingent ordering, rather than upon stasis, structure and social order"—a *mobile sociology*.

Of primary interest to this discussion is how these theoretical understandings of sociality manifest methodologically, and I have found both John Law's (2004) work on "mess" in social science research and Bruno Latour's (2005) discussions on "reassembling the social" to be particularly relevant. While both approaches get applied to different concerns throughout this dissertation, it may be useful at this point to establish a basic foundation on which to continue building.

Following what can broadly be termed the "practice turn" in theory (see Pickering 1989; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and von Savigny 2001), the kinds of ethnographic practice described by Law and Latour are based in actor-network theory, and predicated on the understanding that what researchers witness, participate in, and create is always multiple and partial.

Although best known as actor-network theory, a “sociology of associations” may also be better understood as a methodology where the social must be explained instead of providing the explanation (Latour 2005). As Latour has long advocated “following actors” through the world, John Law focusses on how multiple methods situationally enact multiple subjects, objects and perspectives. Accordingly, to present one’s research subject as a singularity can be seen to “hide the practice that enacts it, [and] also conceal the possibility that different constellations of practice and their hinterlands might make it possible to enact realities in different ways” (Law 2004:66).

This perspective builds on other research in social studies of science, as well as decades of work in anthropology and feminist theory. For example, in order to trace people, objects and ideas as they circulate, anthropologists like Hannerz (2003) and Marcus (1986; 1995:105) advocate a multi-site or multilocal ethnography, where research is “designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations.” While sustained engagement with a specific field has historically been the hallmark of anthropological research, Marcus (1985) points out that shifting global relations challenge the feasibility and appropriateness of studying isolated places or cases. Furthermore, he stresses the fact that fieldwork has actually always involved some combination of following people, things, metaphors, plots, stories or allegories, lives or biographies, or conflicts. In other words, it may actually be impossible to do research that is *not* multi-sited, or perhaps better put, situated in multiple ways.

Similarly, Donna Haraway (1988) claims that all academic research is highly “situated” or positioned knowledge, that arises from particular combinations of people, places, objects and ideas. For example, laboratory studies (see for example Latour and Woolgar 1986; Knorr-Cetina 1999) have demonstrated that much rational, linear, singular and universal knowledge emerges from situations that are actually quite passionate, non-linear, multiple and local. To acknowledge the situatedness of knowledge production, then, is to deny the positivist scientific ‘view from nowhere’ and focus instead on relational processes that highlight the possibility of different perspectives. As Strathern (2004a) puts it, anthropology works through the social construction of what can quite often be precarious and “partial connections,” and always “partial truths” (cf. Clifford 1986).

Such accounts are necessarily more embodied, possibly more modest, and arguably more convincing and productive because they leave any given matter open insofar as providing readers with multiple entries and exits. Unsurprisingly, they are also not straightforward in either process or product. As Cook et al. (2005:16) point out,

Critics might argue that writing in this area can, itself, be inadequately positioned and/or un-situated. And purists could argue that it's inappropriate to step back and offer an overview of an approach which criticizes those who claim to be able to step back and offer an overview!

All this suggests that perhaps more so than in other fields of academic knowledge production, ethnographic researchers actually do dance with their subjects.

More specifically, my approach to methodological bricolage can also be seen to share something in common with choreography (cf. Janesick 2003). Both qualitative research and choreography are highly situated, and continually recontextualised, within shared experiences—and “both refuse to separate art from ordinary experience” (Janesick 2003:47). More generally, just as a choreographer combines the prescriptions of the minuet with various improvisations, the bricoleur can be seen to move through various stages of research and writing, some more structured than others:

First is the warm-up, preparation or pre-choreographic stage of design decisions at the beginning of the study; second is the exploration or tryout and total workout stage, when design decisions are made throughout the study; and third is the illumination and formulation or completion stage, when design decisions are made at the end or near the end of the study. At the same time, the qualitative researcher, like the choreographer, follows set routines...as well as improvisational moments (Janesick 2003:52).

In my case, like many doctoral students, the “warm-up” stage was the completion of comprehensive exams and the preparation and presentation of a thesis proposal. During this period I completed literature reviews, articulated research interests and orientations, and formally delineated a programme of study. The following period involved actually doing the research, or rather doing research, as the plan continually changed according to my experiences and interaction—and now, as I write my final account, I re/search again. However, while I found Janesick’s (2003) three stages to be appropriately described, it was not my experience that they were either exclusive or sequential. For example, I often felt myself sliding back and forth between the second and third stages, and I might

even suggest that every improvisation involved returning to the first stage, if only partially and temporarily.

Looking back, I see these fluid methodologies being well suited to an era of mobile sociology, and I think the role of the bricoleur and choreographer resonates with my experiences in ways that a static model, objective account or other form of traditional sociology could not. In fact, taking this position inevitably produces a different kind of sociological knowledge: one that is more processual and relational than structural, one that tells many stories subjectively instead of one objectively, and one that raises more questions than provides answers.

## 2.2 PARTICIPATORY METHODS

*[W]riting cannot be the sole heroine of this [account], because I believe that writing and fieldwork are imbricated in productive and unsettling ways (St. Pierre 1997:414).*

Although my PhD studies have largely focussed on sociological and theoretical concerns, my background in empirical anthropology has not been abandoned. During my Bachelor and Master's degrees, I conducted one season of fieldwork in Canada, one in the United States, and two field seasons in Peru. This taught me the value of embodied, located and experiential research, as well as the productive—if sometimes tense—relations between seeing things, doing things and writing about them. In keeping with the ideas put forth above, an emphasis on situated practice appears in my doctoral research in several ways.

