E-Seminar on Jay Ruby's working paper
1-15 September 2008

TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CINEMA
by
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Abstract
In the paper, I propose a radical departure from how we perceive ethnographic film and suggest an alternative path for the production of moving images by anthropologists. I argue that anthropologists should relinquish the term "ethnographic film" to documentary filmmakers and embrace the term "Anthropological Cinema" to distinguish their attempts to visualize ethnography from the realist images of the "exotic other" produced by documentarians. In addition, along with Biella and others, I suggest that the production of digital multimedia ethnographies may be a way out of the limits that are possibly inherent in tradition filmic discourse. I illustrate this variety of "new" ethnography with my own recent work.

Subject: Opening of our 23rd E-seminar!
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Mon, 1 September, 2008 7:36 am

Dear All

I'd like to welcome you to our 23 EASA media anthropology e-seminar. The seminar will run on this mailing list for two weeks from now until Monday September 15. The working paper, by Jay Ruby (Center for Visual Communication, USA) is titled: "Towards an Anthropological Cinema" and you've still got time to read the PDF version available at http://media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm

Tomorrow morning (Tuesday), Peter will be posting his comments directly to this list, after which Ruby will respond either on Tuesday or Wednesday. The discussion will then be open to all. Please bear in mind that these sessions can only work if we have wide and sustained participation, so all contributions are very welcome. To post, please write directly to medianthro at easaonline.org, i.e. not to me.

Dr. Jay Ruby is a recently retired visual anthropologist who has explored the relationship between culture and the pictorial world for forty years. His latest publications include Picturing Culture (University of Chicago Press, 2000) and five Oak Park Stories, digital ethnographies on CD-ROM available from DER (see: http://www.der.org/films/oak-park-stories.html).

The discussant will be Peter I. Crawford who holds a degree in social anthropology from Aarhus University (1985). He has been an active member of the board of the Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA) since the late 1970s. He has written extensively on visual anthropology and ethnographic film-making and has wide experience in teaching the subject both theoretically and practically. He is visiting professor at the Visual Anthropology Programme at the University of Tromsø, Norway and, currently (autumn term 2008), also visiting lecturer at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Trondheim, Norway. He has been involved in the long-term Reef Islands Ethnographic Film Project (Solomon Islands) since 1994 and is currently producing a number of films and written work based on material recorded in 1994, 1996, 2000, and 2005. Otherwise Peter I. Crawford mainly works as a publisher/editor (mainly through his publishing company, Intervention Press, www.intervention.dk) and as a socio-economic consultant on development issues.

Thanking our presenter and discussant for their efforts, it□s over to Peter now!

All the best, Sigurjon.

Subject: Delay in response
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Mon, 1 September, 2008 8:46 pm

Dear all,

I just received a note from our working paper discussant, Peter Ian Crawford, but his wife had a bicycle accident today which he had to attend to. His wife was taken to the hospital and is recovering. Peter will post his comments tomorrow evening. We send them our good wishes! So, while we wait there is still time to read or re-read Jay's paper!

All the best, Sigurjon.

Subject: [Medianthro] E-seminar re Jay Ruby's paper
From: "Peter I. Crawford" <interven@inet.uni2.dk>
Date: Tue, 2 September, 2008 8:40 pm

Dear list,
Please find my comments to Jay's paper pasted in below. My apologies for the delay.

Regards,
Peter

Comments to Jay Ruby's paper 'Toward and anthropological cinema', EASA media network e-seminar, September 2008.

By Peter I. Crawford (University of Tromsø/NAFA)

As far as I know, the premises of this e-seminar differ from previous ones in some ways. Firstly, the presenter of the paper (Jay Ruby) and the commentator (myself) are both what may be described as 'veterans' (well, we both have greyish white hair) in the discussion of the key issues raised, indicating that we have 'rattled on', to use a phrase employed by Jay in his paper, about some of the issues for many years.

We therefore know each other's positions quite well and have agreed to disagree with one another for many years in an amicable and, I would say, often fruitful manner. We have also acknowledged that some of our differences are based on our different backgrounds, Jay being one of the key figures in discussions of the visual in anthropology in a N. American context, myself being engaged in similar endeavours in a European context, which does differ considerably, in various respects, from a N. American. Actually, I have cherished my contact with Jay because he could fill me in on the situation over there and, I hope, I have at times been able to explain Jay something about the development of what I call visual anthropology in Europe.

Secondly, Jay's paper is identical to a paper he presented at the conference 'Breaking the barriers', forming part of the annual NAFA (Nordic Anthropological Film Association) festival in Iceland earlier this year, meaning that I, as a commentator, have had more time to consider the paper than what is usually possible for a commentator and even been able to gauge the impressions of other participants in Iceland. Finally, Jay extracted some of the points in his paper, specifically those dealing with his critique of observational film, advocating that there is a desperate need for a new kind of experimental filmic ethnography that not only goes beyond observational ethnographic film but leaves that kind of film to documentary filmmakers. He posted these points on VISCOM (Visual Communications list), triggering an active debate over the northern hemispherical summer. Alongside many colleagues, mainly N. American, I was one of the active participants in this 'summer debate'. To avoid having to re-write a number of the points I raised during that debate I am, below, going to quote myself extensively, following which I will add comments to Jay's paper which I did not address during the debate.

What I posted on VISCOM, following Jay's outburst re the alleged 'observational dull', was:

"It seems that Jay has (once again) opened a can of worms with his general criticism of recent trends in ethnographic film and especially his dissatisfaction with the pre-eminence of so-called observational styles, which he finds discouraging and outdated. Based on my work with the Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA), where I have been a member of the board for almost thirty years, and as a lecturer specialised in teaching visual anthropology, including ethnographic film, currently at the Visual Cultural Studies programme at the University of Tromsoe in Norway, I feel provoked to add a few comments to what is emerging as a very active debate. That so many people feel the need to respond to Jay's disappointment with the current state of affairs in itself

shows that he must be on to something, and he should be given credit for raising interesting debates, something he has managed to do regularly for many years. On a more personal note, I also feel provoked because Jay had first (i.e. before posting them on Viscom) sent these comments in a personal e-mail to me (dealing with several other issues as well), sharing some reflections on ethnographic film festivals he has attended, including the NAFA festival held in May/June in Iceland, in which we both participated and where I had been the chairman of the film selection committee. While I most definitely disagree with many of Jay's points, or perhaps rather the premises on which they are based, and admittedly agree with some of them, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for Jay's honesty and the mere fact that he does actually give critical feedback to those of us involved in organising festivals and conferences. Far too often we hear very little about 'audience' reaction to festivals and other events, and in many cases they consist of 'nice' (i.e. rather uncritical) reviews in journals and newsletters. To try to keep this as short as possible, I would therefore like to initially commend Jay for his complete lack of disguising his evident discontent - even state of depression - with what is happening in 'our' sub-discipline.

Several contributors, most recently Cynthia Close, have saved me the task of responding to Jay's criticism by listing recent eminent films that would seem to counter his generalisations. They even emphasise the fact that many excellent films nowadays are made by students, often students who have attended courses in visual anthropology, giving those of us involved in such courses the satisfaction that we seem to be teaching something useful, even though Jay seems to think that we are forcing observational film down their throats. Not many years ago, I was honoured to be on the film selection committee of the Goettingen (GIEFF) festival. I recall how we had to recommend the organisers to expand the students' section of the programme for the simple reason that many of the student films were of a much higher quality (or more interesting in their content and approach) than other films submitted. At the NAFA festival this year, one of the members of the selection committee, who had not been involved in such work for quite a while, was struck by the general very high quality of films submitted, particularly students' work. I tend to agree that there are so many wonderful films being made today, the current technology most possibly enabling much more talent to emerge than was the case when I initially became involved. What is at the core of the debate at the moment, seems to be that many of these films are 'observational', which, according to Jay, means that they subscribe to a notion of filmmaking that is 'old fashioned' and based on the use of 'third person passive voice' only. Leaving aside my weariness when it comes to using the term 'old fashioned' in a scholarly context (I have a feeling, perhaps unfounded, that the question of whether something is in fashion or not in the world of academia for some reason seems to be a preoccupation more dominant in America than in Europe. We still appreciate the work of people like Aristotle, although they haven't been around for quite a while), what worries me about the debate is the rather vague manner in which the term 'observational' is employed.

It seems that contributors so far have either accepted Jay's not very clear definition (observational cinema = third person passive voice) or simply taken the term for granted. I expect that the term has (wrongly) been interpreted as indicating what Barnouw (which

is what Jay refers to when prompted by me in personal correspondence) among others has described as 'the fly-on-the-wall' approach. While I will concede that some films which may (or may not) be labelled 'observational' do, indeed, tend to fit this description, I find it far too simplistic and almost the opposite of what some of the observational approaches' advocates were getting at when trying to formulate ideas about new trends in ethnographic and documentary filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s. For articles directly linked to anthropology and ethnographic film I refer to the seminal articles by Colin Young and David MacDougall respectively in Principles of Visual Anthropology (1975, ed. by Paul Hockings). Jay, in addition, negatively delineates 'observational' film (s) by claiming that they (it?) are necessarily not 'shared' (he uses Rouch's Les Maitres Fous as an example of 'shared'), not reflexive (such as Chronique d'un été by Rouch), and not ethno-fiction (such as Jaguar). He further claims that MacDougall questioned observational film in 1976, referring I believe to MacDougall's article I refer to above, which is entitled 'Beyond Observational Cinema' (the title on the surface indicating that Jay may have a point but not, I would argue, a right therefore to draw such decisive and generalising conclusions, especially when he later states that he is 'confused' by MacDougall's Doon School films, which could, quite the contrary, be regarded as MacDougall's ultimate fulfilment of some of his early ideas about ethnographic film i.e. until his most recent film Schoolscapes, which goes even further to question the limits or character of 'observation' and what we might, paraphrasing MacDougall, call the corporeality of visual representation itself). What Jay engages in here is a form of categorisation or labelling exercise which I, quite frankly, fail to see the usefulness of. Following his logic (which in a kind of roundabout way is almost Cartesian in its negative foundation), observational films are observational because they are NOT shared, reflexive or ethno-fictional. This exercise, through which one negatively defines little boxes with labels into which one may fit any film, not only seems rather futile but also seems to miss the point of cinema and filmmaking. Jay thus uses it to distance 'observational' film from other 'kinds' (styles, genres, conventions, formats ...?) but why? I would say that most of Rouch's production (whether 'shared', 'reflexive' or 'ethnofictional') has much more in common with some of the notions underpinning what has been described as 'observational' in a British documentary tradition and direct cinema in an American context than that which separates these somewhat different but really quite similar trends in the history of cinema, i.e there is more that keeps them together than tears them apart. This, finally, is most probably due to an even deeper discrepancy between Jay's and my usage of certain concepts and notions. Jay, again basing his argument on 'negatives' (which is Cartesian in the sense that we know from modern science: e.g. culture = not nature, nature = not culture, hence observational = not [reflexive, shared. ethnofiction....]), argues that 'to observe' means not to participate, which again, according to Jay, means that being reflexive or doing interviews is by definition not being observational (I am here quoting statements he has made not only in his contributions to the debate here on Viscom but also my personal correspondence with Jay, which I am sure he accepts). If it were not because I would then in a sense fall in my own trap I would almost argue the opposite: that it is almost impossible to observe if one does not participate or, indeed, is not reflexive.

This rather long account brings me to what I regard as two core problems in the debate, namely a tendency to use words/concepts in a taken for granted way that may easily result in excessive generalisation and simplification:

1. 'Observation'. Being the root word of 'observational' we need to define what we mean by 'observation' and 'to observe'. This is a complicated discussion, being played out in the interface between philosophy and the social sciences (and science in general), heavily affected by the fact that 'observation' has been the key foundation for the development of modern science. It is certainly a discussion far too long for a Viscom e-mail debate but the point I would like to make here is that observation is never simple, i.e. that there is no such thing as simple observation in the sense that we all observe differently. This implies not only that you and I observe differently but also that I/we observe differently in different spatial and temporal contexts. The matter is complicated even further by the significance of observing with or without a camera. It is also linked with the discussion of concepts such as to see, to look, vision, sight, gaze etc. The whole discussion is one of the areas in which visual anthropology, almost by definition, may play an important role. 'Observation' and 'vision' depend on certain skills that we learn in formal, non-formal and informal contexts of our lives (cf. e.g. Grasseni's book 'Skilled Visions'), enabling both 'observation' and visual perception and apperception. While I would not argue that observation has necessarily been more instrumental in anthropology than in other disciplines, it has underpinned ethnographic fieldwork since its inception. For an interesting recent contribution to the discussion of the role of observation in anthropology, see the separate chapter in Paul Rabinow's book 'Marking Time. On the anthropology of the contemporary' (2008). The reason (or, rather, one of the reasons) why a 'fly-on-the-wall' is a misnomer for observational cinema is that it is based on the assumption that the camera acts a passive recording device engaged in 'simple observation'. Most people who have been involved in film-making know that this is never the case (although Margaret Mead possibly had a utopian view of it becoming the case).

