Introduction to Anthropological Fieldwork for Information Studies

IS 289 UCLA Winter 2010.

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Tuesdays 1:30-5pm
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Overview

This is a course to introduce students to methods of fieldwork-based inquiry, specifically the tradition derived from anthropology. While it is designed in part for Information Studies, it is not topically focused, but focused on learning by example and through experimenting with the techniques involved (participant-observation, field-notes, interview, multi-modal data collection). Classically, anthropologists have learned method more or less simply by reading ethnographies. While there are a wealth of handbooks about the experience of fieldwork and the techniques involved, there is no single widely-established method or practice of fieldwork. Students will be expected to discover and explore the techniques they wish to employ on their own and as part of the required project.

Goals/Objectives

The main goal of this class is to allow students to distinguish different approaches within ethnographic fieldwork and to distinguish it from (and connect it to) other kinds of research (survey, statistical sampling, structured interview, investigative journalism, psychological observation, experimental observation, bibliometrics, data mining). Students will learn to deal with several areas of concern in conducting fieldwork-based inquiry, such as: problems of access and participation, structured/unstructured interviews and question-asking, elicitation of theory and explanation from informants, analysis of language and practice, variations on the problem of complicity, objectivity and advocacy and some issues of technical concern (human subjects protocols and ethics, use of new media).

Requirements

1. reading, participation and discussion in class (30%)
2. a review article (8-10 pages) covering one domain of ethnography (30%)
3. Mini-ethnography project including several components(40%)
   - fieldwork design, conceptualizing of an object (field statement)
   - fieldnotes, interview + transcript, other data collection
   - short analysis of data, proposal for more research
   - final research proposal

At the bookstore

Cerwonka, Allaine. 2007. *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork.* Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

Fabian, Johannes. 2008. *Ethnography as Commentary: Writing from the Virtual Archive.* Durham: Duke University Press.

(order from INTERNET) Rabinow, Paul, George E.Marcus, Tobias Rees, and James Faubion. 2008. *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Saunders, Barry F. 2009. *CT Suite: The Work of Diagnosis in the Age of Noninvasive Cutting.* Duke University Press.

Additional readings will be provided as pdf documents.

Schedule

1/5 Introduction. Traditions of fieldwork and the centrality of "culture" as a concept.

readings:

1) Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 1992. "Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 7:6-23.

2) Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 1997. "Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, method and location in anthropology" in Akhil Gupta and James Fergusen eds. *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science.* Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.

3) Fischer, Michael M. J. 2007. "Culture and Cultural Analysis as Experimental Systems." *Cultural Anthropology* 22:1-65.

topics: the various traditions of fieldwork based research in anthropology and elsewhere. The various goals of that research tradition, development alongside other methods. The central role of the cultural concept. The critiques of ethnographic representation, ethnographic authority and the uses and abuses of fieldwork beyond anthropology in the last 20 years.

task: *write a preliminary field statement (<2500 words).* In this course you will be asked to experiment with several techniques involved in doing ethnographic fieldwork, without actually completing an ethnographic project. This first task is simply to try and identify a very specific fieldsite. This means significantly more than a simple geographical location: who are the people you are interested in, what do they do, what practices do they engage in, what is "cultural" about this site, what problems are associated with it, what questions can you ask about it, can you "observe" aspects of it easily and if so how? Pay specific attention to the aspects of the activity that are "public" (i.e. that which anyone could observe if they wanted to) and which are private (i.e. those aspects it would be potentially unethical to observer without permission).

1/12 Learning by Reading. An Ethnography

readings:

1) Saunders, Barry F. 2009. *CT Suite: The Work of Diagnosis in the Age of Noninvasive Cutting*. Duke University Press.

optional) Franklin, Sarah. 2006. *Born and Made: An Ethnography of Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction and Chapter 2.

topics: What does a finished ethnography based on a decade or more of work look like? What kinds of evidence is used? How is evidence used and how are theory and claims intertwined with claims about method? How does writing style matter?

tasks: *construct a richly annotated bibliography* (10-15 entries). Based on one of the subject areas listed here, collect 10-15 articles, edited volumes or monographs focused on that theme. Read as much as necessary to get a sense of what the arguments are, the sites, the relevant background debates, the cited literature, and especially, *the role of ethnography*. Then create an annotated bibliography with an introductory paragraph explaining how these works fit together. Topics for bibliography: the anthropology of work and work practices, ethnomethodology, Computer Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW), anthropology of technology, corporate ethnography, medical ethnography, media studies and ethnography, popular culture, audience studies and ethnography in media studies or communication, ethnography in library and information science, computer mediated communication and linguistic anthropology, action research, grounded theory, actor-network theory. Other topics upon discussion with the instructor.