Following Callon (1986) and Latour (1999), I see that the social comprises a multitude of chains between diverse humans and non-humans, and so any account of the social must necessarily “follow the actors.” This method of tracing requires the kind of multi-sited and heteroglossic approaches I described earlier. In practical terms, this meant I wanted to visit as many places, talk to as many people, and do as many things as I could within the constraints of my personal and professional life between 2002 and 2007—and in the process, write about them. After my PhD coursework was completed, I made the decision to publically document these experiences through a personal weblog, but what I did not know at the time was how much of my research would actually happen online. The role of research blogging in my doctoral project is the topic of the following chapter, but in the remaining sections of this chapter I trace my actions back in time and begin to fold my blog into the narrative.

### **2.2.1 Case histories**

During the early years of my doctorate I regularly worked as a technology research and design consultant. (I continue to do so, but not as often.) In that role, I have variously described myself as web designer, information architect, interaction designer, design researcher and ethnographer—and it was through my practice in these areas that I first connected pervasive computing to my academic interests in space and culture. More specifically, it was my participation in related conferences, workshops and online conversations that both catalysed my interest in the general domain and crystallised my decision to conduct

surveys, interviews and site visits with particular research and design practitioners.

This hybrid identity of mine has expressed itself as conference attendee and hallway conversationalist; conference presenter, moderator and panel organiser; workshop organiser and participant; lurker and agitator; thinker, doer, speaker—and ultimately, writer for many different audiences. I have always approached these professional and social activities from the perspective of a participant and an observer, and wanted to continue along that ethnographic line of flight. However, when participant observation occurs within the context of one's own life it begins to take on a distinctly performative and collaborative quality. Through my overlapping online and offline activities—going to conferences, reading blogs, etc.—I became familiar with more and more collaborations between technologists and artists. Posting interesting ones to my weblog inspired online and offline discussion with friends and colleagues around how emerging technologies stood to reconfigure our understandings and experiences of space and culture.

I was particularly taken by mobile technology and new media projects that focussed on everyday life, public spaces and public use—issues that had clear cultural and political resonance but, in the early 2000s, remained under-explored in the broader human-computer interaction research and design fields. And finally, as a student-becoming-professional, I remember being interested in what



<http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2003/04/ambient-interludes-from-dublin.php>

**Sunday, April 6, 2003**

### **Ambient Interludes from the Dublin Cityscape**

A collaborative project of the [Media Lab Europe](#) Story Networks group, [Texting Glances](#) was designed with the NTRG in Trinity College. "This ambient 'waiting' game establishes a symbiotic relationship between a transient audience, a waiting place, and a story engine that matches SMS inputs to image output. By incorporating culturally current messaging norms, the audience becomes an active collaborating author in a layered exploration of social familiarity and public space."



(Photos Vaucelle et al. 2003)

Wow. Between developing a new course and reading Benjamin's [Arcades Project](#), I've become rather smitten lately with the idea of annotated city spaces. This project is very much along the lines of [what I envisioned](#) for Amsterdam RealTime, and together with other projects I have [recently noted](#), one of the more appealing shapes of emerging social computing applications.

But the pictures got me thinking that none of these spaces are entirely public. What I mean is that the public (masse) are not entirely free to interact with buses or parking meters that belong to municipal government, or buildings that belong to private citizens - there are existing restrictions for such social spaces. I'm curious how we might negotiate the actual use of this type of technology, short of as public art projects. I also immediately cringed when I thought about this technology being used for advertising and other propaganda - because even though I imagined being able to talk back, it takes far less effort to delete digital graffiti than it does to whitewash a wall, and I don't imagine a great deal of dissent marking the landscape. Still, the potential is incredible.

*posted by Anne at 11:23*

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I collected highly evocative images from design projects, understanding that entire dissertations could be dedicated to the role of digital imaging in the creation of future computing scenarios. This realisation led me to 'limit' their role in my project to a form of inspiration, where I let myself be moved by these

images—I *enjoyed* being moved by these images—but never explicitly theorising or analysing their content.

As time went on, I contacted the research and design leads for six projects across a range of industry, university and non-profit domains that I had encountered by following links online. Besides belonging within the broader mandate to embed computation in everyday life, what all the projects had in common was an interest in exploring new technologies in public spaces (i.e. outside the lab), and collaborating with artists or others outside their immediate fields in order to see how this could be done. None of the projects were producing commercial products, but all were exploring new ways to apply or use emerging technologies. The choice to focus my research on pre-competitive products and the design of future-oriented technologies is a topic to which I return in Chapter 4, but I was first and primarily interested in better understanding how different projects approached matters of space and culture.

In keeping with the perspective drawn out in the previous section, and given my highly subjective and affected perspective as both insider and outsider, I approached all the design projects as potential case histories rather than case studies:

Cases are rarely chosen because they are thought to be representative, but generally because of their illustrative significance. Criticism of case studies should therefore be directed towards their logical consistency and not towards their statistical generality (Mitchell as cited in Jackson 1984:107).

Cousins and Hussain (1984:3) explain that while a case study "uses evidence governed by the rule of exhaustiveness", a case history, in the tradition of Freud and Foucault, involves "evidence governed by rules of 'intelligibility', denying the natural science project of producing final pronouncements." Furthermore, Freud's interpretations of dreams and Foucault's case histories do not:

accord privilege to the search for origins which function as a point from which a causality and a narrative can be deployed and where elements borrow their identity from their origins. Beginnings are only 'configurations of elements' not origins ... [Case histories] neither 'demonstrate' metaphysical positions, nor do they reconstitute the analysand's past as a [final] 'history'... [Instead they] make a problem intelligible by reconstituting its conditions of existence and its conditions of emergence (Cousins and Hussain 1984:3).

