

# Methods of socio-cultural research

Lecture for the course: Bi2424 Field  
research methods

Paride Bollettin

[paride\\_bollettin@msn.com](mailto:paride_bollettin@msn.com)

Image: Atlas of Dream, by Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, 2016  
(source: <https://www.anthropology-news.org>)



Image: Malinowski (source: <https://www.grottaglieinrete.it/>)



Image: Digital ethnography (source: <https://blog.experientia.com/>)



Image: Ethnography (source: <https://www.multispecies-salon.org/>)

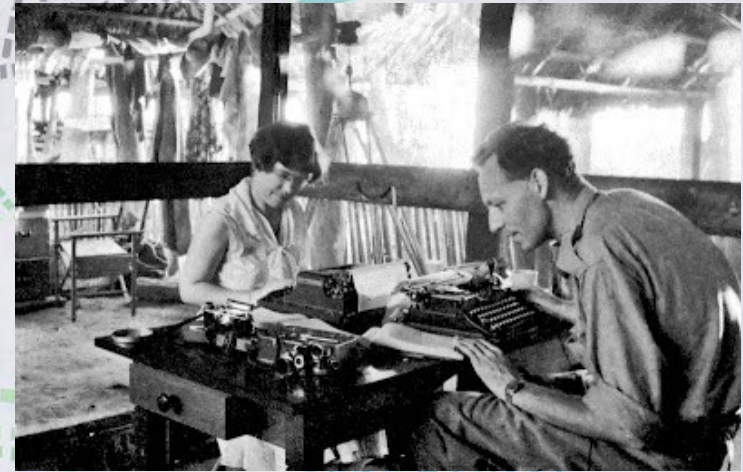


Image: Mead and Bateson at Bali (source: <http://unifiedtao-it.blogspot.com/>)



Image: [Kulture Kidz](http://anthropologynotarcheology.wordpress.com) (source: <http://anthropologynotarcheology.wordpress.com>)

Variable relations composing “ethno(-)graphy”

From ethnography to ethnographies

Thinking on practices of doing

“Ethno-”:  
social and  
cultural  
specificity

“-graphy”:  
describing

# What ethnographers do? **GOSSIP!**

In the field: participating in, observing, annotating, taking notes of the lives of the others...

In the text: organise, interpret, describe, inscribe the lives of the others...



Image: Gossip, by [Abdulrahman Alhinai](#) (source: <http://yourshot.nationalgeographic.com/profile/240155/>)

***“where true life and real lives meet...”\****

**“True”**: as efficacious

**“Real”**: as representative

**Both “fictional” and “ethnographic”**

**Awareness of intellectual production  
(no reproduction of the reality)**

**Reopening the space for the  
interlocutors (as subjects involved)**



Image: Carpathian Ethnography Project, by Marta Malina Moraczewska  
- Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, source:  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50791118>

\*Fassin, Didier.2014. In:  
<https://www.americanethnologist.org/features/interviews/ae-interviews-didier-fassin-institute-for-advanced-study-princeton-nj>

*“But one of the gifts, I think, that anthropology has to offer social science is that it can (sometimes!) deal with the unpredictable”...\**

Unpredictable: the experience as  
the starting point...  
... with curiosity and hybridity

Methods or not methods, that is  
the questions!

\*Strathern, Marilyn. 2005. Anthropology and Interdisciplinarity. *Art and Humanities in Higher Education* 4(2): 125-135.



Image: Frame from the movie *Fitzcarraldo* by Werner Herzog, 1982

Ethnography is about human relations  
(present, past, future)

**Personal:** positioned and subjective

**Collaborative:** responsive and  
committed

**Hermeneutical:** interpretative and  
learning

**Creative:** transformative and  
constitutive



Image: Worldbuilding by Veronica Sicoe (source:  
<https://veronicasicoe.com>)



## The emergence of a research question:

- From personal experiences/interests
- From studies/bibliography
- From people demands
- From colleagues/projects

Each possibility is not exclusive

From the questions to the aims...

