

**Media Anthropology Network**

**European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)**

**E-seminar Series**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

**E-seminar 36**

**Francine Barone**

**University of Kent**

**New leisure forum for old leisure practices:  
online and offline interaction and presentations of self in Figueres, Spain**

**Discussant: Valentina Gueorguieva**

**University of Sofia**

**15–29 March 2011**

**Postill, John [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)**

*Tue Mar 15 01:55:44 PDT 2011*

Dear All

Welcome to the 36th EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar. For those of you who are new to this mailing list, these sessions run for two weeks on the list and all subscribers are welcome to participate.

On this occasion we shall be discussing a working paper by Francine Barone's entitled "New leisure forum for old leisure practices: online and offline interaction and presentations of self in Figueres, Spain". The paper is now available for download from our e-seminar page, see <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

Francine Barone holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK. Her doctoral thesis, "Urban Firewalls: place, space and new technologies in Figueres, Catalonia", analyzes the impact of information and communication technologies and popular media in a Catalan city with reference to national identity, language politics, immigration, multiculturalism and modernity. Fran blogs at Analog/Digital ([www.analogdigital.us](http://www.analogdigital.us)) and is an administrator at the Open Anthropology Cooperative ([www.openanthcoop.ning.com](http://www.openanthcoop.ning.com)).

The discussant will be Valentina Gueorguieva who is assistant professor at the Department of Cultural Studies of the University of Sofia. Valentina is interested in youth cultures and their use of digital media. She studies online forums of subcultural groups and the impact of computer mediated communication on everyday practices of young people. A second field of interest is the digital memories of socialism and the socialist legacy online.

As always you are all very welcome to contribute comments and questions after we've had the presenter's response to the discussant who will be posting her comments later today (Tuesday 15 March 2011). To post please write directly to [medianthro at easaonline.org](mailto:medianthro@easaonline.org) (with cc. to [j.postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.postill@shu.ac.uk) so that I can make sure we don't lose any messages en route). Please keep your messages brief and on-topic.

Feel free to forward this announcement to colleagues who are not on this list but may wish to participate in the seminar. To see PDF transcripts of previous papers and e-seminars, go to <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

It's over to Valentina now!

John

Abstract

It is widely believed that new media have the potential to eradicate traditional forms of leisure by altering how we interact and communicate at a global level in light of ubiquitous and placeless connectivity. However, contrary to pervading assumptions that local leisure traditions will naturally be displaced in favour of new media environments, this paper suggests that evolving leisure practices on the Internet are fundamentally shaped by existing, offline (face-to-face) patterns of interaction. Based on data collected from 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Catalan city of Figueres, Spain, it focuses on the blueprints of traditional leisure practices in a local setting to argue that they may be enriched by web-based activities. I advocate an innovative approach to new leisure spaces in an increasingly mediated world by examining the geographic realities and cultural contexts within which new technologies are appropriated.

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**Valentina Gueorguieva** [valentina\\_gueorguieva at scig.uni-sofia.bg](mailto:valentina_gueorguieva@scig.uni-sofia.bg)

*Wed Mar 16 00:52:11 PDT 2011*

Dear all,

First, I wish to thank John Postill for inviting me to open the discussion on Francine Barone's text. I read the paper with great interest and found it very suggestive. The text starts from the assumption that online patterns of interaction, of identity building and

self-presentation do not have to be considered as a completely new phenomenon originating from the development of new technologies, but as an extension of older cultural forms that re-appropriate means of online communication in their own way. The author affirms that “evolving leisure practices on the Internet are fundamentally shaped by existing offline (face-to-face) patterns of interaction”. Since they are not profoundly distinct, or wholly set apart from the offline world, they should be examined in their real-life context.

The paper has two parts – a historical and an ethnographic study of leisure practices in the Catalan city of Figueres. The historical part reconstructs the practice of the *passeig*, or the social promenade through the main public spaces of the town, with the intention “to see and to be seen”. The practice originated in the 19th century, and was common for Spain and other European cities (the *corso*). The author chooses to interpret it as a social drama (Goffman), the *passeig* is where the self is “on stage”, developing an elaborate performance and where appearance is of utmost importance (clothes and accessories, mobile phones, expensive toys, etc.). Friendship is also on display in the social drama of the *passeig*. Walking, talking and standing in the main street, people in Figueres used to display status and sociality. With the increase of car traffic in 1970s, but also with the coming of television to the homes of Figuerenc, the practices of leisure changed. The decline of the *Rambla* in the 1980s is related to the growing proportion of leisure time spent in home. The *Rambla* is becoming a nostalgic place, now populated by tourists and over-60s.

The second part of the text examines the use of the web service Fotolog, a photo-sharing or photo-blogging platform and one of the most popular social networking sites in the Spanish speaking world, for young people between 13 and 25. A “flogger” can publish one photo per day and receive comments from her/his friends and followers on the website. Since over 95 percent of the daily photos and “ego shots”, or self-portraits (wearing fancy clothes and haircuts), this practice is also interpreted as presentation of the self in public. Comments received by friends are the small gestures cementing the social bond. In Fotolog participants share links to other social-networking sites, to YouTube videos, a wider media context, so it is definitely not a closed world. Moreover, it is clear from the comments that users are a part of an offline community – they are classmates or friends and see each other at school or in the city center. The author argues that Fotolog is not a separate world, “a virtual or less real *passeig*, simply an additional social arena; another Figuerenc space, and another pace to walk around and chat with friends”. In a way the practice of Fotolog revives the social drama of the *passeig*, where individuals construct elaborated presentations of self and put their social capital on display.

In conclusion, Francine Barone discusses the continuity between old and new forms of leisure, reminding that it was not the Internet who led to the *Rambla* exodus, but other cultural practices of the 1980s, and therefore “the Internet need not be demonized as a destroyer of traditional forms of interaction”. She sees in new communication

technologies and in Fotolog in particular a possibility to enhance and resuscitate these old practices, but in a new (media) environment.

