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Framed by the idea that ethnography is a trans-disciplinary praxis, this paper adopts Alan Barnard's framework of the theory as questions, assumptions, methods, and evidence (QAME) to compare how ethnographic praxis is approached across the domains of anthropology, marketing, and design. The companies Intel, Cheskin, and IDEO serve as exemplars for each domain, respectively. Through a content analysis of academic journals and popular media, the paper explores the discursive meanings of ethnography as a "boundary object" across many domains. The paper concludes with how Barnard's QAME framework can be used to make visible ethnography's multiple meanings so that practitioners can improve interdisciplinary collaborations within organizations and better articulate ethnography's value to business.

INTRODUCTION: ETHNOGRAPHY AS TRANS-DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARY OBJECT

Beyond its origins in anthropology, ethnography has virally replicated into forms of design ethnography, marketing ethnography, ethnographic evaluation of policy, educational ethnography, etc. Its cyclical hyper-visibility in the business pundit media such as Fast Company and Business Week only muddles its visibility in business contexts of production (design) and consumption (marketing). Yet as defined by the *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*, ethnography can now be considered a trans-disciplinary praxis:

> Transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all discipline. Its goal is the understanding of the present world, of which one of the imperatives is the unity of knowledge (Nicolescu 2007).

Ethnography no longer "belongs" to any discipline; it operates between, across and beyond disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, business, politics, design, engineering, medicine, and education. Within this diversity, it maintains its core intention to understand the present world. What distinguishes ethnography from other philosophical orientations towards knowledge is the belief that the one must understand and represent knowledge of the present world from the ways of being of the people studied (Tunstall 2006). From the synthesis of the multiple ways of being and knowing the world comes the "unity of knowledge" that is the trans-disciplinary imperative.

Ethnography's trans-disciplinary position poses interesting opportunities in regards to its role across the social worlds of anthropology, marketing, and design. Ethnography has successfully become a boundary object that "…inhabits several intersecting social

worlds…and satisfies the informational requirements of each" (Star and Greisemer 1989: 393). Each social world claims their own form of ethnography as distinct from how practiced by the others, yet share enough similarities to sustain a conference on ethnographic praxis in industry. Beyond the term, one can speculate that it is the satisfaction with the information that ethnography provides which brings these groups together. What is the informational requirement that ethnography satisfies? It is the desire to gain a truer understanding of human (group and individual) behaviors. Yet, in spite of this shared desire, I argue that the resultant human understanding is put to different ends in anthropology, marketing, and design. Thus, ethnography's ubiquity raises certain challenges and questions for its praxis. How does ethnography operate as a boundary object for design compared to anthropology, or marketing? What does a designer mean by his or her praxis of ethnography versus a marketer's praxis ethnography? And how does the variances in the meanings of ethnography in those domains affect ethnography's ability to develop and maintain "coherence across intersecting social worlds" (Star and Gerisemer 1989: 393)?

To analyze and make visible the variances in meaning of ethnography, this paper uses Alan Barnard's (2000) notion of theory as defined as made up of four elements: questions, assumption, methods, and evidence (QAME). Methodologically, a content audit of both popular and academic literatures serves as data for defining the meaning of anthropological ethnography, marketing ethnography, and design ethnography. Visualized as a matrix, each ethnographic domain is systematically classified according to its hegemonic questions, assumptions, methodological approach towards ethnography, and evidence. Three exemplars of each type of ethnographic praxis are analyzed: the work of Intel's People and Practices Group for anthropology, the work of Cheskin for marketing, and the work of IDEO for design. The paper concludes with the implications of the multiple meanings of ethnographic praxis for its theoretical and practical visibility and efficacy in the design and marketing domains.

