



Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

ARTS-L0130

Methods of gathering data

Eeva Berglund – Session 8 – 30.1.2018: Speculative and Activist Research

Speculative & activist research and methods

1. **Discomfort with methods (and 'gathering' and 'data!')**
2. **Social activism and qualitative research – a mini historiography**
 - Including critiques of the critiques
3. **Speculative methods for an experimental time?**
4. **On assignments**

Working with Social Movements

- Working with social movements as academics amounts to a dream situation of being with highly reflexive interlocutors who are themselves often experimenting with how to talk and to listen and who are highly aware of being caught up in distortions imposed by power (Jasper 2016: xvii.)

- In Fillieule, Olivier and Guya Accornero (Eds) 2016. *Social Movement Studies in Europe: The State Of The Art.*

Working with Professionals – especially of knowledge production

E.g. George Marcus 2016, in C. Smith et al (eds)
Design Anthropological Futures

- Anthropologists have long had to negotiate their way through the anxieties and uncertainties that have come from producing knowledge alongside sophisticated and respected experts in their own fields.

Critics of method – from an ethnographer's point of view

E.g. *Against method: Mess in social science research*, by John Law, professor of sociology and technology studies

- Because 'purifying' facts weakens them
- Because it is a way of doing politics (onto-politics)
- e.g. when mapping creates the territory or diagnostic tests create different citizens
- Because knowledge is in large part imagination anyway

Important critics of Data and its Discovery

Donna Haraway, e.g. 1997,
Modest_Witness@_Second_Millennium.
FemaleMan@_Meets_OncoMouse™

- How information technology shapes "unequally distributed chances of life and death"
- Research is about witnessing but also about constructing realities

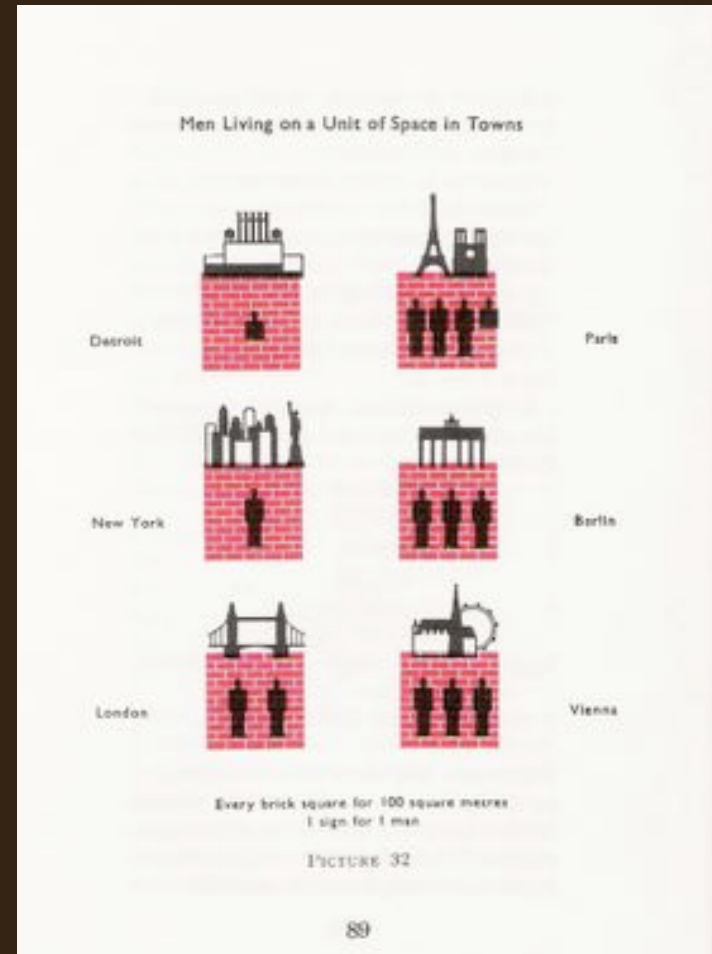
James Clifford & George E Marcus Eds (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.*

- Parallel rise of postcolonial studies, including critiques of the 'scientific' gaze

Social activism and qualitative research

When order in society is imagined as a *status quo* (bearing in mind that innovation might also be part of this)

- Government: those who have the authority to govern; the system of keeping social order
 - Epistemology & policy *modern/modernist*
 - The experts are in charge and they know what the problems are and they are the best people to solve them
 - Science is based on ideas of improvement



Otto Neurath's Isotypes

Religion, knowledge, politics...



