

30. Exploring Regimes of Discipline: Ethnographic and Analytical Inquiries

Convenor:

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The pursuit of discipline has become a commonplace feature of contemporary life. But no longer does it primarily refer to and revolve around forms of externalized control and punishment characteristic of traditional institutional settings such as military units, prisons, religious groups or schoolrooms. Stylized and varying notions and practices of discipline are today encountered in relatively autonomous and individuated fields of professional life, not to mention throughout the realms of leisure and self-therapy. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a field of social engagement within which invocations of the need for and benefits of discipline might not occur.

Discipline comprises not only a technical means for exercising power over self and/or others but also an essential symbolic medium for defining and articulating preferred social practices, objectives and ways of being. Often highly localized and specialized in terms of its discursive constitution, there is an implicit claim that to seek discipline is to assert agency. Obversely, the implementation and management of diverse regimes of discipline are propounded on the basis of their presumed capacities to produce moral, physical or mental improvement.

This workshop invites ethnographic analyses of particular regimes of discipline, be they directed towards selves or others. In addition to identifying and contextualizing the organized practices and premises of disciplinary regimes, we will ask how far the rationales and rhetoric of social control can be reconciled with goals of self-actualization.

Spare the Game, Spoil the Child? Discipline and Individuality in Children's Sports

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Community sports for children and youth in Canada are supposed to be pleasurable activities that aim first and foremost to afford participants "fun". In practice, these are highly organized social spheres that make substantial demands upon the time and resources of child and youth athletes, their parents and adult coaches and sport officials. At the discursive centre of community sports is a multifaceted proposition that "sport is good for kids". Indeed, sport is widely viewed as presenting physical challenges and forms of self discipline that may assist in preparing young athletes to develop not only their athletic capacities but also their future prospects as competent and successful adults. The paper examines constituent features of the disciplinary regimes imposed upon young athletes and their parents by community sports programs as well as the expectation of the introjection of ideals and habits of self-discipline on the part of individual child and youth athletes.

Targeting immigrant children: Disciplinary rationales in Danish pre-schools

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Our paper is concerned with the disciplinary rationales that encompass immigrant children (and their parents) as they are brought into civil society through Danish day-care institutions. The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork in two institutions, where local municipalities, staff and parents are engaged in a struggle over certain civilising processes that govern the lives of immigrant children in Denmark. More specifically we discuss the initial implementation of a recent policy meant to ensure relative fluency in Danish amongst immigrant children before they begin school. With a focus on the practical consequences in the everyday life of pre-school staff, children and their parents, we aim to understand the exchanges and interactions between the different actors involved in the policy process. These interactions can be interpreted as a negotiation over upbringing, responsibility and ideas of the civil person, as the specific language policy is integrated in more general understandings of social behaviour and civil identity. Thus, the political demand on children's language skills is more than a technical device in the educational programme of institutions. Reflecting a planned process of improvement meant to ensure an ideal moral behaviour amongst the future citizens of Denmark, the policy also stands as a symbol of a particular way of being.

Creatively Sculpting the Self Through the Discipline of Martial Arts Training
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This paper draws from fieldwork in the UK and US with practitioners of the Japanese martial art of aikido. It shares their reflections on how their 'selves' are developed in creative new directions through repetitive body practice, illustrating the power of generation and the potential for novelty and agency that is felt to emanate from the discipline of martial arts training. The discovery of such potential is concomitant with a realisation of ironic contradiction involved in the practice. One such irony is that all aikido practice is paired, requiring an other's presence, but the practitioner's sense of change, growth, 'understanding' is conceived of in terms of an individual path. An awareness of change in body shape and reactivity is deeply singular, embodied and silent, but is released, expressed and shared off the mat in a social and discursive context. The martial artist sculpts his or her own body movement through space over years of practice with many others on the mat, as well as privately conditioning his or her 'self'. This self is constitutional as well as relational and moving; it positions itself in a classificatory space in society ('I am an aikidoist') as well as reacting to social environments in new and creative ways.

Disciplining the Body, Purging the Soul. Technologies of Self in a Polish Catholic Youth Movement

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After the fall of communism, Poland was faced with radical changes, which led to fierce debates about Polish national identity, modes of citizenship and governance, the morality of capitalism and the achievements of democracy. In this context, it is important to look at imaginaries and regimes of self and other. A privileged arena in which to find these imaginaries and regimes is that of religion.