THE "QAME" OF THEORY: QUESTIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, METHODS, AND EVIDENCE AS COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

In his book *History and Theory in Anthropology*, Alan Barnard (2000: 5-6) defines theory as made up of four elements: questions, assumption, methods, and evidence (QAME). While there are other definitions of theory, I find his framework most useful for sharing with interdisciplinary colleagues and students due to its flexibility and lack of pretentiousness. Barnard's framework is flexible because every domain has a set of questions it seeks to answer, a set of assumptions it holds dear, a methodological approach towards getting to the answers it seeks, and its own notion of proper evidence. One can use Barnard's QAME to engage in a conversation of what are the questions of anthropology, marketing, and design; what are the assumptions that each domain brings to the table, how does each domain approach answering its questions through ethnography, and what does it use to communicate to others as evidence or proof. Defining theory within the non-pretentious framework of QAME enables both academics and practitioners within and across domains

to discuss the similarities and differences in how they build and utilize knowledge. And while these discussions often take place in competitive and, sometimes, accusatory tones on listservs, blogs, and conference hallways, the QAME framework enables discussions to be grounded in a shared systematic analytical process. It is my assertion that anthropology, marketing, and design represent different theoretical perspectives on ethnographic praxis based on each domains specific questions, assumptions, methods, and evidence: Table 1. These differences reflect ethnography's adaptations to the multiple environments in which its contemporary praxis finds itself.

Table 1. Matrix of the QAME of ethnography across three domains

	Anthropology	Marketing	Design
Questions	What does it mean to be human?	How does one allocate resources to move customers to buy goods and/or services?	How does one design a successful product, service, communication, or experience?
Assumptions - **Issues** - **Roles** - **Scale**	- Origins, evolution, and meaning - Anthropologist as instrument - Qualitative significance	- Economic rational choice - Marketer as selector - Quantitative significance	- Context and user requirements - Designer as intermediary - Qualitative significance
Methodological approach towards ethnography	Preferred epistemological stance	"Intimate" consumer insight	Empathic intuition
Evidence	Informal conversation Experiential textual report	Formal presentation Strategic report	Concepts Prototypes

THE "QAME" OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

The role of ethnography in anthropology has almost mythological status. By this, I mean that people treat it as if the practice is frozen in the times of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* or Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Popular perceptions of anthropological ethnographic praxis in the trade publications continue to emphasize ethnography's Colonial past, with images of pith helmets and the language of exoticism.

Lucy Suchman (2007) in a conference presentation entitled "Anthropology as Brand" analyses the over fifteen years in which trade publications such as *Business Week*, *the New York Times*, and *Fast Company* have described anthropologists "going native" in the corporate world. The persistence of the exotica mythology of anthropological ethnography is unfortunate because it allows people to ignore the vibrancy of contemporary anthropological ethnographic praxis, both academic and industrial. As Bill Maurer (2005: 1) describes in the AAA flagship journal, *American Anthropologist*, "ethnographic emergences" include the anthropology of science, technology, law, media, the environment, or even design, which can now be "repatriated to the center of anthropology." To illustrate the vibrancy of these ethnographic emergences, this section follows the trajectories of anthropological ethnography among the Peoples and Practices Group (PaPR) at Intel.

Anthropological questions

In any introductory anthropology textbook, it states that the fundamental question of the anthropology is "What does it mean to be human?" Anthropology investigates this question from a variety of perspectives: from the distant past in archaeology to the near future in socio-cultural anthropology, and from human biological diversity in physical anthropology to the symbolic diversity of languages in linguistics. The meaning of that humanness evolves over time, but the field encompasses the breadth and depth of exploration of the human condition. How is it that Intel's People and Practices Research (PaPR) Group's ethnography is geared to address anthropological questions?

On the Intel website, the PaPR Group states clearly that their mission is to "…develop a deep understanding of how people live and work." This understanding becomes insights that guide Intel's strategy and long term R&D, with the ultimate goal of ensuring "that future Intel products satisfy people's real world needs." The longer-strategic time frame allows for the group to ask much broader questions framed by very classical anthropological problems areas such as the nature and/or nurture, evolution, internal-external, and emergent social facts (Bernard 2006, Tunstall 2008)[1]. Intel's PaPR project, Mobile Times, addresses the internal-external problem of how behavior is influenced by temporal values of leisure/non-leisure or environmental conditions of mobility. Its intentions are described as "developing a theory based on people's perception of time on a global scale that emphasizes how people today are communicating with others" (Johnson 2007: 12). The Small Country Effect project looks at the evolution (i.e. patterns of change and growth) of technology adoption in small countries. Its Women and Technology Adoption project frames how gender as nature or nurture affects women's relationships with information and communication technologies. The Personal Digital Money project asks how people influence each other socially through emergent forces of electronic payment systems. Although diverse, Intel's PaPR share a central question of how technology figures into the definition

