



Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

ARTS-L0108

Methods of gathering data

*Eeva Berglund – 21.1.2019 Session 7 – Ethnographies and being Ethnographic
(and participatory action research)*

Today

1. **Presenting probe exercises for feedback**
2. **Participation - PD, PAR, observant participation**
3. **Ethnography, ethnographies and being ethnographic**
Constructing, intervening, representing
Is ethnography just a fancy word for qualitative research?
PAR or participatory action research
4. **Prepare for the focus group in session 9: What are focus groups?**

Brief presentations of your probe kits



Participatory research

Participatory research traditions

PAR – 'Participatory Action Research'

Developed with 'pedagogy of the oppressed' ideas involving potential future users in establishing needs as well as possible solutions

Development studies, community studies, etc.

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PD – 'Participatory Design', from Scandinavian software traditions; social democracy; workers' involvement; challenges to what counts as innovation.

Foth, Marcus and Axup, Jeff (2006) 'Participatory Design and Action Research: Identical Twins or Synergetic Pair?' In Jacucci, Gianni and Kensing, Finn and Wagner, Ina and Blomberg, Jeanette, Eds. *Proceedings Participatory Design Conference: Expanding Boundaries in Design 2*.

Kolding, Denmark: We design for life



<http://www.yss.fi/journal/kolding-we-design-for-life/>
Yhdyskuntasuunnittelu 2014 by Guy Julier & Malene Leerberg

Political challenges, e.g. of shrinking cities and austerity
Limits of creative city policies
Design in public sphere

- As design culture
- In governance

Visioning exercise with citizens at municipal level

Initiatives to be implemented by staff trained in design thinking:
experiments?

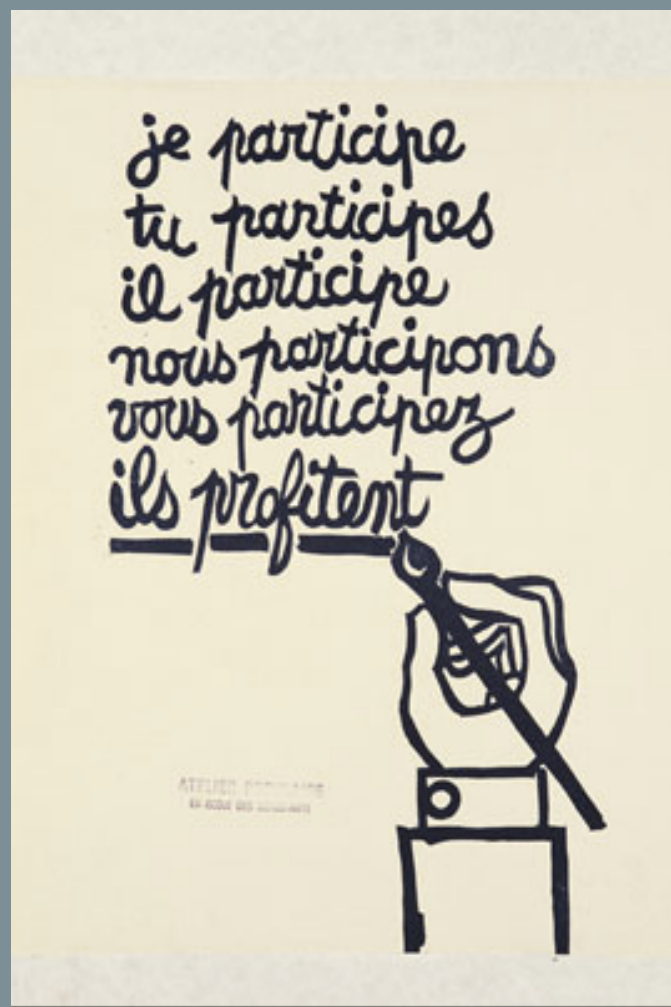
The most radical gesture?



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https://kvelv.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/bishop-artificial_hells-je_participe.pdf

The most radical gesture?



Ethnography and ethnographies



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Ethnography – a very brief history



<http://www.kaukaahaettua.fi/images/landmanjainformantti.jpg>

- Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) in social anthropology
- Chicago School of sociology and criminology, e.g. Robert Park (*The City*) and Louis Wirth (*The Ghetto*)
- Crisis of representation and *Writing Culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*, J Clifford & G Marcus

Ethnographic data is *contextual & relational*

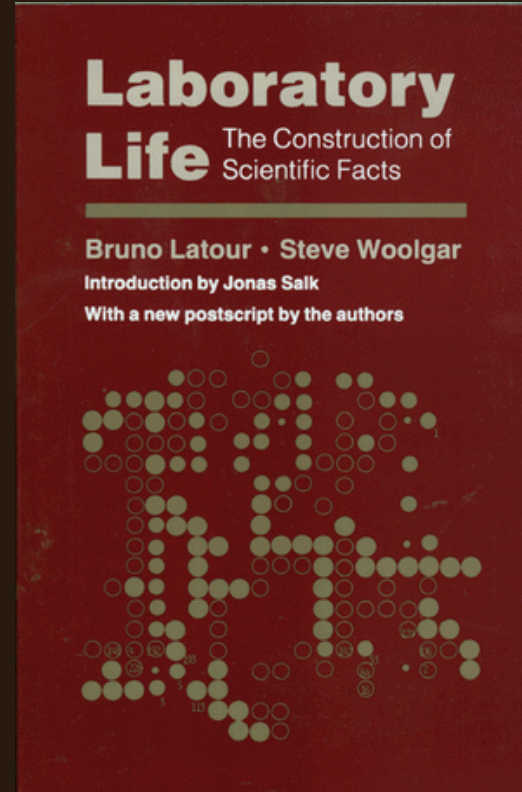
Emerged from cross-cultural experiments in psychology and social life in the late 19th century - influenced anthropology in particular.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) "Imagine yourself, set down ... alone on a tropical beach..."

