

## Reading Questions for Week 4 Place and Space in Anthropological Field Methods

As you might have guessed, the readings for this week are selected to help you to learn some of the fieldwork skills, such as picking a site, doing observations, formulating research questions, and describing it. We have three examples of description and Geertz's theoretical and methodological pamphlet on conducting thick description, without which an anthropological representation of cultures is not quite possible.

Note that the materials for answering these questions are not in one place in each of the readings. They can be cumulative as you read. For instance, Bestor justifies his research in several places in various, albeit subtle, ways.

### Clifford Geertz Thick description

1. How does Geertz define task of anthropology and anthropologists?
2. What should anthropologists avoid doing in the field and why?
3. What are the differences between a "wink" and "twitch"? What is Geertz conveying through the examples of wink vs. twitch?
4. What is thick description? What are its characteristics?

### Theodore Bestor Neighborhood Tokyo

1. How does Bestor define neighborhood in his research?
2. How does Bestor contextualize his study against other studies of Japan?
3. What strategies does he use in choosing his research site?
4. Explain the differences between tradition and traditionalism.
5. How does the Miyamoto-cho differ from the rest of the city?
6. Bestor argues that Tokyo, Miyamoto-cho neighborhood included, is none of the following: an overgrown village, administrative or political construct, and a static old-fashioned village society. How does he dispel these claims? Hint: how does he describe the Miyamoto-cho neighborhood?

Robert Desjarlais  
Shelter Blues

I chose this particular piece as I think it is one of the best descriptions and interpretations of a place. I would like you to learn from his craft as an observer and a writer, so pay attention to his details and descriptions. He also has one of the most interesting interpretations. It is not necessary for you to know anything about Kant and Derrida (skim if you have to), in order to grasp his points in comparing the sublime and people's perceptions of the homeless. I tried to help you with the following reading questions.

1. What were Dejarlais' circumstances for conducting research? How did those conditions shape his research methodology? What limits and advantages did he have? How did they shape his research findings?
2. Describe the power structure in the homeless shelter. How did it manifest and what did the people who had less power do in reaction to the powers imposed on them?
3. How does Dejarlais describe the shelter from various perspectives? What are the ways in which the shelter's architecture influences people's behaviors, perceptions, and senses?
4. Desjarlais discusses that the architecture of the new homeless shelter encapsulates some of the ways in which the architects of Boston's homeless -politicians, journalists, and homeless themselves – perceive the homeless. What connection does he make between the notion of sublime and their perception of the homeless? Why? He also argues that there is an anesthetization of and a fictionalization of the homeless. Why do you think he says so?
5. What is the mythology of homelessness?
6. What does Desjarlais mean that there is “a production of homelessness”?

Judith Farquhar  
The Park Pass:

This article offers a nice blend of historic background of the city and the description of park life. The former is a part of the framing for the latter. The author is especially adept at examining the park as a space that motivates certain kinds of activities, social interactions, and behaviors. She is also showing the ways in which people influence that space and give it additional meanings. Your goal is to unpack and learn how she does that. The second part of the article (starting from “Forms of Efficacy”) is especially helpful for understanding the meaning and values of the park for the park attendants.

The park is situated within a city that is rapidly transforming, so there is a discussion about what actually prompts people to ride buses from another part of the city and join others for crafts, dances, and exercises.

1. This is an example of a study that illustrates that cultures are constantly in flux, they are not static or isolated. Learn from the ways in which Farquhar discusses the “old” or traditional Beijing, and the new developments and how the latter affects people’s lives. I think the same goes for Bestor. Would you agree? What are the differences between Bestor’s approach and that of Farquhar’s? What methods and strategies did you find useful and compelling for your own research?
2. What are the research questions that the author sets to investigate? Why did she find the uses of park space intriguing and compelling?
3. How does she contextualize the people’s attachment to the public space?
4. What does owning a park pass mean for the city residents? Why?
5. What are the multiple meanings that the park carries for its visitors? Provide examples.

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