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Anthony Bourdain's *Parts Unknown*:  
lessons from Western sensory  
ethnography

Paul Bröker  
Environmental Architecture

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## ABSTRACT

We can learn a lot about a person through food; we express our identities and stories by what we eat and a shared meal provides the setting for getting to know one another. Anthony Bourdain's television show *Parts Unknown* was a series of documentaries exploring diverse cultures around the world, using food as an entry point for discussion; Bourdain was the sensory ethnographer, pushing a progressive political agenda. As a white Western man, he encountered many people less privileged than him, sharing food and discussing the issues they face with them. This portfolio examines methods of cultural research, in terms of navigating a globally imbalanced world, interacting with people and sharing findings. Anthony Bourdain and *Parts Unknown* act as a case study of anthropology from a Western perspective. What can researchers learn from Bourdain's studies? I conclude that embracing contradiction - conviction and open-mindedness, similarity and difference, clarity and ambiguity, finding answers and asking questions - and developing and owning honest opinions are crucial tools for us all as we continue learning about each other and sharing our worlds.

**keywords:** sensory ethnography, anthropology, culture, food, television, epistemology, methodology, research, inequality, difference, diversity, solidarity, care, empathy

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Image 01: Anthony Bourdain in Borneo.  
[explorepartsunknown.com](http://explorepartsunknown.com)

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## PART I

### Food and culture: what can food represent?

#### *A conversation at Sunflower Sessions, Dalston*

[Scene: two diners greet each other at the front door of a London restaurant. The ambience is lively. A waiter approaches them.]

WAITER: Please, follow me, your table is this way.

WOMAN 1: I'm so excited!

WOMAN 2: I've been meaning to eat here for sooo long now. My son told me about it, he says it's THE place to be seen eating at right now. Loads of the actors come here.<sup>1</sup>

WOMAN 1: I wonder who we'll see tonight!

WAITER: Can I get you anything to drink?

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1 Ayora-Diaz (2021) uses Bourdieu's (1984) concept of class distinction, applied to food. He writes how certain food choices cement one's place as part of a particular social class, either consciously or subconsciously. See also Mishan (2021). [i: Ayora-Diaz, S. I. (2021). *The Cultural Politics of Food, Taste, and Identity*. Bloomsbury Academic. ii: Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital*. In Richardson, J. (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, p.241-258. Greenwood. iii: Mishan, L. (2022.02.18). *What We Write About When We Write About Food*. *The New York Times*. [Retrieved 8 March 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/t-magazine/food-writing-journalism-criticism.html?referringSource=articleShare>]]

WOMAN 1: I'll have a Margarita, please.

WOMAN 2: Me too, thank you.

WAITER: Comin' right up.

WOMAN 1: I just got back from holiday in Martinique, I'd have these on the beach every day. I ate so well, we'd order French foie gras and delicious saucisson, all the best stuff.<sup>2</sup>

WOMAN 2: Lucky you! I LOVE the Caribbean. I went to St Lucia with my family about 10 years ago. I remember vividly the taste of this incredible fresh red snapper on the beach, perfectly cooked, with an unctuous mango salsa. Whenever I eat mango, I think of that holiday.<sup>3</sup>

WOMAN 1: You're making me want to order the fish!

6 WOMAN 2: Good idea. I think I'll have the Korean chicken with kimchi - my favourite!

WOMAN 1: Ooo, lovely! Have you ever tried making your own?

WOMAN 2: I have, actually! I've got this Asian supermarket

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2 Loichot (2007) studies Edouard Glissant's work through the lens of food, specifically discussing France's neocolonial relationship with Martinique. She argues that food can be an expression of dependence on a colony; the current glut of French goods in Martinique pits the French as benefactors in this historically unequal colonial relationship, which previously had seen Martinique struggling to feed its own population on account of France prioritising its mainland population over its overseas départements in times of struggle. [Loichot, V. (2007). *Between Breadfruit and Masala: Food Politics in Glissant's Martinique*. *Callaloo*, 30(1), 124-137.]

3 Ayora-Diaz (2021) discusses the factors that combine to produce taste, which include memory. Food can thus evoke powerful memories, some of which can be only loosely related to the food that was eaten at the time of the memory. [Ayora-Diaz, S. I. (2021). *The Cultural Politics of Food, Taste, and Identity*. Bloomsbury Academic.]

near me, I can find all the ingredients there I need for it.<sup>4</sup>

WOMAN 1: I love getting those cute little enoki mushrooms from my local, although I do feel bad that they've flown them all the way from China.<sup>5</sup>

WOMAN 2: I know... Oh well, there are worse things!

WAITER: Here are your Margaritas! Are you ready to order?

WOMAN 1: Yes, I'll have the pork laab in the end.

WOMAN 2: And I'll have the chicken and kimchi.

WAITER: Excellent choices. I'll put those through to the kitchen.

WOMAN 1: Is Andy Gannet cooking today?

WAITER: He is indeed!

[waiter leaves]

WOMAN 1: I'm so excited about his food, he's a genius. I'm not sure if you follow his Insta, but he's just been to Thailand for 3 weeks and promised he'd be bringing some of

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4 Loichot (2007) discusses how food can be an expression of globalisation. In the context of Martinique, flour is often referred to as farinefrance, referring to where this staple originated. [Loichot, V. (2007). *Between Breadfruit and Masala: Food Politics in Glissant's Martinique*. *Callaloo*, 30(1), 124-137.]

5 Mishan (2021) discusses the environmental impact that food production and trade have. [Mishan, L. (2022.02.18). *What We Write About When We Write About Food*. *The New York Times*. [Retrieved 8 March 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/t-magazine/food-writing-journalism-criticism.html?referringSource=articleShare>]]

the dishes back to the restaurant.<sup>6</sup>

WOMAN 2: I'm regretting my choice now!

WOMAN 1: I'm sure the chicken will be delicious. Anyway, what are your Sunday plans?

WOMAN 2: I've got lunch at my parents - you know, English family and all. You should know this! I go basically every Sunday.

WOMAN 1: Of course, of course. My mum's family was like that when they grew up in New York. They'd gather all the relatives round the table almost every night!<sup>7</sup>

WOMAN 2: You've gotta love the Italian's and their food, hey. Obsessed!

WOMAN 1: Totally! Food is like a religion for them. I feel like they act more Italian whenever we go to New York compared to when we visit our other family in Italy.

WOMAN 2: That's so funny.

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6 This brings to light the fine line between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation has been defined as "the taking - from a culture that is not one's own - of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge" (Resolution of the Writers Union of Canada, 1992, in Ziff & Rao, 1997). In this fictional context, the ethical discussion surrounds a white British chef spending a short amount of time learning about Thai food and then cooking the cuisine in London and making a profit from it: is this cultural appreciation or appropriation, or both? This will be discussed more in the following sections. [Ziff, B., & Rao, P. V. (1997). *Introduction to Cultural Appropriation: A framework for analysis*. In B. Ziff & P.V. Rao (Eds.). *Borrowed power: Essays on cultural appropriation*. Rutgers, the State University.]

7 Many prominent writers and thinkers have touched on how food can create distinctions between different groups of people in several ways. Matta et al. (2020) list a few of them: Lévi-Strauss (1965), Douglas (1984), Goody (1982), Appadurai (1982), Bourdieu (1979). The authors continue by quoting the example of Proust's madeleine to demonstrate how central food is in forming one's personal identity. [Matta, R., de Suremain, C.-E., & Crenn, C. (2020). *Food Identities at Home and on the Move: Explorations at the Intersection of Food, Belonging and Dwelling*. Routledge.]

WOMAN 1: My grandma was telling me that when they moved over to the States, obviously it was pretty strange at times, but she felt immediately welcomed in with the other Italian families in their neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup>

WOMAN 2: Were they in Little Italy?

WOMAN 1: Yeah. I actually saw Al Pacino there last time I went, ordering a mortadella panino. Speaking of Italian cultural icons, have you read Sophia Loren's cookbook *Eat with Me*?

WOMAN 2: I haven't.

WOMAN 1: It's so great, the way she talks about food is like she's talking about Michelangelo's artworks! She even calls dishes ephemeral masterpieces.<sup>9</sup> [Chuckles.] At one point she says that a bad meal is a 'threat to your health'<sup>10</sup> - sounds like she really lives for good meals. And she has these sections called *Digressions* in which she just talks about other things, mostly related to Italian culture.<sup>11</sup> Did you know the fork was invented in Italy because an old Neapolitan King liked spaghetti so much, but didn't want to eat it with his hands anymore?

