

## Qualitative Methods: Theory and Practice Spring 2017

Lori Leonard  
DSOC 6150  
Thursday, 10:10-1:10  
Warren Hall, Room 137

This is a graduate seminar on qualitative research methods in the social sciences. The course is designed to be a 'studio' course, in the sense that students will experiment with elements of research design over the semester, spurred by creative insights from reading, conversation, and critical reflection. We will cover cutting-edge topics, such as multispecies ethnography, as well as research design and staples of fieldwork: participant observation, interviews, visual methods, and archival work. I encourage you to try on new ideas, imagine possibilities for your projects, think with the readings, and approach your research project creatively from the multiple angles our conversations afford. To do this successfully, you might have to let go of some of the ideas you bring to the seminar about your project, at least temporarily.

The studio metaphor is also apt in that building a research proposal consists of working on the pieces without losing sight of the whole, just as in the studio arts. Moving or changing one part of a proposal generally requires you to re-think, in big or small ways, your entire project. Decisions you make about method cannot be divorced from broader theoretical or conceptual issues, and neither can our discussions. In this seminar we will think about theory and method together, since that's how they operate in practice. This orientation will be more explicit in some of our sessions than in others, but it holds throughout.

### **Assignments:**

Participation: I expect students to be active participants in the seminar. This means that everyone reads the assigned readings before class, writes a critical reflection on the readings each week, and participates in discussions. I encourage you to make a habit of reading beyond the assigned readings, even if it means reading only one or two extra pieces each week. The readings that have made it onto the syllabus are by no means exhaustive treatments of the weekly topics, so please follow a lead that piques your interest.

To keep the cost of books down, I have placed these books on reserve at Mann Library, but, if your budget permits, please buy the following:

Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Tsing, A.L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Each student will take responsibility for leading our discussion of the readings for one class. A sign-up sheet will be distributed at our first meeting.

Critical reflections: The critical reflections are an opportunity to think your project through the prism of the readings and our discussions. Prompts are provided in the syllabus for writing your reflections, but don't be constrained by them. Think of your reflections as trial balloons. You will not use all of the possibilities you consider in your critical reflections in your final research proposal, but I hope your final proposals will be improved by this process of trying on new ideas every week.

Research proposal: The seminar will be most useful for students working on research proposals, since the construction of a research proposal is the main activity in the course. By the end of the semester you should have a proposal for a research project. Write it in blocks, and revise those blocks as you move along so that theory, method, and design are integrated and your final proposal is seamless. Formats will vary. If you are writing for a particular purpose (a research grant competition, an oral defense), the format may be pre-determined. Students who don't yet have a funder in mind might look up grant writing instructions provided by major sponsors of qualitative or ethnographic research, including the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Social Science Research Council, the National Science Foundation, the J. William Fulbright Foundation, and the Fulbright-Hays program through the US Department of Education. Others might adopt formats required by their departments or institutional funders, including those inside Cornell. The last two or three sessions of the seminar (depending on enrollment) will be used to workshop student proposals.

### **Sessions:**

Please note that depending on student interests and projects, some of these sessions may be modified. Please check Blackboard for the latest copy of the syllabus.

#### **January 26:** *Introductions*

#### **February 2:** *Framing studies, locating field sites*

Read this piece first:

Zussman, R. (2004). People in places. *Qualitative Sociology*, 27(4), 351-363.

Then read these pieces (in no particular order):

Burroway, M. (1998). The extended case method. *Sociological Theory*, 16(1), 4-33.

Burrell, J. (2009). The field site as a network: A strategy for locating ethnographic fieldwork. *Field Methods*, 21(2), 181-199.

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (1992). Beyond “culture”: Space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1), 6-23.

Small, M.L. (2009). How many cases do I need?: On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography*, 10(1), 5-38.

Walsh, K. (2006). British expatriate belongings: Mobile homes and transnational homing. *Home Cultures*, 3, 123-144.

**Critical reflection:** All of these readings address questions of the fit between research questions and study design and especially the field/place/site where research is conducted. Write a statement about the project you plan to develop for this course. How do these readings help you think about ‘the field’ for your project and the kinds of questions you can ask and answer in specific places? How do they help you frame or design your project? How do your questions, ideas about design, and field sites work together? Will you work in one or more than one location? Why? How will you connect your situated project to broader (regional, national, or global) processes? How are these connections reflected in your questions, theories of change, and study design? How, following Zussman, does your project work on more than one level?

### **February 9:** *Multi-sited ethnography and mobile methods*

Read:

Marcus, G. (1995). Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 95-117.

Then read:

Candea, M. (2007). Arbitrary locations: In defence of the bounded field-site. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13, 167-184.

Grandia, L. (2015). Slower ethnography: A hut with a view. *Critique of Anthropology*, 35(3), 301-317.