Sir Thomas More 1478 - 1535



Sir Francis Bacon, c. 1618

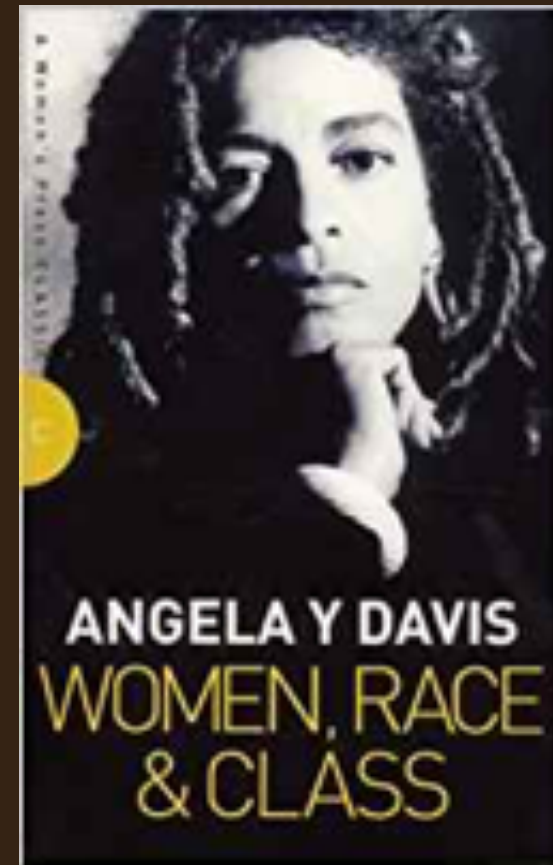
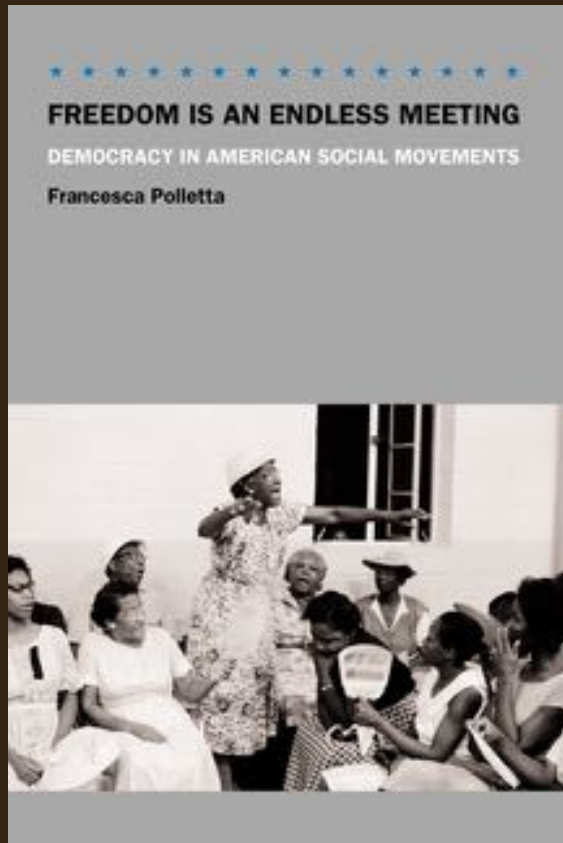
Exercise 1

Go online and find a website, a report, a news item (or several) that relates to your own research topic and could be relevant for your research. It could, but need not, come from an 'activist' perspective. How could it help you generate data?

