VISUALIZING ANTHROPOLOGY

EDITED BY
ANNA GRIMSHAW
AND AMANDA RAVETZ

'A spectacular
achievement, rife with
significance for scholars
and practitioners across
the humanities, human
sciences, and the arts.'

Visualizing Anthropology

Edited by Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz

Table of Contents

Introduction

Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz

Visualizing Anthropology has its origins in a convergence of interests and series of collaborations that developed at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester. As lecturers at the Centre we had become concerned about the types of visual practice that constituted the contemporary field. We were aware from our own experience of ethnographic research that the visual forms at our disposal (documentary film and, to a lesser degree, stills photography), had begun to feel limiting to the kind of anthropology we wanted to pursue. The recent opening up of a shared ethnographic space, notably between anthropology and art, sharpened our sense that ways of working relevant to us as anthropologists existed beyond our own disciplinary boundaries. We felt that these should not be ignored by a discipline committed to the study of visuality and visual practice.

The Granada Centre was critical in the development of our work. Located between the academy and the much larger world of media production, it offered an unusual space in which to pursue a more radical visual anthropology. Since its foundation in the late 1980s, the Centre has emerged as one of the leading sites for anthropological film-making. Its students have produced an impressive range of documentary films that have established the Centre's distinctive profile. In significant ways, this body of work reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of visual anthropology as it currently stands. It suggests new ways of exploring and representing contemporary ethnographic realities, at the same time, it reveals that work continues to be inhibited by the conventions of textuality. For, although ethnographic film has long been critical to conceptions of the field, those working with moving images have found it difficult to shake off the discursive pressures of the mainstream discipline that have served to limit the emergence of a genuinely visual anthropology. Over the last decade the field of visual anthropology has greatly expanded and diversified, such that ethnographic film is now only a small part of an eclectic range of interests. Nevertheless, there remains a continuing division between, on the one hand, anthropologies of the visual and, on the other, visual practice itself. The challenge, it seemed to us, was to bring these two clusters of interest together so that theory and practice could be more effectively – and creatively – linked.

Experimental collaboration has been at the heart of our project in visual anthropology. This initiative began as a series of ad hoc arrangements, occasionally supplementing core teaching in ethnographic cinema. Increasingly, however, collaborations across existing boundaries of practice emerged as critical to our intellectual agenda as visual anthropologists. The challenge was to find ways of integrating this work into the Granada Centre's existing Masters programme,

given its exclusive focus on ethnographic film-making. Changes in the context of the Centre's operation (increased student numbers, a transformation in the culture of broadcasting, the rise of new technologies) made a reassessment of purpose inevitable. Specifically, we were forced to acknowledge the kind of documentary that was the hallmark of the Centre limited both staff and students. The thirty-minute graduation film, with its origins in a pedagogical approach linked to observational cinema, began to look constraining and formulaic. Although we continued to be committed to observational cinema as instrumental in the shift of ethnographic perspective from a literary to filmic approach, we wanted to work with it in different ways. Understood not as a form of "visualism" (Fabian 1983), but as a certain kind of mimetic practice yielding knowledge through contact (Taussig 1993), we sought to use observational cinema as the basis for an investigation of what Laura Marks (2000) calls "tactile epistemologies".

"Visualizing anthropology", as we characterized our project, was about going beyond the narrow concerns of ocularity to investigate ways of knowing located in the body and in the senses. Our purpose was twofold. First of all, we were interested in extending the scope of ethnographic enquiry such that areas of human experience inadequately rendered through discursive forms might be approached. Secondly, we wanted to interrogate the assumptions of a discursive anthropology from a different epistemological position. The development of projects that bridged discrete areas of specialization was at the heart of our project. Beginning as a special issue of the *Journal of Media Practice*, this book is a report on this work.[1] The *Journal* enabled us to provisionally map our interests, providing a space in which we could present examples of collaboration between anthropologists and a range of visual practitioners. The ground of shared practice was ethnography, conceptualised as " a willingness to look at common sense everyday practices – with extended, critical and self-critical attention, with a curiosity about particularity and a willingness to be decentred in acts of translation" (Clifford 2000: 56).

To propose working across established boundaries of practice is always a risky enterprise. Developing projects across the academic–non-academic divide is even more fraught, since it raises issues of intellectual legitimation. "How can the objects that result from shared work be properly evaluated?" is usually one of the first questions to be asked. How does one decide whether an ethnographic work is art or anthropology – or something else? Although occasionally confusing of disciplinary certainties, these kinds of questions are important and interesting. It is our experience of exploring other fields of enquiry that overlap with academic anthropology as traditionally constituted, does not bring about intellectual collapse – the opening up of a sort of conceptual black hole. Quite the opposite. We have found that working with artists, writers, photographers and film-makers functions not to dull anthropological sensibilities but to sharpen them.

Visual Anthropology

Both editors came to the Granada Centre with experience of working in a range of contexts, including television, the art/public gallery, participatory arts, political and cultural activism. From the outset, we sought to creatively link our earlier practices with established techniques and forms of academic anthropology. Visual anthropology became the field in which we sought to work more expansively with ethnography. In particular, we wanted to approach ethnography not as the exclusive and specialised method of a professional discipline but instead as technique or set of techniques linked to a critical stance toward questions of contemporary culture and society (Marcus and Myers 1995).

Visual anthropology developed as a sub-discipline during the 1970s. It was part of the more general expansion and fragmentation of post-war anthropology as it became established within the universities. The publication of Paul Hockings's book, *Principles of Visual Anthropology* in 1975, marked a significant moment in the consolidation of the field. This edited volume brought together a range of interests and activities that had been taking place at the edges of the academic discipline. From the outset, what constituted the visual in visual anthropology was quite limited. Documentary film was central. The anthropology of art, however, existed as a sub-discipline in its own right, concerning itself with "primitive", tribal or non-western art. Both sub-disciplines were somewhat marginal to the textual preoccupations of mainstream anthropology, at the same time as they internalized its conceptual frameworks.

Until recently, those working in the field of visual anthropology oriented themselves more toward the anthropological part of the equation than the visual. Their intellectual agenda was shaped by the discursive concerns of the academic discipline that served to inhibit the investigation of other kinds of ethnographic experience yielded more effectively through visual techniques and forms. Ironically, what Lucien Taylor has identified as anthropology's "iconophobia" (1996) reverberated through the sub-discipline itself. In particular, ethnographic film-makers were often reluctant to depart from a narrow range of realist conventions in their pursuit of a visual anthropology. The work of Robert Gardner has always been an important exception to the prevailing trend; but the intense controversy that his cinema provokes is a sharp reminder of the disciplinary resistance to the aesthetic possibilities of image-based forms.[2] According to David MacDougall (1998), this situation has led to the production of what he calls, following Ruby, films about anthropology rather than anthropological films. By this he means that visual approaches are placed in the service of textual preoccupations. Drawing a distinction between a film that "merely reports on existing knowledge", and one that seeks to "cover new ground through an integral exploration of the data", MacDougall argues for a genuinely visual anthropology that is not about the "pictorial representation" of anthropology. Instead it is a process of inquiry in which knowledge is not prior but emerges and takes distinctive shape, as he puts it, "through the very grain of the filmmaking" (1998:76).

The emergence of anthropology as pre-eminently "a kind of writing" (Spencer

1989) was built upon an explicit repudiation of earlier, visually based ethnographic techniques and forms. It reflected an important shift of conceptual attention from surface to depth, from visible forms of culture to invisible structures. Visual technologies and methods had been central to the Victorian project as anthropologists sought to record, map and classify native peoples. Initially linked to a paradigm that arranged peoples and cultures in a complex evolutionary schema, visual evidence served as primary data for the construction of ambitious speculative theories about the development of human society.[3] If physical characteristics were the focus of early scientific attention (racial types), visible manifestations of culture (clothing, ritual, material objects) were increasingly the focus of attention during the late 1880s and 1890s. By the end of the nineteenth century, the recording and collecting of visual evidence was linked to salvage anthropology. There was a palpable urgency to the task. Leading figures like A. C. Haddon responded to what he perceived to be the plight of the Torres Strait Islanders by launching an ambitious fieldwork expedition that was built on a central paradox. Haddon's famous team of Cambridge scientists set out to record the customs and practices of native peoples before they died out; but such enterprises to save "primitive man" were also part of the process of his destruction. This paradox was symbolised by the prominent role accorded to the camera in salvage projects. The new visual recording technologies that Haddon and his scientific contemporaries so enthusiastically embraced were deeply implicated in the transformation of that which they sought to preserve.[4]

The visual in Victorian anthropology was pronounced, both at the level of the object and method. Visual evidence was central to speculative history; and, over the course of the nineteenth century, image-based technologies came to play an ever more prominent role in the generation of ethnographic data. For until Haddon's 1898 Torres Straits expedition, anthropologist and fieldworker were entirely separate roles. The grand theorists of human society like Sir James Frazer never ventured from the safety of their Oxbridge studies to experience native life first-hand. Instead they were dependent upon reports compiled by a motley collection of gentlemen travellers, missionaries, and explorers. The camera became a critical ethnographic tool. It promised to deliver greater objectivity and standardisation to the data supplied by untrained amateurs in the field.

Haddon and his contemporaries saw themselves as men of science; and they were committed to using the most advanced instrumentation of the day. However, the real breakthrough of Haddon's expedition was the establishment of fieldwork as central to a new kind of ethnographic enquiry. The fieldworker and theorist became united in the same person. "Going to see for yourself", first-hand experience as the basis for knowledge, became the mantra of modern anthropology. It was Malinowski who later claimed the fieldwork revolution as his own. Despite his own highly idiosyncratic practice, his approach was the foundation for the consolidation of anthropology as a scientific endeavour. The discipline's move into the academy depended on the jealous guarding of its new method. Ethnography became a specialised activity that was the preserve of professionals (Clifford 1988). But it was always less of a method and more of a personal initiation. The

Malinowskian revolution, the shift from an armchair Victorian enterprise to the modern university-based project, involved a rejection of second-hand reporting in favour of direct observation. Seeing came to function as a complex metaphor for knowing; but, at the same time that seeing and knowing were linked in different ways, visual technologies were increasingly marginalized from the new scientific enterprise. The disappearance of the camera was linked to the emergence of the fieldworker's body as a site of transformation. It came to simulate the photographic process itself (Pinney 1992).

The progressive marginalisation of the visual in twentieth-century anthropology – a tendency that encompassed art and material culture as much as photography and cinema – was linked to specific issues in the rise of the academic discipline. In particular, Malinowski and his contemporaries saw themselves as *modern* anthropologists. They were anxious to distance themselves from their Victorian counterparts whose use of visual techniques and forms were associated with racial classification, salvage anthropology, and with the culture of collecting and museum display. Moreover, anthropology presented through visual forms came to be identified with the popular. The professional and scientific credibility of the discipline depended on a rejection of both art and entertainment. Nothing was more threatening to assertions of ethnographic authority than an anthropologist with a camera. Such an image was an uncomfortable reminder of the shaky foundations upon which such claims were made, blurring as it did the lines between anthropologists and their rivals – the journalist, for instance; or worse, the tourist. But we can also interpret the suppression of visual anthropology by an emergent textual discipline as part of the more general denigration of vision within European intellectual culture. In significant ways, modern anthropology manifested the profound anxiety about vision that Jay (1993) has identified as one of the hallmarks of twentieth-century western thought.

Rethinking the visual in visual anthropology

Writing in their Introduction to *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, published some twenty years after the Hockings volume, Banks and Morphy (1997) characterised the contemporary field as extraordinarily diverse and expansive in scope. For within anthropology, as well as more generally across the humanities and social sciences, there has been a significant shift in theoretical ground that is linked to renewed interest and engagement with the visual. Today, intellectuals can no longer remain aloof from the complex visual forms characteristic of twenty-first-century culture. But one of the central questions raised by such phenomena is how to avoid what the art historian Barbara Maria Stafford terms "cultural textology"(1997:6). How can we study contemporary forms of visual culture without translating them into a different conceptual register? Stafford is impatient with the linguistic bias of academic debate that is, as she puts it, built on "the false separation of *how* things are presented from what they express" (Stafford 1997: 3). She argues for a conceptual realignment, one that dislodges the disembodied linearity of linguistically based models of interpretation in favour of approaches that encompass the embodied, the sensory and materially grounded dimensions of

the visual. The task is to transcend the limitations of logocentrism, with its hierarchies of reading and seeing, text and image, mind and body. It requires an acknowledgment of the distinctiveness – indeed the "*intelligence* of sight", as Stafford puts it, and other sense-based ways of knowing (1997:4-6).

Certainly many of the assumptions about the objects and methods of study underpinning the emergence of distinctive modern disciplines have been challenged by the conditions of postmodernity. In the case of anthropology, the belated collapse of scientific ethnography brought about a fundamental rethinking of the ethnographic task itself (Clifford and Marcus 1986). This reflexive moment is often understood as profoundly textual; but it also, ironically, can be understood as marking the end of textuality as anthropology's defining paradigm. Over the last decade or so, the dominance of linguistic, semiotic and textual models of interpretation have begun to give way to more phenomenologically inflected approaches (Jackson 1989) and to forms of "sensuous scholarship" (Stoller 1997). This growing interest in areas of ethnographic experience that lie beyond discursive reach has brought to the fore questions about anthropological technique, forms of knowledge and modes of representation.

Experiments in visual practice

Visualizing anthropology is an experimental project concerned with the possibilities of image-based enquiry. It hinges upon a transformation of theoretical perspective that is effected through changes in ethnographic practice. Using a camera, for example, positions one differently in the world. It serves to radically realign the body such that a different range of questions about experience and knowledge come into view. We believe that anthropologists can go much further, however, in exploring image-based techniques and forms. But this depends, in turn, on the forging of new kinds of collaboration with those working in related fields of fine art, photography, ceramics, video installation etc. To propose such a project is to recognise the renewed engagement with anthropology by contemporary artists and other kinds of visual practitioners. The point of exchange is no longer that of the "primitive", the traditional focus of discussion. Interests now converge in a shared commitment to ethnographic work, one that is predicated on a play of the familiar and the strange, a juxtaposition of perspectives that echoes an earlier "ethnographic surrealism" that James Clifford (1988) explored in his classic essay on the culture of inter-war Paris.

The original collection of essays that comprised the special issue of the *Journal of Media Practice* established the initial contours of our project. We asked authors to write about their projects in a way that resembled fieldwork reports. We were interested not in closely argued theoretical pieces but in detailed accounts that would foreground the process of working as inseparable from what was produced, a process that depends on a recursive movement between practice and reflection. The questions that were raised by this initial publication prompted us to invite a further round of contributions from people who we knew were working in a similar area of intellectual enquiry – artist Pavel Büchler, anthropologist Arnd Schneider

and artist-ethnographer Roanna Heller. Their contributions, published here for the first time, serve to extend and to focus some of the general questions raised in the original issue of the *Journal*.

The themes that emerged from the special issue continue to shape this book. A number of the chapters bear a strong imprint of visual anthropology as taught at Manchester University's Granada Centre. Margaret Loescher, Julie Moggan, Amanda Ravetz and Rachel Robertson are all graduates of the Centre. Each of these authors entered the field of visual anthropology through a first-hand engagement with the techniques of observational cinema – a pedagogic approach that Grimshaw developed during her twelve years as a teacher in Manchester and one that she discusses in the introductory chapter to the book's first part. Here Grimshaw offers a critical appraisal of observational cinema, arguing for its unique capacity to reorient perspective and to render a distinctive texture of ethnographic experience. Her re-evaluation of the genre depends on an important shift of theoretical ground away from semiotic to more phenomenologically inflected perspectives. This movement is about reinscribing the body and the senses into ethnographic practice. It is crucial to *visualizing anthropology*.

Moggan's and Robertson's chapters deal with their respective experiences of bringing to bear, in a broadcast context, an anthropological sensibility forged in the space of observational cinema. Moggan's detailed report on two different kinds of image-based practice, one founded in the values of observational cinema, the other in broadcast production, reveals some of the assumptions that underpin each. Observational cinema assumes the possibility that film-maker and subject exist in a shared physical and imaginative space, one that encompasses but is not necessarily synonymous with the events that are filmed. In such a context the withholding and giving of permission is an ongoing two-way process. The telling of a coherent story depends on filming significant moments at the point of their emergence from the 'intersubjective' space between film-maker and subject. By contrast, one key assumption underlying broadcast production values is the belief that stories exist *outside* subjects. A story does not grow from within the spaces of intersubjective exchange. Instead, it is constructed by the film-maker from separate 'takes', each of which must be obtained and fitted in place. For Moggan this second approach raises serious ethical questions about the use and abuse of power, particularly in the context of films made with people whose voices carry little or no weight. But Moggan is not advocating an observational cinematic approach in any simplistic way. She recognises the need to find other ways to evoke certain subjects, for example, historical events or subjective experience such as memories and dreams. The conflict between the values of observational cinema and those of broadcast production context prompt Moggan to reflect on the lack of training she received in any experimental image-based alternatives to observational cinema. She suggests a lack of openness towards such alternatives on the part of visual anthropologists and broadcasters alike.

