

Sociology Retreat at Cumberland Lodge – Part Two

This post by doctoral researcher, Paz Concha, summarises the presentation and main discussion of the Ethnography panel chaired by Suzi Hall.

Mona Sloane (first year PhD) started the session by presenting an ANT-critique developed in her MSc dissertation (Culture and Society 2011/2012) and how this critique has informed the main research questions for her PhD project. Core to the presentation was the question of how to bring materialities to the forefront of ethnographic research, in her case ethnographic research in an urban design practice.

The main focus was how to bring the sensorial experience of materiality when doing ethnographic work.



She used an object (palette, image below) for the audience to be able to use their sight and touch to sense the materiality of the work of interior designers and the relevance of ethnography to obtain information, but also to understand the relationship between subjects and objects in their everyday practices.

Lisa McKenzie, Research Fellow at the Department, presented her work in St. Ann's community (a social housing estate in Nottingham) called 'Going in' The Role of Ethnography and Community Studies in Sociology" focussing on how she started to think about the ethnographic *lenses* from a community studies perspective.

She showed the work of classic authors and talked about "getting in", how she began her journey working in St. Ann's, at first  with a gender perspective on the role of women in this area, and then extending her research project to work the male inhabitants of St. Ann's. Her extensive ethnographic work for over 7 year has led to many publications, and she is preparing a book which will be published later this year.

Her presentation motivated the discussion about how to gain distance from the field; Lisa lived and worked many years in the same community, and she explain how the academic world, the theoretical discussions and even the University itself were elements that kept her at an objective distance.

I also had the chance to present my preliminary work for my research on street food markets in London. I focussed my presentation on the preparation of fieldwork, the use of Twitter, following markets, traders and consumers, literature review of blogs, Facebook pages and websites, visits to street food markets in London, mapping and choosing the sites. I also presented the experience of street food markets production through videos, such as [Kerb Saturday](#), from the sites that I'm planning to work on.

An interesting discussion was on the many forms that the urban experience might take and how street food markets are an expression of the constant rebuilding and reimagining process of urban space. Also, there was much attention on the advantages of doing fieldwork in a pleasurable space where eating is involved as part of the participant observation!

Final comments on our presentation were focussed on the prevalence of community in the ethnographic perspective of our three different research topics; professional community, communities of practice or urban communities. This was a point that merited further discussion about how ethnographies make visible the particular and bring back stories about people wanting to gather together, stay together, transform practices and places into social experiences. This was a good illustration of how ethnography can be understood as a long term process that can begin in

the first year of PhD study but could continue as ongoing research for several years, even post-PhD as an early career researcher.

The benefit of the weekend at Cumberland Lodge was to stimulate such discussions in a relaxing environment, bringing together staff and post-graduate students, and taking time to really enjoy exploring sociological research as a process, as an intellectual endeavour and as means of breaking down barriers.

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