Anthropology 605: Fieldwork

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00-7:00
Fondren Library, Symonds Lab
Christopher Kelty
ckelty@rice.edu

Introduction:

Anthropology often teaches ethnographic fieldwork methodology via the extremes. On the one hand, there is the "just do it" approach, which claims there is no way to *teach* ethnography. On the other hand, so-called "qualitative methods" promise a a common tool chest of proven techniques to give structure to experience. This class does neither, it is methodologically agnostic.

We will proceed under the assumption that students learn the most by simply comparing similar projects with each other. Therefore the model on which this class is based is the architecture design studio. In a design studio, students are given a set of constraints (a site, a plan, and/or a set of materials) and they make designs that are compared and critiqued with each other along the way. This approach generally has the following structure, which I've appropriated for this class. We will discuss each of these in turn during the class.

Site: Site has an easy analogue in anthropology. Most fieldwork is single-site based and long-term. In this class each student will choose his/her own site (while I encourage group work in theory, in this case it will depend on the number of people in the class). Sites in architecture are place-based (i.e. geographically located). Sites in anthropology are also often geographic but can include identity-based sites, network-based sites, and sites determined in more complex theoretical ways.

Program: Program in architecture refers to the proposed uses of the structure (house, office, multi-purpose room, renovation, re-purposing etc.). It is intended to guide the design in form and function. The analogue in anthropology is harder to grasp, and proceeds from the interest of the researcher and the tradition he/she seeks to contribute to; examples might be: kinship, exchange, rationality, institutions, totemism and magic, religion/ethics, political economy, etc. This is the hardest part, we will discuss it at length.

Material and Phenomena: These concepts are harder to make analogous. In architecture, phenomena and material concern the qualities of building materials, such as the tensile strength of steel (material) and what it

will do when it sways (phenomena). In anthropology material might be anything you use to make claims about the site and program you have chosen: interviews (transcripts, video tapes and audio tapes), photos, field-notes, questionnaires, statistics, documents, newspaper and scholarly articles, etc. Phenomena, on the other hand, are the context and structures that give rise to this material (beyond the fact that you asked for it). Phenomena may be related to Program, or it may be related to site. Some examples might include: regular meetings, big events, small events conversations, chance observations, patterned occurrences, etc.

These four concepts are intended to give us an arbitrary structure whose desired effect is *only* to allow us a language in which to compare our projects with each other. Needless to say, this is not the way "real" ethnography proceeds. The main difference is that "real" ethnographic fieldwork requires much more *time*, most of it spent being bored. Consequently, you should temper your ambition accordingly. Do not expect to produce an ethnography in one semester, but rather, to come out with a feeling for process, and to learn from your peers their processes.

Tools and Techniques: Practically speaking we will try to make use of as many different technologies and tools as you want to learn and as we are capable of teaching each other. There are numerous possibilities, not all of which I can cover in detail: video and audio, text processing and dealing with large volumes of text, digital photography, presentation tools, including paper and internet-based presentation. The basic assumption of the class is that you will learn what you need to through self-help or mutual aid. Those of you with experience in one or another area will no doubt be called on to help others learn. For those of you who wish to, this class is a chance for you to try out many different tools, rather than learn to use specific ones really well.

Prerequisites: This class is limited to advanced undergraduates and graduate students. There are no other prerequisites.

Requirements:

1. Readings and Discussion

2. Mandatory class attendance and participation.

3. Research paper + presentation.

There are no required texts for this class
Class Mailing List: TBD

Preliminary Schedule

Section 1: Research
During this period you will be expected to
1) identify your 'site'
2) assess issues of access
3) articulate a basic 'program'
4) plan for phenomena and material
5) begin researching

- Aug 27,29: Introduction, Planning. Sites Concerning the choice of site. Many students may have larger projects underway and wish to use this class to do some work on them. I discourage this in favor of focusing on a smaller, more doable project which might inform a larger project but will not be expected to contribute to it directly. By choosing a "second project" as it were, you can deflect some of the intensity of the inevitable failures away from your main project.

    Readings

    - Ferguson and Gupta, *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Introduction. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.
    - Paul Willis et. al. *Manifesto for Ethnography Ethnography* 1, no. 1 (2000): 5-16.
    - Responses from *Ethnography* 1, no. 2 (2000) 257, 267 by Howard Becker and Lila Abu-Lughod.
    - Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance, Effect*, Chapter 7. London: Athlon Press, 1999.