WOMAN 2: L-O-L!

WOMAN 1: She also talks about the kitchen stove as an emblem of slavery for women.

WOMAN 1: I really feel that - my boyfriend is such a lazy pig, always expecting me to cook for him.

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8 Abbots (2016, in Matta et al., 2020) writes about how practices around food can help transport migrants back home, providing comfort in foreign or new surroundings. [Matta, R., de Suremain, C.-E., & Crenn, C. (2020). *Food Identities at Home and on the Move: Explorations at the Intersection of Food, Belonging and Dwelling*. Routledge.]

9 Loren, S. (1972). *Eat with me*. Michael Joseph.

10 Ibid: p.62.

11 These sections demonstrate the wider significations that food and cooking have beyond eating: table manners, politics, history, sexism.

WOMAN 2: That's unlucky, my partner is such a wizz in the kitchen! He almost won't let me near it! Isn't it weird that most professional kitchens are male-dominated, given the fact that women used to be forced to cook?<sup>12</sup>

WOMAN 1: That doesn't really make sense, you're right. Maybe I need a new partner.

WOMAN 2: I think you do, you know. What are YOU doing Sunday?

WOMAN 1: I don't really like cooking that much on Sundays, so I'll probably just make spaghetti puttanesca, just like my grandma's. Though I'm secretly holding out for some leftovers from my neighbours. They are originally from Ghana and often cook a big jollof rice on Sundays. The smells that fill up the corridor are amazing!<sup>13</sup> They were kind enough to give me some once - really made my Sunday.

8 WOMAN 2: That's amazing! My neighbour's family are originally Native American, and he was telling me how they

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12 According to the Office of National Statistics, only 17% of chef positions in the UK are held by women [Morgan, Z. (2018.09.16). *Why are our professional kitchens still male dominated?* BBC News. [Retrieved 30 March 2022, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-45486646>]]. These gender dynamics evolved significantly throughout the 20th century [Mishan, L. (2022.02.18). *What We Write About When We Write About Food*. *The New York Times*. [Retrieved 8 March 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/t-magazine/food-writing-journalism-criticism.html?referringSource=articleShare>]].

13 Smell and taste are an important tool for expressing everyday racism; food choice is often a means of stereotyping people based on their ethnicity [Highmore, B. (2008). *Alimentary Agents: Food, Cultural Theory and Multiculturalism*. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 29(4), 381-398]. See also Hart, J. R. & Montereescu, D. (2021). *The sensorial life of amba: Taste, smell, and culinary nostalgia for Iraqi Jews in London and Israel*. In F. Edwards, R. Gerritsen & G. Wesser (Eds.). *Food, Senses and the City*. Routledge.



consider certain ingredients, like corn, as relatives.<sup>14</sup> They even kiss every grain of rice that they drop on the floor!<sup>15</sup> Now that's commitment to food.

WOMAN 1: I'm gonna kiss my pork when it arrives, I'm starving!

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The fictional conversation above highlights the myriad ways food is entwined with our daily lives. Aside from daily subsistence, food and cooking create strong forms of identity and belonging. It also often masks power: it expresses power relations, social hierarchies and historical inequalities, from the global scale to the local. As a result, food stands in as a holistic proxy for society and culture, perhaps surprisingly given its mundanity, yet unsurprisingly given its pervasiveness in our lives. Food and eating are therefore deeply political.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Salmon (2012) is a Rarámuri author, who explains the sense of kinship and reciprocity he and his people feel with plants, which are central to his culture, philosophy and cosmology. The Rarámuri understand these species to have emotions and their own equally important lives, entwined with the lives of humans. This case study demonstrates how important food is to certain cultures. [Salmon, E. (2012). *Eating the landscape: American Indian stories of food, identity, and resilience*. University of Arizona Press.]

15 For many across the world, food is entwined with forms of animism, as noted above. Kimmerer (2013) recalls a memory of a Turkish girl taught to kiss dropped rice to show each grain that they 'meant no disrespect in wasting it' (p.189). [Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass*. Milkweed Editions.]

16 Shiva (1999), in Salmon, E. (2012). *Eating the landscape: American Indian stories of food, identity, and resilience*. University of Arizona Press.

Food, foodways and foodscapes have the potential to create a bridge between different cultures. Much like other cultural spectacles, such as football<sup>17</sup>, food can be an accessible commonality between people from different backgrounds, helping people broaden their understanding of each other round the table.

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17 Wrack (2022) writes about how football has acted as a unifier between Arsenal Ladies and trainee footballers in refugee camps in Jordan. Their correspondence is rarely about football, although football provides an initial talking point. [Wrack, S. (2022.03.11). 'Football has power': How Arsenal are helping Syrian refugees in Jordan. *The Guardian*. [Retrieved 13 March 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/mar/11/arsenal-helping-syrian-refugees-in-jordan-football-power>]

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## PART II

### How to talk culture, according to the experts

Anthony Bourdain is white.  
Anthony Bourdain is rich.  
Anthony Bourdain is a man.  
Anthony Bourdain decides to do a television show - *Parts Unknown* - in which he travels around the world eating everything in his path.

Can you spot the issues?

Thankfully, Bourdain, a famous chef from New York, pushed this series further than the plate. Running between 2013 and 2018 and spanning 94 destinations, it saw Bourdain exploring places through their histories, cultures and the issues that their people face, using food as an infrastructure for discussion. Despite his occasionally troubled cooking days<sup>1</sup>, leading some to dismiss the televised global tour as the next chapter in his celebrity lifestyle, the extensive archive of informative episodes have captured the attention of millions more.

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1 Bourdain occasionally endured problematic moments with alcohol, drugs and minor theft throughout his career, according to some of his peers in the documentary *Roadrunner: A film about Anthony Bourdain* and the book *Bourdain: In Stories*. [i: Neville, M. & Rogers, C. (Producers), & Neville, M. (Director). (2021). *Roadrunner: A film about Anthony Bourdain*. United States of America: Focus Features. ii: Woolever, L. (2021). *Bourdain in Stories*. Bloomsbury Publishing.]

*Parts Unknown* was an attempt at sensory anthropology with a clear, progressive political stance, an assertion I hope to have convinced you of by the end of this portfolio. Whatever the intentions and premise of the show were, the list of complications that will have arisen from its production would have been lengthy. Writing and talking about culture is difficult, especially when not discussing one's own. Attempting to accurately represent a culture in the timeframe of a television slot seems like an impossible task. Anthropologists and ethnographers have dedicated entire careers to studying single groups of people, as well as to discussing the principles and ethics surrounding the study of people. If food is culture, then talking about food should be riddled with ethical, methodological and representational challenges. Despite these challenges that ethnographers face, the study of cultures and the sharing of findings are vital in enhancing understanding and 'widening the discussion'<sup>2</sup> surrounding people in a global environment where cultural difference is causing such division.

## 11

This section will review literature related to carrying out and delivery ethnographic or anthropological research. I have separated my analysis based on a researcher's timeline:

- i) preparing for and formulating research,
- ii) conducting research, and
- iii) presenting research;

or:

- i) before,
- ii) during, and
- iii) after.

In reality, however, this timeline and methodology is multi-directional and entangled (see Figure 01): presentation of information to an audience can occur

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2 Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. Penguin Books: p.15.

during an interview, as can interpretation of results; interpreting results can inform future research formulation. You will therefore find that some of the following analysis could fit in several sections; these blurred, flexible boundaries in methodology and ethics serve to reinforce any cultural study as more information and experience is embodied over time. I start by approaching the study of people as a whole and complement this with literature specifically about visual and sensory anthropology. This helps create a framework for the creation of an ethically-successful audiovisual ethnographic study, which doubles up as a framework for analysis for my own subject of research.

