

SO204 Urban Ethnography Workshop

Seminar Leader: **Agata Lisiak**
Email: a.lisiak@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course introduces students to key qualitative methods in urban ethnography, with an emphasis on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Each weekly seminar combines theoretical discussion with a hands-on workshop, offering students opportunities to experiment with a range of methodological and analytical tools. Following an initial exploration of the ethical and political considerations of urban research, students will practice field note-taking, design and peer-review interview guides, conduct interviews, analyze data using thematic coding, and write up their findings. Throughout the semester, students will also discuss different examples of ethnographic writing, engaging critically with questions of voice, positionality, and representation.

Requirements

Students are required to attend class regularly and on time and to engage consistently in coursework including reading, listening, and taking notes. They will participate respectfully in class discussions, listen attentively to others, offer thoughtful questions and comments, and contribute meaningfully to a productive learning environment.

As this class meets only once per week, the number of readings assigned for each session may seem substantial. Students are expected to allocate sufficient time to complete and annotate all readings before class. All readings will be provided as PDFs and links via Google Classroom. Students are responsible for consulting the syllabus to ensure they complete the correct assigned readings on time. Some assignments involve work in small groups or pairs; students are expected to approach collaboration with accountability, supportiveness, and kindness.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, one absence from a once-per-week course will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Any additional unexcused absences will negatively affect the participation grade (e.g., one unexcused absence will result in a reduction from a B to a B-). Absences due to health reasons or emergencies must be communicated in advance and documented when applicable (e.g., with a doctor's note). As this course is conducted in a workshop format, remote participation is not possible.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

Student assessment in this course is based on preparedness for each class, active participation (demonstrating familiarity and critical engagement with the assigned readings), and the timely completion of all required assignments.

Assignments

Writing assignments for this course, along with their deadlines, are outlined in the course schedule below and will be communicated in greater detail via Google Classroom.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for

the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation: 30%

Field notes and annotations: 15%

Ethnographic description: 20%

Interview transcript and notes: 15%

Interview analysis: 20%

Schedule

Week 1 / 26 January

WHAT IS THE URBAN? WHAT IS A METHOD?

Kern, L. (2021) *Feminist City* (Introduction). London: Verso.

Simone, A.M. & Castán Broto, V. (2022) Radical unknowability: an essay on solidarities and multiform urban life. *City*, 26(5-6), 771-790.

Niang, S.M. (2024) in defence of what's there: notes on scavenging as methodology. *Feminist Review* 136, 52-66.

Thomson, P. (2025) Methodology vs Methods. Pat Thomson's Blog:
<https://patthomson.net/2025/11/23/methodology-v-methods/>.

Week 2 / 2 February

THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF (URBAN) RESEARCH

Smith, L.T. (2012) Research Through Imperial Eyes. *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London & New York, Zed Books.

Lindquist, P. (1979) Dig Where You Stand. *Oral History*, 7(2), 24-30.

Haraway, D. (1988) Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.

Gunaratnam, Y. & Hamilton, C. (2017) introduction: the wherewithal of feminist methods. *Feminist Review*, 115, 1-12.

Week 3 / 9 February

RESEARCH DESIGN

Abdulai, R. T. & Owusu-Ansah, A. (2014) Essential Ingredients of a Good Research Proposal for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students in the Social Sciences. *Sage Open* 4(3).

Chang, H. (2008) *Autoethnography as a Method*. London: Routledge, 41-69.

Jackson, E. (2020) Bowling Together? Practices of Belonging and Becoming in a London Ten-Pin Bowling League. *Sociology*, 54(3), 518-533.

Two entries from **Pat Thomson's blog**: <https://patthomson.net/2023/04/17/making-the-case-for-your-research/> and <https://patthomson.net/2018/03/19/writing-bad-research-questions/>.

Week 4 / 16 February

(URBAN) OBSERVATION

Perec, G. (2010 [1975]) *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. Trans. Marc Lowenthal. Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press.

Latronico, V. (2025) *Perfection*. Trans. Sophie Hughes. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions. (fragments)

Bell, K. (2022) *The Undercurrents*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions. (fragments)

Roth, J. (2003 [1930s]) *What I Saw*. Trans. Michael Hofmann. New York: W.W.Norton. (fragments)

Assignment:

Find a place in Berlin you know well and/or would like to get to know better, a place that will help you address some of your research questions and better understand the topics you developed in class last week. Make sure it's manageable for you to go there **regularly in the next two weeks (ideally 2-3 times/week for at least half an hour at a time)**. It can be indoors (Rewe, gym, shopping mall, supermarket, café, etc.) or outdoors (park, open-air market, street, intersection, etc.); mobile (bus, S-bahn, U-bahn, etc. – ensuring it is always the same line) or immobile (bus stop, S- or U-bahn station). Up to you! Discuss in groups of three in class, then write a **300-word explanation** why you want to study this particular place and how it connects to your question/topic. Upload it to the "Choosing your spot" thread on Google Classroom latest by midnight, **19 February**.