Krauss, W. (2009). Localizing climate change: A multi-sited approach. In: Falzon, M.A. (ed.), *Multi-sited ethnography: Theory, praxis and locality in contemporary research* (pp. 149-164). Ashgate.

Sorge, A. and Padwe, J. (2015). The abandoned village? Introduction to the special issue. *Critique of Anthropology*, 35(3), 235-247.

Xiang, B. (2013). Multi-scalar ethnography: An approach for critical engagement with migration and social change. *Ethnography*, 14(3), 282-299.

**Critical reflection:** Think conceptually in this reflection. How might you conceptualize and construct your project as multi-sited in the way that term is used by Marcus? Can you construct questions that reflect its multi-sitedness? (Forget, for the moment, the logistics of data collection). What would you follow? What *could* you follow? How would such an approach reflect conceptually what you are trying to capture? If there are alternative study designs that are more appropriate for the work you propose to do, what are those and why do you favor them?

**February 16:** We will not meet in class this week (stay tuned about a make-up date/time).

**February 23:** *Multispecies encounters*

Read:

Kirksey, S.E. and Helmreich, S. (2010). The emergence of multispecies ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(4), 545-576.

Kirksey, E., Shuetze, C., and Helmreich, S. (2014). Tactics of multi-species ethnography. In: Kirksey, E. (ed.), *The Multispecies Salon* (pp. 1-24). Durham: Duke University Press.

Then read:

Archambault, J.S. (2016). Taking love seriously in human-plant relations in Mozambique: Toward an anthropology of affective encounters. *Cultural Anthropology*, 31(2), 244-271.

Davis, D.L., Maurstad, A., and Dean, S. (2014). My horse is my therapist: The medicalization of pleasure among women equestrians. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 29(3), 298-315.

Fairhead, J. (2016). Termites, mud daubers and their earths: A multispecies approach to fertility and power in West Africa. *Conservation and Society*, 14(4), 359-367.

Kosek, J. (2010). Ecologies of empire: On the new uses of the honeybee. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(4), 650-678.

See also the Multispecies Salon [here](#) and articles in a recent special issue of *Conservation and Society* on multispecies encounters [here](#).

**Critical reflection:** What kinds of multispecies entanglements does your project involve? How would taking non-human actants (plants, animals, waste, etc.) seriously shift the focus of your project or shape it? How will you engage non-human actants in your project? What roles will they play? What would it mean for your research design and methods to recognize the non-human actants that people your project as independent agents?

**March 2:** *Doing fieldwork: Participant observation*

For an (dry-ish, sorry...) overview, read:

Sluka, J.A. and Robben, A.C.G.M. (2007). Fieldwork in cultural anthropology: An introduction. In: Robben, A.C.G.M. and Sluka, J.A. (eds.), *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader* (pp. 1-28). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Then read:

Cons, J. (2014). Field dependencies: Mediation, addiction and anxious fieldwork at the India-Bangladesh border. *Ethnography*, 15(3), 375-393.

Owens, G.R. (2003). What! Me a spy? Intrigue and reflexivity in Zanzibar. *Ethnography*, 4(1), 122-144.

Raikhel, E. (2009). Institutional encounters: Identification and anonymity in Russian addiction treatment (and ethnography). In: Borneman, J. and Hammoudi, A. (eds.). *Being there: The fieldwork encounter and the making of truth* (pp. 201-236). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Stevenson, L. (2009). The suicidal wound and fieldwork among Canadian Inuit. In: Borneman, J. and Hammoudi, A. (eds.). *Being there: The fieldwork encounter and the making of truth* (pp. 55-76). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wozniak, J.S.G. (2014). When the going gets weird: An invitation to gonzo sociology. *American Sociologist*, 45, 453-473.

Recommended and on reserve at Mann Library:

Rabinow, P. (2007, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition). *Reflections on fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Emerson, R. (2001; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). *Contemporary field research: Perspectives and formulations*. Waveland Press, Inc.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R.I., and Shaw, L. (2011; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Critical reflection:** What opportunities do you have for spending time in your field sites? How will you insert yourself into this space/spaces? Who are you in relation to the places, people, or things you will be studying and why and how is this likely to matter? Will you be more participant or observer? What types of ethical concerns are likely to arise, given your topic of study, your field site(s), your participants and their histories, your audiences? How will you think about the validity of data gathered through participant observation and how will you manage threats to validity? Think and write concretely about how you will capture your fieldwork experiences.

### **March 9: Interviews**

Read:

Hermanowicz, J.C. (2002). The great interview: 25 strategies for studying people in bed. *Qualitative Sociology*, 25(4), 479-499.

Hermanowicz, J.C. (2013). The longitudinal qualitative interview. *Qualitative Sociology*, 36, 189-208.

Lamont, M. and Swidler, A. (2014). Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology*, 37, 153-171.