Is it interesting for whom we work with?





Image: Spiritual Healing Festival, Brno 2020 (Source: <https://www.123rf.com/>)

*“to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world”\**

*“who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints?”\*\**

*“The contexts of culture are perpetuated and carried forth by... being invented out of each other and through each”\*\*\**

\*Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge and Kegan

\*\*Clifford, James. 1986. Introduction: partial truth. In Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. (eds.) *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press

\*\*\*Wagner, Roy. 1981. *The Invention of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*“Time to let go and listen”\**

Presentation of the proposal  
and collective/individual  
reflections

Ethical implications of  
research: who is taking  
decisions?

Shared definition of research  
aims, protocols, results, etc,

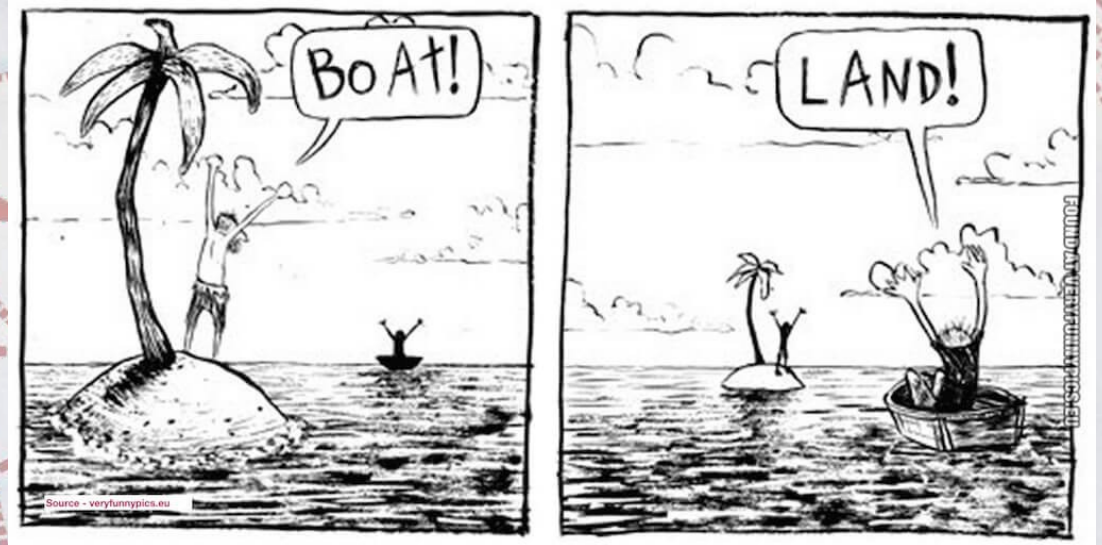


Image: Point of view (Source: <https://veryfunnypics.eu/>)

\*Thorp, Laurie 2006. *The Pull of the Earth: Participatory Ethnography in the School Garden*. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

## An example:

Collaborative research with fishing communities

Inclusion of local people in research design

Inclusion of local demands in academic focuses: emergence of new questions

Inclusion of local demands in actions: effective empowerment



Image: aerial view of Siribinha (source: <https://mapio.net/>)



Non-participant observation: observing “from a distance”, no interaction, focus on “objective” description of actions

Participant observation: direct relationships, long time, learning the codes, focus on intersubjective dimensions

Image: Group learning (source: <https://www.orizzontescuola.it/>)

To listen

To question

To observe

To participate

To reflect

To act



Image: Multitasking (source: <https://researchdesignreview.com/>)



Image: by [Matt Batchelor](#) (source: <https://allegralaboratory.net/learning-to-make-people-laugh-a-semiotic-anthropology-of-stand-up-comedy/>)

Informed consent (what, why, possible risks, etc.)

