Part I

Beyond the Great Divides?
A Primer on Internet Histories, Methods, and Ethics

Introduction to Part I

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Part I provides an initial orientation – to Internet studies *per se*, and thereby to the subsequent work gathered in parts II and III. The first chapter is a brief history of Internet studies by Barry Wellman. This history is particularly important as it clears away a series of dichotomies – what Klaus Bruhn Jensen in his contribution aptly calls "the Great Divides" – that dominated 1990s approaches to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the Internet. Overcoming these divides is crucial for a number of reasons, as we will see. First of all, these divides included an emphasis on the Internet as utterly novel and thereby revolutionary – hence making all previous history and insight irrelevant. At the same time, however, the Internet is undoubtedly marked by novelty in important ways. So in his chapter, Niels Brügger will highlight how the Internet requires new approaches in terms of archiving and our understanding of archived materials. Similarly, Elizabeth Buchanan argues that in some ways, the ethical challenges to Internet researchers evoked especially by what we call Web 2.0 may require novel approaches, alongside more traditional ones. But we will further see in the contributions by Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Maria Bakardjieva the point emphasized by Wellman: in contrast with such 1990s divides, more contemporary approaches focus on an Internet that is embedded in our everyday lives (at least in the developed world). This means that more traditional methods – quantitative, qualitative, and, for Bakardjieva, qualitative methods conjoined with critical theory of a specific sort – remain fruitful. Buchanan's introduction to Internet research ethics likewise makes this point with regard to a number of important examples and watershed cases.

Introducing the Chapters

We begin with Barry Wellman's "Studying the Internet Through the Ages." As a self-described "tribal elder," Wellman provides a history that is at once personal and comprehensive. His own engagement with CMC through a sociological lens

begins in 1990, just prior to what he identifies as the "first age of Internet studies" – an age he aptly captures as dominated more by punditry than by empirical research and data. The pundits, in turn, swing between a strikingly ahistorical utopianism and a darker (but not necessarily better informed) dystopianism. Both tended to assume a sharp (what I and others have called a Cartesian) dichotomy between real and virtual worlds and lives – an assumption that Wellman's own research (along with others such as Nancy Baym, 1995, 2002) directly challenged. The "second age of Internet studies" begins for Wellman in 1998, as a turn towards more extensive empirical work. As is now well recognized, these more recent studies undermine any sharp diremption between real and virtual: correlatively, neither the best nor worst possibilities of the early pundits have been realized. The current "third age" focuses on an Internet that, in the developed world at least, has become "the utility of the masses" – simply part of everyday life. And, if the question posed by the first age was "utopia or dystopia?" – research in the third age increasingly answers "yes." That is, both the darker and brighter sides of the Internet are explored with increasing nuance and sophistication – e.g., social stratification and possible loss of community, on the one hand, countered by recognition of how "networked individuals" utilize the Internet in all its capacities to increase their communicative interactions and relationships with others.

Along the way, Internet studies have likewise evolved – to the point that now, on Wellman's showing, they move in two different but complementary directions. Exemplified in the annual conferences of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), Internet studies now stands as a – highly interdisciplinary – field in its own right. Simultaneously, Internet research is increasingly incorporated within more disciplinary conferences and publications.

Wellman's account thus serves as a succinct roadmap – not only for Internet studies in a broad sense, but also for the project of this volume. To be sure, there are additional elements and more fine-grained twists and turns along the way that this initial map does not fully capture. But no map ever does, of course – which is why, to use Wellman's metaphor of what was once Internet *incognita*, we continue with a journey initially demarcated through our first maps.

Niels Brügger's chapter, "Web Archiving – Between Past, Present, and Future" reminds us that the objects of our study can be profoundly ephemeral; hence, stabilizing the objects of our study by way of archiving practices that follow carefully developed guidelines becomes a foundational component of Internet studies. But this further means that archiving methods and guidelines in turn require the critical attention of Internet researchers more broadly. Brügger argues first that the Internet is characterized by a dynamic, ephemeral, and changing medium: since it is therefore fundamentally different from any other known media type, it must be approached in new ways in our efforts to archive it. Second, when Internet material is archived, it is also fundamentally different from well-known media types, and again we have to approach it in new ways. Brügger then provides a comprehensive overview of both important web archiving methods and significant web archives and archiving projects. He further offers guidelines

for "web philology," for how web scholars may critically evaluate and interpret archived materials vis-à-vis originals that may no longer be accessible. He concludes by sketching out the future research agenda for web archiving, an agenda that, not surprisingly, involves not only Internet researchers specifically interested in web archiving, but, more broadly, the Internet researchers' community at large. Brügger's chapter is critical as it calls our attention to a dimension of Internet research that, while essential, has received comparatively little attention or reflection.

