



Ethnographic Field Methods Methods II



SPRING 2008

TIME: T, Th 9:30-10:45

PLACE: 100 Clough

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Susan Kus

OFFICE: 109 Clough x3933

OFFICE HOURS: T, Th 2-3 PM; W 1-2 PM;
or by appointment

COURSE STATEMENT

“...it is in the practice of ethnography that the vitality of anthropology resides.”
Nancy Scheper-Hughes 1992:222

Participant-observation and ethnography, as every beginning student of anthropology comes to learn, is the methodological core of anthropology. Yet, participant-observation is a critical qualitative method that should be exercised across all disciplines and professions that address the human condition. This course will help us explore this assertion in practice and in discussion around the seminar table.

This course will focus on the “doing” of ethnography by asking you to respectfully, socially, meaningfully, and sensuously engage with a moment in another’s world. One way to describe ethnography is as a compelling descriptive pause to appreciate another way of being in and giving meaning to the world before one begins sustained and systematic social analysis and theorizing.

This course fulfills the F11 requirement.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

During the course of the semester you will engage in a focused piece of ethnographic research in the Memphis community. Several short papers on (1) your proposed project, (2) first impressions in the field, (3) material culture, and (4) interviews with informants will contribute to your final project, the production of a short ethnographic piece in writing and for class presentation. (You will also be presenting your ethnographic field project in the Rhodes Undergraduate Research Seminar on April 25th). You will also be asked to write several short response essays on assigned readings, including the reading of a “classic” ethnography, during the course of the semester.

Class attendance and class participation are very important if you wish to take an active interest in your education and move along the path to enlightenment. Late papers and assignments will not be accepted except in the case of very extenuating circumstances. In such a case, permission to turn in an assignment late must be obtained from the instructor **before** the assignment due date. Such late submissions carry a grade penalty.

Failure to adequately complete any assignment or to take any exam will result in a failing grade for the course. Unexcused absences and/or failure to participate in class can lower

your grade. In the case of a significant number (5 or more) of absences the instructor reserves the right to assign a failing grade for the course. You are asked to self-report on absences. Upon returning to class after an absence, you should sign the attendance notebook with the date of the absence(s) and the reason for the absence.

Incompletes are not normally given in this class. In the rare case where an incomplete may be in order, the student must obtain permission from the instructor and complete all paper work for the Registrar **before** the final day of the course.

COURSE EVALUATION

- 5%..... IRB application & Project proposal
- 5%..... Situating oneself (first impressions of field situation)
- 10%..... What might sensuously and materially matter?
(the senses, space, and material culture)
- 10%..... Expert interview(s) (acknowledging informants)
- 10%..... Mid-term (take-home response paper)
- 10%..... Paper on “Classic ethnography”
- 5%..... Project abstract and public invitation for class presentation
- 35%..... Final paper, presentation and portfolio
(presentation 10%, paper and portfolio 25%)
- 10%..... Class participation & Final Exam (Advice from the field)

READINGS

Texts (to be purchased)

Bohannan, Paul & Dirk van der Elst

1998 *Asking and Listening: Ethnography as Personal Adaptation*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland

Van Maanen, John

1988 *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* Chicago: University of Chicago

Wolf, Margery

1992 *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism and Ethnographic Responsibility*. Stanford: Stanford University

Articles

**Selected chapters from*

Spradley, James and David McCurdy

1988 *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland.

**Geertz, Clifford*

1973 *Thick description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*, *In The Interpretation of Cultures*. Pp. 3-30. New York: Basic Books.

