

Reading and Doing Ethnography

Social Anthropology 314

4.4 Antagonism

Briefly: Fighting is a cultural thing

Terminology

- >> **Antagonism**: A state of opposed structures or projects.
- >> **Hostility**: The affective and cultural state of being in antagonism.
- >> **Fighting** or **Conflict**: The way hostilities are enacted.

Thus, structures of antagonism are experienced as hostility, which may culminate in conflict.

Studying antagonisms

- >> We'll talk about conflicts next week
- >> Ambivalence can be a way of living with antagonisms that you can't get out of.
- >> But what happens when ambivalence isn't enough? When there's nothing to buffer or dissipate antagonisms?

Antagonisms are intersubjective
and intrasubjective

Between us and also within us.

Antagonism could be construed as:

- >> Inner conflicts (spiritual)
- >> Incompatible values (moral)
- >> Incompatible interests (political)
- >> Reaction to dominance (power)

The traditional sociological antagonisms

If it's a category of social division, it's a category of antagonism

- >> Racial antagonism
- >> Class antagonism
- >> Gender antagonism
- >> National antagonism
- >> Age/generational antagonism

The traditional subjective antagonisms

- >> Antagonism towards (unliveable) norms
- >> Antagonism towards your own self
- >> Antagonism towards your internal models of others (parents, friends, lovers)

Rudiments of Berlantian subjectivity theory

- >> Norms are unliveable; or normative structures (families) leave people traumatized; or possibly people have incoherent relations to the pleasures that their norms afford.
- >> Nevertheless, people are full of attachments (to ideas, sex, eating, their parents, school, politics, etc).
- >> You're always trying to cope with the costs of your history (both biographical and collective).
- >> At every instant you are full of fantasies.
- >> Fantasy isn't an idle otherworld but a form of mental training that organizes your encounters.

Berlantian subjectivity theory, cont.

- » But encounters aren't just "real"; they represent something to you that is overdetermined, enigmatic. ("Each woman functions formally as an enigmatic opportunity for something transformative," 127.)
- » Because people are inscrutable and so is the world, a constant effort of "monitoring" is required. ("Hypervigilance.")
- » People are always trying to narrate themselves to themselves and also to others.
- » The unconscious looms large; therefore people don't really know what they know or even altogether what they're doing.

Berlantian subjectivity theory, cont.

- » Whatever is non-normative is something that somebody wants. This includes self-harm, "annihilation," to be scripted, to be a type, to get to feel pain, etc.
- » This does not have to be personal even if it is called intimate.
- » People are trying to stay composed, or enjoying coming undone; sometimes people are very wound up, sometimes they let themselves go; they're trying to become other, or to stay the same. Either way, subjectivity is a struggle. Which is to say, a project.

All forms – – all patterns or scenes of projection that can be misrecognized as objects-with-qualities – – are managerial habits that orchestrate the subject's affective cadence while minimizing her or his risk of unwanted exposure or discomposure... What counts as discomposure might be a conventional style of instability rather than an instability that actually threatens the subject's core self-patterning – – and therefore constitute a form of composure that takes on an antithetical style. (146)

*Sex foregrounds the convolutions of this
unthought known starkly. Even though I wish to
remain myself, I may want also to experience the
discomposure of intimate relationality, yet want
only the discomposure I can imagine, plus a little
of the right kind extra, and how can I bear the
risk of experiencing the anything that might be
beyond? How can I bear not seeking it? (146)*

Depression

"Adventures in Depression," Allie Brosh

<http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.co.za/2011/10/adventures-in-depression.html>

- >> Depression isn't sadness
- >> Sadness is redeemable, depression not.
- >> But it creates meta-pity: selfpity for being deprived of redemptive sadness.

Depression as misplaced aggression

If one listens patiently to a melancholic's many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love.

— Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia"

Marikana strike, August 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssPrxvgePsc>

"The best MARIKANA documentary on YouTube: MINERS SHOT DOWN."

Analyzing antagonisms

- >> What were the structural antagonisms in Marikana?
- >> How were these experienced, as hostility?
- >> What are the cultural forms that conflict subsequently takes?

Antagonisms

- >> Labor vs management (owners)
 - >> Antagonism over money (wages "the biggest threat to the business")
 - >> Antagonism over environment (workplace health & safety)
 - >> Antagonism over power (who determines the course of action?)
- >> Police vs marchers
 - >> Antagonism over movement (controlled/permitted vs "uncontrolled")
 - >> Antagonism over use of force ("your guns cannot stop us")

Hostilities

Conflict is not necessarily
analytically *primary*. It can be
expressive.