The essay by Robertson resonates strongly with Moggan's piece. Here, too, the author exposes the substantial differences between the production contexts,

university and broadcast, that are elided in apparent similarities of film-making approach. For Robertson such differences can best be understood by examining the "fieldwork" methods of ethnographic film-makers and television programme-makers. Working initially as an anthropologist, she found that getting to know the people who were also the subjects of her film was a transformative experience. Her changing relationship towards her subjects over the intensive period of filming formed the basis for her film, *Ecotrip*. Later, as part of the television production teams that made the docu-soap, *Liverpool Mums* and the documentary series, *Everyman*, Robertson discovered that the use of ethnographic techniques to identify and empathise with subjects and to obtain actuality footage was focused towards different ends.

In the case of the docu-soap, the footage was to be 'good value'. It should sustain narrative interest by using engaging characters who could be relied upon to deliver action week upon week. In the case of *Everyman,* observational techniques more closely resembled those used by ethnographic film-makers. They were used to achieve and communicate a sense of intimacy with the subject, illuminating their innermost convictions and beliefs. However, once the observational material was gathered, the relationship between subject and film-makers changed. The next task was to obtain additional footage such as interviews or archival film. This was used not to further the subject's ownership of their story, rather it served to express the programme-makers' underlying agenda. The relationship of an observational approach to actuality footage, Robertson suggests, is like that of process to text. If the first, like experience itself, is risky, unpredictable and potentially transforming, the second involves distance and a smoothing out of uneven texture in the pursuit of an exposition that is, from the programme makers point of view, reliable and safe.

Together Moggan's and Robertson's pieces allow us to interrogate some of the assumptions of anthropology as a discursive enquiry. Both essays bring into focus observational cinema as an exploratory, intersubjective encounter, its techniques foregrounding the relational aspects of film-making. Filmic accounts constructed around processes – whether processes of getting to know other people, of being in a particular place or of going through a period of change – unfold over time. The knowledge such films yield is thus necessarily embedded in the film's texture and timing – the way someone moves, the moment at which someone chooses to speak. This embeddedness of knowledge alludes to kinds of human experience that lie on the margins of textual anthropology. For, although film can be treated like text as Robertson's piece makes clear, its mimetic properties, its forging from what are essentially 'found' materials, make possible not only an expository style but another more tactile and temporal evocation of visual and auditory processes.

From the outset, film-makers who work observationally are forced to confront issues about participation and power. One common misapprehension is the techniques associated with this approach are necessarily distancing, making participant observation a contradictory idea. But, as Grimshaw suggests in her chapter, observational cinema demands that film-makers forge a place within the

process and the action from which to communicate. Such a place can only be founded through relationships understood as process, involving the constant negotiation, the giving and withholding of permission and trust. Thus the difference between text and process that Robertson identifies, hinges, as Moggan notes, on the balance of power film-makers manage to achieve with those whom they film. This balance is embedded in the very fabric of any observational piece, providing its emotional undertow. It is for this reason that Robertson's director at *Everyman* was so keen to disguise the lack of intimacy between herself and the subject of her documentary, James Mawdsley.

Observational cinema provided the initial premise for work carried out at the Granada Centre. Although predicated on a certain kind of complicity forged within the filming process, it remained an important point of reference in situations where establishing agreement between research subjects was more elusive and problematic. Thus in Margaret Loescher's work at an adventure playground in Hulme, Manchester, it is arguably the gaps between the ideal of intimacy that observational cinema seeks to foster and the children's "acting up" that leads the film-maker to a new understanding of the possibilities of documentary film-making itself. At first confused by the children's performances for the camera, Loescher later gives out disposable stills cameras to her subjects; and she comes to see that what she thought of as children's diversionary tactics in the face of her research are precisely the subject of the research itself. The children's shifting ways of exploring space by engaging with imaginary audiences, visual technologies and herself-as-camera are their way of identifying with and asserting their place in a media-infused environment. Here problems about the balance of power between anthropologist and subjects, adult and child, and the appropriate means of communicative expression, are mediated by allowing the children to become photographers. It is through their choice of subject, their framing and use of the finished photographs that Loescher finally grasps that they are not performing for or playing up to the camera but they are, rather, performing and playing *with* visual media. The editing of the film becomes an analogous kind of play, a matter of endlessly reconstructing the world. It is as the film-maker and children negotiate the borderlands between the truth and lies of their encounters that Loescher comes to reflexively grasp the fine balance between honesty and dishonesty in her own documentary practice.

The essays by Moggan, Grimshaw, Robertson and Loescher, with their origins in work pursued at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, reveal the unsettling quality of image-based ethnography. Far from serving as a passive illustration of anthropological arguments articulated through textual forms, the projects discussed underline the interrogatory potential of working with visual technologies. But if the first part of the book constitutes an argument for the continuing significance of observational cinema, the second part reveals that it remains only one approach among many others open to anthropological film-makers. Certainly it cannot be considered the 'right' way for visual anthropologists to work. Indeed, as Ravetz's essay reveals, the failure of her observational approach in one context raised difficult questions about assumptions built into ethnographic work.

Ravetz discusses the experience of filming in two different situations, on a farm and on a housing estate. On the farm the observational approach functions as an analogous way of seeing and working to the farmers' own ways of inhabiting the landscape, where knowledge is situated and work is rooted in close observation of animals and land. She links her film-making techniques to her earlier training as an artist where learning to be visually engaged with the world is also founded in observation. On the housing estate however, there is a different imaginative understanding of social relations and place that demand other techniques of ethnographic representation. The values discussed variously by Grimshaw, Moggan and Robertson are not shared by the young women of the housing estate. Drawing on art's imaginative capacities, Ravetz suggests that similarly imaginative techniques are required if anthropologists are to explore and represent other social realities. She argues for a more experimental and self-consciously *visual* anthropology, proposing greater movement between art and anthropology as the starting point for such a project.

If Ravetz establishes the ground for bringing together the perspectives of fine art and anthropology, the contributions of Owen and Burrows may be considered forms of visual ethnography that originate in art rather than in anthropological practice. Owen's photoessay, *Give Me A Call*, comes out of a postgraduate research methods course taught at the University of Manchester. By inviting Owen to work alongside her, Grimshaw wanted to explore the three-dimensionality of anthropology and to orient students toward the notion of fieldwork as about techniques of material practice. Conceiving of fieldwork in this way strongly resonated with Owen's artistic work rooted in ceramics and dependent upon a highly developed tactile or haptic sensibility. At Owen's suggestion, the course was organised around the theme of the telephone – at once an everyday object and a complex mediating technology that has transformed contemporary fieldwork practice. In the first teaching session, students were required to work in small groups to make a telephone in an hour, using materials that cost no more than a pound. This exercise established the agenda for the course – namely ethnography as about the process of working with found materials and the fashioning of particular kinds of objects. Students were encouraged to explore the overlaps between ethnographic and artistic practice. For anthropologists, like many artists, work with everyday materials that they shape and render meaningful by placing them within certain social and institutional contexts.

The piece of work Owen created gives expression to conflicts that this collaboration between art and anthropology generated. Students became sharply divided. Some strongly resisted attempts to persuade them to work from the perspective of bodily practice (technique), rather than from instruction (method). In particular, there was an acute anxiety about knowledge. What was legitimate knowledge? What kinds of objects were legitimated as appropriate forms for the communication of anthropological understandings – and why? Why were certain kinds of representational forms acceptable and others not? What were the criteria for evaluating different kinds of research objects? What was anthropology and what was, as a number of students impatiently put it, "just art"?

Give Me A Call develops around juxtapositions that bring together an image of the artist's father with different sorts of text. Over the course of the piece the image of Owen's father begins to fade. The process of his dying is mirrored in a collapse of textual coherence; but this movement, from legibility to illegibility, runs counter to the process of textualization that constitutes the making and legitimizing of anthropological knowledge. In her piece, Owen draws attention to the play of three and two-dimensionality, rendering visible tensions inherent in ethnographic knowledge between the sensory and discursive. If this tension became manifest in the teaching context as one that divided art from anthropology, the resistance provoked by the collaboration was suggestive of an unresolved conflict within the anthropological project itself about its artfulness. For, as Büchler's work convincingly reveals, the stabilisation and containment of meaning in discourse and in anthropological texts denies change/process (and so death). But in being forced out, death returns in threatening posture.

What effect does the site itself have on the understanding of the object/objects presented? Is there any scope for anthropologists to work creatively with non-traditional spaces (spaces beyond the seminar room or museum gallery)? Or can anthropology only be produced in the space of the academy and within particular kinds of texts? Burrow's account of the making of her video installation, *The Times of Our Lives,* is a reminder of anthropologists' reluctance to explore the limits of existing disciplinary conventions. Even in the area of visual anthropology, film-makers tend to make pieces for conventional screening; or, they work with museums to present knowledge through particular arrangements of textually situated objects. Following the example of Burrows we might ask what would be involved in putting anthropology in different spaces – for example, in an art gallery conceived as an ethnographic site in its own right? Would the work still be recognized as "anthropology" – or would it be judged to be something else?

Schneider reports upon the preparations and shooting of a feature film, *El Camino,* in the town of Alumine and a neighbouring indigenous Mapuche reservation in Patagonia, Argentina. What, he asks, are the politics and ethics of representation involved in the production of a work whose director promises historical and locational specificity but which depends upon a gamut of distancing techniques such as repeated takes, the creation of 'film-time' and the large-scale importation of visual technologies? By weaving together three narratives – that of the film crew, the townspeople and the Mapuche – Schneider reveals that, despite the director's expressed aim to convey a message of cultural resistance, the production nevertheless constitutes a repeat of the historically 'loaded encounter between victors and vanquished'. Certainly his account leads one to wonder how an anthropological film-maker might have done things differently. Jean Rouch immediately springs to mind with his improvised narratives created in collaboration with his African friends that dissolve the boundaries between fiction and reality, fantasy and truth, acting and real life. But beyond this there are a number of interesting reflexive questions. If we follow Scheider's suggestion that the world of feature film-making, as an 'art world' (Becker 1982), can be studied ethnographically, what role can the anthropologist play, given that s/he has already

been scripted or conscripted? For the intriguing question raised by this essay is the doubling that occurs on the film location. Schneider, the anthropologist, is present, while his counterpart in the script is absent.

Collaboration is at heart of the book's middle section. Schneider's essay raises the pertinent question about what is required in genuinely collaborative projects. For, as his account of the making of *El Camino* suggests, there is always a danger that attempts to dissolve social, institutional or political divisions only serve to reinforce them. Participants in shared enterprises have to be willing to let go of conventional ways of working, surrendering themselves to a process of exploration and discovery in which the outcomes are far from certain. What is produced when one engages in work across conventional boundaries of practice? Addressing this issue in the final section of *Visualizing Anthropology* necessitates a reflexive move. It forces us to examine how anthropology as a discipline constitutes itself through the *objects* that it produces and legitimates. Given the authority accorded to text, experimental collaboration always brings up the problem of "residues". And what begins as a project of documentation becomes something else – a question of performance.

Writing about her return to the boarding school of her youth, a journey witnessed by and with a film-maker, Okely's account brings to the fore the problem about how we know, or are able to identify, something as a piece of anthropology rather than some other kind of object. How does a piece of text, a material object, a visual form or a conversation perform the identity of anthropology (or art)? Okely's stated anthropological intention, to look at the social reproduction of English colonisers, turns out to be far from straightforward. By treating herself as subject and object, blurring her subjective and professional selves, and moving seamlessly between reported performance and performed analysis, it becomes unclear what might be the anthropological object – and what is not. It leads one to wonder how the text, with its particular sensibility (a sensibility underlined by the disciplinary location, knowledge and status of the author), performs the identity of anthropology. Alternatively, given an excess of subjectivity in the piece and its cathartic aesthetic, is it more accurate to think of it as an example of performance art? If so can it also be anthropology, with performance privileged over text?

The production of certain kinds of objects as crucial to disciplinary definitions of art and anthropology is at the core of Heller's work. Using a mixture of academic text-based methods and research-by-practice techniques, she seeks to render visible the multi-layered nature of the research process and the myriad possibilities inherent within it. By allowing the twists and turns of research activity to be manifest in a variety of media and forms (writing, photographs, artist-led workshops, installations), the conflicts over form, that are usually smoothed over in academic "writing up", are accorded heightened significance. Treated separately, the photographs, the installations and the workshops all sit comfortably within the category "art"; but Heller's constant movement across academic divisions and beyond, her weaving together of different strands of ethnographic activity, undermines any such simple categorization. Tracking between disciplines, methods, and forms in her attempt to chart people's engagement with cities,

Heller creates a parallel circuit animated by relationships between collaborations, objects and residues. For each decision to collaborate within one disciplinary community or another, to choose to work with certain materials or forms, to make one object rather than another, becomes a struggle over the direction and reception of the research. As one set of possibilities opens up, others may close down.

The chapters by Okely and Heller challenge the notion of stable forms, suggesting that we begin to think of disciplinary identities and objects *in performance*. Knudsen's meditation on creativity goes further; and he attacks the posture of "standing outside of" that the term "object" has come to imply. Siding with experience over meaning (or process over text), Knudsen proposes the replacement of the conventional subject/object dichotomy by a more intimate, less bounded relationship of self to world. The elusive character of the experiencing and making Self is approached not "rationally-objectively" by Knudsen. Instead he begins his essay with a number of aphoristic statements that evoke a film practice that embraces action and reflection, subject and object, as part of the same poetic moment. The privileging of the relationship between self and creation over that of the social knowing self is certainly challenging for anthropology. It brings to mind the work of film-maker and ethnographer, Maya Deren – and the audacity of her claim to be doing anthropology *as an artist*.

The last chapter, *Making Nothing Happen* by the artist Pavel Büchler, originated as a seminar paper in a series organised by Ravetz at the Department of Social Anthropology in Manchester. Intended as an exploration of the terrain between anthropology and the broader field of visual-based practice, the series produced a lively, though sometimes perplexed reaction from an audience that primarily consisted of academic anthropologists and students. The response of this audience to Deren's suggestion – that anthropology might be done as art – was reflected in the occasional rhetorical question: "[but] what's the point?" This question expressed a legitimate concern. Professional anthropologists needed to know what was the relevance of contemporary visual practice to anthropology. Büchler's work is critical here. For it addresses "the point" of such practice; and, by extension, it may help clarify the anthropological issues at stake in any attempt to explore the shared ground between art and anthropology. Certainly Büchler reminds us that the differences may be more profound than we first thought. Indeed he significantly shifts the terms of the debate. He is not concerned with questions about the production of objects. He proposes a radically different conception of the artist that hinges precisely on the opposite, on making nothing happen.

Outlining the relationship between contemporary western art and society (a culturally specific case as he acknowledges), Büchler argues that artists are given the freedom for imaginative speculation. In exchange, however, they relinquish the right to any real social and political effect. While this artistic licence is of benefit to the artist, society also gains, since through this freedom, the artist celebrates society's liberalism whilst at the same time excusing its shortcomings. For the reasons that Büchler outlines, artworks have become increasingly independent of either physical form or visual content. Artists are no longer identifiable through

what in the past marked their practice out – the production of an object. Now only artistic intention remains as a means of identifying either the artist or the artwork.

Büchler's work can be taken on one level as an exploration of the ways in which the reduction of the visual in visual practice together with 'artistic license', make possible a particular kind of sensitivity to what is overlooked. For example in the piece, *Short Stories*, pencil ends discarded in libraries are collected and bundled into stubby, colourful groups; their halved presences invite speculation about their missing parts and the academic labour that has dispensed with them or promoted for them some other existence. This does not look like anthropology. But in another way it does. The commitment to what cannot be easily seen but which nevertheless needs to be looked at is common to both anthropology and art. If, as Büchler suggests, the ability of the artist to carry out this work depends upon a certain kind of freedom from direct effect (which is also a kind of restraint), anthropologists, conversely, in their role as effective social agents, overlook much of what happens in the world despite their purported claims to see what others do not.

The ability on the part of artists to give up much of what marks their practice as different, not only without losing the point but in order to make it, contains perhaps an important lesson for anthropology. For, although we believe that it *does* matter that something can be understood as anthropology, our intention in this book has been to argue that the anthropological identity of what anthropologists do should not be an end in itself. Artists show us that making something work as art is not necessarily the same as conforming to disciplinary expectations. How something works – whether as art or anthropology, or something else – is perhaps a more fruitful avenue of enquiry than asking "is it anthropology or is it art?" The disappearance of the object in contemporary art and the emphasis on perceptually charged interventions that Büchler describes becomes then an interesting challenge for anthropology. Is it possible to imagine a new kind of anthropology that encompasses the notion that what is not made, what does not happen, is sometimes the point?

Conclusion

The individual essays presented here offer a range of perspectives on anthropology and visual practice. Beginning as a series of loosely connected reflections, *Visualizing Anthropology* has evolved into a book that charts a particular intellectual journey. Our conversations with contributors, the process of editing and ordering the different pieces have served to change and clarify the original ideas with which we launched this project. By way of a conclusion we want to briefly review the intellectual journey that began with the *Journal of Media Practice* because the point where we now leave this project is quite different from where we originally imagined we were heading. At the outset our aim as visual anthropologists was to experiment more boldly with the visual. To this end, we sought to extend our ethnographic work by forging links with a broader field of image-based practice. This represented an important step in the investigation of what might constitute a non-discursive anthropology; and it was made in the

context of an institutional bias against forms of research that fell outside the established textual categories.[5] But as the project unfolded, our understanding of the visual underwent a significant change.