INDIVIDUAL ARTICLES – assigned from among the following

- (1) **Guédon, Marie Françoise**
1994 Dene ways and the ethnographer's culture, *In Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters*, Young & Goulet, eds. Pp. 39-70. Peterborough: Ontario: Broadview.
- (2) **Basso, Keith**
1996 Wisdom sits in places. *In Wisdom Sits in Places*. Pp. 105-152. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico.
- (3) **Behar, Ruth**
1996 The Vulnerable Observer. *In The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Pp. 1-33. Boston: Beacon Press.
- (4) **Sharp, Henry S.**
1996 Experiencing meaning. *In Anthropology and Humanism*. 21(2):171-186.
- (5) **Rosaldo, Renato**
1993 Introduction - Grief and a headhunter's rage. *In Culture and Truth*. Pp. 1-21. Boston: Beacon Press.
- (6) **Angel-Ajani, Asale**
2004 Expert Witness: Notes toward Revisiting the Politics of Listening. *In Anthropology and Humanism*. 29(2):133-144.
- (7) **Smith, David M.**
2003 A gift of Words, a Gift of Truth: A Chipewyan Story of a Hard Winter. *In Anthropology and Humanism*. 28(2):168-179.
- (8) **Toelken, Barre**
1996 From Entertainment to Realization in Navajo Fieldwork. *In The World Observed: Reflections on the Fieldwork Process*. Pp. 1-17. Urbana: U. of Illinois.
- (9) **Macintyre, Martha**
1993 Fictive kinship or mistaken identity? Fieldwork on Tubetube Island, Papua New Guinea. *In Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography*. Pp. 44-62. London, Routledge.

*Kus, Susan

1997 Archaeologist as anthropologist: Much ado about something after all? *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*. 4(3/4):199-213.

*1-Stoller, Eric

1981 Introduction *and* Eye, Mind and Word in Anthropology. *In The Taste of Ethnographic Things*. Pp. 3-11;37-55. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania,

*2-Stoller, Eric

1981 The Reconstruction of Ethnography. *In The Taste of Ethnographic Things*. Pp. 125-141. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania,.

* Lutz, Catherine.

1995 The gender of theory(chapter 12). *In Women Writing Culture*, R. Behar & D. Gordon eds. Pp. 249-266. Berkeley: University of California.

An ethnography to be chosen from the following—first come, first served

Argonauts of the Western Pacific [1922] by Bronislaw Malinowski

The Nuer by [1940] E.E. Evans-Pritchard

The Naven [1958] by Gregory Bateson

The Andaman Islanders [1948] by Radcliffe-Brown

The Chrysanthemum and the Sword [1946] by Ruth Benedict

The Winnebago Tribe [1970] by Paul Radin

Coming of Age in Samoa [1928] by Margaret Mead

Sorcerers of Dobu [1932] by Rio Fortune

We, the Tikopia [1936] by Raymond Firth

Tepoztlan Village [1930] by Robin Redfield

The People of Alor [1944] by Cora Du Bois



DATE	THEME	READING
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- Ⓢ **Readings are due the date under which they are listed**
- Ⓢ **Normally the first portion of class will be devoted to discussion of field projects**

TH--Jan 10 Introduction to class; Ethnography and Ethnology; Ethics
Sign up for individual consultation on project Friday Jan 11 or Monday Jan 14.
Begin reading the information on Anthropology and IRB at the web site of the American Anthropological Association <http://www.aaanet.org/ar/irb/index.htm>

CHOOSING A FIELD LOCATION		
T—Jan 15	Where to begin? And how?	* Chapter from <u>Cultural Experience</u> ; Part I of <u>Asking and Listening</u>
Th—Jan 17	Discussion of IRB review	* Chapter on “Cultural meaning” from <u>Cultural Experience</u> ; Part II of <u>A & L</u>
T—Jan 22	What to note, what to record, etc.	Parts III and IV of <u>A & L</u>
Th--Jan 24	Proposal for term project due including IRB form (class discussion of proposals)	

SITUATING ONSELF

- T—Jan 29 Paying attention; “nothing that is human is alien to me” * Geertz; *Individual article
- Th—Jan 31 **Classic ethnography to be chosen by this date** Thrice Told Tale I and II
- T—Feb 5 Fieldwork III parts III-IV
- Th—Feb 7 Fieldwork III part V
- T—Feb 12 “A general feel”, **Statement of first impressions on field location due** (class discussion of papers)

MATTER AND SENSES - Pragmatics, philosophy and poetics of material existence

- Th—Feb 14 Material girl(s) (and boy[s]) in a material world Tales of the Field
Preface, 1, 2, 3
- T—Feb 19 Midterm take-home handed out Tales 4,5,6
- Th—Feb 21 *Kus, *1-Stoller
- T—Feb 26 **Paper on material culture due**
- Th—Feb 28 **Midterm due (no class meeting)**

