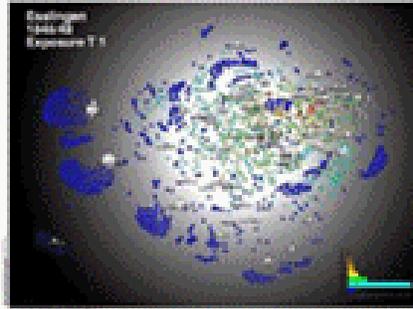# Four-Campus Video-Conference Series, F-W-S 2005-06
Human Sciences and Complexity

March 10: Friday, 1:30-3:00   **Michael Agar** (*Ethknoworks*, Santa Fe NM and Professor Emeritus, Univ. of Maryland, College Park)

powerpoint @ http://tinyurl.com/eae4m

" Telling It Like It (Subjunctively) Is
Organizational Complexity, Linguistic Anthropology, and Narrative "

Abstract: Everyone talks about narrative, but few plunge into the details. Recently, I've been drawn into discussions of narrative among those interested in organizational complexity. The problem is, how do I connect the ideas of "narrative" and "story" from linguistic anthropology with the writings and interests of those who speak of "complex organization?" To put it another way, if I lifted the lid off the ideal "complex organization," could I say anything about what the talking that goes on inside of it would look like?

To set the stage, I'll first consider interest in "complexity theory" on the part of organizations as a response to increasingly frequent unpredictable change with unknown consequences. One recommended strategy foregrounds noticing and "sense-making" on the part of those involved in the organizational practices that are directly affected. "Narrative" and "story" are pointers to such events. But what do "narrative" and "story" mean? As an example we'll play with popular stock guru Peter Lynch's idea of the "story" of a stock. That play will lead directly into Ochs and Capps' recent book on the "Living Narrative." I will shamelessly (mis)use their narrative dimensions of tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity, and moral stance to help see the many different shapes that "narrative" and "story" can take, and then show some examples from the fields of discourse analysis, conversational analysis, pragmatics, etc. (basically the linguistics of how people actually talk). The examples will suggest a more precise description and evaluation of, and perhaps even training for, the kind of talk that a "complex organization" should enable and make good use of.

This talk is part of a larger project on the relation between ethnography, language, complexity and agent-based models. A few samples of the work are available at www.ethknoworks.com. This talk builds on an article in press in *Emergence and Complex Organizations*.

Video Conference Locations for Participants
UCLA: 285 Powell Library - vidcon@ucla.edu

UCSD: 260 Galbraith Hall (CLICS) - mgibsen@ucsd.edu

UCR: A139 Olmsted Hall - mcap@ucr.edu

UCI: 120 Social Science Tower – Dwayne Pack (949)824-7581

We acknowledge deep appreciation for our startup and care in videoconferencing from UCI's Mike Miller, who passed away March 1 from complications due to a heart attack.