Leonard, L. and Ellen, J.M. (2008). "The story of my life": AIDS and 'autobiographical occasions.' *Qualitative Sociology*, 31(1), 37-56.

Ortner, S. (2010). Access: Reflections on studying up in Hollywood. *Ethnography*, 11(2), 211-233.

Warren, C.A.B. et al. (2003). After the interview. *Qualitative Sociology*, 26(1), 93-110.

Recommended and on reserve at Mann Library:

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Rubin, H. and Rubin, I. (2012). *Qualitative interviews: The art of bearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Spradley, J. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

**Critical reflection:** Who do you want to talk to? Why? Turn in a draft interview guide. (You may need to prepare interview questions for multiple different types of informants, but focus on only one type for this reflection). Annotate your interview guide or add some text to discuss it from both technical and substantive points of view. Comment on access, on institutional discourses, on how you will analyze the data you collect and how you will take into account some of the forces that are likely to shape its production. From a more technical perspective, comment on the number of themes you want to cover, the organization of the guide, the flow and pace of the interview, the

opening and closing, the structure or type of your questions (Spradley is particularly thorough on this), the mechanics of staging the interview and recording it.

**March 16:** *Visual methods*

Read:

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13-26.

Kim, A.M. (2015). Critical cartography 2.0: From “participatory mapping” to authored visualizations of power and people. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 142, 215-225.

Mannay, D. (2013). “Who put that on there ... why, why, why?” Power games and participatory techniques of visual data production. *Visual Studies*, 28(2), 136-146.

Novaes, A.R. (2014). Favelas and the divided city: Mapping silences and calculations in Rio de Janeiro’s journalistic cartography. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 15(2), 201-225.

Sontag, S. (2001; Picador first edition). *On photography* (Chapter 1: In Plato’s cave). Picador. (This book is on reserve at Mann Library)

Walley, C.J. (2015). Transmedia as experimental ethnography: The Exit Zero Project, deindustrialization, and the politics of nostalgia. *American Ethnologist*, 42(4), 624-639.

Recommended and on reserve at Mann Library:

Sontag, S. (2003; reprint edition). *Regarding the pain of others*. Picador.

Vergara, C. Images as a tool of discovery. Also, look around his website at his use of images and maps: <http://invinciblecities.camden.rutgers.edu/intro.html>

**Critical reflection:** What possibilities do you see for incorporating visual elements into your project? How would charting, drawing, mapping, filming, or photographing enhance or alter your project? How will you interpret any visual information you are planning to collect? What kinds of interpretive challenges would the visual methods you propose pose? Tack back and forth between your developing ‘methods’ section of your proposal and your research questions and any background or literature review section you are preparing to be sure that modifications are not required to bring these elements into alignment.

**March 23:** *Using documents and archives*

Read:

Darling, J. (2014). Another letter from the Home Office: Reading the material politics of asylum. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 32, 484-500.

Hull, M.S. (2012). Documents and bureaucracy. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41, 251-267.

Navaro-Yashin, Y. (2007). Make-believe papers, legal forms, and the counterfeit: Affective interactions between documents and people in Britain and Cyprus. *Anthropological Theory*, 7(1), 79-98.

Stoler, A. (2002). Colonial archives and the arts of governance. *Archival Science*, 2, 87-109.

Trouillot, M.R. (1995). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history* (Chapter 1, 'The power in the story,' pp. 1-30). Boston: Beacon Press. (This book is on reserve at Mann Library).

**Critical reflection:** What kinds of documentary evidence might be relevant for your project? What might it mean for your project to approach the archive as a site of knowledge production? How can you think about the structure of the archive in relation to your project and any silences in it? What kinds of questions might you ask of the archive? Think concretely about archival sources, and then think critically about those sources.

**March 30:** *Ethnographic writing*

Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Write a brief review of the book and come to class prepared to discuss it. In writing your review, write a 1-2 paragraph summary for someone who has not read it. Then, comment on study design, methods, use of data, and writing style, thinking your review through the readings encountered to date in this course.

**April 6:** Spring break – no class

**April 13:** *Ethnographic writing*

Tsing, A.L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

The reflection this week should follow the format above.

**April 20:** Student proposals

In the last three sessions of the seminar we will turn our attention to reviewing student proposals. The amount of time we have for each proposal will depend on the number of students in the seminar. One week before the session in which we discuss your proposal you will pre-circulate it along with information about the (ultimate) audience for the proposal. In class you'll be asked to make *brief* remarks about your proposal (5-10 minutes) to kick off the discussion. You can talk about particular challenges, questions you have for the group, etc. during this time. We will make a practice of first stating what works and what we particularly like about the proposal (everyone should be prepared to contribute their thoughts on this), followed by suggestions for improvement. All suggestions should be constructive and delivered in the spirit of mutual support and encouragement. I will take responsibility for making sure everyone respects those rules and receives useful feedback.

**April 27:** Student proposals

**May 4:** Student proposals