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# ANTH G6070

## Making Ethnography: Method and Writing

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Fall 2015

Thursday 10:10 am – 12 pm

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### Overview

This course provides a hands-on introduction to ethnographic methods commonly used in social scientific research. Through readings and field exercises we familiarize ourselves with the practice and theory of ethnographic research. Topics include the formation of research topics, questions, and fields; the key fieldwork methods of participant observation and interviewing; using photography and video in the field; methods for investigating social relationships; the analysis of historical sources and material artifacts; and the process of writing up research material. Over the course of the quarter each student will develop a small ethnographic research project that will allow them to practice and reflect on these issues and methods. The course culminates in the writing of a “mini-ethnography” based on students’ class research. Students planning to conduct ethnographic research in New York or online for their M.A. theses may use class exercises for this purpose.

### Goals

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Situate ethnography as a particular social scientific research practice and form of knowledge production.
2. Be able to implement the key methods of fieldwork.
3. Think critically about the ethics of ethnography.
4. Design, execute, and publish a mini-ethnography.
5. Make a case for why ethnography is a useful method for understanding social life and analyzing social issues.

### Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation 25%
2. Research Exercises 40% (5% each)
3. Mini-ethnography 35%

### Materials

All students will need access to an audio recorder and a camera or camcorder for this class. If you do not have this equipment or cannot borrow it from someone you know, please let me know as soon as possible. (Smart phones can be used.)

### Policies

- **RESPECT!**
- Electronic devices should only be used during class workshops (not lectures or discussions).
- If you have a disability, you are welcome (but not at all required) to see me to make arrangements. You may also contact the Office of Disability Services to arrange support services. <http://health.columbia.edu/disability-services>
- If you have any other issue (e.g., religious observance, family duties, illness) that hinders your participation in this course, please see me to make arrangements.
- Please be patient with e-mail. I check and respond to e-mail twice daily (around noon and in the evening).

### Milestones

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**Weeks 4-9, 11; Weds. at 3 pm**

Research Exercises Due

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**Dec. 3 or 10**

In-class presentation

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**Dec. 17**

Mini-ethnography Due

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## Course Format

This course is designed as a practicum. The first few sessions are devoted to discussing and unpacking readings that introduce you to the field of ethnography. The remaining sessions will be divided into two parts, with the first focusing on discussion of particular methods and the second functioning as a “workshop” of assigned ethnographic exercises. For the workshops, students will be placed into groups, with students presenting their research exercises to their groups while others serve as discussants who provide constructive feedback on their peers’ ongoing research. Roles will be assigned on a rotating basis, however all students are expected to share their research and respond to others during the workshops.

## Course Texts

All assigned readings are available on Courseworks.

## Assignments

### 1. Attendance and Participation 25%

Students are expected to come to class having read and prepared to discuss all assigned readings. Students are also expected to provide careful and constructive feedback on their peers’ ongoing work. Participation will be assessed for each class on the basis of a pass/fail scale.

### 2. Research Exercises 40% (5% each)

Students will be required to complete eight research exercises. In addition to providing practice in the use of common ethnographic methods, these assignments will require you to reflect on the value and limitations of individual methods for your research projects. The first seven research exercises will be due by email (to me and your group) at 3 pm on the day *before* each week’s class session (i.e., on Wednesday). A final research presentation, delivered *during one of the two final class sessions*, will require you to reflect on your initial research goals, your actual research experiences, and the lessons you’ve learned, as well as how this class has informed your M.A. research agenda. The research exercises will be graded on a check scale.

✓+ (= 5 pts) means that you have demonstrated superlative care in executing the exercise and original and insightful thought in formulating your written response, reflecting sustained and meaningful engagement with course content and goals.

✓ (= 4 pts) means that you have demonstrated sufficient care in executing the exercise and reasoned thought in formulating your written response, though it could reflect more original insight or more thorough engagement with course content and goals.

✓- (= 3 pts) means that you have demonstrated minimal engagement with the exercise and/or your response lacks careful analysis, original insight, or meaningful use of course content and goals.

0 (= 0 pts) reflects incomplete work.

### 3. Mini-ethnography 35%

For the final paper, students will write a 15-page “mini-ethnography” based on the research topic they explored in the class. The paper should be based on the methods exercises you have completed in class, and it should contain the following sections/areas: a) statement of research problem, b) description of field site, c) methodologies used in gathering data, d) problems encountered and modifications of the problem/methodology in the course of research, e) findings and analysis: preliminary analysis of the data, and reflections on the process of selecting data for the analysis. The mini-ethnography will be graded on a standard A-F scale. A rubric will be provided that details my expectations and grading methodology.

