

Assignment #2: Ethnographic Interview & Essay



Assignment Goal: Conduct a Musical Life-History Ethnographic Interview with an interlocutor of your choosing, and then write an essay summarizing data and themes.

Interview Selection Process: Look for a potential interview subject in your network of friends, family, neighborhood, or community who might be receptive to participating in an interview about and their life history and musical experiences. Try to select someone over 18 years of age (cannot be in this class) who has lived in multiple socio-cultural contexts (for example, through migration or being part of a diaspora). Once you have identified a potential participant, ask them if they agree to be interviewed and recorded for this project. If your subject agrees to the interview, but does not want to be recorded, you must take extensive notes by hand during your conversation. The interview subject does not have to be a musician or particularly interested in music; you are exploring their life history and relationship with music in whatever form that has taken. You can you conduct the interview in languages other than English, but you will need to write the final paper in English and translate any quoted interview material.

Interview: Select a time and place that is convenient for you and your interlocutor to meet; in person is ideal, but by computer/phone is fine as well. Conduct a 30-45-minute interview that explores your interlocutor's life history and musical interests, experiences, and intersections over the course of their life. Ask about your respondents cultural and geographic background and musical tastes, activities, and connections through their communities, family, personal interests, technology, etc..., and how these may have shifted in relation to changes in their life. We will develop list of example questions together in class; use these as a foundation but also come up with your own questions and be flexible during the interview in case what your respondent talks about creates new topics to explore. Make an audio recording, if possible, and take notes as you conduct the interview, jotting down interesting pieces of information that you can further explore in the conversation write about later in the essay.

Analysis: Listen back to the interview and, if possible, transcribe the conversation into written text. Review the interlocutor's contributions as they told it to you, paying close attention to the language they use and how they describe the intersection of music with their personal history, noting what themes emerged around the topics of migration, diaspora, and globalization.

Essay: Write an essay of around 750 words that describes your interlocutor's musical life-story, telling their narrative using in your own words, with a few quotes directly from the interlocutor to highlight some points. The essay should detail your interlocutors name and touch on their cultural background, identity, age, languages spoken, different major social-cultural experiences, and their experiences, impressions, and interests around music as it intersects with different parts of their life and relates to their life experiences. You are not required to cite outside material, but you are certainly able toto reference materials that relate to your interlocutor's story in any way.

Please submit the essay by email as a PDF of Word doc to me at mrestrepo@gradcenter.cuny.edu by class on Thursday November 21st.