

anthropology 605::fieldwork::missions

mission 1: find the fieldwork

Read and analyze ethnographic articles. You will read (2 or 3) ethnographic articles from the following list of recently published works. These articles have been chosen arbitrarily, with the only constraints being that they are recent, and that they all claim to be based on fieldwork.

The goal of the exercise is to try to analyze (etymology: to loosen or dissolve) the articles in order to determine what constitutes the “fieldwork” therein, and what constitutes the rest...

Below are two sets of questions about a text, one from the last version of this class, and one from Kim Fortun’s article *Figuring Out Ethnography*. Answer the first four below and be prepared to share your answers in class; use the remaining questions to help figure out how to answer these four more specifically.

1. **Start with a brief synopsis or abstract for those of us who have not read it.**
2. **What is the site?**
3. **What is the argument?**
4. **What is the narrative?**
5. What theoretical literature or tradition does it contribute to or take issue with, if any?
6. What are the methods? Is there a methods section? If not, can you tell what methods are employed?
7. What work (fieldwork, thinking, writing, traveling, collecting) do you imagine was necessary to get to the point where this article could be written?
8. Does the article employ “evidence”? What and where?
9. If it employs evidence, how is it related to the argument?
10. What style, or genre of writing is employed? Is the genre or style related to the argument?
11. If you had to define what *fieldwork* was, based solely on this article, what would it be?
12. If you had to say define what *ethnographic writing* was, based solely on this article, what would it be?

due: september eleven

From Fortun, *Figuring out Ethnography*:

Questioning a Text

- 1. What is the text “about” -- empirically and conceptually?**
- 2. What modes of inquiry were used to produce it?**
- 3. How is the text structured and performed?**
- 4. How can it circulate?**

1a. What is the text about – empirically?

What phenomenon is drawn out in the text? A social process; a cultural and political-economic shift; a cultural “infrastructure;” an emergent assemblage of science-culture-technology-economics?

Where is this phenomenon located – in a neighborhood, in a country, in “Western Culture,” in a globalizing economy?

What historical trajectory is the phenomenon situated within? What, in the chronology provided or implied, is emphasized -- the role of political or economic forces, the role of certain individuals or social groups? What does the chronology leave out or discount?

What scale(s) are focused on -- nano (i.e. the level of language), micro, meso, macro? What empirical material is developed at each scale?

Who are the players in the text and what are their relations? Does the text trace how these relations have changed across time – because of new technologies, for example?

What is the temporal frame in which players play? In the wake of a particular policy, disaster or other significant “event?” In the general climate of the Reagan era, or of “after-the-Wall” globalization?

What cultures and social structures are in play in the text?

What kinds of practices are described in the text? Are players shown to be embedded in structural contradictions or double-binds?

What structural conditions– technological, legal and legislative, political, cultural – are highlighted, and how are they shown to have shaped the phenomenon described in this text?

How – at different scales, in different ways – is power shown to operate? Is there evidence of power operating through language, “discipline,” social hierarchies, bureaucratic function, economics, etc?

Does the text provide comparative or systems level perspectives? In other words, is the particular phenomenon described in this text situated in relation

to similar phenomenon in other settings? Is this particular phenomena situated within global structures and processes?

1b. What is the text about – conceptually?

Is the goal to verify, challenge or extend prior theoretical claims?

What is the main conceptual argument or theoretical claim of the text? Is it performed, rendered explicit or both?

What ancillary concepts are developed to articulate the conceptual argument?

How is empirical material used to support or build the conceptual argument?

How robust is the main conceptual argument of the text? On what grounds could it be challenged?

How could the empirical material provided support conceptual arguments other than those built in the text?

2. Modes of inquiry?

What theoretical edifice provides the (perhaps haunting – i.e. non-explicit) backdrop to the text?

What assumptions appear to have shaped the inquiry? Does the author assume that individuals are rational actors, for example, or assume that the unconscious is a force to be dealt with? Does the author assume that the “goal” of society is (functional) stability? Does the author assume that what is most interesting occurs with regularity, or is she interested in the incidental and deviant?