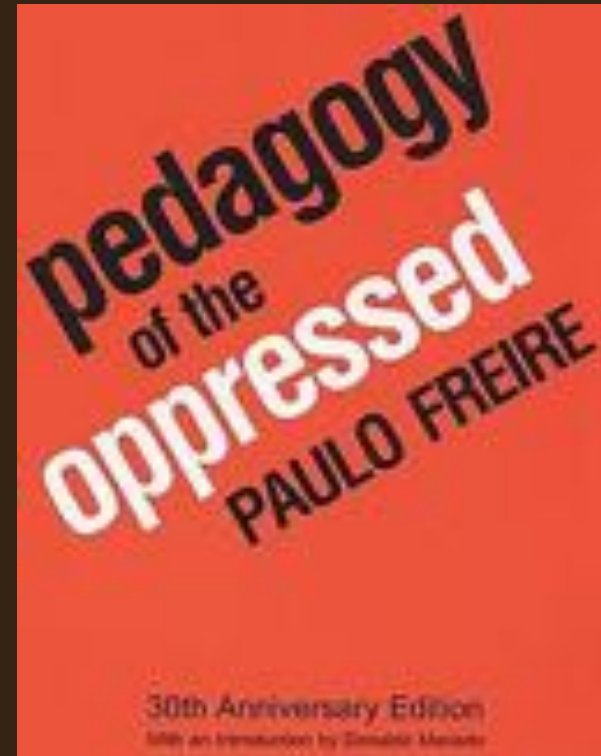
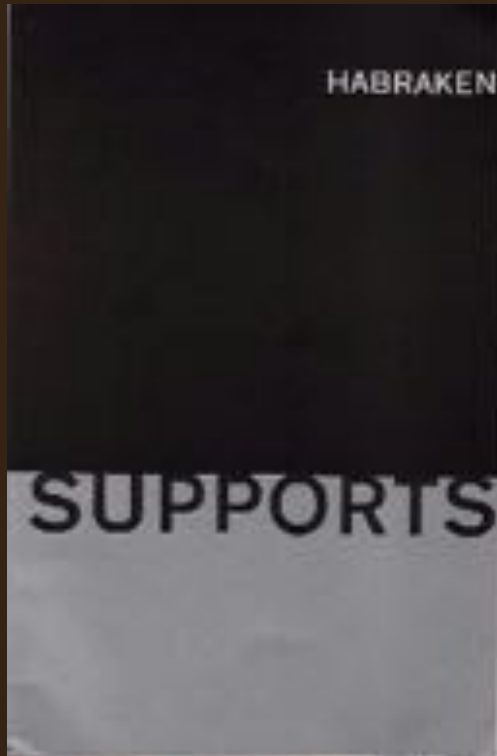
If you get stuck, here are a few much used but very different activist resources in my area, sustainability:

- <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research> [global issues]
- <https://southwarknotes.wordpress.com/> [London housing]
- <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/> [London walking/road safety]
- <http://unevenearth.org/> [environmental justice]
- <https://thebreakthrough.org/> [ecomodernist]

Social change and social movements



When knowledge makes a difference: the need for pedagogy



Also see <http://spatialagency.net/database/> by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, Jeremy Till

Cultures of activism

- Working outside of science, scholarship or mainstream institutions
- Producing counter-knowledge, counter-maps, alternative expertise
- Seeking 'autonomy' (e.g. anarchism)

'Senseless acts of beauty?'