This approach is fully consistent with the kind of situated knowledges, partial connections and partial truths I described above. The question of how to evaluate this kind of qualitative ethnographic research is the subject of Section 2.3.2 below, but it is important now to point out that rather than providing a definitive account of urban computing and locative media that can be evaluated according to its exhaustiveness or generalisability, my dissertation offers a fragmented and incomplete account that invites the reader to assess it in terms of internal intelligibility and illustrative capacity.

Ultimately, four projects accepted the invitation to participate in my research: *Mobile Bristol* (Hewlett-Packard Labs, Bristol, UK), *Passing Glances* (Trinity College Dublin and Media Lab Europe, Dublin, Ireland), *Sonic City* (Future Applications Lab, Viktoria Institute and PLAY Research, Göteborg, Sweden) and *Urban Tapestries* (Proboscis, London, UK). At the time, most research and

design in this area seemed to be located in the UK and Europe, and so my case histories came to be located in three countries and four cities overseas. What came to constitute all the materials of these case histories, however, reaches even further. In addition to empirical research, my dissertation collects a variety of related or supporting texts from numerous sources, both traditional academic texts and online publications. How I chose to re/present these texts is the subject of Section 2.3.1 below.

After selecting cases, the next step was to formally articulate a research plan and get ethics approval for my project from the university. I was grateful to have made some connections in other departments, and I was able to learn from their successful applications. When I had a draft, I sought out the advice of the university's Research Ethics Committee coordinator and revised my application as suggested. I officially submitted my application (Appendix 1) and it was approved in the first meeting of the committee, in March 2004. I immediately emailed questionnaires (Appendix 2) to all the project participants and started to make arrangements for follow-up interviews and site visits in May of the same year.

### **2.2.2 Into "the field"**

My original plan was to see where the questionnaire responses took me, and to leave "cultural probes" with the participants after the interviews. As I wrote in my project proposal:

Cultural probes (Gaver et al. 1999) will be used in this project as a playful means for participants to interact with their surroundings and express themselves, and as an experimental and inspirational approach by the researcher. Cultural probes are used by designers to stimulate imagination; the designer takes the role of "provocateur" and the information collected is "inspirational data ... [used to acquire] a more impressionistic account of [people's] beliefs and desires, their aesthetic preferences and cultural concerns" (Gaver et al. 1999:25). Each researcher and designer interviewed will be left with a cultural probe containing one disposable camera and twelve pre-addressed and stamped postcards to return to me within one month of my visit. The camera will be re-packaged to remove it from its commercial context, and to create space on the camera itself for note-taking. Each postcard will ask an evocative, open-ended question concerning mobility, cities, intimacy, play, design and ubiquitous computing.

In retrospect, the probes were the most poorly thought out aspect of my project proposal—however, in my attempt to employ them I effectively entered the second phase of research (cf. Janesick 2003) with my first concrete improvisational move: abandoning this route of inquiry. Upon meeting the participants, all of whom maintained very busy schedules, I decided that asking them to take photographs would constitute a significant imposition that I could not justify and the cameras were never distributed. However, not willing to give up everything at once, I did go ahead with the postcards (Appendix 3). However, after receiving two sets of answers on what kinds of playful things designers did during the day and what parts of the city they preferred, I could not figure out how the information could be used at that stage in my project, and the postcards were also abandoned. Looking back, I think the cultural probes would have been much more useful if I had used them to help select case projects and determine questionnaire and interview questions. I could have learned more about particular research processes at an earlier stage, and used that to guide my direct interactions. Instead, I collected too much disparate information and was later forced to work with far less material than my research generated.

In the end, by plane and train, I was able to meet with all the UK and Ireland-based participants, but was not able to travel to Sweden as well. I had piggybacked my research on paid-for trips to unrelated workshops in London and Manchester, which were the only means available to me to travel to Europe. With the exception of Giles Lane (*Urban Tapestries*), whom I had met before, May 2004 marked my first meetings with the project participants and at the time I had no idea how our paths would cross again.

First I visited the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering at Trinity College Dublin—I remember thinking it auspicious that there was a large Calder stabile on campus—and met Linda Doyle, who would forever alter my idea of what an engineer could be. I visited the old Guinness Storehouse, which was home to Media Lab Europe at the time and a curious jumble of historical and futuristic elements. I returned to London and cooked risotto with Giles Lane and Alice Angus of Proboscis in their comfortable home, the first of many shared meals to come. I also took the train to Bristol and visited the HP Labs campus, and was overwhelmed the entire time.

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EXCERPTS from *purse lip square jaw* by Anne Galloway

<http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2004/05/dissertation-dreams.php>

**Thursday, May 20, 2004**

### **Dissertation dreams**

Spent all day yesterday at HP Labs Bristol - interviewing the folks working on [Mobile Bristol](#) about things related to technology, space and culture. Quite fascinating really. And quite different from the academics and artists with whom I have spoken for the other case studies.

With all the interviews now done, I dreamed about a completed dissertation, and it was good.

*posted by Anne at 06:00*

<http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/2004/05/from-trinity-college-to-media-lab.php>

**Wednesday, May 5, 2004**

### **From Trinity College to Media Lab Europe**

[Trinity College Dublin](#) is a [gorgeous campus](#). I had tea with [Linda Doyle](#) this morning and will be meeting with her post-grad students tomorrow to discuss my research, as well as spending some time interviewing her for my dissertation case study of the [Passing Glances](#) project (in collaboration with [MLE - Story Networks](#)). I'm off to Media Lab later. Everything is good.

