

Session for the Society of Medical Anthropology

"Therapeutic Environments: Putting Human Health in Place"

2006 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association

Panel Organizer/Chair: Brian A. Hoey, Ph.D., Research Fellow
Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life

The theme of "Critical Intersections/Dangerous Issues" resonates with widespread sentiment that we stand together at a kind of crossroads. Liminal spaces in many societies, crossroads are recognized as sites of power, opportunity and danger. Positioned where anthropology, geography and the sciences of human health come together, this session identifies and discusses important design, planning and lifestyle trends as responses to opportunities and challenges at a crossroads.

Through application of expanding theoretical and practical literature on place, papers on this panel examine intentional environments where a therapeutic ideal is at work. Social scientists studying place have been inspired by cultural critiques of neo-Marxism and postmodernism as well as humanistic approaches of cultural geography. With the deconstruction of place as a given backdrop or container for social and cultural processes, place is now generally interpreted as continuously constructed and contested space. Place is linked to global relations in world marked by "deterritorialization," the loss of culturally meaningful landscapes and defeat of place-based conceptions of culture to globalization as a social, cultural and economic force. Yet despite declarations of the world's "placelessness," the individual and collective experience of place continues to be important. In the face of widespread dislocation, sense of place – the meaning that places have for people and that they give to places – still matters in everyday lives.

This panel encourages conversation between divergent fields, innovatively applying the literature of place to examine and understand its role in human health and well-being. Starting with the concept of therapeutic landscape, we combine a range of practice-oriented and humanistic interpretations. Seen as a symbolic transformation of the natural world and form of cultural production, landscape is a holistic concept that takes account of humans and their anthropogenic environment and how this environment is conceptualized, experienced and symbolized in different locations and times. A geographic metaphor intended to aid social scientists in understanding place-based healing processes, therapeutic landscape is meant to encompass those places that combine the physical, psychological and social environments associated with treatment or healing. This panel extends consideration to a variety of environments from informal shrines and memorials in the deserts of Nevada, the New Urbanist renovation of an historical asylum, to a Zen community, urban zoos, and an innovative hospital.

From landscapes to built forms, our conceptualization of "therapeutic" relates not only to planned treatment of individual disease/disorder or provision of something thought health-promoting but also the impulse or intent to offer remedies for the perceived ills of a collective through alternative social and spatial arrangements. We also appreciate the objectives of individuals for their own relationship with place which may be at odds with the therapeutic plans and intentions of others. The combined projects of this session look at the intent of certain configurations of landscape forms and the design of constructed environments for therapeutic purposes in different contexts. With an eye to the enduring importance of place to human physical and mental health, research presented here will consider different aspects of its therapeutic use.

Session Members – Abstracts & Bios

BRIAN A. HOEY

TITLE: Therapeutic Uses of Place in the Intentional Space of Purposive Community

ABSTRACT: The role of environment in shaping the quality of public health and civic life is the center of an emerging area of inquiry at the intersection of both academic and applied interests. Although the field of public health, and especially environmental health, has documented the negative health effects and risks to the physical person associated with particular places such as industrial sites, there has been comparatively little consideration of the health promoting or creating role of place in human physical and mental health. This presentation will explore the therapeutic use of place within the intentional space of purposively created community while tracing the history of the Northern Michigan Asylum from mental hospital, to its closing and recent adaptive-reuse as neo-traditional community. Built during a period of sweeping social, cultural and structural changes in late 19th century America, the Asylum was founded on the reformist "moral" or "milieu" treatment approach of Thomas Kirkbride. Kirkbride espoused creating self-sustaining communities where the built environment together with a cultivated countryside became not only a sanctuary but also a healing instrument, a therapeutic landscape used to holistically restore health in persons psychically and physically unmoored by the chaos of modern life. I will discuss how the intentional space of place-based community created for therapeutic purposes is mirrored in today's New Urbanist redevelopment project which comes at another period of tremendous change. By approaching this from an historical and ethnographic perspective, this paper offers an important context for evaluating current planning proposals to create "healthy places."

BIO: Brian A. Hoey is a postdoctoral fellow at the Alfred P. Sloan Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life. He received his B.A. in Human Ecology from the College of the Atlantic and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan. Through two years of ethnographic fieldwork in the rapidly growing lakeside communities of rural Northwest Lower Michigan, his dissertation research explored non-economic migration where downsized and downshifting corporate workers relocate as a means of "starting over" in geographic places they believe provide the necessary personal refuge to rethink work, family and personal obligations. In addition to a continuing interest in career change, personal identity and the moral meanings of work, Hoey has a longstanding interest in the anthropology of place and, in particular, therapeutic ideals attached to particular natural and built environments. He also conducts research in Indonesia where fieldwork in planned communities of government sponsored migrants reveal the contested nature of constructing personally and culturally meaningful space within the process of community building. Hoey has published on these topics in *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* and *Ethnology*.

