

## Book reviews

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Richard E Ocejó (ed.), *Ethnography and the City: Readings on Doing Urban Fieldwork*, Routledge: New York and London, 2012; 206 pp.: 9780415808385, £37.99/US\$55.95 (pbk)

**Reviewed by:** Moritz Ege, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany

*Ethnography and the City* comprises 20 short excerpts taken from studies based on participant observation, starting with classics such as William F Whyte's Street Corner Society and second-Chicago-school writing from the 1960s to new classics and more recent, less well-known works, each about five to 10 pages long. Intended primarily as a textbook for qualitative methods and urban studies courses, this is an eminently usable (though somewhat expensive) introduction to urban fieldwork and makes for a very good read. In easily digestible form, the book presents compelling ethnographic writing about life in large US cities from the mid-20th century on and illustrates the merits of that research method. It also includes essays in which the editor introduces the four thematic sections that structure the volume. Each of them highlights crucial aspects of the research process: The first section, titled 'Being There, Up Close', illustrates the basic, classic (by now: neo-classic?) tenet that longer-term immersion in a geographically bounded field site enables a kind of contact with and understanding of the population of a 'little social world' (p. 18) that other methods fail to achieve. It includes Howard

Gans's 1962 reflections on Boston working-class Italian Americans' reactions to urban displacement, Philippe Bourgois's portrayal of children's lives among crack dealers in East Harlem/New York City (1995), Richard Lloyd's account of nightlife as social arena and enterprise in Chicago's Wicker Park neighbourhood, Mary Patillo's analysis of class conflicts among African-American residents of that city's South Side and Gina M Perez's multi-sited research about transnational lives and identities between Chicago's Humboldt Park neighbourhood and the outskirts of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Combined, these texts paint a vivid picture of lives and struggles in contemporary US cities that may convince even the harshest skeptic of that method's achievements and its continuing potential.

The second section, 'Being on the Job', highlights the ways in which it is often a researcher's participation in an occupation that allows him or her to understand their research participants' outlook on life, be it as street vendor (Duneier), police officer (Moskos), blues musician (Grazian), walking tour guide (Wynn), boxer (Trimbur) or volunteer in a non-profit food service (Bender). Overall, the readings in these first two sections, which are grouped under the headline 'Data Collection Strategies', give a tangible sense of how such strategies work practically and of the writing and knowledge in which they result. Didactically, this approach has many advantages over how-to-guides or a toolkit of ethnographic

methods. At the same time, this section highlights a problem that runs through the entire book: the selection of occupations seems both colourfully eclectic and, at the same time, strangely predictable, tending towards what used to be called the 'deviant' and the cool. The thinking and theorising that leads to this selection, however, remain somewhat unclear.

In accordance with ethnography's much-debated need for reflexivity, the third and fourth sections deal with relationships with participants. The third section, 'Crossing boundaries', illustrates the ways in which ethnographers have dealt with differences in positionality or 'social distance' according to class, race, ethnicity, gender and age that separate them from the people they write about. While the book also contains a few examples of 'insider ethnography', the problematic of white middle-class researchers in the 'black ghetto' predominates in this section. Again, the book's strength is in classics such as Elliot Liebow's troubling but honest metaphor of a persistent 'chain-link fence' between the (white) ethnographer and the underemployed African-American 'street-corner men' he studied, or Carole Stack's depiction of her close relationships with impoverished women in 'The Flats'. Although, in this section, the reader is invited to take a step back from the enthusiasm the previous section may have created and consider the possibility that the 'chain-link fence' prevents understanding/*Verstehen* in an emphatic sense, it ultimately leaves us with a sense of optimism about the possibilities of 'crossing boundaries'. This optimism is supported by Sudhir Venkatesh's portrayal of housing project residents' views of him as an 'academic hustler' trying to get by like everyone else (which, despite a number of caveats, reads a bit one-sided). A piece on method, Javier Auyero and Debora Swistun's careful reflections on 'photo-elicitation' work with young people in an

Argentinian shantytown, highlights a more specific, experimental (though well-known) data-collection strategy and at the same time raises important questions about participants' candidness and their filters.

While, then, the third section discusses relationships with participants in a way that is primarily pragmatic (it shows what tends to happen and how people react) and epistemological (it asks about the limits of what can be known on that basis), the fourth section, 'Doing the Right Thing', raises more fundamental questions about research ethics and the (il-)legitimacy of specific research strategies in specific settings: What is an ethnographer's responsibility toward the people he or she works with? What kinds of damage can research cause and what kinds of damage has it caused in the past? Rather than choosing book sections in which authors reflect upon their own research, Ocejo has wisely selected three short texts that present ethnographic results which are based on ethically debatable research practices, including an excerpt from Laud Humphrey's 1975 study of casual gay sex in public restrooms ('Tearoom Trade') which made extensive use of covert participant observation and also of the resources of state agencies to find gay men, many of them closeted, to interview. Jeff Ferrell's study of graffiti writers in Denver, in which the ethnographer appears to have performed some illegal 'tagging', seems harmless in comparison. The book leaves any conclusions about ethical quandaries up to the reader, and the readings certainly provide ample classroom discussion material. However, the selection of these texts (rather than those that critique them) seems likely to direct many readers' sympathies. In addition, one may wonder why, for instance, activist ethnography or the widespread dilemma of wanting to positively depict social groups that are widely misrepresented in political discourse are not taken up more explicitly in this section, and neither

is, for analytical purposes, Bourdieu's important distinction between 'scientific' and 'narcissistic' reflexivity.

