

EASA PhD Summer School
17-22 July 2024, Barcelona

Anthropology and ethnographic experimentation

Organized by xcol. An Ethnographic Inventory
Curated by Adolfo Estalella & Tomás Criado



Ethnographic experimentation has recently become an anthropological response to the epistemic challenges of our contemporary world. Beyond traditional norms and forms of ethnography, all kinds of projects abound that experiment with forms of representation, fieldwork, and analysis. Anthropologists engaged in these endeavours collaborate with their epistemic partners, design digital infrastructures, or produce scenographic encounters, just to name a few examples. The 'experiment' emerges in all these ethnographies as a distinctive epistemic practice, different from observational activities that anthropology has historically sanctioned as the foundation for its empirical engagements.

Certainly, an experimental sensibility has been lingering in Anthropology for the last half a century, since George E. Marcus and Michael J. Fischer declared in the 1980s that the discipline was living in an experimental moment. Following that impulse, many contemporary ethnographic projects are pushing this experimental ethos to variegated instances of anthropological activity. This is certainly not a minor issue for a discipline traditionally invested in observational activities as the main way to undertake its empirical activities. Under these circumstances, the experiment opens an opportunity to reconceptualise the empirical practices of anthropology, whilst indicating important transformations and aspirations that are nowadays found in our discipline.

It could be argued that these practices have become a response to the hegemony of certain versions of ethnography or, even more importantly, to the current limitations of methods for anthropological inquiries. They are a response to the shifting terrains in which anthropologists operate in the present, as well as their efforts to produce relevant modes of inquiry that are up to the challenges that social worlds face today.

This summer school proposes a pedagogic program exploring the analysis, characterisation, and design of ethnographic experiments, also creating the conditions to try them in practice. To this end, it offers a theoretical approximation to ethnographic experimentation through detailed study in reading and

discussion seminars of examples of contemporary projects. The school combines these conceptual sessions with group debates and hands-on practical activities where field experiments will be designed and put to a test to respond to a situated ethnographic challenge. Given the importance of collaborative and group activities, the school will foster a convivial atmosphere of mutual learning between participants and an openness to local actors with whom relevant approaches could be discussed and explored. As a result of this long week of work, participants will be equipped with an analytic repertoire as well as a series of practical skills to attempt their own ethnographic experiments.

Pedagogical proposal and methodology.

The school combines theoretical sessions, debates and practical activities. Students will work in small groups on two sites/problems.

Theory, case, and debate sessions. These sessions are structured in three slots: a brief theoretical introduction (30 min.), a case that will be presented by a group of students (30 min.), and a debate (30 min.).

Hands-on activities in the field. Students will have to develop an experimental project during the week-long school. Groups will engage in two sites proposed by the school with the goal of making a brief empirical investigation and developing an ethnographic experiment.

Mentoring. Each group will have an assigned tutor who will discuss with them their experimental projects in daily meetings.

Self-managed dinner. The school will pay particular attention to the informal moments of social interaction, in this sense dinners will be a special moment to socialize. Participants will be in charge of organising it.

Funded and promoted by EASA
Organized by xcol. An Ethnographic Inventory
Curated by Adolfo Estalella (UCM) and Tomás Sánchez Criado (UOC).

Partners

Open University of Catalonia (UOC) – Social Anthropology and Social Psychology Complutense
University of Madrid (UCM) – Anthropology Department, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) –
Spanish Association of Social Anthropology (ASAE)

PROGRAM

17 – 22 July 2024

Wednesday

10.00 – 11.30. 1st session. **Ethnographic experimentation: an introduction.**

11.30 – 12.00. Coffee break.

12.00 – 13.30. 2nd session. **Ethnography, more than a method: Field devices for anthropological inquiry.**

13.30 – 15.00 Lunch break.

15.00 – 18.00 Hands-on session: organisation of groups.

18.00 – 20.00. Visiting the field sites for activities.

20.30. Dinner at the beach.

Thursday

10.00 – 11.30. 3rd session. **The ethnographic invention.**

11.30 – 12.00. Break

12.00 – 13.30. 4th session. **Styles of ethnographic experimentation.**

13.30 – 15.00 Lunch.

15.00 – 19.00. Hands-on session: Field site engagement.

19.00 – 20.00. Summary of the day and common thoughts (a collective session to share impressions from our first day of group activities).