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[1] Many large organizations with ethnographic R&D functions, such as Motorola and Pitney Bowes have distinct long-term strategy more anthropologically-based groups and mid-to-short term strategy more design-based groups tied to specific product/business lines.

of humanness. As PaPR group leader, Maria Bezaitis, was quoted in *Electronic Engineering Times*, "We start in the social world and work our way back to technology" (Johnson 2007: 12). The focus on anthropological questions distinguishes the PaPR group from other ethnographic groups at Intel, whose work adheres more closely to the questions of design ethnography, as I will address later. Now, I turn to the assumptions underlying anthropological ethnography.

Anthropological assumptions

The American Heritage Dictionary (2007) defines an assumption as "… something taken for granted or accepted as true without proof." Assumptions intrigue me because they tend to be tied to group stances about what issues are important, what roles the group or individual plays in the issue, and what is the scale of engagement/impact. As represented in the both the academic and trade literature on ethnography, the key issues of anthropological academic praxis concern the origins of human phenomena, their evolution over time and space, and the meanings they carry for people at a qualitative scale. This issue of origins—biologically, materially, linguistically, and socio-cultural—is probably the most defining character of traditional anthropology. An title keyword search of the word "origin" in Anthrosource, the database of academic anthropological journal articles, resulted in over 169 articles ranging from 19th century studies of the origin of maple sugar (Henshaw 1890) to 21st century studies of the origin of extinction (Hamberger 2005). The focus on origins is tied to the anthropological concern with evolution, or how phenomena change over time and space. The origin does not have to be absolute, but rather it is a starting point by which to follow the path of changes to their current and future conclusions. What is the subject of this change? It is the meaning of the human phenomenon examined. E-lab captured this emphasis in its statement, "This means something." For Intel, the PaPR group wants to understand the changing meanings of technology for humans across space and time.

With an emphasis on participant-observation, the anthropological ethnographer's role is that of an instrument of knowledge. As Michael Agar (1980: 79) describes, the role of the ethnographer is to learn, metaphorically, as child and student, in order to give account in such as way that reduces "the difference between two accounts, such that mine better approximates a group member's." *MarketWatch* reports on Genevieve Bell's research for Intel:

> She does as the locals do. If that means staying up late, she does. If that means drinking too many cups of teas, she indulges. If that means hanging out in the market, she tags along (Andrejczak 2005: 1).

Because the ethnographer is the instrument of knowledge him or herself, this limits anthropological ethnography to a scale of qualitative significance. Higher scales can be reached with teams of anthropological ethnographers, but the need to give account limits the number of accounts an ethnographer can collect, retain, and most importantly, align. In turn,

the assumptions of issues, roles, and scale in anthropological ethnography affect the methodological approach to ethnography and its resultant evidence.

Methods: Ethnography as epistemology

The online American Heritage Dictionary (2007) defines method as "… a means or manner of procedure   especially a regular and systematic way of accomplishing something." For anthropological ethnographers, ethnography is a method of epistemology or way of knowing the world and oneself. The anthropological ethnography seeks to address in a regular and systematic way address the question of human-ness by looking at how people know what they know in relationship to what others know and/or knew. The anthropological ethnographer uses ethnography to accomplish knowledge by experiencing for him or herself the different aspects of the human condition. In the descriptions of the PaPR group's contributions, it is always emphasized how the research contributes to organization focus and strategic direction (i.e. epistemology) as well as or eventually leading to portfolios of objects (Johnson 2007, Andrejczak 2005).

Anthropological evidence

How do you convince others that you have understood human nature through your ethnographic research? You present evidence in forms that your communities find persuasive and convincing. The evidence of anthropological ethnography takes two forms: one for its internal communities and another for its external communities. The internal form is often the informal conversation (Tunstall 2006). Because the anthropologist sees him or herself as the instrument of research, the informal conversation continues in the legitimizing tradition of ethnographers as merchants of the exotic. While formal presentations are given, Bruce David (2003: 32) warns in the magazine *Brand Strategy*, "Ethnographic research's true value is in the experience of communication and dialogue with the researcher. It is about questions and interpretation (Q and I)." Among anthropological ethnographers, the one-to-one dialogue over coffee is seen as more effective than these wider forums for supporting Q and I instead of Q and A (Tunstall 2006).

