

EPIC2016

PechaKucha 5 – Reflecting on Methods

A Thrice-Told Truth

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“But what do anthropologists do? What kind of special knowledge do you have access to?” This question was posed during one of the salons at EPIC2014 and cuts to the heart of the value of non-academic anthropologists. We contend that there is not one answer, but a series of possibilities, each a pathway – to knowledge with its own consequences and import. To explore these, we take inspiration from Akira Kurosawa’s classic film Rashomon and Margery Wolf’s methodological critique A Thrice-Told Tale. Both of these explore the benefits and limits of perspective by recounting a single story through different lenses. Similarly, we will take a single empirical field observation from fieldwork done on a Caribbean cruise ship. From this starting point, we will frame the same story through three different lenses commonly used in our work: as a user insight, a strategic implication, and as inspiration for innovation. We will emphasize the kinds of “knowledge” that each creates and consider what that may mean for our roles as anthropologists. We see that by applying the ethnographic method to business challenges, anthropologists make no claim on a singular, special knowledge, but rather are positioned as translators between what is true of a user’s experience and what could become true within an organization.

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