Overall, the editor's introductory essays and the readings work together very well in all four sections and make this collection a very useful teaching tool. Almost all of the ethnographic texts are pertinent to the section themes and the introductions have obviously been composed by a well-informed, clear-headed writer. The selective nature of this relatively thin volume is inevitable, and it seems pointless to mention a number of lacunae (the internet, for example). It should be clear, though, and this is no reproach either, that with one and a half studies situated outside the US mainland and 18 and a half inside the US, 'Ethnography and the City' is very much a US-based book and thus difficult for teaching outside of that national context. Eleven out of 20 texts are set in New York or Chicago. However, and here we come back to what was mentioned above, the real selectivity is in the volume's adherence to the 'naturalist' methodology and the research spirit of the Chicago school(s) of sociology, which the editor programmatically affirms in the introduction (pp. 4–7). Those few texts that seem to come from a different tradition of inquiry, such as Bender's study of religious talk and Auyero and Swistun's writing on environmental suffering, sit somewhat awkwardly within an otherwise rather homogenous collection.

This has significant advantages, but it also invites criticism, as in the case of the unclear criteria for selecting jobs to study (see above). The introduction takes up the naturalist imperative of going into the field to find unknown phenomena in their natural setting and relate them to 'macro-level social structures' (p. 3) including those that play out in the city, but the book isn't particularly clear on what 'urban social forces' (p. 3) are (or, for that matter, what constitutes a city), and so, in its composition, the book often

appears to rely on a dubious, pre-theoretical notion of studying 'social problems' and, implicitly (though the term is used only historically here), 'deviance'. The seemingly incongruous and disproportionate interest in urban 'ghettoes' and in drinking establishments (but not, say, suburban neighbourhood associations, executive clubs or urban planners) is thus no coincidence (the latter interest is, it must be said, also closely related to the editor's dissertation topic, which the reviewer does not mean to disparage). Critiquing this approach as 'romantic' may not do it justice, but its undercurrents (political, moral, affective) and its possible limitations would have warranted more attention and, indeed, reflexivity. Symptomatically, the debate around Loic Wacquant's (2002) harsh critique of a 'moralist' strand in US urban ethnography (in which, self-righteous polemics and tendentious readings aside, he correctly identified a strong reliance on effectively conservative theories of norms, morality and social order) is mentioned in the general introduction's only footnote, but the debate is merely acknowledged; it is not taken further. This makes sense, as the book's interest is in methods, not in methodological debates – but one may wonder whether an exclusive reliance on naturalist ethnography does not have its own politics. Furthermore, there is something problematically traditionalist about the way in which the collection ignores other ethnographic traditions and methodological innovations in studying cities and urban life. As an outsider to the US academic landscape, this reviewer is both impressed and a bit puzzled by how self-contained this disciplinary, national, school-based discourse sometimes seems. Of course, this isn't the only collection in which this problem applies.

At the same time, the collection's selectiveness also makes for cohesiveness, it renders the collection more easily teachable, aside from the fact that it contains many

great readings that are now more easily available and can of course be combined with others. If a similarly rich and cohesive tradition of high-quality urban ethnographic writing, and a well-thought-out textbook based on it such as this one, existed elsewhere, this reviewer would only be too pleased.

Roman Adrian Cybriwsky, *Roppongi Crossing: The Demise of a Tokyo Nightclub District and the Reshaping of a Global City*, University of Georgia Press: London and Athens, GA, 2011; 328 pp.: 9780820338323, US\$24.95 (pbk)

**Reviewed by:** Chaoqun Liu, Department of Geography, Durham University, UK

Roman Cybriwsky states at the beginning of his book that he did not set out to write *Roppongi Crossing*, but that since settling in the area in 2011 he gradually became intellectually interested in the neighbourhood. This book is based on his living experience and ethnographic work in the area.

Geographically, Roppongi Crossing refers to a busy street intersection located at the centre of the Roppongi district, Tokyo. The international character of Roppongi attracts people from many different regions, ethnicities and cultures. Particularly in the last three decades of the 20th century, the area was a popular nightclub district infamous for its hostess industry and for being a gathering place for 'bad foreigners'. In the new millennium, a redevelopment project was initiated aiming to clean up and upscale the area, resulting in an intersection of the past and the future.

Cybriwsky structures the book into seven chapters. The first two (i.e. 'Roppongi and the New Tokyo' and 'Roppongi Context') give an overview of the area, including its geographical, administrative and social features, and the aims and methods of the

research. Chapter 3, entitled 'Roppongi Rises' introduces the historical events that have contributed to Roppongi's prosperity as a popular entertainment district, such as the modernisation in the Meiji era, American occupation after the Second World War, the opening of a subway line, the establishment of the foreign embassies nearby and the boom of Japan's economy.

The following two chapters talk about the recent 'Rhythms' and 'Troubles' of Roppongi. Starting from the intersection of Roppongi Crossing, Cybriwsky leads a highly personal tour around the neighbourhood, giving some very detailed accounts of the streets, corners and establishments for various functions and activities. Then Cybriwsky turns to the world of work in Roppongi. While the area is famous for its hostess industry, the author pays the most attention to its foreign workers. Being aware of the danger of generalising ethnic groups, Cybriwsky adopts a 'working-ethnicity' method to profile foreign workers. Foreign hostesses come from all over the world, but the origin of the women has changed over time. In the beginning, many hostesses came from the First World, then Eastern Europe, while many current workers are of Latin American origin. There also seems to be an increasing number of African women working in the district. Over prolonged fieldwork and participant observation, Cybriwsky profiles Chinese and Latin American prostitutes, African streetmen, restaurant proletariat from poor countries, Russian-East Europeans, Filipinos .... Roppongi is therefore a truly global district, from which a map of the world economy can be illustrated.

The image of Roppongi as a '*gaijin* (foreigner) zoo' (p. 153) and a netherworld of troubles has rendered it an area with almost oppressive police presence. From here the book turns to the battle to control and change in Roppongi. Besides the police,