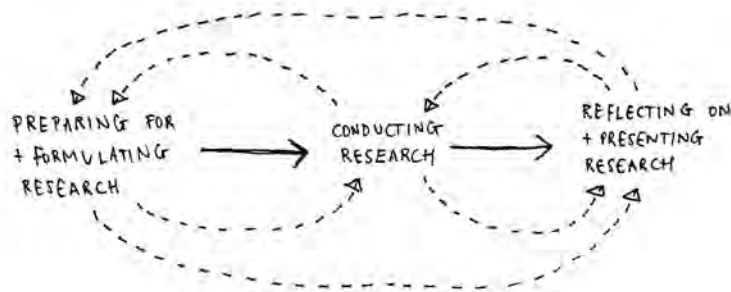


Figure 01: How each stage of a study influences the others. [Produced by Paul Bröker]

## A. How to study & interpret culture

*What can an ethnographer do in preparation for a study? There are many considerations to take into account in terms of situating oneself in the world and reflecting on this position, learning to interpret sociological information, formulating research and its intentions, and contextualising it.*

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Culture and class are inextricably linked. Bourdieu asserts that cultural characteristics inherited by a person through upbringing and lived experience, which he calls cultural capital, have a strong, direct impact on the production of class<sup>3</sup>. This social capital is embodied by individuals within a domestic setting, reinforcing it over time and becoming part of their daily environment, or *habitus*. Class therefore reproduces class. This insidious, hidden and sometimes abstract form of transmission of privilege - or disenfranchisement - makes the connection hard to identify, regulate or dismantle, resulting in the continuous reproduction of inequality.

12

Class, in turn, is a key characteristic when seeking to understand different forms of oppression because of the clear class divide between oppressor and oppressed.<sup>4</sup> This creates potential tension and distrust in the field of cultural studies, specifically in the dynamic between researcher and subject of research in what Pratt calls 'contact zones': spaces where different cultures meet and interact in highly unequal circumstances, reflecting historical patterns of domination and subordination.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital*. In Richardson, J. (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, p.241-258. Greenwood.

<sup>4</sup> Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed (30th anniversary ed)*. Continuum.

<sup>5</sup> Pratt, M. L. (2008). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation (Second edition)*. Routledge.

Bourdieu was associated with structuralism, a philosophical movement aimed at critiquing the notion that meaning ascribed within an author's writing was always fully intentional.<sup>6</sup> Unintended subtext might be present in a piece of writing, which is dependent on an author's cultural environment and identity. While structuralism asserted that there could be hidden meanings in any given piece of cultural discourse, deconstruction was committed to uncovering what these subconsciously included meanings were.<sup>7</sup> Foucault writes about how regimes of power can maintain the dissemination of particular forms of knowledge<sup>8</sup>, often referred to as epistemic violence.<sup>9</sup> He asserts that even in the sciences, we must go as far to question what we accept as statements of fact because of the influence of particular actors on knowledge production, which can create a distorted view of the world. He gives an example of how intellectuals, trying to gain recognition of university institutions and establishments, will fit their studies accordingly, effectively reproducing and reinforcing certain ideas and priority areas for study.<sup>10</sup>

Hartman's writing on critical fabulation builds on these latter principles. She encourages the idea of a form of storytelling that builds on well-researched, factually-possible imaginations, rather than truth-telling, because

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6 Hartley, J. (2002). *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts, Third Edition*. Routledge.

7 Ibid.

8 Foucault, M., & Gordon, C. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977 (1st American ed)*. Pantheon Books. See also Foucault, M. (2012). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. Taylor & Francis.

9 Spivak, G.C. (1988). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Macmillan.

10 Foucault, M., & Gordon, C. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977 (1st American ed)*. Pantheon Books. See also Foucault, M. (2012). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. Taylor & Francis.

of the fact that archives are biased.<sup>11</sup> She argues that archives are biased because archivists have chosen what should be archived, resulting in an incomplete collection. Those items omitted are often those related to the marginalised, which can produce a misleading overall picture of the subject at hand. This has led her to call for efforts to challenge accepted accounts of events by speculating on what else might have occurred.

Said echoes structuralist and deconstructivist sentiment by questioning the purpose of knowledge-seeking. While some studies of people can aim to help further understanding in order to establish modes of cohabitation embracing diversity and difference, others can be geared towards increasing an understanding but with a view to controlling and assimilating a population.<sup>12</sup> Writing within the context of the 'Orient'-West dualism, he calls for researchers, particularly those who are outsiders, to avoid pretending to understand a people and posing as experts, who consider themselves in a position to critique whole populations based on their supposed acquired knowledge and understanding. Being clear on the intentions and implications of any given study at its outset is an important step that any researcher should take prior to undertaking their work.

13

This all has important implications for a researcher. They should reflect on their own position in the world and in relation to who they are learning about and acknowledge how differences might impact results before embarking on a study on cultures. Reflections on these imbalances can influence the content and direction of a study before it has even begun. Researchers in powerful positions can use that power to address any imbalances included in the dominant rhetoric, rather than maintain accepted discourse. They should clarify the purpose of research. When

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11 Hartman, S. (2008). *Venus in Two Acts*. *Small Axe*, 12 (2): 1-14. [Retrieved 11 March 2022, from <https://read.dukeupress.edu/small-axe/article/12/2/1/32332/Venus-in-Two-Acts>]. Via Sutterwalla, S. (2021). *Care/repair [Lecture]*. *Critical and Historical Studies*. Royal College of Art, October.

12 Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. Penguin Books.

researching stories about people, especially those that have experienced some form of oppression or domination, ethnographers should analyse sources with a critical eye, carefully considering their author and context in order to paint a fuller, more accurate picture of the subject(s) of study by uncovering any embodied biases of writers and thinkers. Researchers might consider actively challenging archives of information by selecting and building on alternative possible avenues of stories' outcomes, while resisting the temptation to solve mysteries or fill in gaps as a means of practicing care towards subjects of histories.

### B. How to conduct ethnography

*The researcher has done their homework: they are aware of the challenges associated with navigating different cultures, especially if they are a white man. They then enter the field. It is hoped that they will keep in mind all the lessons learned during preparation and apply these principles when conducting research. What else should they consider when they are in the field? Since interviews and sharing physical space with subjects are such critical parts of any ethnographic study, considering the researcher-subject dynamic is vital, specifically in terms of language, spatial context, activity and attitude.*

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The principles adopted from the previous section should also be taken into the field, argue Geertz<sup>13</sup> and Turnbull.<sup>14</sup> Acknowledging one's identity and potential bias in the field amongst subjects of study is an effective way to help guide the research and establish an honest dynamic. This does not invalidate the study: ultimately, Geertz sees value in anthropology if the author can help 'bring us into touch

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13 Geertz, C. (2008). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.

14 Turnbull, C. M. (1972). *The Mountain People*. Simon & Schuster.

with the lives of strangers'<sup>15</sup> despite any imbalance that may be present.

Geertz also highlights that adopting formal methods in ethnographic research is a fallacy and that observing people in a mundane, everyday context helps 'dissolve their opacity'.<sup>16</sup> Building on this idea of informality, adopting a degree of flexibility in interviewing is important, as well as an awareness of why a particular method adopted is appropriate at any given time.<sup>17</sup> By maintaining an informal, reactionary research procedure, or attitude, a researcher can make significant progress in breaking down any boundaries of difference by building on commonalities offered by the shared banality of everyday life.

Sarah Pink has written extensively on the methodologies of carrying out visual and sensory anthropology. Ethnography that incorporates multisensoriality can humanise both researcher and subject<sup>18</sup>, as well as generally increase the breadth of the results of the research.<sup>19</sup> The goal is to inhabit their world as much as possible, since 'the transmission or learning of knowledge is a social, participatory and embodied process'.<sup>20</sup> McRobbie goes further to argue that it would actually be insincere for researchers of popular culture to not be a part of this culture in some way.<sup>21</sup> One of the many reasons cultural theorist Stuart Hall was revered was because he was or

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15 Geertz, C. (2008). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books: p.24

16 Ibid: p.24.

17 O'Reilly (2005), in Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

18 Rubin & Rubin (2005), in Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

19 Harris & Guillemin (2011), in Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

20 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.: p.39.

21 McRobbie, A. (2014). *Times with Stuart*. *openDemocracy*. (2014). [Retrieved 8 June 2022, from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/times-with-stuart/>].

became a genuine part of the scenes and cultures that he researched<sup>22</sup>. This allowed him to observe first-hand but also to glean precious information from people who trusted him and related to him, putting him in a powerful position to report his findings, an enviable position for any anthropologist. Scott also praises Hall for his willingness to change his mind, arguing for the power of employing open-mindedness in the study of cultures<sup>23</sup>. This would demonstrate a degree of respect and humility towards subjects of study, promoting connection and willingness to share.

