

# Methods of socio-cultural research

Lecture for the course: Bi2424 Field research methods

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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 (source: <http://anthropologynotarcheology.wordpress.com>)

Variable relations composing “ethno(-)graphy”

From ethnography to ethnographies

Ethnography as “practice” and “engaging”

**“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/>)



Image: Pilots, by Lukáš Rittstein, 2017-2020 (source: <https://lukasrittstein.com/sculptures.php>)

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

*“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)

*“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!



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

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

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

**Personal:** positioned and subjective

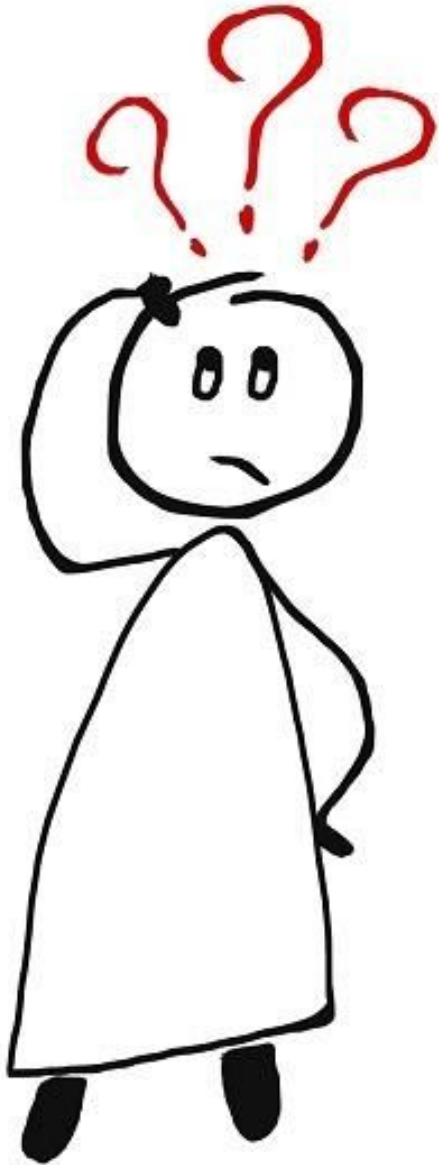
**Collaborative:** responsive and committed

**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: by Nihad Nino Pušija 2001 (Source: <https://www.romarchive.eu/>)

\*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.

*“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”\*\*\**

*“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,

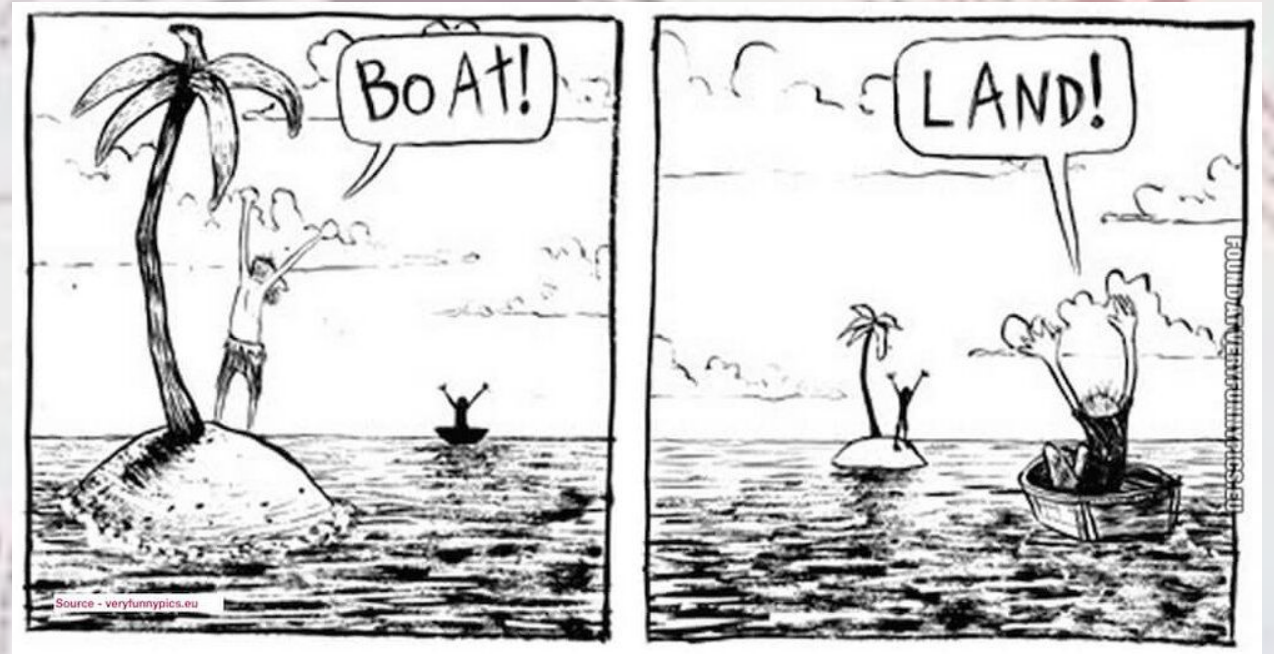


Image: Point of view (Source: <https://veryfunnypics.eu/>)

