

Workshop on Ethnographic Research (2 hours)

Prof. Georgina Born
University of Oxford

Ethnographic research has become one of the most fashionable research methods in the humanities and social sciences. But it is also misunderstood. In this workshop we look at a number of central issues in ethnographic research, from theoretical, epistemological and ethical questions to practical challenges to do with how to go about ethnographic fieldwork. We consider: what does it mean to carry out ethnographic research? How can it be done rigorously? How can it be defended against accusations that it is an entirely subjective engagement with the object of research? Is reflexivity a panacea for such criticisms?

We begin by addressing the origins of ethnographic method and what are considered to be its unique and most powerful attributes, in comparison with questionnaire, survey- or interview-based research. We then consider the practice of fieldwork: choosing a site, dealing with gatekeepers, creating the necessary background knowledge before fieldwork, rigour in fieldwork, the politics of fieldwork, and epistemological concerns raised in relation to ethnography. We move on to consider Rabinow's idea of ethnography as a response to Foucault's 'problematization', and as a way of implementing what, after Deleuze, might be called a post-positivist empiricism – an empiricism with potentially inventive conceptual effects. We continue by examining the conjunction of ethnographic practice and analysis in light of Bourdieu's field theory and Foucault's notion of difference as a methodological principle. We alight on the problem of how to bring ethnographic research into methodological relation with history and diachrony; again, Foucault's work is productive here, but genre theory is also a powerful means of addressing the theorisation of both stability or stasis and invention in cultural, social and discursive systems. We come to reflexivity and consider how ethnography has been refigured in recent decades in response to epistemological and political critique. We look briefly at techniques like multi-site ethnography and online ethnography, which are renewing ethnographic method in the present, posing important new ethical and epistemological challenges.

Anyone interested in carrying out ethnographic research, or intending to do so, particularly on cultural production – whether in relation to music, media, art or interdisciplinary practices – is encouraged to attend, to read some of the below and to bring along questions to the workshop.

To prepare for the workshop, please look at one of my ethnographies or papers:

- G. Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (Vintage 2005)
- G. Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (California 1995)
- G. Born and A. Barry, 'Art-science: From public understanding to public experiment', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, v. 3, n. 1, pp. 107-123, 2010
- G. Born, 'Reflexivity and ambivalence: Culture, creativity and government in the BBC', *Cultural Values: Journal of Cultural Research*, special issue on Culture and Governance, v. 6, n. 1-2, pp. 65-90, 2002
- G. Born, 'On Tardean Relations: Temporality and ethnography', pp. 232-249 in M. Candea (ed.), *The Social After Gabriel Tarde: Debates and Assessments*. London and New York: Routledge
- G. Born, 'The social and the aesthetic: For a post-Bourdieuian theory of cultural production', *Cultural Sociology*, v. 3, n. 3, 2010

... And at one or other of these textbooks and more advanced readings:

- P. Bourdieu, 'Understanding', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 12, 2, 1996
- P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Polity 1993)
- J. Brewer, *Ethnography* (Open University Press 1997)
- J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (California 1986)
- G. Deleuze and C. Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Athlone 1987)
- N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage 1994), esp. chapters 1, 2, 15 and 16
- M. Foucault, 'Questions of method', in J. Faubion (ed.), *Foucault: Essential Works, Vol. 3* (Penguin 2001)
- M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, (ed.) D. F. Bouchard; trans. D. F. Bouchard and S. Simon (Blackwell 1977a)
- M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Allen Lane 1977b)
- J. Goldthorpe, 'Sociological ethnography today: problems and possibilities', in *On Sociology* (Oxford 2000)
- M. Hammersley and P. Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Routledge 2007)
- M. Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* (Routledge 1992)
- A. James (ed.), *After Writing Culture* (Routledge 1997)
- G. Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (Princeton 1998)
- G. Marcus and M. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago 1986)
- P. Rabinow, 'Midst anthropology's problems', in A. Ong and S. Collier (eds.), *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Blackwell 2005)

Some further reading -

- M. Strathern, *The Relation* (Prickly Pear 1994)
- J. Hunt, *Psychoanalytic Aspects of Fieldwork* (Sage 1989)
- C. Humphrey, 'Reassembling individual subjects: Events and decisions in troubled times', *Anthropological Theory*, 8, pp. 357-380, 2008
- T. Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life* (Princeton 2008)
- G. Bowman, 'Radical empiricism: Anthropological fieldwork after psychoanalysis and the *Annee Sociologique*', *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, v. 2 (1998)
- J. Frow, *Genre* (Routledge 2006)
- C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (Sage 2000)
- H. Horst and D. Miller, *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication* (Berg 2006)
- D. Miller and D. Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Berg 2000)

* * *