tion. For this reason, this book shows a renewed methodological option that STS should take into careful consideration: the genealogical perspective.

While contemplating a genealogical approach and a particular sensitivity to the social dimensions of science and technology, this book also stresses the importance of complementing a processual and contingent analysis of the production and sharing of scientific knowledge (typical of ethnographies) with a diachronic dimension. This would allow to account in an articulated way for the historical dimension of how different genealogies of actants converge, diverge and rearrange, creating a technoscientific balance, as precarious as it may be.

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Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce and T.L. Taylor
Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method
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As the title clearly anticipates, the book offers, in the form of a methodological handbook, a sound reflection on the use of the ethnographic approach in/for virtual worlds research.

The handbook arrives in a time in which, on the one hand, ethnography-based research are increasingly spreading through and contaminating with fields other than the traditional ones of anthropology and sociology (such as new media and communication studies, ergonomics, design, HCI, CSCW). On the other hand, research on virtual worlds has continuously proliferated in the last decade and showed a growing affinity with qualitative research design and ethnography, in particular. The four authors' effort is praiseworthy and the result of their work a valuable one, precisely, because in times of methodological appropriation and disciplinary contamination, the re-assessment and the update of what it means to do ethnographic research in/on virtual worlds were sorely missing. Furthermore, the many years of experience that Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce and Taylor share over the handbook topics shine throughout the book making it a sound and authoritative source.

Authors' commitment to a clear definition of "virtual world" as "object" and "field" of research is a remarkable aspect of the handbook, as well as it is their attempt to maintain clarity between what constitutes virtual world research and what not. Indeed, for instance, they clarify more than once, throughout the book, that games with multi-player capabilities, online communities and most networked environments that are usually studied nowadays are not virtual worlds. Virtual worlds "are *places* and have a sense of *worldness*. They are not just space representation, but they have object-rich environments with which is possible to interact. […] They are multi-users in nature. They exist as shared social environments with synchronous communication and interaction. […] They are *persistent* and continue to exist even when participants log off. […] virtual worlds allow participants to *embody* themselves, usually as avatars" (p. 7; original emphasis). Furthermore, in my opinion, the fulfillment of the handbook's main goal – "to provide ethnographers with a practical set of tools and approaches for conducting successful fieldwork in virtual worlds" (p. 1) – is successfully pursued through the handbook's sough-after design as a manuscript that (*i*) is concise and agile: to be held in one hand, in opposition to most handbooks; (*ii*) is compact and practical reference guide: not just to be studied, but to be carried and used while doing ethnography; and (*iii*) identifies with the greatest possible precision the key tenets of ethnographic research (p. 7-9).

In compliance with the principle of a lightweight and agile instrument, the handbook is composed of twelve, relatively brief, chapters each one addressing a key aspect of ethnographic research. The book is not divided into parts, but it is easy to identify the macro areas covered by the chapters.

The first two chapters ("Why this handbook; Three brief histories")

deal with the framing of ethnography as a method for researching virtual worlds. In this initial part, the authors provide an explanation of the rationale behind the handbook and a recount of the emerging research trends on virtual worlds and methods. Chapters three and four ("Ten myths about ethnography; Research design and preparation") justify the choice of method and its place in the research design. This part proceeds by explaining how the choice of an ethnographic approach can be grounded against the typical objections that researchers could face in this regard and how such choice can be seamlessly integrated into a sound research design.

