

# Reading and Doing Ethnography

Social Anthropology 314

## 3.2 Inscription

What you can write depends on the  
fieldwork situation

It's called **participant** observation  
for a reason.

If you don't like the "fly on the wall" style of detached  
observation, don't use it.

# Writing and place

- >> The possibilities for writing are a function of the place where you write.
- >> Not everyone experiences place in the same way.
- >> Or writing.

Writing things down

# Note taking strategies

1. "Head notes" i.e. mental notes
2. Writing in real time
3. Intermittent writing on scene
4. Writing afterwards

It's a good idea to *always* write fieldnotes afterwards, whether or not you have taken notes on scene.



# Notes don't have to be prose narratives

- >> Maps
- >> Diagrams
- >> Fragments of description
- >> Dialogues
- >> Drawings
- >> Photographs

# As far as how you should *write* an analysis

- >> Just be yourself.
- >> You can write narratives and stories, autobiographical or otherwise.
- >> It's fine to be friends with your research participants.

# Analysis ≠ objectivity

- >> Objectivity is not the goal, and trying to write "objectively" will probably lead to bad writing.
- >> The goal is *understanding*, not objectivity.
- >> Do have an analytical *point*. It should be **localized and non-obvious**.

# Exercises

1. Draw a map of Stellenbosch University and its relationship to the surrounding city. Include the most salient features.

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2. Mark on your map a spot where something important happened to you.
3. Briefly describe that event in a few sentences.

# Questions

- >> Ross mentions how he is usually the butt of his friends jokes because of his inability to navigate. Based on this does having social "deficiencies" (for lack of a better word) affect your ethnographical perspective
- >> Who is Poenkies and why is he/she not introduced by Ross?
- >> Taylor & Rupp: There is an almost distinct power relation between male and female and this relation becomes complex on the notion of drag queens. Page 2123 denotes drags as "the pussy lickers". Do you think that the sexual preference of a male or female is what constitutes a power unto that individual? Say a male dressing as a female who's sexual preference is a female has more power than a male dressing as a female who's sexual preference is a male; with the ultimate male – not a drag – who's sexual preference is a female constitutes utmost power?
- >> They refer to shifting ones attention and social connections to one's personal habitat when studying it. However, will ones social connections to the site being studied not be beneficial as one then has a greater understanding of the site being studied?

# Questions

- >> Would Taylor say that when researching on a topic across gender roles, is it important to first establish how people identify themselves sexually in order to avoid stereotyping and bias coming into play?
- >> How does a female anthropologist neutralize male power?
- >> With the Taylor & Rupp article because it was about drag queens would it not have been more appropriate to use the pronoun "she" when using the drag queens stage names consistently throughout the article? Because I noticed that in regards to Sushi they sometimes used the pronoun "he" instead of "she".
- >> Why is there so much tension with lesbian researchers and drag queens even though drag queens promote being true to one self and being whoever you want to be? and are Taylor and Rupp have tension with Drag Queens due to them disturbing the dividing line between male and female?



# Questions

- » How would society go about de-gendering spaces, particularly in terms of not placing the onus of de-gendering spaces on the groups that feel restricted or excluded, but rather on those that feel welcome in these spaces to make it more inclusive and less restrictive, since they are the ones that hold the most power in those spaces.
- » Place is an incredibly important anthropological concept, as it refers to a concept of something that does not have to be a physical location. In what ways should we be looking at or developing a sense of place within our own research sites? How can these understandings affect our observations?
- » on page 2125 of Taylor and Rupp they begin to tell how dissatisfied their 'informants' and their families were with sharing all the personal information. The dissatisfaction from the families was probably caused by being embarrassed or ashamed of their loved ones. One of the informants mother contacted them directly because of what they wrote. My question is how does one deal with such encounters or how do you handle these people?
- » How does one stay subjective throughout their research, are there checks and balance techniques that one can do to ensure work stays as subjective as possible?

# Questions

- » How is drag queens an embarrassment for the queer society if they inspire gay people to come out?
- » Do Taylor and Rupp have tension with drag queens due to them disturbing the dividing line between male and female?
- » Ross: How difficult is it for one to make a cognitive map, without having previous knowledge of the place influencing your understanding of the space you're researching?
- » In a highly patriarchal society how does a female anthropologist combat inequalities in research?
- » In Ross' article, could violence, all forms of it, have been avoided if proper housing placements and if fears of evacuation were not present, were not a factor in South Africa?
- » When your ethnography is not based on gender and it is just a general unlike the study of the drag queens, is it important to note something like the gender?

# Questions

- » In Ross's reading he talks about how the position of the self and the emotions plays an very important role.  
Does this mean that one needs to stipulate everything one experience and feel?
- » How much are drag queens really accepted into society?
- » Is there a relationship between gendered spaces and informal settlements?
- » Ross – What does the author mean by the view "above" and "on the move"? Is it literal, in these sense that "above" is like the view from a map or aircraft, or is it metaphorical in the sense of detachment or the view from an "above", previously-colonial/imperialistic view?
- » Would Taylor say that it is much easier to work with people a researcher identifies with or is it important to be able to work in different research fields?
- » In Taylor and Rupp's piece then make mention of instances where the participants in the study made them feel uncomfortable. If in our own research we feel truly uncomfortable how should we deal with this so as not to offend the participants?