

**anthropology 605: fieldwork**  
**ringleader: Christopher Kelty**  
**sewall hall 580; x3311; ckelty@rice.edu**

monday 2-5  
classroom: Sewall Hall 562  
lab: sewall hall 266

"It is not the 'actual' inter-connection of 'things' but the *conceptual* inter-connection of *problems* that define the scope of the various sciences. A new 'science' emerges where new problems are pursued by new methods and truths are thereby discovered which open up significant new points of view."

— Max Weber

### **overview**

Goal: to practice and discuss several different aspects of qualitative ethnographic research. This course is avowedly *theoretical*—this may seem paradoxical, but it is not. The class is intended to provide you with the experience of connecting the theoretical questions addressed in anthropology, sociology, history and philosophy to the practical question of how to research, observe, describe, record and present material about these theoretical questions in the contemporary world. The course is organized as a "studio" after the model of architecture; this means that students are expected to work together, to present their work to each other regularly, and to share ideas, skills and criticisms with each other.

### **requirements:**

This class is designed for graduate students and undergraduates who plan to go on to graduate study. You must have your own computer, or a computer on which you can safely keep and gain access to the materials you create for this class. You must have a willingness to learn (and to teach your fellow students to use) new technologies and tools such as audio-video recording tools, digital cameras, software tools for editing and various web-based software (e.g. blogs, wikis, "social" software etc.) as needed. You must be prepared to commit at least 6 hours per week, in addition to the 3 hr class and the reading.

### **outline:**

The course consists of weekly meetings, during which we will either have discussions of readings or have short presentations from each student. The course is structured around 7 "missions" ('should you choose to accept it' etc.). All the missions are required, but they form an organic whole, which is intended to lead you from existing scholarship to theory to planning to execution to writing and presentation. The missions are as follows (more detailed information will be provided for each mission



**mission one: find the fieldwork.** Students read 2 or 3 articles, analyze them, and report in class on the type of fieldwork and/or research that went into them. Students work individually, readings will overlap.

**mission two: figuring out ethnography.** Based on a similar class taught by Kim Fortun at RPI, this mission involves filling out several “memos” about your project—differentiating site from project, and empirical from theoretical from methodological.

**mission three: observe.** Based on missions one and two and, students choose a phenomenon to observe for the semester. Students pick several possibilities and narrow them down in discussion. Begin observing immediately.

**mission three and one half: gather.** Students explore the range of writing about their phenomenon, and the writing which precedes them in the field, and are expected to learn to use library and online resources efficiently.

**mission four: interview.** Students conduct an interview with a relevant member from the field they are observing, and learn interviewing techniques and how to use audio/video recording tools.

**mission five: annotate.** Students transcribe the interview, learn to use the class “wiki” to add annotations on their own and other students’ interviews.

**mission six: write.** Students write commentary on their own, and one other student’s interview.

**mission seven: present.** Students give a 15 minute presentation in the last class.

A timeline is attached which gives you the approximate times of each mission plus the several firm deadlines.

During the course of the semester, students will also be introduced to and encouraged to participate in an ongoing research project in the anthropology department called “Ethics and Politics of Nanotechnology” (epnano).

**schedule:**

\*\* = formal presentation

**august twenty-eight** — introduction.  
discussion of class topics, tools, missions.  
begin mission one

**september four** — no class

**september eleven** — find the fieldwork.  
discussion of mission one  
readings: see mission one  
begin mission two

**september eighteen** — figuring out ethnography  
discussion of Fortun: scale, complexity, fieldsite vs. project;  
events and problems. preliminary discussion of observation  
ideas.  
Readings: Fortun, *Figuring out ethnography*  
begin mission three

**september twenty-five** — ethex  
discussion of ethics, IRBs, legality, bureaucracy. More  
discussion of mission three.  
readings: Timmermans and Scheper-Hughes  
continue mission three

**october two** — data hacking  
discussion of EPIT project; epano. discussion of mission  
three ideas  
readings: Fabian, *Virtual Archives*; EPIT project  
mission three/three and a half

\*\* **october nine** — present observations  
presentation of mission three, share observations  
no readings  
begin mission four

**october sixteen** — midterm recess, no class

**october twenty-three** — interview  
discussion of interview technique, tools. Audio/video issues.  
readings: Abel and Glass comix. Murakami  
mission four continued