Though I completely agree with the theoretical stance that new forms of communication should be seen as a continuation of old forms or cultural practices, and with the conclusion that the Internet is not the only reason for the decline of traditional forms of sociality, I would like to address a couple of questions launching the discussion.

First of all, when we take Goffman's theory, there is what he calls the idealization of the self, or one's presentation in a better light. It was seldom underlined that online communication and social network profiles in particular offer an easy possibility of presenting "the idealized me" – through carefully selected profile pictures and double checked pieces of information in the status updates. No doubt, on the passeig and on Fotolog users display such idealized versions of themselves. In real-life contact we have a variety of mechanisms of "reducing the effect" of such presentations. Are there such things in Fotolog? Are there conduct-correcting episodes? Is this technology offering such means? For example on Facebook, a user can carefully select his profile picture, but s/he can also be tagged on some other user's picture. S/he can delete the tag, but not the picture. Her/his presentation of self is then compromised. Is there a similar technological possibility of Fotolog? And is it used by your respondents?

A second question is about the existing offline scenes of youth cultural practices. The passeig was probably a space for the young people and their leisure practices back in the 1960s. But what happened after the appearance of counter-cultural and subcultural movements? Could this be seen as another reason for the decline of the Rambla? And where are the scenes of youth cultures today? Where is the place of hippies, punks, metalheads, skaters and free-runners (if any)? Do they meet at concerts, gigs, sport contests and performances in public spaces?

One more time I wish to thank Francine for such a wonderful text, suggestive and provocative, and invite you all to join the discussion.

Kindest regards,

Valentina

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**Postill, John** [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

*Wed Mar 16 01:15:15 PDT 2011*

Many thanks for those comments on Fran Barone's working paper, Valentina. It is now Fran's turn for a response, after which the floor will be open for further comments and questions.

For those of you who have just tuned in, a PDF of the paper can be found here:  
[http://www.media-anthropology.net/file/barone\\_newleisure.pdf](http://www.media-anthropology.net/file/barone_newleisure.pdf)

John

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Wed Mar 16 15:00:35 PDT 2011*

Dear all,

Many thanks to John for inviting me to present my paper, and to Valentina for kicking off our discussion with her thoughtful comments and questions. I will address the two main questions in some detail to fill in some context for the rest of the discussion to follow.

Beginning with Goffman's idealization of the self, there is no doubt that the internet and Fotolog offer clear possibilities for the careful selection and display of desirable traits (much like in the *passeig*). Offline mechanisms for reducing the effect of such presentations are largely predicated on relationships. Where I see this significance magnified is that the impression one makes on Fotolog does not stay there, but travels offline because it is tangled up with existing relationships and audiences. While floggers want to look fashionable to increase their own social capital, they also bolster their popularity and that of their flogger friends through their on-site interactions. I rarely saw negative, detractive or bullying comments on Fotolog. That is not to say that they don't exist or aren't simply deleted, but teens almost exclusively communicate on Fotolog with people they already know from school and trust/expect to say nice things about them. Perhaps they feel that their online presentations of self are therefore safer and more controlled, although technically they can be seen by anyone in the world.

Similar to the Facebook example Valentina gives, if someone attends a concert with a group of friends, they may find themselves on one or more Fotolog pages the next morning. I rarely observed this being a source of tension, but rather an increasingly accepted practice as cameras are now staple accessories at teen events. In cases where they are out having fun ("presenting" themselves at a party) and aware of digital cameras and camera phones, I am not sure that this constitutes, to them, a compromised presentation of self. Fotolog does not have tagging per se, but people often label their friends in the picture by writing a note in the description. I find that Facebook makes it much harder to keep control of one's personal information (not just in terms of how the site technically works, but how people use it). On Fotolog, a user might never put their real name online, just a moniker, but all their offline friends and F/Fs know them from school, so they only aim this partial anonymity at complete strangers. I do not recall any cases of someone asking for a photo of them to be removed from a friend's account, but neither are there many pictures that appear to be taken without the knowledge of the people in them (they're usually smiling and looking into the camera). In short,

presentation of self can be compromised on Fotolog if used in a certain way, but I did not find this to be of major consideration among my respondents.

Regarding scenes of youth culture, most teens prefer to leave the city center for leisure purposes, heading to the beaches of the Costa Brava or down the train line to Girona and Barcelona for concerts, clubs and parties. This has certainly had an impact on the decline not only of the Rambla, but the life of the entire town and its socio-spatial layout (where class and ethnicity play strong roles).

The most recognizable youth sub-culture is made up of mullet-sporting Catalan independentists (incl. young anarchists or anti-Spanish-monarchists) who most resemble punks/grunge in appearance. Yet, they are overwhelmingly well-educated, middle-class student-types with the finances to leave the city and head to the aforementioned locations. On the polar opposite (in terms of economic class) are another group largely comprised of the children of gypsies in their teens/late teens. The gypsy community is strongly culturally isolated within the city. On some evenings, these youths stake a claim on the steps of the town hall building in the city center. In appearance, they most closely resemble “hoodies” (or “chavs” in the UK), wearing tracksuits and acting defiant, loud and raucous. Their non-conformist behavior pits them against the dominant Catalan majority in the city. (I should note that in contrast to the often physically aggressive “chavs” that I have witnessed in the UK, Figueres is a small and mild-mannered place and these young people do not cause any real disturbances to speak of.) In this staunchly Catalan city in Spain, both of these are important counter-cultures because Catalan nationalists refute Spanish hegemony, while non-Catalans refute the city’s asserted mono-culturalism.