# Course Readings and Schedule

## Week One (Sept. 10)

### **Introduction to the Course**

## Week Two (Sept. 17)

### **Ethnography Then and Now**

Malinowski, Bronislaw 1984 [1922]. "Introduction: The Subject, Method and Scope of this Inquiry." In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Waveland Press. (p. 1-25)

Boellstorff, Tom 2008. "The Subject and Scope of this Inquiry." In *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press. (p. 3-31)

## Week Three (Sept. 24)

### **"The Field": Subject, Object, and Site of Ethnographic Research**

Booth, Wayne C., Colomb, Gregory G., and Williams, Joseph M. 1995 "From Topics to Questions" and "From Questions to a Problem." In *The Craft of Research*. University of Chicago Press (p. 35-67)

Gupta, Akhil and Ferguson, James 1997. "The Field as Site, Method and Location in Anthropology." In Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson (eds.), *Anthropological Locations*. (p. 1-46)

Wolcott, Harry F. 2005. "The Art of Conceptual Self-Defense." In *The Art of Fieldwork*. Altamira Press. (p. 151-168)

#### *EXERCISE 1 (Due Sept. 30)*

Write a statement (2 pages) outlining your research project for the quarter: What topic do you plan to examine? What questions does it raise? What conceptual and/or practical problems does it address? Where will you study this? How do you expect to establish contact and develop relationships with the people necessary for this project? Keep in mind that class exercises will require you to practice participant observation and interviewing techniques, explore the potential of photography or video for ethnographic research, and analyze social relations and a textual or material artifact. Think of a project that will allow you to incorporate all these methods.

Note: We will discuss these in groups in class. Come to class prepared to describe your project and how it will allow you to incorporate course exercises. Also before class, read through the statements for the other members in your group, and prepare to give feedback on the projects proposed in class. Think especially about feasibility and whether the project will allow for incorporating all of the class methods exercises.

## Week Four (Oct. 1)

### **Fieldwork and Fieldnotes (observation, participant observation, and note-taking)**

Wolcott, Harry F. 2005. "Fieldwork: The Basic Arts." In *The Art of Fieldwork*. Altamira Press. (p. 79-114)

Sanjek, Roger 1990. "A Vocabulary for Fieldnotes." In *Fieldnotes*. Cornell Univ. Press. (p. 92-135)

Skim Low, Setha 2000. "Notes from the Field." In *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. Univ. of Texas Press. (p. 3-30)

#### *EXERCISE 2 (Due Oct. 7)*

Spend an hour observing and participating in a public site related to your class research project. Take fieldnotes of your observations. In addition to written notes, you may also draw situations or maps. Turn in 4-5 pages of typed field notes, and write a 2-page statement on your experience. In case you drew something for the exercise, you can scan and attach this as well. What kind of observations did you make? How useful was the exercise for examining your research question? What new questions did your observations raise? Also, what kind of note-taking strategies did you find most useful in the moment, and what kind of notes do you think will provide the most productive material for future analyses?

## **Week Five (Oct. 8)**

## **Interviews, Oral Histories, and Other Kinds of Talk**

Bernard, Russell 2006. "Interviewing: Unstructured and Semi-structured." *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Altamira Press. (p. 210-250)

Briggs, Charles L. 1986. "Listen Before You Leap: Toward Methodological Sophistication." In *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science*. Cambridge Univ. Press. (p. 93-111)

Crapanzano, Vincent 1977. The Life History in Anthropological Field Work. *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* 2 (2-3): 3-17.

### *EXERCISE 3 (Due Oct. 14)*

Plan and conduct a 30-minute long recorded interview on a topic or problem related to your class project. Choose a 5-minute segment of the interview and transcribe it. Write a 2-page essay reflecting on the process of interviewing and transcribing. Turn in your transcript along with your reflections for class.

## **Week Six (Oct. 15)**

## **Photography and Video in Ethnographic Research**

Asch, Timothy et al. 1973 Ethnographic Film: Structure and Function. *Ann. Rev. Anthropology* 2: 179-187.

*A Balinese Trance Seance & Jero on Jero*. 1980-81. 47 minutes, color. Timothy Asch, Linda Connor, and Patsy Asch. DER Documentary. (streaming link on Courseworks)

Bateson, Gregory and Margaret Mead "Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis." In Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Jeffery Sluka (eds.) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Wiley Blackwell (p. 450-464)

Murdock, Graham and Sarah Pink 2005. Picturing Practices: Visual Anthropology and Media Ethnography. In Eric W. Rothenbuhler & Mihai Coman (eds.), *Media Anthropology*. Sage. (149-162).

### *EXERCISE 4 (Due Oct. 21)*

Collect and analyze images using one of the following methods: a) shoot video and prepare a 3-minute clip on a DVD (re: person, place or process); b) take photographs and prepare 3-5 images with interpretative captions (as illustration, as object of analysis); or c) use images you have made – or images made by people in your field site – to elicit comments and background explanations. Write a 2-page commentary in which you discuss your topic/subject/images, what it was like to work with a camera, your editing decisions, the elicitation process and its value, and/or what is gained or lost by using this method.