Thinking questions that are different and yet the same

Exercise 2

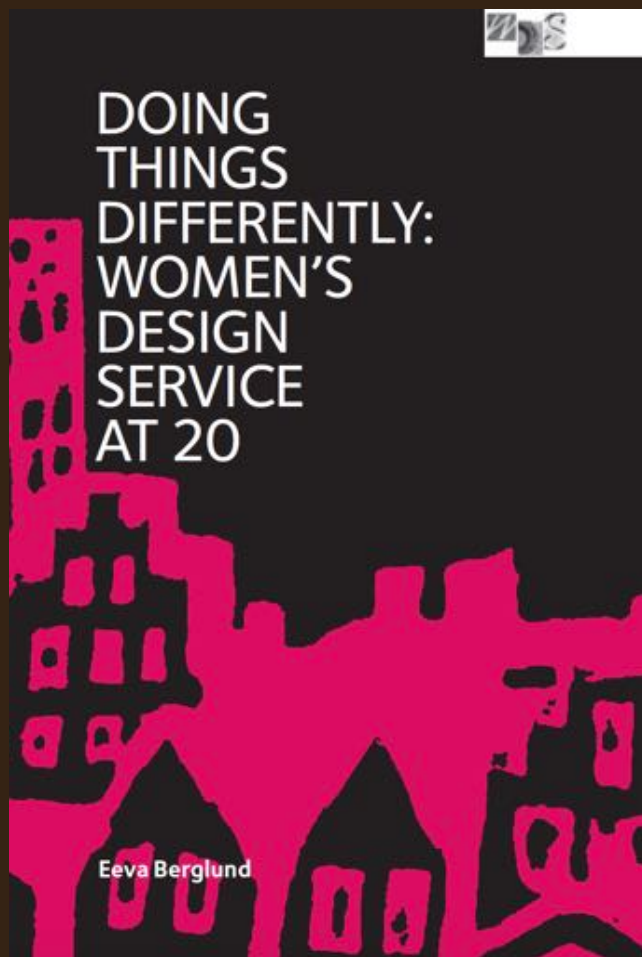
Interdisciplinary and innovation-oriented research typically identifies stakeholders. What kinds of groups and interests do you identify as having an interest and making a contribution to your PhD?

What other words might you use for them besides 'stakeholder'?

Don't forget the utopian impulses of high modernism (e.g. Le Corbusier) and other (capital-intensive) projects of change



When knowledge does not make a difference



- Berglund, Eeva 2011 'Knowledge in a critical mode: feminist expertise in design and planning', in *Recombinant Knowledge: Or How Strathernian Concepts Travel*, Edwards, J. and M. Petrovic-Steger (eds).

**And then the rise and
rise of inter and trans-
disciplinary research:
all those participants
and experiments**



Break

Speculative methods for experimental times

Speculative research

- *All* research should be speculative in some sense!
- In experimental times with multiple wicked problems studying what is may not be as important as studying what might be

Could there be a speculative ethnography?

- Conventionally ethnography (or conventional qualitative methods more broadly) are about describing **what is**
 - But we know it always intervenes and interprets
- Design and artistic research tend to enquire into **what might be**

Examples of speculating with urban futures through research

- Mette Gislev Kjaersgaard and Laurens Boer (2016) ‘Design anthropological frictions: mundane practices meet speculative critiques’, in Smith R C, K T Vangkilde, M G Kjaersgaard, T Otto, J Halse, T Biinder (eds) 2016 *Design Anthropological Futures*.
- Alberto Corsín Jimenez & Adolfo Estalella (2013) ‘The atmospheric person: Value, experiment, and “making neighbors” in Madrid’s popular assemblies’, in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol 3(2). (online)

Speculative design: a definition from Stuart Walker (Routledge Handbook)

- Focuses on emerging technoscientific ideas and practices and their implications for material culture
- Projects socio-technical possibilities
 - scenarios and possible futures
 - often dystopian

Grassroots design (Walker)

- Focus on social implications and relevant to place-based communities
- Value on local skills, materials and vernacular traditions
- 'Design activism' as provoking thought



Jean-Francois Prost, Public loitering area

But what do we learn from it?