For those who are a bit younger, a growing youth subculture of note in Figueres is skater kids (boys typically skate, but emo-looking girls hang around). When I arrived in 2007, a plan to build a skate park had been refused by the city council, so the skaters used whatever open spaces they could find, like the Rambla and another large plaza nearby (the latter has since been built on, eliminating another teen hangout). When I asked teens why they chose to skateboard on the Rambla, they cited a lack of designated areas, but also that they want to have an audience. The small groups generally confine themselves to the peripheral edge of the plaza where there are steps and railings. Boys usually practice skating tricks while others breakdance and/or share music from their mobile phones. I do not want to depict this as a steadfast sub-culture, because these kids are mostly a mixed group.

It is this simultaneous sense of exclusion from having a place to call their own in the city and a desire to perform for public recognition that drew my attention to some interesting parallels in the use of Fotolog for self-expression.

Many thanks again to Valentina. I look forward to the rest of the discussion and would especially welcome everyone to share comparative literature, especially ethnographies of Fotolog usage in other parts Spain, Latin America or other regions.

Kind regards,

Fran

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**Julian Hopkins** [reach at julianhopkins.net](http://julianhopkins.net)

*Fri Mar 18 07:28:33 PDT 2011*

Thanks Francine for the interesting paper, which helpfully puts another nail in the coffin of the real/virtual dichotomy.

Regarding 'ego-shots' and the points regarding controlling the use of photos, I thought I'd chip in with a couple of observations I have made regarding personal blogging in Malaysia.

I think a parallel for 'ego-shots' in Malaysia is what is called 'camwhoring' - i.e. posing for photos. The expression implies excess - i.e. whoring, being a slave to the camera - but it is also often framed as a guilty vice that one cannot avoid, like eating chocolate. In practice, at all blogmeets most people engage in lots of phototaking of each other, and these photos are posted online as ways of concretising the offline connection. Camwhoring can also be a solitary activity, perhaps - as Francine recounts - for women (usually) to show off some new clothes, accessories, make up, or hair style.

As for controlling presentations - what often happens is that, after taking a picture, those in the photo check the photo using the LCD display. If they don't like it, they take another one. In this way, a veto of sorts is allowed for all those in the photo. I caught the process in a few photos that demonstrated it well - I put it online if anyone wants to see it:

[http://julianhopkins.net/distribution/bg\\_fn\\_xpax\\_pic\\_Camwhore.jpg](http://julianhopkins.net/distribution/bg_fn_xpax_pic_Camwhore.jpg)

Regards,

Julian

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Fri Mar 18 09:27:07 PDT 2011*

Hi Julian,

I agree that ego-shots (I originally stuck to "self-portraits", but the term "ego-shot" better captures that bit of vanity and self-obsession) and "camwhoring" are clear parallels. I have also heard the term camwhoring used in terms of live web cams. In this sense, the "promiscuity" is with the partner on the other end of the webcam conversation and a typical "cam whore" will cam-to-cam with strangers. (see sites like chatroulette.com)

Good point also that in real-time there is definitely some group deliberation about which photos to keep and which not to let appear online. Thanks for sharing the illustrative pic. Well-captured.

Fran

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**Postill, John** [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

*Wed Mar 16 15:51:14 PDT 2011*

Many thanks to Fran for that response to Valentina's comments.

The floor is now open for further comments and questions. Please keep these brief and send them directly to [medianthro at easaonline.org](mailto:medianthro@easaonline.org) (with cc. to me in case there are problems with the listserv).

John

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**Postill, John** [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

*Wed Mar 16 15:53:26 PDT 2011*

Speaking of listserv glitches (they do happen sometimes), here is a comment sent by Danny Miller that didn't get through earlier:

John

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On Behalf Of Daniel Miller

Sent: 16 March 2011 12:26

To: Postill, John

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] E-seminar on Fran Barone's text

[...]

First to say many thanks to Barone for a very helpful clear and significant paper. It seems to represent what could be called the classic anthropological intervention, which insists that cultural forms are always developments of some kind of given habitus but also capable of change and extensions that have an unprecedented element. Which also allows

us to appreciate that digital media can be the basis of both continued and new cultural diversity rather than global homogenisation. I was interested in this material partly having supervised a really excellent PhD dissertation by the Chilean anthropologist Marjorie Murray. Her work was based in Madrid (and I would not for one moment confuse Catalonia and Madrid!) but what it brought out, as has Francine's paper, is the extraordinary difference between both sites and say London. Murray shows Madrid seems to place even more emphasis on conformity as expressed in things like clothing brands as highly positive in a manner that in London would be regarded as quite negative. It follows that we should expect the corresponding form of performance on line to be quite different. Another of my PhD students Miran Shin is working on Korea comparing what people wear on and off line and this is still more conformist in background, so that the development of digital presentation becomes the development of established genres. I would hope that anthropologists will quickly establish this emphasis on retained and sometimes increased diversity I digital media, that is also the point of my own recent book *Tales from Facebook* (2011).

I think the paper also shows something which I believe has always been true of the internet - that when digital technologies first arrive they are mainly used not for new unprecedented purposes but to repair the decline in older institutions, so that in a sense what academics tend to miss is that new technologies are almost always in the first instance conservative. Indeed I would argue that there is a bigger picture here which is that these digital media in general are addressed to the decline in sociality in general, at which level this paper is an exemplification of a much wider issue in social science. What Barone shows clearly in her conclusion is not that Foto-log is the decline or the saving of the Rambla, it is the decline of the particular site, but the saving of the genre of sociality that it represented, more like a re-mediation. Finally I think it is worth pointing out the importance of the more detailed discussion of the presentation of the self and its response. Despite the legacy of Goffman there remains a strong tendency for writing in both sociology and media studies to see things in terms of a simple presentation of a singular self on-line often with the assumption that there is an authentic offline self as against the displayed online self. Barone's paper shows that contemporary Europe remains just as good a site from which to insist upon an entirely different concept of the self, one highly socialised, formed as much out of the response of others as through self-presentation and in many respects more like Melanesia and Amazonia than the sociological individualistic or worse still post-structural self. Barone's paper is the self as Anthropologists understand the concept and there is still quite a battle to be waged on its behalf.

