

Two recent events have compelled me to start writing about ‘remix’ as a valuable and ethical tool within qualitative research.

- 1) I caused a small firestorm at an ethics workshop I was leading when I mentioned mentioned that I invented a dialogue in a study
- 2) My two swedish colleagues got a paper rejected because they invented blog was considered ‘fabrication of data’

In the next few minutes I want to walk you through some of my still rough thoughts, part of an ongoing book project, about:

- a) some of the cultural and political conditions within which we find ourselves doing qualitative research, which tells us something about why fabrication might be such a contested practice,
- b) why remix is such a powerful metaphor for thinking about research methods, and
- c) how fabrication is one form of remix that can address an immediate problem related to protecting privacy of participants.

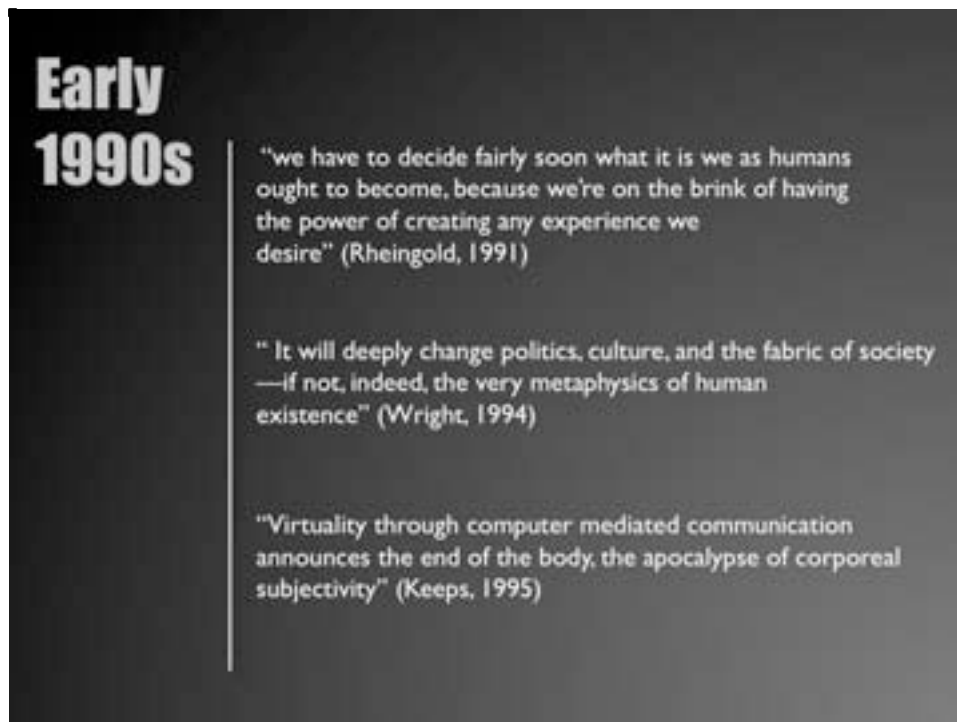
We live in a remix culture, people are doing creative remix all around us, and we researchers seem to be stuck with some degree of methodological hypochondria, where we are afraid of taking too many risks. It seems not just odd but unwise that we would feel restricted in the ways we contribute to this knowledge economy, when



These questions have been plaguing me.

Are our methods of sensemaking and representation adequate? And by this I mean more specifically:

- 1) Do our models for ethnography work when the field is constructed much more by interaction than geography?
  - 2) Do our methods for looking at interaction adequately reflect the MODES of interaction possible?
  - 3) Do our thought processes as researchers fit well with norms for data collection, analysis, and reporting when our own experiences of the research are situated in our own multiphrenic experience of the world?
- 2) Do our methods still protect participants?  
The simple answer is no. Longer answer is one that I write about elsewhere.
- 3) why, within cultural epoch of collaborative, open source, reputation based forms of knowledge production, do we see a strong persistence of traditional procedures and norms for 'what counts' as appropriate for qualitative research?
- 4) And related, are we afraid to take risks?

