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Close Encounters:
Bringing Anthropology Home
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is an undergraduate e-journal which provides a platform for the work of the social anthropology students of University of St Andrews. Established in 2011, the e-journal's main aim is that of publishing research projects conducted by students in their second year of study. Additionally the publication promotes visual and other experimental expressions of ethnographic interest. The *'Inspired by Ethnographic Encounters'* section aims to create a space where we can reflect on the creative aspects of Social Anthropology in St Andrews, as well as to broaden the subject areas included in the journal.

Ethnographic Encounters presents a valuable resource for future students to draw on the experience and insights of their predecessors. It also offers a means for social anthropology students throughout the world to engage with their peers in St Andrews, establish new connections, share ideas and to begin to engage in an exchange of knowledge that is fundamental to the discipline. We are thankful for the support given to us by University of St Andrews' Social Anthropology Department: http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/anthropology/

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1. Privacy in Public: Unified Fragmentation in New York Subway Spaces

Ania Bartkowiak

Full article in Volume 1, No 1 (2012)

The subway's shared journey is comprised of multiple private journeys – indeed, it exists to enable them – and the practice of creating individual personal spaces and the codes regarding their treatment reflects an underlying dichotomy of solidarity as a means of facilitating solitude. What

began as an inquisitive curiosity into avoidant behaviour soon expanded into an awed perplexity at the ambiguity of a ceaselessly transformed, multitudinous entity and its living composites. With what I can now only suspect was supreme naivety, I had expected to discover an influence on

the dictation of space and interpersonal interaction as attributable merely to uncomfortably close quarters. Instead, the subway gradually revealed a sort of uniformity in its very inconsistency; the individual passengers may view the space differently, lead situationally disparate lives, have diverse destinations – but ultimately hold a reciprocal understanding of shared purpose in their enclosed congregation: the journey to a public, and then personal, terminus.

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The conduct is in many ways not anti-social, and the occurrence of private space in public territory should not be considered truly paradoxical. In a room full of strangers one may still inhabit a private and personal sphere by the unspoken knowledge that others are doing the very same. Thus, in the subway, solitude is often practiced communally – and with an eternal shift of participants who lend the space a versatility and variety that perhaps signify it can only ever be described, and not defined, by the aspects of its nebulous journeys.

2. Negotiating Identities in a Randomized Video-Chat

Armina Dinescu

The identities users perform online in general, and on ChatRoulette in particular, are neither the same as, nor do the directly contradict, their 'original', offline identities. The 'singular notion of an identity, linked to a similarly singular physical body' (Hine 2000: 49) should be regarded as outdated, when dealing with the vastly complex cyberspace. The line between authentic and deceitful, offline and online, is not a straight, clear-cut boundary; on the contrary, it adapts itself to the spatial and temporal 'dislocation' that characterizes the internet (Hine 2000: 65).

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The striking lack of rules apparent on the web allows one to represent oneself as wildly inaccurately as one pleases. In the case of ChatRoulette, identity play can be as obvious as masking one's webcam with photos of famous people, to literal masks, or as subtle as 'lying' about one's geographical location, gender or age. The relevance of ChatRoulette rests on its revealing the way people relate to one another and to themselves through it. Complicated notions of identity and time/space are challenged when users allow their webcams to connect to ChatRoulette and transmit themselves into the ether of cyberspace. Contrary to the typical mythologizing of the Internet, triggered by naïve assumptions that the lack of 'face-to-face erases the prejudices associated with assorted "isms": sexism, racism, classism' (Wolf 1998: 15), ChatRoulette does not attempt to conceal its own limitations. Its users are well aware of the dangers of engaging with the unknown; it is 'a perfectly instant jolt of the unfiltered Internet.

3. Why Let the Dogs Out? An Exploration of Human-Animal-Human Relations in Turin, Italy

Francesca Vaghi

Full article in Volume 1, No 1 (2012)

I asked the first person I met in the dog enclosure of Piazza D'Armi, Spina's owner, what value had her dog added to her life; she bluntly answered that she now loved and understood other people more than before she owned Spina. If there was one unanimous finding during the period of my project is that all people who frequented the dog enclosure had made more than one acquaintance through the shared experience of dog ownership. Indeed, some informants affirmed that they had forged some of their closest friendships at the park. Serpell puts forward that animals have increasingly become 'agents of socialization' (in Fine 2006: 11), and further that 'pet animals [have] a special role to play in the acquisition of sympathetic tendencies' (in Manning and Serpell 1994: 137).