In Chapter 3, "New Media, Old Methods – Internet Methodologies and the Online/Offline Divide," Klaus Bruhn Jensen recalls what we have now seen to be a thematic 1990s utopian/dystopian dichotomy as challenging researchers to assess whether the Internet entraps or empowers its users. Referring to a second 1990s dichotomy, Jensen reiterates that while the initial emphasis on a radical distinction between the online and the offline may have been necessary, "it has become increasingly counterproductive in methodological terms." Likewise – and again, consonant with others in this volume who foreground the importance of *embodiment*, despite its temporary banishment during celebrations in the 1990s of the virtual self and virtual communities – Jensen points out that *contra* early rhetoric of a revolution in cyberspace, "Old media rarely die, and humans remain the reference point and prototype for technologically mediated communication." This means that old methods retain much of their salience in contemporary Internet studies. Jensen first distinguishes among three media types in order to sharpen our focus on the Internet, not so much as a distinctive (much less, revolutionary) technology, but as one among many "constituents of layered social and technological networks." This view moves us past, in his phrase, "the great divides" of the 1990s (e.g. offline/online, etc.) and serves as the basis for a six-celled schema of possible research methods. In discussing additional considerations that might guide researchers' choices, Jensen highlights Giddens' notion of "double hermeneutics" (1979): that is, researchers' work, as a specific interpretation of and hermeneutical framework for understanding the Internet, can thereby reshape a broader understanding and use of the Internet – especially as the much-celebrated interactivity of Web 2.0 highlights users' abilities to modify and reshape both web content and web form.

Maria Bakardjieva's chapter, "The Internet in Everyday Life" carries us forward from Jensen's essay on method by providing a fine-grained look at the multiple dimensions of Internet use – where, as emphasized by Jensen and Wellman, we are now dealing with an Internet that is *embedded* in our everyday lives, not somehow radically divorced from them. Again, this means that the Internet is no longer solely a technological *unicum*, demanding utterly new methodologies for its study – however much it requires new methods for its archiving and interpretations of those archives. Rather, as normalized in these ways, the Internet can thus be approached through a wide range of familiar and established methodologies and disciplines – thereby helping us further contextualize this technology with similar research and analyses of "familiar media and communication phenomena."

Bakardjieva offers her own schema for understanding diverse approaches – approaches clustered first of all around different understandings of what "the everyday" means: statistical, interpretive/constructivist, and critical. What follows is a comprehensive survey of the significant studies and findings within each of these three approaches. In her conclusion, Bakardjieva highlights some of the most significant outcomes of this work, showing how each approach and set of findings complements the others to constitute a comprehensive but also very fine-grained understanding of the Internet and its interactions in our everyday lives.

We conclude Part I with Elizabeth A. Buchanan's "Internet Research Ethics: Past, Present, and Future." Buchanan provides here the definitive history and overview of Internet research ethics (IRE), first of all establishing its background and broad context in the emergence of human subjects protections and concomitant research ethics evoked by the disasters of the Tuskegee studies and the atrocities committed in the name of research on prisoners during World War Two. Buchanan interweaves this important history with the specific ethical norms and principles that come to be articulated through the various reports and legislative acts that gradually establish the background and precedents for what became an explicit focus on IRE in the 1990s. Buchanan then follows out the development and growing literature of IRE as such – but again, with a view towards thereby highlighting the substantive considerations of research ethics, especially as these are interwoven with specific methodologies. These lead to her detailed discussion of "ethical considerations" – in effect, a primer on IRE that summarizes the most important guidelines and reflections articulated in the rapidly growing literature of IRE. Finally, Buchanan sketches out some of the contemporary issues and possible future concerns of IRE. As with others in this volume (e.g., Baym, Jensen), Buchanan notes that the advent of Web 2.0 signals a new range of ethical challenges and concerns that, in part at least, have yet to be fully addressed. Building on the participatory "open source" approach of the AoIR guidelines (2002), Buchanan urges Internet researchers to engage in the ongoing development of IRE as an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural enterprise – one essential to the further development of Internet studies as such.

Taken together, these chapters thus provide an initial orientation to the history of Internet studies and to central questions of methods and approaches, including crucial attention to Internet research ethics. We find here as well an initial overview of what historical and contemporary research tells us about the Internet. Finally, these chapters foreground several important thematics for contemporary research, beginning with the everydayness of an Internet that is embedded in our lives. These more contemporary emphases thus shift us from a 1990s fascination with novelty and revolution, and thereby, a "user" who was often presumed to be radically disembodied and thereby disconnected from her larger communities and histories, and oftentimes relatively passive vis-à-vis the technologies envisioned to somehow inevitably carry us all along in their deterministic sweep. By contrast, more contemporary methods and approaches presume not only the activity of the persons taking up these technologies and applications (and their interactivity, as

emphasized by the rubric of Web 2.0); they further bring into play the central importance of *embodiment* as crucial to our understanding of the persons who design and take up the Internet and its multiple applications.

This embeddedness, embodiment, and engagement, finally, extends not only to what Wellman calls "networked selves" – but to Internet researchers themselves, especially as our contributors here call us to engage not only in our research and reflection on the methods of that research, but also in reflection and construction of our archiving methods and research ethics.

In all these ways, these chapters thus orient our readers to what follows – and demarcate a broad agenda for Internet researchers at large, as we move forward with this most ephemeral but most central medium.

References

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