

## **ANT 391: NARRATIVE JOURNALISM & ETHNOGRAPHY**

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Spring 2013  
Wednesdays 2-5 p.m.  
SAC 5.124

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Office Hours: T 2-3:30 p.m., W 5-6:30 p.m.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course explores the convergences and divergences between narrative journalistic and ethnographic writing, and their potential for producing powerful, richly textured accounts that capture the depth of human experience and the complexity of social life. Why is good writing so good, and what makes it last? Borrowing from the toolkits of anthropologists and so-called “literary journalists,” students will learn different strategies for making their writing truer and more memorable. The primary goal of the course is to reveal the literary possibilities in anthropology and other scholarly disciplines that employ ethnographic methods, and to make evident the potential for social inquiry within story-driven nonfiction writing.

Students will work on nurturing their own voices as writers and on developing a self-consciousness around writing as practice, process and form. They will be encouraged to approach their written work strategically and imaginatively, employing various literary techniques such as narrative structure, scene construction, character development, dialogue, point of view, tone and style. At the same time, they will be pushed to reflect on how these techniques might advance the ethnographic project itself. Some of the questions posed are: Can narrative writing be both universally true and culturally specific? Can it illuminate and explain while it moves? Can it contribute its own form of knowledge to our broader understanding of social life? Students will address these questions through discussions of weekly readings by some of the most notable authors in literary journalism and ethnography, including Joseph Mitchell, James Baldwin, Philippe Bourgois, Elena Poniatowska, Tracy Kidder, Ted Conover, Luis Urrea, Katherine Boo, Joan Didion, Keith Basso and Michael Taussig. Concurrently, they will develop their own piece of long-form, fieldwork- or reporting-based narrative writing in the setting of a creative writer’s workshop.

Much hand-wringing has dominated anthropology throughout the past twenty-five years as practitioners became absorbed with the fact that all ethnographies are texts, literary representations of sorts. Saddled with worry, even guilt about what this implies for our “science,” many ethnographers have become less compelling and effective writers, even as other scholars have rushed to embrace the method, and as narrative journalists have churned out stories that reach broader audiences. This course seeks to begin to redress that imbalance by asking students to reach precisely toward literary practices to make ethnography fresh, original and publicly relevant. It recenters writing so that it is no longer just our product, but our reason for being.

## **TEXTS:**

### Required:

Jack Hart, *Story Craft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*. (The University of Chicago Press, 2011)

Kirin Narayan, *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. (The University of Chicago Press, 2012)

David Finkel, *The Good Soldiers*. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010)

Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University*. (Plume, 2007) (suggested)

Course reader or Blackboard

## **GRADING:**

Final essay – 50%

Class participation – 25%

Other assignments (author introductions, workshop feedback, etc.) – 25%

In this class, you will not be graded on your inherent “writing talent” or level of skill. You will be evaluated for the persistence and sincerity of effort you demonstrate in acquiring tools to elevate your writing, and your willingness to embrace writing as a crucial part of your intellectual, professional and creative life. A writing workshop offers you the unparalleled opportunity to sharpen and strengthen a piece of writing based on continuous feedback. As such, the grade on your final essay will reflect that progress more than its polish or how ready it is to reach an audience. (Specific guidelines and requirements will be handed out in class.) One of the central arguments of this course is that writing is a *process*, not a product.

Neither workshops nor group discussions work without every member’s wholehearted engagement, so your final grade will also heavily reflect your participation in class. You will be expected to do all of your readings, to have something (if not many things) to contribute to the conversation, and to be generous with your peers in reading their work carefully and providing both supportive and constructive feedback.

## **OTHER MATTERS:**

Attendance: There is no attendance policy because this is a graduate course and a writer’s workshop, and you’re expected to attend every session. Since others will be investing heavily in writing, they deserve the same investment from you. If you absolutely must miss due to a personal emergency or critical travel, please let me know as far in advance as possible, and be prepared to submit any writing assignments due as well as your written feedback for those students whose work is scheduled for in-class review.

Classroom Conduct: Please bring drinks and snacks to class if they help you stay awake and engaged. That privilege will continue so long as we clean up after ourselves. Laptops are not allowed in class unless your work is being workshopped and you find it easier to take notes that way. Please speak with the professor if you need special accommodations.

Communicating with the Professor: I presume that most of you will reach a point (or many points) when you’ll find it productive to discuss your writing quandaries or progress with me.

Please reserve a slot during my office hours (SAC 5.134) or stick around for a moment after class. *Email should be reserved for quick questions about class matters.*

Scholastic Dishonesty: The University takes a strong posture in cases of scholastic dishonesty, which include “cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, collusion, falsifying academic records, misrepresenting facts,” and anything else that violates “the basic standard of academic integrity” – including submitting the same paper to two professors without permission. Further details about expectations and consequences are detailed on this Dean of Student’s website: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>.

