

Ethnographic Writing and Ethnographic Methods

Anthropology 300 Spring 2007

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Office hours: Mondays 5-6 or by appointment

This course is designed to introduce you to some of the central issues in ethnographic research and writing over the last 100 years. The course is organized loosely around a contrast between objectivist/modernist modes of research and writing on the one hand, and constructivist/postmodernist/feminist on the other. Students will be asked to explore the implications of these theoretical differences, and their preferences in regard to them, as they work themselves through the stages of ethnographic research and write up. Each of our classes will be divided into a theory and a practice section. In the former we will explore the issues of knowledge and its relationship to power, experience and subjectivity, the uses of representation, the complicated ethics of field work, to name a few. In the practice section the class, we will workshop your ongoing ethnographic project.

Requirements and Grading

45% Final paper (25 pages)

45% Portfolio

10% Class presentation

Portfolio

Will be handed in 2 times in the semester (see syllabus for dates).

It will include:

1. Participant observation notes – to include: jottings in the interview if that is not inappropriate to do, “harvesting of head” immediately afterwards (i.e. most salient observations whether of yourself, of the people you are participating with/observing, the setting, the problems you are having in the setting, what people said, what they were wearing, tentative insights, preliminary reflections, etc.), and the more detailed notes on participant observation made once you get home to your own desk.
2. A list of discourses that constructed your understanding of your field site/local culture prior to your entry into it, or else at this very preliminary stage, or both.
3. Fieldwork proposal.
4. One to two pages on two ethical issues that have emerged in your work in your field site.

5. Three experimental paragraphs of your ethnography written in manner of 3 of the following: Evans-Pritchard, Abu-lughod, Bourgois, Behar, Brown.
6. A paragraph about your locatedness in relation to your project.
7. 15 single spaced page minimum of recordings of interviews, 7 pages at first turn in and 15 at second.
8. 1-2 page “Flyover of ethnography”
9. Annotated bibliography

Criteria for grading the portfolio:

- Presence of assigned items
- Quality of assigned items
- Degree of engagement/effort
- Depth of reflection

Portfolio will be graded after first turn-in, and the remainder after the second turn-in.

Books Available at Bookstore

Gupta and Ferguson (eds.). 1997. *Anthropological Locations*

Fife, Wayne. 2005. *Doing Fieldwork*

Trinh Minh-ha. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other.*

Geertz, Clifford. 1988. *Works and Lives.*

The following will also be available but do not purchase until after first class (and you will purchase only one of them).

Brown, Karen McCarthy. 1991. *Mama Lola.*

Behar, Ruth. 1993. *Translated Woman.*

Bourgois, Phillippe. 1995. *In Search of Respect.*

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1993. *Writing Women’s Worlds.*

Articles will be on electronic reserve.

The dates and assignments below are subject to change. This schedule of reading and assignments needs to occasionally be adjusted to meet the variable realities of the student research projects.

Jan. 29 Introduction

Feb. 5 What is fieldwork?

Reading:Fife *Doing Fieldwork* c. 5

Said *Orientalism* pp. 1-15.

Passaro “You can’t take the subway to the field!” In *Anthropological Locations*

Gupta and Ferguson. "Discipline and Practice" In Gupta and Ferguson (eds. *Anthropological Locations* pp. 1-8, 11-16, 35 – end. Recommended though not required.

Assignment:

Bring to class a piece of paper on which you have written:

- your tentative final topic as well as questions and confusions you have about the topic.
- notes about what you have done to make first contact or notes about that contact if you have already made it

In class:

- In class you will be given a chance to come to (or get closer to) final resolution about your choice of topic.
- Practice participant observation (of the class).
- Practice approach to and negotiation of field site.

Feb. 12. What is an ethnography?

Reading:

Geertz *Works and Lives* c. 1, and p. 32-48.

Assignment:

Do first participant observation.

- Take jottings (if it is not inappropriate to do so), do a preliminary "harvesting of your head" immediately afterwards. This harvesting should include observations of all kinds: of yourself, of the people you are participating with/observing, the setting, the problems you are having in the setting, the confusions and problems you are having in writing up. obviously you cannot write down everything but I encourage you not to think of any topic as inappropriate to include.
- Bring copies of one page of your harvested head to class.
- Bring to class a page on which you have written five discourses that constructed your understanding of your field site/local culture prior to your entry into it, or else at this very preliminary stage.

In class:

- Presentation of harvested heads and discourses
- ***Class presentation of P. Bourgois In Search of Respect.***

Put one representative excerpt on course conference or reserve for students to read prior to presentation.

Feb. 19 No class but I recommend you work ahead because of the work crunch coming on March 5.

Feb. 26 Participant observation and the ethics of field work

Fife c. 6 & 7

Patai "U. S. academics and third world women: is ethical research possible?" in S. Gluck and D. Patai (eds.) *Women's Words*.

Assignment:

Second participant observation
Start to work on annotated bibliography.

In class:

- Each student bring to class notes from a second participant observation, including both jottings (if appropriate) and harvesting the head.
- Two students: present one to two pages (total) on two ethical issues that have emerged in your work in your field site.
- In class demo and practice of interviewing.
- Class viewing of *The Couple in the Cage* if there is time.