Danny Miller

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**Postill, John** [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](http://J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

*Thu Mar 17 16:19:07 PDT 2011*

A really interesting paper, I agree with Valentina and Danny.

I'd like to revisit Fran's key point about young Figuerencs' photo-blogging as an online extension of existing local practices. I'm wondering whether the paper makes too much of the apparent similarities between pre-1980s Rambla practices and present-day photoblogging, in so doing neglecting young people's \*actual practices\* (skating, drinking, sitting exams, watching TV, downloading music, etc.) before and during their collective appropriation of Fotolog. Presumably young Figuerencs today know little about that period, and they certainly lack the embodied practical knowledge of passeig life as it was back then.

When they started populating Fotolog a few years ago, didn't they primarily bring with them experiences, skills, habits, etc, from their personal trajectories in schools, families, clubs, etc. rather than from the ghostly Rambla? If so, how did those previous trajectories shape their adoption of Fotolog?

John

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**Sarah Pink** [S.Pink at lboro.ac.uk](mailto:S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk)  
*Fri Mar 18 01:47:22 PDT 2011*

Thanks Fran for a very interesting paper.

I think you have done well to highlight the ways in which there may be continuities between the passeig and fotolog practice. I also believe you are right to suggest there are continuities but I was also wondering what the discontinuities are? I think that new ways of doing things seem to usually manifest both continuities and discontinuities with what we might see as 'traditions' (like the passeig), and that examining this intersection between continuity and discontinuity we can start to understand the dynamics of change in interesting ways.

In relation to that I would like to follow up on John's point, because when reading about the fotolog practices I also kept asking myself how they were embedded in a particular area of youth culture, and how they become part of what these young people are already doing. By thinking about them as youth culture it also occurred to me that this might be a difference between the paseo/passeig and fotolog practices. From my own memory the paseo is an intergenerational event, and one is displayed/ing to an intergenerational public, even if young people would walk with their friends rather than parents. I would have thought there would have been a rather different sense of being on a public stage in this context than on fotolog?

Sarah

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Fri Mar 18 09:14:36 PDT 2011*

Danny, many thanks for your kind review of my paper, and also for sharing the two examples of online and offline fashion in Madrid and Korea. Their work and your own book share an approach to digital media that represents one of the strongest contributions media/digital anthropology is able to offer through more nuanced attention to longstanding cultural contexts and established genres.

Thanks John and Sarah for both taking up the issues of change and dis/continuity. In Figueres at least, the decline of the Rambla is a very recent phenomenon, yet the space itself remains an integral and embedded part of Spanish/Catalan life. While it is used today in new ways, many of which are removed from that of just 10, 20 or 30 years ago, young people are still cognizant of what the Rambla is and how it has always been used as a social institution. Grandparents still bring their grandchildren there, special events and markets are increasingly held there and a generalized respect for the space as an institution remains strong.

I would add that its universal significance is one of the reasons why the Rambla is such a key area for mild rebellion among teens. As a common frame of reference across generations, labeling it un-cool lends teens an important sense of agency. Despite the traditionally intergenerational nature of the Rambla, teens who hang around on the edge of the plaza are choosing to carve up the space to create an audience of their peers and to rebel against parents and grandparents keeping an eye on them. Of course, the Rambla is so prominent and the city so small that everyone can see them, anyway, and it's necessary for adults to see teens using the space in mildly contestable ways to have the desired effect of staking their own territorial claim. That teens feel that there are very few places in the city "just for them" is one reason why I suggest that Fotolog offers them a new freedom, a place where parents tend not to venture. (That said, among my Fotolog respondents were a mother and her daughters, each with their own accounts, but this seemed exceptional).

There are clear changes/discontinuities at various layers present in the paper. Firstly, young people's relationship to the public spaces of their city is changing, and secondly, diversifying media environments allow for new manifestations of youth sociality. In short, teens were already asserting their distinct identities and desire for new spaces through how they communicated and interacted in their city \*before\* Fotolog was picked up around 2006/7. So in many ways Fotolog became continuous with this already evolving trajectory of youth sociality and discontent with the urban landscape that they saw as restrictive. However, when I looked more closely at the features of interaction, even though what I perceived was essentially a dramatic shift in mode of communication, in the overall pattern I found, as Danny usefully puts: "a saving of "the genre of sociality

that [the rambla] represented, more like a re-mediation", which I wanted to represent here.

Fotolog and other social media activity is definitely influenced by personal offline trajectories, becoming an extension of school, work, partying, travel, relationships, etc. I tried to draw attention to this through the ways that actual content of Fotolog posts and comments largely reference real-life activities and hobbies, seamlessly integrating social media activity into everyday life. Fotolog is also deeply entwined with the things teens do everywhere because camera phones are present everywhere. Fashion and music are two main realms of teen life that are most strongly represented on Fotolog in addition to its networking features. Certainly in practice the skills and habits they bring to Fotolog from school life are carried directly to the web and without a doubt teens do not think of their activities in terms of Rambla sociality.

I chose to interpret the changing Rambla and paseo as the key contrasts with Fotolog because of their combined role as an established genre of sociality. Because the paseo represents a confluence of many types of interaction - including performance, remnants of patronage, courting, commensality, friendship, conversation, fashion, exchange of news, political commentary – it is a rich example to draw from and particularly suited to the multifaceted nature of the Internet. One could feasibly extend the comparison to include other parts of the city on one side, and other parts of the web on the other.

Fran

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**fausto barlocco** [fbarlocco at yahoo.it](mailto:fbarlocco@yahoo.it)

*Sat Mar 19 11:22:56 PDT 2011*

Hello to everybody, thanks to Francine Barone for the paper and John for his contribution.