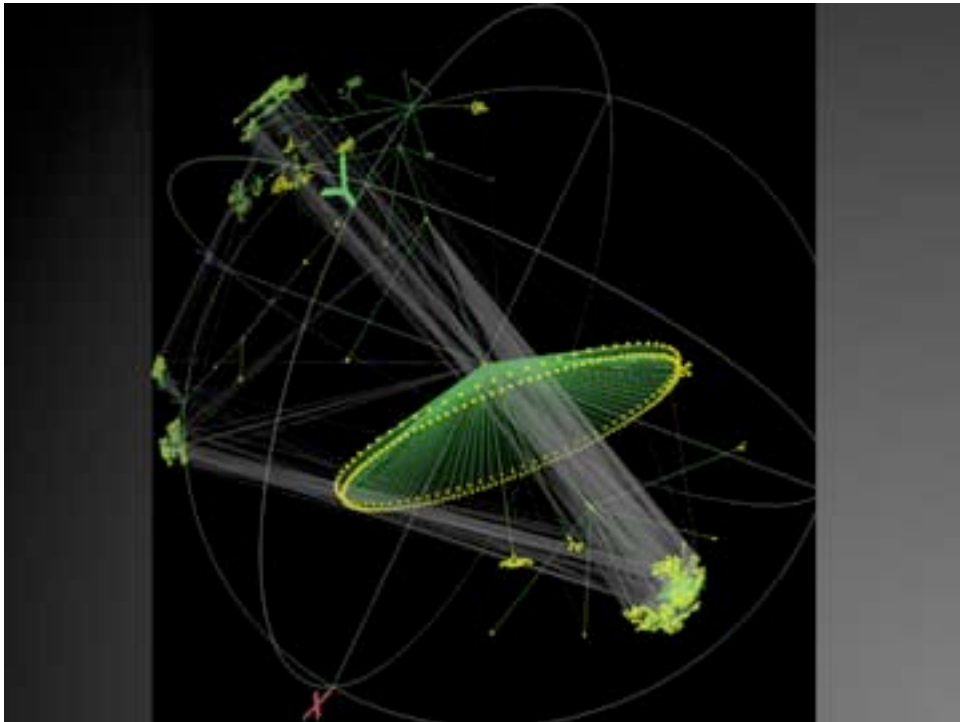
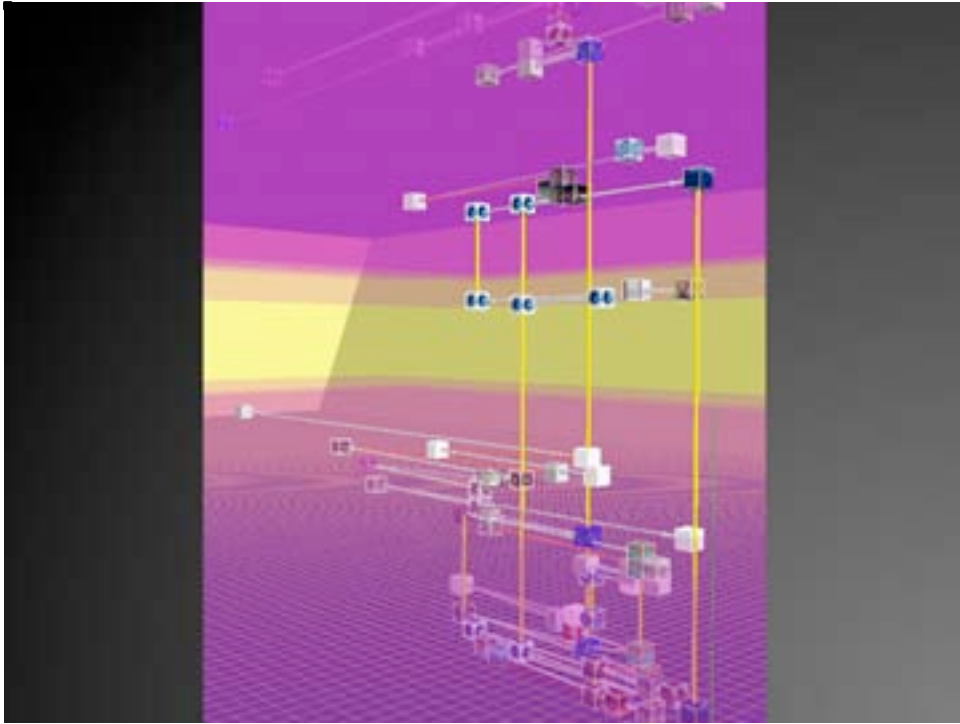


Prior to the commercialization of the internet. These were some prominent types of questions in social research, broadly speaking (and oversimplified for purposes of making an argument)

The early 1990s marked a period of intense attention on the technology, the nature of embodiment, the virtual. People are doing a lot of inventive analyses, using their own experience as guide.

