

Rethinking ethnography in contemporary anthropology

Winter Term 2009-2010

4 credits (8 ECTS)

Lecturer: Vlad Naumescu

Schedule: Thursday 09:00 – 12.40

Office hours: Wednesday 10-12, and by appointment

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Course outline

This advanced seminar builds on your knowledge of anthropology to further explore the relationship between theory and method in contemporary anthropology. It raises questions regarding the epistemological and methodological assumptions of an ethnographic approach and offers some (alternative) answers. It also examines through various case studies the ways in which we explore the world ethnographically and how we can experiment with ethnography beyond classical approaches. Arguing for an open, reflexive understanding of the ethnographic method, it encourages you to take an imaginative approach to ethnography, its means and ends.

The seminar is structured in such a way as to accompany you in thinking through your research proposal. Accordingly, each session proposes a particular theme raising epistemological and practical questions related to your project. The first three sessions (1-3) discuss the relationship between anthropology, ethnography and fieldwork, the ways in which anthropology constructs its object and the different temporalities of ethnographic investigation. The following three sessions (4-6) focus on the anthropologist's engagement with the world and the circumstances in which knowledge emerges in the field through objects, the senses and new collaborative relations. These sessions look at the kinds of knowledge generated by means of different ethnographic techniques. The next step (7-9) is to explore the interplay between these kinds of knowledge and different forms of communication in anthropological experimentation. The last three sessions are dedicated to the presentation and discussion of your research proposals (weeks 10-12).

Learning outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students should a) develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between theory and method in anthropology b) have a better grasp of the established strategies of ethnographic investigation c) improve their research skills by learning to use creatively ethnographic methods in social research d) advance in their preparation for field research by formulating a clear research design and a strategy for approaching fieldwork.

Course requirements

The seminar format requires your active participation and input. Students are encouraged to contribute with ideas, cases, films as material for discussion within the frames of the weekly topic. Every class a student will give an overview of the topic and address critically the week's readings

(ideally in written form). By the end of the course each student is expected to present at least once in the seminar and also to present his/her research project with a special emphasis on research design and fieldwork. Besides the class presentation, each student should choose an ethnography relevant for her research topic and prepare a short review discussing critically epistemological and methodological issues.

Grading:

Class presentation (20%), class presentation of the PhD research design (20%), review (20%) research proposal with an elaborated discussion of its methodology (40%)

Readings:

Week 1. Introduction

Ingold, T. 2007. Anthropology is *Not* Ethnography. *Proceedings of the British Academy*: 69-92.

[http://www.proc.britac.ac.uk/cgi-bin/somsid.cgi
page=154p069&session=825683A&type=header](http://www.proc.britac.ac.uk/cgi-bin/somsid.cgi?page=154p069&session=825683A&type=header)

Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. 1997. Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology. In A. Gupta and J. Ferguson eds. *Anthropological Locations* Berkeley: University of California Press Pp: 1-46.

Week 2. On epistemological matters: evidence in anthropology

Engelke, M. ed. 2009. The Objects of Evidence. Anthropological Approaches to the Production of Knowledge. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute Special Issue Book Series*. pp. 1-20.

Hastrup, K. 2004. Getting it right: knowledge and evidence in anthropology. *Anthropological Theory* 4(4): 455-472.

Week 3. Knowing in Time

Fabian, J. 1983. Time and Writing about the Other. In Fabian, J. *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp. 71-104.

Comaroff, J. L., and J. Comaroff. 1992. *Ethnography and the historical imagination. Studies in the ethnographic imagination*. Boulder: Westview Press. pp. 3-48.

Week 4. Being in the Field

Rabinow, Paul. 1977. Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco. Berkeley, LA: University of California Press. Chapter 3: 31-69.

Robben, A. 1995. The Politics of Truth and Emotion among Victims and Perpetrators of Violence. In Nordstrom, C. & A. Roben (eds.) *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 81-103.

Sequel: Rabinow, P. 2007. Anthropological Observation and Self-Formation. In Biehl, J. et all (eds) *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 98-118.

Week 5. Coming to (your) senses or the situatedness of knowledge

Grasseni, C. 2007. Communities of Practice and Forms of Life: Towards a Rehabilitation of Vision. In Harris, M. (ed.) *Ways of Knowing: New Approaches in the Anthropology of Experience and Learning*. N.Y., Oxford: Berghahn Books. Pp. 203-221.

Seremetakis, N. 1994. The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange, and Modernity. In Taylor, C. ed. *Visualising Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 215-229.

Another sequel: Howes, D. 2003. Coming to Our Senses: The Sensual Turn in Anthropological Understanding In *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture & Social Theory*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press; pp. 29-60.

Week 6. 'Thinking through things' or the materiality of ethnography

Miller, D. 2005. Materiality. Durham : Duke University Press. (Introduction, pp. 1-50)
http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/staff/d_miller/mil-8

The Matsutake Worlds Research Group. 2009. A new form of collaboration in cultural anthropology: Matsutake worlds. *American Ethnologist* Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 380–403.

Week 7. Experimenting with anthropology (1)

Ravetz, A. et al. 2000. The Child in the City: a Case Study in Experimental Anthropology. Manchester: Prickly Pear Pamphlets No. 13. (text provided separately).

Week. 8. Experimenting within anthropology (2)

Astuti, R. 2007. Weaving together culture and cognition: an illustration from Madagascar. *Intellectica*, (46/47). pp. 173-189.

Week 9. Representing cultures: new ways of 'telling stories'?

G.E. Marcus. 1994. The modernist sensibility in recent ethnographic writing and the cinematic metaphor of montage. In Taylor, C. *Visualising Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 37-53.

Boelstroff, T. 2008. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press (Read Chapters 1 and 3).

Week 10-12. Presentation of research proposals

C. Wrigth Mills. 1967. On Intellectual Craftsmanship. In *The Sociological Imagination*. London: Oxford University Press, pp. 195-226.

Silverman, Sydel. 1991. Writing Grant Proposals for Anthropological Research. *Current Anthropology* 32(4):485-9.

American Anthropological Association .1998. *Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association* (Approved June 1998) <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>