

PERFORMANCE AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF FUN



Tufts University, Drama & Dance

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Fall 2018, Wednesday 1:30 – 4:30pm | Office hours by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Performance ethnography is a critical research method that takes seriously the role of the body in doing qualitative research. The sensuous and performing body becomes a central tool in ethically encountering others, and can also function as an interpretive tool to translate research back into the world. Centering the body also means considering the ways the body is read in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and how those differences elicit particular kinds of data. Taking fieldwork *as* performance, this method also considers the contingency, context, and aesthetics of interactions in the field and of quotidian life. In this class, students will learn of the emergence of performance ethnography; consider the ethics of ethnographic research; try on fieldwork, participant observation, interview, oral history; and explore ethnographies that center performance as method and object of analysis. This iteration of the performance ethnography class will focus on “fun,” asking what it means to enjoy doing research, and researching something you (or others) are supposed to enjoy. Participants will locate a field site in the area to focus their study.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

- * To introduce students to performance ethnography
- * To try on various aspects of ethnographic fieldwork
- * To develop an understanding of performance *as* research method
- * To develop a reflexive research practice that considers the pleasures, labor, and fun of doing scholarly work

NOTE ON IRB

All field-based research for this class is for educational purposes only. IRB certification is not required as this research will not be published and is conducted solely for pedagogy reasons. You are encouraged to do the Tufts IRB certification as we will take this up for discussion during Week 5:

<https://viceprovost.tufts.edu/sberirb/research-training-requirements/citi/>
[https://viceprovost.tufts.edu/sberirb/files/CITI Registration Step by Step.pdf](https://viceprovost.tufts.edu/sberirb/files/CITI%20Registration%20Step%20by%20Step.pdf)

READINGS

The readings (as PDFs and links) are available week-by-week under “Modules” in Canvas. You are encouraged to purchase *Cultural Struggles* by Dwight Conquergood, we’re only reading a couple of essays from it, but it’s still a great volume. You will also need to acquire the monograph you are discussing on Weeks 9 and 10.

COMMUNICATION

If you have any problems concerning the course, if you want to better prepare for assignments, or for any other issues related to this class, please don’t hesitate to schedule an appointment. I want to make sure you get the most out of this class.

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION, TECHNOLOGY

Attendance is mandatory at all classes; please let me know in advance if you plan to be absent otherwise your absence will affect your overall grade. This is a discussion-based class, and so I expect active participation from all of you. Please do not use phones while in class except in cases of emergency.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Your writing should consist of *your* own ideas, words, and information you have collated. When you are quoting or referencing a resource other than your own work, please make sure this is evident using citations. You are expected to be familiar with the **Tufts University academic integrity guidelines: <https://students.tufts.edu/student-affairs/student-life-policies/academic-integrity-policy>**

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

If the reading or writing assignments prove to be challenging (and they should be!) I want to encourage you to seek help. There's always room to grow and skills to be learned, and there should be no stigma attached to getting support. You're always welcome to talk to me about these things, and also know that there is an Academic Resource Center available to you: <https://students.tufts.edu/academic-advice-and-support/academic-resource-center/>

ACCOMMODATIONS

We each arrive to the classroom with different learning needs and it is my intention to create as supportive an environment as possible. If you do need accommodations based on disability, please meet with me as soon as possible, and also visit the Student Accessibility Services Office and website for further support: <https://students.tufts.edu/student-accessibility-services>.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 4: Field site / topic rationale (including 5-7 sources) – (4 pages)

What “fun” do you want to research? What has been written about the subject? What are you interested to explore?

Week 6: Thick description of a scene (4 pages)

What did you encounter on your first day of ethnographic research?

Week 8: Interview transcripts of TWO of the following (5 pages of transcription EACH)

Topical interview: An interview about the topic/site/practice you're writing about. What does the person know about the topic you're writing about, its histories, intricacies, and structures? What are the conversations, complexities, and controversies about your subject of research?

Participant interview: An interview with a participant in the fun about how they came to this world, and their experiences in it.

Oral history: An interview that traces your interlocutor's life.

Week 10: Book presentation (15 mins)

A chance to explore an ethnographic monograph in its entirety. Create a handout that details how the text engages with class themes. What is the topic, what methods were engaged, what were the complexities of fieldwork, what were the most interesting findings? What does/could a focus on performance and aesthetics do for analysis? What does/could a focus on fun do for analysis? What quotes are most useful / exciting?

Week 11: Fun and games based on books (20 mins)

Create a game, performance, or interactive experience based on the book you read.

Week 13: Fieldnotes from 10 hours of participant observation

Week 14: Performance pitch (20 mins)

Propose a performance based on your fieldwork and research that you would like to devise and direct at Tufts. What aesthetics, tropes, and theories are you pulling from the field?

