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ARBEITSGRUPPEN MEDIENINFORMATIK UND
MENSCH-MASCHINE-INTERAKTION

Ethnography

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Motivation

http://www.artevos.de/sortenuebersicht/sorte/galmac-camelot.html

Please descripe the picture!

Definition (1/2)

- Ethnography
  - is a descriptive account of social life and culture
 - orginated in anthropology

Definition (2/2)

- Ethnographer
    - take part in the life of people
    - take place in natural setting of the subjects
    - becomes the research instrument
    - tries to construct a representation of the world
   - tries to produce a holistic description of the culture

Types of ethnography

- **holistic:** researcher must have empathy and identification with the group. They should live like local people

- **semiotic:** researcher examine the symbolic forms used by the people and analyse them with respect to the whole culture

- **crititical:** researcher try to uncover what is normally hidden and unspoken in the culture and question the assumptions
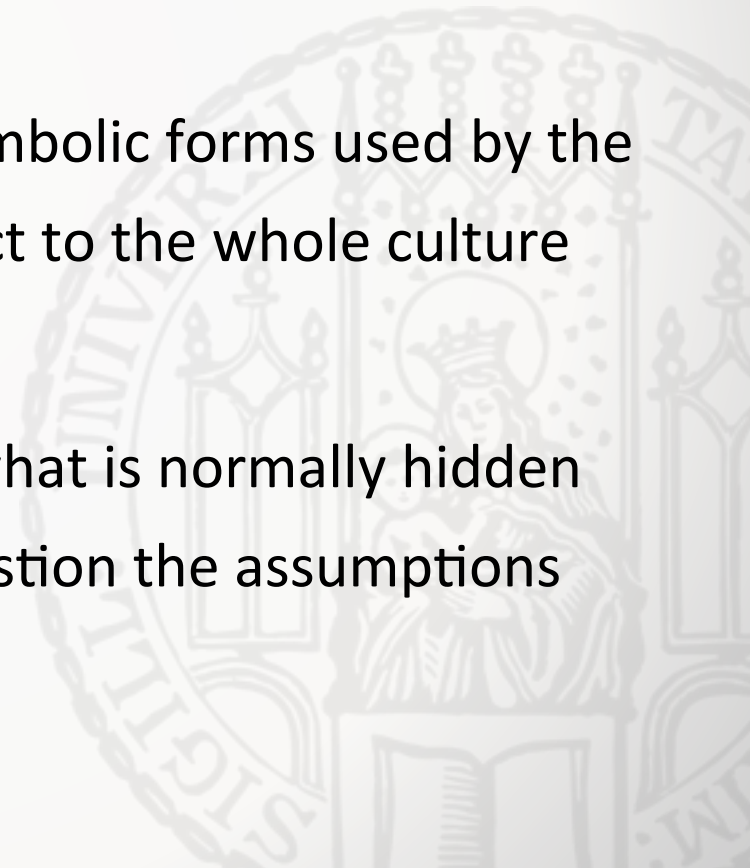
Reflexivity