Focusing on the mechanics of hypertext, the shape of cyberspace. (flip through following 7 slides to see some early visualizations of this, taken from the Cyberspace Atlas.







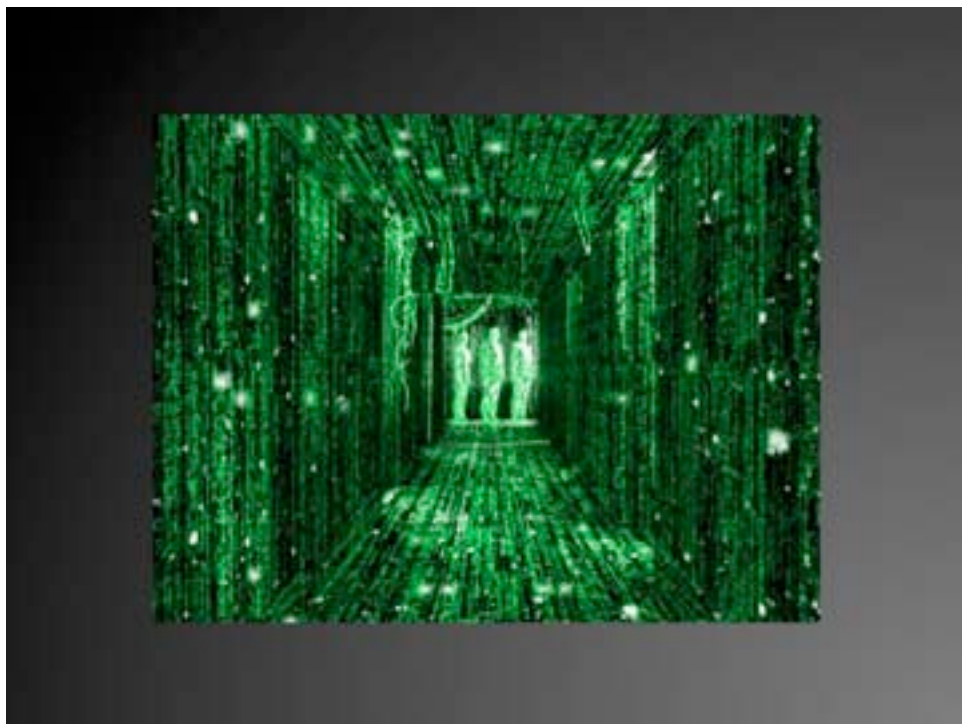
Models grew from simple networked maps to three dimensional spaces for information exploration, including visualizations of ourselves as avatars moving through websites, software for bookmarking websites that geolocated each bookmark and identified it by type, and three dimensional 'scapes' wherein we would exist, informationally.







The creation of the platforms happened in parallel with films of the decade that envisioned a merging of human and machine, the creation of unique lifeworlds for our avatar selves. Here's an image of Johnny Mneumonic and following, the Matrix.

