Folklore 502
FIELDWORK THEORY AND PRACTICE

Prof. Mary Hufford       Wednesdays/ Some Fridays  1-4*
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Introduction

This seminar in place-based ethnography provides an introduction to ethnographic fieldwork, with a focus on how the performance of folklore bears on the making of place. A place-based approach to ethnography is understood as a critical means of engaging with communities struggling toward alternatives to globalized economic development that is destructive of place. Choosing a setting in which to practice weekly field exercises throughout the semester, you will explore how people generate social space and humanize the physical environment through a variety of genres of stylized communication and performance.

Readings and discussion will proceed along two lines. One will introduce you to ethnographic methods and issues, while the other will consider theories and case studies of placemaking, with special, though not exclusive, attention to urban settings. For case studies we will turn to writers from the disciplines of folklore, performance studies, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and journalism. Students will explore 1) how communities generate social space (place) and inhabit, celebrate, and critique it through various forms of social interaction and performance; 2) how to observe and document practices of placemaking through writing, still photography, and audio recording technologies; and 3) how to present ethnographic research in a way that is accessible, meaningful, and useful to communities for whom ethnography can make a difference.

In addition to doing the readings, participating in class discussions and attending guest-led workshops in writing, photography, sound recording, and archiving, work for the course will include selecting a field site in the Philadelphia area that you can visit at least three times weekly; writing up fieldnotes for each visit; documenting your site using technologies of tape recorder and still photography; observing and documenting a performance event at your site; developing an IRB protocol for your research, and archiving your field materials. The final product, due December 14, will be a descriptive essay about your site and the ethnographic questions it raises, concluding with a proposal for continuing fieldwork in this setting, due December 14. I will distribute guidelines for each assignment as we go. Due dates for other assignments are noted in the schedule of topics.

All required and recommended readings and dvds will be on overnight reserve in the Rosengarten Reading room, and readings (but not dvds) will also be on reserve in the
Folklore Archive. Full citations appear in the attached bibliography. Texts available for purchase at Penn Book Center, 130 S. 34th Street include:

Michael Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*
Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography*
Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multi-Centered Society*
Mary Hufford, *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*

**Schedule of Topics and Readings**

**September 7:** (I am away this week: please pick up materials and assignment from Joyce Roselle in Logan 303)

**September 14: People Studying People: The Object of Observation**
**Req:** Watch “Kitchen Stories.” (two copies on reserve in Rosengarten; also available at Blockbuster’s Video) and review handout to prepare for discussion.
  - Agar, *The Professional Stranger*, pp. 1-72, and 113-131
  - Hufford, “Ethnography.” *World Encyclopedia of Folklore*
  - Noyes, “Folklore.” *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*
  - Lippard, “All over the Place,” in *The Lure of the Local*, pp. 1-20


**September 21: Producing Locality: Commons, Enclosures, and Wild Space**
**Req:** Watch Precious Places, from Scribe Video, on reserve
  - Lippard, “Around Here” in *The Lure of the Local*, pp. 21-61

  - Cooper, *Subway Art*

**Assignment:** Identify a site, or several, that interest you, and be prepared to discuss in class. Begin drafting an information sheet about your project that you can hand to people at your site.

**September 28: Noticing Place: A Writing Workshop**
**Guest Speaker:** Joanne Mulcahy, Northwest Writing Institute
Req: Agar, “Getting Started,” “Who Are You to Do This?” and “Beginning Fieldwork,” 73-166.


Assignment: Choose your fieldsite and visit it on at least three different occasions. Describe any “cultural scenes” you observe. Write up your notes and bring them to class.

October 5: Fieldnotes and Background Research


Assignment: Review your fieldnotes and annotate them to develop questions and interaction with “headnotes.” Formulate questions about your site that can be answered through archival and library research and develop a profile of your site to bring to Friday’s workshop.

Friday October 7: Resources for Place-Based Ethnography in Philadelphia
Guest Speaker, Miriam Camitta

Assignment: Watch Crosstown, a film that Miriam Camitta produced about a Philadelphia community’s three decade long struggle against the proposed Crosstown Expressway, and make note of the kinds of resources used in the film that could be helpful to you in researching your site. Come with the list of resources you’ve identified for the Precious Places and Crosstown videos, and with questions about where to find information on your site.

October 12: Genres of Historical Discourse and the Performance of Place
   Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places.” In Senses of Place, pp. 53-90.