Students with Disabilities: Upon request, the University will make appropriate academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Please alert me in confidence of any special needs you have and visit <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd> for additional information.

## **WEEKLY TOPICS, READINGS AND WORKSHOPS:**

CR = Course Reader

### **Jan. 16 Class Introduction**

### **Jan. 23 Joseph Mitchell**

Readings:

Mitchell, “The Mohawks in High Steel,” *Up in the Old Hotel* (CR)  
Sims, “A True Story” and “Tourist in a Strange Land: Tom Wolfe and the Literary Journalists,” *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (CR)  
Boyton, “Introduction,” *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America’s Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (CR)  
Williams, “Why I Write” (in class)

### **Jan. 30 James Baldwin**

Readings:

Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son,” *Notes of a Native Son* (CR)  
Sims, “The Art of Literary Journalism,” *Literary Journalism* (CR)  
Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalism,” *Literary Journalism* (CR)  
Lopate, Introduction, *The Art of the Personal Essay* (CR)

### **Feb. 6 Karen McCarthy Brown**

Readings:

Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” *The Interpretation of Cultures* (CR)  
Brown, Introduction, Ch 3: “Raise That Woman’s Petticoat” and Ch 4: “Ogou,” *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (CR)

## Workshop 1

### **Feb. 13 Ted Conover**

#### Readings:

Hart, Ch 1: "Story" and Ch 2: "Structure," *Storycraft*

Narayan, Preface and Ch 1: "Story and Theory," *Alive in the Writing*

Conover, Ch 1: "Inside Passage," Ch 2: "School for Jailers," *Newjack* (CR)

## Workshop 2

### **Feb. 20 Elena Poniatowska**

#### Readings:

Hart, Ch 11: "Story Narratives" and Ch 12: "Explanatory Narratives," *Storycraft*

Poniatowska, Introduction, *Here's to You, Jesusa!* (CR)

Poniatowska, pp. 1-32, *Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake* (CR)

## Workshop 3

### **Feb. 27 Philippe Bourgois**

#### Readings:

Narayan, Ch 2: "Place," *Alive in the Writing*

Bourgois, Introduction, Ch 1: "Violating Apartheid in the United States" and Ch 3:

"Crackhouse Management," *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (CR)

## Workshop 4

### **Mar. 6 Ryszard Kapuscinski**

#### Readings:

Hart, Ch 13: "Other Narratives" and Ch 3: "Point of View," *Storycraft*

Narayan, Ch 5: "Self," *Alive in the Writing*

Kapuscinski, "The Soccer War" and "Victoriano Gomez on TV" (CR)

Orwell, "Why I Write" (CR)

## Workshop 5

### **Mar. 13 Spring Break**

### **Mar. 20 David Finkel**

#### Readings:

Hart, Ch 5: "Character," *Storycraft*  
Narayan, Ch 3: "Person," *Alive in the Writing*  
Finkel, *The Good Soldiers* (all)

**Mar. 27 Keith H. Basso**

Readings:

Hart, Ch 4: "Voice and Style," *Storycraft*  
Narayan, Ch 4: "Voice," *Alive in the Writing*  
Basso, Ch 1: "Quoting the Ancestors" and Ch 2: "Stalking with Stories," *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western* (CR)

Workshop 6

**Apr. 3 Luis Urrea**

Readings:

Hart, Ch 6: "Scene" and "Ch 7: "Action," *Storycraft*  
Urrea, Chs. 1-4, *The Devil's Highway* (CR)

Workshop 7

**Apr. 10 Tracy Kidder**

Readings:

Hart, Ch 8: "Dialogue" and Ch 9: "Theme," *Storycraft*  
Kidder, Chs 1-8, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World* (CR)

Workshop 8

**Apr. 17 Anne Fadiman**

Readings:

Hart, Ch: 10: "Reporting," *Storycraft*  
Narayan, Postscript: "Writing to Be Alive," *Writing to Be Alive*  
Fadiman, Chs. 1-6, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (CR)

Workshop 9

**Apr. 24 Joan Didion and Katherine Boo**

Readings:

Hart, Ch 14: "Ethics," *Storycraft*  
Didion, Chs. 1-4, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (CR)

Didion, "Why I Write" (CR)

Boo, Prologue: "Between Roses" and Ch 1: "Annawadi," *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (CR)

### Workshop 10

#### **May 1 Michael Taussig**

##### Readings:

Taussig, "May 5," "May 6," "May 7," "May 8" and "May 9," *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia* (CR)

Harrington, "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography," *Qualitative Inquiry* (CR)

Goodall, "Preface" and "Introduction," *Writing the New Ethnography* (CR)

#### **May 6 FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 10 AM**