2. 'Observational'. My latter point may indicate that the term 'observational' in itself is a misnomer. In any case, this adjective makes sense only if one clearly defines what it is an adjective to. Is it film, cinema, style, format, genre, convention, approach etc? Even if one defines it as, for example, style in the context of film, does it then apply to the actual filming (i.e. recording with a camera), the editing, and/or the construction of a narrative structure (assuming then, that we are discussing narrative film, which would then lead to the question how this 'observationally' differs from non-narrative film?), or the final film 'product'? Dai Vaughan, in my opinion, has written very intelligently on these issues (cf. the collection of his essays published in 'For documentary', 1999), presenting his crucial distinction between 'film as record' and 'film as language'. Can fiction film be 'observational'? (here Toni de Bromhead's book 'Looking Two Ways' (1996) makes some interesting points and includes examples from ethnographic film). Instead of defining 'observational' in either a simplistic sense (simple observation, passive recording device) or a negative sense (not 'shared', not reflexive etc.), I would find it more fruitful to define in a positive sense what so-called observational cinema actually attempts to do and in some cases has achieved. This is very difficult, if not impossible, to do in an abstract sense (which is why I do not accept the notion of 'orthodoxy' in this context) and it also

very often transcends the putting-into-boxes/labelling exercises because it may not apply to a film as a whole but rather to sequences in a film or certain filmic modalities. I have tried to do this in some of my own writings, perhaps most explicitly in an assessment of the work of the Australian filmmaker Gary Kildea ('Respect the moment! A retrospective of the cinematographic work of Gary Kildea', In: Pille Runnel (ed.), Tartu viuaalse kultuuri päevad, Estonian National Museum, Tartu, 2004.) where I boldly (I hadn't anticipated the current debate on Viscom!) described his film 'Celso and Cora' almost as the quintessential observational film. On the surface, Celso and Cora may to some viewers appear as a 'simple observation' of a young couple living in the slums of Manila but it is anything but that. It is an exceedingly well 'crafted' film based on an observational approach that may be and has been described as 'unforced storytelling' in which the camera (and the editing) enable the main protagonists to tell their story, which is thus 'found' by the filmmaker, where to 'find' such a story is light years beyond what Jay describes as observational in what I refer to above. It is achieved by meticulously (but also intuitively) 'respecting the moments' which enable the story to become unfold. To me this involves both 'shared' and 'reflexive' elements, which in this particular film almost gives one a feeling of it being a kind of fiction. To label this or other films that achieve similar moments as 'outdated' is an insult towards seriously working filmmakers, who are probably not at all concerned with whether their films are called observational or not, but who filmically manage to analyse cultural phenomena that would leave many an anthropologist envious.

Finally, we (or certainly I) do not teach students orthodoxies or, indeed, instruct them to regard observational film as the only way of filming in the context of anthropological enquiry. We try to teach them to be critical and not accept that there are final recipes to use in making ethnographic films. We know that what may work well in one cultural context may be a disaster in another. What we do try to teach is something about observation, i.e. how to observe and how our observation is affected by many things, including the fact that observing with a camera will always be different from observing without a camera, neither necessarily inferior nor superior to that. We also teach them that the use of a camera in anthropological enquiry is not necessarily linked to the prospect of making a 'film', but that the process may be more important than the product, so to speak (examples of these various uses of filming in ethnography are discussed in the book Reflecting Visual Ethnography, which I recently (2006) edited with Metje Postma. We do also, difficult as it may be, try to teach them to respect the moments and use lots of films from the ethnographic film canon as examples, also the ones described by Jay as being not observational (Rouch is very popular in our course, one reason being that approx. half of our students have been from Francophone Africa).

What I have not found the time and space to include in this already too long intervention is the role observation may play in the intricate relationship between written and filmic ethnography. I am convinced that observing with a camera may open up worlds to us that are difficult to access otherwise. I believe we are still grappling with these issues but also that we are beyond if not the observational then at least notions of simple observation in visual anthropology."

Hoping that EASA media network readers will accept my apologies for re-cycling my summer intervention on VISCOM, I would like to complete my comments to Jay's paper by looking at other issues emerging from it, which I did not, or only indirectly so, comment upon earlier.

I have been pondering, for quite a while, what constitutes the difference between my and Jay's perception of visual anthropology and ethnographic film. I think I have come to the conclusion that it is anchored in a fundamentally different approach to and concept of anthropology, epistemology, scholarship and, maybe even, life. I would still argue that despite this we also have many things in common, such as a critical stance and a profound belief in the need for rigour in a discipline that at times seems to be anything but characterised by rigour. However, Jay's current paper to me seems to constantly invoke assumptions embedded in almost paradoxical either/or situations or conceptualisations, whereas my approach is - or at least intends to be - based on both/ands. I would like to offer a couple of examples from his paper, examples which, however, also echo some of his earlier writings and his 'negative' definitions referred to above. Without trying to stretch an over-used metaphor too far, it is as if Jay throws the baby out with the bath water in many cases, and often chucks the bath tub away as well in the same exercise, whereas I try to argue that we should keep the baby and certainly the bath tub, even if there may be a need to change the water every now and then.

The first example is Jay's approach to defining and conceiving ethnographic film, which is already suggested in his very first sentence of the paper, i.e. the sentence following his long quote about his 'fantasy' from his interesting book Picturing Culture (2000), when he writes: 'I propose a radical departure from how we perceive ethnographic film and suggest an alternative path for the production of moving images by anthropologists.' There are several things that I am concerned about here. Firstly, I am not convinced WHY we need a 'radical departure'? This suggests, again, an either/or. While I do agree with Jay that there are some films out there labelled 'ethnographic' where we may have doubts about the extent to which they are based on or informed by, or indeed informing, anthropology, does that necessarily call for a 'radical departure', indicating something completely different per se than film? I would find it much more fruitful to BOTH appreciate those films, whether they are many or few (which is a slightly different debate), that are 'ethnographic' AND constantly explore and develop new ways of using film in the service of anthropological enquiry. Secondly, I am not sure who the 'we' is when he writes 'we perceive ethnographic film.' We cannot depart from how 'we' perceive ethnographic film until we define who 'we' are and define 'ethnographic film', which Jay does not do (nor, admittedly, does anybody else in a satisfactory way). Thirdly, while I have no objection against - and actually try to encourage - other ways of using 'moving images', Jay seems to insist that we seek an 'alternative path', which seems to mean that the existing path is not good enough, so it is either existing or alternative, not existing and other ways.

A second, and secondary, in my opinion, example, is when Jay states: 'The need to make something the film world calls "a good film" with commercial potential and that qualifies for the increasingly common market-based festivals should be abhorrent to scholars.' I

honestly fail to see why this is necessarily 'abhorrent' to scholars, although I am sure I could find examples that Jay and I would agree on were abhorrent examples. There is something wrong with the logic here, which is almost and extension of one of the classical examples of theories of science: if we see a black swan it means that not all swans are white but not that black (or white) swans are not swans. I think Jay is far too general and far too simplistic in his rejections of both notions of film and the concepts he chooses to employ. This is a general problem with the paper that goes beyond the insistence of either/or rather than both/and. As indicated in the discussion of observational film above, there is a tendency to define things, phenomena, notions or concepts not by what they are but what they are not, which is even further complicated by the fact that Jay provides very few examples that could illustrate what he means when using, for example, the term 'documentary realism', which seems to be the same as 'observational'. Both are no good and should be replaced by, for example, experimental film, which is not defined other than it is not documentary realism and not observational. What is it then, and can you give (filmic) examples, i.e. not only quote a couple of examples of what you regard as experimental (Harry Smith, Bob Ascher, Kathryn Ramey) but explain and argue in which sense they are 'experimental'?

The not-logic appears throughout the paper. The work of Karl Heider and Peter Loizos is inadequate because they are, allegedly, NOT knowledgeable about film, semiotic, or communication theory. Leaving aside that I, knowing them both personally, would contest this, I would, as a reader, be more interested in knowing what they are knowledgeable about and, if needed, criticise them on these grounds rather than on what they are not knowledgeable about. Similarly, Bill Nichols, Fatimah Rony and Trinh T. Minh-ha lack understanding of anthropology, which may be the case (although I would also contest that), but we are not told what they have an understanding of, which would seem more relevant. The worst culprits, however, seem to be people like Robert Gardner, John Marshall and Dennis O'Rourke (the latter two I also knew/know personally and have never experienced any hostility towards anthropology: criticism, some times, well-founded, but hostility never) who allegedly are or were directly hostile towards anthropology and '.know next to nothing about issues of reflexivity, giving the subjects a voice or any other post-modern issues that have dominated anthropology for decades.' Their crime seems to be that they are filmmakers and make films that '.are almost exclusively about the "exotic other" because these filmmakers know so little about anthropology that they do not know we now consider our field to be the whole of humanity and not simply non-western cultures.' Apart from the suggestive 'we' (who are we? Not me!) creeping in again in both quotes, as in the one I referred to above, I do simply not agree with these descriptions, and, in any case, they should be supported by showing how this is the case, for example through filmic examples. I am not sure reflexivity etc. has 'dominated' anthropology for decades, certainly not without clearly defining what reflexivity (here I do not mean to say that Jay has not discussed 'reflexivity'. He has written extensively, and most inspiringly, about this elsewhere, but to underpin his argument in this paper he needs to tell us what 'it' is) is, and I absolutely disagree that we 'now' consider our field the whole of humanity in the sense that so did many of the pioneers of early anthropology. To claim, for example, that Raymond Firth merely spent a lifetime studying the Tikopia because they constituted the 'exotic other'

would not only be a misinterpretation of his work but would also fail to situate anthropology in the development of modern science, in which neither 'reflexivity' nor 'giving voice to subjects' belongs to a certain historical period which some people feel comfortable labelling 'post-modern' without necessarily defining what that means, thus again simplifying matters through the not-logic: post-modern = not modern. Even if I try to turn my argument on its head, i.e. subscribe to Jay's not-logic notion, I honestly cannot see how one could claim that there are not elements of reflexivity in, for example, Gardner's Forest of Bliss or Dennis O'Rourke's Cannibal Tours (or, indeed, his more recent film Land mines. A love story), or for, for that matter, elements of giving voice to subjects in the work of John Marshall. One could argue that he spent the most of his life trying exactly to do that.

To try to reach some sort of conclusion to my comments, I must take into consideration the only case which Jay does try to present in a positive way, namely his Oak Park project, consisting of four interactive digital CD-Rom and a website. Actually, the way he argues for the project is not entirely 'positive' in the sense that his reasoning for initiating the project was to do something including the use of moving images '. instead of making a film' because he '. could NOT [my emphasis] find a method that would overcome the way most viewers watch a film - a position that makes it virtually impossible to comprehend a sophisticated filmic statement.' The not-logic is even carried to the extreme on the website where an introductory written statement to video sections begins with the statement: This is not a movie.

I am not sure what a 'sophisticated filmic statement' is, but would agree that 'film' or, rather, film language is probably more ambiguous than written language, what I elsewhere (e.g. in a book called Film as ethnography (1992), edited together with David Turton) have described as film and images being semantically rich but syntactically weak, whereas written texts and words often tend to be the opposite (unless we are talking about, for example, poetry). Jay's Oak Park project, constituting his 'alternative path' for the use of moving images, could thus be seen as an attempt to find a mode of explanation and intelligibility that gives access to an understanding of Oak Park and its inhabitants. There are several things that puzzle me here. What is it that Jay's moving images, i.e. the video clips, do that film cannot do even better? Here one/Jay could argue that they are part of an interactive, digital multi-media production that combines text, still photos, sound etc. But film, long before the days of digital video, has always had more than moving images as constituents, sound and text being part of film language's repertoire rather than something 'outside'. Referring to Biella, Jay writes that film alone cannot convey the information that anthropologists wish to convey. For Biella (1997), it is an inherent limitation of filmic discourse. The typical solution for this problem has been to write a study guide or film companion . The oblivious [this should be 'obvious'?] problem with this solution is that it depends on the viewer reading the document.' I am not certain whether Jay would claim that is Oak Park CD-Rom and website on their own convey the information; if indeed it is information (something different from 'knowledge') we want. This, of course, is even ore pertinent in the context of this e-seminar since it is related to questions concerning what so-called multimedia, hypermedia etc. actually are. If the video lips are not film, what then are they? They rely on footage

from which they are edited. Is this footage shot differently (and here I do not merely mean the degree f purely technical competence) than if the footage were to be used in a 'proper' film? Here I would like to interject a final (I know that it is getting late and I need to get this posted) comment re film, since Jay underlines that he constructed he four Oak Park Stories that form part of the project '.in a nonlinear fashion, hat is, unlike a book or a film, there is no defined beginning, middle or end.' gain the not-logic is popping up, here assuming that a book or a film is necessarily NOT non-linear, i.e. is linear, which is simply not necessarily the case and certainly not if we are talking about film(s) and books used in an academic context. I am not convinced that Jay's 'alternative path' is more (or less) anthropological than many other ways of using film and a camera in anthropology, ch as one baby I did not throw out with the bath water, observational cinema.