An interview is not merely about the exchange of language; all forms of interaction are important to a successful and productive dialogue.<sup>24</sup> The participation of an interviewee in their own *habitus* can help trigger responses and memories. A familiar spatial setting for an interview is therefore key to achieving this. Similarly, the introduction of objects into an interview setting can generate similar responses. Bronisław Malinowski asserted that he obtained better results in his fieldwork in Papua when ritualistic objects were physically handled during dialogue.<sup>25</sup>

While a subject of research being an active participant in their environment is evidently useful, the researcher themselves participating in the same environment is also an effective ethnographic strategy.<sup>26</sup> Rather than just discussing and observing, getting involved is a great way for a researcher to learn about another's world by

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22 i: Ibid. ii: Scott, D. (2017). *Stuart Hall's voice: Intimations of an ethics of receptive generosity*. Duke University Press.

23 Scott, D. (2017). *Stuart Hall's voice: Intimations of an ethics of receptive generosity*. Duke University Press.

24 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

25 Vokes (2007), in Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

26 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

embodying themselves in it.<sup>27</sup> Researchers participating in a way of life over the long-term can enhance the possibility of a researcher embedding themselves further in particular habits and observing them from within. It can also generate ongoing relationships between researchers and subjects of study, which can lead to more honest dialogue.<sup>28</sup> These exchanges can then begin to yield more personal, intimate stories, which can enrich cultural studies.<sup>29</sup> It is this sense of intimacy between all participants that is crucial to achieve, according to Pink.

Cooking and eating with people is an easy example of how a researcher can participate in the everyday lives of others. Taste and smell are also deeply entwined with memory<sup>30</sup> as well as the processes of forming identity<sup>31</sup>, so involving food can help all participants to access valuable stories from the past and insights about the present. Drawing on one's own experiences in order to understand another's is a natural and useful method by which one might learn about the world, and taste offers a well-trodden, accessible path for comparison.<sup>32</sup>

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Sharing literal paths with interview subjects is also a potentially beneficial strategy for researchers to adopt. Similar to sharing food, by walking together in step, researchers and participants can benefit from shared empathy and a sense of belonging: an experience of 'research *with*

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27 Handing down and transferring indigenous knowledge via imitation and participation is a key principle of First Nations pedagogy in Canada [MacEachren, Z. (2018). *First Nation pedagogical emphasis on imitation and making the stuff of life: Canadian lessons for indigenizing Forest Schools*. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 21(1), 89-102.]

28 Sherman Heyl (2001), in Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

29 Biella (2008), in Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

30 'Nothing revives the past so completely as a smell that was once associated with it' [Nabokov, V. (2012). *Mary*. Penguin Classics.]

31 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

32 Ibid.

people'.<sup>33</sup> Both Turnbull and Geertz experienced increased closeness with their research subjects as a result of shared movement. Turnbull gained approval from the Mbuti Pygmies because of his ability to keep up in the forest walks, as did Geertz when he ran away from the police side by side with the locals he was with.<sup>34</sup> As Ursula Biemann comments about her visiting the Inga people in southern Colombia, they know because they experience.<sup>35</sup> By abandoning the dominance of the visual<sup>36</sup> and activating as many of the senses as possible, a researcher can have a more complete experience and sense of perception.

Alison & Alison back up much of the latter in their book *Rapport*.<sup>37</sup> According to them, of paramount importance is the need for an interviewer to listen to and empathise with an interviewee, which should take precedence over what they might want to achieve from the interview, as well as any urge they may have to impose any particular viewpoint on a conversation. Achieving an authentic connection with an interviewee is the priority. They put forward four key elements of achieving rapport: being honest, showing empathy, enabling autonomy and reflecting on dialogue.<sup>38</sup> They then outline four main communication styles, which they suggest an interviewer learn how to use correctly in the appropriate context. I include their descriptions verbatim below:<sup>39</sup>

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33 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.: p.111 (italics in original).

34 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

35 The World Around (2022.02.24). *Ursula Biemann presents Forest Mind | The World Around Summit 2022* [Video]. YouTube. [Retrieved 8 June 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scu9S-vknBo>].

36 Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography, 2nd Edition*. Sage Publications Ltd.

37 Alison, E. & Alison, L. (2020). *Rapport: The Four Ways to Read People*. Vermilion.

38 Ibid: p.13.

39 Ibid: p.14.

- > T-Rex. How to manage confrontation: when you argue or challenge, be frank and forthright. Do not be attacking, sarcastic and punitive.
- > Mouse. How to capitulate: when you need to concede or show deference, demonstrate humility and patience. But avoid weakness and uncertainty.
- > Lion. How to establish control: good leaders are clear, in charge, set the agenda and support others. They are not demanding, dogmatic and pedantic.
- > Monkey. How to build cooperation: when you want to create connection, show warmth, concern and togetherness.

These principles are particularly important for interviewers who might be tackling sensitive issues. As we have discussed, cultural studies can lead to topics surrounding inequality, oppression and suffering. Researchers should adopt these communication techniques in order to convey respect and compassion for their interview subjects.

16

The concept of discourse has evolved to become situated in the broad study of power relations, but it initially referred to linguistic analysis.<sup>40</sup> A consideration of a researcher's relative position in an imbalanced world has already been discussed in the previous section. Fairclough & Wodak<sup>41</sup> look at how language and discourse can be instrumental in redressing the balance of power, specifically through the use of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis actively seeks to work on behalf of subjugated groups, taking an explicit political stance in its favour. It does not claim to be an objective social science, instead adopting 'emancipatory interests'.<sup>42</sup> Evidently, content selection for research has a significant part to play in whether a study will contribute to this power rebalancing, but it is also vital that with regard to interviewing and interaction with subjects of study, a

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40 Hartley, J. (2002). *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts, Third Edition*. Routledge.

41 Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (2004). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. In C. Seale (Ed.). *Social research methods: A reader*. Routledge.

42 Ibid: p.377.



researcher should consider how language and their broader range of signals might impact dialogue, rapport and responses.

### C. How to tell a story & present

*A researcher being filmed carrying out an interview will be presenting any findings throughout the dialogue in the form of questions, responses and reactions; the interviewer should be adopting the principles just discussed in the previous section. Elements of preparation and initial research laid out in the first section of this chapter also significantly impact the storytelling aspect of a study. But many audiovisual studies incorporate a significant amount of editing, selection and reflection once the study has been completed, before the whole work is unveiled. What might an ethnographer and their team consider in this phase of the work?*

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Gornick writes about the benefits of personal narrative when telling a story. She asserts that syntax is enhanced when a storyteller imagines oneself as they were when recounting the story from the past, and then delivers this imagination.<sup>43</sup> She continues by mentioning that storytellers should focus on and inhabit one sole, contextually-relevant identity when trying to make a point about the subject of the story. This method helps the narrator because if they themselves are aware of who the storyteller is, they are able to know why they are speaking. Adopting a true identity in a personal narrative is very effective because of how undisguised and exposing it is. An insincere outlook could have the opposite effect of distorting the story at hand based on unacknowledged feelings and opinions. Even admitting one's mixed or even disagreeable opinions about a

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43 Gornick, V. (2001). *The situation and the story*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

subject and using these as a basis for narration helps can create a more captivating story delivered by a visibly more credible source.

In *Empire of Signs*<sup>44</sup>, Barthes alludes to Western attitudes towards signs and how their interpretation affects ensuing reading and writing about culture. This acts as a warning to researchers who have to engage in any degree of translation or mediation to be conscious of how this process can distort observation along the way. This is particularly pertinent for ethnographers studying cultures foreign to their own with unfamiliar languages, since the degree of mediation is particularly great, creating more room for (mis)interpretation. Barthes draws attention to signs beyond language, describing the semiotic richness he encounters in Japan (where he is not familiar with the language) and how much can be communicated outside of this medium. According to Kohn<sup>45</sup>, we tend to conflate representation with language, which leads to a narrow-minded understanding of living things that produce a much wider diversity of signs. In addition, because language is culturally and socially specific, this can cause misinterpretations and ensuing misrepresentations when moving between languages. This has led Kohn to call for 'provincialising language'.<sup>46</sup> While Kohn calls for humans to draw on reading signs outside of language, Barthes challenges the need to analyse the signs at all, perhaps inviting observers to enjoy them in their own right, as entities standing alone. As Mead<sup>47</sup> writes, anthropologists tend to still overrely on words to convey the results of their study when the medium of film would tell a story better. Researchers could embrace the full spectrum of semiotics beyond just language and let a place and its

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44 Barthes, R. (1992). *Empire of Signs*. Hill and Wang, The Noonday Press.