RECESS

- T—Mar 4
- Th—Mar 6

CULTURAL INFORMANTS

- T—Mar 11 The “real” experts, indigenous anthropologists *2-Stoller
- BE SURE TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS ON READING THE CLASSIC ETHNOGRAPHY**
- Th—Mar 13 The relationship between fieldwork and theory *Lutz
* Individual “dilemmas” handed out - discussion next time
- T—Mar 18 Ethics (moral dilemmas) - Read relevant sections on ethics from the American Anthropological Association web page <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm>
- Th March 20 **EASTER RECESS**

CLASSIC ETHNOGRAPHIES

- T—Mar 25 Classic ethnography presentations
- Th—Mar 27 **NO CLASS – SAA meetings**

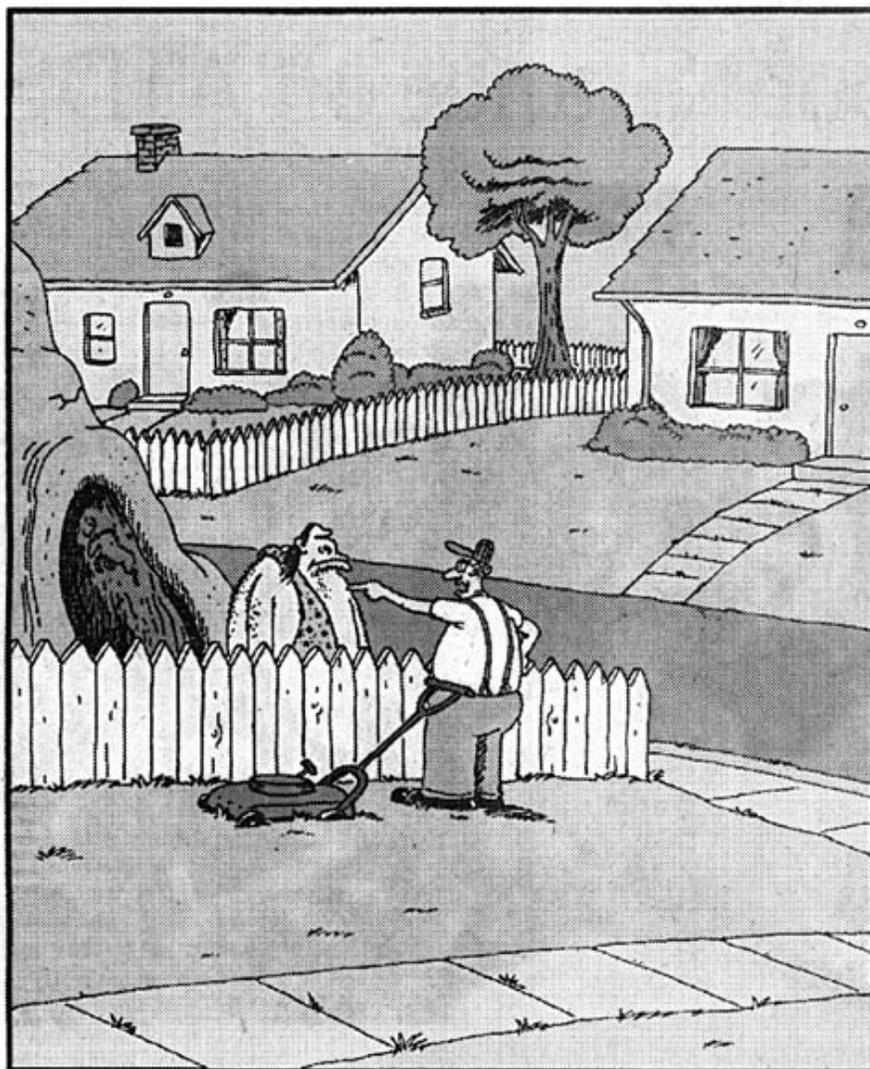
FINAL PROJECTS

- T—Apr 1 **Paper on experts due**
- Th—Apr 3 Bringing projects to finalization
- T—Apr 8 INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION
- Th—Apr 10 INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION

- T— Apr 15 Final project - presentation
- Th— Apr 17 Final project - presentation continued