My apologies for making this so long an intervention and comment but I hope this, in a positive way, reflects the extent to which I found Jay's paper thought-provoking and stimulating. As he said to me the last time we met, at the NAFA festival and conference in Iceland, if we all agree there would be no academic debate. Jay's paper and the Oak Park project have not convinced me that he is right and I subscribe to a notion of approaches to anthropology and film which are the almost opposite of the ones he firmly establishes on the basis of what I have described as his not-logic. I actually find the Oak Park website quite boring, I must confess, and I am almost certain that I would prefer to see the same topic covered by an excellent observational-style documentary coupled with a well-written ethnographic monograph. I do, however, appreciate the attempt to explore new ways of using moving images in anthropological enquiry as such. I also appreciate Jay's implicit or explicit focus on what he calls 'reflexivity' although he does not explain it to us here. To end on a polemical note worthy of Jay Ruby, I actually suspect Jay is what I may call a closet neo-Kantian. Kant did not so much speak about reflexivity, certainly not explicitly, in the sense employed by Jay, but he did talk about 'critical reflection', which in many ways he was the inventor of in a modern, i.e. post-enlightenment, context. Kant's critique, of course, was oriented towards the myriad of philosophical stances of his time, which all claimed to be rational in a day and age when claiming 'reason' (have you ever heard of a philosopher claiming to be un-reasonable?) was what counted. 'Reason' became Kant's ultimate tool in his attempts to analyse and understand rationality, reason becoming both the subject and the object of his enquiry, mirroring itself, as it were, in a manner we may detect as 'reflection' or even 'reflexivity'. We cannot avoid reflexivity or the mirroring of ourselves in the world. The main difference between Kant and Ruby lies not in questions of reflexivity but rather in the way 'critique' is perceived and employed. To Kant it held neither negative nor positive connotations but simply covered a form of 'enquiry' that would encompass phenomena's 'positive' characteristics and expression, whereas Jay, I am afraid, subscribes to a modern (or is it post-modern?) notion of critique based on negativity, where we are not interested in what a phenomenon (or concept, notion etc.) is but what it is NOT.

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Subject: Over to Jay Ruby
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Wed, 3 September, 2008 6:45 am

Dear all,

Thanks to Peter for his response to Jay´s working paper. It is over to Jay now!

All the best, Sigurjon.

Subject: [Medianthro] Response to Peter from Jay Ruby
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Wed, 3 September, 2008 2:14 pm

Dear all,

Enclosed is Jay Ruby's response to Peter I. Crawford's comments. The floor is now open to all on the list to participate in the discussion!! Looking forward to your participation.

Sigurjon

"Crawford's Comments

I completely agree with Peter's opening comments. We are two old grey beards who have been rattling on about these issues for decades.

I am confused about why Peter spends so much time much time re-hashing our debate about observational film when my paper does not even mention observational film? The word isn't in the paper. For those who did not follow the debate on VISCOM, his remarks will probably seem a bit confusing.

About half of my paper is about my digital research in Oak Park. Something Peter barely mentions and he confuses my digital interactive CD-ROMs with a web site. He should try re-read my paper.

To quote him, "I actually find the Oak Park website(IT IS NOT A WEB SITE) quite boring, I must confess, and I am almost certain that I would prefer to see the same topic covered by an excellent observational-style documentary coupled with a well-written

ethnographic monograph. I do, however, appreciate the attempt to explore new ways of using moving images in anthropological enquiry as such. I also appreciate Jay's implicit or explicit focus on what he calls 'reflexivity' although he does not explain it to us here."

I WOULD ASSUME THAT BY NOW REFLEXIVITY IS A WELL-KNOWN AND OFTEN DISCUSSED CONCEPT THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE AN EXPLANATION. I SIMPLY MENTIONED THAT MY LONG TERM INTEREST IN REFLEXIVITY WAS EVINCED IN MY OAK PARK RESEARCH AS I WAS BOTH RESEARCHER AND NATIVE. DOES THAT REALLY MENTION ELABORATION? I THINK NOT.

As the debate about observational film is not really relevant to my paper, I have nothing to say about Peter's remarks except to ask that the re-read my paper and comment on it and not on matters not included in the paper. I am most annoyed and disappointed with his remarks.

Jay Ruby"

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Response to Peter from Jay Ruby
From: "Aaron Shapiro" <aaronm@sas.upenn.edu>
Date: Wed, 3 September, 2008 3:10 pm

Dear Media-anthro list,

Perhaps I should not be the first to comment, as I am merely a first year graduate student. However, I'm feeling quite audacious today.

I am quite intrigued about the possibility of leaving behind "ethnographic film" as a cinematic genre that anthropology has anything to do with. I agree with Dr. Ruby that we should put it completely behind us as a relic of anthropology of times past. However, the changes that anthropology has undergone here in North America (I apologize for my ignorance on the broad trends in European anthropology) have been more than *merely* a departure from exoticizing non-western peoples. Reflexivity in ethnographic practice is an important step, but I disagree with Dr. Ruby here that, by now, it is self-explanatory; further, I disagree with him that by looking at one's hometown in Illinois, he has been "reflexive" in his ethnographic work. I have not had a chance to look closely at the Oak Park projects, because my university's library does not have a copy, and the discs are priced exhorbitantly (as Dr. Ruby kindly put the purchasing information at the end of his essay).

The step after reflexivity, it seems to me at least, is a departure from looking at "a people" at all. I believe that I am in agreement with many anthropologists when I say that to bring the discipline into the 21st century requires anthropology's ability to bring *processes* into focus. The Oak Park project does not seem concerned with the grander processes at hand in the community; rather, it seems more like an oral history project that has been appropriated to explore/experiment with the boundaries of "an anthropological cinema." I

am left wanting (at least from the description of the project) in terms of anthropology's capacity to "see bifocally" (Peters, 1997), attempting to understand the "zoomed out" processes that take place on the supra-local level via a "zoomed in" scenario. Especially since we are having this discussion over the Media Anthropology network, and media anthropology has always had a stake in the power dynamics of supra-local processes (such as circulation, consumption, and production (see Ginsberg et al. 2002), I would have expected more up-to-date content in this project that hoped to be so radical.

In essence, I felt that the Oak Park project *was* a departure from the traditional conventions of "ethnographic film." However, the difference lay in the format of mediation, rather than the object of investigation -- a new filmic take on an old anthropology. In the future, I hope to be able to discuss and brainstorm with the listserve what a filmic representation of contemporary anthropology would look like.

Aaron Shapiro
University of Pennsylvania

References:

Peters, John Durham (1997). *Culture, Power, Place*, eds. Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson. Duke University Press: Durham.

Ginsberg, Faye, Lila Abu-Lughod, & Brian Larkin (2002). "Introduction," in *Media Worlds*, eds Ginsberg, Abu-Lughod, & Larkin. University of California Press: Berkeley.

Subject: [Medianthro] My Response to Shapiro's Comments
From: "Jay Ruby" <ethnographic@embarqmail.com>
Date: Wed, 3 September, 2008 8:14 pm

Ruby's Response to Aaron Shapiro's Comments.

Aaron states "I disagree with him that by looking at one's hometown in Illinois, he has been "reflexive" in his ethnographic work." I would agree and suggest that if Shapiro has the chance to look at the entire CD-ROM he would see how I elaborate about how this work is reflexive.

As to Shapiro's claim that the price for each CD is "exhorbitantly (sic) priced," at US$29.50 the CDs are a bargain when compared with films from DER. Perhaps Mr. Shapiro is not familiar with prices in this kind of market.

I simply do not understand Shapiro's claim that I have not engaged with "anthropology's ability to bring *processes* into focus." Again Shapiro is limited to my brief description and has not seen the CD.

Apparently I am a prisoner of an "old anthropology." Perhaps but then I am one of the grey beards and in my 70s. To be honest I have no idea what Mr. Shapiro is talking about and would like to be enlightened. His comments only confuse me.

Jay Ruby

--
An Election Thought - "There must be some way out of here..." B.
Dylan

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] My Response to Shapiro's Comments
From: "Daniel Taghioff" danieltaghioff@yahoo.com
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 5:58 am

Dear Jay and list

"Jay, I am afraid, subscribes to a modern (or is it post-modern?) notion of critique based on negativity, where we are not interested in what a phenomenon (or concept, notion etc.) is but what it is NOT."

Hmm, that probably rubbed Jay up the wrong way, but was it an unjustified polemic?

I am someone who is not at all familiar with Jay Ruby's work or position (though I am guessing from his tone that he is a giant in his field), and consequently found both his paper and his comments unsatisfying.

What he has provided is an account of a multimedia project that is non-linear, which is hardly a new idea. What I do not feel he has done is adequately explained his reasons for doing this in positive terms that engage with the theoretical concerns of Anthropology. Maybe he needs to spell this out for those of us with beards not yet grey.

I think we deserve more explanation of why he employed the techniques he did, and what they provided to him as an anthropologist, beyond the "hey non-linear narrative is cool it lets people explore" trope. To put things in context, a lot of us in our twenties and thirties were raised on non-linear narratives, via computer games, roleplaying games, adventure books etc... This means that for us the questions "is this a good non-linear production, do we enjoy it, is it entertaining, is it instructive" are not obviated by the immovativeness of the technique.

"Who will wade through all this material? At this point, I am uncertain but hopeful. I am not so egotistical that I think have invented a new and superior way to produce ethnography but it is certainly an alternative. "

I think Peter Crawfords comments were very much of the tone "an alternative to what,

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and why is it a good alternative." Jay articulates forcefully his dissatisfaction with ethnographic film genres, but he does not articulate the trajectory of his departure from it carefully, other than that it is radical and an alternative.

So I personally would appreciate a much more careful and detailed articulation of this trajectory, one that touches on wider debates in Anthropology, so that we can hopefully begin to position film debates more clearly within that as well. I think Peter tried to fill some of this in with the back debate from the VISCOM list, but Jay objected to this, so I feel it is really over to him to provide this material, so that we have something to gt our teeth into.

Daniel Taghioff

Subject: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "Ursula Rao" <u.rao@unsw.edu.au>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 6:15 am

Dear Jay, dear list,

I have two questions regarding Jay's project.

I have been fascinated by Jay's (and others') efforts to explore new media for disseminating anthropology. Hypertext is a very exciting format, that no doubt opens up new ways of depicting, reflecting, evoking and portraying anthropological meaning. While Jay describes the project, he writes little about what drove his decision making in the design process. However this would interest me a great deal. I would like to know what are the issues/the decisions he had to make. Did he feel there are better and worst ways, more or less effect ways of combing image and words, genres in which images and words are presented? Does his project differ from others who have published or are publishing multi-media ethnographies?

The second comment concerns the idea that multi media depictions should replace filmic representations (ethnographic film). Jay was disappointed that the reception of "A Country Auction" did not reflect his intentions properly. But is the strength of the film not its evocative nature, the way it can provoke different reactions, or as Peter puts it films are "semantically rich but syntactically weak". I think this need not always be a disadvantage. Film precludes any possibly/fantasy of the possibility of a narrow reduction of message (in reception context). But maybe that can/and I think it should be seen as a chance, rather than only a limitation.

Best

Ursula

****

Dr. Ursula Rao
Senior Lecturer
Sociology and Anthropology
University of New South Wales
Sydney, NSW 2052
Australia

Subject: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "Paul Basu" <p.basu@sussex.ac.uk>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 7:34 am

Dear all

I was struck by Jay Ruby's paper and the discussion it has provoked, in particular Daniel
and Ursula's recent comments about 'negative critique' and the need to identify more
precisely the positive values of non-linear/multimedia ethnography. This is an area of
research that I am pursuing, and I have recently written a chapter for a book called
'Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices' (ed. T. Austin &
W. de Jong, Open University/McGraw-Hill, 2008
<http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/html/0335221912.html>) that includes an exploration of
'archival modes' of visual anthroplogy dissemination in relation to the 'reframing' of
ethnographic film - in particular I discuss two recent multi-screen video installation
projects.

A pdf version of the proofs of the chapter is available at
<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/anthropology/documents/basu_reframing_ethnographic_film.p
df>.

All the best,

Paul Basu
Department of Anthropology
University of Sussex
Falmer
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BN1 9SJ
UK

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] My Response to Shapiro's Comments
From: "Peter I. Crawford" <interven@inet.uni2.dk>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 9:07 am

Dear Jay and dear list,

I will, if I can keep my mouth shut (or pen on the table) until then, take note of the comments and reply next week, also to Jay's reply to my comments. However, I feel a need to defend Aaron here. He is commenting (as we all are) on Jay's paper and not on all the products that have emerged from Jay's Oak Park project. I do not feel that Jay is fair in 'rejecting' Aaron's comments (whether he understands them or not) on the basis of Aaron not having read/watched/listened to (or whatever one does with such products) the CD-rom. Aaron is simply puzzled as to what is actually meant by reflexivity, which was why I, in my comments, was simply asking Jay to briefly define and explain it in the paper, because that would enable readers to understand the intentions and, eventually, to engage with this when eventually accessing the CD-rom (I think referring reflexivity to the anthropologist being both native and researcher is a far too simplistic rendition of a key concept in the philosophy of science). What Jay is saying to us here is that we cannot comment on his paper until we have watched the entire CD-ROM. I would say, rather, that it is Jay's responsibility to argue in the paper how the project and the CD-ROM employs such notions as reflexivity and how the project forms an 'alternative path', referring to my comments. Here I agree with Aaaron that the whole question of 'process' is central and that 'The Oak Park project does not seem concerned with the grander processes at hand in the community; rather, it seems more like an oral history project that has been appropriated to explore/experiment with the boundaries of "an anthropological cinema."', based on the way Jay presents it in the paper (although it may do so on the CD-ROM, but that is what Jay needs to explain in the paper).

Regards,
Peter
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PS. Jay is right that the price of the CD-ROM is not exorbitant at all when compared with market prices and I would suggest that Aaron gets his university library to purchase copies.