The external form of evidence is the experiential textual report. Anthropological ethnography still clings to its academic publication model of evidence, often collaborating with academy-based authors. The non-proprietary nature of their broad research themes contributes to the ability to publish in journals and conference proceedings such as *Ubicom*, *AMC-CHI*, *Human Computer Interaction*, *Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences*, *New Media & Society*. Following with contemporary ethnographic practices, their accounts are more "messy ethnographies" that combine image, text, personal narrative, and "objective" description to critically interpret human phenomenon.

Anthropological ethnography inhabits a distinct space of ethnographic praxis based on its framing question of what does it mean to be human; its assumptions derived from the focus on origins, evolution, and meaning, the role of the anthropological ethnographer as

the instrument of knowledge which limits its scale to that of qualitative significance; its use of ethnography as epistemology or way of knowing, and informal conversation and experiential textual reports as evidence.

THE "QAME" OF MARKETING ETHNOGRAPHY

By many accounts, marketing ethnography came to the fore in the 1980s as marketers sought to understand "…consumer-choice dynamics under a world system dominated by mature market capitalism" (Mariampolski 2005: 12). In the article, *Reel to Real*, journalist Nate Cavalieri, describes the difference between anthropological ethnography and commercial or marketing ethnography:

> By its academic definition, ethnography is the study of behavior in its natural environment, used mostly for academic anthropology; when that observation is used by a company to understand the way its products affect people in the world -- usually by videotaping or audiotaping consumers -- it's called commercial ethnography. *The idea is to get to know the consumer better than he knows himself* [Emphasis mine] (Cavalieri 2005: 3).

Anthropological ethnography seeks to understand people *as well as* they understand themselves to generate and share knowledge about human nature. The concept of getting to know the customer better than he or she knows himself speaks to the particular context of marketing ethnography, in particular, the importance of consumer "insight" in the competitiveness of marketing and advertising business functions. The questions, assumptions, methods, and evidence of marketing ethnography are informed by the drive to enact specific causes and effects informed by deeper insight into the target customer. The over 20-year old marketing and innovation firm, Cheskin, exemplifies an organization whose work illustrates ethnographical praxis in the context of marketing.

Marketing questions

Marketing 's fundamental question is, "How does one allocate resources to move customers to buy goods and/or services?" For the market researcher, this opens up two areas of inquiry. The first is learning what moves customers to buy, exemplified popularly in Paco Underhill's (1999) work on the "science of shopping". The second is determining the marketing mix of product, price, positioning, and placement that will meet specific business goal. While marketing ethnography can contribute to both areas of research, it tends to be applied most often to the first. Both the academic and trade marketing literatures tout ethnography as a way to get beyond demographics and focus groups to understand what moves customers. Marketing ethnography must address specific business goals: Figure 1.

Figure 7. Author's mapping of qualitative research methods to marketing challenges questions