Week 5 / 23 February

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Spradley, J. (1980) *Participant Observation*. Austin: Rinehart & Company.

Adjepong, A. (2019) Invading Ethnography: A Queer of Color Reflexive Practice. *Ethnography*, 20(1), 27–46.

Hall, S.M. (2012) The Art of Sitting. In: *City, Street, Citizen: The Measure of the Ordinary*. London: Routledge. 52-73.

Assignment:

Starting this week, conduct participant observation in the place of your choice. As you spend time in that place, pay attention to: (built) environments, (social) interactions, (urban) cultures, and anything else that seems relevant for your research question. After each visit, write up your notes and share them with your group. **Minimum 300 words per visit.**

Week 6 / 2 March

VISUAL URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY

Film screening and discussion with an invited guest (readings will be shared in advance)

Preliminary analysis of your field notes

Assignment:

Continue conducting participant observation in your spot. Annotate your partners' notes. Submit your complete field notes with annotations via Google Classroom by **9 am, 9 March**.

Week 7 / 9 March

(AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING

Simone, A.M. (2004) People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 16(3), 407–429.

Hentschel, Ch. (2015) Postcolonizing Berlin and the Fabrication of the Urban. *IJURR*, 39(1), 79-91.

Kasmani, O. (2019) Thin Attachments: Writing Berlin in Scenes of Daily Loves. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* 1(4), 34-53.

Assignment:

Write a **2000-word ethnographic description** of the place where you conducted participant observation. Ensure your piece considers the following: (built) environment, (social) interactions, (urban) culture. Your piece will also demonstrate attention to the time(s) in which you conducted your observations (morning/evening, day of week, rush hour, the weather, etc.). Deadline **midnight, 18 March**.

Week 8 / 16 March

THE POLITICS OF WALKING: GENDER, RACE, CLASS

Rose, M. (2020) Pedestrian practices: walking from the mundane to the marvellous. In: *Mundane Methods*. Ed. Sarah Marie Hall and Helen Holmes. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 211-227.

Phadke, S., Khan, S. & Ranade, S. (2011) *Why loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 175-188.

Cole, T. (2011) *The Open City*. New York: Random House. (fragments)

Cadogan, G. (2016) Walking While Black, *LitHub*.

Week 9 / 23 March

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE (A PROMISE, NOT A THREAT)

Jackson, E. & Lisiak, A. (2025). You'll never walk alone: Theorizing engaged walking with Doreen Massey. *The Sociological Review* 74(1), 216-232.

Spatial Delight, [Episode 3: World City](#) (2022).

Rose, M. (2025) *The Feminist Art of Walking*. London: Pluto, 172-187.

Lisiak, A. et al. (2018). "A city coming into being": Walking in Berlin with Franz Hessel and Marshall Berman. *City*, 22(5–6), 877–893.

Weeks 10 + 11 spring break and public holiday – NO CLASSES

Week 12 / 13 April

INTERVIEWS, PART 1

Back, L. (2007) *The Art of Listening*. London: Bloomsbury, 7-26.

Cochrane, A. (2020) Interviews. In: *Researching the City: A Guide for Students*. Ed. Kevin Ward. London: Sage, 40-56.

Holmes, H. (2020) Material relationships: object interviews as a means of studying everyday life. In: *Mundane Methods*. Ed. Sarah Marie Hall and Helen Holmes. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 66-81.

Assignment:

Conduct a **30-min interview** on a topic that relates to one of your research questions. Record, transcribe, and revise it for typos and formatting. Email the **transcript** to me as a PDF by **midnight, 16 April**. Make sure to take **field notes** before and after the interview and send them to me as a separate document alongside the transcript.

Week 13 / 20 April

INTERVIEWS, PART 2

A two-part workshop on interview analysis. No readings required for this session, just your interview transcripts and notes.

Week 14 / 27 April

WRITING UP YOUR FINDINGS

't Hart, D. (2022) [Lost in transcription?: How to put participants' words on page – without losing their nuance and emotion](#). *The Sociological Review Magazine*:

Emejulu, A. & Bassel, L. (2023). The lonely activist: On being haunted. *The Sociological Review*, 72(1), 58-75.

Krivosos, D. (2025). The ordinariness of life-making in displacement: Young Ukrainian workers' care and work in Warsaw after 2022. *The Sociological Review*, 73(3), 489-507.

Assignment:

Write a **2000-word analysis of your interview**, providing a compellingly narrated context. Your piece will demonstrate attention to the time(s) in which you conducted your observations (morning/evening, day of week, rush hour, the weather, etc.) See Google Classroom for more detailed instructions. Deadline **midnight, 11 May**.

Week 15 / 4 May

WHAT IS THE URBAN? WHAT IS A METHOD? (REVISITED)

Final exercises + discussion + reflection.