- Relationship between the researcher, the participants and the research process

- Ethnographer must observe others and participate with them at the same time

- Possibility of an ethnographer ever being entirely objective is rejected

- Ethnographer include their personal experiences in their findings
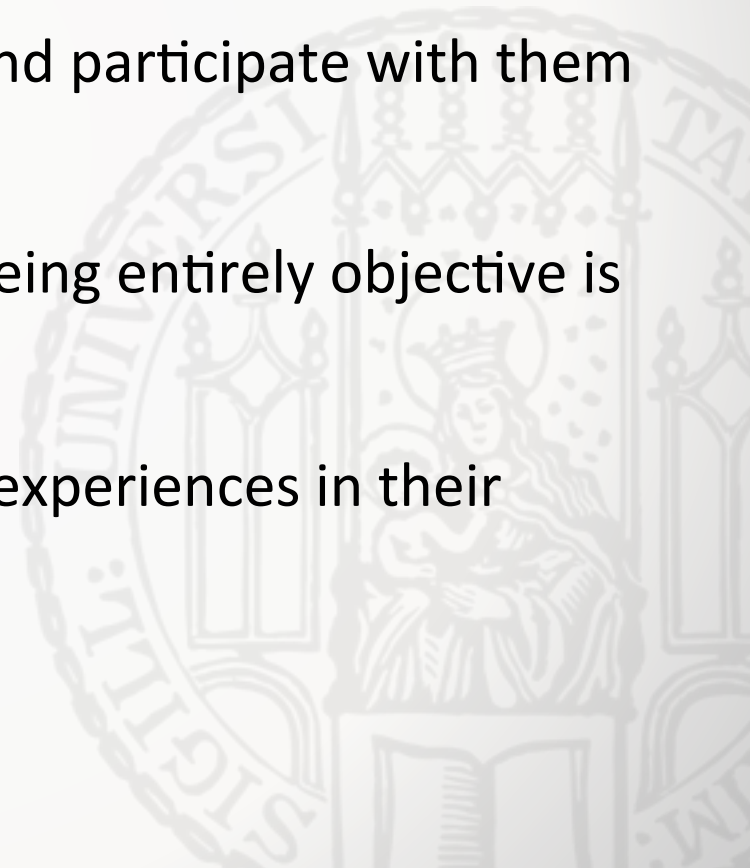
Adoption of ethnographic techniques in HCI

- Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)

  ▪ Social organization of activity

  ▪ Methodological approaches

- Participatory Design (PD)

  ▪ Workplace democracy

  ▪ Participatory involvement

Problem of implications for design

- Marginalization of theory

- Restricted model of the relationship between technology and practice

Internet vs. Ethnography (1/3)

Two different ways of viewing the Internet:

As a **culture**:

A (virtual) place where ..

- people form a culture/communities
- communities make use of technology available to them

Ethnographer can go online and examine what people do in cyberspace (interactions, conventions, ..)

→ Online interviews, observing interactions in chatrooms, collecting documents

Internet vs. Ethnography (2/3)

As a **cultural artefact**:

- Product of a culture
- Technology produced by people **in particular contexts** and shaped by the ways in which people market, develop, use it
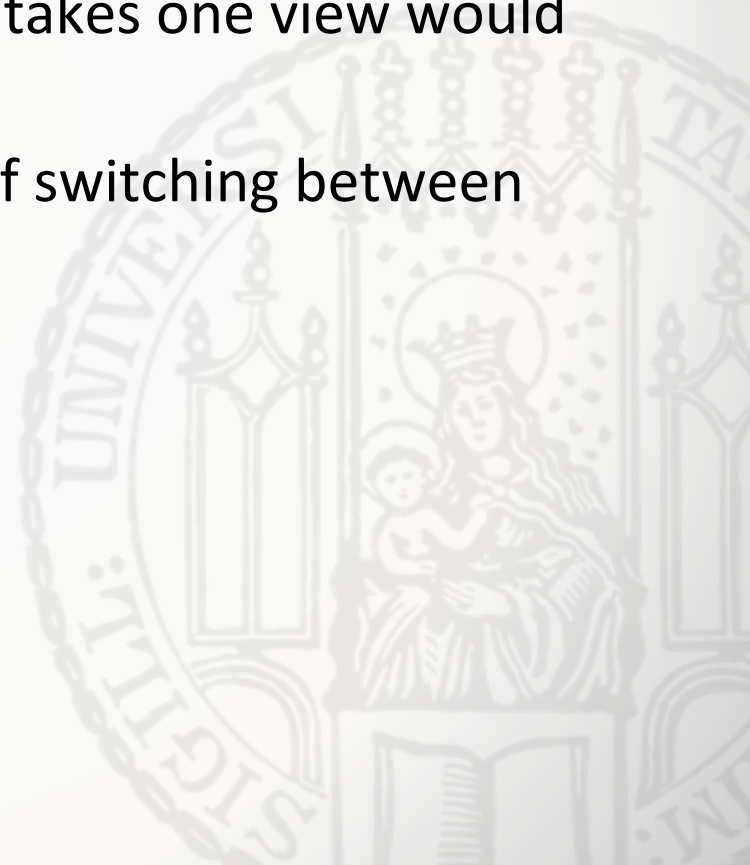
Ethnographer can observe its structure, content, what is changing over time