What kinds of data (ethnographic, experimental, statistical, etc.) are used in the text, and how were they obtained?

If interviews were conducted, what kinds of questions were asked? What does the author seem to have learned from the interviews?

How was the data analyzed? If this is not explicit, what can be inferred?

How are people, objects or ideas aggregated into groups or categories?

What additional data would strengthen the text?

3. Structure and performance?

What is in the introduction? Does the introduction turn around unanswered questions -- in other words, are we told how this text embodies a research project?

Where is theory in the text? Is the theoretical backdrop to the text explained,

or assumed to be understood?

What is the structure of the discourse in the text? What binaries recur in the text, or are conspicuously avoided?

How is the historical trajectory delineated? Is there explicit chronological development?

How is the temporal context provided or evoked in the text?

How does the text specify the cultures and social structures in play in the text?

How are informant perspectives dealt with and integrated?

How does the text draw out the implications of science and technology? At what level of detail are scientific and technological practices described?

How does the text provide in-depth detail – hopefully without losing readers?

What is the layout of the text? How does it move, from first page to last? Does it ask for other ways of reading? Does the layout perform an argument?

What kinds of visuals are used, and to what effect?

What kind of material and analysis are in the footnotes?

How is the criticism of the text performed? If through overt argumentation, who is the “opposition”?

How does the text situate itself? In other words, how is reflexivity addressed, or not?

4.Circulation?

Who is the text written for? How are arguments and evidence in the text shaped to address particular audiences?

What all audiences can you imagine for the text, given its empirical and conceptual scope?

What new knowledge does this text put into circulation? What does this text have to say that otherwise is not obvious?

How generalizable is the main argument? How does this text lay the groundwork for further research?

What kind of “action” is suggested by the main argument of the text imply?

Articles:

[These articles are also listed here:

http://www.citeulike.org/user/ckelty/tag/fieldwork_class

but some articles are available only on campus]

Aporta, Claudio and Eric Higgs "Satellite Culture: Global Positioning Systems, Inuit Wayfinding, and the Need for a New Account of Technology," *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY* 2005, 46 (5), December
<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/CA/journal/issues/v46n5/055005/brief/055005.abstract.htm>

Christen, Kimberly, "Tracking Properness: Repackaging Culture in a Remote Australian Town," *Cultural Anthropology*, 2006 21(3) 416—446
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/can.2006.21.3.416>

Drexler, Elizabeth, "History and liability in Aceh, Indonesia: Single bad guys and convergent narratives" *American Ethnologist*, 2006 33(3), 313—326
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/ae.2006.33.3.313>

Elyachar, Julia, "Best practices: Research, finance, and NGOs in Cairo," *American Ethnologist*, 2006 33(3), 413—426
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/ae.2006.33.3.413>

Gupta, Akhil, "Narratives of corruption: Anthropological and fictional accounts of the Indian state," *Ethnography* 2005 6(1) 15—34, March
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1466138105055663>

Peutz, N., "An Anthropology of Removal" *CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY* 2006, 47 (2), April
<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/CA/journal/issues/v47n2/90418/brief/90418.abstract.html>

Redfield, Peter, "A less modest witness" *American Ethnologist* 2006 33(1), 3—26 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/ae.2006.33.1.3>

Shepherd, Chris J., "From In Vitro to In Situ: On the Precarious Extension of Agricultural Science in the Indigenous 'Third World'" *Social Studies of Science*, 2006 36(3) 399—426, June, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0306312706055272>

Waterston, Alisse and Rylko-Bauer, Barbara, " Out of the shadows of history and memory: Personal family narratives in ethnographies of rediscovery," *American Ethnologist*, 2006 33(3) 397—412
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/ae.2006.33.3.397>

Yaneva, Albena, "Scaling Up and Down: Extraction Trials in Architectural Design," *Social Studies of Science* 2005, 35(6) p. 867—894, December
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0306312705053053>