- Leading to "the ethnographer's magic"

Clifford Geertz (1973) "What the ethnographer is in fact faced with – except when [...] he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection – is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render.

Ethnography and/of science (and technology) opening up (our own) 'black boxes'



What is ethnography?

1. 'Following people around', 'shadowing', '(deep) hanging out'?!
2. Long-term immersion, participant observation, observant participation
3. A sensibility – approach to assembling data using multiple sources in many places
4. A core method in anthropology and increasingly elsewhere
5. 'Writing' – interpretation, representation, narrative

What did I do to gather data for my ethnography?

In my ethnography of local environmental activism I...

- Asked (naïve) questions
- Did lots of 'deep hanging out'
- Participated in routine events (meetings)
- Conducted interviews and collected life histories
- Read various documents
- Wrote copious field-notes, diary entries, interviews and took photos
 - Did a rather “classic” ethnographic study of a group

What did I do?

In all my subsequent work I...

- Asked (naïve) questions
- Did interviews
- Read vast amounts of documents
- Participated when it suited
- Tried to be useful to the people I worked with
 - Did ethnography by appointment
 - “Para-ethnography”

I could also have 'shadowed' people; participated in communities of practice; learned a skill; tracked an object or process

Ethnographic methods get at meanings

- Ethnography is a way of understanding the complexity of social life by immersive, long-term fieldwork among the people under study
- Ethnography is productive encounters
- Ethnography is a popular way to do research in a human-centred way

Ethnographic virtues – thick description and long-term commitment

Blinks are not winks are not parodies of winks or rehearsals of parodies of winks (Geertz)

We trust our own interpretations – we make use of ethnographic moments of overlapping understanding, but not being the same.

Getting a grasp of the texture of a way of life / a world

"What everybody knows" or "common sense", tacit and embodied knowledge, emotional experience (turns out not to be just subjective)

Ethnographic virtues – listening, feeling, attending



Our culture is one that speaks rather than listens. From reality TV to political rallies, there is a clamour to be heard, to narrate, and to receive attention. It reduces 'reality' to revelation and voyeurism.

The Art of Listening argues that this way of life is having severe and damaging consequences in a world that is increasingly globalized and interconnected. It addresses the question: how can we listen more carefully? Social and cultural theory is combined with real stories from the experiences of the desperate stowaways who hide in the undercarriages of jet planes in order to seek asylum, to the young working-class people who use tattooing to commemorate a lost love.

The Art of Listening shows how sociology is in a unique position to record 'life passed in living' and to listen to complex experiences with humility and ethical care, providing a resource to understand the contemporary world while pointing to the possibility of a different kind of future.

Les Back is Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He is a co-editor of *The Auditory Culture Reader*.

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Estalella, A. and A. Corsín Jiménez (2016) 'Matters of sense: Preoccupation in Madrid's popular assemblies movement', in A. Blok and I. Farías (eds) *Urban cosmopolitics: Agencements, assemblies, atmospheres*, Routledge.



“Everybody knows that ...”

- Gods, deities, spirits – e.g. of people who die violently – cause misfortune
 - Burning fossil fuels is changing the climate
 - Some places have special significance
 - The sun does not really rise
 - You shouldn't buy your iPhone at X
-
- Children and ethnographers may need to have seemingly obvious things explained to them

Participating in local life

- Skills – often practical and economic as well as restricted to certain identities
- Dialogue. Listening. Working with, learning from and teaching to.
- Appreciate local moral judgements (the men sitting around...)

On situatedness

Ethnography depends on and builds relationships – e.g. of power and vulnerability

E.g. K Walторп 'Fieldwork as interface'

Ethnography is SITUATED PRACTICE

And creates situated knowledge

Working with Professionals and other COPs

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.

Problems with ethnography

Focus too local or parochial, can reproduce hegemonic perspectives, particularly about cultural difference.

In academic and policy documents, re-present and fix realities that are actually changing and contested ⇒ Crisis of representation in anthropology

There are endless options and ways to develop what I'd call an ethnographic sensibility

- **Multi-sited ethnography – it can probably be done absolutely anywhere!**
- **Seeing better through sketching**
- **Using mobile devices**
- **Organising workshops and happenings**
- **Engaging online and offline**

Design ethnography

- Work studies – PARC (Suchman)
- Design Anthropological innovation – KADK - Smith RC, KT Vangkilde, MG Kjaersgaard, T Otto, J Halse, T Binder (eds) 2016 *Design Anthropological Futures*
 - Combines design orientation: what could be
 - With research orientation: what is
- Ethnography of infrastructure – see Susan Leigh Star 1999
- Here ethnography seeks inspiration, imagining and provoking alternative futures (thanks to Jack Whalen)