

**Media Anthropology Network
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
E-Seminar Series**

<https://easaonline.org/networks/media/eseminars>

**E-Seminar 69
Investigating scientific practice with ethnographic film**

**by
Sanderien Verstappen & Sarah R. Davies
University of Vienna**

**Discussant
Ildikó Plájás
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21 June – 5 July 2022

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21 June 2022

Dear all,

I am happy to announce the opening of e-seminar 69 - 'Investigating scientific practice with ethnographic film' by Sanderien Verstappen and Sarah R. Davies (both University of Vienna). The discussant for the seminar is Ildikó Plájás (Leiden University & University of Amsterdam).

The e-seminar will run for two weeks, from today and until July 5th.

As always, the e-seminar will start with comments from the discussant. Subsequently, the authors will post their reply after which I will open the seminar for all to contribute.

To post a comment to the e-seminar, write directly to medianthro@lists.easaonline.org. You need to be subscribed to the list with the email you are writing from.

If you have not yet had the chance to read the paper, it can be downloaded here: <https://easaonline.org/networks/media/eseminars>.

I am looking forward to what promises to be an inspiring e-seminar on an important topic.

Cheers,
Nina

Dear Sanderien and Sarah, dear all,

Thank you for this very interesting paper and for the opportunity to kick off the discussion. As a visual anthropologist working in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), I am delighted to see the growing interest in multimodal research designs, and specifically ethnographic filmmaking in social sciences. Visual anthropology, if used skillfully, I believe, can offer effective and powerful tools to engage in conversation with the increasingly complex and fragile worlds we live in (Tsing et al. 2017).

In my contribution to the discussion, I will first highlight some of the most salient arguments of Sanderien and Sarah's paper, then I will share some thoughts about moving away from the representational paradigm towards enactment and intervention. I will end with some more general thoughts about the possible roles visual anthropology can play in shaping the futures of our disciplines.

First, I found it very inspiring that the paper takes a teaching-based research approach, that is, instead of talking research into the classroom, it does the opposite. It takes lessons from designing and teaching a course to develop an argument about how ethnographic filmmaking can contribute to studying science in practice. With this move Sanderien and Sarah also go against the duality of research and teaching and convincingly prove that teaching and research are not necessarily competing activities but can be intertwined in creative and inspiring ways.

Second, Sanderien and Sarah argue that ethnographic filmmaking, specifically a strand of observational cinema called process film, can be an effective method to attend to the everyday, seemingly insignificant mundane aspects of scientific work. Those that are often taken-for-granted or "invisible within spoken accounts, and yet vital in shaping the outcomes of research". The focus on everyday practices, on what scientists actually do in their laboratories instead of how they would talk about their practices (as we often see in films using "talking head" interviews) also draws attention to the materiality and technology, "the non-human agencies of objects, animals, spaces, and substances - such as fluids in the chemistry class, or fire to chase the wasps from their nests".

The camera here is not only an extension of the ethnographer's body but can act as a sensitizing device with very specific affordances and sensitivities. For instance, through zooming in, framing meaningful details or by the means of extreme close ups the film as medium can effectively engage with-or, to use the STS specific term, can enact-the materiality (and also spatiality and temporal unfolding) of that specific scientific practice. In this sense, I would suggest, the film is not a representation of the scientific practice it observes, even if a general audience would still perceive it as such. Instead, it is an (ontological) enactment, specific to the materials and technologies involved (the camera, the type of lens, the sound equipment, editing software, etc.), as well as to the specific practice (including the ethnographer's who arranges entrance, sets up collaboration, negotiates ownership, etc.).

As the article itself argues, "practices are implicated in the making of reality" and so are the practices of the ethnographer-filmmaker. If the authors would frame ethnographic filmmaking not through a constructivist epistemology as they do now, but instead through ontology, the focus on practice would allow for engaging with and learning from the specificities of the material and technological enactments in relation to the research object at hand. It would also allow to see ethnographic filmmaking not only a methodological invention within STS scholarship but as a possible intervention in that field.