45 Kohn, E. (2013). *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*. University of California Press.

46 Ibid: p.38.

47 Mead, M. (1995). *Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words*. In P. Hockings (Ed.). *Principles of Visual Anthropology, 2nd Ed.* Mouton de Gruyter.

people tell their own story in other ways.

Geertz asserts that anthropological writings from people that are not 'native' to a culture are second- or third-order interpretations and are therefore 'fictions'.<sup>48</sup> Particular storytellers will have imagined constructions of a place and its people based on their identity and background, and acknowledging the author's identity and position in the world helps clarify what sort of information this is and how to process it as a result. This point is strongly linked to the earlier discussion in part A of this chapter, regarding self-awareness and subconscious meaning in cultural literature, but applies the principle to the writing and reflection phase of a study. By explicitly considering their research as their own interpretation and clarifying their identity, an author can avoid offering a study that attempts to be objective, an aim that will inevitably fail. As Mead<sup>49</sup>, Balikci<sup>50</sup> and Collier<sup>51</sup> all write in the context of visual studies, no work involving a camera is ever objective; the choice of content by the person behind the camera and the limited frame of the camera itself create subjectivity from the outset. Visual anthropologists can increase the responsibility of their results by adding contextual information of their images.<sup>52</sup> Researchers, and particularly filmmakers, should consider embracing an element of subjectivity and fiction of anthropological studies.

While some degree of interpretation by a researcher is inevitable, another important option is to allow for people of any particular culture to interpret their own way of life themselves. This removes a layer of abstraction in

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48 Geertz, C. (2008). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books: p.23.

49 Ibid.

50 Balikci, A. (1995). *Reconstructing Cultures on Film*. In P. Hockings (Ed.). *Principles of Visual Anthropology, 2nd Ed.* Mouton de Gruyter.

51 Collier, M. (2004). *Approaches to Analysis in Visual Anthropology*. In T. Van Leeuwen, & C. Jewitt (Eds.). *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

52 Ibid.

the transfer of information and therefore approaches a more honest, authentic account of a culture under study. Of course, this is still only one interpretation, which another 'actor' might disagree with.<sup>53</sup> The process of actor selection is also itself a subjective decision. It is unlikely that a researcher will choose their interview subjects at random; they will make a judgement on whether this person will provide the study with a valuable account of their own culture. Stepping back from interpreting another culture as much as possible, however, remains a crucial method for an ethnographer to use in the field.

Pratt's work focusses on travel writing from a European hegemonic perspective.<sup>54</sup> By analysing travel literature from across several centuries, she identifies the several characteristics that these accounts contain. Aside from reproducing the 'monopoly on knowledge'<sup>55</sup> from the empire perspective because of the origins of many of these travel writers, she warns against another form of writing, which she calls anti-conquest. This consists of bourgeois accounts that attempt to plead innocence in past subjugation and oppression, while simultaneously maintaining and ignoring an imbalanced power dynamic<sup>56</sup>.

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53 Balikci (1995) references filmmaker Robert Flaherty's methods of selecting 'actors' in his ethnographic documentary *Man of Aran* to portray their own culture in their own words. This documentary was not without its faults, however: Flaherty was accused of over-directing many of the encounters in the end, inserting his own interpretations within the film. [Balikci, A. (1995). *Reconstructing Cultures on Film*. In P. Hockings (Ed.). *Principles of Visual Anthropology, 2nd Ed.* Mouton de Gruyter.]

54 Pratt, M. L. (2008). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (Second edition). Routledge.

55 Ibid: p.22.

56 She gives the example of a naturalist's account of collecting species in parts of Africa, who claims his adventure is to satisfy his innocent curiosity as well as provide some information useful to society, without acknowledging the extractive, colonial roots of natural history exploration. [Pratt, M. L. (2008). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (Second edition). Routledge.]

Finally, Matwick & Matwick<sup>57</sup> have undertaken many analyses of televised food programmes. Of particular importance is the role that storytelling plays in successful shows. They establish a set of content and non-verbal characteristics that contribute to a show's popularity. I have summarised their key findings in a table below:

CHARACTERISTIC	<i>function</i>
EMPATHY, SOCIAL INTIMACY, VIEWER VALIDATION	<i>enables relatability; provides opportunity for connection</i>
ORDINARINESS	<i>relatability; paradoxically legitimises authority; minimise difference (Cheney, 2002)<sup>1</sup></i>
DIRECT GAZE, SMILES	<i>imaginary relationship, connection, contact; trust; sincerity</i>
SELF-DEPRECIATION, SARCASM, REVEAL WEAKNESSES	<i>relatability; people tend to like people who are like them (Floyd, 2011)<sup>2</sup></i>
STORYTELLING	<i>viewers reliving experience; viewers engaged</i>
REFERENCE TO OTHERS LIKE NARRATOR	<i>enhance authenticity; humility</i>

1 Matwick, K. & Matwick, K. (2014). *Storytelling and synthetic personalization in television cooking shows*. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 71: 151-159.

2 Ibid.

Table 1: A summary of Matwick & Matwick (2014).

57 Matwick, K. & Matwick, K. (2014). *Storytelling and synthetic personalization in television cooking shows*. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 71: 151-159.

### *A note on cultural appropriation*

Discussions on culture often overlap with those on cultural appropriation, which is defined as 'the taking - from a culture that is not one's own - of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge'.<sup>58</sup> Since this piece of work is most concerned with the study of culture rather than the generation of profit from culture, I will consider this discussion as beyond the scope of this analysis. I acknowledge, however, that Bourdain could well be undertaking a form of cultural appropriation from some perspectives by producing a commercial television show based on other cultures; I will leave this for the next interested party to explore.

58 Ziff, B., & Rao, P. V. (1997). *Introduction to Cultural Appropriation: A framework for analysis*. In B. Ziff & P.V. Rao (Eds.). *Borrowed power: Essays on cultural appropriation*. Rutgers, the State University: p.1.

## Analytical framework

Following this analysis, I summarised the key points into a word-and-phrase cloud (see Figure 02). I then initially categorised them into four avenues (see Figure 03) for evaluation of *Parts Unknown*:



Figure 02: Word-and-phrase cloud.  
[Produced by Paul Bröker]



Figure 03: Word-and-phrase cloud, annotated.  
[Produced by Paul Bröker]

However, finding multiple areas of overlap, I decided to rearrange the elements into a new set of themes, each with its own set of condensed keywords for guidance, to establish a manageable yet overarching summary with which to assess Bourdain and his show (see Figure 04). The themes all interweave during our journey through Bourdain's televised moments.

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Figure 04: Analytical framework  
[Produced by Paul Bröker]

△

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# INTERLUDE

## Personal diary entry from fieldwork in West Kalimantan, Borneo

19.06.22  
TAHAK

Slow to get up... So hot and noisy! Breakfast of turmeric rice, peanut-fried tempeh, noodles, cucumber, sambal - what a feast to start the day! The kids arrive early, keen to get started. We start talking, Dessy as mediator. One pretends he's busy, feeling shy today. When I ask where they want to live in the future - forest ('hutan') or city ('kato') - they all say HUTAN.

Time to go into the forest. Wow what an amazing time foraging for greens + fruit. They're just so excited to be in the woods, almost competing to pick ferns, leaves, shoots, fruits + berries. It's hot in the sun, but the undergrowth provides some respite. There's so much abundance within even just a few metres. The kids proudly show me all their findings - such exotic fragments I've never seen nor tried.

Image 02: Page from personal Borneo diary.  
Paul Bröker, June 2022.

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We go back to the school + the girls start preparing the greens using machetes to split the stems. The boys break ice and piss about, Everyone's giggling. Dessy fries up our lunch: rice, greens, garlic, giant chives in coconut sauce, sprouts. Delicious.

Not long after we've finished, we're off to the plant nursery. On the way, the kids inspect some jelly mushrooms, saying how they're much harder to find because of climate change. They listen out for bird sounds - apparently some will tell you what the weather will be like tomorrow - natural weather forecast! We're deep in the forest now. We reach an opening at the top of a small hill with a view. The cloudy haze is ethereal. I'm receiving

banana  
tasted like a mix between guava + pear  
passion fruit taste!




Image 03: Page from personal Borneo diary.  
Paul Bröker, June 2022.



Image 04: At the plant nursery, Tahak.  
Paul Bröker, April 2022

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trophies in all shapes + sizes, gobbling them up greedily.  
We get to the nursery: chillies, cassava, aubergines,  
cucumbers, peanuts, coriander, banana.