**october thirty** — transcription  
discussion of issues of circulation, collaboration, publication,  
sharing, blogging, archiving; Copyright and distribution issues  
readings: TBD  
mission four continued

transcriptions due tues november six

**november six** — arguments, narrative, cases, claims  
discussion of theorization (cause, correlate, generalize,  
describe, make), use of evidence, narratives and arguments.  
readings: Katz, TBD  
mission five begin

annotated transcripts due. tues november thirteen

**\*\* november thirteen** — present interviews + annotations.  
no readings  
mission six begin

**november twenty** — AAA recovery session

**november twenty-seven** — Thanksgiving recovery session

written commentary due november thirty

**\*\* december four** — final presentations. mission seven.

**\*\* december TBD** — more presentations (if necessary)

## Required Reading:

Max Weber et.al

1949 [1904] "Objectivity in the Social Sciences" in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Edward A. Shils and Henry Finch eds. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Kim Fortun, "Figuring Out Ethnography" manuscript, 2006

Johannes Fabian

2002 "Virtual Archives and Ethnographic Writing" *Current Anthropology* 43(5):775-786

Stefan Timmermans

1995 "Cui Bono? Institutional Review Board Ethics and Ethnographic Research" *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 19:153-173.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes

2004 "Parts Unknown: Undercover ethnography of the organ-trafficking world" *Ethnography* 5(1):29-73

Abel, Jessica and Ira Glass

1999 *Radio: An Illustrated Guide* (How to make radio that's good). Chicago: WBEZ.

Murakami, Haruki

2000 *Underground*. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel Trans. New York: Vintage Books.

Katz, Jack

2001 "From How to Why: On luminous description and causal inference in ethnography (Parts I and II)" *Ethnography* 2(4): 443-473 and 3(1):63-90.

**additional and further reading:**

Rabinow, Paul

2003 *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (chapters 3-4 especially)

Max Weber,

2004 *The Vocation Lectures*. David Own and Tracy B. Strong eds. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. (The two classic essays by Weber "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation" collected with commentary and background).

Geertz,

1973 "Ideology as a cultural system," "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

1981 "Common Sense as a cultural system." In *Local Knowledge* New York: Basic Books (Three classic essays, each of which demonstrates a different use of fieldwork as the basis for theory).

Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson

1997 "Discipline and Practice: 'The Field' as site, method and location in anthropology" in *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press. (Gupta and Ferguson review recent debates about the location, function and definition of site in anthropological studies).

MacClancy, Jeremy

2002 *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the front lines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (An edited collection of recent work in anthropology that addresses modern issues that face anthropologists, ranging from violence, crime and ethnic conflict to intellectual property to refugees, markets and science. A kind of less stubborn and stodgy *Annual Review*).

Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn

2003 *Ethics and the Profession of Anthropology, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press. (New edition of a collection of essays on ethical issues related to anthropology; includes CIA research, IRBs, repatriation and cyber-ethics issues).

Whyte, W F.



1997 *Creative Problem Solving in the Field: Reflections on a Career*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press. (The author of *Street Corner Society* offers a variety of tips and tricks for doing work in the field; kind of curmudgeonly, but ultimately amazing).

Ragin, Charles C. and Howard Becker

1992 *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press. (Eight answers by sociologists to the question of what makes a case and what makes it interesting—useful for understanding arguments about generalization, populations and narrative argumentation).

George Marcus and Fernando Mascarenhas, *Ocasiao: The Marquis and the Anthropologist, A Collaboration* AltaMira Press, 2005 (An experiment in collaborative ethnographic encounters)

Rosalyn Berne *Nanotalk Conversations With Scientists And Engineers About Ethics, Meaning, And Belief in the Development of Nanotechnology* Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005 (A non-ethnographic, but fascinating attempt to weave exposition through interviews)

Talia Dan-Cohen and Paul Rabinow, *A Machine to Make a Future: Biotech Chronicles*, Princeton University Press 2005 (self-professed attempt to do “real-time” anthropology, to follow the development of a technology and publish and account in less than one year).

**Representative Journals:**

*Anthropology Today*

*Current Anthropology*

*Cultural Anthropology*

*Ethnography*

*American Ethnologist*

*American Anthropologist*

*Social Anthropology*

*Anthropological Quarterly*

*Social Studies of Science*

*Economy and Society*

*Signs*

*Annual Review of Anthropology*

*Reviews in Anthropology*

*Interview Forum* (<http://www.osea-cite.org/interviewforum/index.php>)

**Online resources:**

Anthrosource <<http://www.anthrosource.net/>> (AAA members only)

Fondren main page: <<http://www.rice.edu/fondren/>>

JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org>> [Rice network only]

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EHRaF <<http://ets.umd.umich.edu/e/ehrafe/>>  
RLG Cultural Materials <<http://culturalmaterials.rlg.org/>>  
Lexis-Nexis <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>>