Our interest in what we have called 'image-based practice' started with a commitment to observational cinema. The first part of the book deals in some detail with what it means to work with this kind of film-making approach. While the simple fact of using an image-based medium might arguably lead to an interest in other visual techniques and theories of visuality, we are aware that how we worked at the Granada Centre oriented us as ethnographers in very distinctive ways. Herb di Gioia, in talking about his film *Peter Murray*, draws an analogy between the making of the chair and the making of the film. The idea that the form of an object is contained within the material from which it is fashioned is linked to a certain attitude about the visible world. It involves the recognition that *making* is a process that involves the illumination of things that are not available to vision alone. To work with observational cinema, as we discovered, brings one into intense engagement with the senses, not simply as questions of perception but as a challenge to vision as a narrowly ocular strategy for knowing the world.

If observational cinema involves the making of a certain kind of representational object, one that is not a surface copy of the original world but a new form revealed through its shapes and textures, then what might be produced through other kinds of visual practice? Addressing this question led us to explore creative possibilities emanating from the shared ethnographic ground of art and anthropology. But despite significant points of convergence, our explorations in this field yielded divergent rather than shared understanding. We discovered that approaching ethnography as an artist, for example, involves quite different assumptions about the making and presenting of knowledge. Admitting this difference, however, is critical to the movement of our project beyond a narrow conception of the visual and a concern with making. The conceptual turn in contemporary art dissolved the conventional art object, making way for a fundamental reorganisation of perspective on the world. Perhaps it is only by making an analogous move that visual anthropology can properly constitute itself as a radical form of ethnographic enquiry.

Notes

1. Volume 3 numbers 1 and 2, 2002-2003.

2. Much of this debate focused around his 1992 film, *Forest of Bliss*. For an excellent discussion of Gardner's cinema, see Barbash 2001.

3. See Edwards, 1992a, 1992b.

4. Kuklick 1991 and Herle and Rouse 1998.

5. The Research Assessment Exercise ranks only textual forms – books, articles, papers etc. Visual outputs are not recognised as legitimate categories for evaluation.

References

Banks, M. and Morphy, H. eds., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Barbash, I., "Out of Words: The Aesthesodic Cine-Eye of Robert Gardner," *Visual Anthropology* vol.14, no. 4 (2001), 369–413.

Becker, H., *Art Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Clifford, J., An Ethnographer in the Field," in A. Coles ed. *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000, 52–71.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G., eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Edwards, E., "Photographic 'Types': The Pursuit of Method." *Visual Anthropology* 3, 1992a, 235–258.

Edwards, E. ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992b.

Fabian, J., *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Ginsburg, F., Abu-Lughod, L., Larkin, B. eds. *Media Worlds: Anthropology On New Terrain*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002.

Herle, A. and Rouse, S. eds., *Cambridge and the Torres Strait: Centenary Essays on the 1898 Anthropological Expedition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Hockings, P. ed., *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton, 1975.

Jackson, M., *Paths Toward A Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Kuklick, H., *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

MacDougall, D., "The Visual In Anthropology," in M. Banks and H. Morphy, eds., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, 1997 276–295.

Marcus, G. and Myers, F. eds., *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1995.

Marks, L., *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000.

Pinney, C., "The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography", in E. Edwards ed. *Anthropology and Photography*, Yale UP, 1992, 74–95.

Russell, C., *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.

Spencer, J., "Anthropology as a kind of writing", *Man* n.s. 24, 1989.

Stafford, B., *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images*, Cambridge, Mass and London: The MIT Press, 1997.

Stoller, P., *Sensuous Scholarship*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

Taussig, M., *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Taylor, L., "Iconophobia: How Anthropology Lost it At The Movies", *Transition* 69, 1996, 64–88.

Anna Grimshaw studied Anthropology at Cambridge. She published a personal memoir of her doctoral fieldwork, *Servants of the Buddha* (1992); and recently completed a book about anthropology and cinema, *The Ethnographer's Eye* (2001). She is Associate Professor of Visual Culture, Emory University, USA.

Eyeing the Field:
New Horizons for Visual Anthropology

Anna Grimshaw

Introduction

Nanook of the North, Flaherty's 1922 documentary of Inuit society, is widely cited as a classic example of anthropological film-making. For many commentators it symbolises both the strengths and weaknesses of ethnographic film. The humanism of the work, the acknowledged, collaborative relationship between director and subject, and Flaherty's commitment to long-term immersion in native life as the precondition for its representation, are recognised as unique features which have endured over the years. At the same time, *Nanook of the North* is seen as a film that is deeply flawed and ethically problematic. Indeed the accusations concerning Flaherty's manipulations (his staging of events and re-enactment of long abandoned practices) and his simplistic vision of native society, haunt the documentary project even today.[1]

Some eighty years after Flaherty launched a distinctive kind of ethnographic documentary with his film *Nanook of the North*, this essay takes as its focus a contemporary site of anthropological film-making. Although the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology has produced a substantial body of work during the ten years of its existence, it has done so in a continuing climate of confusion over the status of anthropological documentary. On the whole anthropologists are sceptical as to the *anthropological* value of working with visual media, while film-makers are dubious about the *filmic* value of anthropological documentary. If, in the case of the former, visual anthropology conjures up the spectre of popularisation, for the latter it often suggests spurious science or a concern with the exotic. One of the purposes of this essay is to clarify these areas of confusion. What kind of contemporary synthesis is achieved between two areas of practice, film-making and the ethnographic? This question, in turn, raises issues about the nature of a genuinely *visual* anthropology. Conceived not as a "pictorial" version of a more theoretically rigorous anthropology but a wide-ranging inquiry into the nature of

the ethnographic task itself, we must also ask how such a project might be extended by means of its location within a broader field of visual practice.

I begin this essay with an account of the Granada Centre's origins, highlighting its unusual location with respect to broadcast media, the discipline of anthropology and the tradition of ethnographic cinema. Central to the development of its profile has been the work of its students. But, from the outset, teaching has presented a very particular challenge. What is an anthropological way of seeing? How does one foster it? Is it possible to avoid borrowing here and there from handbooks of film-making and instead develop techniques animated by anthropological sensibilities? These are some of the problems that are posed if one is seeking to develop a visual anthropology anchored in practice. For the students who come to the Granada Centre have been schooled in the conventions of a discursive discipline that organises the ethnographic encounter in a certain manner. In taking up this issue in the second part of the essay, I examine what is involved in dislodging textual habits, effecting the shift from what David MacDougall calls a "word-sentence" to an "image-sequence" approach (1997:291). Critical to such a reorientation of perspective are the techniques of observational cinema. These techniques may render different kinds of ethnographic knowledge from the kinds that are articulated through the framework of a discursive anthropology. Working with observational cinema as the basis of teaching practice is not, however, a straightforward matter. As a particular film-making approach, it has long been the source of controversy and a particular focus of debate about the nature and status of ethnographic film (Bruzzi 2000; Loizos 1997; MacDougall 1998).

Over the years, I have become increasingly impatient with the established discourse that surrounds observational cinema; and, using my own film-making and teaching experiences as the basis of critical reflection, I have sought to develop a new perspective toward the genre. The third part of the essay is an attempt to address these concerns in the light of new work in anthropology and film studies that is concerned with questions of mimesis and epistemologies of the senses. Drawing on the writing of Taussig (1993) and Marks (2000), I seek to make a case for observational cinema as a distinctive *contemporary* form of ethnographic enquiry. Important to my argument is clarifying the distinction between what I call observational cinema proper and its rival versions, reality television for example.

This essay makes a case for the anthropological and filmic significance of work produced at the Granada Centre. But, despite popular misconception, this work is neither about the exotic nor is it about the documentation of disappearing worlds. Contemporary anthropological film-making also makes no claims for science and objectivity. Instead it is distinguished by a very particular sensibility anchored in experiential knowledge. A fuller understanding of how the techniques of observational cinema are expressive of such an ethnographic sensibility is important in imagining a bolder, and more experimental image-based anthropology. For too long, visual anthropology has been marginalised and bracketed off as an area of specialist academic interest. Its vitality as a field of intellectual enquiry greatly depends upon the forging of links across existing

disciplinary boundaries – but, crucially, it also depends upon a much more serious and sustained engagement with related areas of visual practice. The Granada Centre's potential as a site for a genuinely visual anthropology has yet to be fully realised; but it is the strength of the work produced over the last decade that has laid the foundations for the pursuit of a more radical and innovative ethnographic enterprise.

1. The Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology

The Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology was founded in 1989. I joined two years later, in 1991; and, during the last ten years, I have seen the Centre develop a distinctive profile within both the fields of anthropology and documentary film. It is only one of a handful of places where students have an opportunity to extend their anthropological interests by means of experimentation with visual techniques and technologies. The primary focus of the Centre's operations is its fifteen-month Masters programme that trains anthropology graduates in documentary film-making techniques. Despite its television connection, the Granada Centre has never been oriented toward the media industry; rather it has fostered the development of independent film-makers. Graduates of the Centre are multi-skilled. They are able to research and develop their own film projects, assuming responsibility for all aspects of the production from camera and sound recording to editing.[2]

The origins of the Granada Centre lie in the British television series, *Disappearing World*. In 1971, the anthropologist, Brian Moser, moved by the plight of native peoples in South America, persuaded Granada Television to launch a series of documentaries that would bring issues about modernization and cultural change to the attention of a general audience. *Disappearing World* represented a significant extension of the Reithian tradition of public service broadcasting. It was serious documentary, committed to informing and educating, and addressing conceptions of citizenship by extending its television audience's knowledge of cross-cultural difference.[3]

The early films were animated by a salvage paradigm. Later programme-makers, however, moved away from this initial stance and were increasingly interested in documenting the resilience of societies in conditions of change. *Disappearing World* was what might be termed "anthropology on television". It involved an awkward synthesis of academic concerns and television conventions. The different programmes originated in the research interests of consulting anthropologists, rather than being "found" in the field. This meant that, on the whole, the film materials were collected and organised around traditional anthropological themes (kinship, economy, politics, ritual) – that is, they were mobilised in support of previously articulated arguments instead of being generated from the circumstances and relationships of particular ethnographic encounters. In this way, *Disappearing World* was anthropological in its theoretical paradigm rather than in its techniques for documenting social life.

The Granada Centre was a somewhat belated product of the fortuitous television climate in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. By 1989 *Disappearing World* had itself largely disappeared, relegated to an occasional slot on late-night television. But while the Centre's foundations owed much to an opportune moment in broadcast television, its emergence was also a reflection of the growing prominence of visual anthropology within the academy. The use of film and photography as integral to fieldwork-based research had already become established in certain pockets of the discipline, especially in the United States. Here Margaret Mead had made herself an important champion; but her advocacy of visual techniques raised its own difficulties given her own problematic status as a populariser within professional anthropology. Moreover, her notion of film and photography in the service of science and salvage anthropology were increasingly out of touch with changes in the discipline's intellectual orientation.[4] It was the publication of Paul Hockings's edited collection, *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (1975) that marked an important moment in the consolidation of the subdiscipline. The book also served to underline the centrality of documentary film-making (and to a lesser extent, photography) to definitions of visual anthropology as a field. Hockings brought together not just those film-makers working with Mead's legacy (especially Karl Heider, Jay Ruby, Timothy Asch, Robert Gardner); but other leading figures, most notably Jean Rouch and David and Judith MacDougall, who were pursuing a very different kind of visual anthropology from that taking shape within American anthropology.

Based at the Musee de L'Homme in Paris, Jean Rouch had since the 1950s been developing a highly distinctive anthropological cinema built around his notion of the cine-transe. At its centre was an active, embodied camera. It served as a transformative agent such that the film-maker embarked with his subjects and audience on a sort of shamanistic journey. For Rouch, cinema was a magical space. Here he believed that it was possible to encounter new kinds of human connection and knowledge. Rouch's most innovative films, beginning with *Les Maitres Fous* (1954), came out of the unusual conditions of West Africa as the former colonial territories approached independence. Like his African subjects, Rouch was pushing against existing limitations in order to realise his new idea for cinema. He was pioneering what he idiosyncratically called "science fiction", a series of films that represent a sustained interrogation of established categories of reality and fiction. His classic work of this period (including *Jaguar*, *Moi, Un Noir* and *Chronique d'un ete*) anticipated many of the innovations of the French New Wave. It was marked by an enormous energy emanating from his overthrow not just of many of the conventions of cinema but of anthropology too – in particular, the commitment to science, to the "primitive", to the separation and hierarchy of ethnographer and subjects (Feld 2003; Grimshaw 2001).

A decade after Rouch's most innovative work, David and Judith MacDougall began to define a different course for anthropological film. At first it was known as "observational" cinema, later developing into "participatory cinema" with much greater emphasis placed on the process of film-making as involving the mediation of relationships and social knowledge. Unlike Rouch's audacious camera, the work

of the MacDougalls was anchored in the notion of "respect" for their subjects and their place in the world. From their early East African work like *To Live With Herds* (1971) to their later *Turkana Conversations* (1976-77), their films were painstakingly built from the amassing of small detail, sifted and organised such that they coalesced into distinctive patterns, textures and rhythms.[5] The MacDougalls shared with Rouch a commitment to embodied technology (the use of minimal handheld equipment) and to the development of close relationships with subjects through a long-term immersion in field work situations. The resulting films, however, could not be more different. If Rouch's work is characterised by a rough, improvised and exuberant quality, that of the MacDougalls is characterised by its quiet, minutely observed detail and structural elegance. The contrast reflects fundamentally different conceptions of anthropological cinema. One grows out of an interest in the imaginative as a transformative agent in social life, while the other is rooted in a phenomenologically oriented exploration of lived experience.

During the 1960s and 1970s much of the work of American anthropological film-makers was driven by scientistic concerns. Asch and Chagnon's, *The Ax Fight*, perhaps most starkly exemplified the notion of film in the service of documentation and explanation (Winston 1995). Rouch and the MacDougalls, however, claimed Flaherty as their totemic ancestor for his commitment to empathic connection as the central principle of anthropological film. In important ways *Disappearing World*, the television series in which the Granada Centre's origins are to be found, attempted to fuse these different impulses, explanation and empathy, at the same time as its film-makers struggled to work within the conventions of television programme-making. Despite significant changes within anthropology's theoretical paradigm, in particular the abandonment of its pretense to be a science, the tension between explanation and experience, observation and participation continues to be a source of anxiety within ethnographically grounded work.

2. Observational cinema
From its inception the Granada Centre has shared with other sites of visual anthropology a primary concern with documentary film-making. But despite this established focus to the subdiscipline, the training of anthropologists in film-making techniques has remained a somewhat ad hoc, idiosyncratic process. This presented an interesting challenge to me as a teacher. What is involved in fostering an anthropological way of seeing? How might visual techniques emerge from developed ethnographic perspectives toward social realities, rather than being borrowed and adapted from handbooks of documentary film? In reflecting on these problems, I decided to try and develop a teaching approach that was anchored in anthropology's central tenet – the commitment to situated or experiential knowledge. Hence, in acknowledging the centrality of anthropology to film-making practice, I was not driven by the notion of some kind of cultural expertise informing technique. Instead I wanted to work filmically with a certain way of exploring the world embodied in fieldwork.[6]

The techniques I developed as a teacher at the Granada Centre owed much to my own training at the National Film and Television School in the early 1990s. Here Colin Young and Herb Di Gioia had pioneered a distinctive approach toward documentary film-making. It was known as "observational cinema", a term circulating among a variety of film-makers during the 1970s including the MacDougalls. Although there were significant differences in the context in which its techniques were used, practitioners of observational cinema shared a certain philosophical and ethical outlook. According to Young, the term "observation" indicated a particular stance toward life, one characterised by humility and expressive of a fundamental respect for subjects in the world. It involved the humanisation of the film-making process and, as such, an inversion of many of its conventions. For example, there was an abdication of the established role of director. The "mandate" for the film, as Young put it (1975:68), was expected to come from its subjects – or, at the very least, there was to be a synergy of interest between film-makers and subjects. Film-makers now followed action, rather than initiating or directing it. In particular, interviews were eschewed in favour of a new sensitivity to context and to different, non-verbal ways by which social meaning was communicated. Recording technology was kept to a minimum, operated by film-makers as an extension of their bodies. There was also a commitment to authenticity, conceptualised as faithfulness to the filming experience. Editing was the process of distilling this experience. Hence it was to be carried out by those present during the shooting of the film. The camera and sound recordist were considered to be ethically bound to their subjects through the relationships forged within the space of the film; and the footage generated from within this space was understood to express the dynamics of a particular intersubjective encounter. The film was to be shaped from a position within this encounter, rather than from a place external to it through the use of a conventional editor.

