

ethnography and illicit flows
ANG6930 Section 8068 / ANT 4930 Section 8086

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-4pm
or by appointment

Thursdays 3-5
(9:35am - 12:35pm)
TUR 2341

Description:

This course asks how prohibition-infused phenomena, spaces and times can be approached ethnographically. It asks how an ethnographer's need for extended durations of proximity to what she or he studies can be made adequate—ethically and substantively—to social worlds that depend upon secrecy and aggressively defend the perceived boundaries of their activities from unwelcome revelation. If such worlds are never localized in one place but circulate across different kinds of landscapes, how then can ethnographers do justice to the manners in which they 'flow'?

To speak of *flow* is to stress the timing of movement on paths and roads but also the obstacles and surprises confronted along the way. Pursuing a flow leads one, moreover, to face the material specificity of particular terrains where multiple perspectives meet if only to diverge and transform.

To speak of things *illicit* is to place an accent on threats that haunt and partially determine itineraries. It is also to raise the question of 'law' and thereby enter a realm of paradox—conceptual as well as pragmatic—where the clarity of logical distinctions and practical objectives repeatedly slips away. Contemporary scholars of criminality and state margins often struggle to grasp in thought the ambivalences of law while simultaneously underscoring how proscriptions imposed upon things shift as they move across of various types of social space. They refer to the il/legal and distinguish it from the il/licit or even show how both are inevitably complicit with what individual communities and persons deem il/legitimate.

With that in mind, ethnographers of illicit flows might well begin with the question of how lines of (il)legal, (il)licit and (il)legitimate are continuously drawn and blurred, policed or disturbed. They might also ask how the intensities of such flows leave their marks on attempts to study them. Here language matters a great deal, so much so that the proper aim of ethnography may well prove to be less the production of knowledge than learning how to follow patiently behind the flows, sensing and weighing and describing in ever more subtle terms the distances traced in their wakes.

Overview of Requirements: This class is run as a seminar with active participation in all discussions expected. Each student will be asked to prepare and present a seminar report on one or more of the assigned readings at least once during the semester. There will be a take-home mid-term exam and also a final paper.

Required Texts:

Gootenberg, P. *Andean cocaine* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008)
Nordstrom, C. *Global outlaws* (University of California Press, 2007)
Pérez-Reverte, A. *The queen of the south*. (Picador, 2004)
Schendel W. and I. Abraham. *Illicit flows and criminal things* (Indiana University Press, 2005)
Schmitt, C. *Theory of the partisan* (Telos Press, 2007)
Shaw, R. *Memories of the slave trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)
Siegel, J. *A new criminal type in Jakarta* (Duke University Press, 1998)
Stern, L. *The smoking book*. (University of Chicago Press, 1999)
Taussig, M. *My cocaine museum*. (University of Chicago Press, 2004)

Supplemental Texts:

Agamben, G. *State of exception*. (University of Chicago Press, 2005)
Campbell, H. *Drug war zone* (University of Texas Press, 2009)
Gibler, J. *To die in Mexico* (City Lights, 2011)
McCoy, A. *The politics of heroin* (Lawrence Hill Books, 2003)

All remaining class readings can be downloaded from the Sakai course page.

Attendance: Please arrive punctually and remain until the end of class. An attendance sign-up sheet will be circulated each session. If you must miss class, please inform the Instructor ahead of time (or as soon as possible) and provide appropriate documentation. In the event of an absence it is the student's responsibility to contact a classmate in order to obtain notes on the materials covered while away.

Absences for reasons of religious holiday, illness, and official university business are excused; however, proper notification must still be provided. **Please note:** *More than one unexcused* absence will severely undermine performance in the course. After the *second* unexcused absence the final grade will be reduced a full letter. Students with *four or more* unexcused absences will fail. On the other hand, bonus credit will be granted for perfect (or near perfect) attendance.

Evaluations – Final course grades will be calculated according to a combination of four criteria:

Participation (20%): Students are expected to play an active, informed role in class discussions and in so doing contribute to the overall success of the course. Please arrive at each session on time with the assigned materials in hand, having carefully read them all, and prepared to share impressions, questions and interpretations. You are also encouraged to meet with the Instructor in office hours at least two times during the semester to talk about your individual progress in the course or plans for the final project.

Seminar Report and Presentation (25%): Every student will be responsible for the preparation and presentation of one seminar report on the assigned readings of a particular week. The seminar report should not be a mere summary of the texts but rather a well-crafted, spirited interpretation that situates the readings within the ideas and concepts of the course. It should also outline specific concerns and hone questions. Student(s) in charge of the coming week's presentation should circulate a list of discussion points and questions *at least 24 hours* prior to class (that is, no later than 9:30 am on Wednesday) via Sakai.

Mid-term exam (25%): The mid-term will be a take-home exam distributed two weeks before the due date.

Term project paper (30%): For undergraduate students – The final paper should be an interpretative essay that critically examines one of the class themes in depth. The specific topic must be elaborated in consultation of the Instructor and receive his approval. Length: 3000 words.