It is perhaps most important to note Ingold's observation that when exploring modern human-animal relations one must take into account that 'urban society... individualizes and marginalizes people' (Ingold 1998: 57). Meeting other individuals through a shared experience such as that of dog ownership can perhaps help fight the 'blasé' feelings described by Simmel in The Metropolis and the Mental Life (1964). It was evident to me that some barriers were brought down within the park's enclosure, and individuals who seemingly had very little in common could relate to each other easily by displaying interest in the others' dog. Just like Artú's owner confessed that she had overcome her shyness by relating to other dog owners, it was also Emma's and Jack's owners who very proudly informed me that the hub of social interaction in the park happens amongst dog owners.

4. Emmaüs: On peut refaire le monde?

Jens Ole Mølgaard

Full article in Volume 1, No 2 (2012)

You take a sack. Open it. Already now half the judgement has been made: How does it smell? Is the clothing moist or dry? What kind of sack is it, what types of clothes are there? Are they folded neatly or thrown in haphazardly? Items are rapidly classified in terms of type, style, gender, age, material, season, mark, wear. The decision of whether to quickly accept an item, or carefully examine it for sweat marks, stains, loose seams, dropped stitches etc., becomes an entirely visceral decision. After two months of sorting, I was starting to mentally sort clothes in my sleep.

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In spite of the monotonous nature of the process, each sack has a personality, tells a story about where it came from and under what circumstances. After a while you begin to recognise these, and comments are often made regarding the people from whom this or that sack originated. There are the charitable old ladies that give well preserved garments, usually completely out of style, but clean and perfumed like their owners. There are the families with children. One grows up, all the baby clothes go at the same time. One leaves home, all their old t-shirts, jeans full of holes and similar artefacts of teenage life are let go of. There are the sacks collected after people have died. No one usually likes to sort through the clothes of the dead, particularly close relatives, and these sacks usually contain a wide range of clothing, from the brand new to the completely worn out or dirty. People will leave the strangest things in the sacks, and I have found everything from soiled nappies to broken glass and dirt, but also jewellery, money, sex toys.

5. Where the Hens Come to Roost: How the Functionality of a Staff Room is Subverted by Teachers to a Space of Conviviality
Annelies Van De Ven
Full article in Volume 1, No 2 (2012)

Not very surprisingly, the topic being discussed was Kaat's pregnancy. This topic … had been the main subject of conversation in the teacher's lounge … As the conversation went on, the older teachers started to chime in, giving advice on good paediatricians and the best brands of baby food. It was at this point that Frederique entered the room … declaring 'dat is hier net een kiekenkot met al jullie gekakel, ik kon het van buiten al horen', which translates to 'It's like a chicken coop in here with all your chatter, I could hear you from outside'. This elicited a laugh from all the teachers and conversation continued with her joining in. It was this chirpy atmosphere that the principal Luc walked into when he entered the room for his lunchtime meeting. If anyone noticed his entrance they did nothing to acknowledge it, and after awkwardly standing at the head of the table for a few minutes, he tapped his fist on the table and called for attention … After a few more minutes of tapping, clearing his throat and a series of hushing motions, the room finally quieted down and he began to describe the issue at hand: a student's parents had phoned in because their son was being bullied. His patronizing tone, aloof composure and proper vocabulary stood in opposition to the informality of the earlier conversation. The orderliness of the meeting did not last long, and soon the break room was full of separate discussions. Luc gave up his attempt, mumbling a quick 'dat is dan geregeld' (well that's sorted) as he left the room.

6. Swinging Roles: An Ethnographic Account of Symbols, Challenges and Reflections Encountered While Discovering New Self Concepts through Music
Pia Noel
Full article in Volume 1, No 2 (2012)

'I ordered a 'caña' (the word used in Spain to refer to a draught beer) and Joaquín, the boss and bartender, replied with an unexpected question: "Are you sure you know what you want?" I was, and must have looked, puzzled as he did not take long to add: "There are so many 'guiris' that come here ordering a 'caña' and then ask me for the bottle, without knowing what they ordered". The word 'guiri' is a term carrying a negative connotation used throughout Spain to refer to tourists ... Joaquín was right, I thought to myself while taking a seat with a 'caña' in my hands, there were a lot of tourists'

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'On the following night, during the Jam Session of Jazz, there was a group of girls sitting next to me celebrating the birthday party of one of them. Two invited friends were asking one another why the birthday party girl liked this bar so much. One of the girls put into words what I had constantly felt on the previous night: "es un bar de la misma gente" ("it is a bar of the same people"). The divide between regulars/non regulars was hence stated. Amongst this divide coexisted other ones: musicians/non musicians and locals/'guiris'. All of these divides were drawn with symbolic boundaries, with more or less explicitness and resentfulness. On Friday, Flamenco night, Joaquín went on stage and asked everyone to turn off our telephones and added "sobretodo si está en otro idioma" ("especially if it [the ringtone] is in a different language").'