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "Kerim Friedman" <oxusnet@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 11:22 am

Jay's paper raises two important questions:

1. Do we need a uniquely anthropological documentary form?

2. Assuming we do need such a form, what should it look like?

Jay writes:

"While documentary filmmakers will, I am certain, continue to make films they call "ethnographic," these works are of little interest to me nor do I consider them to be an asset to the development of an anthropological cinema. Let me be clear that my criticisms of the documentary only apply to ones that are incorrectly labeled as ethnographic. In fact, I have been an ardent fan of documentaries for decades. "

For those not familiar with Jay's work this calls for clarification. Anyone who knows Jay is familiar with his deep and abiding love of all forms of experimental and avant-guard cinema and photography. In his teaching and writing he mines these for what they can teach us about how to articulate complex ideas through visual media. This includes documentary films which lack "ethnographic" pretensions. What he is targeting here are specifically those films which claim for themselves the authority of anthropology without actually engaging with anthropological methods, ethics, or theory. I will comment more on this later, but lets first turn to how he handles the second question:

"The work that I am discussing here was initially designed to enable me to construct what I had been calling a filmic ethnography. As it turned out, I was wrong. Perhaps I was not technically or conceptually up to the task, but I do not think so. I wish to make myself clear, I am not suggesting that a film can never be an expression of anthropological knowledge. I am saying that I could not find a method that would overcome the way most viewers watch a film – a position that makes it virtually impossible to comprehend a sophisticated filmic statement. One only has to contemplate the tiny audiences that avant-garde films have been able to attract to see the logic of this statement. Like the constructs of experimental film, anthropological knowledge is too complex to be packaged within the conventions of documentary realism. Sadly we have too often been content to dumb down our knowledge in order to accommodate the assumed needs of a television audience. So instead of making a film, I produced four interactive digital CD-ROM ethnographic portraits titled "Some Oak Park Stories". "

Here again he is careful not to say that hypermedia is the only form possible for such work, just that he did not himself feel that he could make something which was simultaneously accessible and complex using more traditional approaches. So while it may be that, as Cynthia Close pointed out, there are many young anthropologists now who are making work which is both engaging and anthropological (I haven't yet seen the films she mentions, so I must hold judgement), Jay is simply stating that he himself did not feel up to the task, and that CD-ROM seemed to offer a better alternative. Having, I hope, clarified Jay's position. I'd like to make a few comments:

First, Anthropology itself is changing, with people doing shorter-length multi-sited ethnographies and experimenting with various narrative forms in their written works. Simultaneously, more and more people outside our discipline are emulating our methods,

so that you have writers who function much more like anthropologists than most anthropologists do, sometimes living their whole lives with the people they write about. Theoretically anthropologists are adrift, with some returning to the empiricism of fieldwork and others experimenting with poststructuralist literary theory. In such a situation I find it hard myself to clearly identify what "counts" as anthropology, even though I think I know what it is when I see it. Not only are there sociologists and cultural studies folks who are doing excellent ethnography these days, the job market is increasingly pushing trained anthropologists out into other disciplines. Google "anthropology" (a surprisingly good indicator of what a word has come to mean in the public sphere) and you'll find a lot of hits which a few years ago would have been called "marketing."

Second, I worry about the tendency of contemporary anthropology to want to reproduce all the complexity of reality in ethnography (written or visual). I hate the all-too-common term 'assemblages' because I see it as symptomatic of the inability of anthropologists to abstract from what they see. It strikes me as a return to empiricism, a refusal to move beyond the directly observed insights of the fieldworker. In a sense this is the flip side of post-structuralism with its rejection of "grand narratives." The new grand narrative is to deny that we have anything to do but describe. I'm not accusing Jay of this kind of empiricism. I haven't seen his DVDs so I can't comment on the extent to which he uses explicit theoretical models to frame his arguments. However, I do see something in the desire to reproduce the whole knotted assemblage of the field site in DVD form which strikes me as akin to empiricism. We might need to coin a new word for this: "virtual empiricism," or the desire to recreate the observed field site in virtual form.

I don't want to dismiss the use of new methods, written or otherwise, to capture the complexity of what we find in the field. However, I think at the same time we should value the power of narrative and the skill it takes to tell a good story. Both at the empirical level ("this is a story as recounted by a trained observer"), as well as at the meta-level ("what you are watching is indicative of a general shift in how people relate to one another"). Again, without having seen this particular DVD, I worry that hypermedia can be an attempt to shirk the responsibility to do the hard work of saying something which is both compelling and capable of being wrong. Some of what I've said above draws on ideas I expressed in a blog post on Savage Minds back in 2006.

http://savageminds.org/2006/03/13/anthropology-20-the-death-of-hypermedia/

I'd like to quote a part of that post: "When I was in graduate school the hot word was "hypermedia." Peter Biella's classic piece from 1993, "Beyond Ethnographic Film: Hypermedia and Scholarship" is still making the rounds. Peter's piece was ahead of its time. Just about every DVD we buy now is full of additional material, including alternative soundtracks, interviews, and even documents related to the film, but they still aren't linked together as coherently as Peter imagined, or conceived of in projects like his Yanomamö Interactive: The Ax Fight On CD-ROM. And that's my point: I think the immense amount of work it takes to create a truly complete hypermedia world for a single text is beyond the resources of any single anthropologist or academic publisher,

not to mention even major film studios eager to add value to your Star Ward DVD box set. ... Web 2.0 technologies offer a way around these limitations by removing the burden of authorial omnipotence. No longer does an anthropologist need to personally collect and link every possible piece of related data in order to create a fully immersive hypermedia world. Instead, it should be possible to lay down a framework which to which informants, other academics, and the general public can constantly add new information, allowing the work to grow in the same way that Wikipedia does."

This is my last point, which is that I think there is a lot of exciting development in terms of new media, and DVDs strike me as missing out on a lot of what's exciting. New media is people. For instance, the Institute for the Future of the Book has created CommentPress, a system which allows people to easily comment on particular passages of an article or book. Similarly, numerous websites (including YouTube) now allow annotations and comments to be placed directly within a video. This isn't to say we shouldn't be making DVDs. Hell, people doing interesting things with antique photographic processes like daguerreotypes. But I take very seriously Jay Ruby's own exhortations to "speak with, speak alongside" the other, and I think we should be embracing technology which allows us to do just that. Which isn't to say there aren't problems we face using Web 2.0 technology in anthropology. But that's another paper:

http://remixinganthropology.wordpress.com/2008/03/19/massively-multiplayer-online-anthropology/

Cheers,

Kerim

Subject: [Medianthro] Response to Daniel Taghioff and the list
From: "Jay Ruby" <ethnographic@embarqmail.com>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 11:29 am

Daniel,

You claim that what I did was "old hat." Ok, provide me with some examples of digital ethnographies that attempt some of the things I did. I do not think you can. At least I have not found any. So may be this is not old hat. As to Pater's irrelevant comments, I know that this will sound egomanical but trying ready Picturing Culture - U of Chicago Press, 200 for my discussion about ethnographic film in some detail. I fault myself for trying to discuss too many things in the paper and not elaborating.

Perhaps I am too old and too cranky but submitting my paper to this listserv was clearly a mistake I am too busy to respond to any more comments. Bye.

Jay Ruby

Subject: [Medianthro] Onward
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 11:45 am

Dear all,
I urge people to join in the disucssion about Jay´s paper despite his last message. This e-seminar is scheduled to continue until September 15.

All the best, Sigurjon

Subject: [Medianthro] Response to Crawford's Comments of 4 Sept.
From: "Jay Ruby" <ethnographic@embarqmail.com>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 11:47 am

For one Peter is correct it is a mistake for me to say you can't understand my paper until you have looked at my CDs. I see now circulating this paper/talk was a mistake and I regret it. Given that, let's forget the entire thing. Sorry.

Jay Ruby

Subject: [Medianthro] Discussion Should Continue
From: "Jay Ruby" <ethnographic@embarqmail.com>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 1:20 pm

Both Ziggy and Peter Crawford have successfully pointed out that I am being childish - an amazing feat for a 72 year old. So I will chill and watch and then at the end offer some more reasoned comments. Mea Cupla.

Jay Ruby

Subject: [Medianthro] Refreshing start
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Thu, 4 September, 2008 8:44 pm

Dear all,

Want to remind you that the e-seminar is still on and that the floor is open. For those who haven´t read Jay Ruby´s paper its available at our web site: http://media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm

For those who are new to the list (but many people joined us in the last few days) you can access the comments by Peter Ian Crawford on Jay s paper - and other contributions to

the discussion - in the listserv archive. I want to remind you that the e-seminars have worked well in the past for everyone on the list. The key to that has been the will of many to join in with their comments and criticism and made the list what it is today. Let´s continue with the discussion of Jay s paper.

All the best, Sigurjon
Coordinator, Media Anthropology Network

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Response to Daniel Taghioff and the list
From: "Daniel Taghioff" <danieltaghioff@yahoo.com>
Date: Fri, 5 September, 2008 5:25 am

Dear Jay

>From one polemicist to another, I have a snarky way about me sometimes, apologies.

What I meant was no that this was old hat in itself, but that I would like to hear more about what made it anthropological. Your article made it clear that you had put a lot of thought into the project, and gave detail on the technical aspects of the project, but did not give us that anthropological thought process.

So really I am asking for more....

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "Daniel Taghioff" danieltaghioff@yahoo.com
Date: Fri, 5 September, 2008 5:55 am

Apologies, my last response was not very complete, and did not contribute much to the debate, I beg permission to count this as an extension of it, so that I have one more comment later on...:

Kerim says:

"Jay's paper raises two important questions:

1. Do we need a uniquely anthropological documentary form?

2. Assuming we do need such a form, what should it look like?"

I would like to add to that. The questions about narrative that Jay starts to raise

are fascinating. Clearly Anthropological concerns about how narratives come to be constructed have massive implications for documentary making, particularly as we move into an era of non-linear narrative as a major strand in public culture.

So another way of looking at it is:

1) [How] do Anthropological concerns transform or impact how we look at documentaries and narrative construction?

2) [How] does making a genre "anthropological" allow film-makers and audiences, in their relationship as mutually constituting, step out of conventional restrictions in that relationship, and into dare-I-say-it liminal spaces where the concerns in 1) can be more fully explored?

These issues are raised by Jay, and I for one would love to see them explored further, particularly in relation to non-linearity in narrative.

What does non-linearity actually let us do in relation to 1) and 2) and how does this change the anthropological concerns in 1.

For instance, does the growth of such forms mean that we are all becoming more anthropological, is this a threat or opportunity for anthropologists?

I know this is very much an aside, but when I hear accounts of how people now just "hang out" in non-linear environments such as Grand Theft Auto IV, because the detail of the setting is more compelling than most of the plot lines, I have a vision of "playstation Anthropology" developing as a sort of subculture.

So are we moving towards documentary forms that we can inhabit?

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "Virginia Nightingale" <V.Nightingale@uws.edu.au>
Date: Fri, 5 September, 2008 7:54 am

Thanks Daniel for the interesting thoughts on documentary...I haven't caught up with the whole of this debate (and Jay apologies - I haven't had time to read your paper yet but hopefully the weekend will bring some time) but reading Daniel's response has prompted me to comment on a few things I've noticed as an occasional lurker and sometime participant on this list:

1. Where Daniel seems to have wondered where the anthropology is in Jay's paper, as

a media scholar I often wonder where the media studies are in the accounts of 'media anthrop' that we discuss on this site...and the issue of documentary and documentary narrative processes is an important example of what I often find to be missing. It's funny but the idea that media are somehow just a tool for anthropology seems really strange, somehow off-centre to me, when from a media studies perspective, we see media ethnography as a tool to help us understand the media and processes of audience engagement.

So for the future of this extremely interesting and intellectually important email group, can I encourage you all to continue to look at this 'disjuncture' because it's important to the future of media studies and media anthropologies (and yes I think the plural is important). Somewhere in this debate there's an important future direction.

2. Another issue - beyond narrative practices in anthropology... why are audience formations treated as transparent by media anthropology...the anthropological model of society seems to imagine that the audience is 'everyone' in a society but this is obviously not the case as increasingly audiences take a variety of forms depending on the media in use and the use contexts in play. (Sorry that's a pet hobbyhorse!).

3. On non-linearity and immersive narratives... I think that this is already the case...most media texts are now designed as non-linear projects...this is done to increase the revenue to copyright holders and distributors. The story of a text is increasingly written as a story told in different ways and different registers across different media platforms. Second Life and World of Warcraft are only one manifestations of non-linear narratives... the media industries are now talking about the 'story of a product' - having diverse manifestations in print, online, chat, etc forms. Even brands are now designed as immersive narratives, inviting people to write themselves as a brand story (hence my allusion to anthropologies because we are going to need the insights and skills of anthropology to unravel the mediatization of everyday life in a meaningful way).

My apologies if this is too much of a rave... but the comments touched a trigger.

Virginia

Associate Professor Virginia Nightingale
School of Communication Arts
University of Western Sydney
Australia

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "Ben Unguren" <benu@byu.edu>
Date: Fri, 5 September, 2008 7:40 pm

I'd like to address some of the formal/design ideas that Jay discusses in his paper. As with others, I have not used the CDs; however, I have known about the Oak Park project for a couple years, and became an interested reader of Jay's work several years before that. Jay mentions that he did not begin this project with the CD-ROM approach in mind. It was only later -- with his growing collection of video footage, photographs, field notes, etc -- that he decided to   take a MULTI-media approach. If he had decided in advance to create a   "CD-site" (my term: a hyperlinked collection of HTML pages put on a CD (a website on CD)) instead of a book or a film, might he have   approached it differently? In other words, might he have made different *methodological* decisions in order to facilitate an appropriate aesthetic experience?