- To turn the 'problem' on its head? Find better questions?
- To decolonise our minds and therefore our futures?
- But note, research about social movements / activists can be 'thin' and overly optimistic
 - <https://blogs.aalto.fi/makerculture/2018/01/11/how-to-research-emerging-practices/> Cindy Kohtala on Researching emerging practices of making/production

The world is changing

- So what?
- We need to speculate on what it will be like?
 - How?

Alf Hornborg in 2017

- 'Dithering while the planet burns: Anthropologists' approaches to the Anthropocene', in *Reviews in Anthropology*, Vol.46(2-3), 61-77.
- Anthropology is emulating the environmental humanities in style [worlding worlds in the eco-evo-tralala-scene...]
- "We might ask ourselves why anthropological deliberations on the Anthropocene increasingly sound like dinner conversations after some glasses of wine. I am not happy about the signals we are sending to our students, who discover that academic success (such as being published by a major university press) maybe inversely proportional to clarity." (Hornborg)

Experimental sites and encounters: The #Colleex network as a catalyst for the renewal of ethnographic arts

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ART OF RESEARCH
CONFERENCE 2017
Aalto University 30.11.2017



#colleex

STATISTICA GRAPHICA

Kriegskarte von
Deutsch-Südwestafrika

ATLAS
DES MISS

DE LA

CHAMBERS
OF
COMMERCE
ATLAS

ATLAS



<http://analebarreto.wixsite.com/leticiabarreto/the-color-of-silence-project>

On tasks 8, 9 and 10

Task 8: individual data gathering exercise

- Produce a small portfolio of data of different kinds on a coherent topic in your stream, using the methods from the course but also from beyond if you can and wish to. Make notes of what methods were used in the fieldnotes.
- Specify your own brief somehow, based on how this exercise is feasible and useful to you. I can't do this for you. You will need some fieldnotes and transcriptions and visual materials (data).
- The materials will be analysed in the Methods of Analysing Data course. . All the other materials you have generated during this course will also be potentially useful.

Task 9: Produce a field report from the interview you scheduled and carried out

This is not a transcription exercise, but an exercise in writing up information-rich notes on your encounter with your interviewee. The format of the report should be loosely based on a model of ethnographic, relatively long-term, observant participation or participant observation. This means including plenty of description and attending to details whose meanings you do not (yet) fully appreciate.

Include tags, keywords, etc. note where you would find the recording and/or transcript in your filing system. If documenting the actual words of the interview are relevant to the issue you are reporting, you can of course reproduce those.

Include the key details including information on interviewee consent regarding use of the material. Also consider including careful descriptions of the venue, the atmosphere, non-verbal communication. Perhaps reflect on which questions elicited the most information or enthusiasm, and where you had to use probing questions to seek information. It may be helpful to include visuals.

You may find that over time your interviews together give you a 'feel' for a situation, question or field. Learn to trust your intuition in deciding what and how much interpretive reflections of your own to include in a field report.

Task 10

- Write a reflective essay of no more than 1 500 words on the process of gathering your 'portfolio'.
- Due 12.2. for all except Design students whose deadline is 14.2.

An example of a clearly laid out transcript, with thanks to Félix

Interview n-1 – 25.16min - /Users/Felix/Dropbox/AALTO/04_COURSES/05_ARTS-L0103 - Methods of Gathering Data/WEEK1/04_Task_4/ Interview 1 Exercise -180117.m4a

FINLAND - Aalto university, TAIK

Interviewer Félix Bourgeau

Interviewee Vesa (Kantola?)

17.01.208 – Starting at 10.15

00.00

recording trials

00.06

FB: It is 10.13, this is the interview n-1, walk along interview, interviewer is Felix Bourgeau and interviewee is ?

VK: Vesa (Kantola)

FB: Ok Vesa, this is a walk along interview and we are going to talk about the light in the building Arabia and how does it influence you behavior within the building. We are now on...the floor... n5?

00.38

VK: Yeah... and the::n The lighting system.. oh:: I don't know...