7. The Need to Believe in a Secularised World: Practices among the Basketball Fans in Lithuania
Une Kaunaite
Full article in Volume 2, No 1 (2012)

The situation is actually puzzling: individuals are reluctant to admit that they *do* believe in superstitions, even if they are sometimes also reluctant to say that they *do not*. He calls this 'half- believe', using the term proposed by Peter McKellar. Campbell states that this is not simply a lie about their 'real beliefs', but actual half-belief in these superstitions. He adds that the need to believe is not only due to uncertainty, but also due to a value of 'being active'. In important events which they cannot control, modern people of the secularised society feel particular discomfort and still want to act. Thus, their practices re-affirm the general belief of active orientation, rather than actual belief in the possibility to change outcomes. In this case, unlike belief in magic, these modern performers pay little attention to the outcome. However, basketball fans seem to be a more difficult case. They do not usually believe in their actions, or at least say so, but they care about the outcome and even change their beliefs accordingly.

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Leseth (1996) describes the use of witchcraft to affect the outcome of a soccer game in Tanzania, and argues that this practice 'for many Europeans probably appears as highly "exotic'' (*ibid*: 159). In contrast, this paper tried to show that, at least for sport fans, and quite possibly for others as well, witchcraft, spells, rituals and superstitions might be familiar practices, although most of them would never accept this kind of label because it intervenes with their secularised world-view.

8. Relative Locality: People, Land and Food in Fife

Hannah McInnes-Dean
Full article in Volume 2, No 1 (2012).

Of all my encounters, of which only a few can be detailed here, Sian was by far the most forthcoming. This can partly be put down to her incredibly friendly personality, and partly to her own need to speak to customers about Fife food for the pottery commission. Ultimately though, I think the most pertinent reason she was happy to chat to me was because she and her husband are potters by vocation, not merely occupation. They both work at a university, teaching art and design. Pottery is done out-with work and fulfills a 'need to make', especially for Chris. This phrase expresses how they 'believe' in what they do on a deep-seated level. Of all the people I spoke to they seemed the most invested on an ideological level with this movement of the 'local'. Though other stall-holders and farm shop owners were willing to talk to me and answer my questions, every other conversation was pervaded with 'selling speak'. This was somewhat unexpected; I had initially expected much more ideological discourse. However, my approach was that of a potential customer and I initiated most of the encounters by expressing interest in a particular product, which I'm sure was a contributing factor. When I asked Charles, selling rapeseed oil, why he came to the Fife farmers' markets he evaluated it in terms of sales – 'We sell almost as much here as in Glasgow, and that's our best one'. He then launched into a sales pitch: the cold-pressed oil he sells is 'healthier than olive oil, more versatile – and local too!' Here, the 'local' is an additional selling point, rather than an essential characteristic of the product or business ethic.

9. The Personal Darkroom: Keeping in Touch with Family Photographs
ILinca Vânău
Full article in Volume 2, No 1 (2012).

Despite the ubiquity of images and the complexities of the visual theory maze, I am still always impressed by the mere possibility of reviewing a moment that is no longer in front of my eyes; by the photograph's potency to 'mechanically repeat what could never be repeated existentially' (Barthes 1981: 21). This amazement, charged with fascination and gratitude, boosts whenever particular photographs, which speak to me directly, reveal themselves as fundamentally different from massive flows of anonymous images. Sensing this territory as an anthropologically revealing one, I wanted to talk to other people about their interaction with the world of personal photographs, while staying outside debates about the market-led image environment, or ambiguities about authorial intentions. Instead, the focus is on the subjective response of two of my friends, Aisha and Livia, to equally subjective images of their own choice.

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While what one may feel now about a family photograph can change over the years, the photograph remains a visual memento in correspondence to its unchangeable and undeniable prototype. What is at stake then is a permanent negotiation between experienced reality and interpretation. For Aisha, it is precisely the balance between them that can provide access to what the photograph ultimately elegises—'all the things that move freely on and through, and escape the shutter' (Aisha).

Aisha holding a photograph of her grandmother

Aisha's photographs on a windowsill