

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

STS.036 Technology and Nature in American History
Spring 2008

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

STS.036
Spring 2008
Paper #1

Due date: Tuesday, March 11
Length: 5 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font)
Value: 20 points

Keith Basso's book on Western Apache landscape and language is the end result of his ambitious ethnographic and mapping project that encompassed two decades of fieldwork and a twenty-mile radius around Cibecue. For this assignment I would like you to undertake a similar, although far smaller, mapping project of the landscape of your daily life. Take your reader on a journey through the physical landscape you experience on a daily basis—your residence, your routes to class, your classrooms and lab spaces, your recreational spaces, your workplace, the stores and restaurants where you are a “regular,” your favorite places on and off campus, and any other places where you can often be found. Assume that you, like Nick Thompson, have “maps in [y]our minds,” and translate those maps for a reader who is a stranger to your landscape (43).

Pay particular attention to how various places in your own landscape have become invested with meaning, whether through place-naming, story-telling, or other creative activity. How have the names you have assigned to places and the stories you have told about those places shaped the way you and perhaps others know these places? Also pay attention to how memory and history are located in your physical landscape. How have your own experiences and memories become a part of the places you pass by every day?

As Basso reminds us, “our attachments to places, like the ease with which we usually sustain them, are unthinkingly taken for granted” (xiii). The purpose of this assignment is to consider carefully your own attachments to places and to explain how those attachments have been formed and maintained.

This is a creative writing exercise and you are free to organize your essay however you wish. You are not obligated to quote or refer to Basso's book, but the best papers will resonate with some of the themes and ideas that Basso puts forth.

Papers will be graded on quality of insight and clarity of expression. Strive for elegant prose, and make sure that your paper is free of grammatical flaws and typographical errors. (The best way to proofread your paper is to read it aloud.)

“If place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of *doing* human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We *are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine” (Basso, 7).