## **Week Seven (Oct. 22)**

## **Historical Texts and Objects in Ethnographic Research**

Dirks, Nicholas 2002. "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History." In Brian K. Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and its Futures*. Duke Univ. Press. (47-65).

Kopytoff, Igor 1986. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process." In Appadurai, Arjun (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge Univ. Press. (p. 64-93)

Jarman, Neil 1998. "Material of Culture, Fabric of Identity." In Daniel Miller (ed.), *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*. Univ. of Chicago Press. (p. 121-45)

### *EXERCISE 5 (Due Oct. 28)*

Choose an historical object or text artifact (for example from a newspaper, the internet, an advertisement). Write a 2-page analysis on the object in question reflecting on the value and challenges of the use of such data for your class project.

## **Week Eight (Oct. 29)**

### **Social Relationships with Kith and Kin**

Conklin, Harold 1963. "Ethnogenealogical Method." In Ward H. Goodenough (ed.), *Explorations in Cultural Anthropology: Essays in Honor of George Peter Murdock*. McGraw-Hill (p. 25-50)

Horst, Heather & Daniel Miller 2005. From Kinship to Link-up: Cell Phones and Social Networking in Jamaica. *Current Anthropology* 46 (5): 755-778.

Weston, Kath 1991. "Exiles from Kinship." *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. Columbia Univ. Press. (p. 21-38)

#### *EXERCISE 6 (Due Nov. 4)*

Draw a chart of social relationships in a group in relation to an individual, a non-human being, or object. You may for example base the chart on an interview or an examination of someone's profile on a social networking site. Along with chart, write a 1-2-page reflection on the process. How did you elicit/find the information you used to compose the chart? What kind of social relationships does your chart represent? Could you have composed a different kind of chart grounded in different sets of social relationships for the same object on the basis of the same material? What value, if any, does this chart have for your class research project?

## **Week Nine (Nov. 5)**

### **The Ethics of Ethnographic Research**

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy 1995. The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 409-440.

González, Roberto J. 2010. "Indirect Rule and Embedded Anthropology: Practical, Theoretical, and Ethical Concerns." In John Kelly et al. (eds.), *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*. Univ. of Chicago Press. (p. 215-230)

Fosher, Kerry 2010. "Yes, Both, Absolutely: A Personal and Professional Commentary on Anthropological Engagement with Military and Intelligence Organizations." In John Kelly et al. (eds.), *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*. Univ. of Chicago Press. (p. 261-271)

*NYT* article "Army Enlists Anthropologists in War Zones"

## **Week Ten (Nov. 12)**

### **The Ethics of Ethnographic Representation**

Rabinow, Paul 1977. "Ali: An Insider's Outsider." In *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Univ. of California Press (p. 31-69)

Venkatesh, Sudhir 2002. 'Doin' the hustle': Constructing the Ethnographer in the American Ghetto. *Ethnography* 3(1): 91-111.

*Select Passages from Recent Ethnographies*

#### *EXERCISE 7 (Due Nov. 18)*

Either write a short reflection (1-2 pages) on the ethical implications of your proposed research project OR write a short statement (1-2 pages) situating your particular social position (e.g., race, gender, class, sexual orientation, education, nationality, etc.) and reflecting on its implications for your role as a researcher.

**Week Eleven (Nov. 19)**

**Writing and Being Read**

Clifford, James 1986. "On Ethnographic Allegory." In James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Univ. of California Press. (p. 98-121)

Rosaldo, Renato 1993 [1989]. "The Erosion of Classic Norms" and "After Objectivism." In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Beacon Press. (p. 25-45; 46-47)

*Select Passages from Recent Ethnographies*

*EXERCISE 8 (Due Dec. 3 or 10 - IN CLASS)*

Prepare a short presentation on your class research project that details your initial goals, findings over the course of the term, and the theoretical or methodological lessons you've learned from the research methods exercises. Details to follow.

**Week Twelve (Nov. 26) No Class**

**Week Thirteen (Dec. 3) Presentations and Concluding Reflections**

Deloria, Vine Jr. 1988 [1969]. "Anthropologists and Other Friends." In *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Univ. of Oklahoma Press. (78-100).

**Week Fourteen (Dec. 10)**

**Presentations and Concluding Reflections**

Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth 2013. 2012 Public Anthropology Year in Review: Actually, Rick, Florida Could Use a Few More Anthropologists. *American Anthropologist* 108(1):178-190.

**\*Mini-Ethnography Due Thursday, December 17.** (Send by email any time that day.)