		Interviewing							Self-documentation				Observation				Participatory design			
		Digital (text)	Telephone	Face-to-face	In-context	Expert/stakeholder	Guerilla	Focus/network groups	Visual diaries (book)	Texting/SMS studies	Online blog diaries	Video diaries	Shadowing (shop-alongs)	Site observation	Camera hanging	Remote sensing	Card sorting	Concept testing	Branding collages	Role playing
Acquisition																				
Customer identification	Who is using the product/service?	●				●	●	●						●	●					
Awareness	How did they hear about the product/service?		●	●	●		●	●		●	●			●	●					
Marketing effectiveness	Which marketing methods are most effective?						●			●		●								
Triggers	What triggers cause a customer to consider the product/service?	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●		●	●	●				
Conversion																				
Purchase intent	What is the customer's intent to purchase?	●	●	●	●		●			●		●	●	●						
Conversion effectiveness	What offers/messages are most effective in migrating a customer to purchase?	●	●	●	●		●			●		●					●	●		
Abandonment	Where do customers abandon the process?	●	●	●	●		●						●	●	●					
Retention																				
Satisfaction	What is the customer's satisfaction levels with the experience/product/service?	●	●	●	●		●	●		●		●	●				●			●
Repeat purchase	What is the likelihood to buy again?	●	●	●	●		●	●		●										
Repeat interaction	What keeps a customer coming back?	●	●	●	●		●			●	●	●	●							
Service preference	How would the customer like to be serviced post-purchase?	●	●	●	●		●			●										
Navigation																				
Taxonomy	How would the customer organize things?		●	●			●			●			●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Task effectiveness	How efficient is task completion?			●						●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Channel integration																				
Channel effectiveness	What is the most effective channel for each customer touchpoint?									●	●	●	●		●					
Channel opportunities	Are there opportunities to leverage other channels?			●						●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Brand perception																				
Competitive position	What is the position within competitive marketplace?	●	●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●	●			●		●
Competitive differentiation	What differentiators seem most compelling vs. competitors?	●	●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●				●		●

Marketing professors, Eric Arnould and Linda Price (2006: 260) revisit the importance of market-oriented ethnography to companies "identify new opportunities and increase significant bottom line metrics." The focus on customer lifetime value and metrics ties marketing ethnography back to its primary question of how to allocate resources to move customers to buy. Cheskin positions its marketing ethnography as providing ROI (return on investment) that ties back to moving more units of product or services by better defining existing or creating new markets of customers in relationship to the business's competition.

Marketing assumptions

Marketing ethnography's assumptions are those of its business economic contexts: dominance of economic rational choice model, the marketer's role is as selector, and a scale of quantitative significance. In marketing ethnography, the customer, who is not addressed

as a human, adheres to variations of economic rational choice behavioral models[2]. Economic rational choice model posits that the individual will make the decision, from available information, that best optimizes his or her own preferential interests. The role of ethnography in marketing is often to demonstrate the emic "rationality" of the consumer's behaviors by translating them for the business context. Modeled in the customer reach-acquisition-conversion-retention lifecycle model, the intentions of marketing are to demonstrate to the customer that their best interests are served by the product or service through those phases. The necessity of feeding into the customer lifecycle model constrains the meanings gained from ethnographic understanding in the marketing context.

The assumptive role of marketer—who segments, qualifies, and quantifies the consumer—is one of selector of the value of humans. Knowing the customer better than he or she knows him or herself requires a distance from the customer. As quoted in *The Toronto Star* (2006: D01), Steve Diller of Cheskin states, "If you want to understand what people care about, you don't ask them, you watch them." Watching people is a distancing technique different from anthropological participant-observation. But I argue that this distancing is necessary because the marketer actually makes decisions about which customers are more valuable than others through segmentation. Making these decisions are difficult when you are connected too intimately with individual people.

Marketing's determination of human value—as driven by the costs associated with consumer investment—preclude the need for quantitative significance as a distancing technique in spite of ethnography's intimacy. Scalability becomes a means to address the necessary for quantitative significance. In a 2003 DMI article, then Cheskin principal, Davis Masten and design anthropologist, Tim Plowman, promote digital ethnography as the "new wave in understanding customer experience." They underscore the "opportunity for scalability" as one of Digital Ethno's benefits (Masten and Plowman 2003: 6).

Methods: Ethnography as intimate consumer insight

Those who practice marketing ethnography carefully frame their intentions as gaining customer insight. Masten and Plowman state explicitly, "Our goal is to produce new, deep, continuing, and rapid insight's into people's lives and needs" (2003: 2). What do they mean by insight? According to the Encarta World English Dictionary (2007), insight is defined as "perceptiveness: the ability to see clearly and intuitively into the nature of a complex person, situation, or subject." The consumer is a complex person. Focus groups, surveys, MRI tracking, and other marketing methods provide insight, but ethnography provides intimate insight by its ability to get side people's heads by getting into their homes, offices, cars, streets, bathrooms, and sometimes even their showers.