→ Online/offline interviews
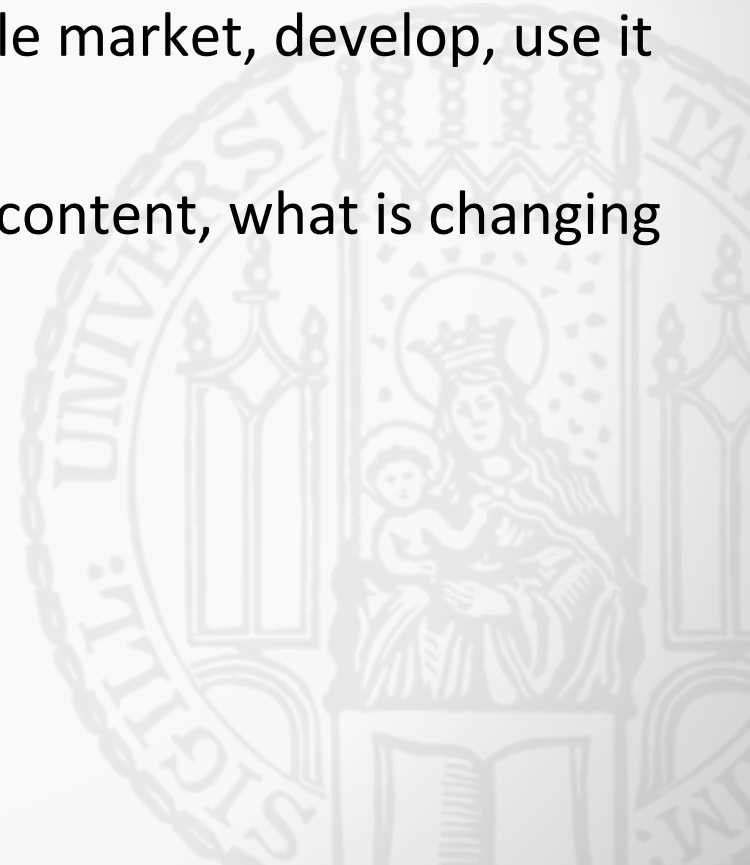
Internet vs. Ethnography (3/3): Conclusion

- Internet can be seen in both ways

- Any internet ethnography that only takes one view would be probably incomplete
  - → Ethnographer has to find a way of switching between the two views

Evaluate/analyse an ethnographic research

1. Did the research focus on lifestyle, meanings, beliefs?
2. Do you think enough methods were used and enough data collected?
3. How long did the researcher spend in the field? Was it long enough?
4. Does the work seem to belong to the holistic, semiotic or critical school?
5. Has the researcher acknowledged that the ethnography is a construction rather than a literal description?
6. What limitations in the ethnography does the researcher recognize?

Examples of ethnographic research

- Zuboff´s ground-breaking study (1988):
   Introduction of a IT-based systems

- Turkle (1995):
   How people reconstruct their identities when they go online?

- Trauth´s study (2000):
   Information economy in Ireland (companies, workers producing
   hardware, software, informations systems)
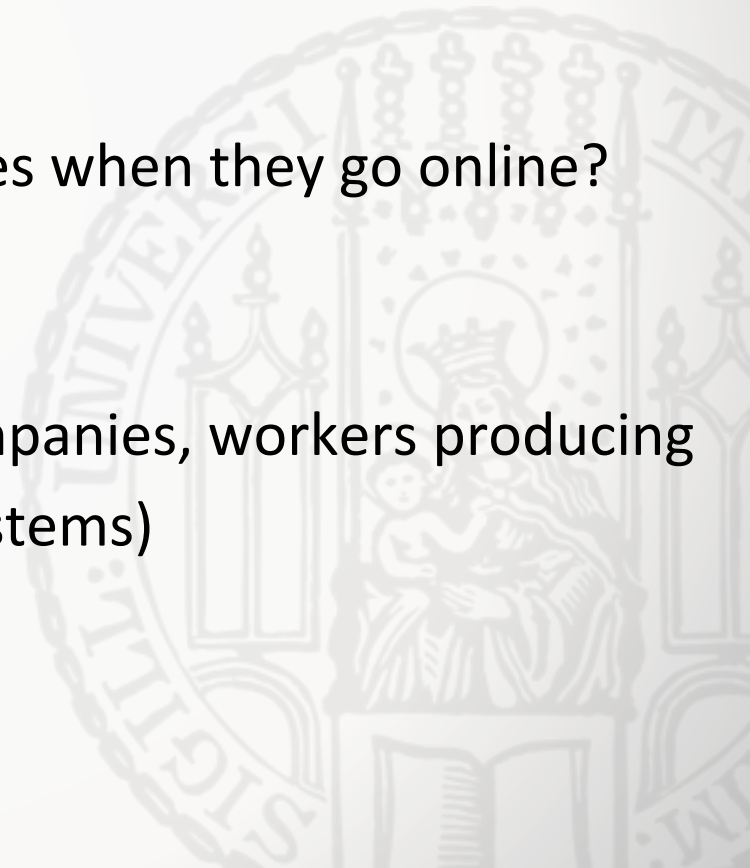
Advantages of ethnography