**Assignment:** Identify at least three genres of vernacular historical discourse in The Lure of the Local and recall as many as you can from the Precious Places video. Begin talking with people at your site about the history of the place, if you have not already. What do you learn, and through what forms of historical discourse? Develop a list of potential performances at your site that you could study further, as well as a list of key consultants you would need to be able to work with. Refine your information sheet as needed and create release forms for photography and tape recordings. Bring these to class, along with your fieldnotes for this week.

For examples of release forms see:
http://www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork/formsmenu.html

**October 19: No class – AFS meetings in Atlanta, Georgia**

**October 26 and 28: Ethnographic Photography Workshop with Richard Bell**

**Req:** Cooper, “The Folklore Photograph.” Voices, 26:1-4.
Lippard, “Out the Picture Window.” Lure of the Local, pp. 178-192

**Assignment:** Develop a list of photographic images you would like to make to convey a sense of the place you have chosen to work in. Bring this with you to the workshop.

**November 2: The Dialogue of Local with Larger Than Local: Critical Regionalism and the Ethnographic Interview**

Shuman, “Dismantling Local Culture.” Western Folklore 52:345-364
Lippard, “Around Here,” The Lure of the Local, pp. 61-82

Tsing, Anna. Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection

**Assignment:** Articulate an emerging cluster of larger research questions raised in this week’s readings that may apply to your site, and develop a set of interview questions/topics designed to get at your research questions. Bring these to class, along with your fieldnotes for this week.

*Some resources for developing your interview:*

**November 9 (Friday) and 11: Audio Recording Workshop with Barry Dornfeld**


**Assignment:** Check the place-based workshop webpage for further listening and reading assignments: [http://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/placebased_workshops.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/placebased_workshops.html)
Identify a cultural scene or performative event to record over the weekend and bring fieldnotes about its soundscape to the workshop.

**November 16: Ethics in Fieldwork and Civic Professionalism**

Lippard, “Down to Earth: Land Use,” *The Lure of the Local*, pp. 124-177

**Online Resources:**
A Statement of Ethics for the American Folklore Society [http://www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/ethics.cfm](http://www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/ethics.cfm)

**Assignment:** In your fieldnotes for this week, incorporate reflections on ethical aspects of your fieldwork, related either to issues raised in the readings, or to issues that, in your
view, the readings neglect. Bring in several pages of transcription of your field recording from last week to share in class.

**November 23: Backtalking the Logic of Fungibility: Place, Public Policy, and the Ethnographer**


**November 30: Archiving Places: The Social Life of Ethnographic Materials**

**Guest Speaker:** Catherine Kerst, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress


Parsons, “What is an Ethnographic Collection?”

[http://www.loc.gov/folklife/ethno.html](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/ethno.html)

Review the American Folklore Society’s working version of an ethnographic thesaurus at [http://www.etproject.org](http://www.etproject.org)

**Assignment:** Inventory your field collection so far and bring in the inventory, along with an example of each kind of material and format.

**Dec. 7: Perils, Politics, and Poetics of Writing Ethnography**


[http://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/stewart.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/stewart.html)

Dorst, John. “Moving Skin.” (Handout)

**Assignment:** Be prepared to describe, discuss, and defend the politics and poetics of your approach to writing ethnography.
December 14: Presentations in class.
December 16: Due date for turning in finalized projects.


Bateson, Gregory. *Steps to An Ecology of Mind*.


Cobb, Edith.


--------. (unpublished ms) “Moving Skin.”


Ives, Edward D. *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History*.


Tsing, Anna. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*.


Some online resources:

American Folklore Society: [http://afsnet.org/sitemap.cfm](http://afsnet.org/sitemap.cfm)

American Folklife Center: [http://www.loc.gov/folklife/](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/)

American Sociological Association: http://www.asanet.org/index.ww

Center for Folklore and Ethnography: http://www.sas.upenn.edu/folklore/center/links.html

Philadelphia Folklore Project: http://www.folkloreproject.org/

Place Matters: http://www.placematters.net/flash/home.htm

Project for a Civic and Environmental Commons: http://www.uky.edu/RGS/AppalCenter/research/pcec.html

Public Interest Anthropology at Penn: http://www.sas.upenn.edu/anthro/CPIA/

Scribe Video: http://www.scribe.org/

Indivisible: Stories of American Community: http://www.indivisible.org/

Tending the Commons: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cmnshtml/cmnshome.html

Downloadable publications on Community-Based Approaches to Environmental Protection: http://www.epa.gov/ecocommunity/bib.htm