Through tinkering with materials, crafting experimentations (Ballestero and Winthereik 2021) and fostering collaboration, doing ethnography (and doing ethnographic film) can also be a meaningful way of crafting (theoretical) interventions. In STS and its subdisciplines (such as anthropology of science, actor network theory, material semiotics, etc.) multimodality has long been embraced not as an alternative to writing but as inherent to experimentation and indeed, collaboration, that allows for creative engagements and interventions in complex topics and fragile worlds. It is seen as a necessity for "staying with the trouble" (Haraway 2016). As so nicely demonstrated by the article, ethnographic filmmaking could have a prominent place as an inventive and generous method, one that is capable of enacting time and materials in a unique, cinema specific way.

And finally, I would like to end with some thoughts about the role of visual anthropology for the development of the broader social science landscape. I strongly feel that using audiovisual and multimodal methods should not only be taken as a pursuit for the more 'creative' anthropologists and students. As so poignantly proven by the article, visual literacy should be part of any research curriculum. As social scientists, we must be aware of how visual representations work, including their affective and political power. We should also be able to make use of different audiovisual media to enhance our own research practices. This can already be achieved with accessible technologies like a smartphone (Verstappen 2020). In this sense, visual anthropology should be a method equal in its importance to the skills of reading and writing.

Second, I see great potential in using audiovisual and multimedia methods as ways of engaging in public debates. Researching politically sensitive and urgent subjects such as social injustice, border regimes or climate change should urge us to be more creative in 'speaking nearby' (Chen 1992) and 'speaking back' to our fields. Multimodal engagements such as film, photography, podcasts, graphic novels, etc. offer effective and exciting tools for collaboration with a wide range of actors. They can also help tackle the challenge of translating and communicating knowledge without too much loss of complexity to a wider audience. Additionally, these methods can offer shared platforms where new insights and possible solutions emerge from experimentation and tinkering as so nicely demonstrated by Sanderien and Sarah's article.

References:

Ballestero, A. and Winthereik, B. R. (eds.) (2021) *Experimenting with ethnography: A companion to analysis*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Chen, N. N. (1992). "Speaking Nearby:" A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 8(1), 82-91.

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Tsing, A. L., Swanson, H.A., Gan, E. and Bubandt, N. (eds) (2017) *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet. Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. University of Minnesota Press.

Verstappen, S. (2020). 'Ultrashort, low-resolution and anonymous: Designing anthropological films for smartphone viewers', *entanglements*, 3(1):62-80.

Dear Ildikó,

Thank you for these thoughtful and generous - and extremely helpful - comments. I will respond quickly on a couple of your points that particularly caught my attention; Sanderien will, I think, want to respond separately as well.

First, thank you for putting your finger so precisely on one dynamic that I think we have been struggling to articulate as we write and think about our interdisciplinary experiment: the shift from a representational frame to an ontological one. As you say, this is something we describe with regard to what STS work has argued concerning scientific practice, and something that we tried to encourage reflection on in the course (through the use of notions such as method assemblage in social science research, for instance). But thus far we have found it difficult to talk about these interventions in terms of what was enacted through them. This is (once again) partly a challenge of writing, and of academic norms and genres, but I think this question also deserves more focused analytical attention from us. It's therefore something I think we will take forward as we continue to reflect on this experiment.

A second point that struck me was that I think you are too generous to STS as a discipline when you write that "multimodality has long been embraced not as an alternative to writing but as inherent to experimentation". This is perhaps true in particular spaces, but my impression of the discipline as a whole is that it has largely failed to apply its own theoretical and empirical precepts. This is one reason that I am so enthusiastic about multimodal methods and other forms of 'tinkering', but I think it also leads us to broader questions about academic research and how it is valued, made visible, and rewarded. How might we imagine forms of research practice (and its governance) that afford and even encourage methodological experiments, diverse forms of representation, and 'impact' that goes beyond citation? How can the results of different forms of tinkering travel and become visible in diverse spaces (you mention public policy and debate, and I think this is important - but perhaps not always rewarded)?

Well, I hope that is not too rambling (or too far outside the scope of the paper)!

Thank you again for the comments,

Sarah

Dear everyone,

Nice to e-meet you all!

Sarah and I are delighted to present our working paper "Investigating scientific practice with ethnographic film" as the 69th working paper in the EASA Media Anthropology Network E-Seminar series.

A big thanks to Philipp and Nina for making this possible, and to Ildiko Plajas for her thoughtful discussion.