Later: [Media Lab Europe](#) is amazing. It is located in the old Guinness building, so it's this lovely combination of old wood floors and rafters, open brick walls and tons of technological devices. It is also full of interesting people doing interesting things. I met with Stefan Agamanolis, who leads the [Human Connectedness](#) group, and I'm already looking forward to going back on Friday to talk with some other researchers.

*posted by Anne at 06:22*

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I have continued to see Giles Lane about twice a year since then, mostly at conferences and workshops. Likewise, I have stayed in touch with Linda Doyle and in early 2007 invited her to participate in a panel discussion I was co-organising for Futuresonic's Social Technologies Summit. However, the only time I had the pleasure of seeing any of the Hewlett-Packard researchers again was at the Pervasive and Locative Arts Network event in January 2005.

Although I never managed a site visit, my relationship with the *Sonic City* researchers has also been a combination of online and offline interactions, primarily conference and workshop based. I first met engineer and interaction

designer Lalya Gaye at Ubicomp 2003, where I was introduced to her PhD research, and knew immediately that we had many shared interests. Lalya and I have regularly stayed in contact, more often as PhD students sharing our experiences than as researcher and study participant. In August 2004, Lalya joined a panel I organised at *Designing Interactive Systems* (DIS) 2004 and presented her continuing research on *Sonic City*. At that conference I also met Ramia Mazé, one of the designers working on the project. I had met Margot Jacobs, the other designer, at an Intel Research Berkeley event the month prior. Neither one was able to participate in my questionnaires or interviews, and both have gone on to do other things, so much of the *Sonic City* discussion in my dissertation relies on my continued relationship with Lalya Gaye as we both struggle to complete our doctorates this year.

At this point, social scientists may be wondering about the use of names in my narrative. Although my ethics approval depended on ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, the consent forms made provisions for participants to waive these rights, and none of the project participants objected to their real names being used. At the time of the questionnaires and interviews, all the projects had published research online and were well known enough in the 'design community' to arguably make anonymity a moot point. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to draw out all the implications of research anonymity (see for example Wiles et al. 2006) in the era of online communication, but this small example raises issues that deserve to be addressed by social scientists and university ethics committees alike.

By now it should also be clear that my experience of being in 'the field' included being online and on the ground, and just as in my everyday life, I simply experience these as different but complementary ways of being in the world with others. While anthropologists have thoroughly troubled the place, role and affect of fieldwork (see for example Strathern 1993; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1998; Watson 1999; Anderson et al. 2004), it is worth drawing attention to the fact that more recent online communications further complicate relationships between people and places. While "virtual ethnography" (see Markham 1998; Hine 2000) generally refers to doing ethnography online, references to using collaborative or collective online applications like wikis, blogs and social networking sites to disseminate and discuss research ideas *in progress* are few and far between.

Being online, for me, was another 'field' for participant observation. In other words, whether posting to my blog, participating in conferences and workshops, or going on site visits and conducting interviews, I was always already engaged in an ethnographic performance with the subjects of my study. I was trying to learn about new cultures, and in doing so I could not avoid shaping them, and being shaped by them in return. These exchanges also shaped and reshaped my research project, right up to and including the act of writing. For example, contrary to what I had anticipated I never got the opportunity to see working prototypes for any of the projects, and that reconfigured my understanding of the objects I would mobilise in my account. Images of the prototypes appear alongside my text but, for example, Proboscis has published enough visual

material on *Urban Tapestries* to warrant an entire thesis, and so most images are not addressed in any detail.

My initial interest in intimate and playful technologies became less compelling to me than finding playful and intimate ways to represent my ideas. Not only did that match my experience doing research, but ultimately all I was left with were texts: transcriptions of what the participants said, reports and papers they had written, online exchanges, etc. In fact, the sheer volume of available textual materials on all the projects presented here would have provided sufficient resources for several dissertations without ever doing fieldwork. To further complicate things, it was not until late 2006 that I started to understand that the responses from my questionnaires, and the content of the interviews, was so diverse that I would have to be very selective with them alone just to bring my dissertation topic to a manageable size.

In particular, I needed to separate the content on how designers worked from the content about how designers envisioned urban interaction with technology. After listening to the interview recordings several times and taking notes, I realised that I had too much disparate information for one thesis. I decided that if I was going to be able to focus in any depth on space and culture, then it would be helpful to address only the material I had on *Urban Tapestries*, *Passing Glances* and *Sonic City*. While various *Mobile Bristol* applications were relevant to these interests, my interviews focussed on *Mobile Bristol* as a platform for applications rather than on the applications themselves. This made the case qualitatively

different from the other three examples, and in order to keep my dissertation focussed and manageable, I focus my discussion of *Mobile Bristol* in terms of broad research agendas.

In keeping with the particular methodologies described earlier in this chapter, I performed selective transcription (cf. Coyle 2002) of interviews with Giles Lane and Alice Angus (*Urban Tapestries*), Linda Doyle (*Passing Glances*), and Phil Stenton and Richard Hull (*Mobile Bristol*). I also selected excerpts from questionnaires completed by Lalya Gaye (*Sonic City*) and Giles Lane (*Proboscis*). In addition to these questionnaire and interview selections, excerpts from the projects' websites and published reports, and a variety of web-based publications also appear in my dissertation. Initially intending to explore "a set of relations for resonating with and amplifying chosen patterns" (Law 2004:117), I ultimately found myself with an eclectic collection of information that resisted many attempts at ordering.

In sum, participant observation for this dissertation was seen to informally involve all the conferences and workshops I attended during the past five years, as well as the formal site visits and interviews I conducted with project participants for the case histories. In both cases, I documented my experiences on my weblog, further engaging the participants and others along the way. These short-term visits and the tendency of online publishing to follow the "logic of mash-up culture" (cf. Shiga 2007) presented me with a challenge: How could I

represent these experiences—these online and offline performances—of mine as a doctoral dissertation?

