

Fall 2018
Urban and Public Affairs 680
Room: UPA 117
Thursday 2:30-5:15

Dr. Lisa Björkman
Office: UPA 119
office hours by appointment
email: lisa.bjorkman@louisville.edu

Urban Ethnography
UPA-680-05-4172
Fall 2018

NOTE: syllabus subject to revision during the semester

This seminar-style course explores three dimensions of ethnography: first as a distinct form of knowledge; secondly as a research method; and thirdly as a genre of writing. The course is organized around the following questions:

- How is ethnographic knowledge different from the knowledge produced by other research methodologies?
- What's the difference between positivist and nonpositivist knowledge claims?
- How are ethnographic methods different from other research methods?
- What is a "fieldsite" and what exactly do ethnographers do there?
- How does the writing process proceed from jottings to fieldnotes to ethnography?
- What's the relationship between ethnographic methods and ethnographic writing?
- How is this relationship between research and writing similar or different from other methodological traditions?
- Why is writing so important for good ethnography? What makes an ethnographic text persuasive or convincing? What is the criteria for assessing ethnographic evidence?

We explore these questions by learning from scholars who have written about their fieldwork—from entering the field to ethical issues encountered there. Our aim in this course is not only to learn about but also to practice these various methods and methodologies. To that end, students will engage in hands-on experiential learning, identifying a site of study within the university or in city of Louisville, conducting research exercises, and writing fieldnotes.

Requirements, assignments, evaluation:

Class participation and Presentations (30%): Students are expected to attend seminars, complete all of the readings, come to class prepared to discuss the texts and with questions.

Research Portfolio (35%): Fieldnotes Assignments, Research Proposal, Peer Review

There are four official fieldnotes assignments (but as we will discuss you are encouraged to write more!). By the second class you need to have purchased a composition book for writing fieldnotes. You will use this notebook throughout the semester to take fieldnotes on your research site and topic. At least two of the fieldwork exercises will be handwritten in this notebook. The rest are to be submitted on Blackboard by noon on Wednesday, the day before class.

Research proposal: You are to write a 5-page (or so) research proposal explaining the puzzle that to explore ethnographically and the significance that research question. We will discuss the assignment in class. Peer review sessions of the proposals will take place in class, and you will use this feedback to guide your revisions. Responding to this feedback, you will submit the revised, final draft with the research portfolio

Reflections Essays (20%): there are two reflections essays, each worth 10%

Final Essay (15%): Write a 4000 word book review of Alice Goffman's *On the Run*, in which you outline the following things: the author's overall argument; the evidence for the argument; the methods and techniques by which the author arrived at the evidence; whether you are convinced by the evidence (in light of his methods); any doubts or concerns – ethical concerns, methodological issues – that you might have; what contribution the book makes to knowledge about the city; why this knowledge matters (i.e., the 'stakes' of the book's intervention). You will cite no fewer than eight texts that we have read for class. Have another look in particular at Dvora Yanow's article "dear author, dear reader," paying particular attention to Yanow's discussion of the elements in the "Being There" section: place, time, exposure, positionality, access narratives, data details and representation. As Yanow writes, "these are commonly part of a research design and you have most likely attended to them in planning your work. They also belong, however, in one way or another, in your manuscript. They typically figure in methods narratives, but they also come through less directly in the descriptive presentations of data and their analytic discussion." Reflecting on Goffman's book, assess her treatment of each of these elements. Reflect as well on the debates about "transparency."

Books recommended for purchase:

Alice Goffman *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (Picador, 2015)

Mitchell Duneier *Sidewalk*

Timothy Pachirat, *Among Wolves: Ethnography and the Immersive Study of Power*

Katherine Boo, *Beyond the Beautiful Forevers*

Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I., Shaw, L.L., 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Second Edition. University of Chicago Press.

Week 1 (August 23) introductions: What is Ethnography? knowledge, method, writing

How is ethnographic knowledge different from the knowledge produced by other research methodologies? How are ethnographic methods different from other methods? What is ethnography as a genre of writing?

Week 2 (August 30) Ethnographic Knowledge

What constitutes ethnographic knowledge? What's the difference between positivist and non-positivist knowledge claims? How should interpretivist knowledge claims be assessed?