An important model for those committed to working observationally was Di Gioia and Hancock's film, *Peter Murray*. Taking as its focus the skilled practice of Peter Murray, a chairmaker in Vermont, the film is at once a meditation on his art of woodworking and on the process of film-making itself. This work represented a key moment for Di Gioia himself in understanding the essence of his own approach. Describing Peter Murray's practice, Di Gioia says: "[he's] not trying to let the chair be this or that, but to sort of release what is inside of the chair. It is a sort of Eskimo attitude toward making things. It is already in the chair – I just have to find it, I have to release it – or rather it is already in the wood. And in a way I thought the same about film editing especially – that it is there in the material. I have to look at the material, understand the material, see what's there and sort of find a way to release it from the rushes, from the material itself; rather than trying to force it to be this or force it to be that."[7]

From the outset, I made observational cinema the foundation of my teaching at the Granada Centre. The exercises I designed for students at the beginning of their Masters course were intended to facilitate what might be described as "learning to see again" or "seeing as if for the first time". It was about using the camera to effect a shift from book-based to sensory or experiential learning. For, as I had

discovered through my own practice, anthropological film-making was not about adding film-making onto anthropology. Instead "visualizing anthropology" involved a fundamental reorientation of perspective such that the world is not primarily approached discursively through language, explanation, generalisation; but through a re-embodiment of the self as the foundation for renewed engagement with everyday life. Such a reorientation is brought about through what Ingold terms (following Gibson) "the education of attention" (2000:22). It is achieved not by means of instruction but through discovery prompted by a realignment of the body.

Working with a camera places one differently in the world. The initial exercises were designed to foreground this new position. I found that making observational cinema central to students' evolving film practice facilitated the transition from a word-sentence to an image-sequence approach that MacDougall identifies as critical to a visual anthropology. Its classic techniques (close proximity to subjects, embodied technology, long, unbroken shots, no interviews) disrupt familiar or established habits of engagement (especially through talk), fostering a new awareness of the non-verbal, of movement, gesture, posture, action and refocusing attention around the details, textures, and materiality of the social world. Observational cinema profoundly subverts traditional models of academic learning based upon discursive knowledge. Specifically, it works to defamiliarise, to render the familiar strange; and, as such, it mirrors the "surrealist" experience enshrined at the heart of ethnographic fieldwork (Clifford 1988).

Although students at the Granada Centre *begin* their development as film-makers from the foundations of observational cinema, their later work need not be pursued within these parameters.[8] Clearly there are many ethnographic situations and interests that would not be well served by such an approach. But criticism of observational films often emerges from a misunderstanding of the anthropological knowledge being sought, one which is about the subjective, the sensory, the experiential, rather than the structural. For the challenge of working observationally is not a problem of omniscience and objectification – in fact quite the reverse. It is about how to establish a creative tension within the work between participation and observation. It goes to the heart of observational cinema – and, of course, to the anthropological enterprise more generally.

If one of the foundational principles of anthropological knowledge is experience, understanding emerging from the sensory immersion of "being there", how can it be given form that does not involve translating it into a different register? Is it possible to both render experience and reflect upon that experience from within the representation itself? Among the most frequently aired criticisms of observational work is that it lacks context, explanation or some kind of interpretative stance toward what is being presented. This is the crux of the issue. How can one, as an anthropological film-maker, work creatively with the conflicting currents of the imaginative (experience) and the social (representation)? As Di Gioia himself acknowledged in his own work, the observational film-maker struggles to find a commentary on the substance of the film from inside the film itself, rather than bringing it to bear from the outside. Although observational

cinema is often thought to be a passive form of film-making, following rather than initiating action, it actually requires high degrees of both energy and concentration. Film-makers become not just part of what is happening and how it is developing; they have to remain continually aware of how their perspective is being forged within the space of the film itself. Editing is about clarifying this perspective; but it has to be already there in the materials. Observational cinema is not about a superficial, distanced encounter; rather it requires intense engagement with what is happening around the camera. It demands both courage and a willingness to admit the intuitive.

Recent changes in the theoretical paradigms that underpin anthropology and film studies offer new ways of understanding the nature and scope of observational cinema. Specifically, the shift away from the dominance of linguistic and semiotic frameworks of interpretation toward more phenomenologically inflected perspectives brings observational film-making practice into different focus. Taussig's discussion of mimesis (1993) and Marks's exploration of what she calls "tactile epistemologies" (2000) is crucial in any attempt to clarify the distinctiveness of observational cinema as a particular kind of ethnographic endeavour. But so, too, is the critical discussion that has followed the renaissance of documentary film. For the rise of reality television with its markedly observational style and ethnographic content has profoundly challenged the existing terms of debate. Drawing on this body of new work, I seek to locate observational cinema within a different theoretical space, moving it away from the older discourses of science (objectivity, evidence, truth) toward practices of contemporary art. This movement is, I believe, central to the articulation of a bolder and more radical agenda for visual anthropology.

3. Rethinking observational cinema

There is perhaps no other term in visual anthropology that has been used and abused as much as "observational cinema." According to Loizos (1997), the observational approach has long dominated ethnographic film-making practice, its pre-eminence serving to seriously inhibit the development or exploration of other styles. Certainly, ever since Colin Young coined the term to describe the emergence of a new sort of anthropological film-making, it has been the focus of much critical attention. On the whole, observational cinema has come to be viewed sceptically by anthropologists and film critics alike. There is unease about its supposed theoretical naivety, a suspicion that it is nothing more than a simple-minded realism, a reflection of life rather than interrogation of it. Also, for many commentators, the term "observation" has become synonymous with objectivity, implying distance and the dehumanisation of human subjects. It was David MacDougall himself, perhaps the most prominent figure in the emergence of observational cinema, who was among the first to suggest its limitations.

Writing immediately after Young's essay in the Hockings collection, *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, MacDougall highlighted the drawbacks in taking up an observational stance as a film-maker. For him, it was a stance predicated on a

fundamental inequality – as he put it, the film subject gave while the film-maker withheld (1975:118). The strength of observational cinema, that the camera learned to see again, MacDougall argued, was also its weakness, for it became a voyeur. He proposed instead a *participatory* cinema in which the processes and relationships of film-making were explicitly acknowledged as integral to the work's meaning: "[b]eyond observational cinema lies the possibility of a PARTICIPATORY CINEMA, bearing witness to the 'event' of the film and making strengths of what most films are at pains to conceal. Here the film-maker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture" (1975: 119). For MacDougall, such reflexive practice is predicated on the forging of a new, open-ended relationship with both film subjects and audience. The process of ethnographic understanding is now conceptualised as an exchange, a dialogue or a conversation between different parties, rather than a task animated by notions of data collection and scientific interpretation.

The authority of MacDougall's voice in debates about observational cinema stemmed from his own commitment to practice. Always a thoughtful, incisive and elegant commentator, his reflections were deeply rooted in his experiences as an ethnographic film-maker seeking to establish a distinctive and intellectually rigorous agenda for visual anthropology. MacDougall's position is now somewhat different. For twenty years or so after the publication of "Beyond Observational Cinema", he added a postscript to the essay (1998). Here he acknowledged that the differences he had sought to establish between observational and participatory cinema no longer seemed so clear cut or convincing. MacDougall noted that observational cinema had often been unfairly caricatured, subject to a certain critical discourse that was not properly attentive to the particular films themselves. But he also reminds us that the criteria by which judgments might be made of such work have also changed, as anthropology's central paradigm, scientific ethnography, itself crumbled. Since the mid-1980s anthropology's established practice (fieldwork), object of inquiry ("primitive society") and theoretical framework (culture) have been subject to sustained interrogation. Although in important ways this moment of disciplinary self-consciousness has been profoundly *textual*, it has nevertheless created an opening for film to be judged as a form of ethnographic enquiry in its own right, one that yields different kinds of knowledge than that discursively represented. Conceptualised in this way, what MacDougall calls "the descriptive and evocative potential" of an image-based medium serves as an important basis for extending the scope of ethnographic endeavour (1998:137)

MacDougall's reflections on observational cinema can be understood in the context of a general shift of intellectual perspective across the human sciences. Both his recent film work (especially the Doon School Project) and his writing are part of a growing interest in areas of human experience that lie at the edge of discourse. Much of this interest has come to focus around questions of the visual, interpreted broadly as about embodied and sensory-based ways of knowing. Approached from a "post-semiotic" perspective, observational cinema takes on a

new significance as a distinctive form of ethnographic encounter. Indeed, following Taussig (1993), we may understand it as a very particular kind of mimetic practice.

Taking as his starting point, Benjamin's writings on the re-emergence of the mimetic faculty at the heart of modernity, Taussig argues for a renewed engagement with forms of knowledge that draw on the body and the senses. Although imitation or copying have long been considered inferior, he suggests that we understand such activities not just as knowledge producing but as highly charged, indeed magical, social practices. In Taussig's view, mimesis, with its characteristics of contact and copy, is akin to the Frazerian notion of sympathetic magic. It is an attempt to "get hold of something by means of its likeness", the copy taking on something of the form and power of the original (1993:16-20).

Critical to Taussig's discussion of the mimetic faculty is an acknowledgement of the tactility of vision, the eye yielding knowledge not through distance and mastery but through proximity such that "the concept of *knowing* something becomes displaced by a *relating to"* (1993:26, original emphases). It is Taussig's purpose to address ways of knowing that are located in the body and in the senses and that have come to be regarded as archaic or naïve in the modern world. What Marks calls "haptic knowledge" (2000) is now an important focus of debate within both anthropology and cinema studies; and her writing strongly echoes that of Taussig's in the centrality she accords to mimesis as a distinctive and legitimate form of knowledge.

The work of both Taussig and Marks is important in establishing new critical ground for the reappraisal of observational cinema. Ever since Colin Young identified this particular genre of anthropological cinema, discussion of it has tended to be dominated by commentators who are not film-makers themselves – David MacDougall, an important and obvious exception. As a consequence, the characterisation of observational cinema that exists in the critical literature is often at odds with the experience of working observationally as a film-maker. Certainly I have long been aware of a discrepancy between what I read about observational cinema and what I knew from my own practice. Approaching observational cinema from a renewed interest in the mimetic and in the senses allows us to evaluate it differently. No longer understood as a manifestation of Fabian's "visualism" (1983) in which the disembodied techniques of the observer create distance and a spurious objectivity, we can interpret the genre as about precisely the opposite. It involves an "active yielding", the embodied camera pressing up close, seeking to be moulded and to take the form of its object as a means of thereby coming to know it (Taussig 1993:45-46).

Observational cinema, contrary to much critical opinion, is not about the achievement of an accurate transcription of the world. Instead it hinges upon imaginative connection, expressed in an almost intangible, empathic moment. Rendering that moment concrete is the problem that confronts the film-maker. Once we take seriously the mimetic and the possibility of knowledge through resemblance, we are able to recognise the imperative of an imaginative leap at the

heart of observational cinema. For, as Taussig reminds us, mimesis is never a straightforward process of mirroring. It has a marked visionary aspect – Benjamin's "flash of recognition" – transformation wrought in an instant of contact. For precisely this reason one can argue that the abandonment of observational cinema is because it is too difficult and too risky to work with, rather than it is too undemanding.

Understood in these terms, observational cinema is a very different kind of project from that traditionally presented in film criticism (Winston 1995, for example). Importantly, it is also very different from the kind of observational film that has become central to the renaissance of television documentary. Here Winston (2000) is certainly correct in identifying the journalistic roots of contemporary forms of reality television that simulate the classic techniques of observational cinema. But, in casting off ethical commitment to human subjects and disavowing any interest in sense-based ways of knowing, such enterprises have almost nothing in common with what I call "observational cinema proper".

Conclusion: eyeing the field – towards new collaborations, new sites, new forms

Over the last ten years the Granada Centre has emerged as a key site for anthropological film-making. The work of its students has been critical in establishing the contours of a distinctive kind of documentary project. It is marked by an ethnographic sensibility that is not linked to traditional claims about cross-cultural expertise but one that is, rather, anchored in a commitment to experiential or what, following Marks (2000), we might call "tactile epistemologies". Although this work is highly diverse in subject matter and approach, observational cinema has remained at the heart of the Centre's intellectual agenda. Not least, because it effects the change of perspective that an image-based enquiry requires. By dislodging established textual frameworks, observational techniques foreground different sorts of ethnographic experiences and encounters. The radical potential of such techniques, however, has yet to be tested.

Anthropologists can go much further in their explorations of visual and sense-based ways of knowing. Critical is the forging of collaborative work across existing boundaries of visual practice. The ethnographic turn in contemporary art now offers a space for engagement that reaches beyond an anthropology *of* art. Indeed it makes possible the art of anthropology. Changing the theoretical framework by which we understand observational cinema establishes the ground for such experimentation, thereby facilitating participation in a range of ethnographic projects pursued in other sites and by other means. For, interpreted as mimetic practice, an observational approach may function as the basis for approaching other forms of knowledge located at the edge of discursive anthropology. Such an investigation brings into sharp focus the theoretical and methodological assumptions that underpin documentary and textual anthropology, while simultaneously serving to realign the project of ethnographic film-making such that it becomes located within a broader field of visual practice.

To propose the visualization of anthropology, linked to collaborative experimentation, is something of a risky enterprise. It involves a willingness to surrender to the confusion and conflict that follows from the erosion of conventional hierarchies of knowledge. Working alongside artists and other visual practitioners brings into sharp relief what is shared and what is different in understandings of ethnographic realities. In my own experience, the early crisis of identity gives way to a much stronger sense of distinctiveness. But such distinctiveness cannot be asserted *a priori*; it has to be continually renewed. The forging of collaboration across boundaries of specialization changes one's understanding of the anthropological task. Being open to that possibility is the key to rnewing anthropology's *anthropological* inventiveness.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Much current discussion about television documentary, especially the docu-soap, focuses on these same issues.

2. When the Granada Centre first began, this model of film-making was unusual. It was in keeping, however, with the reputation anthropologists have earned as interlopers, their longstanding refusal to respect professional hierarchies. At the time such a model was considered rather eccentric, indeed amateurish by many working in the field of film-making. Today the situation is quite different. For television itself now utilises cheap, lightweight digital equipment to pursue its own ethnographic agenda. See Moggan and Robertson in this volume.

3. See also Grimshaw 2001. If *Disappearing World* was of its time in terms of television documentary, serious, high-minded, improving, it was also reflective of a certain moment in professional anthropology. It pre-dated the crisis of representation that swept through discipline in 1980s. The anthropology of *Disappearing World* was anchored in the paradigm of scientific ethnography, the basis of discipline's academic consolidation in postwar period. It was predicated on a distinctive object of study (society) and method (fieldwork). The discipline's claim to be about specialist knowledge depended upon the separation of an objective body of expertise from the subjective conditions of its garnering. Anthropology's postmodern revolution of the 1980s brought about the collapse of scientific ethnography; and with it there was a greater acknowledgement of the subjectivity, partiality, and the interpretative dimensions of ethnographic practice. In particular, anthropological knowledge was increasingly recognised to emerge from intersubjective exchange, that it was a process not a product. See Turton 1992.

4. Although anthropology's decisive break with science did not occur until the 1980s, there was growing unease during late 1960s and 1970s about the discipline's ahistoricism and its presumption of speaking for/about people. The objectification of human subjects was increasingly challenged following political independence in the traditional areas of anthropological study. See Clifford and Marcus 1986.

5. Basil Wright's film, *Song of Ceylon*, has been a defining influence in the work of David MacDougall. See MacDougall 1995.

6. Despite the extensive debate about the nature of anthropological enquiry, the practice of fieldwork has remained a central methodological principle. See Introduction above. Also Kuklick 1991 and Schaffer 1994.

7. Conversation with author, July 2000. *Peter Murray* is part of a series of films that Di Gioia and Hancock made in Vermont, USA. Their project was about extending existing relationships,

allowing films and subjects to suggest themselves rather than be decided by the film-makers in advance.

8. Over the ten years of its existence there has been considerable variety in the subject and approach of student graduation films. Although the exotic and faraway still exert a certain fascination for students, those films that remain in the memory among the hundred or so graduation projects are probably the observational ones – films distinguished by a particular sensibility anchored in close relationships with subjects. The graduation films are based on a period of three months fieldwork, students working alone to create event or character based films (much less often, ideas-led films) which they edit over three weeks. For more details see www:http//les1.man.ac.uk/visualanthropology

References

Bruzzi, S., *New Documentary*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Clifford, J., "On Ethnographic Surrealism", *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988, 117–151.

Clifford, J., "An Ethnographer in the Field," in A. Coles, ed., *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000, 52–71.

Clifford, J., and Marcus, G., eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Fabian, J., *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Grimshaw, A., *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001a.

Grimshaw, A., "Teaching Visual Anthropology: notes from the field", *Ethnos* vol.66:2, 237–258, 2001b.

Ingold, T., "Culture, Nature, Environment", in *The Perception of the Environment*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 13–26.

Kuklick, H., *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology 1885–1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Loizos, P. "First exits from observational realism: narrative experiments in recent ethnographic film", in M. Banks and H. Morphy eds., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, 81–104.

MacDougall, D., "Beyond Observational Cinema", in P. Hockings ed. *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton, 1975, 109–124.

MacDougall, D., *Conversations with Anthropological Filmmakers*, A. Grimshaw and N. Papstergiadis eds., Cambridge: Prickly Pear Press, 1995.

MacDougall, D. "The Visual In Anthropology," in M. Banks and H. Morphy, eds., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, 276–295.