Our aim is to open a conversation about the possible role of ethnographic filmmaking in the social sciences, specifically, to create venues for integrating ethnographic filmmaking in Science and Technology Studies (STS) research and teaching. We have started this conversation in our shared classroom of the University of Vienna, together with students of both STS and anthropology; and in the Museum of Technology in Vienna where we interacted with curators Sophie Gerber and Martina Griesser to shape, display, and discuss the students' films. With this EASA e-seminar, we are sharing our ideas for the first time in the international field of anthropology. We are excited about this opportunity to learn from distinguished colleagues in the field, and look forward to your responses.

Ildiko's comments on the paper suggest that ethnographic filmmaking can be a "possible intervention" as well as a "methodological invention" within STS scholarship. As Sarah mentioned, we are still in the process of expanding our conclusions in that regard: how do the resulting films actually intervene in STS scholarship? To be able to converse about this in a concrete way in this e-seminar, I am sharing a link to one of the films discussed in the paper, *Blurred Visions*: <https://vimeo.com/718218838>

With *Blurred Visions*, the makers (Andrea Heisse, Jamina Trapp, and Antonia Winkler, in collaboration with the research group Physics of Nanostructured Materials in Vienna) investigated practices of visualisation in electron microscopy. Following a nano physicist throughout an experiment, the project looked at how a substance, graphene, is made invisible through exfoliation, with the aim of rendering it visible again through light and electron microscopy.

Since the film ends with perceived failure of the scientific experiment, it prompts us to reflect what else is happening in the process.

All the best,
From Vienna,
Sanderien

References:

Blurred Visions (2022), short film by Andrea Heisse, Jamina Trapp, Antonia Winkler, in collaboration with Research Group Physics of Nanostructured Materials in Vienna, during the course "Visual Ethnographies of Science", taught by Sarah Davies and Sanderien Verstappen with tutoring of Viktoria Paar, at the Department of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology (KSA) of the University of Vienna.

Dear all,

Thanks to Ildikó for her comments and to Sarah and Sanderien for their reply.

The e-seminar is now open for all to participate. In order to do so, simply send an email to the whole list using medianthro@lists.easaonline.org.

Cheers,
Nina

Dear All,

Thanks for starting this interesting discussion. Having taken part in Sarah's and Sanderien's course (as part of the blurred visions team), I found it extremely interesting to engage in this paper. I would like to respond to the question that Sanderien poses in relation to the films that we produced: How do they actually intervene in STS scholarship? In this context, I would like to draw on my personal experiences in the filming process.

While filming the movie, I often had to think of Karen Barads (2007) work on agential realism and analytical distinctions or "agential cuts" (which I think translates nicely into film making vocabulary) that I automatically perform when writing a text about a scientific practice. For instance, while writing about the practice of electron microscopy, I automatically delineated Manuel (the scientist) from the machinery (the different microscopes) and the surroundings of the lab. Through filming the process, we did not have to perform the same "cuts". Manuel and his spatially immediate environment remained undissected. However, other complexities are not captured in the movie. For instance, we were instructed that the potential of an electron microscope in this precision area could not have been fully exploited at the physics faculty since the nearby traffic and the consequent emergence of magnetic fields would distort the electron beam of the microscope and therefore worsen its accuracy. Therefore, the electron microscope was located at Sternwarte Vienna, where a huge park area shields the experiment from the distorting surroundings of the city. While it is possible for me to convey the importance of this larger material surrounding for electron microscopy in writing, we could not (comprehensively) include it visually into the movie. In that sense, we performed a different "cut".

Therefore, I think that doing ethnographic film sensitized me to reflect on the performativity of methods in general. In the case of electron microscopy, I think the method of process film was a good way to bring to the fore the dynamic entanglements of human and nonhuman elements that matter in the process of visualization. However, some aspects of the process could be more comprehensively captured in subsequent writing. In this sense, I think it is extremely valuable to integrate process film as a method more broadly into the toolkit of investigating scientific practices. Not only is it a method that allows to account for multiplicity and human-nonhuman entanglements in new ways, but it additionally sensitizes researchers to more consciously reflect on the cuts they perform in the research process.

All the best from Vienna,
Antonia

References:

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press.

Ildikó Plájás (i.plajas@uva.nl)

26 June 2022

Dear Sarah and Sanderien,

Thanks for your replies and for this important discussion.

