

7.3 Conclusions

Reading and Doing Ethnography
Social Anthropology 314

How strange that "hell is other people" and yet they are also our greatest and most necessary refuge.

— A friend from my home town

Course review: First half

- >> To be a person is to be a social actor moving through a series of cultural encounters (Week 1).
- >> These cultural encounters are full of ideology (rationalization, strategic simplification, mystification), which people are somewhat aware of (Week 2).
- >> Cultural encounters are also inscrutable, full of intimacies and dialogues that need interpretation (Week 3).
- >> Social actors have an inner life: they often display ambivalence, antagonisms (of race or class or gender), distaste for their norms (Week 4).

Course review: Second half

- » Social actors also have social strategies for getting things done in their encounters with others. These strategies have patterns and rhythms (Week 5).
- » Cultural situations are organized around critique and controversy. This includes anthropology and its colonial and racial legacy (Week 6).
- » Our senses go beyond sight and sound, and even beyond language. The senses have their particular histories and technologies (Week 7).

Ethnography: literary critical version

- >> Ethnography is about making sense out of the social world.
- >> Here is a set of concepts that you could use to help do this.
- >> But the way you put conflicts to work is *in interpretation*.
- >> Interpretation is always a creative act. It's not just about classifying and labeling things.

Ethnography: humanist version

- >> Become close to people.
- >> Learn their stories.
- >> Become a storyteller.
- >> Tell stories.

What's a question you
wish someone would
ask you?

Club story

When I was sixteen, I visited my brother who was at university at the time. He wanted to show me the night life and attempted to sneak me into clubs, although I was underaged. I remember feeling extremely excited and grown-up, however at the same time so nervous about the fact that there would be a possibility that I would get bounced from the club. My feelings were definitely mixed, because I really wanted to experience a club, also I was too terrified to take the risk of being caught out. I chickened out, and we stayed at home.

Sick story

Yesterday I was feeling veyr sick and I had mixed feelings about coming to campus or not. I felt too guilty to not come, but I was feeling so sick and down at the same time. I didn't want to come, but at the same time I felt so guilty. I ended up not coming to campus but felt guilty the entire day.

Biking story

I was riding my bike through a desolate town in the foothills of the Catskill mountains looking for a place to stay the night. A group of kids was on the sidewalk, and they started talking to me as I rode past.

"Hey!"

"Hi!" I responded.

"What's your name?"

"Frank!" I said.

"Can I ride your bike?"

"Maybe later," I said, not knowing how to respond and not wanting to stop.

Then they asked a very peculiar question.

"Are you gay?"

I didn't answer, and never saw the kids again, but I wondered what had possessed them to make such a crass inquiry of a total stranger.

Rock story

I left work early on a hot summer day and went for a walk in a little river valley. After walking for a while, I sat down in a secluded spot, and covered my shoulders with a blanket to keep off the sunburn, because I was very pale.

Out of the woods, several kids appeared suddenly, shouting, trailed by a dad who seemed to have little authority.

Frustrated by the lost solitude, I covered my head with the blanket and waited, hoping the kids would go away.

But instead the kids were intrigued. "Who are you?" they asked. No answer. "Maybe it's an alien!" they shouted. "Maybe the aliens left it there!" I laughed quietly at these remarks.

"Let's throw a rock at it!" they shouted.

No one in their right mind would throw a rock at a total stranger under a blanket, I said to myself.

A rock hit me in the shoulder. Then I came out from under the blanket and stared angrily at the children. And they stopped bothering me.

What do these mean?

What's the meaning of Others?

What is it about questions?