It seems easy to agree with the point made by Francine that online forms of sociality develop from already existing online ones, and I agree with Danny Miller's point that technologies tend to fill gaps left by offline sociality, a point Francine supports by talking about the idea of lack of safety - how relevant is the fact that only the children of gypsy origin seem to claim the space? Has the rambla been left to the excluded? - and of the fact that teenagers find commercial centres or Costa Brava more interesting.

However, I would like to follow Sarah's point and point at some differences/discontinuities. I would imagine, on the basis of what I understood from the paper and of my experience of South European 'strolling'/paseig, that the rambla would be a place dominated by adult, 'serious' social interaction and connected attempt to gain and assert status, while the fotolog phenomenon seems mostly a teenager arena. Is that so? And if so, what would be the differences deriving from the fact? Would there be other, alternative forms of teenage sociality (ex. the already mentioned skating and gigs) that would be more direct 'predecessors' of the online sociality of fotolog?

Thanks again for the paper.  
Have a good rest of the weekend,  
best

Fausto Barlocco

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**Elisenda Ardévol** [eardevol at gmail.com](mailto:eardevol@gmail.com)  
*Sat Mar 19 18:55:02 PDT 2011*

First of all, thanks to Francine Barone for the interesting paper, as a growing up citizen from Barcelona, I also remember the great significance of the Ramblas for the people from the city, now crowded of tourists and impossible to walk thorough in a relaxed way. I have really enjoyed the beautiful description of the Ramblas life and sociality written by Francine.

However, I have some remarks or comments about some of the arguments posed. One of them has to do with the statement that says that:

"the experience and practice of interactive photo-blogging shares many similarities with the traditional, on-the-ground model of sociality embedded in the passeig, despite youth insistence that such a style of interaction is outdated and irrelevant to their lives."

I may agree that this "old" form of socialization resembles new forms of digital interaction, and that the Ramblas public display of social performances may be similar to a digital gallery of profiles, as much as a mall can serve to the same social processes. Malls can also be seen as new spaces for social interaction and a good metaphor as well for photologs or other forms of online sociality. But I wonder why the author stresses these similarities despite the young people dismiss them, saying that they do not do see the similitudes but the differences.

Another related question has to do with the idea that:

"In general, many Figuerencs agree that the significance of the Rambla in Figueres today can be said to be on a decline that started in force in the 1980s.... Only those over 50 years old seem to have a memory of a vibrant Rambla. Many blame this on the arrival of television, video games and other household diversions in the 1980s and 1990s..."

I am very surprised about that given reasons, since television is present in Catalan households at least since the sixties and seventies of the last century, and a very common leisure patterns of that times. I wonder if the people interviewed answers are homogeneous in that point or suggest other reasons, as the widespread of the car –also among young people-, for example, alongside with the urbanization of Figueres

surroundings, the proliferation of shopping malls and pubs in the Costa Brava, etc. While people of Figueres, as the people of Barcelona, have changed their habits around their Ramblas, many other catalan cities may not. Other Catalan cities as Terrassa, Vic or Manresa, for example, still have very populated intergenerational Ramblas, related with commerce, leisure and sociality and comensality practices. So it seems to be a local phenomena related with specific causalities and casuistic.

Finally, and connecting with Fausto intervention about gypsies, there is a question that may be has to deal with the homogeneity of the Figueres population and the social status of the old and young people interviewed. I mean what do the author mean by "Figuerenc youth" and how class, ethnic origin or kinship filiation may still define different social status and practices among Figuerencs, and if there are different youth practices depending on that factors that make difficult to talk about "Figuerenc youths" in general.

Thanks again for sharing with us this wonderful paper,  
Elisenda

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Mon Mar 21 11:06:13 PDT 2011*

Thanks to Fausto and Elisenda for their additional comments.

Fausto asks, “by talking about the idea of lack of safety - how relevant is the fact that only the children of gypsy origin seem to claim the space? Has the rambla been left to the excluded?”

To be clear, young Roma do not spend time on the Rambla. Outside of the gypsy area of the city, I made reference to how they claim part of another plaza in the city center (the location of the town hall building, cafes and shops in the pedestrianized old town). A whole other paper could be devoted to the topic of ethnic exclusion of gypsies in Figueres. That said, the Rambla is not exempt from the symbolic and actual dynamics of social exclusion/inclusion, which I’ll touch on here. Today, much of its symbolic power as an iconic social space remains significant for the display of Catalan national identity, such as annual festivals, traditional dancing and concerts, feast days, parades, processions, weekly markets, art installations, etc. Special cultural performances literally circulate around the Rambla. In short, while daily use as a place for leisure and relaxation has declined, it is still used as a site for various ritual and commercial occasions. I discuss in my PhD thesis how in this respect the Rambla has almost become a caricature of itself, exalted on days when it’s especially important to be together and to be Catalan. But on everyday, non-ritual occasions, it is populated by ethnic "others", who are generally excluded from many aspects of “native” (Spanish/Catalan, see below) life.

I mentioned that it's used mostly by Northern European and American tourists by day and Moroccans in the evenings, with a short window of time for native seniors. Locals speak openly about this and offer a simple explanation. Moroccans/Arabs stand out, imagined as the most "threatening", excluded minority in the city. They're characterized as taking over the space and people admit to retreating to their homes after a certain time because of the increased "danger" that this represents. Even though this logic is taken for granted among my respondents, some – a minority that I spoke to – find this process of (self-) exclusion ironic and/or wrong. One editorial in a local newspaper drew attention to this fact, suggesting that "immigrants and their children give us a lesson on how to treat the public spaces that we've abandoned." This is merely the surface, but it's clear that there are reasons to argue that the space has indeed been left to the excluded. Age can be considered here, too.

"the fact that teenagers find commercial centres or Costa Brava more interesting"...