- Sept 3: Present site and program plan, discussion.

- Sept 5: No Class

- Sept 10: Program and Ethnographic Description. Imagining how and why. *Readings*

    - Jack Katz "From How to Why: On luminosity and causal inference in ethnography" Parts 1 and 2. *Ethnography* Vol 2(4), p. 443-473

- Sept 12: Revised site and program plan, if necessary. Discussion.

- Sept 17: Discuss: access, key informants, ancillary research.

- Sept 19: Interview techniques and Questions. Telephone and internet interviews, email conversations etc. Correlating and Corroborating stories, thinking up new questions. Drawing Hermeneutic Circles.

- Sept 24: Work/TBD

- Sept 26: Work/TBD

Section 2: Analyze By this period you should have plenty of material to work with. You will be expected to;
1) organize your material
2) examine it according to the program you set out, and assess whether other programs or other material might be better.
3) research other scholarly material concerning it.

- Oct 1: Organization of Material. Transcription, mark-up. making your site material yield your program questions.

  Readings:

  – Mary Carruthers, "Reading with Attitude, Remembering the Book," in *The Book and the Body Body and Book* Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame Press, 1997, p. 1-33.

- Oct 3: Work/TBD

  Readings

  – TBD on the basis of site/program decisions

  Some Possible Program Books:

  – Bruno Latour, Science in Action
  – Faubion, Ethics of Kinship
  – Rabinow, Anthropology of Reason.
  – Mary Douglas, How Institutions Think.

- Oct 8,10: Program

- Oct 17: Program

4

Mid-Semester Reviews, Oct 22 and 24th

Section 3: Research During this period you will be expected to 'return' to the site after having been critiqued.

- Oct 29, 31: TBD

Section 4: Present

This final period will focus on the organization and presentation of your research. You will be expected to

1) Choose a method of presenting your research

2) organize your material and reiterate the 'program' for analyzing it.

3) Begin writing/making your presentation.

- Nov 5: Thinking about Design. How to Present materials

- Nov 12, 14:

   Readings

   - Edward Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*
   - *Radio: An illustrated Guide*, at http://www.thislife.org/
   -

- Nov 19, 21: AAA

Final Presentations, November 26,27 December 2,3

Potential Tools and Techniques

- Research

  - tools for substantive investigation
    * how to take advantage of the internet
    * searching techniques
    * determining who/what/where of content
    * online databases and resources
    * understanding the difference between static and dynamic
    * content– finding/collecting news articles online
  - tools for recording
    * Recording for recording's sake vs. recording for presentation: balancing quality with getting it on tape.
    * speech to text recording
    * Recording field-notes vs. writing (typing) them.
    * the importance of flexible and secure documents.
    * audio recording (cassette, Minidisc, DAT)
      · testing your equipment
      · interview techniques
      · quality issues
    * using the internet to participate/observe
      · email
      · chat, irc
      · streaming video, conferencing software
    * photos
      · digital still photography
      · scanning images, organizing images
      · digital manipulation (This Old Adobe)
    * video
      · digital video
      · how to use the camera, how to take usable
      · footage
      · working in groups separating audio/video
      · understanding formats, codecs, NLEs, video for
      · Output formats: web video vs. TV video

6

- Presentation
  * tools for organization of textual material
    · understanding files text, image, sound, video
    · managing files, emails, transcripts basic text-processing, editing, backup
    · investigating text
    · advanced tools for text processing
    · Speech recognition tools for transcribing
    · keyword and co-word programs
    · Anthropology specific tools e.g Atlas/ti and Nud*ist
    · markup and text transform tools
  * tools for organization of audio-visual material
    · Software tools for presentation
    · Photoshop-like tools
    · Illustration tools
    · Page Layout tools
  * tools for presentation on the web
    · Basic HTML, basic intro to where documents are and how to manage them
    · Using Rice allotted webpages
    · Creating html and pdf versions of text
    · scaling images, sounds, video for web presentation
  * What this currently excludes: Statistical Methods Software, graphing software, population genetics and kinship mapping software, spreadsheets, GIS software.