### 2.3 WRITING EXPERIMENTAL ETHNOGRAPHY

*My intentions then-and now-have never been to dismiss social-scientific writing-but to examine it. My intentions then-and now-have never been to reject social-scientific writing-but to enlarge the field through other representational forms (Richardson 1997:298).*

*I believe, I see, that the state of things is more like a scattering of islets in archipelagos in the noisy and barely-known disorder of the sea, islets whose peaks and edges, slashed and battered by the surf, are constantly subjected to transformation, wear and tear, being broken, encroached upon; with the sporadic emergence of rationalities whose links with one another are neither easy nor obvious (from Michel Serres' Le Passage du Nord-Ouest, translated in Law 2004:117)*

*The fragmented narrative can function as political action in many ways: It can resist traditional academic systems, which may acknowledge alternate ways of knowing but nonetheless continue to lock sociological inquiry into normative forms that serve to reify the traditional system itself. It can also open the space for reflexivity for both the author and the reader. A researcher's choices throughout the research process matter, in that they lead to interpretations and subsequent forms of presentation that have persuasive effects. Revealing even a few of the author's choices in the production of social knowledge can open a space for critical and reflexive authorship and reading. Juxtaposition and fragmentation help authors see—through disjuncture—their own habits of interpretation, to reveal, or at least question, taken-for-granted patterns of sense making. Fragments also tend to reveal and, therefore, make available the interstices of reading, so that the reader is not locked into a single line of argument, the form of which is transparent in its smooth familiarity. Multiplicity is made more possible. One must understand that the goals of research may be distinctively different than in traditional research. In fragmented narratives, power is more distributed: The piece can simultaneously make the author's particular set of arguments and allow for alternatives by revealing the practices at work in the interpretive process. In the end, something important about the topic is learned, but the outcome is not completed, controlled, or predicted by the form (Markham 2005:815-816).*

Since I was obligated by the university to produce a written dissertation, and my primary materials were written texts, I knew that I would need to find ways of

writing sociology and anthropology that would not fundamentally misrepresent my research experience and the worlds I was trying to describe. What I saw was messy, and what I did was messy. My project covers five years, various cities, and an unknown extent of the World Wide Web. It blurred boundaries between work and play, and like much of everyday life, it often manifested itself as glimpses or glances, instead of a protracted gaze (cf. Shields 2004).

Students of cultural studies will be familiar with the use of bricolage in the writing of Walter Benjamin, and his *Arcades Project* (1999) continues to serve as a wonderful example of what a fragmented narrative might look like. While Bruno Latour (1996) uses a similar approach in *Aramis, or the love of technology*, where interview excerpts, documents and analysis are interspersed throughout the text in montage style, most work in this area has been done through feminist epistemological critiques of social and cultural knowledge. Accordingly, it is to them that I turned and ultimately found ways that made sense to me—all without altering, or hiding, what I felt and thought about what I had done and seen.

In particular, I wanted to write a dissertation that would be of interest to the university examiners, the study participants and the readers of my blog—and I saw that as possible only if I could engage in more fragmented or experimental writing where trajectories and links were “neither easy nor obvious.” As part of the opening quote by Markham (2005:816) explains,

Fragments...tend to reveal and, therefore, make available the interstices of reading, so that the reader is not locked into a single line of argument, the form of which is transparent in its smooth familiarity. Multiplicity is made more possible. One must understand that the goals of research may be distinctively different than in traditional research. In fragmented narratives, power is more distributed: The piece can simultaneously make the author's particular set of arguments and allow for alternatives by revealing the practices at work in the interpretive process.

### **2.3.1 Different ways of reading and writing**

The idea that writing can serve as a form of qualitative inquiry relies on the acknowledgement that all ethnographic accounts involve the crafting of selves (cf. Kondo 1990). As Laurel Richardson (1997:303) so poetically puts it:

I have accepted writing as process of discovery, and writing autobiographically as a feminist-sociological praxis. In the next few years, I plan to write more of these essays, structured rhizomically, the way my life is experienced-lines of flight, whirling whirling skirts of pleated texts. A surprisingly surprising de-disciplined life.

I too want to write "the way my life is experienced" and this dissertation can be seen as a step in that direction. Richardson's (1997) "pleated texts" offer another example of how the structure and content of an academic thesis can be used to make new connections and reach new audiences. Her work can also be seen to stress the politics of location as research is always highly situated in space and time. Furthermore, Richardson (1998) considered writing about one's physical location as a means to relocate the self in research, which takes on new meaning when we consider a mobile or relational sociology. Not only are researchers challenged to identify multiple and shifting contexts, we will inevitably re/position ourselves in the process. By doing so, the experimental writer can also

be seen to create ruptures in the narrative where others can escape or enter, and surely this is what Kincheloe had in mind when he claimed that bricolage should “uncover new insights, expand and modify old principles, and re-examine accepted interpretations in unanticipated contexts” (2001:687).

In its broadest sense, experimental writing in sociology and anthropology is concerned with “evoking the world without representing it” (Marcus 1986:190), allowing for greater focus on the performativity of research. Recognising that academic definitions of ‘culture’ always already involve written accounts, since the 1980s anthropologists and sociologists have increasingly moved towards ways of writing that make explicit, and interrogate, the production of social and cultural knowledge (see for example Clifford and Marcus 1986; James, Hockey and Dawson 1997). Attention to the practices of “writing culture” encourages ethnographers to acknowledge our positions, and pay close attention to the voices we choose to hear, the texts we choose to see, the things we choose to do, and how we choose to re/present all of them. Doing ethnographic research means asking more questions: What are the most appropriate ways to contextualise other voices without speaking ‘for’ people or ‘allowing’ them to speak for themselves? How do we best accommodate different perspectives without flattening the field?