To be fair, it's not just teenagers who find the commercial centers or the Costa Brava more interesting. Nearly all of my informants regardless of age confirmed that they spend little of their free time in Figueres, heading as quickly and as often as possible to the coast for bars, clubs and beaches; Girona or Barcelona for shopping and cultural events; nearby villages for dining in excellent restaurants or getting away from the city; and to vacation homes in the Catalan mountains or southern France for short breaks. People of all ages confirmed that the best part of living in Figueres is "how easy it is to get out of" because of how close it is to the sea, mountains, countryside and other cities where they like to escape to. Yet a desirable proximity to everything is sometimes maligned by long-term residents who feel that this prevents any real, home-grown leisure or cultural scene from developing there. I got the impression that this need to escape the city is increasing exponentially in correlation with perceptions of risk as per above.

For a concentrated Catalan city center, the fact that it depletes rapidly and people scatter away from it is significant by Spanish standards of urban life. (That said, the Costa Brava is beautiful, well-maintained and entertaining and it would be odd if people didn't take advantage of their location to it.) So yes, as Elisenda also suggests, I would argue that this, along with an occasionally empty Rambla, is potentially peculiar to Figueres (or the entire Alt Empordà county) based on its location, history, size, economy, demographics, etc. My informants often stressed that their city had become less "traditionally Catalan" than cities inland like Vic or Olot, and blamed this on the coastal influence and diversity. Some more comparative research would be useful.

Fausto says: "I would imagine, on the basis of what I understood from the paper and of my experience of South European 'strolling'/paseig, that the rambla would be a place dominated by adult, 'serious' social interaction and connected attempt to gain and assert status, while the fotolog phenomenon seems mostly a teenager arena".

Yes, Fotolog is a teenage arena. Figuerencs emphasize that the traditional Rambla is “a place for people of all ages” and not just a domain for serious adult interactions, although adults are probably the most cognizant of its important performance aspects for the maintenance and attainment of social capital and status. I think, however, that it is also a bit of a risk to relegate teen and child activities in this domain in the past as somehow less important than that of adults. Although they might generally break off into their own groups of friends and not spend too much time with the adults enjoying the passeig, they are still entwined in the rest of the performance through their comportment and interaction with other adults and teens.

In the same vein, a general comment I often heard from younger residents (teens and early 20s) was not just that there aren't enough youth activities in the city, but not enough leisure choices for "people of all ages" where everyone can feel equally represented. Usually they were referring to young people especially, but they nearly unanimously framed it in terms of offerings that would satisfy everyone. I would argue that despite their semi-rebellious need for carving out expressive teen spaces, intergenerationality remains deeply ingrained in their sense of society and urban life. This is probably a safe generalization throughout Spain.

Elisenda asks about the uniqueness of Fotolog as metaphor while youths might reject it. It's true that shopping malls or concerts or parties can also be seen as new spaces for interaction that have a lot to do with fashion and co-presence. I would still argue from an analytical point of view that the similarities drawn from the Rambla example (as emblematic of Catalan sociality) run much deeper. In particular, the self-portrait aspect reveals an intense emphasis on physical appearance and public presentations of the individual that are strongly imbued in Spanish connotations of self (again cf. Murray 2009 on Madrid). In addition, Fotolog regularly becomes an extension of shopping, concert-going and partying through the sharing of experiences in text and imagery, demonstrating what they've done and with whom. So it can be considered alongside these other forms of teen leisure activity as part of a comprehensive whole.

Re: television and cars, television is indeed an older technology domesticated since the 60s. The point being made by people being interviewed was that the retreat away from the streets and into the home did not start with computers and the Internet (relatively recent technology of last 10-15 years) but with things like television. Yes, people do attribute this loss to other things like diversions outside of the city, including the coast and increasingly easy access to it by car and train (esp. now with the new high-speed rail link from Perpignan to Barcelona via Figueres).

Lastly, a brief but important word about “Figuerenc youth”: there are 90 nationalities represented in Figueres. This heterogeneity greatly affects social status and practices and makes it very tricky to talk about “Figuerenc youths” in general. Leaving recent immigrants aside, there is also the situation of sub-state nationalism influenced by mass-migrations of southern Spaniards during and after the Civil War and Franco period.

Figueres is, on the surface, a staunchly Catalan city; yet due to historical waves of Spanish migration, a great deal of the local population has at least one non-Catalan parent. Most families are comprised of a mix of places of origins. Still, Andaluz and Catalan communities are somewhat separated spatially within the city. Class, ethnicity, kinship and Spanish/Catalan nationalism represent a tangled quagmire of affiliations that took me about four chapters just to scratch the surface in my PhD. It happens that the central area of the town where I conducted the bulk of my research was mostly self-ascribed Catalan as were many of my respondents. When referring to local youths on Fotolog, I am mostly speaking of this Catalan central majority including those with extensive Spanish kinship ties.

Many thanks to everyone for their thought-provoking contributions so far.

Fran

References:

Murray, M. 2009. "How Madrid Creates Individuals", in D. Miller (ed.) \*Anthropology and the Individual: A Material Culture Perspective\*. Oxford: Berg. pp. 83-98.

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Tue Mar 22 19:09:49 PDT 2011*

Moltes gràcies, Elisenda. I agree that the resemblances can't possibly be "singular" nor is seeing and being seen exclusive to the Rambla, but I do think that the Rambla is certainly "good to think with" in this case.

All the best,

Fran

[responding to off-list remark copied in email:]

2011/3/22 Elisenda Ardévol

- > *Thanks for your response, Frank, it shows a great fieldwork among catalans!*
- > *:~)*
- >
- > *The question is if the young practices with fotolog is a continuity of*
- > *cultural patterns of their adult references or not. I see that the*
- > *metaphor or resemblances between ramblas social display and fotolog*
- > *social display is evident, but singular? I am not convinced 100% about*

- > *this claim as far as I think, but may be I am in a "native" mistake,*
  - > *that this pattern of socialization -to go to a place to see and to be*
  - > *seen by others- is exclusive of Ramblas associated social behaviour.*
  - >
  - > *Cheers from Barcelona!*
  - > *Elisenda*
- 

**Postill, John** [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

*Tue Mar 22 01:38:01 PDT 2011*

Many thanks to Fran and all other seminar participants for that first round of contributions!