- Gives a rich, detailed picture of a particular situation than abstracting one/two aspects in isolation

- Findings based on natural setting and lives of the people

- Good for studies where the topic
  - is complex
  - and embedded in a social system that is not fully understood

- Ethnography can be used for studying something over a long period (e.g. introduction of a new system)
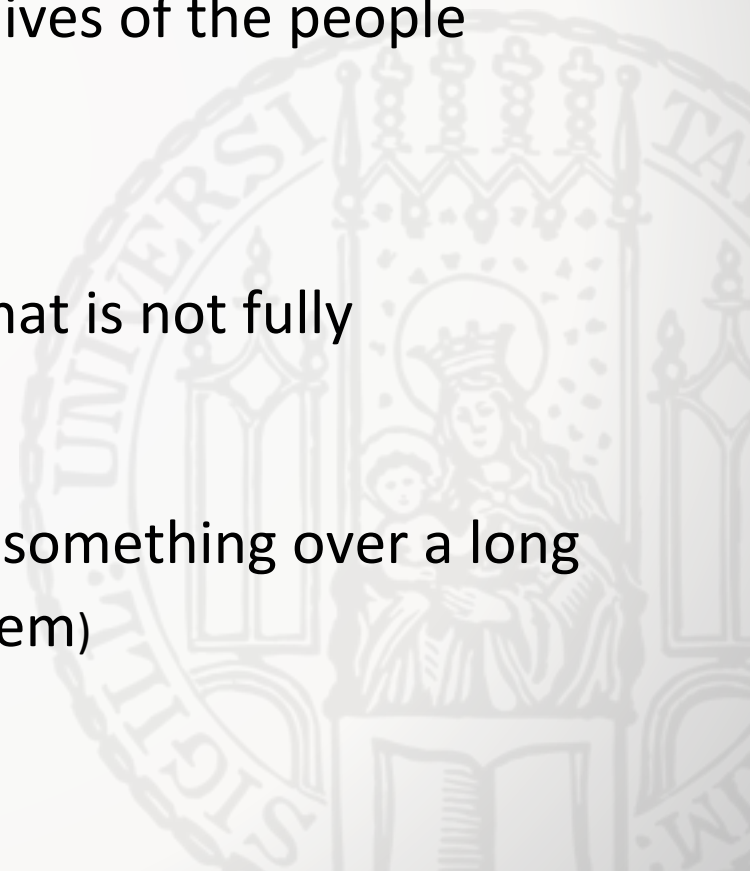
Disadvantages of ethnography

- High demands of the researcher

- Ethnography = „story-telling"
- No reproducing of findings to any other solution
- Not as well-established as surveys / experiments