Law (2004:117) claims that the “elusive objects” and “fluid results” of a mobile sociology compel “non-conventional forms,” and recalling my earlier discussion of bricolage, “perhaps, then, it is useful to think of method assemblage as a radio receiver...a set of relations for resonating with and amplifying chosen patterns

which then return to the flux." In practical terms this means tuning in to particular frequencies of everyday life, or sampling the spectrum (see Crow, Longford and Sawchuck *in press*). And, without stretching this sound metaphor too far, I can also evoke 'remix' or 'mash-up' culture in their capacity as recombinant strategies. Both my process (everything up until now) and my product (this text) have sampled materials (sound/image/text/etc.) and I have improvised and attempted to arrange (disorder and reorder) them in harmonious ways. In reading the text, it is my hope that you understand where I am coming from, and find an interesting place to go from there.

In sociology and anthropology, this crafting of relations includes narrative and textual activities, or, in broader and more political terms, matters of voice. In writing this dissertation I want to stay attuned to different contexts and "individuating local intensities" (Gregg 2007). When I took texts as my material I chose to include relatively large selections of other people's words. In terms of voice, I first wanted to see if this could serve as a small act of scholarly modesty. It was, and is, my hope that readers will not get the impression that I have done all this work alone, or that I did it *before* anyone else did. If not precisely a tribute to these others (people, words, texts) that have accompanied me for years, I certainly want to draw attention to them. If nothing else, I wanted to know if I could find a way to temper the impression of elitism that often accompanies specialised/specialist knowledge? Could I make sociological research appealing to more than sociologists? Part of the answer, I believed, was in often listening rather than telling, and sometimes describing rather than explaining.

To return to my earlier 'mash-up' metaphor, I would like to underscore that "in the mash-up community, copying [sampling] is inextricably tied to listening" (Shiga 2007:97). More generally, a harmonious song (or text) invites the listener (or reader) to follow progressive chords of movement, or simultaneous pitches, and melodious ones create patterns of changing pitches and durations. The act of listening to both melody and harmony, of *feeling* the horizontal together with the vertical, is crucial to aural appreciation and aesthetic expression. Here we might recall Sartre's (1947) deceptively simple observation that mobiles—as works of art—"have to draw their mobility from some source," and since their source (the air) is unpredictable, so too are the movements of the mobile and their aesthetic trajectories. Rather than "precision and efficiency," a mobile "weaves uncertainty, hesitates and at times appears to begin its movement anew, as if it had caught itself in a mistake" (Sartre 1947). This is, in part, what makes a mobile pleasing and what makes mobility beautiful.

In a more critical take on listening, Sterne's (2003) notion of the *audile technique* or "virtuoso listening" asks us to consider that for more than 150 years, practices of listening have encouraged rational and instrumental aesthetics—or what he calls a "a distinctly bourgeois form of listening" (2003:94-95) related to habitus and taste. Without being too cynical, surely we can say the same about reading academic writing? Are we not, especially in the social sciences, expected to produce something rational and instrumental? Are we not, in proving our competence as professionals, expected to present ourselves confidently and effectively?

Since the 1990s experimental writing forms have been most thoroughly explored in feminist epistemological inquiry, and can be seen to explore new ways of accounting without losing the rigour of more traditional representations. One impetus behind such experimentation has been to delineate the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge, including the systematic exclusion of affect from rational discourse, and how emotional experience (Ellis 1991) might be re/inserted in the products of intellectual labour. However, implicit in these concerns is a broader interest in questions of authority and who 'gets to speak' in an ethnographic account. If an increasing interest in auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997; Bochner and Ellis 2002; Ellis 2004) is any indication, then a desire to locate the researcher-self predominates, all the while "eschew[ing] seamless linear stories of coming to 'know' our hidden selves" (Gannon 2006:480).

But there is no reason to limit ourselves just to stories of our selves. Multi-vocal, multi-lingual, and multi-perspectival texts all serve to reconfigure relations between research subjects and objects by including different and divergent voices alongside each other in the text. Related implicit and explicit challenges to authority can also serve to bring this kind of writing into the realm of ethical action. As Denzin (2003:137) suggests, what emerges from—and is demanded by—this scenario are "accountable and vulnerable" writers, as well as "reflexive and active readers." And this returns us to the kind of pleated or layered texts I described above:

The layered account offers an impressionistic sketch, handing readers layers of experience so that they may fill in the spaces and construct an interpretation of

the writer's narrative. The readers reconstruct the subject, thus projecting more of themselves into it, and taking more away from it...The layered account is a narrative form designed to loosely represent to, as well as produce for, the reader, a continuous dialectic of experience, emerging from the multitude of reflexive voices that simultaneously produce and interpret a text (Ronai 1995:396).

However, Latour (1988:169) argues that explaining how research is conducted and including the researcher in the text does not make a sociological account any more interesting or believable. Instead, he argues for a kind of "infra-reflexivity" that emphasises storytelling, "because instead of writing about how (not) to write, it just writes" (Latour 1988:170). By "replacing methodology with style," infra-reflexivity can bring a sort of closure to the 'openness' of a text like this one.

Drawing on these practices and descriptions of experimental writing in sociology and anthropology, my dissertation explores ways of writing and representation that resonate with my experiences as a graduate student actually *doing* this research. Far from being disorderly, this has resulted in a broadly dialectical re/ordering of text, a playful zig-zig of movement reminiscent of Calder's mobiles that is open to witnessing things according to their own logic. Nonetheless, following Latour (1988) I do not ask that my text be privileged over others, but rather that it be seen to raise questions about authority and explanation. As he so bluntly puts it, "my own text is in your hands and lives or dies through what you will do to it" (Latour 1988:171).