MacDougall, D., *Transcultural Cinema*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Marks, L. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000.

Schaffer, S., *From Physics to Anthropology – and Back Again*, Cambridge: Prickly Pear Press, 1994.

Stoller, P., *The Cinematic Griot: The Ethnography of Jean Rouch*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.

Taussig, M., *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Turton, D., "Anthropology on television: what next?" in P. Crawford and D. Turton eds. *Film as Ethnography*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

Winston, B., *Claiming the Real: the documentary film revisited*, London: British Film Institute, 1995.

Winston, B., *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries*, London: British Film Institute, 2000.

Young, C., "Observational Cinema", in P. Hockings ed., *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton, 1975, 69–79.

Julie Moggan studied Anthropology at the University of Manchester before going on to complete a Masters at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology. Her graduation film 'In Search of Home' has been shown at a number of international festivals. In 2003, she completed her training as a documentary filmmaker at the National Film and Television School.

Reflections of a Neophyte: A University Versus a Broadcast Context

Julie Moggan

1. Observational cinema

The Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology exists within the University of Manchester; and yet it does not strictly inhabit an academic context. Though its origins lie in television and its students are undoubtedly influenced by a broader media context, the Centre has complete autonomy from its sponsor – Granada Television. At the same time – unusually for a film-making course it operates within a discipline that is extremely critical and mistrustful of image based media.

The Masters programme that the Centre offers is oriented around experimentation with 'observational cinema' – a film-making approach which is seen to serve as a good starting point for anthropological film-making. Observational cinema is an approach that was developed by Colin Young and Herb di Gioia at the National Film and Television School during the 1970s and 1980s.

Observational cinema is based on the fundamental premise that films should arise out of the film-maker's intimate, sensitive and sympathetic relationship with his/her subjects – with the film-maker watching 'as much as possible from the inside' (Young, p. 76), rather than operating in an aloof and detached manner. This sensitivity is reflected in the fact that the mandate for the film comes from the subjects. The film-maker does not impose direction, but instead allows the space for the film to be heavily shaped by its protagonists. Rather than constructing the film around preconceptions and what is already known, the film-maker approaches film-making as a process of discovery.

In observational films emphasis is placed on following action in the context of

peoples' everyday lives. This approach is cinematic – words are not necessarily privileged over images and informal conversation between film-maker and subject takes the place of interviews. In this way the audience is given a great deal of space to form their own conclusions on what they are viewing. They are shown something rather than told something and the evocation of experience takes precedence over the communication of information.

This approach is underpinned by a strong ethical stance of respect for the film subjects and of a reciprocal exchange between film-maker and subject. The kind of relationships on which observational cinema is based take time to build. The intimacy achieved is strongly related to working in a very small team – unencumbered by too much technology and regarding the camera and sound kit almost as an extension of the body. Students at the Granada Centre are given three months to work on their graduation films and are trained to research, film, take sound and edit alone.

One of the many examples I could offer of a film that embodies the observational method to great effect is a film called *Room To Live* (Everson and Stoica). It focuses upon the daily struggle against poverty of a young family living in the Polish city of Lodz. The film is situated for the most part in the tiny flat that the family shares. Through detailed and careful observation the film gradually and powerfully communicates the loving relationships within the family, their daily routines of survival and the manner in which the family manage to live happily in this small space with little money and with the parents working long hours. The film is so intimate and detailed that an audience has the feeling they are in the room with the family and begins to form a strong sense of the individual personalities of each of the characters, without them having to verbally explain themselves and their situation to the film-makers. The manner in which this film is made empowers the protagonists because they are not spoken about but given space to show their life just as they live it, in all its fullness and dignity despite the relative poverty they are living in. The protagonists are imprinting upon and shaping this representation in their own terms and thus appear to be very comfortable with the cameras and the film-makers. *Room to Live* is a film in which the unsaid is often more effective in suggesting personality, relationships and experience then the 'said'.

2. Working with observational cinema

Although Granada Centre students are in no way restricted to the observational approach when they come to making their graduation films, it was the approach I felt to be the most appropriate to the people and topic that I was working with. A fundamental aspect of the experience of refugees and people seeking asylum is being spoken about and told what to do by others. They lack power and control over their own lives and for the most part they are made 'voiceless' by the host society in which they exist. Observational cinema was an approach that offered the space and sensitivity for people in this situation to feel comfortable in making their voices heard. I didn't puritanically adhere to the tenets of observational cinema, but they

certainly served as my foundations upon which I sometimes experimented with other film-making methods.

My graduation film, *In Search of Home*, is about the experiences of the Shabani's a Kosovar Albanian family who return to Pristina after a year spent living in Manchester as refugees. In this half-hour film, you see the high expectations they have for life in post-war Kosovo, the joy of reunion with family and friends, and their growing realization of the bitter reality of life in a country of dark and painful memories, traumatized people, scarred landscapes, high unemployment and limited medical care. The film opens with the family's emotional arrival back in Pristina. It proceeds to follow the younger daughter's (Donika) visit to see the family's countryside home that was destroyed by Serbian forces; the family's unsuccessful attempts to find work and urgently needed medicine for Fahri (the diabetic father of the family); and it concludes with the family's desperate search to find a way back to Britain.

This film grew out of the close relationship that I had with the Shabani family. I had struck up a friendship in Manchester with Dafina and Donika (the teenage daughters) and gradually got to know the rest of the family over a three-month period. However it was our journey back to Kosovo that bought us closer together and I very much felt I was going through this experience with them. I lived and worked with the family in an intimate way – barely out of their company for any time, living in their home and even sharing a bed with Donika. Though the camera was by my side at all times, I participated in their lives in many ways beyond film-making – visiting friends and family with them, cooking together, helping them in their search for work and medicine and at times taking on a counsellor-like role within the family.

I believe that this level of intimacy and trust that I had with the family was partly linked to the fact that I did not impose direction upon them in the making of the film and did not go in with a preconceived idea of what I wanted the film to be. I certainly had some ideas of the kinds of events and interactions that I might be interested in focusing on, were they to occur; but, for the most part, I followed events and often-unexpected interactions as they spontaneously unfolded. Because I understood the making of this film as a process of discovery, rather than being intimidated and overpowered by 'directions', the Shabani family had the space and freedom to 'be themselves', to open up in the presence of the camera and take control over the way in which their experiences were being represented. For the most part any conversation I did have with the family whilst filming was informal and occurred in a conversational manner. On the few occasions when I did try and carry out interviews with individual family members they became much more self-conscious. Their response felt forced and awkward and was far less revealing than learning about their experiences through their spontaneous interactions and reactions.

There are, of course, many shortcomings to this half-hour film that I have made about the Shabani family, and undoubted limitations to the observational approach

that I shall go on to discuss at a later stage in this piece. However I feel that overall, through adopting this film-making approach, I was able to make the film communicate in much the way I had intended. In this film there is no voice-over to tell the audience what to think. They are instead almost right in there with the family, going through events with them as they unfold. The film does not so much communicate information, as evoke the experiences that the family is going through. Without a voice-over to impose a particular interpretation there remains an ambiguity and complexity to the interactions and events taking place, that invites a viewer into imagining how he/she might feel and react if placed in such situations. Something of the individual personalities of the family's members comes through. The audience is able to get to know them a little, to form some kind of attachment to them and to therefore empathize with them. This film encourages an audience to relate to current debates about asylum, immigration and repatriation from the perspective of one particular refugee family. Most people who have seen the film seem to recognize these 'refugees' as fellow human beings and, most importantly, care about what happens to them.

3.Broadcast television and a 'shopping list' approach to film-making

On graduating from the Granada Centre I wanted to develop my understanding of the experiences of refugees and people seeking asylum through a second film. In the hope of reaching a broader audience, I sought out the opportunity to make this film in a broadcast context, through a production company commissioning and developing the work of new film-makers on behalf of my local television network. On the basis of my graduation film and a new proposal to make a film about the experiences of people seeking asylum in the region in which I grew up, I was offered me the chance to make a ten-minute documentary.

During the commissioning process I was able to persuade my commissioners into seeing the importance of me working alone or with just one other person, and I was offered a maximum of five days in which to shoot (though, later in practice, these criteria were not strictly met). I was informed that I needed to move 'up a level' from my graduation film, but was given little time to discuss with them what was actually meant by this. The most I could garner at this early stage was that it needed to look more professional and should communicate in a faster and more explicit way. From this point I was very much left alone and received little creative support from the producer whom I had been assigned or from the series producer. Only at a very late stage in the production process (when I was about to begin filming) did they step in, with the realization that we had both wrongly assumed that each had the same approach to film-making in mind.

In these last-minute discussions the series producer denigrated almost every tenet of the observational approach. Her main concern with this approach seemed to be that I was not planning to enter into the filming with a highly predetermined and scripted out notion of what the film was 'going to be'. I had in mind certain elements that I planned to look out for in the process of filming, but I also wanted to remain open to what was occurring before me spontaneously. This was

interpreted by the series producer as a poor excuse for the fact that I did not know what I was doing. She understood this approach as the antithesis of 'directing'. As she saw it there wasn't the budget and therefore the time to hang around and hope that something interesting would eventually happen. I was to go in with my predetermined notion of the film and direct my subjects into acting out my vision of their story. Ideally I would liked to have had a shooting period of two weeks, and though in the constant company of my subjects I would have spent only a fraction of this time filming significant events and interactions as they occurred. My producers seemed to see this as a very risky way of working. Rather than waiting for that highly revealing and engaging two minutes of interaction to spontaneously occur, they thought it safer and more economical to go straight in and make things happen – compromising on the quality of the material ultimately gathered.

As much as being linked to budget considerations, these tight time limitations seemed to arise out of a different ethical conception of the film-making process to that endorsed by the Granada Centre. It is the case that graduates of the Centre have often been employed by programme commissioners because of their ability to negotiate with subjects. Although it has been recognized that anthropological film-makers can offer a particular kind of television ethnography based on observational cinema, there has been an 'unwillingness [by television] to acknowledge its fundamental ethical stance' (Grimshaw, p. 11). In my case, my ability to negotiate with subjects was very much tied up with ethical ideas about having the time to form genuine relationships; the time for subjects to communicate to the camera when they felt ready; and the time to offer something back during the process of film-making, as opposed to merely taking from the subjects. As I was to find, when denied the time and space to fully work according to this ethical stance, the access I could gain was limited.

When I expressed some anxiety over the fact that I had not yet managed to build a strong enough relationship with my subjects for them to feel safe and confident enough to really express their feelings and have a 'voice' in the film, this was not seen to be at all problematic. I was told that I should find other ways within the film to tell this story and look to other voices to speak for them. There was a definite sense that, in contrast to my graduation film, this piece had to convey 'information' and communicate in a much more direct and explicit manner. My producer set out in practical terms the alternative approach by which I was to achieve this style of documentary-making.

Firstly, it was suggested that I conduct and film a comprehensive interview with the two main protagonists of the film. From the transcriptions of these interviews, I was to extract the most interesting answers and out of them form a verbal script for the film on paper. Secondly, I had to think about the kind of visuals that would best compliment and illustrate this dialogue-based framework for the film. I was to think about these visuals in terms of 'sequences', plotted out according to certain film-making conventions. Thirdly, it was proposed that my planned sequences be broken down into a kind of 'shopping list' of shots and a series of shot lists be plotted out – detailing the location, date and time that each shot was to be filmed.

All that remained was to carry out second interviews, prompting the subjects into repeating only the most interesting points made in the original interviews.

This approach seemed alien and uninspiring to me. I had planned to work alongside just one other person – sharing the camerawork and sound with my colleague Maggie Loescher. However, at the last minute, the series producer insisted that we were to be accompanied by a production assistant to keep an eye on us, leaving me with the feeling that I had little choice but to take up the 'shopping list' approach.

4. Relationships and representation in a broadcasting context

I had wanted to make a documentary about the experiences of unaccompanied refugee children thousands of whom flee to the UK each year, without their parents or guardians, to escape unbearable living conditions in their own countries. I had found it very difficult to find young people living in the region who were willing to tell their stories on camera. Most were terrified of the possible negative consequences of being publicly identified in the area as 'asylum seekers'. They were also fearful that speaking out about their experiences in public could have damaging repercussions for the family and friends they'd left behind. I did, however, eventually meet two teenage boys from Afghanistan – Noor and Hashmat – who were willing to be filmed. They had each lost older male relatives at the hands of the Taliban, and their families, fearful that these teenage boys would be the next to be killed, had paid the way for them to make the long and dangerous journey alone to Britain. Both Noor and Hashmat had arrived in the country in the backs of lorries, and were now being cared for by social services, sharing a house with four other boys from Afghanistan. The boys believed that they might put the lives of their families in Afghanistan in greater danger if they were to be seen to talk publicly about their difficult and traumatic lives under the Taliban. Instead we agreed to make a film which focused on their 'new lives' in a particular region of Britain to discover what they felt about the place and how they were coping.

Due to the difficulties that I had experienced during the research period, I had not had nearly as much time as I would have liked to get to know Noor and Hashmat. I quickly discovered that beginning film-making according to the suggested approach drastically changed the kind of relationship I had begun to build with them. It became difficult to continue interacting with them on a more equal person-to-person basis, rather than simply as a film-maker. Our relationship suddenly became much more hierarchical. I felt uncomfortable beginning the film-making process by carrying out interviews in which the boys were expected to answer some very personal questions, before they had got to know all of us. Though, in the commissioning stage, it had been agreed that I could work alone or with one other person, Maggie and I were not only accompanied by a production assistant. The series producer also insisted that a 'professional' cameraman should film the interviews. Surrounded by four crew members, a translator, a large camera and a boom, Noor and Hashmat clearly felt very intimidated during these interviews. Maggie and I had a strong feeling that neither of the boys was truly

expressing their feelings on all that they had been through. Their answers to questions were predictable and brief and they responded very much on a superficial level – telling us what they thought we wanted to hear. These two long interviews around which the film was to be structured, actually revealed very little.

When it came to filming the visual sequences that I had been asked to regimentally pre-plan, I found myself relating to the boys as if they were actors. Begrudgingly I asked the boys to go to certain places, to carry out particular actions and then repeat them again so they could be filmed from different distances and angles – directing them even to the point of looking happy or sad in order to conform to my preconceived idea of the sequence and the dialogue that it would accompany. Partly because of the limited production budget it wasn't possible to have a translator with us at all times. Hashmat passively complied with my requests, but we were unable to fully communicate the reasoning behind them, when he asked me rather bemusedly why he was being asked to do these things. Maggie and I found it extremely problematic that this film-making process only further disempowered and confused this young asylum seeker. Noor's more dramatic response to my 'directions' further emphasized just how inappropriate such a film-making approach was to this particular project. Quite quickly Noor began to resent being asked to do certain things for the camera. He clearly felt somewhat humiliated and mistrustful of the representation that was being formed of him. This sense of having no control over the film-making process led to Noor becoming quite angry at times and to his closing up to the camera. Understandably he cut short the filming we were able to do with him before I'd had the chance to direct all the sequences involving him that I had planned.

I felt that this 'shopping list' approach damaged the relationship I had begun to build with Noor. It prevented me from making the kind of fulfilling and close relationships I had been able to forge with the Shabani family. This approach also completely obscured the true personalities and individuality of Noor and Hashmat. The revealing and spontaneous ways in which they each act and interact were replaced by wooden and self-conscious actions that I had imposed upon the boys.

Due to the somewhat unexpressive answers from Noor and Hashmat that an intimidating interview set-up had delivered, I was pushed to carry out interviews with adults who it was understood could speak more powerfully on their behalf. In using an interview filmed with a member of social services in the final film to 'speak about' and 'for' Noor and Hashmat, I once again reinforced the whole disempowering discourse through which the media generally comments upon people seeking asylum. I had wanted to provide an outlet for their side of the story, but this method had prohibited me from truly allowing the voices of Hashmat and Noor to be heard.

In the editing process I was encouraged to further silence the boys by adding my own voice-over. It was felt that information about this issue and the context of Afghanistan should be more explicitly communicated through narration. The decision was made to dub the boy's voices with a translation delivered by English

teenagers. Part of the reason for choosing to dub the boys voices rather than use subtitles (as I had done in *In Search of Home*) was the hope that it might be a way of falsely imparting, through tone of voice and emphasis, the emotion that was lacking in the original interviews the boys gave. However, both the dubbing and voice-over only served to further distance Noor and Hashmat from an audience and created a sense of 'us' and 'them'. I was also pushed to use 'Middle-Eastern' music to artificially impart the emotion and drama lacking in the material – to try and push the audience into feeling something that wasn't there in the film. But for me, this music used in alliance with this particularly superficial material only succeeds in further exoticizing the film's central subjects.

I felt that ultimately I created an 'othering' film. It never allows an audience to get to know the boys as individuals and to engage with them as fellow human beings. In dealing with the issues that it does, it therefore becomes a dangerous and ethically problematic film. It risks reinforcing popularly held ideas that these asylum seekers are 'not like us' and that they can never truly belong here. The boys remain mysterious strangers from a faraway culture and the audience is left wondering why they should care what happens to them. From the boys' point of view, this is a disempowering film in which they were rendered voiceless.

