

Patchy haunts

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Summary

This is a contribution to the special section “100s for Katie,” which celebrates Kathleen Stewart's work. It reflects on the capacity of dreams to embody the affective stakes of ethnographic fieldwork.

KEYWORDS

affect, dreams, fieldwork, patchwork ethnography

I'm a run-of-the-mill dreamer. Still, I'm haunted by dreams of fieldwork encumbered and unaccomplished. They resound with doubt and insufficiency, those debilitating but less acknowledged affects accompanying ethnographic research in the neoliberal mode.¹ Patchy² haunts: The last day of a hurried field trip, bags packed, ready to leave, home's calling, but friends have gone unembraced and questions unasked. Joyful optimism washes over into a sense of panic. Time frittered away. Patchy haunts substitute for extended visits. The truth is, it's been years. Familiar places come to me as pared-down nocturnal sites—geometrical, faded, hushed. Sometimes, there's a family get-together at which I'm an awkward bystander, a party for which I'm not dressed, a dance undanced. Intimacy failed? Distressed, I wake. I shake, reassuring myself of the abiding commitment that lets my fieldwork companions inhabit my dreams. Patchy haunts. Any time.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Johnson, Alix. 2016. “Affect, Attention, and Ethnographic Research: Thoughts on Mental Health in the Field.” *Savage Minds*, March 30. <https://savageminds.org/2016/03/30/affect-attention-and-ethnographic-research-thoughts-on-mental-health-in-the-field/>.
- ² Günel, Gökçe, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe. 2020. “A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography.” *Member Voices, Fieldsights*, June 9. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>.

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