Despite first appearing in an academic publication only in 2003, the term “big data” has swiftly become central to technology and social science. While bearing deep histories, big data is clearly linked to developments in computational storage, algorithmic analysis, mobile devices, and online sociality. But big data is also debated in the blogosphere, portrayed in mass media, discussed in everyday life.

The goal of this workshop is to take these multiple meanings and practices of big data seriously by placing them in conversation with ethnographic methods. Big data has sometimes been said to imply the “death of ethnographic methods” because it ostensibly provides a more comprehensive, accurate, or unbiased view of social life. In this workshop, however, we explore emergent synergies between ethnographic methods and big data. While some speak of a quantitative versus qualitative divide as foundational to social inquiry, there is value in exploring the possibly more consequential distinction between experimental methods “in” a laboratory (based on the control of variables) versus fieldwork methods “out” in the world (based on empirically investigating contexts preexisting the research process).

From this perspective, big data and ethnography lie on the same side of a divide that separates them from laboratory approaches. Both are forms of engagement with “the field.” As a result, considering new possibilities for their creative entanglement and
mutual reconfiguration could present “big” possibilities for investigating the digital dimensions of contemporary cultures.

The workshop is free to attend, but space may be limited. Please RSVP with Sylvia Lotito (slotito@uci.edu) if you would like to attend.

SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2014
7:00pm  Dinner for presenters

FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2014
8:30–9:30am  Coffee, light breakfast
9:30–10:00am  Welcoming comments
10:00–11:00am  Fifteen-minute presentations
   – Malte Ziewitz: Unscaling Ethnography
   – Morten Axel Pedersen: Complementary Social Science? Reflections from a Deep Data Experiment
   – Mimi Ito: From Thick to Thin: An Ethnographer Designing Assessments and Key Performance Indicators
   – Jeff Burke: A Data-Centric Architecture for the Future Internet
11:00–11:30am  Fishbowl #1 (A “fishbowl” is a form of interactive group discussion)
11:30am–noon  General discussion
noon–1:30pm  Lunch
1:30–2:15pm  Fifteen-minute minute presentations
   – Antonia Walford: The Nature of Data; the Culture of Data
   – Karine Nahon: A Multi-Edged Sword: The Politics of Big Data
   – Christine L. Borgman: The Data Dance
2:15–2:45pm  Fishbowl #2
2:45–3:15pm  General discussion
3:15–3:30pm  Break
3:30–4:15pm  Fifteen-minute minute presentations
   – Natasha Schüll: Ethnographer in the Loop
   – Mary L. Gray: Crowded: A Call for “Dimensional Data” in Digital Media Studies
   – Geoffrey C. Bowker: Make It So, Data
4:15–4:45pm  Fishbowl #3
4:45–5:15pm  Wrap-up discussion
5:15–6:30pm  Reception
7:00pm  Dinner for presenters

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2014
10:00am–noon  Breakfast discussion about future discussions/events for presenters and invited guests


who is your partner? Library, archive, scholar, future reader?

What is correct, valid, right way to dance? Evidence of what? Perfect for one thing and not for something else. Classic lib and archives problem, diff of anticipating future use. What kind of dance step are we doing? Hip hop, improvised, or a waltz? Labor intensive, close work, a tango, know your partner, work closely for a long time. Or a quick partnership on the dance floor.

Libs not always the first or last – leading or following? Relationship keeps changing, need to be on both sides. Ideally, you’d like to be part of the initiation of a project, instrument the whole process. Help scholars exploit their own data better. Who’s your audience – dance like nobody’s watching or the Olympics ice dance finals; how risk averse are you?

We need a lot of nobody’s watching while we figure it out, but we also need a trust relationship, else people get cold feet, when things are not sustained. Look for a few good wins, warm up the dancing feet before you put on the high heels.

Libraries dancing with each other. What happens when one library tries to tango and another to waltz? Where’s the trading zone? Somebody has to learn a few of each other’s steps. Being all things to all people often leaves things useful to none. Each community has its own way of working with things.

Economic value. What’s the role of libraries in recognizing? Info econ, very different from hard goods, better understood as common pool resources. They need governance, not enough for everyone, sustainability, free riders, who contributes, who benefits. Need
to be concerned about keeping these as common pool resources. Put $ on it is to misunderstand much of info economics. Social media data can be used and reused in many ways, Johan.

Value to the community? Can we ensure best value for the communities? Back to collection development policies. Public libs, what’s worth keeping for your town. Even if aggregated. What’s worth having here, last copy agreements by region. Some things are of short term value. Last clean sets after the data reduction worth keeping. Archivists keep well under 10% of an organizations records. Need to cultivate that area of librarianship. Return to core librarianship, first p