First, dear Sarah, thanks so much for pointing out that I am perhaps a bit too enthusiastic when celebrating multimodal experimentation within STS. I see how this indeed might come from my STS bubble that is specific to the Netherlands/some European networks of which I am part of. Coming from visual anthropology, a field that has long been struggling to be taken seriously as a scholarly achievement in its own right (and not always reduced to illustration or the empirical material based on which the “proper”, as in logocentric, analysis is written), I found very refreshing the methodological inventiveness of STS.

Some of the works that I find particularly inspiring are about the senses and the body (Mann et al. 2011, Annemarie Mol, Ulrike Scholtes), the making and doing initiatives (Downey and Zuiderent-Jerak 2021), experimental collaborations and multimodality (Estalella & Sanchez Criado 2018) or the recent edited volume by Ballestero et al. (2021). There are also many interesting multimodal platforms starting with the Sensate Journal (<https://sensatejournal.com/>) and ending with all those scholars who routinely incorporate other ways of doing into their work: sound (ex. Stefan Helmrich, Andrew Littlejohn, etc.), code writing (Adrian Mackenzie), digital methods (ex. Ethos Lab in Copenhagen), drama & immersive visualisations (Joe Dumit), creative storytelling and poetry (Tsing et al 2017, M’charek 2020) and of course Donna Haraway (2016). And now the two of you with observational cinema. I feel that you have something really important to add to these developments by mobilizing visual/multimodal anthropology.

But you are right that the work that goes into such creative tinkering is often not valued and certainly doesn’t reflect in citation numbers and career developments. Perhaps we can work against this together. Collaboration is high on the funding body’s agenda and there is so much talk about societal impact. There is also more than ever a keen interest in moving between fields and taking lessons from STS, anthropology, digital humanities, the arts, etc. etc. to address the most pressing issues of our times. The problems has grown bigger than to remain in our disciplinary comfort. So maybe there’s a momentum now. When reading Isabelle Stenger’s (2018) plea for slow science I couldn’t but think about how film forces us to slow down. And this takes me to Sanderien’s points.

Dear Sanderien, it is so great that you shared the link to this film. I watched it for the second time and it brings up so many ideas.

First about the temporal dimension of working/engaging with film. I realize that it is not possible to glance over a film the same way we would do with a text. Of course, we can speed it up and run through it, but then we lose at least half of it, the sound. So film has its own temporal logic and if we want to engage with it we must honour its time. So perhaps this is the first challenge: how to convince our colleagues that it worth the time? Maybe there is something to be done in how we intertwine film and text by considering both as equally important for the argument we want to make. The reader then has no choice but to watch it if they want to engage with the argument.

Second, about the film's engagement with the materiality of vision. This is such a rich topic. I was really struck by how much preparation, careful work, cleaning, braking, gluing, numbering, cycling, walking is needed to make vision possible in the first place. There's even some magic in there ;). Seeing the graphite happens not only in the microscope but it involves plastic bags, gloves, sticky tapes, tweezers, and also cables, screens, pens, mirrors (and also buildings, badges, masks etc etc). My absolute favourite is the long scene where the graphite in the transport cart has to be pulled through (with a magnet?) the long pipes across several rooms all the way to the electron microscope. I very much appreciated that this scene takes 2 entire minutes (which is one fourth of the 8 minute long film). And then there's the sound of vision, the loud buzzing of the electron microscope, the rhythmic clicking of zooming in. And by the time we finally see—we also get here for the first time the close up of the attentive eye that is cut to the screen where the attention is lead through the hovering mouse—vision has been performed through lens upon lens, and mediated through screen upon screen.

The camera lens with which all of this was recorded, the monitor(s) where the editing happened and finally, the screen where we read our emails and now watch this film are also part of this infrastructure that enables and performs vision. There's the moment of braking the mirror. This could again be such a beautiful metaphor for vision. Braking the mirror can be harmful for the eyes, so we need to protect it. Therefore, the scientist puts a paper tissue on top it. Then the mirror needs to be cleaned as well. The graphite particles sticking to the tape made me think about light touching the celluloid. How there's always hapticity involved in vision. It's brilliant how the film starts with putting on gloves. Vision cannot happen without purification. This holds for the film as well. When we select, frame, zoom in, we "clean" the field of vision from all that we deem irrelevant...

I could go on and on, but I realize my response is getting way too long, so I'm going to stop here. But I'm very curious about what others saw/think.

