

Carol
Delaney

with Deborah Kaspin

An Experiential Introduction
to Anthropology

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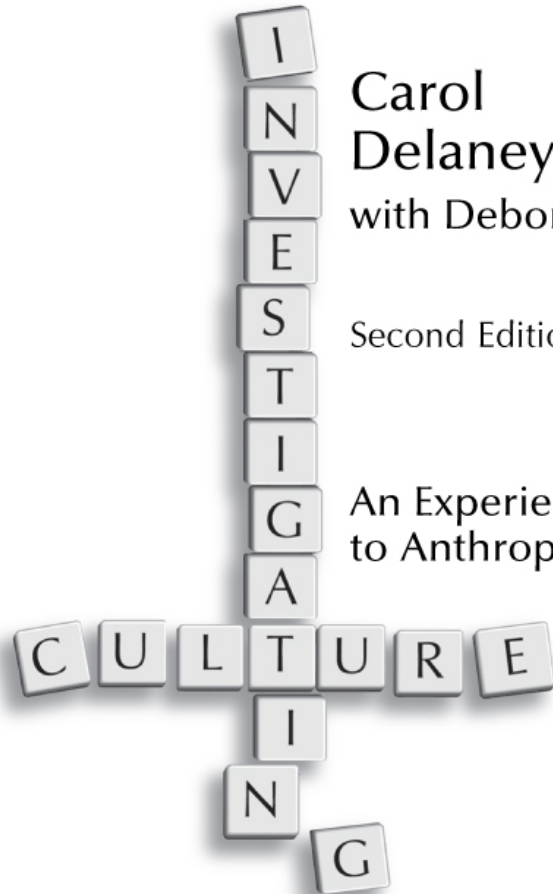
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*To all of the students who have participated in one version
or another of our Investigating Culture classes.*



Carol
Delaney
with Deborah Kaspin

Second Edition

An Experiential Introduction
to Anthropology

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Preface to Second Edition

Because the response from students and professors to *Investigating Culture* has been very positive, the publisher asked me to prepare a new edition. I procrastinated for several years due to other projects and commitments. After retiring from Stanford, I taught for two years at Brown University, where I used the first edition in a course of the same title. The students helped to pinpoint areas that needed updating. In particular, I wish to acknowledge Sarah Cocuzzo, Lydia Magyar, and Andrew Mathis, who met with me on a regular basis. As we went over each chapter, they made suggestions for revision and brought in material from their experience and independent research.

However, this new edition would not have happened without the gentle persistence of Rosalie Robertson at Blackwell Publishers. When she suggested that I find a collaborator, I thought, immediately, of Deborah Kaspin, who had been a fellow graduate student at the University of Chicago, and has taught at University of Virginia, Yale University, Wheaton College, and Rhode Island College. Working with her has been a great pleasure; not only has she corrected some of my grammar and awkward sentence structure, but also she has contributed in a major way by updating existing material, adding new material from her own research, making subtle but important elaborations and clarifications in the text, and, from her teaching experience, suggesting ways to make the material more accessible to a broader student population.

This book, unlike most introductory anthropology textbooks, is not so much intended to teach facts *about* other cultures as it is to help students learn how to go about studying any culture, including their own. Additionally, this book is not constructed according to traditional categories such as the family, religion, economy, and politics because we feel these domains cannot be so easily separated.

Instead, the book is organized in terms of space, time, language, social relations, body, food, clothing, and culture icons - important people, places, and performances - in order to show how the system of cultural symbols and meanings spans a range of domains. Material gleaned from a variety of cultures is used primarily as illustration. The goal of the text and the ethnographic exercises is to enable students to think like anthropologists.

Carol Delaney

Deborah Kaspin

Acknowledgments

The course on which this book is based emerged as a result of “trial by fire” when I had to offer a course – to start in two weeks’ time – in cultural anthropology and comparative religion to a small group of freshmen in the University Professors’ Program at Boston University. I had very little time to prepare and decided to use the class as an experiment, that is, to use the experience of entering the university as an analogy to think about what it was like for anthropologists to go elsewhere. It worked. It was exciting. We had a great time and learned a lot. However, the book, with its accompanying course, is not just for freshmen: it can be, and has been, used at any time and place during the typical four-year college education and has also been used at campuses in Europe. (It could also be used productively for people posted to positions in foreign countries – military, diplomats, journalists, etc.) I continue to hear from the students who took that first course long ago (1986) who feel it set them on a path of discovery, which is what an undergraduate education ought to be. Over the years the course changed considerably; the insights and critiques of the students helped to shape the content into what became this book.