If a core of the handbook shall be found then, in my opinion, it is in chapters five, six and seven ("Participant observation in virtual worlds"; "Interviews and virtual worlds research"; "Other data collection methods for virtual worlds research"), which tackle in depth the key ethnographic tenets of data gathering: participant observation, interviewing, and the use of virtual worlds specific data (e.g. screenshots, chatlogs, audio, virtual artifacts). The authors give incisive explanations about the meaning of *participating* in/for the fieldwork and about the establishment and upkeep of fulfilling relationships with the informants. More importantly, they clarify the differences and the similarities for (participant) observation and interviewing as conducted in virtual worlds research and physical worlds ones. The eighth and ninth chapter ("Ethics"; "Human subjects clearance and institutional review boards") enter into the details of research ethics, both in terms of principles and practical matters. Chapters ten and eleven ("Data Analysis"; "Writing up, presenting and publishing ethnographic research") deal with the challenge of analyzing and presenting the data within the frame of ethnographic research. In this part, they are particularly helpful the practical tips over the drafting of the research results through different ethnographic genres, as well as the considerations over the styles and the target venues for submitting research outputs. The last chapter ("Conclusion: arrivals and new departures") is a small, conclusive reflection on the rationale of the handbook's design and the authors' expectations over its usefulness and outreach. Finally, as an overall framework, the handbook also includes: an initial "Foreword" by George Marcus, a very rich "References" section and an "Index" one.

The critical remarks to address to the handbook are very few in my opinion. An issue worth mentioning is that, despite being a methodological book, it includes no examples of the practical application of the techniques that are introduces and explained in general terms. For instance, the sections "Taking extensive fieldnotes" (p. 82) or "Keeping data organized" (p. 85) discuss very well the tenets and principles of fieldnotes taking and of their coherent organization, but the book provides no fieldnote excerpt neither an organization scheme for the data as examples. Similarly, when explaining the use of chatlogs and screenshots as data, no examples of how to use, organize or subsequently analyze this kind of data are provided. Another, minor, issue I feel to highlight relates to the choice of

keeping the book light while covering a large spectrum of methodological topics which, of course, come at the detriment of the depth of analysis for each topic or sub-topic. As this is an explicit choice made by the authors it can be hardly criticized, also because it is well pursued. However, certain chapters really make the reader wish the authors had dwelled deeper into the matter. A clear example is in chapter five where the handbook touches on a sub-topic such as "Making Mistakes" (p. 79-82). From the practical point of view of doing ethnography this is a very interesting theme, but it is treated for no longer than a couple of pages. The same issue goes for chapter seven, where the use of different data types and gathering techniques that are specific to virtual worlds research are mentioned, but not fully treated. Truth be told, to cushion both of the issues mentioned here, the authors often provide an account of how they tackled the specific topic at hand in their own respective research works, which is a very interesting and pleasant way to establish affinity with the reader, or provide references to specific literature that allowing those who would be interested in, to dwell deeper into the topics.

About the style of the handbook, I certainly appreciated its narrative and fluid tone that manages to establish a direct and somewhat informal conversation with the target audience. Statements, key arguments and examples are clear and never convoluted. Furthermore, the use of virtual worlds' jargon and of theory-laden terminology is kept to the minimum, which makes the book easily accessible for researchers who are starting to approach either the methodology or the field of virtual worlds. A few words shall be spent also about the audience the book is addressed to. Indeed, I believe that, regardless of the fact that the authors' explicit intent was to provide a useful instrument for graduate students and early stage researchers who are not necessarily acquainted with the handbook's subject matters, "Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method" can be useful for more experienced ethnographers too. The main reason for this is that the handbook itself grew out from the authors' direct experiences and challenges with ethnographic research and it is the result of an ongoing conversation among the authors about such challenges. Therefore, despite being written in a simple, accessible and lightweight way, it certainly touches the key methodological issues that any researcher entering this field will have to face, regardless of his or her experience.

One final aspect I want to raise in this closing sentence may be of interest for some STS scholars. Indeed, I believe that through its design, its style, the scope of its arguments and the framing of its specific elements, the handbook manages to make looking as outdated the whole set of methodological and epistemological challenges that were raised by the study of the computer-mediated, the second self, the online and the virtual during the past two decades. These past great challenges appear here as "normal" and integrated elements that are common to any research journey, ethnographic or not, striving for discovering a world, virtual or not.