This piece does not require much engagement from an audience. Rather than a viewer coming to his/her own experiential understanding through watching a person's spontaneous actions and interactions, information is explicitly communicated through words. Viewers are told what to think and given much less space than an observational film allows for them to formulate their own interpretations. The approach of imposing the director's fully preconceived idea of the film upon its subjects and privileging words/language over 'seeing' creates a very different kind of knowledge to that arrived at by an observational approach.

5. The limitations of observational cinema

I do not mean to suggest that the 'shopping list' approach is one common to all documentaries made in a broadcast context. This is clearly not the case. I have seen some excellent documentaries on television drawing upon a range of film-making approaches and a couple of documentaries that have employed the 'shopping list' approach to great effect in relation to particular subject matter. Nor do I mean to give the impression that all short documentaries commissioned by the production company I worked for take up this particular method. I speak entirely from my personal experience. The failures of the film I made can be attributed as much to my inexperience and lack of confidence to push to make the film in ways I would have preferred. My commissioners pressed the 'shopping list' approach upon me in direct reaction against difficulties they had with the observational approach – and certainly observational cinema is not without its limitations. The production company made some fair criticisms of the approach.

My commissioners were concerned that an observational film would take too long to communicate to an audience. They seemed to feel that a failure of my graduation

film was that it did not make points quickly enough for an audience. I certainly found it hard to tell the Shabani family's story in the half-hour time limit imposed on graduation films at the Granada Centre. The characters and the experiences they are going through are revealed by their actions and interactions through the course of the film. At times their characters and their feelings are quite subtly revealed and there is some ambiguity in their actions and interactions. For me, a strength of the observational approach and cinema more generally is the space that it provides for representing such ambiguity and complexity – so inherent to human experience and interaction. The production company wanted me to use words to impose and set in stone one particular interpretation upon the material and to do so quickly, directly and explicitly. No room for misinterpretation was to be given.

Certainly there is a real danger with the open nature of observational film material of it being misunderstood and perceived in an entirely different way from that which the film-maker intended. I have known of at least one viewer who managed to entirely misread my graduation film in a way that could be damaging to the Shabani family. On explaining how he arrived at this reading I could see how the ambiguity and space was there for him to derive this misinterpretation. My producer's intentions to communicate in an explicit, direct and simplified manner seemed also to be linked to a lack of confidence in the perceived audience. They seemed to doubt that an audience would have the will, intelligence and patience to take on a more active kind of viewing, in which they have a certain amount of scope to interpret for themselves what they are seeing before them.

Some observational films are accused of being aesthetically displeasing. In my case, the series producer commented that my graduation film did not look 'professional' enough. Though fair, this criticism was not just down to my lack of film-making experience. Due to the spontaneous and sometimes unexpected manner in which much of this kind of film-making arises, it is not always possible to fully anticipate unfolding action. Sometimes the camerawork in observational films can be uncertain and shaky. Shots are not always controlled and beautifully composed. This can be seen as a limitation of observational cinema. I personally find it interesting that the process of film-making is highlighted in such a way and embedded in the fabric of the film itself.

A further limitation of observational cinema is that it is a method by which it can sometimes be quite difficult to get at what is going on 'inside people's heads'. With the observational film-maker's stance of speaking only when spoken to during filming – it can be hard to get at the memories, dreams and emotions of a subject. It is also not a method that lends itself easily to representing events that have already past or providing historical context. As Jean Rouch so powerfully demonstrated through his films it is sometimes necessary to introduce new stimuli to uncover deeper layers of human subjectivity and experience. In my graduation film I found that at times I had to ask certain questions to provoke my subjects into revealing something extra – particularly with regard to memories of their past experiences.

Conclusion

In this essay I have attempted to draw a comparison between two highly personal experiences of film-making in two very particular contexts. I do not mean to suggest that either are representative of film-making in university or broadcast contexts more generally. I have tried to show how the 'shopping list' approach (as I perhaps rather unfairly refer to it) was an inappropriate and rather dangerous one to take up in making a film dealing with the experience of people seeking asylum. For me, at least, it was unable to truly 'get at' and communicate these boys' experiences; and, as a result, it merely served to reinforce divisive and dehumanizing discourses on asylum. I have attempted to justify why I feel I was able to make a far more revealing, moving and empowering film in a university context through my appropriation of observational cinema. However, I have also acknowledged the limitations of observational cinema and conceded that it may not necessarily have been the most suitable approach for making a ten-minute film on the experience of young asylum seekers in the specific broadcast context in which it was commissioned.

Overall I found the transition from an academic to a broadcast context to be disappointing and a somewhat depressing experience. It seemed I had moved from a nurturing and inspiring environment to one in which I felt unsupported and pressured into conforming to a production-line style of documentary-making. I wonder how the Granada Centre might better have prepared me (and its other students) for this transition? Perhaps if greater attention was to be given to more experimental forms of film-making on the course, I may have been better able to offer an imaginative, engaging and ethically acceptable alternative to both the 'shopping list' approach and observational cinema (though I think such a change would entail extending the length of the course). Certainly, when struggling with the production company's rejection of observational cinema and the unattractive alternative that they presented to me, I had some initial ideas about more experimental ways of making this film.

Partly in response to problems I was having with the subjects' requests for anonymity, I thought about working more collaboratively with the boys to try and represent their subjectivity on camera. I had ideas about giving the boys disposable cameras to work with and using their photos, letters to family and friends back home and diary entries as the foundation and starting point for conveying something of the landscapes, spaces and experiences they were moving through. The boys' faces would not necessarily need to have been shown on camera; and, with their help, I was keen to try to imagine and convey the world through their eyes. For example, I wanted to evoke something of the details, textures, sounds, behaviour and interactions that had struck them on arriving in what must have at first seemed a very different and strange society to them. I would have liked to have used sound in a much more creative and evocative way – freeing sound up more from the image to new effect.

However, in the end I didn't feel that I had the confidence or creative engagement and encouragement from the production company to make this idea work. For all I

know they may have found this approach as equally problematic as an observational one. It is perhaps not so much observational cinema that is at issue here. I am wondering if my experience is possibly symptomatic of a more general lack of interest on the part on many television executives – not just in observational cinema but with cinematic forms of documentary-making full stop. Such a reluctance to draw creatively upon cinema is evident in many documentaries that are screened on British television. This reluctance is frequently noted by many of the frustrated young film-makers I have met and worked with. I have just returned to film school. My decision to do so was in part motivated by such frustrations. I hope to rediscover a creative and supportive environment that will allow me to experiment and to make the kind of films that were excluded from the particular broadcast context in which I recently worked.

Acknowledgements

References

Everson, S. and Stoica, M. (1991), *Room To Live,* National Film and Television School.

Grimshaw, A. (2001), 'Teaching Visual Anthropology: Notes from the Field', *Ethnos* 66: 2, pp. 237-58.

Young, C. (1975), 'Observational Cinema', in P. Hockings (ed.), *Principles of Visual Anthropology,* The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter.

In Search of Home (2000) available from Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester; http//www.1esl.man.ac.uk.

Rachel Robertson studied Social Anthropology at Cambridge and Visual Anthropology at Manchester. She now works as a freelance documentary producer/director, specialising in human rights, environmental and sustainable development issues. Recent TV credits include 'Earth Report' (BBC World) and 'The Rory Peck Awards' (Channel 4).

Seeing is Believing:
An Ethnographer's Encounter with Television Documentary Production

Rachel Robertson

Introduction

Anthropology has always had a complex relationship with broadcast media. While anthropological knowledge, approaches and expertise have frequently been used in the production of television documentaries, many anthropologists have sought to use television as a way to engage a wider audience with their work (Ginsburg 1992; Turton 1992). As anthropologists have responded to the changing nature of the world around them, their fieldwork has frequently taken place closer to home. In a globalized world where the 'exotic' and the 'other' are as likely to be found upon our own doorsteps as deep in the Amazonian rainforest, many anthropologists now make the homeless, artists, farmers, management consultants, migrants and refugees the subjects of their research. This leads many to ask of those anthropologists who produce ethnographic films what justifies their claims to be doing something different. To the untrained eye, these films may seem indistinguishable from their television counterparts.

My aim in writing this article is to cast an anthropological eye into the world of British television documentary production. I want to consider the overlap between anthropological film-making and certain kinds of television documentary. In particular, I am interested in exploring the similarities and differences between ethnographic film and a certain kind of television documentary that uses 'observational' techniques. The term 'observational' is critical in this distinction. One of the purposes of my essay is to clarify the different meanings implied by the use of this term. In the context of anthropological film-making, 'observational' refers to an approach situated in

the transformative experience of fieldwork, while television's use of the same term refers to a method of obtaining 'actuality' material when filming.

In bringing an anthropological perspective to bear on new forms of television ethnography, I seek to offer different insights from those being developed within media and cultural studies. The emphasis of my approach is upon television documentary production as *process* rather than *text*. I examine production techniques, technologies, roles and relationships. I highlight the ways in which content and style, subject and representation are selected, appropriated and manipulated by programme-makers to create documentary forms which claim to be a particular kind of truthful encounter.[1] My aim is to offer insight into the realities that are portrayed and the claims to knowledge that television documentary programme-makers produce. I suggest that these approaches and techniques, while mimicking anthropological ones, differ in significant ways from those employed by anthropological film-makers. Before taking my experience in television as the basis for my enquiry into a different kind of observational film-making, I want to provide an account of how I developed an anthropological way of seeing. I ask how this affects the claims to understanding and forms of knowledge as represented in ethnographic film practice.

Background

Anthropologists have always been concerned with the way they situate themselves among the people they study and whose experiences they claim to represent. Central to anthropology's distinctiveness as a mode of intellectual enquiry is the practice of 'participant observation'. Fieldwork is about going to see for yourself. It involves immersing oneself in a completely different way of life. Whether the fieldwork site is a council estate in Glasgow or a pastoral village in Kenya, the language, the customs, the food, the patterns of relatedness, the rhythms and routines of daily life and even the sense of humour are usually significantly different. Doing fieldwork is about submitting oneself to those experiences (eating the food, getting the jokes); and it relies on the anthropologist developing relationships of mutual trust and respect with those s/he has chosen to live among. Anthropologists usually stay for a long time, often a year or more, having little direct contact with the life they left behind. Their everyday reality becomes that of the community they have chosen to live within. The anthropologist is no longer an outsider looking in, but an insider of sorts, looking both ways. Staying for long enough to see what really goes on often reveals the differences between what people say they do and what they actually do, contributing to the distinctive nature of anthropological knowledge.

My own trajectory from anthropology to documentary film and television began at Cambridge. The anthropology I studied there had its foundations in the structural-functionalism of a generation of anthropologists who believed that 'traditional' societies were discrete entities whose social organization could be explained through the analysis of the separate but interrelated institutions of kinship, religion, economic and political systems. These anthropologists saw themselves as

scientists. They invariably wrote themselves out of their fieldwork monographs in an attempt to render an objective account of the society they had come to know.[2]

When I studied anthropology in the early 1990s, the idea of the world as being divided into traditional and modern societies that could be studied using the 'objective science' of anthropology no longer held much currency. Anthropologists had developed their practice to find new ways to engage with and explore increasingly complex and interconnected social realities. Notions of scientific objectivity, it was recognized, denied both the subjective nature of the anthropological encounter and the agency of the people anthropologists claimed to represent. Just as the process of doing fieldwork required the negotiation of complex relationships, so, it was realized, did the process of representing that encounter to a wider audience. The translation of lived experience into text became a highly political act. Many anthropologists experimented with writing techniques and other media as they began to explore the relationship between subject and representation, between content and form (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

If undergraduate studies had convinced me of the value of an anthropological perspective, my enrolment as a postgraduate student at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in Manchester was motivated by my desire to find a way for anthropology to be relevant to the world around me.[3] Engaging with a medium that had the potential to democratize the encounter and reach a much wider audience seemed a part of doing this. Yet it also became clear to me that the anthropology we saw on our television screens (for example, *Disappearing World*) belonged to anthropology's classic salvage paradigm and to a generation of anthropologists who sought to contain and classify culture as traditional ways of life in distant societies became extinct. I felt inclined to agree with those anthropologists who argued that anthropology was not suffering from a crisis of representation but a crisis of relevance (Ahmed and Shore 1995).

However, my Granada Centre training led me to consider the relationship between subject and representation in unexpected ways. Visual anthropology, I discovered, was as much about learning new ways of seeing as it was about harnessing a new form of technology. Ethnographic film-making was not only about showing other people's worlds (as we perceived them), but also about using the camera to explore those worlds, encouraging the viewer to engage with the subject, to empathize and to feel something of what it might be like to be there. It seemed to me that what was crucial in developing a visual approach to anthropology was a return to the discipline's central theme, participant observation. Making anthropology relevant, I discovered, was also about addressing issues of representation. The two were inextricably linked.

I completed my course at the Granada Centre with the production of a thirty-minute graduation film, *Ecotrip*.[4] It followed a group of direct-action campaigners on a summer road trip around festivals in the south of England. Ecotrip interested me because their lives went beyond protest. They were trying to live and promote an alternative way of life. I wanted to understand what this meant.

I spent three months on the road with Ecotrip, following their journey from inner-city London to the fields of Wiltshire as they travelled in battered vans, pitched tents, set up their vegan organic café and staged discussions and performances of live poetry and protest music. Negotiating access was not difficult. I had been 'on the scene' for a while and they already saw me as somehow one of them. Ecotrip wanted to promote their activities and thought a film would be useful.

To begin with I filmed very little. We were getting to know one another and I was learning their way of doing things. I learned the arts of 'blagging', 'skipping' and veggie-burger flipping, picked up the lingo (lentil knitting and tofu welding). Spending evenings around the fire drinking cider, listening to African drumming, watching people juggle and firebreathe, I began to get a feel for what it meant to be committed to this way of life. The experience was intense. I slept in their tents, worked in their café and ate their food. I didn't go home at the end of the day or at the end of the week. I observed their relationships and began to form my own. For a few short months their way of life also became mine.

The camera was never far from my side. It defined my identity within the group and mediated my relationships with its members. Growing closer to the people I was filming, I began to explore their own understandings of what they were doing and how they related to one another. Ecotrip was a microcosm of the kind of society they wanted to live in. As I observed them grapple with difficult issues and confront practical dilemmas in their everyday lives, the process of trying to act out a life according to their beliefs and vision of society became the focus of my filming.[5] I learned to recognize when a significant situation was developing and to anticipate what the responses of different group members might be. Knowing what to film (and what not to film) became an intuitive process.

Editing the film presented a different challenge. There was no obvious event-based narrative to structure the material. The footage was anarchic, and rather like the subject, seemed to resist attempts to be given a coherent form. Commentary or voice-over could have been used to impose a narrative and to provide explanation; but I resisted this. I wanted meaning to emerge from events themselves and to be intrinsic to what actually took place, with all its ambiguities and inconsistencies. In trying to give shape to the film, I wanted to try to recreate the sense of being there. I wanted to evoke the Ecotrip experience in all its glorious confusion, revealing both the craziness and the seriousness of what took place, giving a sense of the frustration and the mounting tension as well as the moments of sheer magic. In order to tell their story, the form had to be found within what I had filmed. Subject and representation were inseparable.

The resultant film was deeply evocative of the Ecotrip experience, taking the viewer on a voyage of discovery that ultimately raised many more questions than it answered. The problems of narrative and structure were never entirely resolved. There was much that remained unexplained or inconclusive in the final version of the film. The Ecotrip experience didn't provide a neatly packaged and self-explanatory version of reality. Employing an observational approach reflected

that. The film's perspective instead came from my own changing relationship with the subject. This developed through my close engagement in the filming process and the critical analysis that editing necessitated. The film reflected my own growing ambivalence towards the subject, revealing many of the inconsistencies and ambiguities inherent in the activities of Ecotrip.

Television ethnography

I completed my Granada Centre training in 1997 and began working in television the following year. At that time British television was undergoing a process of rapid transformation. Amid a fierce public debate about 'dumbing down', budgets were being slashed and producers were experimenting in innovative ways with both the content and the form of the programmes they made as they sought to ensure their continued popularity in an increasingly competitive market. The docu-soap had emerged as a popular format in the mid-1990s. 'Observational' styles of programme-making were inherent to the form. A resurgence in factual programming followed in the docu-soap's wake. It seemed like an exciting time to be working in television. There was a sense of possibility. There was a renewed interest in documentaries whose claims to authority were based in individual lived experience, rather than being made in the voice of an 'objective' narrator. I knew that the skills I had to offer as an anthropologist were in short supply.[6] Over the subsequent three years I worked on a range of television documentaries for both independent production companies and the BBC.

My examination of the claims made by the new kind of television documentary (to be a more authentic expression of social reality) is anchored in two case studies, *Liverpool Mums* and *Everyman*. Both series were marked by the use of what the programme-makers called 'observational' techniques. In the case of the former, these were intrinsic to its status as a docu-soap; but, in the case of the latter, these techniques were a recent addition to its long-established expository approach. My own participant-observation in television documentary production led me to reflect on the different kinds of relationships negotiated in this kind of programme-making. In particular, I became interested in the process by which television documentary appropriated certain anthropological techniques but used them to very different ends.