Whose stories do you want to tell? What roles will the performers on stage play?

December 18: Final reflection essay (10 pages)

CALENDAR

Sept 5: Week 1: Multiplicities

Dwight Conquergood: "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance."
Zora Neale Hurston: "Folklore and Music"
Micaela Di Leonardo: "Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter"
Bryant Keith Alexander: "Standing in the Wake: A Critical Auto/Ethnographic Exercise on Reflexivity in Three Movements"
Diedre Sklar: "On Dance Ethnography"
Tom Boellstorff: "Rethinking Digital Anthropology"

Sept 12: Week 2: Thinking with Fun

Clifford Geertz: "Deep Play: notes on the Balinese Cockfight"
Robert Desjarlais: "Blitzkrieg Bop" in *Counterplay*
Byrd McDaniel: "Out of Thin Air: Configurability, Choreography, and the Air Guitar World Championship."
Lisa Biggs: "Serious fun at Sun City: Theatre for Incarcerated Women in the 'New' South Africa"
Joel Robbins: "Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good"
Asef Bayat: "Islamism and the politics of fun"

Optional:

Victor Turner: *From Ritual to Theatre*
CLR James: *Beyond the Boundary*
Don Kulick: "Theory in Furs"

Sept 19: Week 3: In the field

Esther Newton "My Best Informant's Dress"
David Valentine: "Introduction" to *Imagining Transgender*
Anima Adjepong: "Invading Ethnographies: a queer of color reflexive practice"
Kamala Visweswaran: "Refusing the Subject"
Yamuna Sangarasivam "Researcher, Informant, "Assassin," me*"
Mingwei Huang "Vulnerable Observers: Notes on Fieldwork and Rape"

Optional:

Kamala Visweswaran: *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*

Sept 26: Week 4: Attending to Bodies

Soyini Madison: "The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography"

Clifford Geertz: "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture"

Stephanie Batiste: "Dunham Possessed: Ethnographic Bodies, Movement, and Transnational Constructions of Blackness"

Sally Ann Ness: "Understanding Cultural Performance: 'Trobriand Cricket'"

Amanda Weidman: "The Ethnographer as Apprentice: Embodying Sociomusical Knowledge in South India"

Oct 3: Week 5: Responsibilities

Soyini Madison: "Co-performative Witnessing"

Linda Alcoff: "The Problem of Speaking for Others"

Della Pollock: "Origins in Absence: Performing Birth Stories"

Judith Hamera: "'Saving' Khmer Classical Dance in Long Beach"

Shaka McGlotten: "Unlearning/Ethnography"

Mitch Librett & Dina Perrone: "Apples and Oranges: Ethnography and the IRB"

Optional:

Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez: "Ethnographic Lessons"

Oct 10: Week 6: Transcriptions

Della Pollock: "The performative 'I'"

Marta Savigliano: "Nocturnal Ethnographies: Following Cortázar in the Milongas of Buenos Aires"

Pavithra Prasad: "Paradiso Lost: Writing Memory and Nostalgia in the Post-Ethnographic Present"

Kathleen Stewart: "Precarity's Forms"

Optional:

Della Pollock: "Beyond Experience"

Stuart McLean & Anand Pandian: *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*

Oct 17: Week 7: Theory and analysis

Anusha Kehdar: "Flexibility and its Bodily Limits: Transnational South Asian Dancers in an Age of Neoliberalism"

Scott Morgensen: "Arrival at Home: Radical Faerie Configurations of Sexuality and Place"

Soyini Madison: “That Was My Occupation”: Oral Narrative Performance and Black Feminist Thought.”

Oct 24: Week 8: Interpretations

Dwight Conquergood: “Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, and Culture”

John L. Jackson Jr.: “Theorizing Production/Producing Theory (Or, why filmmaking could really count at scholarship)”

Renee Alexander Craft: “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea”

Bryant Keith Alexander: “Archiving Performance/Performance as Archive”

Optional:

Madison: “Performing Ethnography: The Political Economy of Water”

Xavier Lemoine: “Performing Black Queerness in the U.S. South: Ethnographic Performance and the Blurring of Presence in E. P. Johnson’s *Sweet Tea*.”

Oct 31: Week 9: Updates from the field

Nov 7: Week 10: Ethnographies of fun

Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*

Stanley Thangaraj, *Desi Hoop Dreams*

Pascal Ménoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh*

Catherine Cole, *Ghana’s Concert Party Theatre*

Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*

Gregory Mitchell, *Tourist Attractions*

Cyndi Garcia, *Salsa Crossings*

Bianca Williams, *The Pursuit of Happiness*

Suk-Young Kim, *K-Pop Live*

Nov 14: Week 11: Fun and games with ethnography

Nov 21: Week 12: No class

Nov 28: Week 13: Updates from the field

Dec 5: Week 14: Performance pitches