Jay is quick to dismiss aesthetics in his paper (and thus may be quick to dismiss my comments, which is fine), stating that he designed the site himself and chose to ignore "cute tricks" that programming- and design-savvy individuals might undertake. Jay doesn't apologize for this -- he even celebrates that "any ethnographer" (even ones who stink at design) can do this.

This is where I'd like to push back, if only a little.

Jay mentions Jean Rouch and Tim Asch as filmmaker-anthropologists who were "working to make film a means of conveying anthropological knowledge." In other words, they were wrestling with how the formal or design aspects of film could facilitate -- even contribute to -- anthropological work. I agree, and I would add that I find both of these men terrific at the *aesthetics* of film. Rouch is widely appreciated in non-anthropological circles. Asch is also admired -- though sometimes indirectly, as with his camera work in Frederick Wiseman's groundbreaking film "Titicut Follies."

Tim Asch becomes most interesting in this conversation because of his work at USC. As I understand it, an important aspect of his methodology was to pair up a film student with an anthro student in the production of an ethnographic film. As Jay points out in his paper, the anthropologist usually doesn't know film, and the filmmaker doesn't know anthropology. Thus -- now we're back to Asch -- a collaboration is in order. A film like The Ax Fight, which Jay commends in his paper, is the result of this sort of thinking: the bulk of the anthropological work was being performed by Napoleon Chagnon, and the documentary film work (if you will) was by Tim Asch. Asch undertook this filmmaker-anthropologist-team approach on other occasions (a number of films shot in Bali, for instance).

I don't see why some thoughtful *web-designer* couldn't spend a couple years working with an anthropologist (even doing fieldwork with her/ him) to develop an ideal formal structure to house the anthropological research. As with the films of Tim Asch (The Ax Fight, but also films like Jero on Jero), the creative/aesthetic elements may ultimately *contribute* to the study, addressing in its very design issues of reflexivity, representation, etc. Isn't this something we could easily encourage in academic settings?

Consider, for instance, "The Whale Hunt" (thewhalehunt.org) -- clearly not an anthropological project (by Jay's definition at any rate), but a very compelling non-linear design that presents not only a LOT of photographs, but also visually demonstrates how often they were taken and has notes on what we see while we watch (Kerim Friedman has already pointed out how this kind of notation is becoming more and more common on YouTube). Imagine if, from the start, this had been In fact, I imagine this sort of collaboration is already going on, if anyone would like to let me know where.

This sort of collaboration might also lead to better models for publishing interactive and non-linear content. Few of us, it seems, have actually used the Oak Park CD. And yet it COULD be put online for everyone in just a matter of hours, if only "this kind of market" (as Jay puts it) would allow it. Considering how many academic journals are now online, it doesn't seem prohibitive.

In sum: Anthropologists generally suck (aesthetically speaking) at making their own films. Tim Asch -- a filmmaker -- came along and tried some collaborative approaches with impressive results. Now (forgive me for this) anthropologists equally suck (aesthetically) at making websites up to the task of appropriately housing such complex information as an ethnographic study. Jay's "Oak Park" CD-site is to contemporary [web]site production what Mead's "Bathing Babies in Three Cultures" is to "The Ax Fight." But who expected Mead -- more an anthropologist than a filmmaker -- to do any better? Likewise, I don't expect Jay -- more an anthropologist than a [web]site designer -- to do any better. I think his project is a useful step. And I think Tim-Asch-style collaboration in production is an important future step in finding new "means of conveying anthropological knowledge."

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "giulia battaglia" giu_bat@hotmail.com
Date: Sat, 6 September, 2008 7:44 pm

Dear list,

I took a while to give my comments to Jay Ruby's paper and contribute to the discussion since I wanted to see which direction the discussion could take. I was expecting many reactions but not the tone that eventually this seminar took. In this regard I feel like underlining a couple of things before giving my comments which, I apologize, will make my intervention a bit longer than the usual:

As a member of this list for the past two years I could see the different directions that the list took through while. We reached the stage in which a vast heterogeneous range of people are now participants. These people are either: media anthropologists, visual anthropologists, media studies experts or scholars, practitioners with in interest in anthropology and so forth (I won't identify myself in any of these or probably in all of them); and they are of different level of study from undergraduate students to senior lecturers. This range of disciplines has increased the vibrancy of the mailing list.

However, it could (and it did) create some confusion when each and every person coming from those listed disciplines believes that this is a 'forum' of other people/experts coming from 'the same' field as them, and therefore that certain knowledge it is actually given and we should discuss 'upon' it. Probably there is a big part of the group which, indeed, lacks of knowledge of historical debate among visual anthropologists on ethnographic films to which Jay Ruby as well as Peter Crowford have strongly contribute through the time. In this regard I should thank both for the inspiring thought-provoking perspectives which have accompanied me through my past 5 years of engagement with the subject.

Having said this I would like to underline the long term braveness of Jay Ruby who is one of the few scholars who has always been able to question himself and his essays by stepping further from what he wrote previously toward new still unexplored paths of visual anthropology. I more and more find academics who "stick" with their 'own' concepts and ideas that sometimes loose the sense of new contexts. By saying this, I am not denying the importance of 'old theories' and 'traditional thinkers' which characterizes the European approach of study (I come from extremely traditional classical Italian studies based on classical Latin and Greek), but I am saying that with those theories in mind we should always be able to update ourselves according to what changes around us.

Even in his 70s and in this paper Jay tries to go further and he does it while assuming that his readers know about all this long academic journey of his life (I may be wrong but I have never found any of Jay's article which repeats concepts that he articulated previously. What I have found instead was to make references to other work written by him). In this respect this paper was a foreseeable approach which built upon a well known debate which did not surprise me. Moreover, I agree with Ruby that concepts of 'reflexivity' are in these days 'given' among visual anthropologists (but, I should add, also documentary filmmakers).
However, in this list there are not many people familiar with those theories and the paper (as other paper could do in a different context) has created certain confusion/tension. I believe that there are different ways of writing according to the Eco's 'ideal' reader you are referring to. If Ruby's ideal readers were who knew about certain concepts discussed and re-discussed in the past decade, did he really have to explain everything again? I would rather suggest who does not know about certain debate going and searching for the missing information (or politely asking the list or the presenter for references) before intervening and judging.

However, I still believe that in this paper Jay did not theorize much with valid examples (also other than Oak Park) about WHY to leave the problematic terminology "ethnographic film" toward "anthropological cinema" within the discipline of anthropology.

I agree with Kerim Friedman when says that anthropology is taking certain turns in society that we should be prepared to negotiate the term as well as to find collaborative practices. To me, the innovative turn should not start from the idea of "contamination" (my reading) of ethnographic filmmaking by documentary

filmmakers. And it should not therefore be in search of new "not contaminable" forms of visual (again my reading) so that to increase the 'ghettoization' of the discipline. It should rather started from the perspective that we are not "shaman" of ethnographic representation of "others" as well as of "us", and that "others" can actually do similar or better job than us through visual forms. Acknowledging this, to me, the direction should rather take a collaborative turn and started wondering which extra contribution anthropologist can give to other representations.

I take two examples coming from my on-going fieldwork in India to better explain. I am currently researching "documentary filmmakers/ing" and therefore I am completely exposed to various and fascinating visual works that are "other than anthropological" but that sometimes take such a deep understanding that I started questioning the usefulness and neediness of anthropological approach.
I believe that there is not much knowledge of the ethnographic approach (non-north-American and non-European) of documentary filmmakers in India, otherwise statements such as "Documentarians seldom learn the language of the people they film, economic realities often prevent them from staying in the field long enough to conduct ethnographic research and return visits to see the impact of their film has had on the people seldom are possible", would have never been written by any visual anthropologist (although I understand it was not meant to target everybody, it is still sounds like a extreme generalization to me). Most of the documentary filmmakers in India have for example a long-term engagement with the issue or with the people before approaching the community with their camera, they learn tribal languages or work on area where they know the language, they don't shoot if they don't' have a deep understanding of issues, they go back to screen their films and see response to build upon that for next films or further research, their aim is to screen their film as much as possible in various places: from colleges to slums to festival and so on. Moreover, there are many documentary filmmakers who do not come from a filmmaking background but other disciplines (mainly social sciences) but they are not anthropologists. With long term approach I mean minimum one year to max (as far as I know) nine years work in the same field. The ethnographic approach is therefore very much there as well as the deep understanding of the cultural, economical, political aspect of the field. In this scenario, visual anthropologists among Indian documentary filmmakers are not extremely appreciated.

One of my informants is an example. He has worked for 9 years on the same Sikkim family while trying to understand certain traditional knowledge about the "power" of stopping the rain passed on three generations, and collecting an unbelievable amount of ethnographic footages that can be converted into several films (one recently completed).

Same person though, has recently decided in his own journey as a filmmaker, to try to go over the film language of the visual and to experiment new forms of representations. What he did is not far from me from Oak Park project and it is my second examples for my argument. This new visual form is called "Interpretative Interactive Archive on Culcutta" made under Calcutta Art Research Foundation. It is a

composition of use of still photographs, videos, texts, and audios for representing and understanding certain aspects of the city. These 'representations' are called "capsules" because are fragments of a city. It is a sort of un-finished work made in purpose for constructing a different way of understanding a city by keeping the possibilities to add information by other experts or artists.

The first stage of this project has just finished and the format has not been defined yet – that is, there is a range of material that is not yet together in a form such as a CD 'site', web'site', videogames 'site' or exhibition 'site' and so on. The project is now travelling to different colleges in India keeping singular form for each 'capsule' (which work pretty well in an academic-presentation context) and is planning to travel to art galleries, film festivals or Universities to Europe as well as somewhere else (wherever it gets invited).

What I am trying to point out with these two parallel examples is that despite the struggle to find "alternative" ways of representation (because by me, Ruby's use of "alternative" has been read as 'alternative to representations that are not anthropological') for the discipline of anthropology, it is better to be aware that somebody else with the facilities of new technologies and against an 'overvisualization' of issues which are brainstorming us, may have thought something similar from another discipline and may question or may use the definition and categorization of "anthropological cinema" and its approach, as it has been done with the use of term and practice of "ethnographic film".

Do we really need to be "unique"? Do we really need to ghettoize ourselves in the name of keeping the orthodoxy of the discipline and a certain rigour in teaching new generation of anthropologists? Is it not better to think that our theory and methodology can be useful for interacting to new existent forms of visual representations? Rather than talking about "anthropological cinema" can we talk about "anthropological contribute to cinema"?

I came to my fieldwork one year ago with my camera thinking to combine visual and textual methodology. Eventually I decided to leave my camera at home and use other senses to understand an already "visual-mediated" world.

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Subject: [Medianthro] comments to Jay's paper
From: "Leshu Torchin" <lt40@st-andrews.ac.uk>
Date: Tue, 9 September, 2008 10:42 pm

I've been meaning to read carefully through all the comments before posting, but while I've read and appreciated the last batch, careful parsing prior to posting may impede any interaction at all.

I say this by way of apology, as I make comments without properly acknowledging all the sentiments thus far.

I hope Jay does return to this discussion, as I find his position one that deserves sustained attention that can be well benefited by a Q&A. I say this, because I have lots of questions and would love more information.

1. I'm embarrassed to say I have not seen 'A Country Auction'. To that end, I was wondering if I could hear about how it was avant-garde, and how the style influenced both the anthropological and ethnographic processes. what did the stylistic innovations and departures bring to the process? In what ways are these lacking from both Visual Anthropology and Documentary Film? (A dubious distinction I will likely use only for the purposes of this discussion.)

2. As a film/media studies person, I'm afraid I see everything as involving aesthetic choices, including the observational dull which was discussed on the Viscom Listserv (regarding a position of Jay's with which I was inclined to agree). That said, this means that I do see aesthetic choices informing the interactive information presentation of the CD-ROM. To that end, I'd love to hear more about what the interactive interface produces, and what ways Jay sees as building on this potential, particularly as such an interface has been developing on the Internet.

2a. In this case, I especially wonder about using such software as Sophie to build ethnographic sites that allow subjects and other ethnographers to comment in a shared space. Or separate spaces, even, but in response to a video subjected to various interpretations.

3. I would love to hear more about the distinction between ethnographic film and documentary cinema, particularly as Jay's CD-ROM project is technically not cinema, but its own medium (or multi-media platform). What does this distinction look like (if cinema) and what does the production of distinction make, especially given that anthropological filmmakers like Asch and Rouch were involved with filmmaking communities. As one who fights to consider Rouch alongside the French New wave (and he was part of the various omnibus productions, and sat at the feet of Henri Langlois as he used to recall), I wonder about the effects of disarticulation.

4. For those who've brought up the GTA or second Life models of ethnography, I am both intrigued and excited. At the same time, as the film/media studies person, I think the promise of this interactive experience needs to be united with the studies of these formats; these too, are subject to analysis, especially given how they, especially GTA, are shaped by cinematic form and experience. I'm only saying this so we all remember that despite the ease of interaction, there is nothing transparent in the exchange.