Inevitably this has led me to write with a view to the past, and an active re/construction of that past from the present. As Gannon (2006:483) reminds us,

“memory writing is not a veridical act that reproduces the original experience as it was lived but is necessarily always constituted from a particular time and place and discursive frame.” In other words, while I attempt to tell a story in the present I mobilise things I have written in the past, as well as things others have written. Some of these ‘others’ are academic, and some are not—but both will be readers. Accordingly, theoretical and analytical discussion can be found here among multiple genres of text—scholarly quotes, survey and interview excerpts, blog posts, news stories, personal reflections, etc.—as well as the occasional image. Some bits are so highly contextualised that a reader can barely tell them apart from my own words. Others are obviously naked, starkly juxtaposed without comment. I have chosen a few stylistic conventions to indicate different kinds of quoted text, but do not mean any one kind (including the academic citations) to be the authoritative account. In other words, it is precisely in their entangled differences that the reader is invited to join.

As I have shown so far, the primary theoretical and analytical text is typeset like any standard academic text. It uses a first-person narrative, and offsets quotes by cited authors and researchers. As mentioned above, many of these quotes are excerpted at length, something I have done for a couple of reasons. Primarily, I see it as a way in which different authors’ voices can be heard with only minimal filtering, and their context and relevance can be derived from their placement in the text if not by explicit analysis or explanation. This manoeuvre is related to how this dissertation can be read by, and I hope appeal to, a variety of readers. Furthermore, it is one way in which not insubstantial quantities of academic text

can be made available to non-academic audiences, in keeping with the implicit commitment of bricolage research to include and explore ways of communicating (including giving access to) academic research outside the university.

But before I get to my discussion of research blogging, and begin to introduce some of the other actors in this performance, it may be useful to offer a few thoughts on the broader ontological and epistemological validity of the approach I take here.

### **2.3.2 A note on interpretive validity**

*We do not abandon theoretical or critical frames in pursuing evocative provocative effects in the texts we write. Rather, genres and speaking positions proliferate. Texts foreground the dialogic relationship between the self and his or her tenuous and particular social/cultural/historical locations (Gannon 2006:477).*

*A good ANT account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don't just sit there ... As soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators, they render the social visible to the reader. Thus, through many textual inventions, the social may become again a circulating entity that is no longer composed of the stale assemblage of what passed earlier as being part of society. A text, in our definition of social science, is thus a test on how many actors the writer is able to treat as mediators and how far he or she is able to achieve the social ... A good text elicits networks of actors when it allows the writer to trace a set of relations defined as so many translations (Latour 2005:128-129).*

In order to begin to evaluate an experimentally written dissertation like mine—as well as the broader concerns of a mobile sociology—we may turn to the work of Patricia Lather (1993) and what she calls sociology's “fertile obsession” with validity. She approaches validity not as “epistemological guarantees” but as

multiple, partial, endlessly deferred [validities that] construct a site of development for a validity of transgression that runs counter to the standard validity of correspondence: a non-referential validity interested in how discourse does its work, where transgression is defined as the game of limits... at the border of disciplines, and across the line of taboo (Lather 1993:675).

This perspective is connected to the feminist epistemological critiques discussed above. Lather challenges academics to listen to different voices and registers, to come to terms with what has long been excluded by making it present. In judging such accounts, she suggests a "nomadic and dispersed validity" that employs

a strategy of excess and categorical scandal in the hope of both imploding ideas of policing social science and working against the inscription of another 'regime of truth' [and] rather than prescriptions for establishing validity in post-positivist empirical work [offers] a forthrightly personal and deliberately ephemeral antithesis to more conventional and prescriptive discourse-practices of validity (Lather 1993:677).

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in ways consistent with the kind of mobile or relational sociology I have presented in this chapter, Lather continues to outline a "rhizomatic validity," where rhizomes are understood to supplement and exceed what order has tried to make stable and permanent. As such, rhizomes (including rhizomatic texts) come to produce paradoxical objects, following growth and not surveying a smooth unfolding. Rhizomatic validity, then, would address what it means "to let contradictions remain in tension, to unsettle from within, to dissolve interpretations by marking them as temporary, partial, invested" (Lather 1993:681). The associated politics of excess, of leakage, of "going too far," bring "ethics and epistemology together in self-conscious partiality, an embodied positionality and a tentativeness which leaves space for others to enter, for the joining of partial voices" (Lather 1993:683).

Such an approach evokes further reflection and questioning, and suggests that the kind of experimental sociological investigation presented here may be evaluated in terms of its ability to do the same. As Lather would ask, does my dissertation “generate new locally determined norms of understanding”? Does it “work against constraints of authority via replay, multiple openings, networks, complexities of problematics”? Does it “create a questioning text that is bounded and unbounded, closed and open”?

In a later article, Lather continues her exploration of rhizomatic validity:

Adding another layer or fold or pleat...rhizomatic validity asks about proliferations, crossings, and overlaps, all without underlying structures or deeply rooted connections. Here, information is organized like a hypermedia environment, a mapping of potential assemblages, a storing, retrieving, and linking well beyond a mere tracing of descriptive information. Changing the way we organize and communicate knowledge, rhizomatic practices question taxonomies and construct interconnected networks where readers jump from one assemblage to another.

[...]

The textual strategies I have delineated work toward a practice that erases itself at the same time as it produces itself. Such a practice makes space for returns, silence, interruptions, and self-criticism, and it points to its own incapacity, gesturing toward a feminist practice of a double science that works from within a tradition even while exposing what that tradition has ignored or forgotten (Lather 1995:58-62).

