

ETHNOGRAPHY (Fall 2010)

Javier Auyero

Thursdays 3 PM-6 PM

OFFICE: BUR 564

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays 3 PM – 4.45 PM

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This course has four major objectives:

- to become familiar with some examples of classic and contemporary ethnographic writing.
- to acquaint students with the methodological tenets of ethnography
- to consider theoretical and epistemological issues in ethnographic research
- to put some data production techniques (observant participation and in-depth interviews) into practice

Throughout the semester will we read ethnographies that study poverty and/or marginality in the Americas. We will submit these works to a *generative reading*, that is, we will take the analytic, epistemological, and methodological tools these ethnographies provide to think about our own research objects.

Since learning to do ethnography is essentially a practical task, a craft that must be learned in practice, ***as part of the requirements*** students will be asked to develop a research project and conduct preliminary observations, write fieldnotes, and conduct interviews. The project should be located at a site where poor, marginal, or otherwise destitute populations/groups/individuals live or hang out (welfare offices, homeless shelters, parking lots where day laborers wait for work, soup kitchens, trailer parks, etc.). The final product should be a first draft of a research project that uses ethnography as a major data-production technique. Warning: ***if you are not willing to conduct observations and/or interviews, do not take this class.***

Grading: Half of your course grade comes from a book review essay (8 pages maximum) based on three recent ethnographic texts of your choosing (for samples of book review essays, please peruse recent issues of *Contemporary Sociology*). You will also have to present two sets of fieldnotes and full transcriptions of two in-depth interviews (50% of your grade).

Required books

- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. *Death Without Weeping*. California University Press, 1992.
- Emerson, Robert. et al. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago University Press, 1995.
- Weiss, Robert. *Learning from Strangers*. Free Press, 1995.
- Desmond, Matthew. *On the Fireline. Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Comfort, Megan. *Doing Time Together. Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Auyero, Javier. *Poor People's Politics*. Duke University Press, 2000.

Readings mark with (*) are accessible on blackboard.

Schedule

- **August 26: Presentation of seminar.**
- **September 2: On Theory and Ethnography**

* Pierre Bourdieu et al. *The Craft of Sociology*. De Gruyter, 1991 [pp. 1-77]

* Jorge Luis Borges. "Funes, his Memory."

* Edgar Allan Poe. "A Descent into the Maelstrom."

* David Snow, Calvin Morrill and Leon Anderson. 2003. "Analytic Ethnography" in *Ethnography* 4 (2).

* Michael Burawoy, "Introduction," "Reconstructing Social Theories," and "The Extended Case Method," in *Ethnography Unbound*. University of California Press, 1991.

Recommended:

The Craft of Inquiry by Robert Alford (Oxford University Press, 1998) [Introduction, Chapters 1-3, 5].

Becker, H. "How I Learned What a Crock was," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 (1), 1993.

Stacey, Judith. 1988. "Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 11(1).

Erving Goffman. 1989. "On Fieldwork." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18 (2).

➤ **September 9: What do Cases do?**

- * Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books. 2000. [Chapter 1 and 15]
- * Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. Basic Books, 2000. [Chapter 3].
- * Vaughan, Diane. 2004. "Theorizing Disaster. Analogy, Historical Ethnography, and the Challenger Accident." *Ethnography* 5 (3).
- * Katz, Jack. 2001/2002. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography," Parts I and II. *Ethnography* 2 (4) and 3 (1)

Recommended:

- * Walton, John. "Making the Theoretical Case," in What is a Case? By Charles Ragin and H. Becker. Cambridge U. Press 1992.
- * Harper, Douglas. "Small N's and Community Case Studies," in What is a Case? By Charles Ragin and H. Becker. Cambridge U. Press 1992.

➤ **September 16: A Classic on Social Suffering**

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. *Death Without Weeping*. California University Press, 1992. Chapters Introduction, 1-2, 4-5, 7-9.

➤ **September 23: Discussion of student projects: Site and general topic**

ONE PAGE ABSTRACT OF YOUR PROJECT DUE ON SEPTEMBER 21ST

➤ **September 30: Fieldnotes**

Emerson, R. et al. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago University Press, 1995.

Recommended:

Stewart, A. *The Ethnographer's Method*. Sage, 2004.

➤ **October 14: Interviews**

Weiss, R. *Learning from Strangers*. Free Press, 1995.

Recommended:

Atkinson, R. *The Life Story Interview*. Sage, 1998

Marshall, C. and G. Rossman. *Designing Qualitative Research*. Sage, 2006. [Chapters 1, 3, & 4]

➤ **October 28: Gender and Risk**

Desmond, Matthew. *On the Fireline. Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters*. University of Chicago Press, 2008 (Entire)

➤ **November 11: Incarceration/Socialization**

*Goffman, Alice. 2009. "On The Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto." *American Sociological Review* 74 (2): 339-357

Comfort, Megan. *Doing Time Together. Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. University of Chicago Press, 2008 (Entire)

➤ **November 18: Political Ethnography**

Auyero, Javier. *Poor People's Politics*. Duke University Press, 2000 (Entire).

➤ **December 2: Destitution**

*Purser, Gretchen. "The Circle of Dispossession: Evictions in the U.S. Metropolis." Unpublished paper.

*Gowan, Teresa. 2009. "New Hobos or Neo-Romantic Fantasy? Urban Ethnography beyond the Neoliberal Disconnect." *Qualitative Sociology* 33 (2):231-258.

*Kusenbach, Margarethe. 2009. "Salvaging Decency: Mobile Home Residents' Strategies of Managing the Stigma of "Trailer" Living." *Qualitative Sociology* 32 (4): 399-428

December 9 and December 16: WORKSHOP: Discussion of Students' Fieldnotes, Interviews, and Projects