With kind regards,

Ildikó

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

30 June 2022

Dear Sanderien and Sarah,

Thank you very much for your thought provoking paper and the discussion so far! I get a few questions. I was wondering when STS includes the non-human into its understanding of (social) practice(s), as you describe on the first pages, where would you situate the practice of

filmmaking and the involved actors – human and non-human – in the developing assemblage of relationships? What do scientists gain from being filmed, aside from establishing relationships with STS or VA researchers? And, would you consider mediation, as one of media anthropology's key concepts (being continuously discussed within the Media Anthropology Network's e-seminars for instance, <https://easaonline.org/downloads/networks/media/64e.pdf>), relevant or useful for investigating scientific practices with processual film?

Thank you and all the best,

Philipp

Sanderien Verstappen (sanderien.verstappen@univie.ac.at)

30 June 2022

Dear all,

This is to respond to the points made by Ildiko and Antonia in their responses.

Dear Ildiko,

The points you made about the materiality of vision stuck with me. They resonate with your earlier comment about cameras as a material object – not merely an extension of the own body, but as a sensitizing device with very specific affordances. There is a long line of thought about the “objecthood” of visual culture (Edwards 2002), which has been generative in thinking through the materiality of images and their distribution infrastructures. On the other hand, there are handbooks for ethnographic filmmaking, which give practical, technical, and methodological advice for the handling of image-making objects such as cameras and sound recorders (Barbash and Taylor 1997; Lawrence 2020). As far as I know, these discussions remain quite separate. Co-teaching with Sarah, who brought in the STS perspective, was generative because it invited us to think materiality and methodology together. This made us reflect on to the objecthood of the technologies of vision, and the embodied experience of handling them, as central aspects of science and knowledge production – a similarity between the natural sciences and anthropology.

To illustrate: the “objecthood” of the camera and its diverse accessories as objects that organize vision was discussed in our classes as both an affordance and a problem. The cameras are large and can become quite heavy if you hold them for a while. They are full of buttons to be pressed and menus with options to be studied, and there are cables to be plugged in, SD cards to be formatted, microphones and boom sticks to be handled, and a shoulder rig that needs to be carefully adjusted to fit the own body size. Working in a pair with a camera person and a sound person, two become materially connected to each other with two cables: the headphone cable and the microphone cable. These two people then need to handle these cables between them, which means they have to stay close (for example walk in the same pace) to prevent the cables from disconnecting. All of this is quite a challenge. When evaluating the camera workshops, students initially said that they felt these material and technical aspects distract them from vision rather than enhancing it. Experiences of the camera as a tool of vision do not automatically arrive but are trained over time when the body adjusts to this new practice. One affordance of going through all this “trouble”, from an STS perspective, is that it resonates so intriguingly with the technologies of vision in the natural sciences. Many thanks Ildiko, for

putting that resonance forward in such sensitive prose.

Thank you, too, Antonia, for your reflection on the relation between text and film in your research.

Regarding the relation between text and film, there are broadly two positions that can be taken. One important argument made in Visual Anthropology is that film should be treated as a stand-alone product, to be understood independently of a textual accompaniment. This argument responds to long-standing critiques on the relative dominance of textual publication modes in the social sciences, and is an effort to reinstate film at equal level. An important international initiative in this direction is the Journal of Anthropological Films (JAF). I support these initiatives, nevertheless, in my own work I prefer to work across text and film, and I treat film and text as complementary (Verstappen 2021). This is the approach you also take, Antonia, when you clarify how each has its affordances in terms of what you aimed to achieve.

I prefer not to spend too much energy on the long-discussed idea that films are marginalized in anthropology (Mead 1975). Films do a lot of academic work, obviously in terms of social impact as Ildiko already pointed out, but also within in the academia itself. Education is one of the sites where films are integrated within a broader set of textual and other resources, generating energies for students and teachers alike. For example, the films our students made are currently being integrated in classes of Social Studies of Science and Technology at the TU Berlin in Germany (thanks to Markus Hoffmann), as visual prompts to discuss scientific work in future classrooms.

Thanks again for your thoughtful comments, and I look forward to hearing what others think!

Sanderien

References:

Barbash, I., & Taylor, L. (1997). *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking: A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos*. University of California Press.

Edwards, E. (2002). Material beings: Objecthood and ethnographic photographs. *Visual Studies* 17 (1), 67-75.