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Back at the house. Quick freshen up with a bucketful  
of water. Skinny chickens and their chicks constantly  
chirping beside me. I love being barefoot. It's time  
to start preparing dinner - I'm excited to muck in  
I'm tasked with picking the cassava + pounding it  
with a giant pestle + mortar. The pestle is taller  
than me! I'm doing my best to impress. Me +  
Dessy get talking. I ask her about favourite foods  
(spicy crab), the forest rituals. I learn some Simpany  
words, what her parents do (teacher, farmer). Her  
dad ('bapak') used to be village leader - he seems  
like a great man, quiet but stoic. Dessy meanwhile  
is whizzing around the kitchen. I'm now

Image 05: Page from personal Borneo diary.  
Paul Bröker, June 2022.



Making sambal - pounding garlic, chillies, salt, sugar, lime juice. Kankung tries my cassava and asks who made it - it's a bit chewy. We all laugh.

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After dinner, we all settle in on the floor with Dessy's bapak and tuck into some 'arak' - trust water. We light some cigarettes and set out to chat deep into the night. I'll write the findings tomorrow if I can remember them ...

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Image 06: Page from personal Borneo diary.  
Paul Bröker, June 2022.

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Image 07: Preparing lunch, Tahak.  
Paul Bröker, April 2022

## PART III

### Anthony Bourdain & *Parts Unknown*

#### *A note on author bias*

It should be noted that I am a fan of *Parts Unknown*. It should also be noted that I am a white western European man. These two facts position me relatively close to Bourdain himself, helping me identify and relate to him. The fact that I began watching the show for my love of food and culture, rather than knowing who Anthony Bourdain was, rebalances my position to a degree. In order to appreciate different perspectives on Bourdain, his show and their success at representing other cultures, I watched the Borneo episode<sup>1</sup> with a Borneo local when undertaking separate fieldwork there, and I watched the Hong Kong episode<sup>2</sup> with a Hong Kong resident in London, interviewing both participants during and after the viewing<sup>3</sup>. I also watched and read accounts of Bourdain from the point of

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2 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Argento, A. (Director). (2018). *Hong Kong* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

3 i: Dessy Plorenthina (2022). Interview with Paul Bröker. 19 April, Tahak (Borneo, Indonesia) ii: Phoebe Cheng (2022). Interview with Paul Bröker. 27 May, London (United Kingdom).

view of others.<sup>4</sup> The analytical framework helps counteract any biases I might hold by formalising and regimenting my process of analysis and interpretation as I journey through some of Bourdain's televised moments, but it is unlikely to completely neutralise them. I do however hope to provide some useful insights into Bourdain's strengths and weaknesses as a sensory anthropologist. I will conclude that despite some personal, human flaws and certain errors in methods of representation, Bourdain displayed a wide-ranging sensitivity to the world and an admirable ability to enthusiastically yet respectfully connect with it and many of its people throughout his travels, traits we could all learn from and adopt in today's globalised and troubled world.

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26 For a global cooking show spanning all seven continents, viewers across the world might have been surprised to be watching an episode set in Provincetown, Massachusetts (USA)<sup>5</sup>. With a tiny population of just 3,600 people, located in a fringe part of the USA, it might not have promised the excitement of the previous four episodes: Paraguay, Vietnam, Tanzania and Iran. Provincetown was personal for Bourdain: he had nonchalantly kickstarted his cooking career here, after overstaying his welcome at a friend's house and, needing to find a way to start paying rent, had reluctantly agreed to start washing dishes. Even more personal is his opening line:

*I bought my first bag of heroin here.*

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4 i: Neville, M. & Rogers, C. (Producers), & Neville, M. (Director). (2021). *Roadrunner: A film about Anthony Bourdain*. United States of America: Focus Features. ii: Woolever, L. (2021). *Bourdain in Stories*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

5 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Oppenheimer, T. (Director). (2014). *Massachusetts* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

One might assume self-indulgence, lack of relevance or even arrogance from this episode choice and its content, but Bourdain's personal story is a key strength of the series. The overtly personal characteristic of the series as a method acts as an important acknowledgement of personal viewpoint and bias. He often selected filming locations based on personal contacts or because they were special or interesting according to him and his values. He mentions how a past moment in his life brings him back to Borneo<sup>6</sup>; he travels to his childhood home state of New Jersey with his brother<sup>7</sup>; he explores southern Italy with the film director Asia Argento<sup>8</sup>, with whom he had a relationship and who also produced and directed several of the episodes; he wanders around the French Alps with longtime friend and chef Eric Ripert<sup>9</sup>, who grew up nearby. By owning these choices, he does not try to pass these episodes off as objective representations of places. It also becomes apparent that Bourdain has successfully befriended many locals during his travels, keeping in touch with many and revisiting them.<sup>10</sup> This not only helps enrich his research by tapping into more intimate stories, but is also a testament to his interpersonal skills.

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6 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2015). *Borneo* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

7 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Steed, M. (Director). (2015). *New Jersey* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

8 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. & Allen, J. (Directors). (2017). *Southern Italy* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

9 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2017). *French Alps* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

10 For example, he revisits a taxi driver he met in Istanbul and a Dayak tribe in Borneo. i: Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2015). *Istanbul* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN. ii: Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2015). *Borneo* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

He often complements these episode selections with deeply personal narratives. For example, at the beginning of the Hong Kong episode<sup>11</sup>, he proclaims how lonely his job is, while also acknowledging how lucky he is. These sorts of personal statements generate a sense of intimacy between Bourdain and the viewer, helping them to connect with him. The sharing of individual taste and preferences can also be a powerful way to create connections with interview subjects. For example, Bourdain serendipitously bonds with a Hong Kong local over their shared passion of films by the Hong Kongese director Wong Kar Wai<sup>12</sup>, connects with locals in Nashville over their overlapping music tastes<sup>13</sup>, and shares marijuana with musicians in Uruguay<sup>14</sup>. These moments help create closeness between Bourdain and the people he is studying, and by gaining their approval in some way, Bourdain is able to carry out more interesting, more honest and richer interviews. His interest in ordinary things normalises him in the eyes of his interview subjects, as well as his viewers, making him more relatable.

27 This personal style of documentary sometimes gets in the way of informative storytelling, however, leaving the viewer wondering what the purpose of the episode was. In southern Italy<sup>15</sup>, there is barely any mention of food, and the episode is characterised by discussions of indulgence and relatively private dining. Dessy, with whom I watched

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11 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Argento, A. (Director). (2018). *Hong Kong* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

12 Ibid.

13 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2016). *Nashville* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

14 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2018). *Uruguay* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

15 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. & Allen, J. (Directors). (2017). *Southern Italy* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

the Borneo episode, felt that the overall depiction of an indigenous tribe in Borneo during this episode<sup>16</sup> was disproportionately weighted towards drinking culture, which Bourdain regularly and enthusiastically partakes in throughout the series, instead of focussing on their other cultural practices.<sup>17</sup> Phoebe, who watched the Hong Kong episode<sup>18</sup> with me, felt that Bourdain's passion for Wong Kar Wai films in fact meant that important stories, particularly from the point of view of Hong Kong's elderly urban poor, were overlooked in favour of less relevant ruminations based on film references.<sup>19</sup> Bourdain also used his love for the book *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad to guide his episode filmed in the Congo<sup>20</sup>, which, despite giving him purpose and context for the episode through the country's colonial history and the book's mostly encouraging reception, might be considered a *faux-pas* by others, given some of the criticisms the book has also generated.<sup>21</sup>

Many episodes did have a clear agenda. Bourdain investigates the annual Cajun Mardi Gras festival<sup>22</sup> and

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16 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2015). *Borneo* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

17 Dessy Plorenthina (2022). Interview with Paul Bröker. 19 April, Tahak (Borneo, Indonesia).

18 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Argento, A. (Director). (2018). *Hong Kong* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

19 Phoebe Cheng (2022). Interview with Paul Bröker. 27 May, London (United Kingdom).

20 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2013). *Congo* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

21 The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe criticised Joseph Conrad, the book's author for a racist dehumanisation of African people in his book [Watts, C. (1983). 'A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad. *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 13: 196-209.]

22 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2018). *Cajun Mardi Gras* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

seeks to celebrate ethnic diversity through food in Queens<sup>23</sup> and the Bronx<sup>24</sup>. In New Mexico<sup>25</sup>, he gives a platform to the state's gun-bearing population in an explicit attempt at telling the other side of the story of a people often maligned by New Yorkers like him - as well as many other parts of the world - for their strong right wing views and views on gun ownership.

