ETHNOGRAPHY

In this second unit, you will move beyond some of those research skills you attempted earlier in your academic career, and here you will conduct and incorporate field research in order to engage in cultural studies. Here you will investigate the culture of a place through acting as an ethnographer doing an ethnography or an anthropologist who goes and studies a particular culture or the way a particular foreign society functions. You will not, however, be traveling to Bali or Zaire to make your observations. Your field site will be local. Your assignment is to choose some aspect of society, some form of a group of people interacting, or some place where people interact, and describe it, make observations about it. Your observations and descriptions should then come together in an essay that says something about what that group means or how that group works.

Identify a sub-culture—a particular group of people with a singular interest and specific expertise—that you are interested in, one that you would like to learn more about. It may be best to choose a place where you are an outsider. Sometimes it is difficult to be objective so you must work extra hard to view a group close to you with a fresh eye.

You will want to consider the models we have been reading. Please consider the stylistic choices these writers make in order to embody their themes in their forms. In the course of this unit through preliminary assignments, we will also revisit research skills like observation and notetaking, artifact analysis, and interviewing. You will gather the best resources through an ethnography about that topic and incorporate them in a fluid and sophisticated way. This article should be engaging for the reader, and thus, it must in turn be engaging for the writer so be smart about your choice of a fieldsite.

Assignment 1:

Write a proposal including the following before you do your observations:

- Propose your prospective fieldsite in a professional memo or letter brought to class 9.13. Identify where you will observe, what you will observe, and who you will observe.
- Write up a plan for when you will make your observations.
- Describe your relationship to this sub-culture. Are you an insider or outsider? What is your “position” as a researcher? Remember this needs to be a place you can go and observe with new eyes.
- Identify what your assumptions are. What do you expect to see? What do you assume you won’t see?
- This assignment is due in a typed document of 100-200 words written in formal professional English by Th9.13.

Assignment 2:
Bring an artifact that is symbolic of, is a metaphor for, or somehow represents your particular subculture. Bring this artifact to class. This task is due Tu.9.18.

Assignment 3:
Bring a glossary to class or a list of lingo or language that characterizes your sub-culture. What words do they use? What makes them insiders when they speak to one another? This task is due Th.9.20.

Assessment 4:
Conduct your interview. Find an expert on this sub-culture to interview. Bring your transcription or interview notes to class.
Compile your field notes. This means you will need to have made your observations by Tuesday, 9.24. These are free-writes of EVERYTHING you see or research even if you don’t know what it means or what you are writing down. These should be a thick pile of notes and observations. They should be written furiously on paper or napkins or coffee-stained post-its. There will be contest to see who has the most! Bring ALL of your fieldnotes and your interview to class! There should be pages and pages! This assignment is due Tu, 9.24.

HINTS FOR THE FINAL PROJECT: THE ETHNOGRAPHY ITSELF:

- After you have done the above, read over your notes and figure out what you think. What makes this sub-culture work the way it does? What surprises have you discovered?
- That conclusion you draw—that surprise you discover—that answer to the questions just above—is your purpose or the idea you are trying to get across, or prove to be true.
- You might begin by looking at how your observations compared to your initial assumptions. Perhaps this will help you formulate your purpose: what is something that makes this group “tick”? What surprised you? What is the controversy there? That information will probably be surprising to your readers and may help you define your purpose.
- Use your observations, your descriptions, and your details to back this purpose up. Make sure your observations, your descriptions, and your details are as vivid and provocative as possible.
- Organize your ideas. Think about your different sections. Consider section breaks if you think your topic would benefit from them. Title these distinct sections.
- Think about including descriptions of dialogues that take place, artifacts that make the group function the way they do, key lingo that they use when they talk, or any appendices or colorful information that help give the full picture.
- Make sure you don't have silly mechanical errors. Check to see that your sentences are complete.

An A paper will address the above issues and satisfy the requirements as outlined in the departmental grading policy. Your essay must be 4-5 double-spaced pages. It should have 1 inch margins. It should be in a reasonable professional font like Times New Roman 11 or 12 point or Garamond 11 point (which you see here). If you are
tempted to achieve length via a technicality, DON'T. See me instead

9.13 PROPOSAL DUE; Chapter 5 (166-180)
9.18 ARTIFACT DUE; Chapter 7 (248-254)
9.20 GLOSSARY DUE; Chapter 8 (284-290)
9.24 INTERVIEW AND FIELD NOTES DUE
9.27 WORKSHOP DRAFT DUE
10.2 PAPER 2 DUE/ Culture Clash Exercise