The Catholic Oasis youth movement offers a new model for society and imagines that society will in the long run become a community of committed Christians, or ‘new people’ –to employ the language of the movement. This new society however is to start with a new self and it is the self that is the primary focus of the movement’s formational program. This technology of the self, while involving confession, extends far beyond this traditional religious institution of discipline. It also involves group meetings, reading the Bible, prayer, witnessing, evangelisation, retreats and play and comprises both body and soul. Learning how to behave and to dress properly as well as to practise chastity are primary means for achieving self-transformation. In this paper I will explore the processes of disciplining body and soul in Oasis and relate this to imaginaries of self and society – of the self in society.

Towards a Historical Anthropology of Quaker Discipline

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The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) sprang up during the 1640s amid the social, political and religious turmoil of the English Civil War. The Society began codifying its church government or discipline almost immediately and has subsequently published a number of revisions including the most recent version in 1994. Quakers have maintained an extraordinarily careful record of the development and implementation of their code of discipline – indeed the record itself is a critically important part of that disciplinary procedure. A written record which is as detailed and sustained as this naturally provides an excellent source of data with which to compare the organisation of discipline as it has developed over more than 350 years, during the pre-modern, modern and (if I may) post-modern periods. In this paper I introduce the Quaker case as a vehicle for exploring the complex negotiation of self and social control within voluntary associations, for the clues it provides in helping us comprehend an important means of constructing identity and also for the analytical purchase it provides in helping us grasp the historical trajectory of discipline per se.

The Legacy of Vieskeri – Agency and Discipline in Amateur Trotting Racing in Finland

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In my paper I ask how regimes of discipline enacted between amateur trainers and trotting horses contribute to the construction of local identities and express trainer agency grounded in the local context of farming in southwestern Finland. The issue of agency and autonomy in the practice of skills based on learning by doing and knowing by doing (Bourdieu) gain particular significance in a situation where trainer-farmers feel their autonomy as cultivator agents is subject to the morally distant surveillance and discipline regimes (Foucault) of the European Union. The trotter becomes a means to build a symbolic bridge between a “good farmer” and a “good trotter” because through the horse a farmer-trainer can show that discipline based on local knowledge and individual experience can produce successful results. The discipline and subsequent morality found in the social world of amateur trainers is at once particular to the local moral world (Kleinman) of horse racing in Finland and simultaneously a symbol of national history. Reflecting on the ideas of discursive and habitual practices (Foucault; Bourdieu) I present a critique against the precedence given to social process and discourse above the force of individual innovation and processes of making history and moral worlds through inter-subjectivity.

“Being free, energetic and fit”: On techniques of flexible selves in an uncertain academia

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The notion of “Flexible Bodies” as defining a fundamentally new form of organizing and experiencing contemporary bodies has assumed a significant place in the body’s remarkable career in anthropology. However, while anthropologists have much invested in the development of this theoretical paradigm, they have doggedly neglected to reflect on the impact of academic bodies on their own careers. In contrast, this paper examines how to “enact flexibility” in a profoundly changing academia. In particular, it focuses on teachers who face uncertainty at the widening margins of Austrian universities. More specifically, in order to create their academic selves, these academics must operate between stricter and unequal forms of institutional regulation of bodies on the one hand, and competing ideas about and regulations of gendered bodies on the other. Within this context, two approaches are proposed for analyzing issues of controls over and self-control of flexible bodies: the “techniques of the body” (as defined by Mauss) and the “techniques of the self” (as coined by Foucault). Accordingly, I argue that body styles and the “investment” of subjects are pivotal for creating success as well as subversion in “commodified” academia. As will be further demonstrated, these techniques of subjects relate to and interact with broader cultural processes and specific assumptions about the self in Western societies.

Governance as a regime of discipline

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The paper analyses the rise of ‘governance’ in Britain as a new regime of discipline. The term ‘governance’ appears in two contexts in contemporary Britain: in New Labour’s espousal of a shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’; and in debates about styles of management associated with corporate governance. Higher education has been affected by both of these two aspects of governance and provides the site for exploring the meanings of its associated constellation of terms – discipline, empowerment, regulation and control. In the first section, the paper explores changes in the way government is managing the supposedly autonomous higher education sector with new interventionist disciplines parading as partnership and responsibility. The second section explores the management technologies which purport to empower academic workers to be self-disciplined, self-managed and responsible but do much to undermine those qualities. The third section examines how government’s arms-length agency is claiming the right to define and monitor academic professionalism thus undermining the very basis of autonomous self-definition and responsibility on which systems of governance rely.