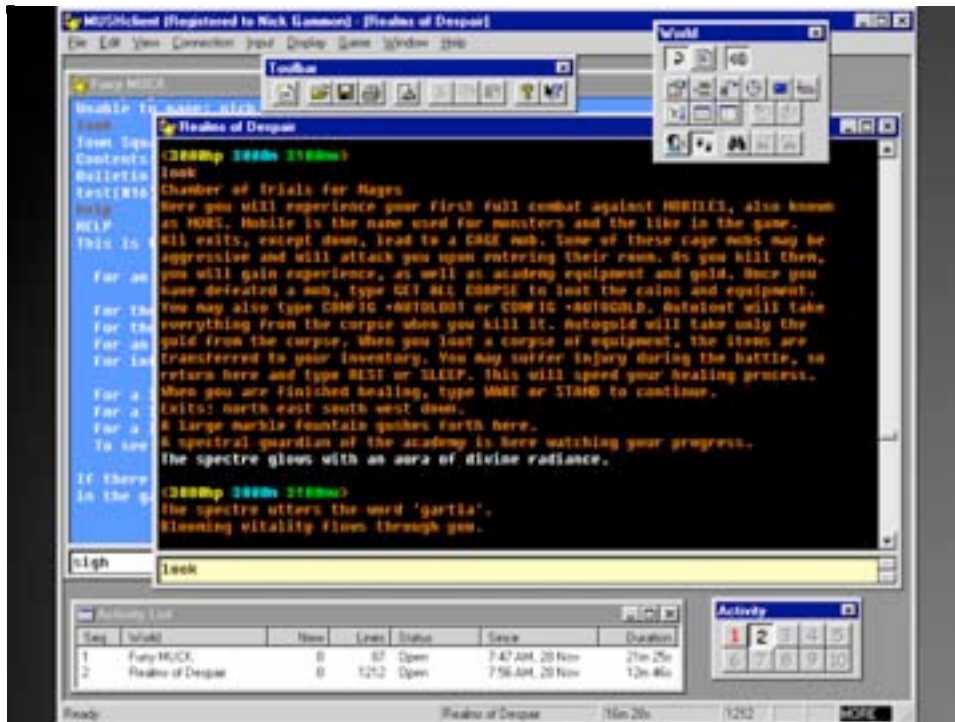






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*** Connecting to port 6667 of server irc
*** Welcome to the Internet Relay Network forcer!["forcer@preforcix.roof.lan
*** Loading forcer's .ircrc
*** Your host is irc.roof.lan, running version 2.9.5-G-1561-F14
*** This server was created Mon May 18 1998 at 05:42:51 MET DST
*** Modes available sirv, channel modes available abiklwopqstv
*** There are 0 users and 0 services on 1 servers
*** 1 unknown connections
*** 10 channels have been formed
*** This server has 0 clients, 0 services and 0 servers connected
*** - irc.roof.lan Message of the Day -
*** - 16/5/1998 10:43
*** - Welcome to irc.roof.lan, the IRC server for roof.lan
*** - Please behave and enjoy your stay.
*** End of /MOTD command.
*** Mode change "+i" for user forcer by forcer
*** /linuxfaq <nick>
*** forcer ("forcer@preforcix.roof.lan) has joined channel #channel
*** Mode change "+o forcer" on channel #channel by forcer
*** Users on #channel: @forcer
*** #channel End of /WHOIS list.
> !msg
*** MSG @forcer (+i) on #channel #type /help for help
#channel>
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Yet in all of it, this was our method of communicating in cyberspace. No wonder there was a focus on the body when the body was so glaringly absent yet viscerally present.



If you were lucky, your software had more colors. But the mode of “being with other” in this timeframe is ascii text, primarily.

In certain fields of qualitative inquiry, there’s an impulse to reconsider what counts as research, to embrace autoethnographic or decentered ways of knowing (following the path of Geertz, then Clifford and Marcus and situated feminists like Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway). This is most extremely expressed by interpretive sociology in the U.S., where we see a lot of experimentation with methods of analysis and representation in different genres of writing.

### Salient Characteristics of the 1990s

disembodiment

text as being

geographic displacement/dispersion

### meant challenges for ethnographic research:

interviewing both online or offline?

authenticity? in the body or in the content of the text?