1/19 Deployments (literature reports due, discussion)

reading: individually directed towards literature reports. Presentation of results by students.

tasks: *observe and report*. Construct a way to observe some aspect of your fieldsite and observe it. Spend 4-6 hours this week trying to observe and talk to people. This may involve distant observation, learning something from someone, talking to people, asking questions, etc. Take detailed notes of your observations and conversations, and reflect on what kinds of things you can and cannot discover or understand in this mode.

**A*LSO: schedule a formal interview* with one or more people from your site. Do not underestimate how hard it is to do this. Record the interview and begin transcribing it. You will need to have this transcript completed by Feb. 16th.

~~**1/26**~~ **TBD (At Duke)**
no class

2/2 Designing Fieldwork The work of conceiving sites, subjects and methods together.

readings: Katz, Jack. 1999. *How Emotions Work*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, Introduction and Chapter 1, other selected bits.

topics: How is a fieldwork project conceived, how are different methods, sites or problems chosen? Design of open-endedness vs. design of a closed or experimental project.

tasks: *discuss in class. Challenges of fieldnotes, observations. Discuss interviewing, techniques, styles. Learn open-ended, semi-structured, structured; conversation vs. discrete questions; level of detail necessary. Organization of materials and relationship to topic. Compare Saunders and Katz approaches*

to data.

2/9 Learning by Doing. Participant-observation, Advocacy, Complicity, Antagonism

readings:

1) Cerwonka, Allaine. 2007. *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

2) Marcus, George E. 1997. "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork." *Representations* 85-108.

topics: learning by doing, frustrations of the field, openness to serendipty, reworking your problem, staying true to your instincts, boredom, advocacy, complicity, danger.

tasks: *rewrite your field statement.* Reflect on your observations, interview and experience thinking about human subjects research, re-write your field statement based on these reflections. Have new questions emerged for you?

2/16 Human Subjects, IRBs and Ethics

readings:

1) Bosk, Charles L. 2007. "The New Bureaucracies of Virtue or When Form Fails to Follow Function." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 30:192-209.

2) Jacob, Marie Andrée, and Annelise Riles. 2007. "The New Bureaucracies of Virtue: Introduction." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 30:181-191.

3) Lederman, Rena. 2007. "Comparative "Research": A Modest Proposal concerning the Object of Ethics Regulation." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 30:305-327.

topics: investigation vs. research, ethics vs. law, regulation of research, the definition of objects of study, human subjects as objects of study vs. as tools for study.

tasks:

1) discuss interviews. by this date you should have completed an interview and begun transcription/notation of it.

2) (in class) *fill out a mock Research Protocol for your project.* Using the forms available (Either HS-1 or more likely HS-7) on the UCLA Office of Sponsored research, describe your project as if it were a full-fledged project.

http://www.oprs.ucla.edu/human/forms/

2/23 Analyzing what you've done. Writing, thinking, evidence and argument, reframing questions vs. testing hypothesis, logics of analysis.

readings:

1) Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

2) Katz, Jack. 1999. *How Emotions Work*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press. Selections TBD

tasks: *Outline an analytical paper (2-3 page outline).* The analysis of notes and interviews is an ongoing process of reading and re-reading. Read for repeated themes and concepts, and

especially for things that you recorded but either didn't really notice, didn't make much of, or do not understand. Experiment with coding if the mood strikes you. Your outline should reflect the key ideas that you extract from this material and the way you might present those ideas to a reader (by extracting rich quotations? By telling a story from your notes? By juxtaposing two surprising facts or occurrences? By focusing on rhetorical or logical aspects of your material?

3/2 Fieldwork of and with New Media?

Readings:

1) Fabian, Johannes. 2008. *Ethnography as Commentary: Writing from the Virtual Archive*. Durham: Duke University Press.

2) Kelty, Christopher M. 2009. "Collaboration, Coordination and Cooperation: Fieldwork after the Internet," in Faubion, James D, and George E. Marcus. 2009. *Fieldwork is not what it used to be: learning anthropology's method in a time of transition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

topics:

tasks:

1) using new media. Bring a list of tools, technologies, sites, games, novels, memories, or other objects you think might enhance your capacity to do the fieldwork project you have proposed and be prepared to talk in detail about what you would do with them.