The latter episode demonstrates Bourdain's qualities of openmindedness. Despite not sharing the same political views as his interviewees, he listens to them and provides them with a sense of autonomy. In Seattle<sup>26</sup>, he interviews musicians who criticise the tech industry that has contributed to intense gentrification, as well as employees in that same industry. Despite taking sides with the musicians, he demonstrates patience, respect and understanding with the other side of the debate in his reflections, helping validate a wide variety of points of view and ways of life.

28 Bourdain also developed his sense of respect and responsibility over time. After filming in Beirut for his previous series *No Reservations*, during which Israeli bombs fell on the Lebanese capital, he proclaimed his strong desire to not air the episode, citing a refusal to exploit the grave situation.<sup>27</sup> From this point on, he stopped trying to do a rosy sum up of the places he visited if it was

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23 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2017). *Queens* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

24 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2014). *The Bronx* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

25 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2013). *New Mexico* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

26 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2017). *Seattle* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

27 Neville, M. & Rogers, C. (Producers), & Neville, M. (Director). (2021). *Roadrunner: A film about Anthony Bourdain*. United States of America: Focus Features.

not the case. For example, his narration about Detroit compares the city to Chernobyl and expresses concern about its future.<sup>28</sup> He does not try to sugarcoat the situation; he shares his honest opinion. He realised the powerful position he was in to try and tell the truth about the places he visited.

Bourdain was not shy to do this even with accusations. Bourdain denounces the Belgian colonisation and ensuing genocide committed against the people of the Congo.<sup>29</sup> He calls out the Saudi Arabian government in Iran.<sup>30</sup> He intervenes in Uruguay<sup>31</sup> by telling a man to shut up when he answers a question Bourdain had directed to a woman. In Singapore<sup>32</sup>, he bluntly challenges a group of people when learning about their over-reliance on maids:

*...you are living off the labour of an oppressed underclass. You're making me want to join the Communist party.*

In these instances, he let his opinions evolve into displays of solidarity and support for groups of people often considered as subjugated in some way. By gravitating towards stories of the marginalised and sharing them to a wide audience, Bourdain was actively seeking to redress global power imbalances, recognising that many people's stories are often silenced through omission. These were his

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28 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Steed, M. (Director). (2013). *Detroit* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

29 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2013). *Congo* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

30 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2014). *Iran* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

31 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2018). *Uruguay* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

32 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Osterholm, E. (Director). (2017). *Singapore* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

contributions towards the shift from epistemic violence to epistemic resistance and care.

He also shows awareness of his own position in the world as a wealthy white Western man, accepting guilt when appropriate. For example, he criticises the opulence of Western holidaymakers in Bali, Indonesia<sup>33</sup>. In Southern Italy<sup>34</sup>, when discussing rising house prices as a result of tourism and the ensuing pricing out of locals, he acknowledges his part to play in contributing to this harmful impact:

*...we're selling AirBnbs as we speak!*

He often acknowledged the role that his country and other colonial powers had to play in past and present human suffering and understood that it was important for him to take on the responsibility of sharing these connections given his powerful position in the world.

29

As you may have noticed from the quotations, despite his frankness and conviction, in many of these expressions of solidarity Bourdain also uses humour as a means to connect, relate to and respect as many people as possible by watering down accusations. In the aforementioned Singapore example<sup>35</sup>, he follows up his seemingly confrontational accusation by saying:

*I'm just fuckin' with you.*

He makes his point but dispels some of the criticism and sanctimony by passing it off as a joke and bringing

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33 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2018). *Indonesia* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

34 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. & Allen, J. (Directors). (2017). *Southern Italy* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

35 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Osterholm, E. (Director). (2017). *Singapore* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

the tone of the conversation back into more comfortable territory. This helps cultivate relatability. Although it is true that by watering down remarks and relying on humour risks sacrificing sincerity, his political stance across the series, taken as a whole, is clear and cohesive.

When tackling issues of oppression, however, he could have done a better job at allowing oppressed people to speak for themselves at times. Phoebe felt that although Bourdain was sensitively speaking out about issues that concerned the oppressed, not enough effort had been made to allow workers to express their own views on camera, or even simply share their own food habits, for example.<sup>36</sup>

Despite these occasional failures to find the correct source to tell the right story, Bourdain relies heavily on locals to tell their own story. He only ever addresses the camera directly to share inconsequential remarks about food; when tackling discussions about culture, he overwhelmingly prefers to focus on conversations with locals. He is often happy to let a local conclude an episode in their own words, acknowledging the better position they are in to do so and removing a layer of abstraction and interpretation in the process.<sup>37</sup> In this way, he practices restraint, resisting the temptation to condense a place's story into a neat summary based on personal interpretation. Any reflections that he personally shares are off-camera and often ask more questions than they answer, refraining from completing the story. This can sometimes result in confusing endings; he prioritised authenticity over

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36 Phoebe Cheng (2022). Interview with Paul Bröker. 27 May, London (United Kingdom).

37 For example, in Hong Kong and Ethiopia. i: Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Argento, A. (Director). (2018). *Hong Kong* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN. ii: Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Fallon, M. (Director). (2015). *Ethiopia* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

clarity, embracing ambiguity.<sup>38</sup> He sometimes chose to also end episodes with long periods devoid of speech, instead letting visuals do the talking, such as in Indonesia.<sup>39</sup> This method recognised the power of moving images to tell a story of a place, rather than an interpreted vocal observation.

Bourdain's show embraced multisensoriality and experientiality, which helps the viewer experience a place. The premise of food is already strong: tastes and smells help interviewees recall memories, encouraging them to share information. By sharing a meal together, both Bourdain and his interviewee(s) are brought to the same level, and he begins to inhabit and experience their world as they do. Bourdain demonstrates adaptability, flexibility and humility by enjoying much of his food on the street or in people's homes, often in modest settings. This provides an informal, familiar scene for interviewees, again promoting connection and trust.

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But he takes his participation further in many cases. He is willing to try almost anything that he is asked to participate in. He travels by quad-bike in the desert and on the beach in Colombia.<sup>40</sup> He fires high-powered guns in New Mexico.<sup>41</sup> He even agrees to carry out a pig sacrifice in Borneo.<sup>42</sup> By participating, sometimes in dangerous activities, he gains approval and respect from the locals

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38 Neville, M. & Rogers, C. (Producers), & Neville, M. (Director). (2021). *Roadrunner: A film about Anthony Bourdain*. United States of America: Focus Features.

39 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2018). *Indonesia* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

40 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Freeman, S. (Director). (2013). *Colombia* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

41 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2013). *New Mexico* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

42 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2015). *Borneo* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

and builds up trust.

He does occasionally fall short, however. His hate of dancing and festivals leads him to sit out of celebrations at Cajun Mardi Gras.<sup>43</sup> (In some ways, however, his occasional opinionated rejection lent him authenticity and humanised him, even if the study risked being compromised). Bourdain would also sometimes over-rely on people like him - white Americans - to tell the story of a place. Although these same interviewees were selected for having some degree of meaningful connection to places, this could at times result in missing authentic, intimate, first-hand stories. Bourdain explored Thailand<sup>44</sup> with chef Andy Ricker, who, despite having spent a lot of time in Thailand and founding Thai restaurants in the USA<sup>45</sup>, culturally still appears on screen as American. The experience feels touristic and seems to prevent the next, deeper level of conversation that Bourdain often arrives at in many of his episodes. Some of his peers also recall him being awkward, shy and quiet.<sup>46</sup> While these are by no means criticisms, they may well have affected his ability to engage with places at times. Phoebe felt that he lacked engagement in Hong Kong, for example, taking a back seat during the episode, in which he seems disconnected and mellow.<sup>47</sup>

Given his celebrity status, Bourdain appears surprisingly relatable to both his interview subjects and his viewers,

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43 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2018). *Cajun Mardi Gras* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

44 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2014). *Thailand* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

45 As per Part II of this portfolio, although I acknowledge there is discussion surrounding cultural appropriation to be had here, I have decided that this is outside of the remit of my discussion.

46 Neville, M. & Rogers, C. (Producers), & Neville, M. (Director). (2021). *Roadrunner: A film about Anthony Bourdain*. United States of America: Focus Features.