*“doing good, not doing harm and protecting the autonomy, wellbeing, safety and dignity of all research participants”\**

Language accessible

Ethics beyond the field

Privacy

\*Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology: in: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-et-hnog-anthrop\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-et-hnog-anthrop_en.pdf)

# Talking with people

Informal conversation

Interviews

Individual vs. collective

Structured vs. semi structured

Recordings (written, audio, video)

Use, storage and sharing



Image: Acampamento Terra Livre (source: <https://apiboficial.org/atl2022/?lang=en>)

**Doing together**

Ethnography as collective  
experience

Taking part in what people do  
Public spaces  
Private spaces

Practices  
Performances  
Competencies

**Avoid invasiveness!**



Image: Kataprove Xikrin (source: Paride Bollettin)



# Observing

What we observe or not?

Interests

Perceptions

Selections

Public and private

Respecting privacy!

Recording observations



Image: Brno vegetable market (source: <https://www.123rf.com/>)



Image: ?

*“We can begin to see organisms as intersecting relationships that are part of the greater web of life”\**

Inclusive attention beyond the human

Sensorial experiences (multiple auditions, smellings, etc.)

Art of attentiveness!

\*Holdrege, Craig. *The Story of an Organism: Common Milkweed*. In: <https://www.natureinstitute.org/article/craig-holdrege/the-story-of-an-organism-comm-on-milkweed>

“Agent” as the producer of an effect

Abduction: inferred intentionality (we attribute/recognise to objects the responsibility for an action)

Objects as embedding human agency\*

Reality as composed by “hybrids”  
(social and natural) agencies\*\*

\*Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and Agency: An anthropological theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

\*\*Latour, Bruno. 1999 *Pandora's Hope, An essay on the reality of science studies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



Image: MUNI Anthropology Lab (source: <https://www.muni.cz/>)



Image: Mebengokré body painting (source: Paride Bollettin)

*“the objective reality of social facts as an ongoing accomplishment of the activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used, and taken for granted, is, for members doing sociology, a fundamental phenomenon”\**

\*Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

*“not to explain this point of view, that is, to find its causes (cognitive, economic, and what have you); it is rather to explicate it: to explore its consequences and follow its implications”*



Image: Dragon Boat race on water reservoir in Brno (source: <https://www.123rf.com/>)

## “Poetics” and “politics”



Image: Mead and Bateson at Bali (source: <http://unifiedtao-it.blogspot.com/>)

Ethnographic authority  
Ethnographer-informant  
Ethnographer-reader

Attention to:  
Partial truths  
Literary devices  
The “self”

## Counter-hegemony

\*Clifford, James and Marcus, George (eds.). 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press

realistic style: present a picture of the situation

a confessional style: highlighting the work of the ethnographer more than the research

an impressionist style: ethnographic dramatization

etc...

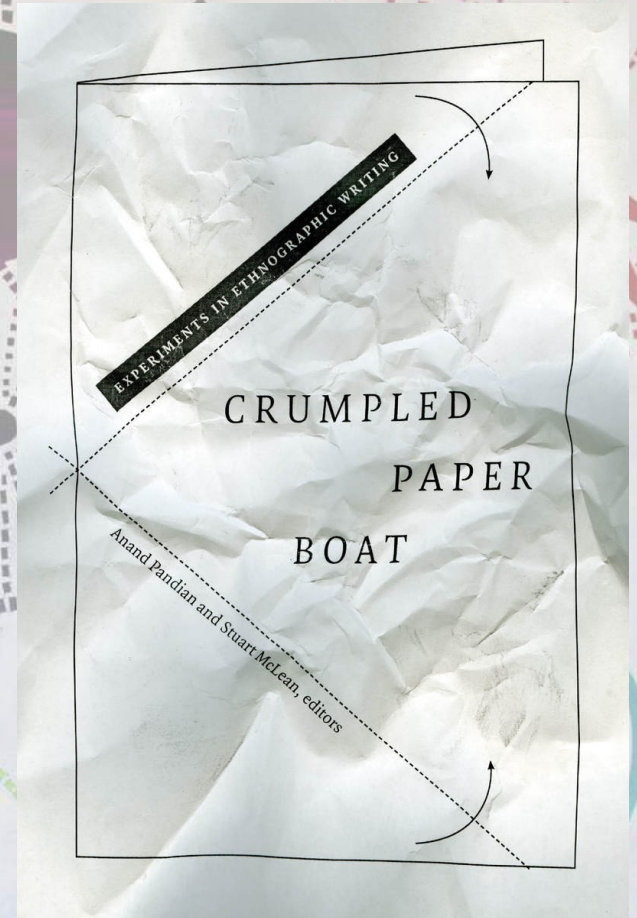


Image: Cover of Pandian Anand and McLean Stuart J. (Eds.).2017. *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Beyond the writing...

