

Call for Inventions 1.0: Field Devices



An Ethnographic Inventory

www.xcol.org

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How can our modes of ethnographic inquiry respond to the challenges of the day? Amidst rampant planetary and health crises revealing our worlds' constitutive vulnerability, **it has become more urgent than ever to open up speculative spaces to make emerge the possible.** We think that **this invocation needs to go hand in hand with a speculation of the many possible forms of ethnographic practice.** A challenge that, in our opinion, needs to acknowledge and animate the intrinsic inventive condition of ethnography.

This is our point of departure: **Ethnography is an act of invention.** By that we mean that anthropologists invent the relations allowing them to inquire with others. Sadly, these forms of inventiveness—part and parcel of ethnographic inquiries—are rarely accounted for and shared. *xcol, an ethnographic inventory* invites ethnographers to join this inventorying endeavour.

The inventiveness that permeates the modes of anthropological inquiry **takes expression in very different socio-material techniques:** ranging from digital infrastructures used in fieldwork to novel modes of documenting through, say, drawing, as well as very diverse forms of relationality. We call these **field devices** for they devise the socio-spatial and material conditions of fieldwork.

Any anthropologist has faced in their fieldwork the challenging circumstance of forging out of nothing relations with complete strangers in an unknown situation. Ethnographers draw on the forms of relationality they already know and the guides and norms of the ethnographic method they have learnt. But this knowledge is never enough. As any experienced ethnographer very well knows from their own field experience, there is no script for social life and no sufficient method to guide the construction of relations in the field. Hence, anthropological inquiries always demand inventing the modes of relationality allowing anthropologists to investigate with others (whoever they are).

The starting point of the inventory assumes that besides, or rather beyond, the conventional conceptualization of ethnography as a 'method' we may conceive it as an act of invention.

The language of creativity, improvisation and invention is seldom, if ever, present in the anthropological accounts of ethnography. Our proposal goes against this state of affairs, positing a different conception that signals out the always creative and improvisational nature of ethnography.

The xcol ethnographic inventory is a curated open-source digital archive seeking to document and display this endless invention integral to any ethnographic inquiry. In our first **Call for Inventions (Cfi)** we are particularly **aiming to inventory accounts of 'field devices':** the inventive social and material arrangements undertaken, created, made or repurposed in the course of doing fieldwork with others.

What we have in mind are texts of at least **2000 words** accounting for these field devices in at least two senses: (1) fleshing out the context as well as the social and material arrangements of

particular ‘field devices’ as they are put into practice in empirical situations; and (2) hinting at the particular modes of ethnographic inquiry they enable or make emerge.

We particularly welcome texts experimenting with genres in between recipes or instruction manuals and ethnographic descriptive accounts.

We particularly welcome texts experimenting with genres in between recipes or instruction manuals and ethnographic descriptive accounts. As an inspiration, you might want to check this existing invention in our platform: “[How to ‘device’ an ethnographic infrastructure](https://xcol.org/invention/how-to-device-an-ethnographic-infrastructure/)” - <https://xcol.org/invention/how-to-device-an-ethnographic-infrastructure/>

But also, please consult our “[how to guide on the writing of field devices](https://xcol.org/xposition/writing-inventions-a-how-to-guide-to-approach-the-description-of-field-devices/)”:
<https://xcol.org/xposition/writing-inventions-a-how-to-guide-to-approach-the-description-of-field-devices/>

Deadline

For this first call we would like to receive fully-fledged proposals for these pieces by **February 18, 2022**.

More about the platform

xcol, an ethnographic inventory was born with the main aspiration to document and curate four types of inventions: the relational inventions produced in the field by anthropologists and their companions (*field devices*), pedagogical methodologies and venues for the apprenticeship of ethnography (*open formats*), interventions into the inside of the discipline drawing inspiration from our fields of study (*intrventions*) and experiments in ethnographic practice (*prototypes*).

But we also make space for other genres of writing about the social life of ethnographic methods: *xpositions* (conceptual positions, programmatic essays, longer reflections and other contributions addressing relevant aspects of ethnographic inventiveness), *inquiries* (curated bundles of the elements already present in the inventory presenting explorations into relevant topics, or mapping out distinctive modes of inquiry and pedagogic programmes), and a *glossary*.

The *xcol* inventory takes as its departing point the idea that ethnography is an act of invention: by that we mean that anthropologists invent the relations allowing them to inquire with others. *xcol, an ethnographic inventory* seeks to invite ethnographers and their close companions to join this inventorying endeavour.

Rather than a mere repository, *xcol* is a collective inquiry into the modes of inquiry of ethnography, both present and past (and why not: future too). In line with this goal, the *xcol* inventory is an infrastructure aiming (1) to **promote ethnographic invention**, (2) to **care for existing and past ethnographic invention**, and (3) to **look after the one that could happen**.

Having a collaborative aspiration, the *xcol* inventory would like to invite *xcolars* (at all levels and from different backgrounds) interested in documenting and sharing the inventiveness of their ethnographic modes of inquiry to join and contribute. We are, in fact, envisioning individual as well as collective modalities of collaboration: from singular contributions to more or less thematic workshops where different areas of ethnographic invention are collectively explored and inventoried, developing new areas and domains within the platform.

Care review

In the spirit of what we call 'care review' *xcol*, an *ethnographic inventory* commits to publishing all proposals we would receive, whenever they might be ready to be shared: hence taking care to bring them to fruition and working together with interested *xcolars* in their writing in subsequent months.

Contact info

If you wanted to submit or discuss an individual contribution, but also, if you thought about organising with us a workshop on inventions (an *inventathon*) around some of these topics, please do not hesitate to contact us here: inventory@xcol.org

URL of the call

<https://xcol.org/xposition/call-for-inventions-1-0-field-devices/>