I do hope this seminar continues as Jay's paper offers exciting ideas which can allow us all to build on our work. I look forward to Jay's comments on this present stage of contributions.

Best wishes,

Leshu

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Subject: [Medianthro] Jay Ruby paper
From: "David Zeitlyn" <d.Zeitlyn@kent.ac.uk>
Date: Wed, 10 September, 2008 10:56 am

Dear all,

I enjoyed reading Jay's article and it made me realise with a guilty start that I never finished the paper I presented at the RAI film festival a few years back (Sept 2005) which similarly pronounced the death of anthropological film (or more accurately: the replacement for anthropology, of film by multimedia).

Since some of the discussion has raised the question of other examples, may I suggest the teaching materials which were prepared as part of the 'Experience Rich Anthropology' project fit the bill – especially since it includes Steve Lyon's PhD material which was made partially available online as the research progressed (but nb before wiki's had become commonplace). The main url is http://era.anthropology.ac.uk/

All of it bar one section is still available some 10 years down the line. The html now looks somewhat quaint and old fashioned but the contents are there for all to use (freely licensed for non-commercial use).

Inspired by Jay's example I'll try and get my 2005 article into a form that can be distributed.

best wishes
davidz
--
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Subject: [Medianthro] E-seminar coming to a close
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Fri, 12 September, 2008 8:56 am

Dear all,
Our 23rd e-seminar is coming to a close Monday morning (September 15). We are
discussing Jay Ruby s paper (available at:
http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm) and so far we ve
received comments, questions and criticism about the paper that exceeds
25 pages.

Please, join in the disucssion.

All the best, Sigurjon.

Subject: [Medianthro] Discussion on Jay Ruby's paper
From: "Thorolf Lipp" <lipp@arcadia-film.de>
Date: Fri, September 12, 2008 9:16 pm

Dear colleagues,
here are my comments to Jay Ruby's paper.

I. Introduction
I do know parts of Jay Ruby's work and use some of his texts in my teaching. He
deserves a lot of praise for what he has done over the years. Not only did he have the guts
to stand up for a point of view time and time again, he also dares modifying it. Also, he
attempts to test practically what he comes up with in theory. While most scholars, even in
the field of Visual Anthropology, confine themselves to writing, Ruby does both, writing
and producing audiovisual material. That is brave enough in an academic world where,
more often than not and despite all theoretical knowledge about the mediality of culture,
audiovisual production is still not considered academic. This is why Ruby's initiative is
outstanding and reminds me of part two of Nietzsche's "Untimely Reflections" where he
states, that the one who wants to act, needs to be able to forget in order to be able to act at
all. In other words – Ruby is oscillating between him being a "Cultural Anthropologist"
and what I would call a "Cultural Producer". While producing, Ruby necessarily needed
to forget a lot about what he certainly knows about narrative.

II. Ruby's intention: to get out of the "ethnographic film ghetto" The little I know about narrative indicates that a "successful" narrative, one that reaches a wider audience instead of a special interest "ghetto", is both the result of certain needs of both human nature (yes, I'm a bit of a structuralist here, clinging on to a dramatological theory of culture...) and cultural nurture at a particular point in time. It's banal: in different times and cultures, somewhat different ways of storytelling seem to be in favor. One has to keep that in mind if one wants to get out of a special interest ghetto and reach "the masses". Now, in comparison with many other (nonfictional) narrative forms, I guess that a contemporary audience will find Ruby's Oak Park attempt too longish, too amateurish in terms of production value and as a result of these and other reasons probably too boring to watch. Does that say something about the ingenuity of some of the ideas applied, for instance the concept of non-linearity? Not necessarily. There is a discourse going on about the Oak Park right now and I guess it will, within the boundaries of the discipline, go on for a while. It will be interesting to see, however, if both the project and the discussion about it will have some impact outside of what Ruby calls the "ethnographic film ghetto". So far, he does not seem to have a lot of success. Taking into account how much Ruby knows about narrative I am pretty sure, however, that he also knew that with "Oak Park" it was not going to happen. I don't even think he really wanted it, because otherwise he would probably not be so critical with the work of those he calls "professional filmmakers" but, rather, look for some support from that side as well in order to get where he wants to go.

III. Narrative
At some point of his article Ruby asks: "Who will wade through all this material". I think this is were another part of my criticism comes in. I must admit that I question the role that Ruby bestows to the author of an audiovisual text.

For one I guess that any author's attempt to "hide" behind his data is an epistemological mistake, especially if it comes to audiovisual material. Franz Boas once pointed out: „Your data must of course be separate from your interpretation, but you must have the guts to interpret." That might be o.k. for a book, but with audiovisuals it simply does not work. Footage can not be put on display in full length without boring most people to death. This again, I would argue, has to do with the "nature" of storytelling on the one hand and with cultural conventions on the other. Since these conventions DO constitute culture, however, they should not be overlooked just because they are conventions. While Dr. Ruby does actually not put his material on display in full length, it still is relatively boring. Of course he selects what he shows to us and what he doesn't. So he is without doubts the author. But why is he the ONLY author in a project of that nature? Would the non-linear Oak Park project not have been a perfect example to show how limited the point of view of one single author, in this case a retired male Anthropologist, in fact is? Why are there not several authors who compete, with different esthetic concepts, about e.g. the most innovative narrative / the most outstanding point of view / the most sensitive insight on Oak Park and it's protagonists? Also: if we talk about nonlinearity we should not forget that we live in a world full of what Nicolaus Cusanus has called coincidentia oppositorum. All these contradictions surrounding us can most probably not

be depicted by one single author, no matter how much footage he or she puts on display or how self reflexive he or she is. I miss this multivocality.

Consequently, I would like to add a few general remarks to what lies at the heart of Ruby's picturing culture theory: reflexivity. Both, the role of any author in selecting, shaping and thickening his data and his role in reflecting them and the process of getting them within the audiovisual text are almost contradictory and extremely hard to master. I would argue, that the reflexivity that Ruby every so often demands from anthropological cinema was very important at a time when questions around the concept of reflexivity have probably had the most important impact on the discipline of anthropology as a whole (and far beyond). At that time cinema vérité (going back to Dziga Vertov, of course) has, for good reasons, reshaped not only the form of ethnographic or nonfictional filmmaking but of filmmaking as such. While it is true, that "pure" cinema vérité approaches are rare, elements of it are commonly used by both anthropologists and "professional filmmakers" since more than three decades now. I would argue that reflexivity still is important, of course, and as anthropologists we should be proudly aware of this basic concept. It was arguably the last really relevant anthropological contribution to cultural production anyway. At the same time, however, the quests for anthropological audiovisual texts have changed and if we really want to get out of the "ethnographic film ghetto" I think that overstretching reflexive elements in a filmic text is rather dangerous for its capacity to work as such. While written texts work better syntactically, filmic texts rely much more on their semantic capacities. Again, Ruby's central claim is very, very hard to come by with and I must say that Oak Park proves it: "If ethnographic filmmakers were to produce films that tell the story of their field research, and the story of the people they studied, in a reflexive manner that permitted audiences to enjoy the cinematic illusion of verisimilitude without causing them to think they were seeing reality, then an anthropological cinema would be born" (Ruby 2000: 278).

As a filmmaker I am not mainly concerned about the epistemological questions pertaining to my role as an author and I do admit that I am generally more busy, or at least busy enough, with storytelling as such (mostly applying a Grierson type narrative form). The little I know about mediating culture indicates that it is always the irrealization of reality, the construction of a story, that then again forms reality. There are no stories in real life but life can only be depicted in the form of a story. As a consequence I dare to tell stories, rather than pretending that revealing something beyond the story through making the filmic process visible is more "honest" or more "real" or more "effective". Again: I do NOT think at all that reflexivity is irrelevant. I DO think, however, that as cultural producers we pretty much limit our capacities of expression by overstretching it or seeing it as the most relevant goal of our undertakings.

IV. Ethnographicness
Let's forget for a moment all the attempts to find new labels (such as Ruby's Anthropological Cinema) for the old trade of representing (exotic) culture. In "Rethinking Visual Anthropology" Marcus Banks asks a central question: what constitutes the "ethnographicness" of a filmic text? Banks comes up with what I think is a

pretty good answer: it's the intention of those who engage in it that makes the difference. It's the discourse, it's an ongoing process. If anthropologists on this list take on a perspective that is different from Jay Ruby's (certainly a very important elder, so to speak) that's fine. It's necessary and he will somehow have to cope with it. While I do not see THE new paradigm on the horizon, however, it seems that my generation (I am 35 years old) is not that much concerned anymore about reflexivity issues. We rather did grow up with it and somehow, probably, needed or still need to free ourselves from a lot of constraints that reflexivity means for our attempts to find a place as Visual Anthropologists not only in a (terribly limited) academic context but also, and probably more importantly, outside of this context. Here, I do agree and disagree with Ruby at the same time. I think we should leave the ghetto, but we should NOT be afraid of what Ruby calls "professional filmmaking". Rather, I would argue, we need to team up much more with professional filmmakers to become, on the basis of anthropological concepts (reflexivity being but one of them), more relevant again in the much broader discourse of nonfictional filmmaking as a whole. That is my plea as a professional anthropologist and a professional filmmaker.

I recently attended a two weeks summer school "ritual & media" in Heidelberg that was organized by Christiane Brosius and her colleagues at the South Asian Institute and the SFB 619. It was very interesting to observe that some of the elder scholars came up with intricate theoretical concepts and really unprofessional (not in quotation marks!) audiovisual material that, more often than not, did not work very well in communicating their theory . The younger scholars and students did not buy into that. They were simply not satisfied with the esthetic and semantic quality of what they saw. They found it mostly boring and unpleasant to watch and applied very different categories to judge the presented media than the producers themselves. (Sarah Pink was one of the exceptions. To my great surprise, she showed a rather poetic, highly estheticised, beautifully filmed and edited, Grierson type documentary on bull fighting.) I think we can no longer overlook this (generational?) gap. As a matter of fact (due to cultural conventions, of course): every anthropologist who attempts to produce audiovisual material that is supposed to have some sort of impact outside of what Ruby calls "ethnographic film ghettos", obviously needs to comply to certain production standards these days. Being both an anthropologist and a "professional filmmaker" myself (author, cameraman & cutter) I feel actually more and more offended if scholars pretend that even the most basic filmic qualities (again – it's cultural conventions, o.k., but by overlooking the diegesis of filmic texts one simply does not solve the issue!) are something that can or should be overlooked or should even be despised. This is a general remark, however and not a statement on Ruby's work.

To come to a conclusion: If a one man show can produce audiovisuals well enough, in a time where all of us are used to an incredible amount of professional "production value", fine. Poorly executed audiovisuals, on the other hand, that are accompanied by statements of the sort "this is NOT professional and aims at something different" will not help any anthropological attempts to come up with something innovative. This way we will NOT free ourselves from the "domination of professional filmmakers". Instead, I would argue, we should do our homework better: know more about

the history & theory of nonfictional media, know more about narrative, know more about the (arbitrary, yes, but not meaningless of course) contemporary conventions in regards to the technical qualities required, know more about the viewers expectations that form the diegesis of an audiovisual text. All these things are equally important for the impact that audiovisual texts will eventually have. If we keep on excusing ourselves for not being "professional" than we will remain marginal both in the academic world and in the world of "professional" media production. And this is exactly, If I understand it correctly, what Dr. Ruby regrets and tries to change.

What we really need to do is to work twice as hard in order to come up with new and innovative intellectual, esthetic, and sensitive (in whatever order!) concepts that combine the best of both worlds. It is only then, I would argue, that we will be able to leave the ghetto, find bigger audiences for what we produce and have a stronger impact on society.

V. Society and Audience
Audiences are not just there. They are formed by diverse forces within society. If we, especially as Visual Anthropologists, refuse to take part in the nurture element of the cultural process, that is, if we refuse to accept, or are not capable to use the possibilities that, for instance, television offers in terms of making our anthropological insights publicly available, then we simply overlook a huge chance in constituting cultural memory. Cultural memory does not automatically come into being. It is shaped by the (social, political, economical etc.) will of people in institutions. Television is such an institution. Most media scholars I know would agree that television still is a much more widely used and a more powerful medium than the world wide web. (The amount of serious media that is solely produced for the web is very, very low. A brief look at YouTube proves it!) On one hand Ruby argues that we should not talk ourselves in these "ethnographic film ghettos" and that he has come to realize that "conceptually ethnographic film has remained essentially where it was thirty years ago". On the other hand, Ruby's basing of television and professional filmmaking does not lead us out of this ghetto. At the most it opens yet another sub-ghetto, so to speak.

I really do value Dr. Ruby's attempt a lot. It's a brave, "bold" (as he himself puts it) and terribly labor intensive undertaking. I do NOT think, however, that it succeeds where he wants it to succeed. It will most likely remain in what Ruby calls the "ethnographic ghetto". I have tried to indicate at least some reasons for my opinion. I am leaving for a holiday on Sunday and will not be able to react to potential replies until the end of the month.

Best,

Thorolf

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Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Discussion on Jay Ruby's paper
From: "Daniel Taghioff" <danieltaghioff@yahoo.com>
Date: Sat, September 13, 2008 6:05 am

Thorolf's comments certainly bring home to me how hard it is to make films and do anthropology at the same time. As someone who struggles currently with only the latter, it feels almost intimidating to even begin consider the role of film in ones own ethnography...