47 Phoebe Cheng (2022). Interview with Paul Bröker. 27 May, London (United Kingdom).

in big part due to his honesty, regular use of self-deprecation and admitting he could be wrong. For example, in Queens<sup>48</sup> he disagrees with a chef of Korean origin over whether his restaurant should have Korean staff or not, happy to admit he may well be racist for seeking out Korean restaurants with Korean staff himself. This willingness to admit personal guilt or error cements his credibility as an honest host. His blunt honesty reveals his personal vulnerabilities. By sharing his weaknesses, Bourdain humanises himself and paves the way for connection with both his interview subjects and his viewers. It also helps to keep in check any moral superiority image he might have created through his liberal, progressive politics, helping to cast his net of relatability even wider. These vulnerabilities are not shallow attempts at sympathy in an attempt to be liked: their occasional intensity are credible statements of his issues. In Sicily<sup>49</sup>, he breaks down because of the staging of a fishing scene and goes on a depressive drinking binge. He recalls a dark, untold memory from his previous visit to Borneo with melancholy.<sup>50</sup> His eventual death by suicide is evidence for his genuine struggle. The presenter is susceptible, relatable, hurt: a real-life human with weaknesses. These outbursts of openness make the viewer trust him and empathise with him.

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Running through all of Bourdain's qualities, methods and moments as a presenter and researcher was his empathy and compassion. Circling back to the beginning of this part of the portfolio, Bourdain's sensitivity is possibly most

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48 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2017). *Queens* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

49 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Freeman, S. (Director). (2013). *Sicily* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

50 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Vitale, T. (Director). (2015). *Borneo* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

apparent when he returns to Provincetown, Massachusetts.<sup>51</sup> In what is one of Bourdain's more serious episodes, focussed in part on the heroin epidemic, he sensitively navigates this delicate, taboo topic with ex-addicts, opening up about his own past heroin addiction, helping them feel more at ease and share their experiences. By listening and displaying warmth and concern towards the people he interviews, Bourdain's empathy shines through and allows him to tell an important story, a story much bigger than Provincetown or Bourdain himself.

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32 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Freeman, S. (Director). (2013). *Sicily* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.

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51 Bourdain, A. (Writer), & Oppenheimer, T. (Director). (2014). *Massachusetts* [Television series episode]. In Bourdain, A., Collins, C., Tenaglia, L. & Zweig, S. (Executive Producers). *Parts Unknown*. Atlanta, GA: CNN.



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## PART IV

### Reflections

Bourdain provided a platform for countless fascinating stories, navigated interviews with grace and narrated with style. He also occasionally stumbled, letting his vulnerabilities, opinions and identity compromise cultural representation. Are Bourdain's mistakes excusable? I do not believe it is valuable for me to say; some might let them slide, while others might dismiss his work, and both would be valid opinions. What I can offer, however, is personal reflections on the question: what can we learn from Bourdain's method and experience?

Bourdain was a conflicted character, oscillating between enthusiastic, kind, fascinated traveller and cynical, depressive, judgmental man. This conflict ran throughout the series in several ways and reminded viewers of his credibility and sincerity. His eventual suicide was a tragic expression of his true humanity, exposing his weaknesses, which he openly shared and entrusted to the world on screen.

But this oscillation also acted as an accurate representation of the world. His honest expressions of mood, influenced by places and people, mirror reality; his refusal to rosy a view of a place through his show's messages acts as an important reminder that there are many problems still out there, difficult and irresponsible to ignore. Avoiding masking reality and instead trying to tell the truth - his truth, from his point of view - was a respectful move, aimed at inspiring both compassion and action.

Conflicts are of course divisive and are complicated when they involve subjective opinion. From the start, Bourdain embraced the idea of critical discourse; in other words, his stories would unashamedly reflect and push his progressive views before they even began. This would alienate some. But this stance, while seemingly stubborn on the surface, was a considered one, backed up by plenty of research, demonstrated on camera, and masterfully balanced with an open-mindedness and respect for other points of view, as well as a dash of well-timed, light humour. This contradiction, between conviction and respect, is a success. It is a contradiction that I believe should be embraced by all in an increasingly polarised world; maintaining principles is important, but this only works if we are willing to listen and change our minds. We often forget our daily worldview is minuscule; Bourdain's was uniquely large on account of his far-reaching travels and we should, to an extent, trust his openminded approach at understanding the world's diversity.

34 Bourdain learned that he could not possibly summarise a place in a 42 minute episode; over time, concluding remarks became shorter and shorter, or disappeared altogether.<sup>1</sup> Instead, he embraced his personal interpretation. While I think the intention is a sensible, professional and necessary decision, what replaces any doomed attempt at objectivity is difficult to get right; this is where, in my opinion, the show's success becomes more debatable. A tussle between personal touches and a fair, overarching representation is created. The show captivates the viewer when his personal take generates intimate stories; it is clear to see the benefit of this approach during these moments. Where the show suffers is when Bourdain's interests and preferences eat into the storyline of the people, or worse, misrepresent them. This is rare during *Parts Unknown*, but a key lesson to be drawn out is that an

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1 Dobson, J. (2016.04.24). *Anthony Bourdain: No Holds Barred Discussion on His Best and Worst Travel Adventures*. *Forbes*. [Retrieved 5 June 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jimdobson/2016/04/24/anthony-bourdain-no-holds-barred-discussion-on-his-best-and-worst-travel-adventures-exclusive/?sh=221adb797e0c>].

immense amount of care should be practiced to avoid this.

In many ways, *Parts Unknown* was a quest for answers, a journey to get to know unfamiliar places. But ironically, Bourdain often returned with more questions. This is great. Leaving a place with more questions than before admits the impossibility of the task of summarising a place in a universally-understandable way and is a mark of respect for its complexity, diversity and richness. Pretending to understand a foreign place is the opposite: disrespectfully arrogant, close-minded and over-simplified. When one stands by a personal viewpoint with an open mind, one legitimises one's experience. Bourdain was there after all: he spoke to people, he ate some food, he walked some streets, he made some observations. If I said bananas are disgusting, you could tell me I was wrong. If I said I find bananas disgusting, telling me I was wrong would no longer make sense. Confidently owning an opinion, especially with sensitive, complicated issues, was what Bourdain did well, giving the viewer an authentic view of a place through this one empathetic man's eyes. This is different to the last point: compared to when he strayed off course, missing the story, Bourdain was at his best when he was fully engaged and immersed, discussing, debating and reflecting on the issues he encountered head on. It is easier to shy away from difficult topics of discussion, in fear of offending, than to take a side and express an opinion. Bourdain did this courageously on an internationally televised stage, and he did this with preparation, conviction, astuteness and respect.

I would like to end this portfolio with one final contradiction that Bourdain's show weaved through. Any progressively-minded research about culture that hopes to promote unity and address inequalities will have to simultaneously navigate celebrating difference and embracing commonality. A plate of food, shared between two different people, is the perfect embodiment of this contradiction: at that moment, those people are companions<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> Definition and etymology of the word 'companion' from Oxford Languages: Middle English, from Old French *compaignon*, literally 'one who breaks bread with another', based on Latin *com-* 'together with' + *panis* 'bread'.

bonding over a shared resource, considered equal. This act is a springboard for people to talk, to find common interests, highlight personal quirks, share opinions, debate them, learn from each other, get closer.

Contradiction is a good thing; thanks for the lessons, Tony.

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## EPILOGUE

Anthony Bourdain in West Kalimantan,  
if he were still here

### *The closing scene*

[compilation of video clips of locals cooking, eating,  
playing, foraging, laughing]

Bourdain [off camera]: 'The last time I was on this magical island, I wasn't myself. That love-sickness I spoke of followed me, hanging over my head like a cloud of acid rain, polluting my thoughts, hampering my enjoyment of the place, and to be honest, making me sad.

'This time was different. I opened my eyes more, stretched my ears as far as they could go, and of course, I ate. I ate like a king. Because flatteringly, that is what I felt like in West Kalimantan.

'The people here, they make you feel like family. The generosity, the smiles, the kindness, the looks of awe and wonder; I will cherish those moments forever.

36 'On my return trip down the river, I thought to myself: How can they be so happy? Staring down the barrel of the monolithic threat from greedy palm oil companies, devouring their precious forest, their home, they still smile. I can only admire the quiet, joyous, inspiring determination of their true grit.

[cut to Dessy walking through the forest, picking mushrooms]

Dessy: 'The first time they hit us, we don't say anything. The second time they come, we tell them to stop. The third time, we fight back.'

CUT

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