Liverpool Mums

Liverpool Mums followed expectant mothers through pregnancy and childbirth, with filming centred around their visits to Liverpool Women's Hospital. Popular among pregnant women, housewives and prison inmates, the Channel 5 series was part of an afternoon magazine programme. My role on *Liverpool Mums* was as a location assistant. Working with a producer/director who operated a digital video camera, I recorded sound, 'warmed up' contributors and generally made sure that things ran smoothly during filming. My colleagues on the series had mostly worked on chat shows and travel programmes or come from news and current affairs backgrounds. They saw the docu-soap as another way of presenting real people's

lives, differentiated from the other programmes they had made by the overall form of the finished programme, rather than by approach or production techniques. They were employed for their ability to 'pin down' a good story. I had yet to develop this skill.

Each fifteen-minute episode would typically consist of two or three stories linked by narration, featuring familiar characters at different stages of pregnancy, childbirth or early motherhood. Contributors were selected according to a range of criteria. Most important was that they were 'good value'. They had to be 'good talkers', engaging characters and we had to be sure that they would provide us with a long-running and action-packed story, typically involving twins, a complicated pregnancy or something unusual – a lesbian couple having a baby or an unexpectedly pregnant grandmother. We sought to exploit the highs and lows of everyday human drama and our approach to this was carefully choreographed.

In contrast to an anthropological approach, there was little opportunity for discovery or revelation during the process of filming and even less during the editing. We had already been given the subject, the characters and the overall narrative (beginning with a pregnancy and ending with a baby). Our job was to illustrate these predetermined stories by filling in the gaps and presenting individual stories as variations on a theme. Anything that digressed from these preconceived stories (for example, unexpected events such as a miscarriage or an overdue baby) was either viewed as a bonus or an inconvenience, depending on how the director felt these events could be incorporated into the predetermined narrative.

Given this kind of approach by television programme-makers, many of their techniques involved the simulation of relationships. Hence filming was essentially formulaic, consisting of a mixture of 'actuality', interview material and 'wallpaper shots'.[7] Directors returned to London every three weeks to edit the material they had shot and were expected to have ninety broadcast minutes in the can. How they obtained this material was up to them. In television terms, filming 'observationally' meant getting actuality material without resorting to intervention techniques, but few felt confident enough to rely on this approach. In order to be sure of having adequately 'covered' a story, most directors went to elaborate lengths, often asking contributors to do the same thing several times, for example, walking in and out of a room or picking up and putting down the baby. To provide a maximum range of 'cutting choices' in the edit, contributors were filmed doing the same thing from a range of angles and distances.[8] Interviews became lengthy as the director asked the same questions in multiple ways until the interviewee gave the answer that the director required to fit the story s/he had chosen to tell.

Contributors invariably felt most comfortable with the directors who 'directed' the least and who were able to follow the action as it took place. Within the parameters of the event or activity they had been asked to film, these directors sometimes captured unexpected moments that revealed much greater insights into the lives of their contributors. By contrast, directors who intervened and placed demands on their subjects prevented these opportunities from ever arising. Once asked to do

something again or to say something in a different way, contributors became complicit in the construction and presentation of their own realities and began to perform for the camera rather than for themselves.

Throughout the time that we were filming, relationships between members of the production team and contributors were key to the series. There were practical reasons for this. If contributors were to be 'good value', then we had to keep them committed to the series throughout their pregnancies. This required us to invest in the relationships we formed. Everything had to be geared towards creating the right circumstances for contributors to want us to be present at the birth of their child.

Around three months into filming, *Liverpool Mums* began to be broadcast. We would often arrive at a hospital ward only to have to wait for patients to finish watching the programme before we could begin filming. People saw how we were representing themselves and others. If we were to keep our contributors on board then we had to develop a strategy that took this into account.

Relationships were calculated but the empathy was often genuine. This was typical of the ambiguity surrounding the docu-soap experience where anthropological approaches were appropriated and manipulated to provide the semblance of an encounter remarkably similar to those which anthropologists and ethnographic film-makers strive to achieve. The docu-soap as text had an 'ethnographic' feel to it. Ordinary people's everyday lives were the subject of the programmes. We returned to familiar characters and locations to follow the experiences of women going through pregnancy and childbirth. There was a closeness to the encounter which gave the viewer the impression of watching a programme more authentically 'lived experience' than many other more traditional documentary forms.

Everyman

Moving to a more 'serious' documentary strand, *Everyman*, I wanted to engage with more challenging subjects and to explore how television represents people's complex realities. The stories that *Liverpool Mums* told had lent themselves to the neat packaging the series provided. More difficult issues (and contributors) could not be so neatly contained.

Central to my role on *Everyman* were my 'people skills' and my ability to amass, digest and summarize large quantities of information in small amounts of time. As a researcher, I occupied a liminal position, and rather like an anthropologist, my skill lay in the ability to negotiate in-betweenness, to sympathize, empathize and understand, to get inside other people's worlds and to translate that experience into a language understandable to my television colleagues.

At the time I began working for *Everyman*, it had come to occupy a marginal position in the schedules. Despite its reputation for quality, integrity and intellectual rigour, the series was trying to adapt to the increasingly ratings-driven television environment.[9] When I

joined, *Everyman* was under a new editorship and had a new brief. The programmes were to be character-led, exploring individuals' struggles with faith and belief in contemporary society. The aim was to take the most popular elements of the docu-soap (with its emphasis on character, strong events and intrinsic narrative) and incorporate them into *Everyman*'s established expository style. The films were to be intimate, personal, dramatic, compelling, and address serious issues in contemporary society.

I was interested in seeing how anthropological approaches would be used in this context. Would 'serious' documentary take 'observational' approaches more seriously than the docu-soap had? Or would it devise more complex strategies to simulate relationships as a way of authenticating the televisual encounter? My discussion of these questions is focused around two programmes I worked on during my time at *Everyman*. 'Is Grandma a Criminal?' and 'Released' reveals problems inherent in observational television that differ from those revealed in *Liverpool Mums*. These stem from the contradiction at the heart of the *Everyman* series – its attempt to fuse an ethnographic style with exposition.

'Is Grandma a Criminal?' followed a Quaker peace campaigner as she prepared to sabotage a Trident nuclear submarine. Sylvia Boyes, a veteran of the Greenham Common campaign of the 1980s, held strong beliefs that were guided by her faith and a deep conviction that it was her moral responsibility to do whatever she could to put a stop to the threat of nuclear weapons. The lengths she was prepared to go to in order to act according to her beliefs distinguished Sylvia as an extraordinary individual. She was planning an attack on a nuclear submarine. We knew it would make great television.

My fieldwork skills, an ability (sharpened by my *Liverpool Mums* experience) to rapidly identify and empathize with the subject became a crucial short cut to achieving the programme's aims. Sylvia agreed to be the subject of an *Everyman* documentary because she wanted to promote the activities of her group. The series' reputation was crucial in convincing her that we were committed to telling her story.

The resultant programme told the story of Sylvia's sabotage attempt; and it explained something of the beliefs which informed her actions. The programme had an 'ethnographic' feel, remaining close to the subject and her experiences, relying on Sylvia's own account of events, rather than using the voice of a disembodied narrator to explain what took place. The narrative of the programme was found in her actions and in the events that were filmed taking place. Implicit in the presentation of Sylvia's story was the impression that the audience was being provided with an inside view of her life and close to Sylvia's own understanding of what took place. Nevertheless the subject had been selected not out of an interest in discovering something, but for its ability to fulfil the *Everyman* brief. This meant knowing what would happen and how the story would end before it even took place. With 'Is Grandma A Criminal?' there weren't enough filming days to risk the possibility of a significantly different story emerging.

Trust was the essential ingredient in an encounter that for Sylvia had no guarantee of outcome, no editorial control and little opportunity for recourse. The initial relationship of trust that we developed with our contributor enabled us to get inside her world and to film her actions in an 'observational' style, with minimal intervention. But once the action was in the can, there was less need to maintain the close relationship we had formed. The director began constructing his explanation and this signalled a new phase in the filming process. Sylvia was interviewed extensively and was required to carry out everyday activities for the purposes of filming. While Sylvia had previously been able to ignore the camera, she was now asked to explain herself and to present herself in a very particular way. Becoming complicit in the construction of her own reality, Sylvia began to realize that she was acting out her own character in someone else's story. She became increasingly suspicious of the programme's aims.

Ironically, the *Everyman* rhetoric of ethics disguised a lack of genuine commitment to the subject. There was a rapid erosion of the relationship of trust with the contributor, once that relationship had served its purpose in obtaining the 'actuality' material. Sylvia had allowed us into her world on the understanding that the programme would somehow reflect the understanding and empathy she had been shown. But the programme told a story that reflected the underlying concerns and interests of the programme-makers. These were more about storytelling, narrative and style than they were about being true to the subject or to what anthropologists might call the experience of 'being there' (evocative of Sylvia's experiences). The underlying narrative and form of 'Is Grandma a Criminal?' conformed to television's need to package, contain and explain human experience. The resultant programme was a compelling account of Sylvia's beliefs and actions; but presented in a sensational manner, Sylvia became spectacle, an objectified 'other'.

The other case I would like to discuss from my fieldwork at *Everyman* offers a number of interesting comparisons with 'Is Grandma a Criminal?' For here the programme's central subject refused to be subject to many of the manipulations of television's 'observational' programme-makers. James Mawdsley was much more knowing – and much more distrusting of programme-makers even when their remit encompassed the ethical.

'Released' was about James Mawdsley, a human-rights campaigner who had spent almost two years in solitary confinement in a Burmese jail for his pro-democracy activities. He was released from prison in October 2000. *Everyman* sought to tell his story from the moment he landed back on British soil. We had fought off the competition to get our hands on James. He seemed like a 'natural *Everyman* subject' – a relentless campaigner driven by his beliefs and his deep Christian faith. Access had been negotiated when James arrived at Heathrow. The film was made largely 'on the fly'. We didn't know what he was going to be doing, but with such a high profile story, it was bound to make good television.

James' journey was largely a voyage through the contemporary media landscape

and his encounters provided a cynical and reflexive view of the media. Just out of solitary confinement, his eyesight damaged by the twenty-four-hour artificial light he had been subjected to in his cell, he was like an animal caught in the glare of headlights, often not knowing which way to turn. In our terms, James revealed himself to be a 'tricky customer' – unpredictable, unreliable, prone to irrational behaviour, frequently changing his mind about being filmed, and loathing us only slightly less than the rest of the media scrum.

James' press officer accompanied him everywhere we filmed and tightly controlled our access to his life. While I liaised with the press officer to arrange what we would film next, the director tried to get close to James. But James didn't trust us and was determined to limit our access to his life. His personal life was 'off limits' and he and his press officer conspired together to control the process of how his story would be presented.

James' reluctance to endure the formal interview set-up led the director to employ a more casual style of asking questions from beside the camera. The director appeared protective of her subject, but this was a strategy designed to encourage James to drop his guard. With a sceptical contributor, little opportunity to nurture the relationship and so much else to consider once in production, this approach had little success. We filmed various events and discovered nothing. There were no twists and turns and the drama we had anticipated, the crisis we had expected James to face and which we needed for his story to become good viewing, never really materialized before the camera. The director struggled to find other ways to animate the encounter, especially in the editing. Using her own voice to narrate the story, the director created an impression of herself as someone who had developed a close relationship with James out of her own desire to understand what motivated him to take such extreme action. The narration implied intimacy and revelation as they explored his freedom together. Yet his reluctance to participate was evident throughout. The director employed other techniques to disguise the distance between herself and the subject. For example, the programme used a variety of news reports and clips from television shows James appeared in, juxtaposing these with evocative reconstruction-style shots of a prison cell, a Burmese savannah landscape and ethnic Karen faces (shot on 16mm film in Thailand). Added to this was footage taken by an undercover video-activist, filming in the aftermath of a massacre inside Burma. Screaming figures flee a burning village. None of the footage was labelled. The boundaries between reality, reconstruction and evocation were unclear.

'Released' utilized a hybrid of styles to give authenticity and intimacy to a reluctant and cynical encounter. The real was not real enough, and the encounter was fictionalized and fabricated to justify the programme's claims to be telling a personal story. While attempting to differentiate itself from the rest of the media, the film revealed its own part in the presentation and commoditization of James's experiences. The programme's disparate and ambiguous use of a range of styles created a hybrid documentary form that mirrored the ambivalent and reflexive nature of the subject's encounter.

Conclusion

If anthropology had radically altered my ways of seeing and engaging with the world, then so did the experience of working in television. Becoming immersed in television documentary production was a subtle process of transformation. It involved the gradual absorption of new ways of interpreting, valuing and understanding human realities.

My experience of working on *Liverpool Mums* and *Everyman* demonstrated to me that the similarities between television documentary and ethnographic film were superficial. These programmes as 'texts' strived to have an 'ethnographic' feel, selecting 'ordinary' people as their subjects, appearing close to the experience, filming 'actuality', structuring storytelling around a narrative intrinsic to events that took place, and supplementing explanation with contributors' own accounts of their experiences. Television's use of its own 'observational' approach offered a closeness to the televisual encounter that created the semblance of a more authentic viewing experience.

Yet the nature of the encounters between contributors and programme-makers reveals the differing conceptions of truth and authenticity that distinguish anthropological approaches to documentary from those of television. Television selected its subjects in order to fulfil predetermined criteria. Relationships were simulated to ensure maximum returns. We knew how stories would end before they began, and there was little scope for revelation or discovery. What was significant and had meaning was chosen according to a set of criteria that existed outside of what was being filmed. Truth or the authentic were to be found in the reality presented to the viewer, packaged in terms of television's own framework of understanding.

Fundamental to the difference between anthropological approaches and those used in television is the process through which the representation of people's realities is arrived at. Anthropologists have always spent a long time in the field because of the particular kind of understanding this enables. It is an understanding based on experience and a willingness to try and imaginatively enter other people's lives. A particular kind of ethnographic reality emerges through the encounter between subject and anthropological film-maker. Truth is not predetermined. It is something attained together.

As television diversifies and expands, its potential for creative engagement with anthropological approaches and insights increases. Fiction series such as Tony Garnett's *Cops* use observational techniques to enhance character and drama. Penny

Woolcock's docudrama *Tina Goes Shopping* achieves a closeness to lived experience rarely found in television documentary. It is in genres other than documentary that ethnographic styles have been used to engage most imaginatively with other people's realities. Documentary has yet to rise to this challenge.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Current debates in media and cultural studies focus largely on issues of content and style in contemporary documentary to address issues of objectivity, performance, truth and reality. See, for example, Bruzzi (2000). The work of Ginsburg (1998) has been significant in making culture and media a focus for anthropological concern.

2. *The Nuer* was compulsory undergraduate reading (Evans-Pritchard 1940). Grimshaw and Hart (1996) offer a more detailed discussion of anthropology's scientific paradigm.

3. My own encounter with anthropology was deeply influenced by my experiences of taking aid to Bosnia during the war. The anthropology I had studied, it seemed, had not equipped me to understand the events that were unfolding before my eyes, both on the television screen and in the (battle)field.

4. *Ecotrip* (1997) available from Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester; www.http://1esl.man.ac.uk/visualanthropology.

5. In particular, drugs were a recurring issue of contention.

6. My Granada Centre training had provided me with many of the skills necessary for working on a docu-soap. In television terms I was 'multi-skilled', I could operate a camera, record sound and talk to contributors, all roles which had traditionally been separated in television production.

7. 'Actuality' was usually either filmed in the hospital or at home, and might be a scan, shopping for a pram or baby clothes, or giving birth. Interviews usually consisted of getting the contributor to explain what they were doing and how they felt about it. 'Wallpaper shots', typically of a contributor ironing, breast-feeding or changing a nappy, were laid over interview material to supplement actuality and commentary.

8. Directors got wides, mediums, close-ups, reverse shots, cutaways, 'noddies' (contributors nodding, apparently in response to something someone else says), so that voice-over and commentary could be added and any part of what was said could be placed at any point in the edited sequence.

9. *Everyman* is a prestigious, award-winning fifty-minute documentary strand produced by the Religion and Ethics department of the BBC. Its attempt to find new audiences had backfired when in 1999, following a spate of much-publicized documentary fakes the previous year, it fell victim to a hoax by a *Sun* reporter who posed as a sex-addicted barmaid for a programme entitled 'Addicted to Love'.

References

Ahmed, A., & Shore, C., Introduction to *The Future of Anthropology* (eds.) A. Ahmed & C. Shore, London and Atlantic Highlands: Athlone Press, 1995.

Bruzzi, S., *New Documentary,* London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G., (eds), *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography,* Berkeley:University of California Press, 1986.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E., *TheNuer,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940.

Ginsburg, F. (ed.), "Notes on British tele-anthropology" and "Television and the Mediation of Culture", *Visual Anthropology Review*, 8:1, Spring, 1992.

Ginsburg, F., "Ethnographies on the Airwaves: the presentation of anthropology on American, British, Belgian and Japanese television", in P. Hockings (ed) *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, 1975; rev.ed. 1995.

Ginsburg, F., "Institutionalizing the Unruly: Charting a Future for Visual Anthropology". *Ethnos*, 63(2): 73 - 201, 1998.