For graduate students – The final paper should be an original, persuasive and creative engagement with one or more of the class concepts. Of approximately 5500-7000 words in length, it should contribute directly towards the development of a conference paper, journal article or dissertation chapter.

From all students a concise 250-word abstract that clearly outlines the objectives of the project is due in late October. The term paper itself must be handed in no later than the last day of class.

All papers, exams and reports should be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins and pages numbered. In addition to submitting a hard copy of the assignment, *you are also required to send an electronic version to the Instructor via Sakai.*

Written assignments will be judged on content (the extent to which they succeed in explicating course material and themes) but also in terms of style (coherence, persuasiveness and creativity).

Assignment Deadlines:

1) mid-term exam: 10/13

2) term paper abstract: 10/27

3) final paper: 12/1

Late policy: Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Mid-term exams and seminar reports handed in late but still within one week of the original due date will be docked the equivalent of a full letter grade. After that they will no longer be accepted. Except in cases of extremely unusual circumstances, no extensions will be granted for the term paper.

Academic Honesty:

All work submitted by a student for a grade must be completed by that student and free from unauthorized assistance or deliberate misrepresentations. The penalty for plagiarism or cheating is a grade of zero points on the assignment in question; in such cases an incident form will also be sent to the Office of the Dean of Students. If you have questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, please consult the UF Honor Code as well as the UF Policies on Academic Honesty, Student Rights and Responsibilities. These are available online at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentrights.php> - [academichonestyguidelines](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentrights.php).

ADA Statement: “Students with disabilities, who need reasonable modifications to complete assignments successfully and otherwise satisfy course criteria, are encouraged to meet with the instructor as early in the course as possible to identify and plan specific accommodations. Students will be asked to supply a letter from the Disability Resource Center to assist in planning accommodations.”

Grading Scale: The following scale will be used for grades on all assignments and exams: 94-100=A; 90-93=A-; 87-89=B+; 83-86=B; 79-82=B-; 76-78=C+; 72-75=C; 69-71=C-; 66-68=D+; 62-65=D; 59-61=D-; 58 and below=E (failing).

Regarding university grading policies, be advised that a grade of C- is not valid for major, minor, Gen Ed, Gordon Rule, or for college basic distribution credit. For questions about minus grades, please see <http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>.

You may consult current UF policy on how grade point averages are calculated at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>.

Health and Counseling: The University offers the following health and counseling services for students in the event personal problems hinder academic performance:

University Counseling Center (301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575),

Student Mental Health (Student Health Care Center, 392-1171), and

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (Student Health Care Center, 392-1161).

Please note: The Instructor may make minor adjustments to class readings or assignment requirements during the course of the semester. Any and all modifications will be announced ahead of time.

Course Schedule

week 1 **ethnographic passages**

8/25

introductions

film: *Biutiful* (dir. González Iñárritu)

week 2 **modes of thought and speech**

9/1

Abraham and Schendel, "The making of illicitness"

Bakhtin, "The problem of speech genres"

Barthes, "What is writing?"

Molano, "The mule driver"

supplemental readings:

Todorov, "The origin of genres"

Gootenberg, "Talking like a state: drugs, borders, and the language of control"

week 3 **research expressions**

9/8

Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System"

Law, *After Method* (chap. 1)

Stern, *The Smoking Book*

supplemental readings:

Schendel, "Spaces of Engagement"

Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things"

week 4

force

9/15

Benjamin, "Critique of Violence"

Agamben, *State of Exception* (chap. 2)

supplemental reading:

Derrida, "Force of Law"

week 5

following

9/22

Pérez-Reverte, *Queen of the South*

supplemental readings:

Campbell, *Drug War Zone*

Gibler, *To Die in Mexico*

week 6

criminals or enemies

9/29

Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*

Pine, "Economy of Speed: the new narco capitalism"

week 7 **telling stories**

10/6 Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws*

Deleuze and Guattari, "1874: "Three Novellas, or 'What Happened?'

week 8 **of social categories**

10/13 Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta* (pp. 1-51)

mid-term due

supplemental reading:

Schneider and Schneider, "The Anthropology of Crime and Criminalization"

week 9 **theft, counterfeit, con**

10/20 Alarcón, "Life among the pirates"

Siegel, *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta* (pp. 52-89)

week 10 **commodity histories**

10/27 **film:** *Traffic* (dir. Soderberg)

abstract due

Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine* (chaps. 1, 5, 6)

McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin* (selections)

week 11 **methods, evidence, affects**

11/3 Blanchot, "Everyday Speech"

Law, *After Method* (chaps. 4 & 5)

Deleuze, "He stuttered"

week 12	temporalities of predation	
11/10	Shaw, <i>Memories of the Slave Trade</i> (esp. chaps. 1-4, 8-9)	
week 13	theorizing limits	
11/17	Kafka, "The problem with our laws"	
	Foucault, "A preface to transgression"	
	Taussig, "Transgression"	
	<u>supplemental reading:</u>	
	Klossowski, "The Philosopher-Villain"	
week 14	make up class (Monday evening 11/21)	
11/24	Thanksgiving Holiday	
week 15	ethnographic collections	
12/1	Taussig, <i>My Cocaine Museum</i>	<u>final paper due</u>