I suggest we have a second round of brief posts (including follow-ups) from here till Friday and then we can wrap up with some concluding remarks by closing time on Tuesday night CET.

If you've just joined the list and wonder what all this is about, we're currently discussing a working paper by Francine Barone which can be found here: <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

John

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**T L Neal** [Tim.Neal at sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:Tim.Neal@sheffield.ac.uk)

*Tue Mar 22 06:43:40 PDT 2011*

Apologies for coming late to this discussion. I enjoyed the paper and I was intrigued at how Francine would work through what was a very appealing thesis, fitting, as Daniel has pointed out, classic anthropological schema whereby practices are moderated by new conditions rather than erased by them. My pleasure in reading this was partly due to memories it evoked of similar passeig in Greece. It hadn't, I admit, occurred to me these events would have passed out of common practice and on one level it made me sad to think this may be so. During the evening gathering/strolling on the seafront, I remember being approached by a mother in the southern Peloponnese (in 1985) who discussed with me the possibility of my marriage to her daughter. I am admittedly very gullible and she may have been teasing. Such are the conditions of being an outsider in such a complex of encounters.

That aside, I was wondering at what point web based practices do not follow the sorts of sociability that are suggested by the description of the passeig? I am thinking of the facebook activities of my daughter (20) and teenage children of other parents I know,

even perhaps of the activities of my younger children (4, 6 and 8) on very early age social networking sites such as Moshi or Binweevils.

Certainly, in the case of the older children/teenagers/youths, they too are interacting principally with people they know, posting images and comments that refer to actual physical events/encounters, there is the amassing of social capital through numbers (including regular postings, the particular qualities of 'friends' and knowledge and display of aspects of culture - all of which largely refer to a spatial and material world in which these relations have a place. In the case of the early age sites - there is the added aspect of initiation into a host of practices and knowledges, that someone may not be who they seem for example, no doubt something that takes/took place within the setting of the passeig too?

I recognise that there is something specific to Fotolog, minimal interference with the circumscribed social interaction encouraged by the format – I wonder to what extent its usage in Figueres, is born of linguistic/cultural groups that allow for imitation and repetition of form?

There is no direct equivalent to the passeig in memory here (Sheffield) although there were/are certain practices, Easter Parades, Wakes Weeks etc and on a different time scale although not unrelated, tourism practices both in seaside resorts, abroad and at 'home', fairs, clubs and thronging evening streets where similarities in display and sociability may usefully be explored – social capital being gained by distinctly different practices under such conditions perhaps.

Would this suggest more general sets of sociability to which Francine's study refers? On this point, I also wonder – what happens to the way that say affective values, insecurity or fear, for example, are/were experienced in both the passeig and its contemporary web form? What happens to class or at least embedded social divisions that are/were active in the passeig? Have these too found some form of transposition/modulation?

What also emerges, reflected in other responses: there is something about teenage/youth practice that is distinguished. Have the (imagined) calmer practices of the well dressed adults parading on the Rambla found their expression elsewhere? Or is there some value in considering that there has been, in certain environments, through particular configurations of sociality, the perpetuation of 'teenage/youth' practices into adulthood and this has perhaps contributed to the 'decline' of the passeia? A passing thought.

Just a few ideas and questions that emerged from my reading of a informative and rewarding paper.

Tim

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Tue Mar 22 20:17:35 PDT 2011*

Tim, many thanks for your insights and links to other related aspects of online and offline life.

You mention Facebook and other web-based practices. While Fotolog was generally seen by teens a place just for hanging out and messing around, Facebook suddenly appeared as a more appropriate or potentially efficacious platform for political discussion and trying to effect change. I'm not sure how much that was fuelled by media coverage of the site, but people across a wider age range in Figueres began to adopt Facebook and this also affected the dynamic there. Again it reveals both continuities and differences between on-site user practices and offline life. I am lucky to have been able to examine these two sites together while based in my field location.

“I wonder to what extent its usage in Figueres, is born of linguistic/cultural groups that allow for imitation and repetition of form?”

Interesting point. Also thinking about language and culture, this particular style of site (Fotolog, Metroflog, etc) has become extremely popular in Spain and Latin America, but seemingly less so elsewhere? This is not an unusual occurrence with social media (for popular SNS by country: <http://3.ly/xkrN>), but regional domination is a worthwhile subject for cross-cultural comparison. Any Latin American anthros have insights to share?

“What happens to class or at least embedded social divisions that are/were active in the passeig?”

Social divisions definitely remain active online. Floggers are mostly Catalan/Spanish. Recent immigrants and long-term minorities (mainly gypsies) are absent from Fotolog in the same way that they're absent from the passeig. Language dynamics and nationalist symbolism become a contestable (mostly playful) area on Fotolog. Because Spanish pop culture references comprise a majority of posts, there are a lot of captions at least partially in the Spanish language, while most interpersonal comments between Figuerencs are written in Catalan or a mix of Catalan and Spanish slang. Poking fun at linguistic/cultural differences and regionalism is common throughout Figueres and this carries onto the web. Similarly, politics, immigration, class, ethnicity, age and other embedded social divisions are prominent in user discussions on Facebook across a wider age range, even to the extent of promoting local activism. Across the board, participants are predominantly middle- and upper-middle class “natives”.

Glad you found the paper informative and rewarding!

