

Anthropology 697CC
Spring 2009
Tuesdays 1:00-3:45 p.m.
Location: Machmer E-25
Professor Betsy Krause
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Office hours: Thursdays, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and by appointment

Writing Ethnography

"For us the problem appeared to be entirely one of poetics, of how to transform that world which for us was *the* world into a work of literature."

--Italo Calvino, *The Paths to the Spiders' Nests*

Description

This graduate seminar takes ethnography as its object of analysis and its subject of practice. The seminar provides students with tools for thinking through the politics of representation. We examine the ongoing consequences of the representational crisis that plagued ethnography, with vehemence in the 1980s, and investigate how and to what degree the genre has recovered. As Veena Das asks, "What is it to engage the life of the other in the context of the everyday?" We may also question whether we are committed to ethnography as a genre, and if so how and why? In addition, the seminar will provide students with a space to practice their own ethnographic writing. In both our reading and writing, we will explore conventional as well as experimental (or blurred) forms of representation, including critical ethnography, the ethnographic novel, creative non-fiction, and cross-cultural memoir.

Goals

This course aims to familiarize students with the genre of ethnography and to provide them a context in which to produce their own ethnographic texts.

Requirements

Students will be asked to produce two essays: one short essay (maximum of 10 pages) reflecting on the readings from the first half of the course; one longer essay (20 pages maximum) in the ethnographic sub-genre of their choice.

Grading

Review Essay	30%
Ethnographic Essay	50%
Presentation	10%
Participation	10%

Presentations

Each student will be expected to present on one topic of their choice and each student will serve once as recorder of our seminar discussion. (These roles may be shared, depending on the number of seminar participants.) Presenters will be

asked to (1) summarize the readings; (2) identify lucid, muddy and problematic aspects of the readings; and (3) raise questions for discussion. Recorders will take notes, write up the notes, and distribute them to seminar participants the following week. This approach is designed to create a record and foster dialogue as the seminar proceeds.

Participation

Seminar participants are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and actively engage in discussion. Seminar sessions will include occasional writing prompts. During the second half of the course, the seminar will run as a workshop and we will read and comment on each other's writing according to a mutually agreed upon set of guidelines.

Course Materials

The following required texts will be available from Food for Thought Books, 106 N. Pleasant, Amherst, as well as on reserve at the UMass W.E.B. DuBois Library. Readings may also be made available through Spark.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Geertz, Clifford. *Works and Lives*.

Hecht, Tobias. 2006. *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mintz, Sidney. 1974 [1960]. *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Ragusa, Kym. 2005. *The Skin Between Us*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Stoller, Paul. 1999. *Jaguar: A Story of Africans in America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Week 1 (January 27): Introduction & Aspirations

Ruth Behar. 1999. "Ethnography: Cherishing Our Second-Fiddle Genre," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(5): 472-484.

Writing prompt: Do you believe in ethnography as a genre? What characterizes good ethnography? Is the genre worth keeping?

Week 2 (February 3): Narrative Ethnography and its Precedents

Barbara Tedlock. 1991. From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47(1): 69-94.

Sidney Mintz. 1974 [1960]. *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Week 3 (February 10): Ethnographic Representation and its Crisis

Clifford Geertz. 1973. Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. Pp. 3-30. New York: BasicBooks.

James Clifford. 1986. Introduction: Partial Truths. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. Pp. 1-26. Berkeley: University of California Press.

William Roseberry and Nicole Polier. 1989. Tristes Tropes: Post-Modern Anthropologists Encounter the Other and Discover Themselves. *Economy and Society* 18: 245-264.

Paul Willis and Mats Trondman. 2000. Manifesto for Ethnography. *Ethnography* 1(1):5-16.

Virginia Dominguez. 2000. For a Politics of Love and Rescue. *Cultural Anthropology* 15(3): 361-393.

Week 4 (February 17): Ethnographic Recovery

Lila Abu-Lughod. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Week 5 (February 24): Blurred Genres: Ethnographic Fiction

William Deresiewicz. 2006. Representative Fictions. The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture, and Volume 2: Forms and Themes, Franco Moretti, ed. (Book review essay.) *The Nation* 238(19): 23-28.

Kirin Narayan. 1999. Ethnography and Fiction: Where is the Border? *Anthropology and Humanism* 24(2): 134-147.

Paul Stoller. 1999. *Jaguar: A Story of Africans in America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Week 6 (March 3): Auto-Ethnography vs. Memoir

Writing prompt: How do you view the predicament of the ethnographer's role in the final writing product?

Renato Rosaldo. 1989. Grief and a Headhunter's Rage. In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Ruth Behar. 1996. (Selections) *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Kym Ragusa. 2005. *The Skin Between Us*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Week 7 (March 10) Blurred Genres

Tobias Hecht. 2006. *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel*

"The Art of Ethnography: Narrative Style as A Research Method"
Selected essays from 2006 AAA panelists

Due: Essay 1

Spring recess March 14-22

***if available, proofs of Elizabeth L. Krause, *Unraveled: A Weaver's Tale of Life Gone Modern*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 8 (March 24): Workshop. Presentation of student work-in-progress.

Week 9 (March 31): Workshop. Presentation of student work-in-progress.

Week 10 (April 7): Workshop. Presentation of student work-in-progress.

Week 11 (April 14): Workshop. Presentation of student work-in-progress.

Holiday—Patriot's Day, Monday 4/20; Monday Class followed Tuesday 4/21

Week 12 (April 28) Workshop. Presentation of student work-in-progress.

Week 13 (May 5): Workshop. Presentation of student work-in-progress.

Week 14 (May 12): Last class. Presentation of final project. Final paper due.