BONNIE HALLMAN

TITLE: The Zoological Park as a Meaningful Place in the Emotional Geographies of Families

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the meaning that zoos have for families, focusing on emotional work that maintains family ties and wellbeing. It explores how meanings given to zoo visits by adults influence construction of a positive *sense of family*, i.e., that well-functioning families spend time together and families that spend this time are well-functioning. I argue that the zoological park plays an important role in family building and

maintenance due to its historic and contemporary role in facilitating constructive “family time.” Conceptualizing zoos as a form of therapeutic landscape and understanding them as culturally defined “family friendly” places, the paper discusses how zoos might encourage and strengthen positive cross-generational experiences. As an emotionally meaningful activity, zoo visits create a sense of wellbeing through social and emotional interaction and connection in families, especially between young children and their adult caregivers. This paper uses national and local zoo surveys, as well as relevant literature in geography, leisure studies and family studies, to outline the history of physical and social constructions of the zoo as an environment for the work of maintaining family ties and emotional health. Importantly, however, we must consider that what constitutes a “family” in contemporary society takes many, sometimes contested forms. Through various depictions and normative exhibitions of animals in “family groups,” zoos present a particular heterosexist and patriarchal vision of the family as a model which may be at odds with the lived experience of contemporary visitors.

BIO: Bonnie C. Hallman is an Associate Professor in the Department of Environment and Geography, Research Affiliate with the Centre on Aging and Affiliate with the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. She joined the Environment and Geography Department at the University of Manitoba in 2001, having previously taught at California State University, Chico (1997-2001). Hallman's principal teaching and research interests are in the broad areas of Social / Cultural, Gender, Health and Rural Geographies. Early work focused on the geographies of family care-giving, particularly the resources and coping strategies of caregivers to elderly relatives. Three current research projects continue her longstanding interest in the everyday geographies of families and in the critical analysis of the spaces and places that structure and influence the resources and behaviors of families. These include 1) exploring the potential for zoos as environments that can promote healthy, active living, particularly amongst older adults; 2) exploring the zoo as a landscape where the nature/family connection is inscribed into the zoo experience; and 3) critiquing the historical creation and use of department store restaurants as a reflection of the rise of consumer capitalism and prevailing gender norms in order to understand current users of department store restaurants (with a particular focus on older adults); why and how do they use these spaces/places and what meanings do these spaces/places have for them? Last but far from least, Hallman is an active participant in the everyday, mundane geography of 'hockey goalie mom' and 'hockey referee spouse'.

JULIAN E. ORR

TITLE: Practicing a Landscape: The Zen Construction of a *Dharma* Gate

ABSTRACT: If landscape refers to the symbolic transformation of the natural world as a type of cultural production, one may notice that Green Gulch Farm Zen Center is little changed from its earlier existences as a cattle or horse ranch. There is a scattering of Buddhist statues and shrines and a guest house, conference center, and teahouse, all of classic Japanese design and construction. The biggest change is one of intent and performance; the residents say it is a *dharma* gate, a place for visitors and passers-by to encounter what residents describe as the healing lifestyle of Zen practice. This paper is based on an extended ethnographic study of a Soto Zen Buddhist community in northern California. Green Gulch Farm Zen Center is a conference center, retreat center, guesthouse, and organic farm, as well as a place of practice, so they have many visitors. Members of the community at Green Gulch derive their practice from the Four Noble Truths, the core of Buddhist doctrine,

which offer an escape from the sufferings of life through the Eightfold Path, which is to say, healing through practice. Under the obligation of the Bodhisattva vow to save all beings, the residents have framed Green Gulch as a *dharma* gate, where they may offer others this escape from suffering through encountering the example of their practice. Residents are thus healing themselves and offering this healing to society at large through their practice of a therapeutic landscape.

BIO: Julian E. Orr was born in Brooklyn and graduated from high school in Kabul, Afghanistan. Subsequent education included Yale University, the U.S. Army Signal Center and School at Fort Monmouth, N.J., and the University of California at Berkeley; he eventually received a PhD in Anthropology from Cornell University. He worked at Xerox PARC for twenty years, initially as a technician, from 1984 as a Member of the Research Staff. His research there focused on the work practice of service technicians, including questions of the nature of expertise and the relationship of practice to the models of managers (and other researchers). His projects at PARC included an experimental introduction of portable radios into the work place, which led Xerox to adopt them nationally, and he studied the use in the field of computer-based tools for the technicians, including the Eureka tool to preserve and circulate community knowledge. His book, Talking about Machines: An ethnography of a modern job (Cornell University Press, 1996), provides a constructivist analysis of the practice, narratives, and community of service technicians. With Steven Barley, he co-edited Between Craft and Science: Technical work in U.S. settings (Cornell University Press, 1997), a collection of empirically based studies of technical work. Currently he raises sheep in Pescadero and does free-lance research on work practice at the Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in Marin.

