A BRIEF GUIDE TO ETHNOGRAPHY

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY 25: GLOBAL POP
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Selecting a performance/event

- This class is on *global* pop, so the concert or event you select should either be by a non-American/non-Anglosphere group/artist or by a group/artist with a background outside of the Anglosphere
- Eventbrite
- Ticketmaster
- Los Angeles Times
- LA Weekly
Documenting the performance

Bring as many of the following to the performance as possible:

- pen/pencil and a notepad
- a recording device (most pop concerts do not allow analog or digital tape recorders, but almost every smartphone has some sort of inbuilt recording app – e.g. “Voice memos” on the Iphone)
- Camera or photographic/video device (Iphone works fine)
Background preparation/What to note

Background details
- Background research about the artist (genre, country/culture of origin, influences, key themes of their work), most of which can be done through the Internet
- Who/what/when/where (who is the artist; date/time and venue for the concert)

What to note
- Details about the audience (age/gender/ethnicity and national background/whether they are “insiders” or “outsiders” to the genre/culture/tradition)
- Details/observations about the venue or performance space
- How does the artist engage with the audience? How does the audience respond?
- Musical and visual features of the performance
  - Instrumentation
  - Tempo
  - Repertoire (choice of songs performed; make note of what songs the artist performs if you can identify them)
  - Lyrics (if you can understand them)
  - How the artist is dressed
  - Gestures/movements the artist makes (if dance is a feature of the performance, make note of it)
- Your own immediate reactions to the performance
- Does the artist make use of video or visual effects? How do these visual elements interact with the music?
Taking notes (continued)

- Write down your own responses to the music, how it makes you feel, what memories or associations it evokes for you, whether it meets or diverges from your expectations, etc. Record as many immediate personal reactions to the performance and impressions of what you're seeing/hearing as you can, and don't try to judge how or why you react the way that you do until after you've recorded those reactions.

- Continue to write down your observations when you get home from the concert. Make these notes as soon as you can so that your experience at the event is still fresh in your mind. This is when you can start to reflect more deeply and extensively on the experience, expanding beyond your immediate reactions to the performance in the moment and delving into what the performance meant to you, what you think it meant to the audience, the meaning that the artist tried to convey, and how the artists' intentions, the audience's interpretation, and your own how you related (or didn’t relate) to the music, the performer, and the audience.

- Did you relate to the way the audience responded to the music? Did you feel like an insider or outsider? Why? Did you understand what the artist was doing and why the audience reacted the way that it did, or was it a totally new and unfamiliar experience? What was the most striking or memorable aspect of the event for you, and why?

- Note: it's fine to do your ethnography on an artist or genre with which you are already intimately familiar. If you are a musician yourself and make music within this particular style, absolutely bring that into your reflections and your analysis. How is your reaction to this performance/event affected by your existing relationship with the artist, with the genre, and so forth?
After you’ve finished writing down your observations and reflections, look for common threads or themes to organize your analysis around. These themes might come out of your answers to the sorts of critical questions I suggested asking on the previous slide (“Did you relate to the way the audience responded to the performance? Did you feel like an insider or outsider?” etc.).

Once you’ve identified what you think is the most important or interesting theme, you can develop that into a thesis statement. Your analysis will flesh out that thesis statement and your notes/documentation will provide you with details to support that analysis.