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[2] There are many critiques of rational choice model in marketing based on its assumptions of omniscience, individuality, and context-free criteria. See Douglas Allen's (2002) and Joel Sobel's (2005) reviews of the consumer choice literature. However, rational choice models remain the dominant paradigm that one must address or critique when discussing consumer behavior.

Theories of Praxis as Boundary Object

Arnould and Price (2006: 251-253) identify three levels or forms of market-oriented ethnographic research. First, macro-level research seeks to "get inside people's heads" to capture brand character, cross-cultural desires, or cultural brandings. Second, micro-level research focuses on either task-based analysis of products-in-use in people's everyday lives or studies of extreme brand communities. The micro-level research characterizes the majority of ethnographic praxis by small and individual ethnographic marketing firms, especially those who rely upon video. Lastly, their meso-level research focuses on consumers' relational preferences and practices. Regardless of the level, marketing ethnography must demonstrate that it has discovered some intimate insight into consumer behavior through evidence.

Marketing evidence

Marketing evidence takes many forms, but the formal presentation and the strategic report are the two that the marketing community considers most persuasive and convincing. Contextually, the formal presentation dominates as evidence because marketing decisions often require the buy-in of several executives across multiple divisions (Johnson 2004: 320). The formal presentation also persuades the clients more effectively of the marketer's knowledge of their consumer business challenges and the validity of the strategic solution to those challenges. Again, the marketer determines the human value of the target to the client, and therefore must demonstrate that he or she knows the customer better than the client and the customer themselves. Even with the current extensive use of video, the structure of the formal presentation focuses intimate consumer insights within the client's business lenses of, for example ROI, due to its time constraints (ex. 25-40 minutes) and specific audience (ex. business executives).

The strategic report is the leave-behind document that allows for more in-depth study of the marketing research's process, insightful outcomes, and most importantly, recommendations that justify the allocation of resources. What distinguishes the strategic report from the experiential textual report is that it is almost always proprietary. In addition, the marketing ethnographer's presence in the research is found not in the experiential role of data collection, but rather in the expert authority of the recommendations.

In summary, marketing ethnography represents a distinct praxis of ethnography based on the question of how to justify the allocation of resources based on consumer behavior. Assumptions of consumer rationality, the marketer's role of selecting valuable consumers, and the need for quantitative significance directly influences marketing's ethnographic praxis. Intimate insight defines the methodological goals of marketing ethnography so that the marketer demonstrates his or her superior knowledge of the consumer's value to the client. The focus on sets of client stakeholders makes formal presentations and strategic documents the most persuasive forms of evidence.

THE "QAME" OF DESIGN ETHNOGRAPHY

While marketing ethnography seeks human understanding in order to move consumers to buy, design ethnography seeks human understanding in order to design the product, communication, or experience that could be bought. Of Intel's more platform-based research group, Tony Salvador and Michael Mateas (1997: 166) define design ethnography as "a set of data collection and analysis perspectives, assumptions, and skills that can be used effectively and efficiently to understand a particular environment, or domain of people for the express purposes of designing new technology products." Paul Rothstein (1999) outlines four reasons for ethnography's reemergence in design in the 1990s: its ability to link designers to users, help clients succeed in competitive marketplace, support growth in industrial design, and enhance designer's creativity. The semantic shift from humans and consumers to users exemplifies how the domain of design ethnography is distinct from anthropological and marketing ethnography. The company IDEO is the exemplar of ethnography in the field of design.

Design questions

The main question of design is "How does one design a successful product, service, communication, or experience?" Ethnography intersects with design in the definition of success. Rothstein (1999: 5) describes how for top industrial designers in the 1950s and 1960s –Henry Dreyfuss, Robert Probst and Bill Stumpf of Herman Miller—success meant having "…a basic level of truth about the way people work, play, sleep, travel, take baths…" IDEO (2008), in describing their process on their website, locates the success of any big, disruptive offering in its "…ability to satisfy a latent human need, behavior, or desire." Contemporary design defines success as meeting and extending the delight of users' experiences.