This is consistent with the kinds of experimental writing—infra-reflexive layered and pleated texts—I described above, and suggests that part of the validity and value of my argument may be found precisely in its ability to avoid presenting a single voice or point of view that reinforces the false notion that my subject of study is stable and describable in its entirety.

Following Lather, Richardson (1993) also discusses how to validate the kinds of “transgression” that occur in the multiple genres of writing, personal reflections and critical analyses she assembles in her work. She suggests that her texts—perhaps like some of the ones I have assembled here—are “vulnerable to dismissal and to trivialization as commonplace” (Richardson 1993:705) but explains that she “had in mind writing sociologies which displayed how meaning was constructed, and which were helpful to people, and not boring” (Richardson 1993:697) and that she tries “to write sociology that moves people emotionally and intellectually. When successful, the texts violate sociology’s unwritten emotional rules. Social science writing is supposedly emotionless, the reader unmoved” (Richardson 1993:706) but I too want readers to be moved.

As an alternative to the exclusion of affective experience, Richardson models what she calls a “feminist-postmodernist practice”:

In that practice, one’s relationship to one’s work is displayed. There is a sense of immediacy, of an author’s presence and pleasure in doing the work. Lived-experience is not “talked about,” it is demonstrated; science is created as a lived-experience. Dualisms-“mind-body,” “intellect-emotion,” “self-other,” “researcher-research,” “literary writing-science writing”-are collapsed. The researcher is embodied, reflexive, self-consciously partial. A female imaginary, an unremarked gynocentric world, centers and grounds the practice. Space is left for others to speak, for tension and differences to be acknowledged, celebrated, rather than buried alive (Richardson 1993:706).

While the content of my thesis is not woman-centred, it does offer a humble feminist critique of the everyday lives of academics by making our work more transparent and by refusing to claim singular authority or truthfulness. It strives to provide multiple points of entry, evidence concatenations of actors, and

represent the multiple spatialities, temporalities and embodiments that have characterised my experiences, as well as those of the actors and actions I recount. In this way, my dissertation can also be evaluated in terms of its success as a “map” rather than a “tracing” as defined by Deleuze and Guattari (1983a:25-26):

The map is open, connectable in all its dimensions, and capable of being dismantled; it is reversible, and susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to montages of every kind, taken in hand by an individual, a group or a social formation... Contrary to a tracing, which always returns to the 'same', a map has multiple entrances.

Inherent in this ability to move in and out of my narrative is the possibility that readers can—and indeed probably will—get lost. But rather than assuming this signals the exclusion of the reader or a failure to communicate, it may instead point to the opening-up of new spaces for both readers and writers to try something else.

## **2.4 SUMMARY**

This chapter has argued that methodological bricolage is particularly well suited to tackle the indeterminacy and contingency of social and cultural knowledge in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century through a combination of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ accounts. Beginning with a brief introduction to a shift in sociological focus from society to sociality—largely characterised by a proliferation of heterogeneity and ambivalence—my dissertation positions itself within sociological traditions more concerned with processes and relations, than with objects and structures. Put a bit differently, the kind of empiricism I attempt here is not about objects, per se,

but rather about “active and anthropological projects, full of life...ready to take place in a dramatic story” (Latour 1988:173).

This kind of mobile sociology is seen to compel the mapping of connections and associations, always emphasising situated positions and partial truths. A multi-sited approach to ethnography was “designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” (Marcus 1995:105), and resulted in accounts that were choreographed and performed with others. Grounded in participatory methods, my approach to ethnographic fieldwork attempts to strike a balance between online and offline participatory observation. Not only does this best reflect my research experiences, but it seeks to open new ways of conducting academic research that position our work within the embodied and situated practices of everyday life. My empirical research, in the form of site visits, questionnaires and interviews, is presented in the form of case histories. In contrast to exhaustive and generalisable case studies, the Freudian and Foucauldian case history stresses partiality and internal intelligibility.

Faced with the challenge of how to re/present such an approach as a written dissertation, I turned to experimental approaches to reading and writing found within anthropology and feminist theory. Following Richardson (1997:303), I write here “the way my life is experienced,” full of recombinant strategies that encourage listening over telling, and often description over explanation. Seeking to explore ways of re/inserting affective experience into the rational products of intellectual labour, I chose multivocal and multiperspectival accounts presented

as pleated or layered texts. My dissertation, then, weaves together theoretical and analytical discussion with multiple genres of text: scholarly quotes, survey and interview excerpts, blog posts, news stories, personal reflections, etc. And it is precisely in their entangled differences that the reader is invited to join. By following my zig-zagging paths, and remaining open to understanding things according to their own logic rather than imposing a singular or stable logic to control them, the reader can become an active producer of her own knowledge rather than a 'passive' consumer of academic wisdom.

Given the situated and partial nature of such an account, I concluded this chapter with a brief discussion of interpretive validity. Stressing a critical approach based on the validity of transgression, and a "strategy of excess and categorical scandal" (Lather 1993:677), my dissertation seeks to evoke further reflection and questioning. In fact, part of the validity and value of my argument may be found precisely in its ability to avoid presenting a single voice or point of view that reinforces the false notion that my subject of study is stable and describable in its entirety. In evaluating its success, we can ask if I succeed in creating such a questioning text. Or recalling Latour, is the story rich, interesting and believable?

Continuing along this line of flight, the following chapter takes a closer look at research blogging—and how it can further serve the interests and concerns outlined so far. An integral part of my everyday research practice, my blogging experiences and how I fold those texts into the current narrative provide concrete

examples of how methodological bricolage and experimental writing in sociology  
can work together now, and into the future.