

Workshop 8

Applied Visual Anthropology

Convenor:

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This workshop will explore uses of and perspectives on the application of visual anthropological approaches and methods outside academic contexts. There is a long history of visual anthropology's involvement with non-academic projects in the creative media as well as social intervention and policy domains. For example in ethnographic television documentary making, indigenous media projects broaching issues of local community development, identity and self-representation, and as photographic inventories as part of wider social research projects. With the recent increase in use of digital technologies (video, stills photography and hypermedia) there is much wider access to and use of visual imagery and audio-visual media by anthropologists working both in and outside the academy. Simultaneously the use of visual anthropological methods of research and representation is now more prevalent: in consumer ethnography and design anthropology trained visual anthropologists are working with businesses using visual ethnography and anthropologically informed ideas to provide insights that offer commercial advantage; anthropologists working in social development overseas use visual research methods, and video production as part of their working practices; and 'at home' anthropologists use visual ethnographic methods in applied work in the public sector and policy research.

This workshop aims to draw together the experiences and views of EASA members who have used visual methods and media in anthropological work in any field that has some impact outside academic contexts. I welcome papers on ethnographic experiences or methodological or theoretical issues that relate to this area.

Archiving “Heritage”, Reconstructing the “Area”: Examples from Building an Audio-Visual Database in EU Sponsored Research

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Carrying out anthropological research for a European-Commission programme on “Mediterranean” “urban heritage”, I discuss aspects of our ongoing work pertaining to the use of audio-visual digital technologies in conducting ethnography which supports an institutionally (EU) constructed theoretical framework. How does one come to terms with the necessity to promote concepts such as “cultural heritage” or the “Mediterranean”, which, at first sight, seem outdated, or are long deconstructed and/or contested by anthropologists? And what can be the socio-political significance of building an audio-visual database

of Mediterranean oral histories for the Internet, in terms of the non-academic character of the project (i.e., urban heritage management, and the strengthening of local actors)? While critically approaching the EU institutional rhetoric, one ought to be aware of the fact that it emerges today at a specific interface of new policy agendas within the EU. In this context, “traditional” terms can be re-signified and the use of visual media by each research partner may creatively bypass the issue of subscribing to the idea of a culturally homogeneous Mediterranean region, and offer alternative ways of viewing the urban landscapes in question, which are sensitive to the emerging social realities of each urban setting (gentrification, immigration, etc.).

Collectivity on Screen: Multi-Vocal Ethnography of the Production Process of “Karaoke”, a Community Based Film Project Led by Artist Els Dietvorst

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The process of production is a critical and inexperienced tool in the research of representation, which I investigate by offering ethnographic data in a performative and multi-vocal way of the film shoot of ‘Karaoke’ led by Els Dietvorst. This project offers an interesting case in the field of collaborative filmmaking challenging stereotypical representations. She collaborates, discusses and works for about four years with a collective she named “The Swallows’ located in a marginalised area of Brussels. They presented street performances, video installations, juke-box stories and films. My approach shifts the attention deliberately from analyses focusing on the end result, which might be a film, a documentary, as is classic in cultural and film studies, towards a critical research on the context of interaction in which this result is submerged. As such, it is my aim to add an investigative tool in the examination of the rich potentiality of visuals in the construction of the self, on the one hand, and the formation of sodalities through those media, on the other, presenting important challenges to anthropology.

The First Digital Ethnographic Atlas of Andalucía

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Andalusia is one of Spain’s leading tourist destinations. The province of Málaga, where tourism is focused has a 37% share of the Andalusian tourist market. A steady increase in tourist figures indicates the rising role of inland comarcas as tourist destinations and maps out a new pattern for coastal tourism destinations. The Etnoatlas project focused on these areas, specifically the easternmost comarca of Axarquía (hinterland of the Costa del Sol). The objective was to 1) provide an ethnographic tool for policy-makers, based on a cultural-ecological approach, and 2) to digitalise culture drawing from discourses on new technologies

and an anthropological perspective. The visual narrative presented in the CD is based upon the idea of blurring the edges between the linearity of writing and the graphic limitations of mapping. The method brings in live local actors' voices (interviews and interpellations) alongside still photographs, which are conceived as partial signs in the context of traditional Andalusia culture. The photographs are reinforced through the music of the copla which uses sensory evocation to incisively build the meaning of "the world from which we talk" through musical identification.