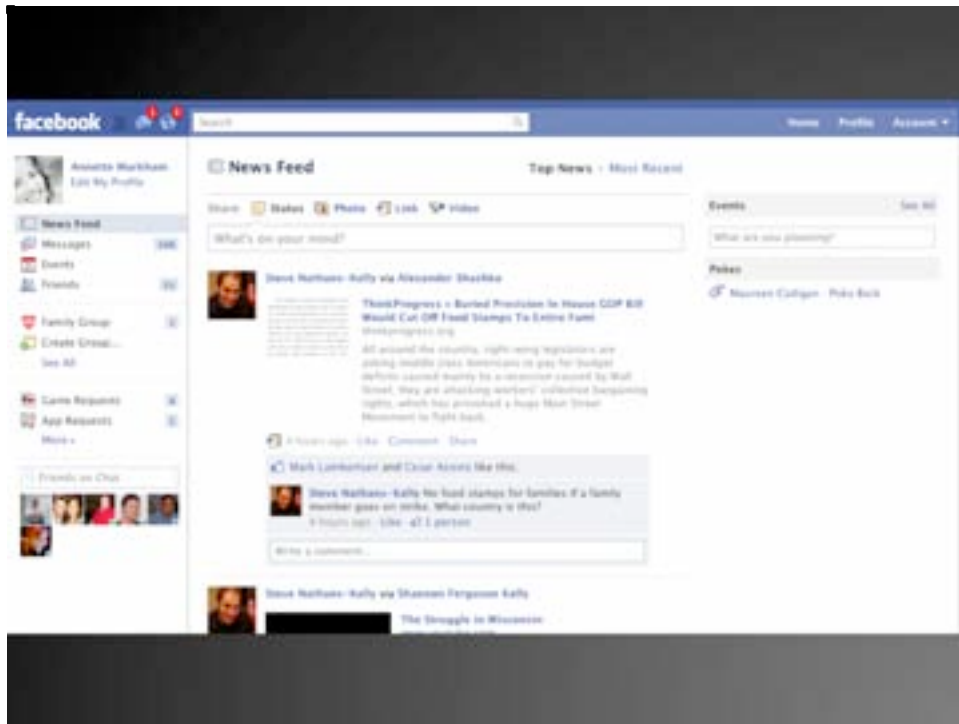
where is real experience? online or offline or a mix of both?

participation as active building of field boundaries

storing and managing huge amounts of field data

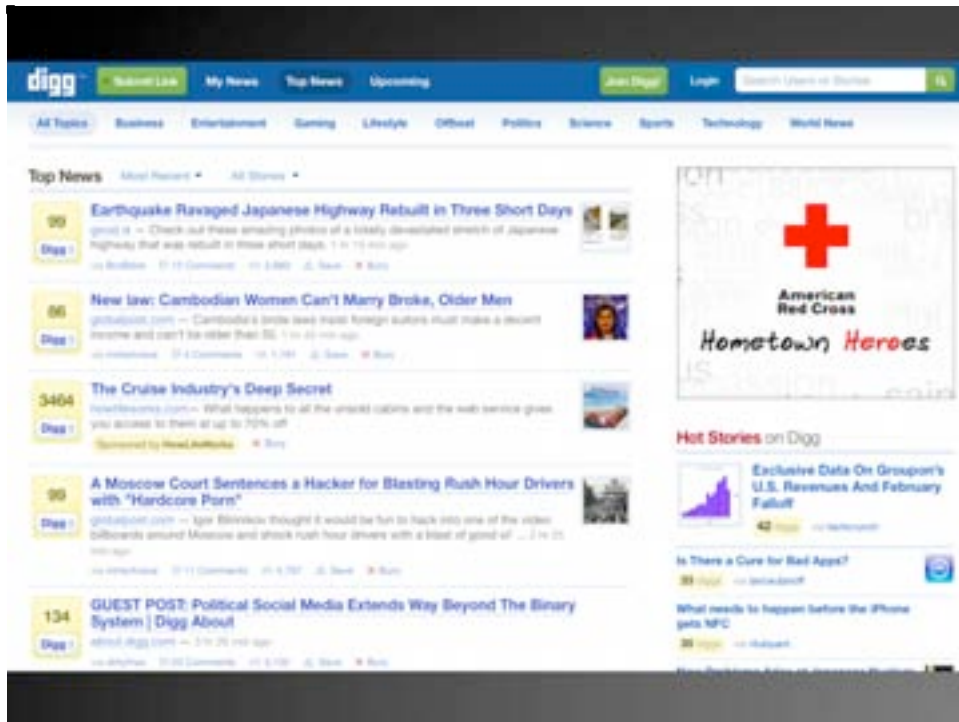


Then, in the mid 1990s, the focus of research turned to the WWW as a visually dominated space for commerce and personal production of personal pages.



Concurrently, we see a rise in studying networks, or larger pictures of society, based on the more robust web and the growing social use of the web as a networking tool.

Now, our parameters for what is appropriate for an interface have changed somewhat. If we're not in a gaming environment or 'alternative' space, this is the classic look of the stage upon which we now play.



The ubiquitous plain interface took hold and firmly influences web design now.



