

Workshop 65

Public Images: Anthropology and the Display, Circulation, and Consumption of Images (Invited Workshop)

Convenors:

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In recent years anthropology has been increasingly called upon to justify its value to society. The presentation of images of other societies - through ethnographic films on television, or through the use of photographs in the printed media, in museum displays or in web sites - would seem to fulfil this demand. Yet do anthropologists have anything more to say about the display of images in public space?

This panel invites contributions that consider the relationship between anthropology and a broader public as mediated by images, still and moving.

In this panel we seek to explore the variety of ways in which archetypal – or even stereotypical – anthropological ‘subjects’ are represented to the general public in Euro-America and beyond, whether by professional anthropologists (for example, through images used in museum displays, televised ethnographic films, and other channels) or by non-anthropologists seeking to evoke ‘anthropological’ representations for other purposes (for example, advertising companies co-opting images of the ‘primitive’ to underline the modernity of their products). Proposals for papers should explicitly consider the idea of ‘public anthropology’, whether consciously intended or a by-product of some other project, and its relation to popular discourse. Historical as well as contemporary perspectives are welcomed.

Other Images of the Others: Types, Persons, Processes

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Far from occupying a hegemonic position as producers of images of distant societies, anthropologists are today engaged in an unequal competition with other professional groups. Anthropology is facing on the one hand images of an ‘artistic’ kind, in a context where artefacts, but also photographs, that were once seen as «ethnographic» are increasingly redefined as «art»; the French case, where the Musée de l’Homme is giving way to an art museum (Musée du quai Branly) is in a sense paradigmatic of this shift; on the other hand, ‘anthropological’ images are now lost in a flood of images originating in photojournalism, documentary photography or even advertising. Moreover, the representatives of various

social groups or movements are increasingly concerned with the control of their public image. Modes of exhibition are changing together with anthropology and with the relationships between the West and those it constituted as its «Others». An objectifying discourse from above, displaying the typical characteristics of an ethnic group or a «culture», is being replaced by a more polyphonic discourse, expressing the diversity of the voices in a changing world. My presentation will draw both on recent exhibitions and on the experience of curating an exhibition on land reform and social transformation in North-eastern Brazil.

The Relevance of Ethnographicity in the Documentary Films

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The presentation draws upon the concrete examples of some documentary films on the Siberian peoples, made in 1990ies in Estonia and the attitudes of the film-makers themselves (Mark Soosaar, *Father, Son and Holy Torum* 1997, Valentin Kuik *Flight* 1995, *Voices* 1996 etc) on their subjects. Majority of these Estonian films that can be regarded ethnographic pursuant to some criteria, have been made by professional film makers and their films are directed towards the wider (international) public. Generally, these documentary films have been determined and evaluated according to artistic canon and values.

In the particular examples, film as a tool was most frequently used for the presentation of political arguments (relationship between the Russian central government and the indigenous peoples) in the form of author's message.

Regarding a documentary film as an art, sets up strong limits for the authors and subjects relationship also in anthropological documentaries: it becomes inevitably a power-relationship.

In one of the cases the filmmaker explained his behaviour and choices by saying that he was actually fascinated by the topic or the problem, which, in reality, could take place anywhere. Thus, also filming could have taken place elsewhere, if they had not occurred namely in this place. On one hand, it is necessary to agree with the makers of a film – the recording of a concrete environment as a film should also manage to make extra-environmental generalisations or conclusions (regarding human nature, political situation, etc.), but can the subjects of documentary films be made the actors or an illustration, an element of the film's message, a so-to-speak side-theme?

How close can anthropological film move to fiction to guarantee understanding of the issue?

The success of some of the films, referred to above, at international festivals of anthropological films, indicates to the fact that in the case of the ethnographic films, the artistic, powerful message, is of central importance. Spectators seem to prefer the concentration of reality as an exotic phenomenon, not as everyday realism.

Sacred Cow or Silly Cow? EU in Polish Press Cartoons

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The press cartoons representing the EU are one of the discursive means used in the conceptualisation of the new Europe. This political and cultural phenomenon is both new and omnipresent in the contemporary press discourse in Poland.

Cartoons of Europe are affected by the “problems with the EU”.

One is the EU lacking emotional appeal. The cartoons of the EU are often based on abstract symbols (e.g. ring of euro-stars, road signs). The other is the deficiency of understanding the EU. The effect of the latter problem is relative scarcity of visual representations of the EU in press as well as often relying on national rather than “supra-national” symbolism.

However, cartoons have the means of overcoming these problems. One of them is visual metaphorisation (anthropomorphisation and zoo-morphisation of the EU). Metaphorisation may rely on myth (e.g. the abduction of Europe by the divine bull) or familiar realities (e.g. cow, reception desk). The EU is being “personalised”, both positively and negatively, and “banalised”. The other instrument which cartoons use to overcome “problems with the EU” is humour. The functions of laughing at the EU include symbolic domination over it, distancing from it, making it familiar.

Images, Imagery and the Construction of a Nation (the Iconography of Guinea-Bissau)

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Public Images and History: Designing the „Kallawaya“

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The valleys northeast of the Titicaca-lake basin currently are well known by Bolivians, tourists, anthropologists and assistants of development projects. One of the reasons for the attractive status of the area emerged from a stereotype associated with the inhabitants of the region. They are known as “the Kallawaya”, magicians and specialists of natural medical treatment. This image of the “exotic physician” and of people leading an everyday-life imbued with rituals and magic never has been viewed critically. Historical analysis permits some insights how currently used forms of representations have developed over time and in which way they are connected with the sphere of commercialisation and consumption. It also shows how images associated with the valleys’ inhabitants have been and still are being reproduced, and what kind of potentialities for change are inherent to them. The basic intentions of the paper are: the definition of the elements involved in the construction of the Kallawayas’ publicly represented image and the detection of its reflective qualities.

These reflections are influencing both: the self-perception of the local groups of the Charazani region, and the stereotypeinfluenced consumers' perceptions of images that are generated by public representations of anthropological subjects.