

Refunctioning Ethnography: A Workshop on Qualitative Methodologies, Interdisciplinarity and the Professions

Invited participants included Douglas Holmes (SUNY Binghamton), Christopher Kelty (Rice University), Hiro Miyazaki (Cornell University), and Annelise Riles (Cornell University)

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This workshop explored the new functions ethnography has taken on in the study of contemporary cultural, social and technological transformations. Where ethnography previously referred solely to the in-depth participant-observation and description of a social or cultural formation in situ, ethnography more recently has involved multi-sited research on social and cultural milieux that transcend particular places and involve networks of expertise and knowledge linked through new communications technologies and flows of goods, people and ideas. Ethnographers often find the milieux they would study already analyzed, as it were, by experts within the fields under investigation. Ethnographic research on such fields – generally auto-analytical or auto-documentary arenas like bureaucracy, finance, science and the like – thus takes on the character of collaboration with one's subjects rather than empathetic rapport. Second, and implicit in the preceding observation, ethnography has become a tool in policy and professional fields, particularly those fields that seek to account for themselves through various qualitative forms of auto-documentation and audit.

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