At Stanford, I was fortunate to get research funds to hire some of my students as research assistants. Not only did they make trips to the library while I was writing and look up material on the Internet, with which they were far more proficient than I, but also they served as “guinea pigs,” telling me when the tone was all wrong or that a particular example was passé. They also suggested topics and then found material to address them. Here, then, I acknowledge the help of Alisha Niehaus (my first student research assistant), who was indefatigable in locating interesting

material and telling me when I was “off.” Sam Gellman and Andrea Christensen helped during the summer of 2001, and Andrea, along with Katie Cueva, helped during the final phases in the summer of 2002. They had a tough job: they had to do a lot of research on new topics and trace all the things I had neglected to record, and they served as editors, reading and rereading the chapters. To all of them I extend heartfelt thanks; the book is a better product because of their input, and I am deeply grateful for their help.

But I must also acknowledge the initial interest and enthusiasm of Jane Huber, my editor at Blackwell Publishers. Without her ongoing support, my energy might have flagged; in addition, she suggested material and broadened my perspective when my focus had narrowed. My daughter, Elizabeth Quarantiello, and colleagues Miyako Inoue (Stanford) and Don Brenneis (University of California, Santa Cruz) read and made suggestions for the language chapter. Steve Piker, a professor at Swarthmore, was brave enough to try out the penultimate draft on his students at the same time I used it with mine, and the response was gratifying. I hope the future users of this book find inspiration, new perspectives, and ways of making connections between things they never thought were related.

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CHAPTER 1

Disorientation and Orientation

Introduction; how culture provides orientation in the world; what is culture and how do anthropologists investigate it? Learning to think anthropologically.

Introduction

A number of years ago, I was asked to teach a course on anthropology and comparative religion to incoming freshmen at Boston University. I was intrigued because freshmen do not usually enroll in anthropology courses and often do not know what it is. Furthermore, the course was to begin in two weeks, leaving me very little time to prepare a syllabus and order books. Consequently, I decided to take a bold approach. Rather than trying to do a typical survey course, beginning with human origins and moving on to hunters and gatherers, and then peasants, to modern urban society, I decided to treat the course as an anthropological experience. I wanted students to imagine themselves as anthropologists coming to study another culture, for, although they wouldn't think of it that way, that was a part of what they were doing when they entered college. I wanted them to learn not only *about* anthropology, but also about *being* an anthropologist.

That original course was an adventure for all of us, and it was a great success. However, when I first went to Stanford, I was not able to teach it as a freshman course because freshmen were tracked into a number of prescribed large lecture courses. Instead, I taught somewhat revised forms

for upperclassmen, for students planning to go abroad for a time, and at the Stanford campus in Berlin. Other professors borrowed it, modified it, and taught it at Stanford campuses in Spain and Italy. When the university instituted a “freshman seminar” program, I was able, once again, to teach this course to entering freshmen. While the course can, obviously, be taught in a number of contexts, I still think it works best for freshmen as they enter college or university, not because the material is simplified, but because their experience is fresh.

The course is an innovative way to introduce students to anthropology, and because it has been a success, I was asked by the publisher to write a textbook based on it so that it might become available to students elsewhere. Although each chapter is devoted to one of the topics I discuss in class, such as space or time or food, it is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of any one of them. Otherwise, each chapter could easily have become a book on its own. Even less is this book meant to be an in-depth analysis of American, British, or any other culture, although it is intended for use in the United States and United Kingdom. I juxtapose a range of material - classical anthropological material about a variety of cultures; contemporary items drawn from the newspaper, the Web, Stanford, and Brown; and ethnographic material from my own fieldwork in Turkey - for the purpose of generating ideas and indicating the range of areas for further exploration.

While this book is a general introduction to anthropology, it also reflects my own journey as an anthropologist. This includes my graduate training at the Harvard Divinity School and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, my academic concentrations on gender issues and the Abrahamic religions, and my personal life as a teenager of the 1950s, a young wife of the 1960s, a divorcee, a

welfare mother, and so on. All of this led me into and informed my academic career. This is how anthropology (and any life path) unfolds: the personal intertwines with the professional. So too, another anthropologist could write a similar book (or design a similar course) using the same canon of classic and current anthropology, but would read that canon into his or her own areas of specialization and personal biography. I think the subjective experience reveals the relevance of anthropology to everyday life, although this necessarily means that other worthwhile issues - including those of particular interest to the readers - are overlooked in the process. Such omissions are not meant as dismissals, but as invitations to take an anthropological approach to your own topics of interest.