Lawrence, A. (2020). *Filmmaking for Fieldwork: A Practical Handbook*. Manchester University Press.

Mead, M. 2003/1975. Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words. In *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, P. Hockings (ed.). Mouton de Gruyter (third edition), 3-10.

Verstappen, S. (2021). Ethnocinematographic theory: How to develop migration theory through ethnographic filmmaking. In Karolina Nikielska-Sekula and Amandine Desille (eds.), *Visual Methodology in Migration Studies: New Possibilities, Theoretical Implications, and Ethical Questions*. Springer.

Dear Sanderien and Sarah,

Thank you very much for your interesting paper. As it has been already said so far in this discussion, I also find it very useful to read you from your own teaching experience. In a way I even wanted to read more of this and to see it develop in a more complex theoretical discussion in anthropology and STS/media. Perhaps you can consider inverting your paper and start from your ethnographic observation to then head to a more general epistemological discussion about the connection between the two disciplines?

Your approach reminds me a lot of Sol Worth's experimentations of the 1960s. At that time, he already led students exploring through a camera as a tool of communication. He was indeed interested in how human being could create and share meanings through media-film.

Today, we can read about what was happening in his classes and how he developed the idea of a 'biodocumentary' (Worth and Gross 1981). As argued in many key texts of VA, it was during the 1970s that he came out with the proposition of an anthropology of visual communication (vs. the already established visual anthropology). Yet, as we all know, his proposition never taken off within the discipline. Your paper really made me think that there may be a scope, with contemporary technology and class experimentations, to perhaps return to these existing works and discussions...

Just a thought.

Thank you very much again

Best

Giulia

Thank you also from my side for all these wonderful comments. A couple of things caught my attention in particular.

First, Ildikó, thank you for highlighting the temporality of (watching) film, and the way it intervenes into 'normal' academic practices (for instance of skimming through a text). Indeed, this connects very nicely to Stengers' notion of slow science, and to the concerns of many others about the 'acceleration' of research (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2017/08/18/book-review-accelerating-academia-the-changing-structure-of-academic-time-by-filip-vostal/>) or 'project time'. While we can argue about the degree to which this is actually happening, and how the temporalities of science are shifting, I think it could be extremely generative to think of film as a radical intervention into mundane academic practice, in and of itself, in that it forces a different mode (and temporality) of engagement. In this respect we can see such films as already mitigating against some of the dynamics - competition, uncritical notions of 'excellence', the devaluation of care work - that mark many experiences of academic work.

And thank you, Philip, for raising such interesting questions! As we don't use the language of mediation/medialisation much in STS, the link to the previous seminar discussion was extremely interesting to me. But perhaps I will let Sanderien speak about that as she surely has

thought more about these concepts :-) Your first questions, however, triggered some thoughts about how to think about intentionality in our analysis. Thus far, in other words, the emphasis has been on the method assemblages of visual ethnography, our role in putting these together, and what they enact. But we might also 'redraw' (or refocus) the network to emphasise the students' interlocutors. As we start to discuss in the paper, at least some of these interlocutors had very concrete intentions with regard to the collaboration with students: to get a promotional video; to access raw footage that they could use for their own films; to publicise what they were doing (for instance). One of the interesting things was to watch the negotiations that went on around what the films were for, and therefore what they should look like (e.g. process films versus pieces of science communication). Asking what interlocutors want, and get, from participating in such projects perhaps allows us to make another 'cut' (to pick up on Antonia's really helpful and powerful use of Barad) to see something different again: the films as one by-product of particular actors' world-building, and their efforts associated with that.

Definitely things to keep thinking about...

Sarah

Mark Pedelty (pedeltmh@umn.edu)

3 July 2022

Thank you, Sanderien and Sarahfor, for this very interesting paper. It advances our thinking in regard to the methodological role of film as fieldwork, and I found your observations on STS very enlightening. Rather than seeing filmmaking as instrumental, you demonstrate that it can be central, epistemologically, especially in a world where mediation/mediatization is omnipresent.

I'll leave my praise and remarks there. Anything else I have to say on the topic is in the following recent publications and "Film as Fieldwork," which is in press. Very poor timing. If we had read your paper before writing these, we would have found it very useful for advancing our theoretical conceptualization. One thing that hit me when reading your piece is the way in which the social practices being filmed change the nature of the mediation. For example, although we were dealing with ecological topics, the more arts-oriented nature of the social practices we were filming led to a different set of methodological considerations. In case these are of interest...

