The rise of the digital has been challenged the field of anthropology by producing a whole new environment for the research of human activity. Through a wide range of detailed case studies – from digital archives through gaming to social – *Digital Anthropology* explores the impact of digital culture in everyday life. Edited by Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller, it includes contributions from thirteen anthropologists, of whom Tom Boellstorff, Daniel Miller and John Postill are the best known. The book is organized into four sections: *Positioning Digital Anthropology*, *Socialising Digital Anthropology*, *Politicising Digital Anthropology* and *Designing Digital Anthropology*; there is the serious attempt to integrate contemporary theorizing with actual ethnography.

The book argues that digital anthropology is considered a new sub-discipline of anthropology; 'new' means here merely the new way of defining the essential terms digital, culture and anthropology. Miller and Horst list six principles of digital anthropology as a sub-discipline based on the articles in the book. I consider this listing – the declaration of digital anthropology – the biggest achievement of this publication.

The first principle is that the term digital is defined as an intensified contributor to the interaction. Though it references 'binary', which is simply bits consisting of 0s and 1s, it is also dialectical. The development of binary code simplified information and communication: we can more easily produce, reproduce, distribute, and supply information.

The second principle is that digital does not mean that the humanity is more mediated than before. Digital anthropology reveals the mediated nature of the non-digital world. In his article Boellstorff points out, that online worlds are only another arena of social interaction. With this I slightly disagree. One could still claim that there is a natural tendency to take the world we live in at any particular moment as the very basis of our understanding. Hence any new media is inevitably going to be experienced as an additional media. But if interacting face-to-face is just as culturally appropriate as digitally mediated communication, what are the grounds for claiming digital anthropology as a new subfield?

Anthropology is still the science of humanity. Horst’s and Miller’s third principle is the traditional commitment to holism in anthropology: no one lives an entirely digital life. Still, the discussion of the digital aspect could be found in almost all conventional subfields of anthropology today. Another thing is that all media are part of wider media ecology with interdependent relationships. Hence it is not easy to treat each new media independently. Media ecology, referring to Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) original idea, means that communication technology not only strongly influences society, but could be the primary cause of social change. There are, however, different interpretations of the definition of media ecology among European and North American researchers. That is one reason why I find this publication inevitably somewhat one-sided and incomplete as it has strong ties to the British practice of anthropology. In Faye Ginsburg’s article on the ethnography of *Second Life* – the online virtual world that is built into three-dimensional modelling software – the holistic sense of ethnography is brought out pre-eminently. She argues
that there disabled persons have the opportunities to do things they cannot perform in the offline world.

The fourth principle reminds us that digital research has new possibilities for addressing peripheralized research subjects. Lately there has been a lot of discussion on democracy and the internet, most importantly in communication studies. That underlines the conventional anthropological principle of considering all the people equal and equally cultural. As Franz Boas (1911) argued in the early-twentieth century, the world was full of distinct cultures, rather than societies whose evolution could be measured by how much or how little 'civilization' they had. In Jo Tacchi’s article Digital Engagement: Voice and Participation in Development she shows the radical shift from vertical to horizontal relationships in communication.

The fifth principle is about the obscurity of digital culture compared with the variety of openness and privacy. The importance of the role of social media in the Arab uprisings has been largely debated. This theme is especially clear in John Postill’s article, where there is much evidence for the way Facebook, WikiLeaks and Twitter helped to facilitate the Arab Spring that began in the end of 2010.

The sixth principle is that digital culture is not more or less material than non-digital. It is impossible to become human otherwise than through an enculturation process taking place within the material world around us. Materiality is thus the basis for digital anthropology. Materiality can be seen in digital technology, digital content and in digital context. Horst and Miller argue that the digital is a constitutive part of what makes us human, because digital media and technology are far more than mere expressions of human intention. That is quite a strong argument, however, and I am not sure if this is yet a valid generalization with regards the whole of humankind.

This book is about communication both in the anthropological and in the digital context. It attempts to demonstrate what anthropology brings to the study of the digital and vice versa. It is a welcome contribution to discussion in the field. Most of all, it finally attempts to define the essential elements of digital anthropology, if only from the view point of the European school of digital anthropology. Hence the book is mostly recommended to those who are practicing digital anthropology or online ethnography and would like to respond and participate to contemporary discussions in the field. In addition to that, it is eligible reading for students of anthropology, media studies, communication studies, cultural studies and sociology. But I recommend it mainly in combination with other readings in order to keep the presentation in its context.

REFERENCES