Video

Digital

Audio

Sensorial

Hybrid possibilities

Always political!

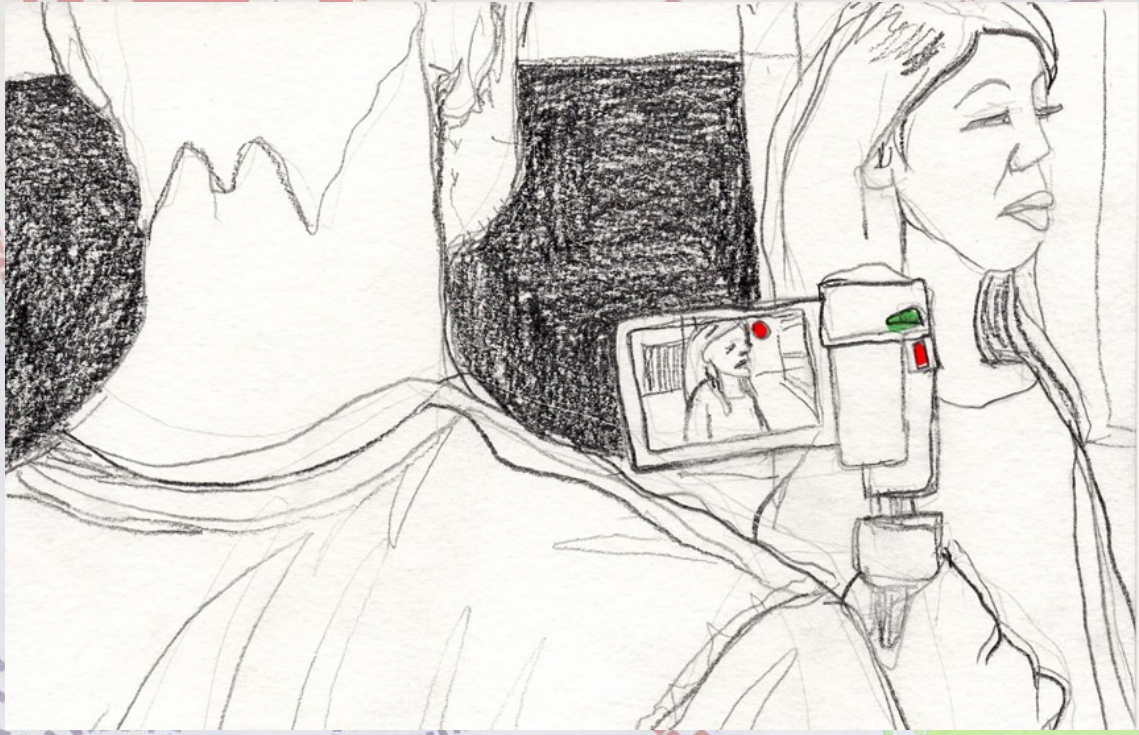


Image: Break it down by Carrie Yori, 2015 (source: <https://www.epicpeople.org/>)



The background is a complex, abstract pattern of overlapping shapes and lines. It features several large, stylized circular motifs in red, purple, green, and teal. These motifs are composed of concentric circles, spirals, and radial lines, some of which are filled with a grid of small dots. The overall effect is a vibrant, multi-colored web of geometric forms. The text is centered in the middle of the page, overlaid on the pattern.

Please try to think on something of your direct daily life  
via these indications ... enjoy!