20.30. Dinner. Cooking together (self-managed).

Friday

10.00 – 11.30. 5th session. **Beyond text: Experiments on ethnographic expression.**

11.30 – 12.00. Coffee break.

12.00 – 13.30. 6th session. **Beyond representation: Experiments on multimodal anthropology.**

13.30 – 15.30. Lunch on site (each group on their own).

15.30 – 19.00. Activity in the field: devising devices.

19.00 – 20.00. Group debriefing meetings with tutors.

20.30. Dinner. Cooking together (self-managed).

Saturday

10.00 – 13.30. Hands-on session: field site investigation.

13.30 – 15.30. Lunch on site (each group on their own).

15.30 – 19.00. Hands-on session: working on ethnographic accounts.

19.00 – 20.00. Group debriefing meetings with tutors.

20.30. Dinner. Cooking together (self-managed).

Sunday

10.00 – 13.30. Hands-on session: field site investigation.

13.30 – 15.30. Lunch on site (each group on their own).

15.30 – 20.00. Hands-on session: working on ethnographic accounts.

20.30. Dinner. Cooking together (self-managed).

Monday

10.00 – 13.30. Meeting with tutors: Hands-on session at UOC.

13.30 – 15.30. Lunch on site (each group on their own).

16.00 – 19.00. Public presentations of the group experiments.

20.00. Dinner and good-bye party.

Readings

1st session. Ethnographic experimentation: an introduction.

Tomás Sánchez Criado & Adolfo Estalella. 2018. Introduction. Experimental collaborations. In A. Estalella & T. S. Criado (Eds.), *Experimental collaborations. Ethnography through fieldwork devices* (pp. 1-30). New York, Oxford: Berghahn.

First case.

Cantarella, L., Marcus, G. E., & Hegel, C. (2019). *Ethnography by design: Scenographic experiments in fieldwork*. Taylor & Francis. Introduction and Chapter 3.

2nd session. Ethnography, more than a method: Field devices for anthropological inquiry.

Law, J. (2004). *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. Routledge. Introduction.

Law, J., & Ruppert, E. (2013). The Social Life of Methods: Devices. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 6(3), 229-240.

Second case.

Khandekar, A., Costelloe-Kuehn, B., Poirier, L., Morgan, A., Kenner, A., Fortun, K., & Fortun, M. (2021). Moving Ethnography: Infrastructuring Doubletakes and Switchbacks in Experimental Collaborative Methods. *Science & Technology Studies*, 34(3), 78-102.

3rd session. The ethnographic invention.

Estalella, A., & Criado, T.S. (2023). Introduction: The ethnographic invention. In T.S. Criado & A. Estalella (Eds.), *An Ethnographic Inventory: Field Devices for Anthropological Inquiry* (pp. 1-14). Routledge.

Third case.

Hartblay, C. (2020). *I Was Never Alone or Oporniki: An Ethnographic Play on Disability*. Toronto University Press. Introduction.

4th session. Styles of ethnographic experimentation.

Estalella, A. (n/d). The anthropological experiment (and the disappearing field of ethnography).

Fourth case.

Martínez, F. (2021). *Ethnographic experiments with artists, designers and boundary objects: Exhibitions as a research method*. UCL Press. Self-selected fragments.

5th session. Beyond text: Experiments on ethnographic expression.

Cox, R., Irving, A., & Wright, C. (Eds.) (2016). *Beyond text?: Critical practices and sensory anthropology*. Manchester University Press. Introduction.

Fifth case.

Flores, M., Suárez, M., & Nuñez, J. (2021, January 18). EthnoData: A collaborative project in cross-disciplinary experimentation - Society for Social Studies of Science.
<https://www.4sonline.org/ethnodata-a-collaborative-project-in-cross-disciplinary-experimentation/>

6th session. Beyond representation: Experiments on multimodal anthropology.

Dattatreyan, E. G., & Marrero-Guillamón, I. (2019). Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention. *American Anthropologist*, 121(1), 220-228.

Sixth case.

Farías, I., & Criado, T.S. (2023). How to game ethnography. En T. Sánchez Criado & A. Estalella (Eds.), *An Ethnographic Inventory: Field Devices for Anthropological Inquiry* (pp. 102-111). Routledge.