2011

"Who should I accept as a friend? Everyone I know or just people I like?" (U.S. teen talking about Facebook)

"What role does social media play in protest movements?"

Should I be angry or try to sue people for spreading my photography all over the internet or just be glad I was noticed? (Noam Galai)

"How can musicians engage their fans through social media?" (Nancy Baym)

It's no wonder the questions have shifted. Instead of radicalizing the cultural parameters, we've (or they've) erased the obviousness, created interfaces that are transparent.

whereas we used to see the frames out there in front of us, we now have stepped into the frames.

IMPORTANT: I don't mean to imply these plain interfaces are the only way we experience media and internet. There's a huge range of experience possible in vivid color and movement and detail.

But Google or Facebook or generic commercial website: These are our 'everyday' spaces. The visionary platforms became quite vanilla.

**Methodologically, I have to ask NOT ONLY what have we gained, but what has been lost?**

**Variation and experimentation, Invention and creativity: these may be tolerated, but they are still not explored as premises for sound or rigorous scholarship.**



Several shifts that occur(ed), culturally, politically, technologically, to influence the way we conceptualize and design research studies:

- 1) Usability studies promote the idea that we should have templates for our social environments online, that technologies should be invisible, seamless conduits or portals
- 2) There's a significant backlash against alternative methods of qualitative inquiry, such as "autoethnography."
- 3) Shrinking pools of funding and an associated growth of regulatory guidelines and regulation models privileging evidence-based, positivist research. We see this in ethics guidelines, which have not kept up with methodological developments, funding restrictions, such as the NSF, which has seen a resurgence of terminology like validity, replicability and generalizability, all of which are defined in fairly traditional ways.  
And increased requirements for data sharing which flies in the face of epistemologies that lie outside positivism.

Regardless of reason, we now find ourselves situated (or, some would say, still situated) in a fairly conservative set of practices, ironically at a time when there is a





**To address this mismatch, I have been working on an approach to thinking about method that draws on the ideas of remix**

The characteristics of Remix include creative re-ensemble of units of cultural information.

=creative mashup

=sampling

=mixing

=creation of **partial products** that **grow in quality and cohesion over time** through **continued practice** of one's art slash craft **plus the participation of others**

=continual growth through feedback loops and collaboration. Networked knowledge, truly networked.

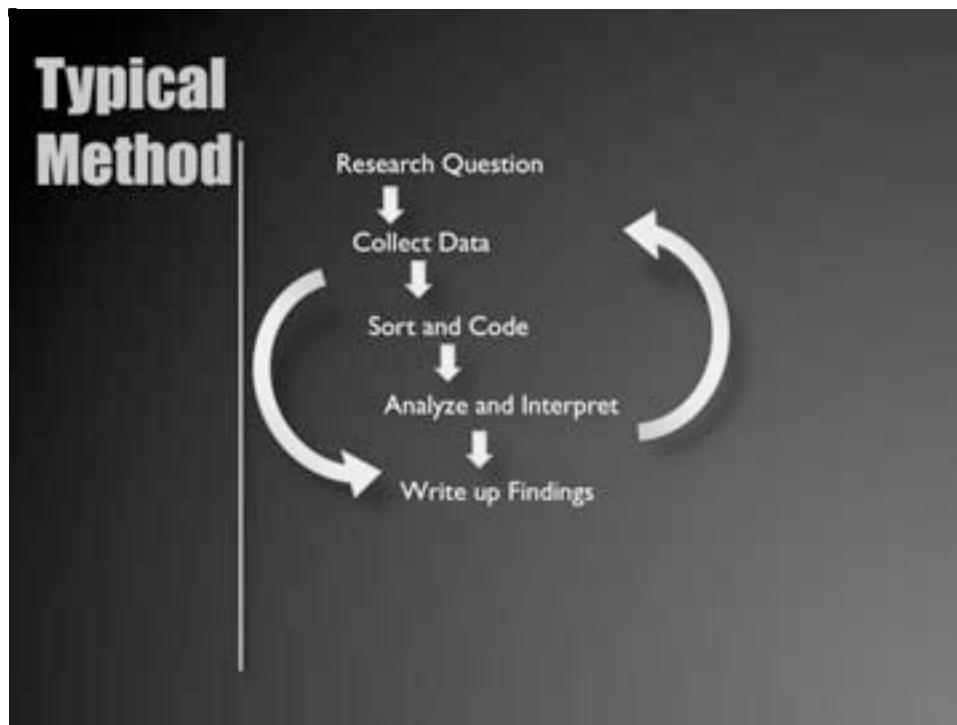


And our Research environments look more and more like this.