Fran

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**Philipp Budka** [ph.budka at philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

*Thu Mar 24 02:09:13 PDT 2011*

Hi Fran, hi List,

I also very much enjoyed reading your paper and to get to know more about the passeig and fotolog(ing) as similar social practices. I have just some brief comments/questions that came to my mind:

- 1) You make clear that it is (in this case) the offline context that determines the online (leisure) practice. To generalize, is this also true for the offline context determining the online context? Miller & Slater (2003) e.g. suggest that by applying a "holistic commitment" (to ethnographic internet research), such a hierarchisation through the concept of context should be avoided. They therefore treat "the internet" as material culture. What is your approach here?
- 2) Can you tell us a little bit more about privacy in the fotolog environment? What kind of control users have over their content, etc.?
- 3) And could you give us some idea about the organisational structure and history of fotolog as online service?

Thank you very much and all the best,

Philipp

Reference

Miller, D., & Slater, D. 2002. Ethnography and the extreme Internet. In Eriksen, T. H. (Hg.), Globalisation: Studies in anthropology. London: Pluto Press.

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Fri Mar 25 15:26:04 PDT 2011*

Hi Philipp,

Thanks for your questions.

1. I agree with Miller and Slater's attempt to avoid contextual hierarchisation by way of seeking "a recognition of the complex and nuanced relationship between online and offline worlds which produces the normative structures of both of these worlds" (2002: 53). It's probable that our similar ethnographic methods for studying the Internet from a particular locale influence this reciprocal, rather than hierarchical, reading of people's engagement with technology. Their characterization of the "Trinidadian Internet" and my impression of the "Figuerenc web" are doubtlessly informed by this same perspective,

albeit arrived at in distinct ways based on fieldwork in different countries and at distanced points in the history of the Internet (1999 and 2008, respectively).

Although in Figueres I found important linkages to offline context as in the case of Fotolog, I also uncovered ways that online activities appeared to create new and unique styles of communicating which had the potential to be fed back into society on the ground, challenging what people know and think about, say, local banal activism or politics. So it's important to be aware of how relationships and interactions on the Internet can create their own contexts. Rigid structural hierarchies of context would fall apart quickly in these circumstances. Indeed they do, hence the muddiness of the real/virtual dichotomy even for the average internet user. I also believe that researchers should be aware of the material nature of technology - including infrastructure, hardware, software, networks and resources. But rather than seeing the Internet as a "thing" or tool, I have thus far found that metaphors of place lend greater nuance to understand the complexities of online life and how it intermingles with offline life, especially when viewed from particular locations.

2. Fotolog offers some privacy options for members. Users can restrict access to their guestbook to anyone or just to their friends, delete comments on their guestbook, and block other users from commenting again. They can prevent public broadcasting of their status when they're online and restrict personal data like email and birth date from appearing on a public profile. They can also remove themselves from a searchable public directory. Most significantly removed from the basic privacy offerings of most sites (photo-sharing and social networking) is the fact that uploaded photos are always publicly visible - to the entire internet, not just other site members. This can't be changed and an FAQ warns members not to post anything that they wouldn't want the world to see. In addition to the formal privacy options, there are related, user-generated methods of maintaining privacy, like using screen names instead of real names, changing their location label to another city, and only sharing their URL with close friends.

3. Fotolog was launched in 2002 in NYC by Scott Heiferman (of meetup.com) and Adam Seifer (of sixdegrees.com), backed by BV Capital and 3i. It was acquired in 2007 by Hi-Media Group (France). There's more info on their About page including a press packet released after the Hi-Media acquisition with a some company history, global stats, etc. <http://www.fotolog.com/a/info/aboutus>

Thanks again.

Best regards,

Fran

Reference

Miller, D., & Slater, D. 2002. Ethnography and the extreme Internet. In Eriksen, T. H. (Hg.), Globalisation: Studies in anthropology. London: Pluto Press.

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**Postill, John** [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

*Tue Mar 29 14:54:03 PDT 2011*

Dear All

We've come to the end of our e-seminar on "New leisure forum for old leisure practices: online and offline interaction and presentations of self in Figueres, Spain". Many thanks to Fran Barone for presenting this paper and responding to questions from the floor, to Valentina Gueorguieva for her opening comments and to all other participants. As usual, there'll be a PDF transcript of this session up on our site shortly.

Our next presenter will be Kristin Vold Lexander (University of Oslo). Kristin will be sharing a working paper entitled "Names U ma puce: multilingual texting in Senegal" (abstract below). The discussant will be Ken Banks who specialises in mobile phone applications for development and conservation and is the founder of kiwanja.net. This seminar will run from 17 to 31 May.

John

Abstract

Multilingualism is an important aspect of African urban life, also of the lives of students in Dakar. While the students usually write monolingual texts, mainly in French, their text messages involve the use of African languages too, in particular of the majority language Wolof, as well as Arabic and English, often mixed in one and the same message. With the rapid rise in the use of mobile phones, texting is becoming increasingly central as a means of communication for the students, and the social network with whom they text is growing. This working paper investigates texting as literacy practices (cf. Barton & Hamilton 1998), putting the accent on language choices: what role do they play in constructing these new practices? What are the motivations and the functions of the students' language choices? The analysis is based on six months of fieldwork in Dakar, during which I collected 464 SMS and interviewed and observed the 15 students who had sent and received the messages. I will focus on the practices of three of the students: Baba Yaro, a Fula-speaker born outside Dakar who has come to the Senegalese capital to undertake his studies, Christine, a Joola-speaker born in Dakar, and the Wolof-speaker Ousmane, from the suburb. I argue that in order to manage relationships and express different aspects of their identity, the students both exploit and challenge dominating language attitudes in their texting.

Reference

Barton, David and Mary Hamilton 1998: Local Literacies. Reading and writing in one community. London, Routledge.

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**Fran Barone** [fbarone at gmail.com](mailto:fbarone@gmail.com)

*Tue Mar 29 15:59:24 PDT 2011*

Hi all,

Many thanks to John and to everyone who participated. Your constructive input has been extremely useful and has also given me some new directions to pursue.

If you missed the seminar or would like to have any further discussion about this Fotolog study or other aspects of my fieldwork, please feel free to contact me via email.

All the best,

Fran