2) final research proposal (<4000 words). Using your revised field statement and the notes and interview material, write a proposal for a research project based on what you have learned in the class and from your project. Prepare a 10 minute presentation (4-5 slides) explaining it.

3/9 Final Presentations

tasks: *present.*

Other resources

some random resources, with an emphasis on information studies and the internet

Axel, Brian Keith. 2004. "The Context of Diaspora." *Cultural Anthropology* 19:26-60.

Barker, Joshua. 2008. "Playing with publics: Technology, talk and sociability in Indonesia." *Language & Communication* 28:127-142.

Bernal, Victoria. 2005. "Eritrea On-Line: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and the Public Sphere." *American Ethnologist* 32:660-675.

Boczkowski, Pablo J. 2005. *Digitizing the news.*Cambridge, MA. MIT Press.

Boellstorff, Tom. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press.

Burrell, Jenna. 2009. "The Field Site as a Network: A Strategy for Locating Ethnographic Research." *Field Methods* 21:181-199.

Clifford, James and George Marcus. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Advanced Seminar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

English-Lueck, June Anne. 2002. *Cultures@Silicon Valley*. Stanford University Press.

Escobar, Arturo et al. 1994. "Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the Anthropology of Cyberculture [and Comments and Reply]." *Current Anthropology* 35:211-231.

Fischer, M. M.J. 1999. "Worlding cyberspace: Toward a critical ethnography in time, space, and theory." *Critical anthropology now: Unexpected contexts, shifting constituencies, changing agendas* 245–304.

Fortun, Kim. 2009. "Figuring Out Ethnography" in Faubion, James D, and George E. Marcus. *Fieldwork is not what it used to be: learning anthropology's method in a time of transition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ginsburg, Faye D, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, eds. 2002. *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson, eds. 1997a. *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.

Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson, eds. 1997b. *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press.

Hine, Christine. 2000. *Virtual Ethnography*. London: SAGE.

Hume, Lynne, and Jane Mulcock, eds. 2004. *Anthropologists in the Field Cases in Participant Observation*. New York N.Y: Columbia University Press.

Ito, Mizuko. 1996. "Theory, Method, and Design in Anthropologies of the Internet." *Social Science Computer Review* 14:24-26.

Jackson, Bruce, and Edward D Ives, eds. 1996. *The World Observed: Reflections on the Fieldwork Process*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Katz, Jack. 2001. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography (Part I)." *Ethnography* 2:443-473.

Katz, Jack. 2002. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography (part 2)." *Ethnography* 3:63-90.

Kelty, Christopher M. 2008. *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Larkin, Brian. 2008. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lofland, John. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. 4th ed. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth.

Lysloff, Rene T. A. 2003. "Musical Community on the Internet: An On-line Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology* 18:233-263.

Malaby, Thomas. 2009. *Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life*. Cornell University Press.

Marcus, George E. 1995. "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:95-117.

Marcus, George E. 1999. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Miller, D., and D. Slater. 2000. *The Internet: an ethnographic approach*. Berg Publishers.

Orr, Julian E. 1996. *Talking About Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job*. Ithaca, N.Y: ILR Press/Cornell University Press.

Pfaffenberger, Bryan. 1992. "Social Anthropology of Technology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21:491-516.

Postill, John. 2009. "What is the point of media anthropology?." *Social Anthropology* 17:334-337.

Star, S. L. 1999. "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43:377-391.

Star, Susan Leigh, and Karen Ruhleder. 1996. "Steps Toward an Ecology of Infrastructure: Design and Access for Large Information Spaces." *INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH* 7:111-134.

Star, Susan Leigh, ed. 1995. *The Cultures of Computing*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publisher.

Suchman, L., J. Blomberg, J. E. Orr, and R. Trigg. 1999. "Reconstructing Technologies as Social Practice." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43:392-408.

Uimonen, Paula. 2009. "Internet, arts and translocality in Tanzania." *Social Anthropology* 17:276-290.

Whitaker, Mark P. 2004. "Tamilnet.com: Some Reflections on Popular Anthropology, Nationalism, and the Internet." *Anthropological Quarterly* 77:469-498.

Wilson, Samuel M., and Leighton C. Peterson. 2002. "The Anthropology of Online Communities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31:449-467.

Other syllabi

http://savageminds.org/2009/03/23/stories-of-the-field-some-bibliographic-notes/
http://sociology.rutgers.edu/graduate/Syllabi/Fall%202009/Daipha%20and%20Rodriguez.pdf
http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~mlamont/soc209/syllabus/index.html