ANT 391 Current Ethnography
Spring 2015
Dr. John Hartigan
Wednesdays: 9:00-12:00, SAC 5.118
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Office Hours: Mon & Wed, 11am-12pm, & by appt. (SAC 4.158)

Seminar Overview: Ethnography is a powerful method for analyzing cultural dynamics, objects, and settings. As a method that crosses disciplinary boundaries and is increasingly deployed by marketers, ethnography is continually being reinvented and applied in novel situations. This course combines a grounding in how to do ethnography with a survey of interesting ethnographic research today. The initial focus of the seminar will be understanding the components of fieldwork, both applying and appraising its distinctive elements (participant observation, interviewing, etc.). We will do so through reading a range of articles and book-length works. As we build familiarity with the components of ethnography, we will consider the range of subjects to which it can be applied, with a particular attention to online/social network forums and multisited projects. This will involve thinking about a variety of theoretical questions by imagining and framing them in field settings. This seminar will feature a multidisciplinary perspective, sampling how this distinctive mode of generating social knowledge operates in different institutional settings, as well as glimpsing the future of fieldwork via a variety of current innovative approaches.

Our first concern will be to establish our respective interests and levels of familiarity with ethnography. Our first session we will articulate some basic objectives and guidelines for these readings and our subsequent discussions. We will also establish some touchstones for reading and critically assessing ethnographies. Then we will proceed through these books, which are loosely clumped together thematically. You are not expected to have any familiarity with these areas of research—just a basic level of curiosity and increasingly honed sensibility for what makes a good ethnography. By the conclusion of this seminar, you should have both a clear understanding of developing trends in ethnographic research and a solid grasp on the way ethnographers combine theories, methods, and reflection into innovative analytical insights.

Selected Books:
Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov, Kirin Narayan.
Networked Anthropology: A Primer for Ethnographers, Samuel Gerald Collins and Matthew Slover Durnington.
Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing, Didier Fassin
Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction, Gastón R. Gordillo
Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina, Javier Auyero.

Journal Resources:
American Ethnologist; Cultural Anthropology, http://www.culanth.org/
Ethnography; Ethnos; Journal of Contemporary Ethnography; Qualitative Sociology
Weekly Topics:

Week 1 Jan. 17: Introducing Ethnographic Research.

Week 2 Jan. 24: Field observations, round 1.
Readings: Chapters 1, 4, 6, 8 from Rethinking Urban Parks, Low et al.
Assignment: Select 3 journal articles that cover some topic of interest to you; delineate what you find appealing and frustrating about them.

Week 3 Jan 31: Report on field observations; report on journal research; identify theoretical topics.

Week 4 Feb 7: What counts as ethnography?
Readings: Alive in the Writing, Narayan; “Moscow’s Echo,” Matza; “The End(s) of Ethnography,” Marcus.

Week 5 Feb 14: Evaluating ethnographic writing.
Assignment: survey journal articles; read 3 book reviews of ethnographies.

Week 6 Feb 21: Writing Culture
Readings: “Introduction” to Writing Culture, Clifford; Chaps 3 & 9, from Ethnography Through Thick & Thin, Marcus; online essays on WC @ Cultural Anthropology.

Week 7 Feb 28: Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing, Didier Fassin

Week 8 Mar 7: field observations, round 2.

Mar 14: Spring Break


Week 10 Mar 28: Wild life in Austin: field observations, round 3.

Week 11 Apr 4: Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction, Gastón R. Gordillo

Week 12 Apr 11: Networked Anthropology: A Primer for Ethnographers, Samuel Gerald Collins and Matthew Slover Durington.

Week 13 Apr 18: Ethnographic perspectives on virtual worlds; field observations, round 5.

Week 14 Apr 25: Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina, Javier Auyero.

Week 15 May 2: final projects.
Final projects will be designed to reflect both our progression as a seminar through the semester and individual participants respective stages of research and disciplinary orientations. These may range from being “review” type projects to more directed research.

**Assignment 1**: Select 3 journal articles that cover some topic of interest to you; delineate what you find appealing and frustrating about them.

The purpose of this assignment is for you to familiarize yourself with the range of topics examined by ethnography today. In doing so you should make an effort to: 1) recognize and assess your disciplinary orientation—what are the prevailing assumptions about data, methods, and knowledge claims in your field; what counts as analysis or theorizing; 2) identify areas of research interest to you that are accessible or addressable by ethnography—can you imagine a boundary between topics that are or are not amenable to ethnographic analysis; if so, what’s the basis for delineation; 3) what forms of competence are required to understand current ethnographic research—ask yourself how accessible or inaccessible these accounts are; also, what areas of expertise do you think you need to acquire to pursue such projects; 4) what is typical of ethnographic research; are their common aims, assumptions, and conclusions in these works; are their topics you can’t imagine approaching ethnographically?

Send me a written account of your reflections on these readings, along with whatever details you consider relevant for me to understand regarding your interest in ethnography. Send these to me by noon on January 24th.

**Assignment 2**: Try it out. Sift through the readings from Low et al (*Rethinking Urban Parks*), select a public park (or a similar setting) and observe it. What can and can’t you tell about the setting? Compile notes and/or written reflections to post in advance of our session on January 31st.