Readings

- Pachirat *Among Wolves* Chapters 1-3
- 2016. Schaffer *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. (chapter one)
- Yanow, Dvora "Dear Author, Dear Reader: the third hermeneutic in writing and reviewing ethnography" in Schatz, ed. *Political Ethnography*

Week 3 (September 6) fieldsite: relational ethnography, abductive analysis, infrastructure as method

Readings

- Desmond, Matthew, "Relational Ethnography," *Theory and Society*, 43: 547–579. (2014)
- Agar, M.H. On the ethnographic part of the mix: a multigenre tale of the field. *Organ. Res. Methods* 2010, 13 (2), 286–303.
- Stefan Timmermans and Ido Tavory (2012) "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis"
- Lisa Björkman "infrastructure as method"

Recommended

- Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play, Notes on a Balinese Cockfight" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 412-417.

Week 4 (September 13): Power and positionality

- Pachirat, Timothy (2009) "the political in political ethnography"
- Pachirat *Among Wolves* (Chapter 4)

PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE: Initial project description due in class: 1000-2000 page description of the research project: statement of the puzzle that animates the research, the research question, the choice of fieldsite or field sites and what you hope to learn about. Bring hard copy to class because we will workshop the proposals in class.

NOTE: We will discuss Boo's book next week but get started now because we have other readings for next week as well.

Week 5 (September 20): Reflexivity

- Katherine Boo *Beyond the Beautiful Forevers* (ENTIRE)
- Anand Vaidya "A Subtle Alignment"

Reflections Essay: 2000-word review of Katherine Boo's book assessing it's character as an

'ethnography' in light of Vaidya's review and reflecting on our discussions on reflexivity, positionality and power

(Revised Proposals due)

Week 6 (September 27): writing fieldnotes

- Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Fieldnotes assignments #1 (jottings and fieldnotes) due in class

Week 7 (October 4): Space

- Dvora Yanow, "How Built Spaces Mean: A Semiotics of Space" in Interpretation and Method
- Siegfried Kracauer, "On Employment Agencies: The Construction of a Space" and "Hotel Lobby"
- Lefebvre "production of space" (extracts)

NO CLASS OCTOBER 11

Fieldnotes Assignment #2 (DUE OCTOBER 11): Reflecting on the readings, conduct a spatial ethnography of your fieldsite. How is your site bound spatially and temporally?

Week 8 (October 18): sensory ethnography and sound

- Sarah Pink and David Howes 2010. "The Future of Sensory Anthropology/The Anthropology of the Senses." *Social Anthropology* 18, no. 3: 331-333.
- Rice, T., 2010. Learning to listen: auscultation and the transmission of auditory knowledge. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16, S41-S61.
- Arquette, S., 2004. Sounds Like City. *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, 159-168.
- Timothy Pachirat, *Among Wolves* Chapter 5

RECOMMENDED

- (youtube): Ingold "To Learn is to Improvise a Movement Along a Way of Life" **(parts 1-6)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDaaPaK-N5o>

- Ingold, Tim “Anthropology Comes to Life” in *Being Alive*

Fieldnotes Assignment #3: sensory ethnography (sound)

Conduct a sensory ethnography of your fieldsite. Look at your past fieldnotes: are there certain senses that you rely on more often than others? What have you learned from focusing on other senses? While conducting your fieldwork this week, focus on “learning to listen” in the ways that Rice suggests. In your fieldsite, do you encounter any sort of noise that you dislike? Relate your findings to Arquette’s discussions of urban sound and noise.

Week 9 (October 25): theory, ethnography and ethnographic theory

- Mitch Duneier *Sidewalk* (parts 1-3)

Suggested further reading

- Cerwonka, A., Malkki, L.H., 2007. *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. University Of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Week 10 (November 1): Promises (or Pitfalls) of Ethnography as Theory

- Mitch Duneier *Sidewalk* (parts 4-5)
- Waquant: “Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography” (first section, on Duneier’s book)

Reflections Essay #2: 2000 word essay evaluating Duneier’s book in light of Wacquant’s critiques and Pachirat’s discussion.

Week 11 (November 8): ethnographic interview: *What makes an interview ethnographic?*

- Lee Ann Fujii “Five stories of accidental ethnography: turning unplanned moments in the field into data”
- Lee Ann Fujii Shades of truth and lies: Interpreting testimonies of war and violence. *Journal of Peace Research* 47(2): 231-41.
- Schaffer “ordinary language interviewing” in *Interpretation and method*

Fieldnote Assignment #4: ethnographic interview (bring hard copy to class)

Week 12 (November 15): The 'transparency' debates: Reading and assessing ethnographic knowledge claims

- Alice Goffman *On The Run* (first 2/3)
- Björkman, Wedeen, Williams (2018) Interpretive Methods Report of QTD Working Group

Week 13 (NOVEMBER 21ST): Ethnography On Trial

Alice Goffman *On the run* (remainder)

Pachirat *Among Wolves* (Chapter six and conclusion)

FINAL ESSAY DUE DECEMBER 5