Design assumptions

According to the academic and trade literature, design ethnography's main assumptions include a focus on the issues of context and user requirements, the role of the designer as an intermediary, and a scale of qualitative significance. Getting out of the studio and into the contexts of users through field research has been the main driver of ethnography's praxis within design (Salvador and Mateas 1997, Rothstein 1999, Ante and Edwards 2006, Rogers 2006, Whitemyer 2006). To quote David Rogers, "I appreciate design ethnography's emphasis on exploring how people actually *use* Web sites and products in the *contexts of their lives*—and not merely by how they explain it." The design ethnographer internalizes this knowledge in order to serve as an intermediary between the users' needs and their expression in prototypes. IDEO (2008) states how it is their designers who are "seasoned observers of people and how they interact with the world," although they caveat the leadership of their human factors specialists in that task. Similar to the anthropological ethnographer, the design ethnographer's ability to absorb human experiences limits the scale to qualitative significance.

Theories of Praxis as Boundary Object

Methods: Ethnography as empathic intuition

One of the interesting things about selecting IDEO as an exemplar of design ethnography is that the company carefully avoids using the term ethnography (Whitemyer 2006). This is in contrast to the 1990s and early 2000s, when IDEO was one of the strongest advocates for ethnography (Gilmore 2002). This shift represents the emergence of design research and design thinking as design-proprietary knowledge systems for design praxis. The need to create designs for an unknown future reshapes ethnography from an analytical tool to one of many available inspirational tools for designers. As IDEO chief creative officer, Jane Fulton Suri, explains:

> Design research both *inspires imagination* and *informs intuition* through a variety of methods with related intents: to expose pattern underlying the rich reality of people's behaviours and experiences, to explore reactions to probes and prototypes, and to shed light on the unknown through iterative hypothesis and experiment (Suri 2008: 54).

Ethnographic praxis in design is characterized as mostly observational. IDEO designers observe people. The observational focus provides design ethnographers with just enough empathy for users. Designers "suggest in advance" what designed objects, communications, and experiences users need and desire (Rothstein 1991). Ethnographic observation provides designers distance from the user in order to create.

Design evidence

Acceptable forms of evidence in the design community are design concepts and prototypes. Design concepts are ideas for solving design problems. Prototypes are the built and iterated manifestation of those ideas. IDEO has widely promoted their prototyping culture. IDEO General Manager, Tom Kelley (2001: 36) writes, "Prototyping is problem solving. It's a culture and a language. You can prototype just about anything—a new product or service, or a special promotion." The textual reports of anthropological and marketing ethnography are not just transformed into pictures, but prototypes. As stated by IDEO (2008), prototyping allows the design ethnographer/designer to "…provide stakeholders with the ability to evaluate an idea through direct and experiential learning, and to create a common vision that informs everyone involved." Interestingly, trade publications focus on the final successful product as opposed to the prototype in their discussion of ethnography in design.

In summary, design ethnography's question of how to design successful objects, communications, and experiences leads to a focus on users and contexts as the requirements of success and designers as intermediary translators of those qualitative needs. Ethnography operates as a methodological approach to gain user empathy. Empathy gets converted into

intuitions for creating tangible prototypes as evidence. As such, design ethnography is theoretically distinct from anthropological ethnography and marketing ethnography.

CONCLUSION: MAKING VISIBLE TRANS-DISCIPLINARY MEANINGS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC PRAXIS

Having worked in anthropological, design, and marketing domains, I've engaged in all three forms of ethnographic praxis. Making the differences visible represents my attempt to clarify ethnography as a boundary object at the intersection of various domains. Anthropology, marketing, and design each represent a distinct theoretical orientation towards ethnography. The frictions among ethnographic practitioners across domains stem from our desires to make our ethnographic theory the single definition of ethnographic praxis. These frictions are no longer sustainable given the greater uses and responsibilities presented to ethnographic praxis in industry. In order to demonstrate its value to business, ethnography has naturally adapted to its various environments, while maintaining its coherence around the focus on understanding human experience from the perspective of the people studied. Applying Barnard's QAME framework to ethnographic praxis, the questions, assumptions, methods, and evidence of ethnography in anthropological, marketing, and design researches are different. We cannot clearly articulate our value as a community of ethnographic practitioners until those distinctions are made visible and then subsumed within a trans-disciplinary desire to create a unity of knowledge.

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