- T—Apr 22 Final “preening” for Undergraduate Research Seminar
(final ethnography paper due)
- Th—Apr 24 Pulling it together -- final exam take home handed out
- Fri—Apr 25 **AWARDS CONVOCATION and Undergraduate Research Seminar**

FINAL EXAM -- due 1 PM Saturday, May 3rd



For The New York Times

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**“Don’t threaten me, Thagerson! My cousin’s an anthropologist,
and she can make your life *hell!*”**

Project Guidelines

You will be asked to take an “ethnographic” stance¹ in a cultural moment, in a cultural scene. One way to describe a cultural scene is as a “location,” which can be geographic or symbolically constituted, where participants, through repeated shared activities, come to some level of collective understandings. You will be asked to “delve” into the aesthetico-logic of a cultural scene so as to come to some level of understanding and appreciation of how the scene is constituted materially, behaviorally and meaningfully for its participants. How one goes about such “delving” by observing, listening, participating and learning is an important focus of this qualitative methods course. You will further be asked to “translate” your understanding for an audience that is unfamiliar with the cultural scene, all the while taking into account the burden and the challenges of presuming to speak about another (an assignment of much delicacy, indeed.) In this course, you are not being asked to impose formal theory from the top down on your data and experience. If theory is to enter your ethnographic project, it should emerge from the ground up. Consider the following quote from Keith Basso as a description of the challenge before you in this ethnographic methods course:

Heaven, then, in a few grains of carefully inspected sand....

Mulling over imperfect field notes, sorting through conflicting intuitions, and beset by a host of unanswered questions, the ethnographer must somehow fashion a written account that adequately conveys his or her understanding of other peoples’ understandings. ...my own preference is for chronological narratives that move from interpretations of experience raw to those of experience digested, from moments of anxious puzzlement (“What the devil is going on her?”) to subsequent ones of cautious insight (“I think perhaps I see.”) Because that, more often than not, is how ethnographic fieldwork actually unfolds. It is a discomfiting business in which loose ends abound and little is ever certain. But with ample time, a dollop of patience, and steady guidance from interested native instructors, one does make measurable progress. To argue otherwise...is to dismiss ethnography as a valid source of cultural knowledge.... As Isaiah Berlin remarked somewhere, it is better to write of things one believes one knows something about than to anguish in high despair over the manifold difficulties of knowing things at all. And better as well, having taken the plunge, to allow oneself to enjoy it. Doing ethnography can also be a great deal of fun, and disguising the fact on paper, as though it were something to be ashamed of, is less than totally honest.... In crafting one’s prose, as in going about one’s fieldwork, it is always permissible—and sometimes highly informative—to smile and even to laugh.

It is permissible, too, to be pleased—and sometimes downright impressed—with things one happens to learn. From time to time, when luck is on their side, ethnographers stumble onto culturally given ideas whose striking novelty and evident scope seem to cry out for thoughtful consideration beyond their accustomed boundaries. Making these ideas available in perusable form is a worthy endeavor....²

¹ What constitutes an “ethnographic stance” will be the subject of a large number of our class discussions.

² Wisdom Sits in Places, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, 2002, pp. 110-111.

Your participation in this semester long course will come to fruition in a 15-20 page ethnographic project that will include text **and** illustrations **and/or** appendices. You will also be asked to make a formal presentation to the class on your final project. Since the final project will be due before the day of the Undergraduate Research Seminar, you are required to give a second presentation of your project in that setting.

A project proposal and several additional short papers during the semester will contribute to the production of your final ethnographic project.

GETTING STARTED

You will need to choose a cultural scene in the Memphis community that will be the focus of your ethnographic project and the site of your fieldwork. In previous years students have produced ethnographies on a yoga studio, Dungeons and Dragons aficionados, an anarchist co-op, a movie crew, a donut shop, an independent bookstore, an independent coffee shop, a health food market, a karaoke bar, an animal shelter and a fire-station.

You will need permission from the individuals that you will be observing and interacting with to carry out the project, as well as clearance from the Rhodes Institutional Review Board (IRB) on non-medical research involving human subjects. Children and pregnant women should be avoided as subjects of research as obtaining authorization for such studies is complicated and difficult.

"KEEPING IT TOGETHER"

Consideration should be given to how to record and organize the data from your fieldwork. Minimally one should keep a field notebook and a journal. We will further discuss how one should organize a portfolio that will constitute not only the basic data from which you will create your final project but also as a record of your work that will be available for periodic review and final grading.