Which raises two areas for me:

Teamwork - This has come up repeatedly as an issue. The magnitude of the task and the range of skills required to do something like Oak Park to high production values feels overwhelming for any one person. (I make websites, and concur with Jay's comment on aesthetics to an extent, but nonetheless it is a hard enterprise, without really having to deal with narrative, ethnographic observation, cinematography etc...)

This reminds me a bit of how the new particle accellerator at CERN calls into question the idea of the lone scientific innovator...

So, where are the structures that would support these kind of collaborations? Does academia provide such interfaces? Is there research funding for these kinds of joint ventures? And how does this interface with the world of film funding more general? What sorts of platforms would make a difference to getting such collaborations off of the ground? One gets the sense with Oak Park that necessity was the mother of invention, but is it possible to change the circumstances?

Film making as an ethnographic object:- This is Anthropology of Media rather than Mediated Anthropology I suppose.

I am trying to get my head around researching environmental activists in India. They use films in their work, often in what feel like documentary ways, as they try and portray life situations impacted by environmental issues to a wider English-speaking public sphere.

So what are the links between this and the concerns of Oak Park? Is it just too circular to look at narratives about how people construct narratives? What can a confused early-career field ethnographer draw from these discussions of anthropological film, when approaching how people make films as a part of "the field"?

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

Subject: [Medianthro] Youtube examples
From: "David Zeitlyn" <d.Zeitlyn@kent.ac.uk>
Date: Sat, September 13, 2008 11:34 am

Hello
Thorolf's comments raise the dreaded spectre of amateurishness as the bane of watchability. Most of the clips on youtube are nothing if not amateur (apart from the Jean Rouch films of course). But there are some examples of anthropologists using it in interesting ways:

See: http://youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE
See also 'Introducing Our You Tube Ethnography Project':
http://youtube.com/watch?v=tYcS_VpoWJk

These look pretty professional to me!

They come from
Michael Wesch of Kansa State U, see 'Lessons From an Accidental Viral Video' in Anthropology News 48(5) May 2007 30-31pp. See:
http://www.ksu.edu/sasw/anthro/wesch.htm and particularly: http://mediatedcultures.net/

I am more than half tempted to suggest to Jay that he prepares a youtube version of at least part of the Oak Park project - that way it can engage and interact with a whole other audience (much of it a long way from academe)...all the best

davidz

--
David Zeitlyn,
Professor of Anthropology,
Department of Anthropology,
Marlowe Building,
University of Kent,
Canterbury,

Subject: Ruby´s retort
From: Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson <sbh@hi.is>
Date: Sun, September 14, 2008 1:46 pm

Dear all,
Please, find Jay Ruby s retort enclosed. The seminar closes tomorrow morning (Monday, UK time) so there is still time for last remarks.

All the best, Sigurjon.

I found this process to be somewhat difficult, at times annoying, at times interesting and finally useful in that I will use the insights from this process when I write a paper on my Oak Park work to present in Italy next month.

Let me begin with a few general reactions before discussing particular comments.

To begin, several people said that they were not familiar with my work. I suggest reading, Picturing Culture (U of Chicago Press, 2000) and browsing my web site - astro.temple.edu/~ruby/ruby/ - where several of papers are available and finally my Oak Park web site - astro.temple.edu/~ruby/opp/.

I sensed some confusion about my position regarding ethnographic film that requires clarification. In 1976 I wrote "Is and Ethnographic Film a Filmic Ethnography?" I argued that ethnographic film should be produced by professional anthropologists who use film to express the knowledge they gain from long term participant observational field research. Without meaning to, I became the Don Quixote of Ethnographic Film. After 30 years when almost no one seemed to agree with my ideas including some of my graduate students, I decided it was time to find a new position. I partially articulated it in *Picturing Culture*. The first half of this paper was an extension of those ideas. I wish to disassociate myself from ethnographic films as they are too often made by people who know little or nothing about ethnography or anthropology. They tend not to know the language of the people they portray and seldom spend much time in the field. Just look at the lists of film shown at any one of the many ethnographic film festivals(AAA or RAI for example) if you doubt my assertion. I am still hoping that anthropologists will open themselves up to the potential of all forms of cinema and not blindly follow the conventions of documentary realism.

Some of you have said that the *Oak Park Stories* are boring and old hat because others have done something similar before me and even old fashioned. You are simply wrong. Oak Park is one of the few, perhaps only, community that I know about where the white majority openly tried to accommodate a minority, in this case black, and succeeded. In many part of the world, a majority population is struggling to accommodate new minorities. They could benefit by understanding Oak Park. If this bores you Peter Crawford then there is something wrong with you. I believe that the country you live in is struggling with similar problems.

As to the uniqueness of the Oak Park Stories, I still maintain that no one has done anything like this before, that is, produce digital ethnographies that combine text, subject's snapshots, my photos of the community and video life histories. The suggestion that were made are interesting but not the same thing. The only thing that approaches my work is "Scroll Singers of Naya - http://learningobjects.wesleyan.edu/naya/ but that was created **after my work** not before.

As Peter Crawford was asked to begin the process with his comments, I will start with my response. Crawford claims that "Jay extracted some of the points in his paper, specifically those dealing with his critique of observational film" I do not even mention the word observational in my paper. In spite of this Peter chooses to spend a great deal of time discussing observational film and using materials from a prior discussion on VISCOM. His discussion of this is irrelevant to my paper and therefore not worth commenting upon. When Crawford actually begins to discuss my Oak Park work, he has little to say that is interesting or useful. He appears simply to not understand it and is at times confused. An example, he states that "The not-logic is even carried to the extreme on the website where an introductory written statement to video sections begins with the statement: This is not a movie." This statement does not appears on the web site but in the CD Video section of each ethnography. I explain this in the paper. Apparently Peter did not read it carefully. Peter's view of new media is so old fashioned that he thinks that "The typical solution for this problem [that is the limitations of film] has been to write a study guide or film companion." I am sorry that someone else was not selected to comment on my paper. Someone who was not so behind the times. I am sorry to say that I found nothing useful in Crawford's original comments nor those that followed. As a fellow Dylan fan, I suggest to Peter that:

> "I'm not saying you treated me unkind,
> you could have done better but I don't mind,
> you just kind of wasted my precious time.
> But don't think twice it's alright."

Aaron Shapiro, as well as others, complained that I did not discuss the term reflexivity sufficiently. Others made similar complaints about my lack of discussion of the anthropology that underlies my work. This is a valid criticism almost. My paper was a description of the research and how I decided to convey it. A discussion of the underlying theories and concepts like reflexivity would be another paper. Sorry if some of you missed that discussion but it was not my intent to go in that direction. I think you swere saying that I should have written another paper.

Battaglia's comments were generally supportive and also critical. He is correct that this listserv is composed of people from different disciplines and backgrounds. My comments assumed knowledge about the debates that have been raging among those interested in ethnographic film perhaps more than they should have been. He gave me something to think about. I am particularly looking forward to seeing the Indian project he discusses.

Freidman partially misunderstands one of my ideas when we suggests that my paper asks the question - "Do we need a uniquely anthropological documentary form?" That is not what I meant. The correct question is "Do we need a uniquely anthropological form?" I also agree with him that multimedia/hypermedia is not some form of techosalvation. The hard work is telling a good story based on our fieldwork still remains.

I would really love to see a copy of Zeitlyn's 2005 paper if it is available. Contrary to David's opinion I find Michael Wesch's Youtube work to be slick, superficial. He is too much like a second rate McLuhan. As to his suggestion that I "prepare a youtube version of at least part of the Oak Park project - that way it can engage and interact with a whole other audience." I actually cringe at the idea. What little I know about YouTube is that consists mainly of stupid pet tricks, stupid human tricks and million of really really bad rock bands. I know there are some really interesting clips and that some of Rouch's films are available there but the "whole other audience" that David alludes to consists mainly of 15 year olds and that is not exactly who I had in mind as a new audience. Perhaps I am showing my age but too much of the material available on YouTube is too adolescent for my tastes. Before I retired I even thought the undergrads I taught had values that I abhorred. God knows what the people who love stupid pet tricks would do with my work? I prefer not to know.

Daniel Taghioff raises what may be the most important issue that results from my paper when he asks, "[How] does making a genre "anthropological" allow film-makers and audiences, in their relationship as mutually constituting, step out of conventional restrictions in that relationship, and into dare-I-say-it liminal spaces where the concerns in 1) can be more fully explored?" I am afraid at this point I do not know the answer as we have so few examples of the kind of film that I think should be made. If it were possible to have the competence to truly analyze the corpus of Rouch (some 150+ films) we could begin to answer that question but to my mind such a person does not exist. They would need to have a competence in French anthropological thought, film and communication theory, African ethnography, etc.

Ben Unguren raises the issue of aesthetics which he thinks I "dismiss." Not really what I meant was that the designers I know are more interested in form than content. May be I just don't know the right ones. Unguren asks "I don't see why some thoughtful *web-designer* couldn't spend a couple years working with an anthropologist (even doing fieldwork with her/him) to develop an ideal formal structure to house the anthropological research." Who might these thoughtful designers be?

When asked questions about aesthetics Rouch would respond that the person asking the question was interested in "pretty pictures" (In french I think it is *belle vues*). Asch thought most of his films were "bad" that is, not aesthetically pleasing. It was not until he went to USC that he became selfconscious about his lack of aesthetic competence - long after the Ax Fight. I think ethnographic film has been held back by the assumptions that anthropologists need to make what the film industry calls "a good film." I would like to see films that concentrate on making the anthropology primary.

Leshu Torchin asks about A Country Auction. Rather than try to explain why I think it was before its time, I suggest the those interested go to my web site - astro.temple.edu/~ruby/cap/ which discusses the original Auction film and the new film in progress - Country Auction Revisited.

This response has gone on far too long. I am sorry that I did not respond to all of the questions and challenges.

Onward,

Jay Ruby

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Ruby´s retort
From: "Peter I. Crawford" <interven@inet.uni2.dk>
Date: Sun, September 14, 2008 9:31 pm

Dear List,
I am afraid I do not have time to send more comments before the dead-line as I will be travelling. So I will end my contribution with only two brief
comments.

Firstly, using Jay's form of rejecting my comments, I do not think Jay has understood a word of what I have said and we have communicated about this to one another off the list. I accept that Jay does not use the specific word 'observational' in this paper but I cannot understand why he will not admit that he has observational films in mind when arguing that we should move beyond ethnographic or anthropological film 'toward an anthropologtical cinema'. My main point has been that there is no need to establish either/ ors and that there is a lot of interesting work being done within ethnographic film, contrary to what Jay says or believes. Jay simply neither understands nor acknowledges my criticism of what I call his NOT-logic (see my initial comment). He also fails to respect my sense of boredom with his Oak Park project products, claiming that I (and others) find it 'old hat' etc. I (that was another commentator) do not find it 'old hat' and must confess that I am not bothered with questions of whether something is 'old' or not but rather whether it is interesting anthropology or not. Maybe I am old fashioned in many ways but then I have never engaged in anthropology to make fashion statements but to develop scholarship and in some romantic sense to better understand the world. Jay, in a rather crude way, gives the impression that I find Oak Park (i.e. the community) boring (which I do not), where my point was that I did not find his series of audio-visual products emerging from his project particularly interesting and find that there is so much other work out there exploring 'alternative' ways of mixing images, sound and text more interesting (to me). I am not convinced that the Oak Park Series are breaking new ground at all methodologically speaking but what matters even more to me is that I fail to find the 'anthropology' in the series. Where is the anthropological analysis? What is it based on? Jay may claim that it is somewhere there in the whole project but he cannot expect readers of this paper to be familar with the whole project and its products. If it is not clear to a reader of the paper in what sense the project is anthropological I find it a shortcoming of the paper not of the reader.

Secondly, a brief general comment on what Jay and some other participants in the debate seem to believe is the demise of ethnograhic film in general and observational film in

particular (without, again, explaining how these are defined very clearly) and that we should get rid of the 'orthodoxies' of ethnographic film. I think one of the last comments in the debate, by Alyssa Grossman, clearly demonstrates that 'we' (ie. those of us who teach visual anthropology in places like Manchester and Tromsø) do not teach orthodoxy. Furthermore, I think one completely misses the point of so-called observational film if one believes that it is based on very rigid notions of documentary filmmaking. In a strict sense it is but one trend or approach to filmmaking that exactly is based on exploring new ways of using film to understand the world around us. In that sense, as indicated in my initial comments, the agenda of Rouch, Marshall, MacDougall and Kildea (and even Dennis O'Rourke, despite his alleged hostility towards anthropology), for example, is the same, there is more that brings them together than what makes them differ. I fully appreciate it when Jay in the beginning of his video sections (whether on the website or on CD-rom, I cannot see why that matters) states that 'This is not a movie'. He's absolutely right, and if he had grasped the potential of film maybe his project would have gained from including 'movies' rather than whatever the moving images with people talking most of the time are. There is another odd kind of logic in play here. It is almost as if Jay is arguing that the less professional one does something, e.g. filming, the better it is. It is echoed in his weird statement that the notion of a good film should '... be abhorrent to scholars'. I still fail to see why. Finally, and fortunately, there is no sign whatsoever that the death of ethnographic film is imminent. There are more films than ever (just ask other people who like me have been involved in organising festivals and selecting films) being made out there and, although some of it is not particularly interesting, there is so much talent going into exploring how we can use film in anthropogical research, in some cases resulting in very interesting and innovative 'observational' style films in other cases using excellent film material in the context of finding new ways of mixing audio-visual material with academic texts. My view of 'new media' may well be old fashioned but it is in one respect exactly like my view of 'old media'; if it's good I do not give a damn whether it is the one or the other, good here defined also as something that is useful and serves a purpose of aiding or even constituting anthropological enquiry.

