

INTRODUCTION TO BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY OBSERVATION EXERCISE

This document outlines what the exercise is for this part of the course and provides guidance on how you might go about it.

The aim of the exercise is to get to look at consumption and material culture through the eyes of an anthropologist - to begin to ask the kind of '*cultural questions*' described by Denny and Sutherland in their 'What is Coffee' and 'Asking Cultural Questions' chapters.

If 'culture' for anthropologists is essentially about understanding what things and ways of doing mean to people as part of a larger system of meaning, then asking cultural questions about a product, activity (what anthropologists sometimes call 'practice') or a thing means not so much asking questions about the thing itself, but asking the kinds of questions which will help you to learn about its place in a bigger system.

This is not necessarily done through asking people direct questions- although it can be, but through *OBSERVATION* - about how people actually use, relate to, understand, situate, value the thing or activity in question.

So , using the coffee example, we could:

- OBSERVE WHEN , WHERE AND HOW COFFEE IS DRUNK IN A PLACE
- WHO DRINKS IT
- IS IT SOLD, BY WHOM, IN WHAT KINDS OF PRODUCTS?
- WHEN?
- WHAT CHARACTERISTICS PLACES WHERE COFFEE IS SOLD?
- ARE OTHER THINGS SOLD THERE?
- IS COFFEE USED OUTSIDE THESE PLACES ? IS THIS KIND OF COFFEE DIFFERENT ? HOW ETC

Thinking about these questions in Manchester for example we might learn that:

- COFFEE IS DRUNK IN HOMES, COFFEE SHOPS, RESTAURANTS AND BARS
- SOME COFFEE SHOPS WHICH ORGANISE THEMSELVES AROUND THE SALE AND DIFFERENTIATION OF KINDS OF COFFEE DRINK
- PEOPLE DRINK IT ALL DAY, BUT IN THE MORNINGS MAY TAKE IT AWAY TO WORK

In addition, we find that : MEN AND WOMEN DRINK IT; IN TOWN ITS ASSOCIATED WITH OFFICE WORKERS AND SHOPPERS; PEOPLE USE WIFI IN COFFEE SHOPS AND READ PAPERS; SOME OTHER THINGS ARE SOLD THERE EG CAKES AND SNACKS; THE STAFF MAY BE QUITE YOUNG; THEY MAY WEAR UNIFORMS; BRANDING IS VERY STRONG; VERY OLD PEOPLE DON'T GO INTO COFFEE SHOPS AS MUCH; COFFEE

IN HOUSES IS DIFFERENT, AS IT IS IN STUDENT HALLS, WHAT IS THIS COFFEE LIKE?

We can apply these kinds of questions to other activities and things. For example, if we consider clothing, we could ask: What is a sweater? What is it made of? Who wears sweaters? When? Why? Where are sweaters worn? What are sweaters intended to convey about the wearer? Are sweaters worn for warmth? Or display? How are they worn in relation to other kinds of clothing such as coats? What characterises sweaters worn by different age groups?

Or, another question posed by Daniel Miller's work on globalisation and local differences - WHAT ARE JEANS? WHO WEARS THEM? WHERE AND WHEN? HOW ARE THEY WORN? WHAT KINDS OF JEANS? WHAT ARE THEY MADE OF? HOW DO MEN AND WOMEN AND YOUNG AND OLD WEAR THEM? ARE JEANS ALL THE SAME? DO PEOPLE USE JEANS TO MAKE CLAIMS ABOUT WEALTH, FITTING IN OR IDENTITY?

Or we can take an activity such as FOOTBALL or watching football and ask: WHAT IS FOOTBALL? Who plays football? Where do they play? How do they play? What do they wear ie in a sports centre five a side/ on the street? Who watches football? Where is it watched? Why is it watched? Which teams are watched publicly in Manchester? Who is football important for? How do people show they like football?

ASSESSED ASSIGNMENT

For the exercise which is worth 15% of your total mark for the course I want you to write 800 words based on a piece of observation. This observation can be conducted in a specific location or focus on a specific object within that location.

I want you to take an item, object, activity or brand and observe it in context (ie not based on books, articles, internet). This could mean you take some time to sit in a coffee shop and write about your experience, or you could sit in Manchester city centre and then write about the kinds of shoes you saw people wearing. Equally you could do the observation for this piece at a sports match, event, or in a shop. There is no correct location to do the observation for this assignment, you have the freedom to explore a location or object which interests you. Once you have completed some observation you must write up to 800 words based on your observation and the kind of questions which they provoke.

The written 800 words of this assignment has two key parts:

- 1) In this assignment I want to see you write in a thickly descriptive manner. Describe your experience and the world around you which you observed with detail. Transport the reader to the spot from which you observed. Think about sight, smell, sound, taste, and don't be afraid to write in a creative prose style.

2) One you have established your observation in the mind of the reader, think about some of the questions which your observation has provoked. (see above for some examples). Use the observations which you have made and the thick description which you have written to pose these questions to the reader. Demonstrate the questions which have arisen from your observation.

You should:

- Formulate your questions around your choice of thing or brand
- Think of a suitable public location where you can observe it in context
- Spend some time hanging out and watching, thinking about your questions
- Take a few notes on what you see
- Use the notes to pull out main patterns from what you have seen. Use these to structure your written assignment.

REMEMBER- YOU ARE ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS YOU SET YOURSELF THROUGH WHAT YOU SEE- YOU DON'T NEED TO INTERVIEW PEOPLE.