Mar. 5 Knowledge, power and representation

Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Woman, Native, Other* pp. 1-76.

Assignment:

- **Fieldwork proposal.** I will give you the details of how to do this as we get close to this assignment.
- Do first interview and record it either by taping (and doing a full or partial transcription using counter numbers) or process recording style, or a combination.
- Continue participant observation.

In class:

- Discussion of field work proposals
- In class demo of interviewing and class practices
- Presentation of excerpts from texts of one or two student interviews.
- Report on annotated bibliography
- Film: *Reassemblage* (excerpt only)

Mar. 12 Knowledge, power and representation, part 2: the ethnographic gaze and issues of subject and object.

Reading:

Trinh Minh-ha pp. 77-end.

Assignment:

- Do second interview and record it.
- Presentation of excerpts from texts of one or two student interviews.
- Continue to keep participant observation notes.
- **Turn portfolio in (to include items 1-4, 7 as specified, and a good start on 9).**

In class:

- Discussion of where you are now in research process.

- Presentation of excerpts from texts of one or two student interviews.
- Two students: present one to two pages (total) on two ethical issues that have emerged in your work in your field site.
- ***In class presentation of R. Behar Translated Woman***

Put one representative excerpt on course conference for students to read prior to presentation.

Mar. 19 Spring vacation

Mar. 26 . Arguments for and against postmodern ethnography

Reading:

Abu-Lughod *Writing Women's Worlds*, Introduction.

Mascia-Less, Sharpe, and Cohen. "The postmodernist turn in anthropology: cautions from a feminist perspective" *sign* 15 (1).

Assignment:

- Do a third interview and record it.
- Continue to keep participant observation notes.

In class:

- Discussion of arguments for and against postmodernist ethnography and its relevance to you.
- Presentation of excerpts from texts of one or two student interviews.
- Two students: present one to two pages (total) on two ethical issues that have emerged in your work in your field site.
- ***Class presentation of L. Abu-Lughod Writing Women's Worlds.***

Put one representative excerpt on course conference for students to read prior to presentation.

In class viewing of excerpt from film *Cannibal Tours*.

Apr. 2 What convention will you write in? modernist or postmodernist or something inbetween?

Reading:

Clifford "On ethnographic authority" in J. Clifford *The Predicament of Cultures*

Geertz *Works and Lives* c. 3 (on Evans-Pritchard)

A brief excerpt from E-P

Assignment:

- Write 3 paragraphs of your ethnography (it may be the same paragraph repeated in varied form). Each paragraph respectively should imitate the ethnographic conventions of one of the following: Evans-Pritchard, Brown, Abu-Lughod, Bourgois, Behar. In other words, there will, for example, be one paragraph in the style of Bourgois, one in that of Behar, and a third in that of Brown.

- Continued interviewing and participant observing and recording both.

In class:

- Discussion of convention in which you will write.
- Continued presentation of excerpts from texts of student interviews.
- ***In Class presentation of Karen McCarthy Brown Mama Lola***

Put one representative excerpt on course conference for students to read prior to presentation.

April 9. How will you, or will you not, situate yourself in your text?

Reading:

Scott “Experience” in J. Butler and J. Scott *Feminists theorize the Political*.

Assignment:

- Write a paragraph on issues of your locatedness, discourses as they relate to it, and how you think you might deal with this issue in your ethnography.
- Continue to interview and do participant observation as needed.
- **Turn portfolio in whole portfolio with exception of item 8).**

April 16. No class. Class is moved to April 17.

April 17 Reflection and “fly over”

Bring to class a one to two page “flyover of your ethnography”. Write this page or two up as if you were flying over your ethnography in a helicopter. Can you see a structure emerging? Can you see the convention in which you think you want to write, even if only vaguely? How will you use your quotes? You can do this “flyover” in writing or as a diagram, in fact in whatever way is easiest for you. This will be turned in and considered as a part of overall portfolio grade.

Also bring a list of 3 to 5 problems you are encountering.

Make copies of both the above for distribution in class.

April 23 First Draft Due – 12 -15 pages.

Class party! And general rehash of where we are and where we have to go from here. This is a class where we get to think in depth about each other’s papers, draw them on the board, suggest ideas, build on each others’ ideas, and generally have a fun intellectual free for all.

Assignment:

- Bring to class a 12-15 page first draft of your paper. Think about the purpose of doing an early 15 page draft. It is to give you an opportunity to fly your paper by me and another person in the class and get our feedback. So design your paper in

such a way as to be able to get feedback on what is confusing or troubling to you. The paper can have some sections written and some sketched etc. bring two copies of your paper to class, one for me and one for your peer reviewer.

- You will each have the opportunity to have the class's undivided attention for 3-5 minutes of presentation time and then some discussion time. Use that time to present a problem you are having with you paper, a problem that you can present in a manner that the class can connect with it, and on which it would be reasonable to expect that the class could give you useful feedback.

April 30 TBA

May 7 TBA