Reading and Doing Ethnography

Social Anthropology 314

1.1 Ethnographic Encounters

Anthropological observations around the Arts Building

Race, gender, self-presentation

» Girls like their group, while boys are more alone.

» It feels like we are scared of communicating to each other; then we isolate ourselves from other racially.

» They go on their phones to make themselves look occupied and look like they are being social.

Feelings

» Students were preoccupied. It seemed they did not entirely want to be in class.

» When they go into class they seem more unhapppy/have a look of dreadfulness, but when they leave they are kind of relieved.

» [Smokers outside] look very relaxed as if they don't have any motive to work.

» There is a somewhat nervous energy which, as a 3rd year student, I assign to nervous 1st years who clearly have a lost or confused expression.

How social are we?

1. Majority of people sitting in the BA building use their phones while waiting for their next class, while minority read books and socialise with other people.

2. People tend to sit in groups to avoid sitting alone and to be part of a group's conversation. The few people who choose to sit alone, sit far from each other.

How do we analyze observations?

Things you can observation

» Physical behavior and location

» Forms of sociability or isolation (showing social relationships)

» Cultural presentation (e.g. fashion)

» Ways of talking

» Observations about social strategy

» Public feelings

What is "observing"

» You *already have expectations* when you observe.

» You notice differences between norm and reality.

» You make inferences about why people do what they do: their *strategies.*

» You may make inferences about *theoretical findings.*

Essential points in ethnographic observation

» Know what you're expecting.

» Don't generalize **at all**. Note specific people and details about them, rather than types.

» Find something surprising, given your expectations.

» Be aware of the difference between what you see and what you infer.

The main problem with this exercise:

It's impossible to observe with no project.

You have to have a project to start out, even if it changes.

Social situations

Gluckman-style questions

» Where is it?

» Who was there? Where did they come from?

» What happened, very concretely?

» What did people talk about?

» How were people divided into groups?

» What sorts of power and politics were at work?

» What is the role of the white state? Of race?

» What forms of work are represented?

» How are people organized by gender?

» How do different social structures fit together?

» What are people's different motives?

The difference from Malinowski

» Malinowski gives us an image of coherent, separated "native" culture.

» Gluckman is interested in the system that integrates different racial and social groups.

Ethnographic Encounters

Abu-Lughod-style questions

» How are you integrated into local norms?

» What do you owe the locals?

» What sorts of attachments do you form?

» Is local culture a critique of your own culture?

» How are bodies regulated and ritualized?

» Can we distinguish "home" and "field"?

» How are similar practices interpreted culturally?