I wrote the first edition of this book as my own enterprise, but the second edition is a collaborative effort with Deborah Kaspin. She was a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Chicago while I was, conducted fieldwork among Chewa in Malawi for her dissertation project, and more recently pursued fieldwork among modern orthodox Jews in New England. She has taught at several places of various types - private and public, universities and colleges - which are listed in the preface. Kaspin's contributions to the second edition include material from her own research, updates on topics in the first edition, and occasionally slightly different interpretations of issues developed in the first edition. She also pushed to make the subject matter more accessible to a wider range of students and educational settings. It is our hope that the new edition accomplishes this.

The goal of the second edition, like the first, is not to teach *about* other cultures. That is the normal pedagogical approach adopted in schools, but it is passive and distanced learning. I believe that people learn best when they are actively involved in the process. You will learn about

anthropology and about culture by learning how to think like an anthropologist, that is, by becoming amateur anthropologists. Not everyone is able to go to another society to gain this experience, but it is possible to simulate it. As I illustrate below, you will learn to draw analogies between your own experience of entering and becoming acclimated to college life and the experience of anthropologists who go to study another culture. Both can be quite disorienting, at least initially. Hold on to the disorientation for a while, because it provides some mental space from which you can grasp, as they occur, aspects of the new culture you have entered and how these aspects relate to each other. Even while the focus must be on your own environment, the aim is not to illuminate merely the “culture” of your particular school, but also to explore the way those particular aspects connect to and represent concepts, values, and structures of the wider culture. Indeed, I think the use of the word *culture* in that restricted sense is inappropriate.

Clifford Geertz, probably the most influential American anthropologist of the last 40 years, made the point very clear: “[T]he locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don’t study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods ...); they study *in* villages” (1973: 22). Substitute *college* for *village*, and you will see what I mean. Although I conducted my fieldwork in a village in central Turkey, my aim was to try to understand something about Turkish culture and how it was inflected in that one place. Analogously, the object of your study is the culture of your country even as you investigate it in your particular locale. My goal is to get you to learn *experientially*, to get you to adopt an anthropological approach that you can use to investigate any social or cultural phenomenon in any culture. Prerequisite is a mind open to new ways of thinking about things and willing to take nothing for granted.

Anything is available for inspection, including the most ordinary, mundane items and events such as a McDonald's hamburger, a pair of blue jeans, a cell phone, a birthday or New Year's Eve, and so forth. These items and events are *clues* you can use to investigate your sociocultural system. Each of them provides a window into a much larger set of beliefs, power relations, and values. For example, what would you make of a community that celebrates death days rather than birthdays? How might that fact relate to other facets of that society? What other kinds of questions would you need to ask to begin to understand not just that practice but also the culture in which it occurs?

Disorientation

The experience of beginning college can be exhilarating, anxiety producing, and disorienting. This is magnified for those who come from other parts of the country or from foreign countries. Even when the language is familiar and you have not moved from your home town or city, college life is different from high school. You are entering a new world. You don't know where anything is or how to find it; you don't understand the time schedule or how to manage your time; you don't know the lingo - the insider abbreviations and acronyms; and you don't know the code of dress or behavior. For those who go away to college, it might be the first time you are away from home alone. It might be the first time you share a room with someone or have a room of your own. It might be the first time you have to schedule your own time.

Listen to the echoes of your experience in one of the most famous and oft-quoted sentences in anthropology. It was written by Bronislaw Malinowski, who is credited with inventing the anthropological method of intensive fieldwork. At the beginning of his work in the Trobriand Islands in the

South Pacific, where he was interned during World War I, he wrote,

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight.

([1922] 1961: 4)

An analogous translation might be something like:

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone in your room but with unfamiliar people nearby, while the car that brought you drives away out of sight.

Many students, just like many anthropologists, get a feeling of panic at that moment: “What am I doing here?” “Why didn’t I go to X?” “I want to go home.” Anthropologists call this feeling of panic *culture shock*. The term is credited to Ruth Benedict, but Cora Du Bois defines it as a “syndrome precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all your familiar cues” (cited in Golde [1970] 1986: 11); in short, you become disoriented. Culture shock is not confined to that initial moment but can resurface at various times at the beginning of any new adventure. Nor is it confined only to anthropologists or to students, for it can occur at other life-changing moments, for example when you take a new job or move to a new city. Anthropologists who have studied the phenomenon of culture shock have noted the following telltale signs: “frustration, repressed or expressed aggression against the source of discomfort, an irrational fervor for the familiar and comforting, and disproportionate anger at trivial interferences” (Golde [1970] 1986: 11).¹ It is useful to keep this in mind during the first few weeks of college life.