Pedelty, Mark, Rebecca Dirksen, Tara Hatfield, Yan Pang, and Elja Roy 2020. "Field to Media: applied ecomusicology in the Anthropocene." *Popular Music* 39, no. 1 (2020): 22-42.

Pedelty, Mark and Elja Roy (in press, 2022). "Film as Fieldwork." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication Research*

Thanks for your fascinating paper and great pedagogical ideas as well!

Mark

Thanks, Mark for the references - good to know, and I will look forward to the new chapter!

Dear all,

Philipp asked if we find the term 'mediation' useful for our analysis, referring to discussions in the EASA Media Anthropology network about media practices.

Such an analysis could be generative in drawing visual anthropology and media anthropology closer together. The separate existence of an EASA Media Anthropology Network and an EASA Visual Anthropology Network suggests that the two fields have different histories and operate in separate realms. Yet the invitation to share our paper in this MA network and the productive exchanges on this mailing list over the last two weeks shows that there is a lot of synergy between the two fields, and indeed several visual anthropologists build on histories of thought in media anthropology to talk about the role of filmmaking in anthropology (e.g., van de Port 2018, see below).

In the linked discussion Philipp sent (<https://easaonline.org/downloads/networks/media/64e.pdf>), the term mediation is interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, mediation is used to consider if/how certain media come with certain kinds of logics that enable or limit certain kinds of practices. In VA discussions, this framework is relevant when the question is asked what the affordances of film are for fieldwork (and other academic work) - a question normally asked in terms of a comparison between film and text. If we apply this lens to our paper, we can ask how the process film as a genre with its own set of stylistic conventions and historically grown cinematographic routines might enable (or constrain) certain kinds of research practices, pedagogical practices, and practices of science communication.

However, several contributors to the discussion critique this interpretation of mediation and state that all interactions are mediated. In their approach, the notion of causality falls apart and the attention instead turns to what people do with media - or even more broadly, to all communication practices. If we apply this second lens to our working paper, we can ask how science is mediated. This can lead to questions of materiality, experience, and the entanglement of film with various world-making projects, including those of the researchers and those of their interlocutors - as highlighted in the previous contributions by Sarah, Ildiko, and others in this e-seminar. Anthropologist and filmmaker Mattijs van de Port developed such an analysis in an essay about the role of filmmaking in anthropology, which critiques the impulse to arrive at 'understanding of the "essential differences" between textual and visual anthropologies' (van de Port 2018, 137). Building on earlier articulations of mediation, such as those of anthropologist Birgit Meyer in the context of religion (2014), he articulates a vision of film as promising to fulfil certain expectations ("desires") that underlie the process of mediation in anthropology.

If others have thoughts to share on the links between media anthropology and visual anthropology: please don't hold back, this is the last day of the e-seminar!

Best wishes,
Sanderien

References:

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4 July 2022

Dear Giulia

Thanks for that reference to Sol Worth's classroom experiments – will look into it!

Best wishes,
Sanderien

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

4 July 2022

Dear Sanderien, Sarah, and all,

Thank you very much for your replies and thoughts. There are obviously quite a few links between media and visual anthropology, particularly if we put aside the idea that visual anthropology is only about filmmaking. The (use of the) concept of mediation - or of related concepts - and/or the analytical focus on the phenomenon of mediation could be such a link between these two anthropological research fields. As I see it, film - processual and ethnographic - is a great methodological tool to document and explore changes of mediation; or its nature, as Mark puts it. The role, the setting, and the intentionality - as Sarah reminds us – of filming practices become interesting here. Definitely a lot to think about - thank you!

All the best,

Philipp

Dear all,

Our 69th e-seminar, “Investigating scientific practice with ethnographic film”, is now closed.

Thanks to Sanderien and Sarah for sharing their thought-provoking paper, to Ildikó for her insightful comments, to Philipp for organising and to everyone who has participated.

As always, the transcript will be available online as soon as it is ready.

If you would like to present a working paper to an e-seminar or have a suggestion for a paper, please get in touch with Elisabetta, Sahana, Philipp or myself.

Cheers,
Nina