You will write 4 preliminary papers previous to your final project. While these papers will follow a temporal sequence in their due dates, it is important to recognize the artificiality of this sequencing. Ethnographic field work, itself, cannot always be forced into a schedule convenient to the ethnographer. In particular, the data collection for the last 3 papers should take place simultaneously and continuously throughout the semester.

Below you will find initial guidelines for the 4 papers. Further details and discussion of these assignments will take place in class over the course of the semester.



PAPER I - PROJECT PROPOSAL (Due Thursday January 24th)

This 3-5 page paper will detail your proposed ethnographic project. Issues that should be addressed in this proposal should include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Defining your field site
- Why you choose this particular cultural scene
- How you will be “positioned” (observer, volunteer, participant, etc.) within the cultural scene you have chosen to investigate.
- Time budget for the project
- How to reciprocate for peoples’ time and cooperation in your study
- Ethical implications of your study and its methodology

PAPER II - SITUATING ONESELF (Due Tuesday February 12th)

This 4-6 page paper will focus on (1) your first impressions in the field (of people, place, rhythms, language, sensorial stimuli, etc.) (2) specifics of how you “situated” yourself in the cultural scene you are investigating, (3) developing a theme that will serve as an organizing focus to your study, and (4) unforeseen questions, obstacles, issues, etc. that have come to your attention.

PAPER III - MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE SENSES (Due Tuesday February 26th)

This 5-8 page paper will specifically focus on the “material” and “sensuous” aspects of the cultural scene you are observing and in which you are participating. You will discuss how the materials and experiences of place, space, adornment, touch, taste, smell, sound, sight, rhythm, etc. **constitute** the cultural scene and **constitute** experience and meaning in the cultural scene. You will also face the challenge of addressing how to present these “materials” in both writing and “illustration” (e.g., mapping, diagramming, sketching, recording, photographing, etc.)

PAPER IV - TALKING TO THE “EXPERTS” (Due Tuesday April 1st)

This 5-7 page paper will focus on an expert(s) interview. It will explore the nature of social relations in a field situation, the importance of “informants” to fieldwork, and the challenges (e.g., to tape or not to tape, degree of structuring and formality) of interviewing in the field.

FINAL PROJECT REPORT (Due Tuesday April 22nd)

In the final project report of 15-20 pages you will present your findings. Two challenges that will face you are (1) what to present and (2) how to present it. Further discussion of this assignment will take place over the course of the semester.



Classic Ethnography Paper Guidelines



What follows is a suggested outline for the written report on your classic ethnography. (Suggested length is 7 pages.)

- 1) 1-2 page introduction and general summary
 - a) Include some statement as to who the author is (you might want to do a quick search to find out who this individual is with respect to the discipline of anthropology.)
 - b) Space and time – when was the study done and over what length of time, where was the study done (include a map in your paper.)
 - c) If you know why the author undertook the study, explain their choice.
 - d) What is covered (or not covered) in the ethnography
 - i) Is it classic and comprehensive (e.g., subsistence & technology, social organization, ideology)?
 - ii) What is the organization of the chapters, that is, in what order is the information provided?
 - iii) Are there noticeable absences of topics (e.g., gender, history, colonial activity)?
- 2) 4-5 pages discussion of several themes that have come up in class discussion, and in particular, brought up in the materials we have read for this class, especially the works of Wolf and Van Maanen. Some example themes are listed below.
 - a) Authority and writing style
 - b) Overt or covert theory guiding the presentation of the data
 - c) Overt or covert question or theme guiding the presentation of the data
 - d) Aspects of language and vocabulary
 - i) Are indigenous concepts being automatically translated and classified into the ethnographer's "etic" perspective?
 - ii) How much of an effort is made to discuss and explore alternative conceptual fields of the indigenous culture?
 - iii) Do we hear any voices, direct quotes, from the people themselves?
 - e) Are the terms "etic" and "emic" of any use in discussing the ethnography
 - f) Is the ethnography "gendered"?
 - g) Is the ethnography written in the "ethnographic present," that is as if the people are in a timeless and pristine cultural setting?
 - h) Is the ethnographer aware of his/her situatedness?