DAWN EINWALTER

TITLE: Why do people shoot at signs? Reclaiming public space through roadside shrines and memorials in rural Nevada

ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes informal shrines and memorials in rural Nevada and considers their relationship to public land use policy and role in private and public life. Typically made of found materials and personal objects, these sites include *descansos* (informal shrines erected to commemorate auto accident victims), stone writing, and idiosyncratic art/shrines such as Dubey Lane. Although highly personal, they are constructed along roadsides and easily viewed by passing motorists. They serve as a form of public art that can be interpreted by others. They create place through engagement with the desert in ways that allow people to reclaim public space. In their use and ascribed meanings they may represent a form of symbolic ownership with potentially therapeutic value, individually and socially. Nevada is a state in which over 90 percent of land is publicly owned and managed with multiple and often conflicting meanings regarding its use, ranging from resource extraction to protection, interpretation, and restoration. As noted by Sennett and Holston, the uses and meanings assigned to public space are negotiated and subject to contestation. Roadside shrines and memorials may be a unique form of negotiated meaning tolerated by beleaguered and understaffed public agencies because they are one-time instances of personal expression where art does not fit a category of inappropriate use. Both Francis and Geertz assert that the use of landscape, rather than mere viewing of it, confers therapeutic benefits. This art is an opening for persons who seek to modify public space and create personally and publicly therapeutic landscapes.

BIO: Dawn Einwalter is a planner and project manager with EDAW, an international urban design firm. Including the Reno Open Space and Greenways and Modesto Redevelopment

master plans, her projects have focused on urban revitalization. Prior to EDAW, Einwalter was a planner with Lumos Engineering where her work focused on projects in rural Nevada. In addition to her work in planning, Einwalter has taught at several colleges and universities, including the University of Nevada, Reno and the University of Washington. Until recently her research has focused on China and the changing nature of a form of mediation in urban public space. As planner and anthropologist, she continues to be interested in public space as a venue for an understanding of the intersection of social behavior and landscape as displayed through interpretive exhibits, public art and historical sites.

PETER COLLINS

TITLE: The Construction of Place as Aesthetic-therapeutic

ABSTRACT: Broadly speaking, it is the hospital that has come to carry the burden of the therapeutic at least since the Middle Ages. Taken to mean the treatment of disease, the therapeutic is the primary function of the hospital. Unfortunately, public confidence in the ability of the hospital to provide for the therapeutic has been collapsing for more than a decade. It is commonplace to read in British newspapers accounts which claim that the hospital is increasingly likely to cause rather than cure disease. Even allowing for the recent spate of scare stories regarding the apparently unethical retention of body parts, and the reported epidemic of SARS and related contagions, the hospital as a therapeutic place has been undermined. At the same time, we have seen a veritable explosion of interest in and capital spent on the aestheticization of public space. Significantly (both for academics and the general public), these processes have come together in significant and complex ways in the hospital itself. Nowadays, British hospitals are conceived as aesthetic as well as therapeutic places -- indeed the aesthetic and therapeutic are increasingly presented as equal partners, the one partially defining and even constituting the other. Drawing on ethnographic research undertaken at a large, new-build hospital in the North East of England, I consider the trajectory of this 'aesthetic-therapeutic' turn and describe some of the intricate ways in which the therapeutic is represented as the aesthetic and vice versa – a cultural dynamic which, in this place at least, is contested.

BIO: Peter Collins teaches in the Department of Anthropology in the University of Durham. His main interests are in aesthetics, space and place, religion and qualitative methodology. He has recently co-edited Locating the Field: Space Place and Context in Anthropology (Berg, 2006), with Simon Coleman; Reading Religion in Text and Context: Reflections of Faith and Practice in Religious Materials (Ashgate 2006), with Elisabeth Arweck; and Religion, Identity and Change: Perspectives on Global Transformations (ed.). Ashgate (2004), with Simon Coleman. His Continuity and Change: Bolton Quakers 1650-1990 (Edwin Mellen) is in press, as is Keeping an Open 'I': Memory and Experience as Resources in Ethnography (Co-edited with Anselma Gallinat). He is currently working on the Concise Dictionary of Anthropology (OUP).

SETHA M. LOW

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PhD, University of California at Berkeley, 1976. Professor of Psychology and Anthropology, City University of New York.

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>>Discussant<<

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~~RESEARCH INTERESTS & SELECTED PUBLICATIONS: Anthropology of space and place, cultural aspects of design, housing and community development, gated communities and landscapes of fear, security post 9/11, cultural conservation and historic preservation, public space, medical anthropology, social distress and illness, qualitative research methods and ethnography.~~

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~~2003 Behind the Gates: The New American Dream. New York and London: Routledge.~~

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~~2003 The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture [with co-author Denise Lawrence-Zuñiga]. Oxford: Blackwell.~~

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~~2000 On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture. Austin: University of Texas Press.~~

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~~1999 Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.~~

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~~1996 "Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of Public Space," *American Ethnologist* 23(4): 861-879.~~

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~~1995 Children of the Urban Poor: The Sociocultural Environment of Growth, Development and Malnutrition in Guatemala City [with co-author F. Johnston]. Boulder: Westview.~~

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~~1995 "Indigenous Architectural Representations: Mesoamerican and Caribbean Foundations of the Spanish American Plaza," *American Anthropologist* 97(4): 748-762.~~

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