\*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/>)



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

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

To listen

To question

To observe

To participate

To reflect

To act



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

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

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

\*Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology: in: [https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-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: Katopryre Xikrin, Paride Bollettin and Bepky Xikrin at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (source: Julia Turska, 2023)



# 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-common-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\*\*



Image: MUNI Anthropology Lab (source: <https://anthro.sci.muni.cz/en/activities>)

\*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.



Pictures: Girls painting themselves (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”\**



\*Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2015. *The Native Relative*. Chicago: Hau Books.

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

## “Poetics” and “politics”\*

Ethnographic authority

Ethnographer-informant

Ethnographer-reader

Attention to:

Partial truths

Literary devices

The “self”

Counter-hegemony



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

\*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

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

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!

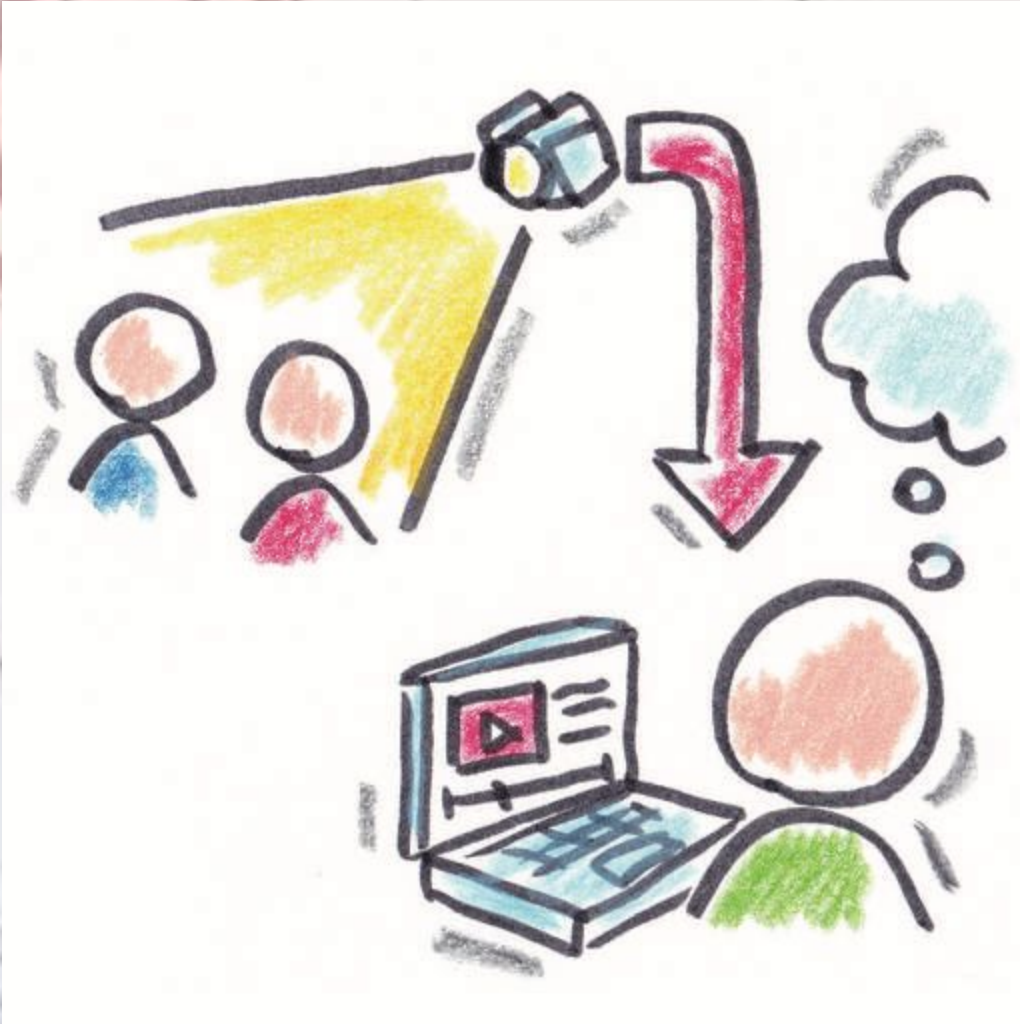
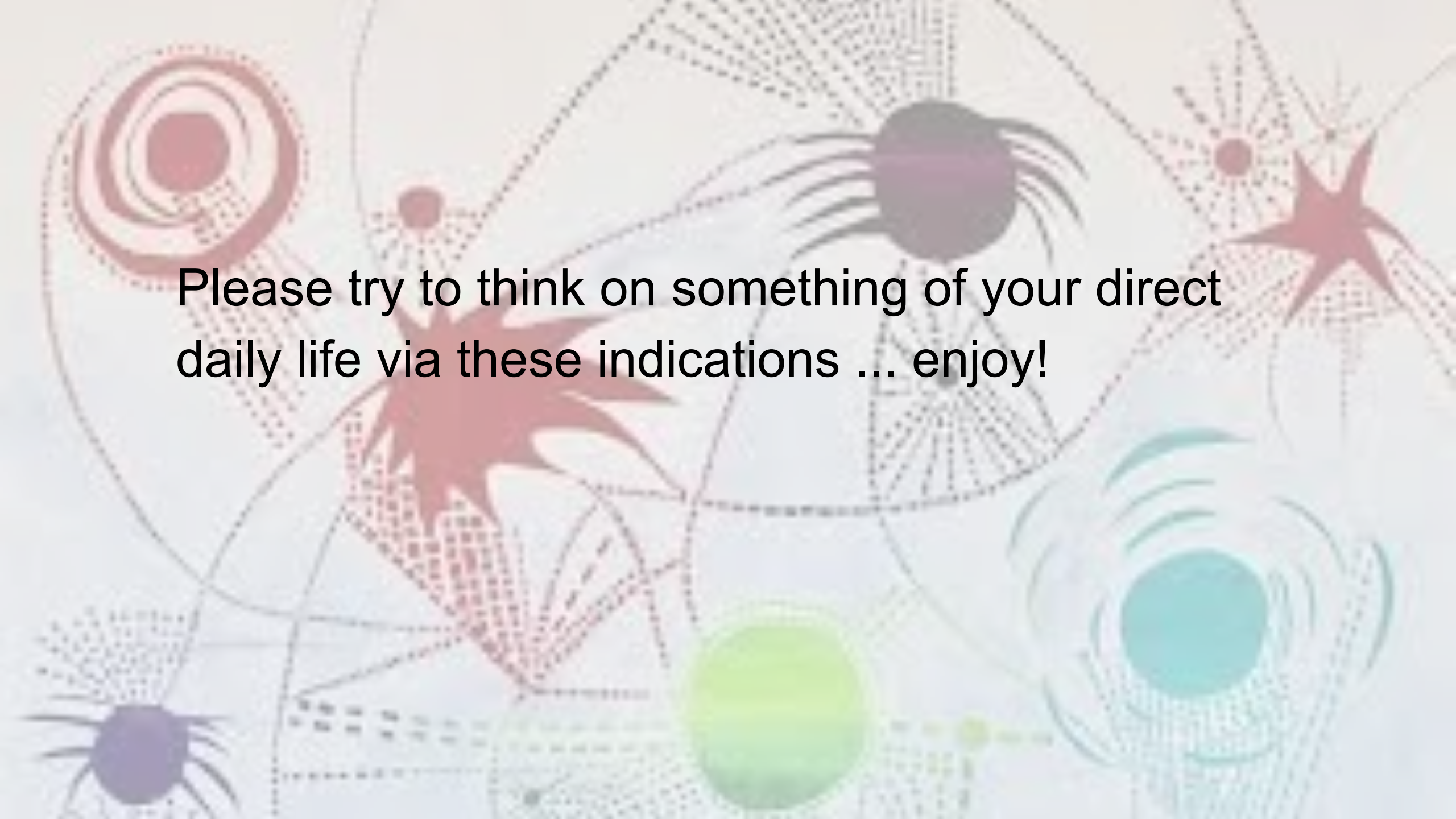


Image: videoethnography (source: <https://www.ask-flip.com/method/517>)



The background is a complex, abstract composition of various geometric and organic shapes. It features several prominent elements: a large, multi-pointed star in the center-left; a dark purple circle with radiating lines in the upper right; a teal circle with concentric rings in the lower right; a green circle in the lower center; and a purple circle with radiating lines in the lower left. The background is filled with a network of thin, dotted lines and larger, faint outlines of shapes, creating a sense of interconnectedness and depth. The overall color palette is soft and pastel, with muted reds, purples, greens, and blues.

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