This may have always been the case, but it's certainly more visible now, and the temptation to collect and comprehend the whole is strong.



Yet our models for research are embedded in the notion of the classic ethnographer in the simply bounded field, as this picture of Malinowski in the midst of fieldwork illustrates.



And despite alternatives given by feminist scholars and others, this remains the main training model for qualitative inquiry. A linear, straightforward process.



A remix method approach is a way of embracing the idea that our individual products are similar to the entire academic enterprise. That we are contributing pieces of an ongoing conversation; that understanding takes place over time and in a collaborative, creative way. Which moves us away from the impossible goal of finding the right answer, the whole description,

**how to do it well?**

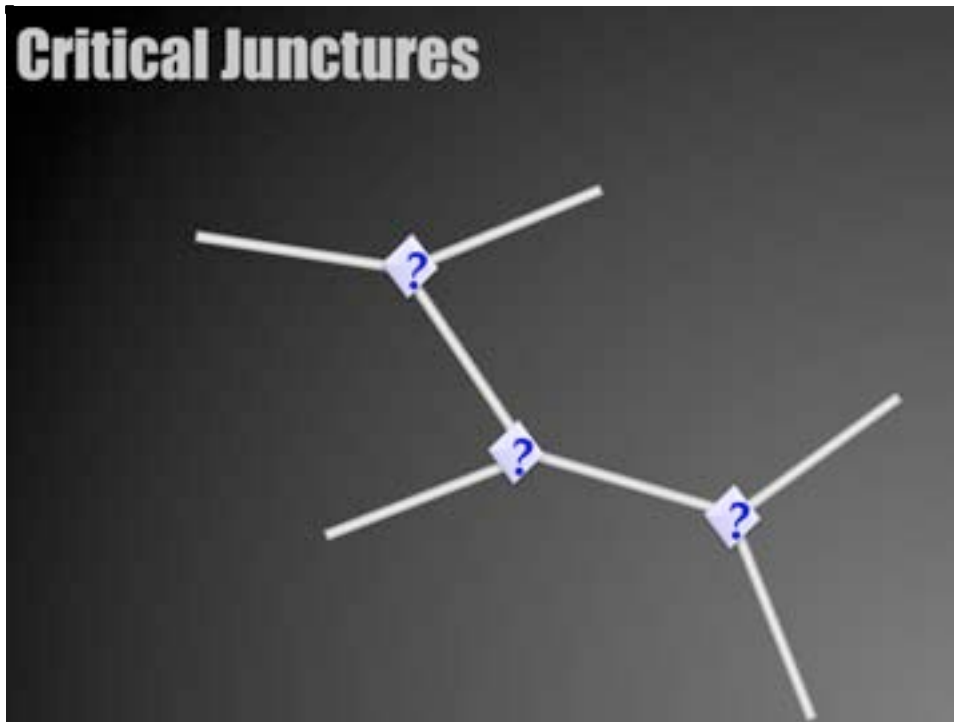
reflexivity  
interpretive authority

**But seriously, what does it involve?**

Borrowing. Taking the 'best of' from a range of approaches.  
Generating  
Moving  
Playing (practicing, testing, rehearsing)  
Interrogating

**But seriously, what does it involve?**

Borrow from anything. Any way of knowing. Any epistemological framework. Any philosophy. Any art



Remix is really about

Flexible adaptation. An attempt to find creative ways to cope with global, fragmented, multi-sited contexts and experiences.

And it's based on the notion that methods are nothing more or less than choices, made at critical junctures, with consequences for knowledge production and the communities and individuals we study.\

So for me, the issue is how remix can help me mix things up, literally, to try to create frame breaks for myself so that I can identify my frames, think differently, and engage in an ethical practice of reflexivity. It's basically an interrogative technique. Not an "anything goes" technique, but a model for opening doors, finding new frames for thinking and analyzing, using strong modes of accountability, and building on existing alternatives for remixed measures of quality.

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