- Ethnographer is not then immersed in a culture as a traditional ethnographer is
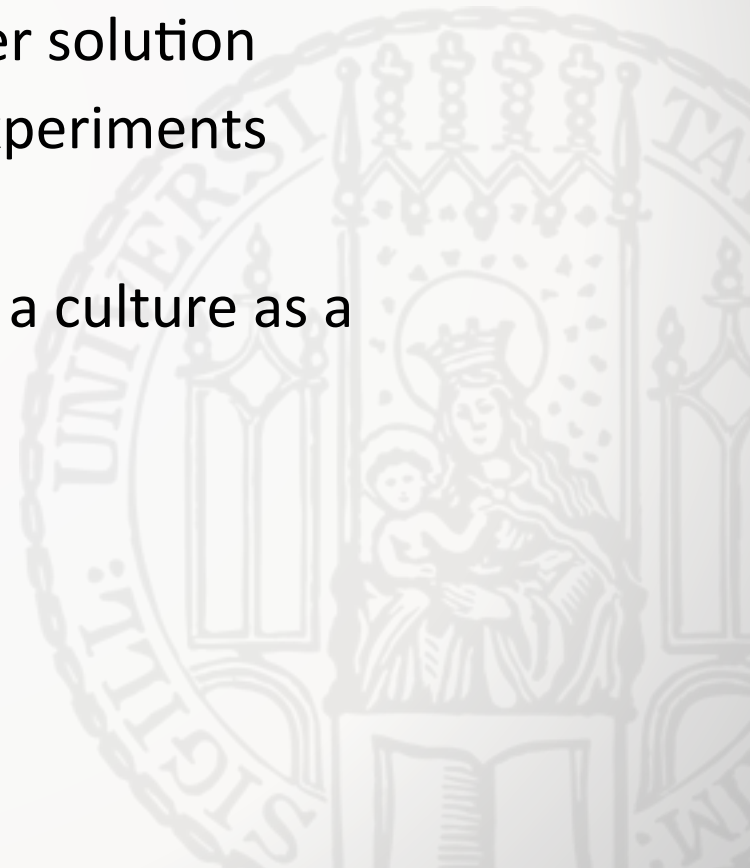
Take-away Message

- Types of Ethnography: holistic, semiotic, critical

- Planning Ethnography depend on people

- Problem of Implications for design

- Internet as „new" medium → Still needs to be investigated!

- Two views of the internet. Keep in mind both!

- There are controversial opinions about ethnography..
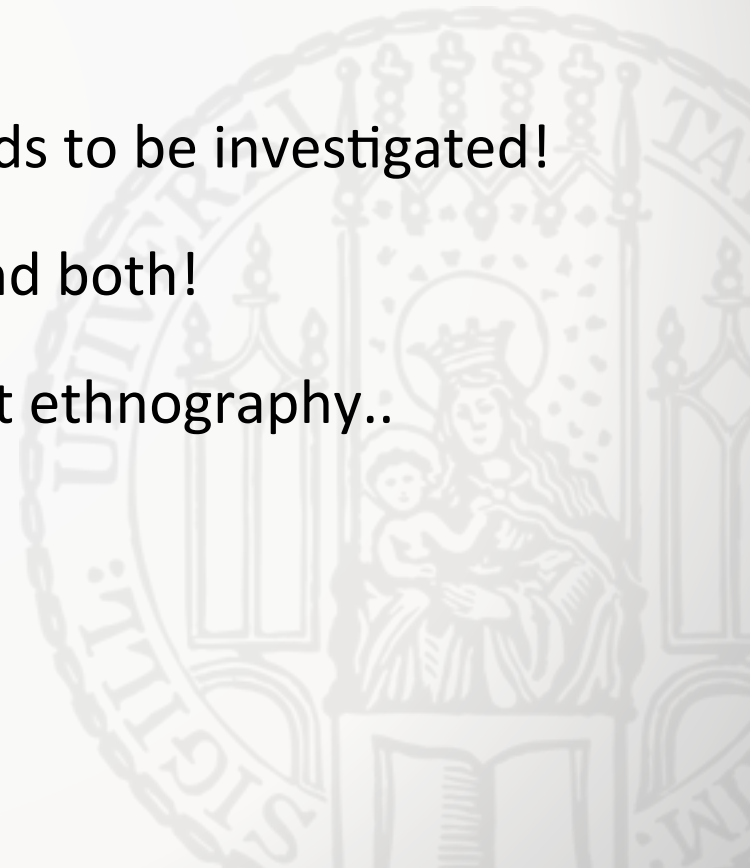
Discussion

Find examples of online conventions that people have adopted. What different metaphors are used to portray the idea of the Internet?

Sources

- Oates, Briony J. (2006): *Researching Information Systems and Computing*

- Dourish, Paul (2006): *Implication for Design*

- Crabtree, Andy et al. (2009): *Ethnography considered harmful*

- Hine, Christine (2000): *Virtual Ethnography*