Skin and Screen. Displaying 'Epidermal Schemas' in the Operating Theatres of Interventional Radiology

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In my video supported presentation I will focus on the mutual connectedness of bodies and imaging technologies in the medical context of interventional radiology, where mainly the blood flow is rendered visible, diagnosed and treated therapeutically. Physicians do not directly peer into bodily depths, exposing secrecies beneath the skin, but navigate through interior structures like with a finger on a roadmap, which is projected on video screens. Their gaze is fully concentrated on the information they get from monitors, where continually moving fluoroscopy video pictures are projected. I will argue that X-ray pictures increasingly replace real present bodies and similarly create new virtual ones. Bodily and sensuous (mainly nonverbal) processes, which I have observed in the particularly equipped operating theatres of interventional radiology with my digital video camera, are usually kept unseen. Patients get only vague ideas of what happens with and within them during the operation. They are unable to look in the direction of the operating area, because their field of vision is shielded through green cloth. Despite these interventional procedures go literally under the skin as well as beyond the screen, thus marking an existing taboo of the body's interior yet being entirely entered.

Mediating Memories in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone. Notes from a Work in Progress

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This paper seeks to examine the processes of remembrance and reconciliation in post-war Sierra Leone through exploring the 'narrativisation' of war experiences and the influence of the media through which such narratives are performed, communicated and materialised. Paul Richards has described the Sierra Leonean conflict as a 'war of globalisation', which cannot be understood without considering the 'media flows and cultural hybridisations that make up globalised modernity'. With increasing access to new media technologies and the postconflict expansion of international development initiatives, such

flows and hybridisations continue to proliferate, not least in the arena of human rights discourse and associated institutions such as Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Despite their quasi-judicial rhetoric of 'truth telling', the power of truth commissions is, as Richard Wilson argues, 'ultimately symbolic', and their 'symbolic impact...lies in how they codify the history of a period'. Drawing on the results of a pilot study, the paper examines alternative sites of memory production in Sierra Leone, exploring how narratives of the conflict are differently codified through the mediation of different media technologies and social contexts. Consulting on a local oral history/archive collection initiative, the paper discusses the (visual) anthropologist's own implication in the mediation of memory.

The Art of Catastrophe: Ethnography and Multimedia

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The paper assesses the ethnographic value and potential to be found in artists' responses to humanitarian disasters concentrating on their use of multimedia. In such artworks, new information and communication technologies offer the possibility of the complex interlinking of sources and commentary in different media, adding a level of technical sophistication to ethnographic studies that makes analysis easier, richer, and more accessible to a broader audience. While television reporting of disasters has the potential to stir public opinion, ultimately prompting aid agencies and governments to respond to the problem, there is a marked tendency to categorise the victims of such tragedies as human types, whereby the selective nature of the visual image frequently objectifies them dismissing their historical, cultural and political circumstances. In contrast, visual artists challenge these conventions. Examples include, Eva Koch's Villa multimedia project relating to forced migration during the Spanish Civil War and Alfredo Jaar's The Rwanda Project: 1994-1998: an installation documenting survivors and locations of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. These attempts aim to portray the disaster through the personal experiences of those involved. The paper aims to demonstrate the sophistication of digital-media era ethnology, made more profound by the treatment of disaster by artists.

Remarks on the Protection of Indigenous Heritage

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There is an "inextricable" link binding together linguistic, cultural, legal and biological diversity to traditional knowledge. (Posey 1999). It is a remarkable paradox, according to which, by and large, intangible fluid heritage can only be protected by being made into what it is not: that is tangible and fixed. This shift continues to have a profound impact on indigenous peoples in terms of its consequences on the nature of their cultural, social

traditions and the integrity of their relationships with the land. My paper explores firstly perspectives of applied visual anthropology within the academia. Viewed structurally, possible adverse consequences for the integrity of heritage that may derive from the application of an exogenous framework, developed for public or private use need to be considered. Recent developments are worthy of consideration and have been relevant around the presentations of the exhibition “Lakol Wokiksuye” (lit. transl. “An Indian Remembers”) and the drafting process of the U.N.-document “Guidelines and Principles of the Heritage of an Indigenous People” (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/26).

Applied Visual Anthropology: A Sub-Field in the Making?

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In the mid twentieth century John Collier Jr. carried out innovative and important work as a visual anthropologist in projects relating to Alaskan Eskimo and Native American Indian education in the US. However this work, like much applied research in the history of visual anthropology seems somehow to have been lost and excluded from the history of the visual anthropology that until recently has developed as a sub-discipline dominated by ethnographic documentary filmmaking. This paper explores historical and contemporary developments in the application of visual anthropological methods of research and representation in applied anthropology projects across a range of sectors including industry, disaster relief, development, medical anthropology, arts practice and post-conflict contexts. I will argue that applied visual anthropology is an emergent subfield that is of equal relevance in its potential contribution to academic anthropology and its application as a tool of social intervention.