

070.317 – JUNIOR-SENIOR SEMINAR: ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING

Johns Hopkins University, Spring 2012
Thursdays 1:30-3:50 PM, Macaulay 400
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This seminar will explore the craft of writing in contemporary anthropology. Writing is one of the most important ways in which we pull the experience of others into focus. The very notion of *ethnography* evokes not only the fieldwork that anthropology is known for, but also the bringing of a world to life through the creation of a text. In this seminar, we will closely examine a few works of anthropological writing, and pursue experiments of our own in ethnographic description and expression. Working collaboratively in the spirit of a workshop, we will do exercises in reading and writing, trying out various ways of describing ethnographic scenes, characters, problems, and situations. We will explore ethnographic writing as a creative practice committed to excavating unknown depths and faces of the reality we see, feel, and experience.

Books. There are four books to purchase for the course (by Taussig, Gandolfo, Garcia, and Narayan), all of which will be available at the campus bookstore. Other articles and excerpted readings for the course will be available under “Course Content” on the course Blackboard site. You are also going to need a journal to write in. When I do fieldwork, I like to take notes in a Moleskin Reporter Pocket Plain Notebook, which is available at the campus bookstore as well.

Requirements (and % of overall grade). Please carefully read the assigned reading before class, and be prepared to participate actively in class discussion (20%). Each Wednesday night, you will post a couple of sentences reflecting on the reading on the course Blackboard discussion board for the week, focusing on *one* passage or theme that promises insight into ethnographic writing (10%). You will be responsible for leading class discussion with a brief (<5 min) presentation once over the course of the semester (5%). There will be one brief (<500 words) assignment in ethnographic description due early on (10%). Throughout the semester, you will keep an ethnographic journal to practice various handwritten “freewriting” experiments, which you will hand in every other week (20% - when grading, I will mostly be looking for evidence that you are trying out these exercises in good faith). You will engage in one larger project in ethnographic writing (approx. 3000 words), which you are encouraged to develop out of the subject of your writing exercises. It will be due as a paragraph proposal and bibliography (5%), rough draft (10%) and final draft (20%). I strongly encourage you to meet with me individually to discuss your evolving work for the course. All assignments are due as e-mail attachments by midnight that day; no extensions, exceptions, or excuses, and late assignments will be marked down 10% per day. On academic honesty, please consult <http://www.advising.jhu.edu>.

Schedule

February 2 Orientations

- February 9 Robert Myers, "The Familiar Strange and the Strange Familiar in Anthropology and Beyond," from *General Anthropology*, 2011
 Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 249-293
 Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight"
 Juan Obarrio, "ER (...) Ellipses," from *Social Text*, 2011
Brief ethnographic description due by e-mail
- February 16 Anton Chekhov, "In Exile" and selections from *The Island*
 Kirin Narayan, *Alive in the Writing*, Preface, Chapter 1: Story & Theory
 Michael Jackson, "The Gulf of Corinth" and "Writing Workshop" from
Between One and One Another
 Gilles Deleuze, "Literature and Life"
Hand in ethnographic journals in class
- February 23 Michael Taussig, *I Swear I Saw That*
- March 1 Taussig, *I Swear I Saw That*, continued
 Narayan, Chapter 2: Place
Hand in ethnographic journals in class
- March 8 Daniella Gandolfo, *The City at Its Limits*
Proposal and bibliography due by e-mail
- March 15 Gandolfo, *The City at Its Limits*, continued
 Narayan, Chapter 3: Person
Hand in ethnographic journals in class
- March 29 Angela Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic*
- April 5 Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic*, continued
 Narayan, Chapter 4: Voice
Hand in ethnographic journals in class
- April 12 No class: work on individual projects
- April 19 Anand Pandian, *In the Flow of Time*, selections
 Narayan, Chapter 5: self
Hand in ethnographic journals in class
- April 26 Discussion of student rough drafts
- May 3 Discussion of student rough drafts
- May 10 *Final drafts due by e-mail*