Regards,
Peter
Peter I. Crawford
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Subject: RE: [Medianthro] Ruby´s retort
From: "giulia battaglia" giu_bat@hotmail.com
Date: Mon, September 15, 2008 3:09 am

Dear list,

I would like to add a couple of considerations to my previous comments and inresponse to last comments before the session closes .

It is a pity that we still look for "good" anthropological visual work fordeveloping scholarship. To me scholarship develops exactly from conversations likethis with substantial disagreement among different positions. With this I am notsaying that Oak Park is not a good example of anthropological work, but I am sayingthat if somebody, such as Peter Crowford, found it not good enough for scholarshipin anthropology, this becomes a good start for developing further debates in visual anthropology. And if others find it an interesting attempt to break certainclassical ways of using the visual in anthropology, it will also contribute to further considerations in the discipline. How could we write papers if we had nobody to disagree with? How could 'debate' be possible?

As I pointed out in my previous comments, to me it is a matter of acknowledging "other worlds" - other than anthropology - that can strongly contribute to the discipline. Ethnographic film festivals organized by visual anthropologists should give a small space to other disciplines which also produced similar, if not the same, anthropological work (although they will not call it anthropological), from which scholars can build upon (in writing as well as visually). Academia should open up some funds to other work which may be extremely relevant from the discipline although not produced by an anthropologist. And as I argued before, new attempts to go 'beyond traditional ethnographic/observational films' should try to do it while considering other areas of experimentation.

If our romantic view is "to better understand the world" (quoting Peter), it would be better for us to try to understand it with "others".

I brought last time an example (among many others that I could give), that can be a starting point for further development of collaboration. Ruby asked me to know more about it, I can put whoever is interested in contact with the person in charge (just by sending a personal email to my address above). Of course by bringing this example I did not want to overtake the importance of scholars' insights within the discipline of anthropology, but I wanted to make more considerations on HOW we can contribute to potential anthropological existent projects or to make project in a collaborative way (initiated also by non-anthropologists), so that "to better understand the world".

Eventually I would like to underline that while originally thinking that Indian documentary filmmaking could be read in the debate of indigenous media, I changed completely my mind by observing and discovering that the practice of "documentation" in an "ethnographic form" which gives deep insights of a community is actually contemporary if not antecedent to the first use of the visual in anthropology. This means to me that it should deserve enough space among other 'so read' anthropological visual works.

Thank you all for sharing ideas and comments,

best

Giulia

Giulia Battaglia
PhD Candidate
Dept of Anthropology and Sociology
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

Dear list,

Now, after running for two interesting weeks our 23rd seminar has come to a close.

I want to thank Dr. Jay Ruby and Dr. Peter Ian Crawford for their
participation in our 23rd e-seminar. Also, I want to thank the many that contributed with
their questions, comments and criticism on Ruby´s paper.

The entire e-seminar/discussion will shortly be available (as a PDF) on
our web site at: http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm.

Our next e-seminar will be held between October 22 2008 – November 5 2008.

Dr. Eric W. Rothenbuhler (Texas A&M University) will present his
working paper called "Media Anthropology as a Field of Interdisciplinary Contact."
Discussant will be Dr. Ariel Heryanto (University of Melbourne).

Enclosed are further particulars about the working paper, Dr. Rothenbuhler and Dr.
Heryanto.

"Media Anthropology as a Field of Interdisciplinary Contact"

Dr. Eric W. Rothenbuhler, Department of Communication, Texas A&M University

Abstract
"Media anthropology is a rapidly developing new field of interdisciplinary studies. With
roots going back decades in both Communication and Anthropology, nevertheless this
work has only recently coalesced under the label Media Anthropology and its
contributing authors come into dialogue. In turn this has produced a moment of
intellectual self-consciousness about the tasks of defining this field of study and debating
its parameters. This chapter will argue that media anthropology is and would most

profitably continue to be a field of contact between two disciplines, rather than generating a new disciplinary frame of its own. Often this contact is rudimentary, but productively so. Anthropologists and communication scholars approach Media Anthropology from differentdirections with different histories and for different purposes. It is not only natural, but productive, that they would make differing choices of concepts, methods, and interpretations. This is as it should be and attempts to discipline Media Anthropology will either fail or bleed the territory of its vitality."

Dr. Eric W. Rothenbuhler, Department of Communication, Texas A&M University. Rothenbuhler's teaching and research address media anthropology and communication systems ranging from ritual through community to media industries. He is co-editor (with Mihai Coman) of Media Anthropology (2005, Sage). Author of Ritual communication: From everyday conversation to mediated ceremony (1988, Sage), which has been translated to Polish (2003), and co-editor (with Greg Shepherd) of Communication and Community (2001, LEA). He was Review and Criticism Editor for the Journal of Communication (1997-99) and currently serves on the Editorial Boards of Journal of Communication, Critical Studies in Media Communication, and The Radio Journal. He is author or co-author of over 50 articles, chapters, essays, and reviews on media, ritual, community, media industries, popular music, and communication theory. He is currently at work on a cultural history of the US radio industry 1947-62, especially regarding the development of Top 40 and other radio formats as systems of social knowledge and cultural expression. For further information about Dr. Rothenbuhler go to http://comm.tamu.edu/People/rothenbuhler.html.

Discussant
Dr. Ariel Heryanto, Asia Institute, University of Melbourne.

Ariel Heryanto is the author of State Terrorism And Political Identity In Indonesia: Fatally Belonging (Routledge, 2006), co-editor of Popular
Culture in Indonesia; Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics
(Routledge, 2008), and Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia;
comparing Indonesia and Malaysia (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). He is currently a member of the Human Ethic Research Sub-Committee, The University of Melbourne. Before joining the University of Melbourne he taught in Indonesia and Singapore. His first two university degrees are in Education. He received his Master of Arts degree from the University of Michigan, USA in Asian Studies, and his Doctorate of Philosophy from Monash University, Australia in Anthropology. While in Indonesia, his
country of birth, he was active in literary and theatrical production. He has been writing opinion columns (now over 600 in total) for major
newspapers and magazines in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. For further
information about Dr. Heryanto go to
http://www.asiainstitute.unimelb.edu.au/people/staff/heryanto.html.

All the best, Sigurjon.

Additional response after the seminar closed.

Dear colleagues,

As a newcomer to the list I missed the e-seminar end date for Jay Ruby's paper. But with the encouragement of our moderator, I'm posting my notes from the paper hoping something from my experience resonates with others who read this exchanges on the electronic list.

Apart from the Visual Anthropology course I took in my undergraduate days and my continuing interest in using visual material for data and for presentation, I have been out of the discussions concerning the field until subscribing to the MediaAnthropology discussion circle a few weeks ago. Accordingly, my remarks and impressions may have limited use to others who long have thought about the issues connected to visual materials. But I offer these responses with a view to feeding the discussion further.

--Guven Witteveen
in middle Michigan (USA)
anthroview@gmail.com
www.msu.edu/~wittevee/publications and
http://koreanstudies08.googlepages.com/ksf2008

To borrow a familiar line from Levi-Straus (on symbols, I think), Jay Ruby's paper "is good to think."

[page 6 "...experimenting with various interactive, multi-media solutions"]

Here is another form to experiment with that builds in visual (physical) context and lends itself to a longitudinal or narrative (cultural) footnoting: *Panoramic pictures*, either presented in PDF with mouse-over pop-ups or along the lines of the image mark-up (overlay text) at http://flickr.com There is also the collaborative, text/audio annotations for video at http://vimeo.com. And www.voicethread.com offers another way to add layers of interpretion.

Finally, I attended a demonstration of www.jingproject.com and the free hosting of the short movie result at www.screencast.com. Here the idea is to record whatever displays on your screen, accompanied by voice over (up to 5 minutes maximum) and packaged as Flash video file (*.swf) on your computer (Mac or PC) or published to the free screencast hosting service. While it was conceived as a heuristic device (think "voice mail message

with moving images"), for short capsule/summary or portrait/nutshell/vignette works perhaps this JING mode can be regarded among those various interactive, multi-media solutions?

In any of these multi-media and interactive derivative works the lone social scientist needs easy ways to go from raw material to finished products. In other words, shortcuts, workflow and batch editing of image, audio or video files is important to leverage. As readers of this electronic list will know, the work is time intensive and normally has to come *after* the text-based manuscript to conceived and drafted, since most peers still weigh significance according to (verbal) text produced.

[p.8 Each portrait contains several slideshows]
David Z. suggested Jay compose a YouTube version of his work. Perhaps a shortcut leading to something like that is with JING (above): Jay can produce a guided walk-through of the selected parts of the Oak Park Project (disks or website) with JING screencast(s). www.jingproject.com

[p.11] Maybe cater to two kinds of readers/audience - those actively exploring the groupings of narrative and images, and those seeking more of a finished, "playback" form of receiving the text. In other words, offer something with a "play slideshow" or "play movie" button that takes the person on a tour of the subject matter. But also make it easy for others to proceed in a fragmented, non-linear way. Readers of books already do this: some read from page one to the end, while others read around to engage chapters in a sequence meaningful to the reader.

"Bold experimentation is required by anthropologists searching for a new way to pictorially represent their research." To this declaration I respond with, "how best can our next generation of scholars and applied social scientists who are now in grad school be encouraged and supported to pictorially represent their subjects?" In other words, how can one learn (exposure to examples, instruction in methods to use, opportunities/exercises for drafting visual description and commentary) AND be given credit and professional value for these efforts: how can visual representations be institutionally integrated and acknowledged?

And I read, "We have few examples of films that seriously attempt to convey an anthropological perspective of human behavior pictorially," (APHB) which makes me return to fundamentals: according to one's intended audience, how best can one define an APHB, described and analyzed pictorially or primarily in text? Do we mean a set of conceptual tools or lenses for approaching one's subject, or moreover do we mean a resulting attitude of respect and curiosity that foregrounds individuals and personalizes issues within the wider contexts at play? If it is our materials and methods that define us, rather than the careful interweaving of insider/outsider perspectives, then the serious attempt to convey APHB should dwell more on such materials and methods as we value most highly. But if it is instead the Rashomon-like interplay of insider/outsider

perspectives that we take to be the hallmark of the APHB, then surely the field of possible modes of pictorially presenting this interwoven nature is wide; the attempts to convey the APHB must be varied; and the range of presentations must include some interesting cases where the APHB is well expressed.

I wonder if medianth readers have seen and discussed the energetic pictorial efforts at mediastorm.org or some of Interactive Essays at http://magnuminmotion.com? I corresponded with the contact people at MIM, Claudia and Bjorn, before the annual meeting of the Am. Anthro. Association in San Jose in 2006 and found out that a special template was worked out with the help of Macromedia Flash (now Adobe Flash) so that the edited images, audio, hotlinks and captions could all be supplied to the Interactive Essay Maker and produce the finished multimedia file in about one hour! It would be wonderful to have a workshop session or keynote speech at the Society for Visual Anthropology or similar event. Also on the subject of expediently putting one's material into an interactive form most expediently, I have been reading Mindy McAdams' blog, "Teaching Online Journalism," originally at http://tojou.blogspot.com and continuing at http://mindymcadams.com. There is came to understand the media convergense of print, radio, Web and TV journalists, with each person on the ground, in the field being expected to a little representation across these forms: for example, writers asked to supply images, video clips and audio content which can be handily used in the Web interactive supplemental story information. The 2-3 minute episodes at The San Jose Mercury News show the attractive use of the Soundslides software (Mac or PC). The user forum at soundslides.com gives many other examples of image driven stories.

In conclusion, reading Jay Ruby's paper presented a number of issues relating to expressing an Anthropological Perspective of Human Behavior (APHB) in pictorial form. I learn best by doing. So as I was thinking through the obstacles identified in the paper, I came to understand that the best way forward may be to gather up a number of vivid examples to view and interact with, then to choose the (software and hardware) tools to organize and present the text, images, audio and moving images together in such as way that readers/users can engage the material either passively (press play) or more interactively (navigating through the separate components, sequentially and chronologically or non-linearly). As long as anthropologically contextual meta-data can tag along with each image file, audio segment, video clip, then something anthropological will remain, even if pieces are excerpted from the playback version of the originating author/ethnographer.

In sum, let us call for more and more experiments with pictorially expressing an APHB. Let us seek was to make this integral in grad school assignments/exercises. Let us watch for better and better ways to bring together the Interactive components. And from our journalist cousins let us learn how they produce their more compact pictorial representations on a tight schedule.

I'm the kind of person who likes to look at a book (or paper's) extras: the glossary, bibliography, illustrations/figures, preface and so forth *before* the linear reading. So

after reading Jay's paper, I found myself hungry for a set of terms; maybe a typology of interactive media examples. I've started collecting some at http://anthroview.googlepages.com/visual and most recently have been infatuated by the longform visual essays at http://mediastorm.org/

== Guven Witteveen, anthroview@gmail.com
writing from middle Michigan (USA)