As an example, let me tell you about something that happened to me when I began my fieldwork in Turkey. I was

excited to be there and ready to begin my fieldwork, but I didn't know how I was supposed to go about it or where to start. I recall that I got a craving for vanilla yogurt. This was a very trivial thing, and I was never even that fond of yogurt at home, but in Turkey I had to have vanilla yogurt. Now you have to realize that Turkey is full of yogurt; it is one of their basic foods. Yogurt, yogurt everywhere, but no vanilla to be found anywhere. I was frustrated and angry: how could they not have vanilla? What kind of people are they anyway? I began a frantic search, feeling that I would not be happy until I found it; vanilla yogurt would be my comfort food, my little piece of home. I eventually found a few desiccated pods of vanilla in a spice shop and ground my own. After that, I was prepared for anything.

In order to avoid severe culture shock and to overcome students' initial disorientation, it is no wonder colleges set aside some time, often several days, for "orientation."

Orientation

An orientation program is, obviously, intended to help you get oriented in the new environment. Often you are told something about the history, the resources, and the rules of the school; you are shown where to go for class, for books, for food, for exercise, and for help if you get sick. Such a program helps you to get your bearings, literally and figuratively.

The purpose of orientation programs is to help you feel at home and become acclimated to your new environment. It can also be viewed quite productively as an *initiation* ritual, for it does initiate you into your new status - that of undergraduate. Initiation rituals are one type of *rites de passage* first analyzed by a Flemish anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in 1909 ([1909] 1960). Although there are a number of rites of passage, rites that mark transitions from

one life stage to another, such as at birth, puberty, marriage, and death, Van Gennep focused primarily on initiation rites that occur around the time of puberty in a number of small-scale, kinship-based, hunter-gatherer societies, namely, those societies we have so condescendingly called “primitive.”² Initiation rites are the rituals that transform youths or adolescents into adults; during the rituals, they are initiated by tribal elders into the lore of the tribe and into adult responsibilities. In some places, the rites occur over a number of weeks or months, but in others they have been known to last several years. Among Australian aborigines, for example, the initiation rites traditionally took about four years, exactly equivalent to a typical American college education.

According to Van Gennep’s schema, most *rites de passage* have three stages. The first is rites of separation, when the person is detached from his or her group or family; the second is made up of rites that characterize the *liminal* period, which is *the* transitional stage. Victor Turner, a famous British anthropologist who developed Van Gennep’s schema in his own studies of ritual, characterized this stage as “betwixt and between” fixed statuses when a boy, for example, is no longer a child but not yet a man with adult responsibilities (1967: 93-111). The third stage includes the rites of reaggregation, when the transformed person is inserted back into society.

You will have to analyze your own orientation programs for some of these features. The example that follows, from Stanford University, is meant to be used for comparative purposes and is not held up as the norm or as an ideal. I use it only because it was my locale. While some of the particulars vary from year to year, the orientation program follows quite closely the pattern laid down by Van Gennep. It is primarily for freshmen and takes place over a three-day weekend, *before* the other students arrive. Students leave

their homes, familiar surroundings, and friends. This is the beginning of the “separation” phase. On Friday the freshmen arrive, often with their parents, siblings, and sometimes friends in tow. Some come by car; others arrive by plane, train, or bus. They are taken to their living quarters and introduced to their roommates and the resident heads. After a few activities that include parents, there is an announced time when parents (and friends) are supposed to leave. This truly marks the “separation” phase, though at this point the separation is often more traumatic for the parents. Students then have their first dinner with their assembled dorm mates.

Saturday resembles the “liminal” phase of the rite, when initiates are expected to undergo a number of *ordeals*. At Stanford, these can vary from being led around campus in the dead of night, not knowing where you are or where you are going, to being awakened at dawn and dragged out of bed to participate in a scavenger hunt. Later in the day students sit for hours and take placement exams that will determine the level of the classes in which they will enroll. They must also consider the other classes they will take and the extracurricular activities they will join. At least for a while, their choices will have an impact on their academic and social direction (or orientation). Other parts of the *ordeal* can include being quizzed on the names of other students and of residence heads, the local jargon that they should have memorized, and so forth. In the evening, they are sometimes required to participate in a race and gender sensitivity-training program, which can be unsettling for a number of students who must confront their prejudices. Then they are taught some of the new rules for academic and personal behavior – what is acceptable and what is not.

The culmination of orientation weekend is a football game, where the freshmen go *en masse* and sit in a special area reserved for them. Many alumni attend this game, and

faculty are given free passes. The freshmen are being made into Stanfordites: they are shown the school symbols, they hear the school songs and cheers for the first time, and they are caught up in the school spirit, rooting for *their* team against the opponents. This could be imagined as the *reaggregation* ritual, for symbolically they are being incorporated into the Stanford community.

You could also easily see all four years of college as a prolonged initiation ritual, since you are separated from the rest of society for the entire period. You are no longer a child, but are not yet a fully functioning adult. You have a special, liminal, “student” status that is socially recognized; you receive certain benefits – discounts on buses, airplanes, movies, and so on, as well as a wide berth for some types of disruptive behavior. During the college years, students are freer than they ever will be again to “discover who they are,” to try on various identities, and to prepare themselves for their adult roles in society. In this latter task, they are aided by the wisdom of the elders – professors and counselors – just as in initiation rites among traditional societies.

For some students, the liminal phase is more interesting or even comforting than what awaits them “outside” in the “real world,” and they want to stay on as long as possible. Eventually, however, most of them pass through the initiation and come out ready to be reinserted, as adults, into society. This achievement is marked by the graduation ceremony, which, with ironic connotations, is called *commencement*, no doubt to indicate that this is the *beginning* of the rest of your life, as a newly fledged person.

Anthropology

The foregoing may not be *at all* your image of what anthropology is. Most people think it has to do with “stones

and bones” and with *elsewhere* but not here. This is a very common assumption that I hear in the responses of people when I tell them that I am an anthropologist. They often launch into an account of some program they saw on television about an ancient site or a recent bone find. They are thinking of archaeology (the “stones”) and physical anthropology (the “bones”). Yet, these are only two of the traditional four subfields of anthropology, while linguistics is a third. Other people sometimes think of Margaret Mead and realize that anthropology can also be about psychology and human behavior; the kinds of studies she conducted fall in the major “subfield” of the discipline – social and cultural anthropology. Many anthropologists today, myself included, no longer subscribe to the fourfield division of the discipline but feel, instead, that the defining element is not so much what one studies but the *theoretical* stance one takes toward the material one studies. The difference has to do with the way people define, or at least imagine, human nature and culture (see Segal and Yanagisako 2004).

Nature and Culture

To give you some sense of what this means in practice, think about some of the ways we often identify differences between *peoples*: environment, race, genetics, religion, economy, technology, and development. Often these differences are collapsed into broader categories of *nature* versus *culture*, with race and genetics put in the nature box and religion, economy, and technology in the culture box. Many people then conflate the nature and culture categories by assuming that peoples with the best natural gifts (genes, intelligence, and strength) produce the most advanced cultures.

But who makes these judgments about “advanced” and “primitive” cultures, and whose scale is used as the

standard? And what exactly does *advanced* mean? If advanced means *complex*, then the Australian aborigines are among the most advanced peoples, judging by the extraordinary complexity of their kinship system and their religious concepts. Or perhaps some of the Western nations are the most advanced, as evidenced by the mechanical complexity of their locomotive technologies. Or perhaps Hindus and Buddhists are the most advanced, given the complexity and sophistication of their meditative and mental practices. In the nineteenth century, British and American social theorists ranked peoples of the world on an evolutionary, progressive, unilinear, and universal scale of culture that ended, not coincidentally, with themselves at the top. They simply assumed that all peoples necessarily tread the same path to civilization, for there was only one scale and one orientation - up and West.

A very popular notion about anthropology is that it is the search for human universals with the corollary that whatever is universal must, *ipso facto*, be natural. People want to know what is natural to the human species and often try to make analogies from animal behavior to human behavior, believing that the overlap indicates what is natural about human nature. For a long time, it was believed that *Homo sapiens* first developed their modern form (two-legged stance, opposable thumbs, and large brain), and *then* invented culture. Instead, it is now generally accepted not only that *Homo sapiens* developed from their ape-like ancestors to their modern form, but also that culture was part of their development. Clifford Geertz wrote that “the greater part of human cortical expansion has *followed*, not preceded, the ‘beginning’ of culture” (1973: 64, emphasis mine). In other words, “cultural resources are ingredient, not accessory, to human thought” (Geertz 1973: 83).

And yet some scientists continue to see in animal behavior (not so) faint echoes of our own. They persist in drawing