Grimshaw, A.,and Hart, K., *Anthropology and the Crisis of the Intellectuals,* Cambridge: Prickly Pear Press, 1996.

Turton, D., 'Anthropology on television: what next?' in P. I. Crawford and D. Turton (eds.) *Film as Ethnography,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

Margaret Loescher completed the Masters course at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology. Her graduation film, Piece of Me (2000) was about the writer Zadie Smith. She subsequently collaborated on a photography project with Manchester children and directed a film about the inner-city playground they frequented. She is currently on the Advanced Programme for Documentary Direction at the National Film and Television School. Her new film is about the American poet, William Carlos Williams.

Cameras at the Addy: Speaking in Pictures with City Kids

Margaret Loescher

Introduction

The photographs in this article were taken by children using the North Hulme Adventure Playground in Manchester. From March to October 2001 I conducted fieldwork there and made a documentary film, *A Camera at the Addy*. My work at the playground grew out of my involvement in a research project that looked at aspects of contemporary urban childhood.[1] I was particularly interested in children's explorations of space. I was also committed to finding ways of working with the children that would give them some agency in the research process.

In focusing on children's play I drew inspiration from Colin Ward's *The Child in the City,* a book that attends to the skills and pleasures involved in children's mastery of their urban surroundings. In my own research I discovered that the public street had become less the play place of which Ward wrote. Children seemed more likely to play indoors or in areas officially designated for outdoor play. However, I was fortunate to find an adventure playground in the Hulme district of Manchester where children, free from constant adult supervision, were able to create a world of their own. Over an eight-month period I visited the playground as often as I could.

The adventure playground

The playground is a large, enclosed, green area with extensive climbing and swinging apparatus, located by one of the city's ring roads. Housing in Hulme is largely made up of council-owned properties and is a white British- and black British-populated neighbourhood that has undergone extensive redevelopment in recent years. The adventure playground is a stable landmark and has been an

important source of entertainment and childcare for the last 25 years. Most of the children who use the playground live in neighbouring streets. They take themselves and their siblings there after school and often stay until it closes at night. Four trained workers are employed to supervise the facilities, but the children are given a lot of freedom and adult presence is scarce. Children aged from five to thirteen years old are welcome at the 'Addy'; the children I worked with were aged between six and eight years old.

Meeting and getting to know the children was difficult. This unease was captured on camera when I meet a six-year-old, Ainsley and we share introductions. There is an air of uncertainty and mistrust in our meeting.

A: Do you know my name?
M: I've forgotten your name. What's your name?
A: Ainsley.
M: Linsley?
A: Ainsley. (*He grins and looks up at me above the camera*)
M: Is that your real name? *(Said with an air of suspicion)*
A: Yep.
        (Pause)
M: Do you know my name?
A: Maggie.
        (*He squints up at me, tilting his head, half a question, and half a statement*)
M: That's right.
        (Pause)
A: Do you know my second name?
M: No. What's your second name?
A: Ainsley.
M: *(laughs)* So what's your first name?
A: *(laughs)* I mean Ainsley Green!
M: Ainsley Green.
A: Yep.

In this interaction I am wondering what this boy is 'about'. I want to know him and he wants to know me; but I am unsure on what basis we will be 'knowing' each other. Is he, for instance, playing with me? Is he lying to me? Is he introducing himself as someone he is not? This suspicion arose from the significant age and class division I felt between many of the children and myself. They belonged in the playground whilst I did not - I was expecting rejection. Later, I was to use this footage at the beginning of *A Camera at the Addy* as a way of reflecting my tentative entry into the playground world and the reactions of some of the children to my early use of the camera.

I was neither playground staff nor child and my role and interaction in the playground developed slowly. To the children I was obviously not 'staff' as I

Fig. 1: Jenna Bennett

Fig. 2: Shyree Smith

Fig. 3: Ainsley Green

attempted to join in their games without adopting an authoritative stance. This was often an ambiguous role to occupy. It is partly because of this that, once I had introduced the camera into the research, I became recognized as the camera operator. Metaphorically speaking, the camera became my face. During the first few months of filming I was often disappointed by what I understood as the children's 'performances' for the camera. The camera seemed to create a barrier between the children and me. Their performances were aimed at me and yet also beyond me, to a wider audience, some 'unknown other'.

Through the camera the children saw the world of fame and TV. Reflected back to them was an image of them as part of that world. My patience with the children's role-playing and the observational way in which I used the camera seemed to encourage these performances. Ainsley and his cousin Remi danced like Michael Jackson. They practised their moves in the guise of grown men, grabbing their crotches and flexing their muscles. Girls frequently pretended to be presenters of children's TV programmes and *The Antiques Road Show*. While these girls were constantly aware of the situated character of the camera, its limited range and their pretence in relation to it, Ainsley and Remi distanced themselves from the camera's limitations. They were not simply role-playing but defining themselves as men and as 'cool'. The camera might have initiated their dancing but once they had begun, the competitive element of their performance and their concern with making the 'imaginary' real took over.

Even after several months of visiting the playground I felt the children still did not understand that the camera was not a doorway into the world of 'pop' culture. I felt awkward when they performed for their imagined audience - so different from that

which I imagined - particularly when they took it so seriously. This awkwardness stemmed from a position of power I did not want to occupy. I felt I was recording and 'taking' rather than involving and being involved. Eventually I came to understand that they were not playing *for* the camera but *with* it. They were actively and knowingly representing the urban, television environment in which they lived. They were indeed representing themselves.

This became evident when I gave disposable cameras to some of the children in the playground to use there or to take home. Many of the young photographers framed their subjects with significant objects or in landscapes that helped to identify them. Remi is seen posed by the television which is switched off. He is not watching it, rather he is identifying *with* it. In another image Remi's brother, Joely, stands outside the Manchester City Ground. When Remi received his camera he had decided to ask one of his parents to drive to the football stadium and have each of his brothers pose for their portrait there because it was an important place to them all. Lakeasha took a series of photographs of her older sister showing her an array of mobile telephones and one in which she grins in front of a poster of the rapper, Eminem. She also took a photograph of her younger sister, Shyree, in the family living room, draped in a string of lights, holding a trophy, posed like a movie star, the photographs of her family on the walls around her.

Seeing these photographs made it clear that the performances I had been recording in the playground were not an attempt to be 'other' or to please the camera or me. Rather the children were forging relationships with their environment, literally showing and proving that belonging to the playground was 'their place'. Children fill spaces and use the tools they are given to reflect back to the viewer/adult a picture of the urban landscape in which they are emplaced. Thus I came to understand play as a constant 'showing' and shifting of interest. Children interact with their environment in a direct and flexible way. They absorb and shape what they come across. Perhaps it is this openness of children to their surroundings that gives rise to the stereotyped notion of the honesty and 'simplicity' of the child.

The children as photographers

The children's role as photographers marked a new phase in the development of my relationship with them. The images they made of their homes and their families brought me closer to the domestic environments in which I did not film. By being given cameras the children were empowered with the choice of what aspects of the domestic scene they showed. They came to understand my use of the video camera better and what the task of making a film involved. I felt less isolated and overpowerful; and, as I relaxed, I remembered how to play.

With the help of the children's photography I came to appreciate that representation and artistic expression are a part of play. Ainsley used his camera in the playground to instigate a game of chase. In my video footage of the game he 'captures' and 'gets' people with his camera. In this way he collected pieces of his

Fig. 4: Chris Ellis

Fig. 5: Roxanne Williams

Fig. 6: Lakeasha Smith

world that I then had developed. When he looked at the images again, he noticed the photographic choices he had made and the 'captured' places, objects and people he did not remember having photographed. He represented and mirrored back to me the very process of filming and editing which I was experiencing and of which he was a part.

Play for both children and adults is about absorbing an environment, manipulating it and, through this, learning about boundaries. My research in the playground, my use of the camera, and the making of the film also involved play. At the Addy I played at being a child again. I attempted to enter the private spaces of children, listen in on and observe their games in their 'dens'. I held the camera at hip height to engage the audience with a child's world. I filmed what they were interested in. The camera became a toy for the children, an object of exploration. The camera provided a means of recording an environment but also provided a landscape of its own. In one part of the film Ricky leans into the camera, moving her face and hands over it, exploring its parts and attempting to understand how it works. She teases and challenges it by playing hide-and-seek with it - 'I bet you can't see me here!' Ricky plays with the camera and with me behind the camera in the way she might play with a new child in the playground. As a result, the camera became a toy and a tool of exploration for me as well. In responding to Ricky's challenge to the camera, I play hide-and-seek with the camera and Ricky. I allowed the children at the Addy to teach me about the camera that I had introduced to them.

Fig. 7: Shyree Smith

Fig. 8: Lakeasha Smith

When I came to edit the material I had gathered at the playground I saw how both editing and play involve the reconstruction of the world. Endless possibilities and stories can emerge from a body of material. I edited the film as a series of brief encounters and small sequences interspersed with repetitive activity like swinging in order to represent the shifting interest of the children. During my time spent in the playground I observed play as both transitory and continuous: a continuous interest in activities such as swinging, wrestling and dancing and yet an ever-present seeking of the new. Editing is of a similar contradictory nature. It is the process of finding harmony between honesty and dishonesty. My necessary pretences in the editing suite mirrored the children's games of pretend in the playground. Pretending to have control over the story told; pretending it happened the way I decided to show that it happened while, at the same time, trying to acknowledge my role within the film and the influence that my presence had on the children and their photography.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the performance-based playful nature of editing and film-making builds the potential of a shared visual language. It proposes a greater understanding of the film-maker behind the lens and their position within the filmic interactions. This method of film-making should lead to a greater, active involvement of the film subjects in their own representation. In an anthropological film context, the potential for the use of cameras amongst 'researcher' and 'researched' questions the very existence of such categories and enables a

Fig. 9: Jordan Smith

discussion to take place through visual media. Visual media becomes the language of research rather than its tool.

In the making of *A Camera at the Addy*, I discovered that children respond enthusiastically to both video and stills photography. Indeed, I would argue that film and photography are ideal mediums through which to represent childhood and to encourage discussion between children and the adult world. It is not that children are unaware of the effects of being on camera, but that they are expertly aware of what it means to be watched and to watch. Children engage with images all the time. The World Wrestling Foundation and MTV form the basis of a socializing process amongst the children in Hulme. Children are astutely aware of the visual component of belonging and identity. They understand that to be someone or to belong to something you must show to others those associations. But children are also on the lookout for new associations, their identities are constantly in the making. Play is a combination of these processes of acknowledging the ever-present gaze, seeking it and incorporating it into their daily interactions. They are learning about it as much as it is learning about them. This disarms the camera as a force of categorization and potential oppression and pulls it into children's worlds. It becomes another thing which signifies them as social agents, like the television, the mobile telephones, the football ground and the pop-star poster in the photographs taken by children in Hulme.

The current moral panic concerning controls over the use of images of children rewrites children's identities as victims in a world of the camera. Images are the

Fig. 10: Remi Smith

Fig. 11: Ainsley Green

tool of contemporary society. Without the knowledge of how to create and manipulate them, children are denied the use of a prolific urban landscape, one that is as significant as the streets of which Colin Ward wrote.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Anna Grimshaw initiated and led the project which was funded by the University of Manchester. A Manchester-based photographer, Jonathan Purcell and myself, a recent graduate of the Granada Centre, were the other members of the team. In January 2002, photographs taken by children who participated in the project were exhibited in the show 'Moving the Goal Posts: Manchester's Young Photographers'; the film *A Camera at the Addy* was also screened. The event was given financial support by the Community Foundation for Greater Manchester and the University of Manchester.

References

Ward, C., *The Child in the City*, London: Bedford Square Press, 1990 [1979].

Grimshaw, A. and Harris, M. (eds.), *The Child in the City: a case study in experimental anthropology*, Cambridge: Prickly Pear Pamphlets, 2000.
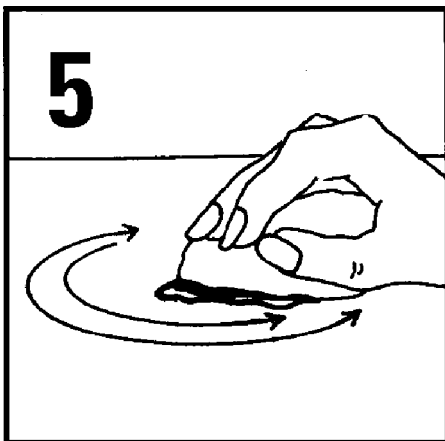
HOW
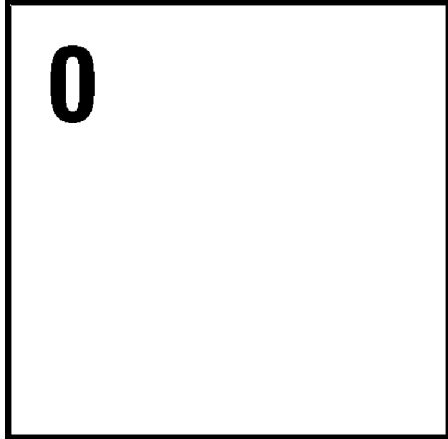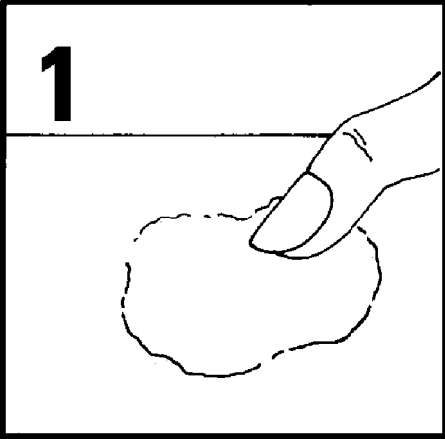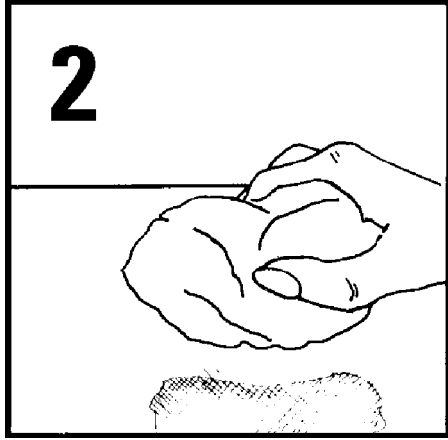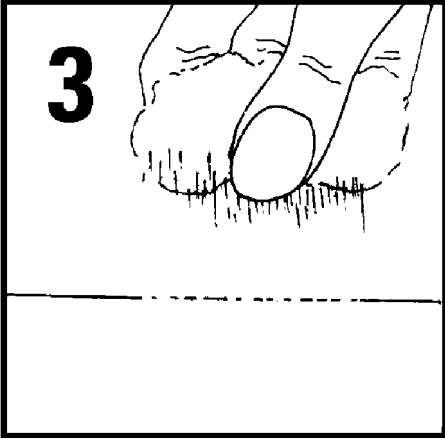TO MAKE
IT GO
AWAY

14

13
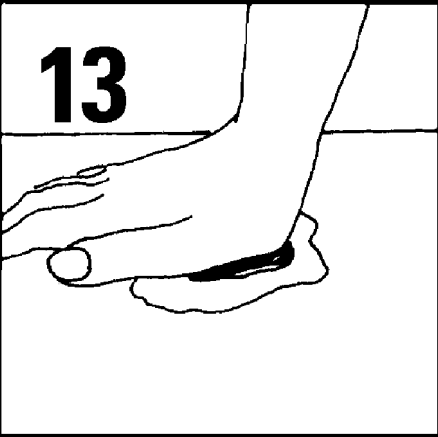
12
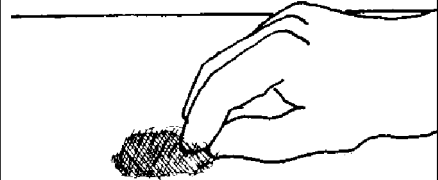
11

10
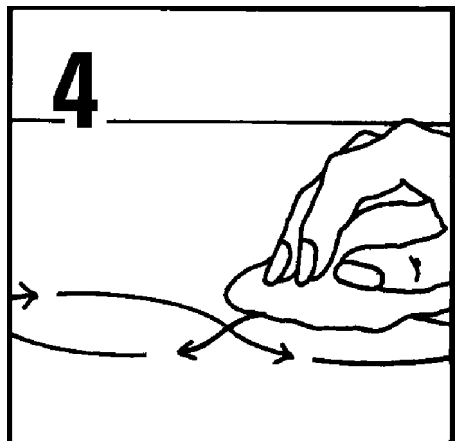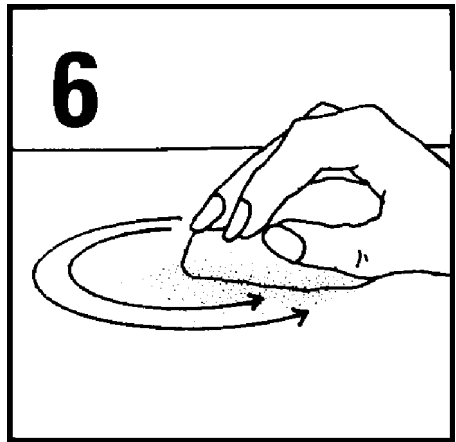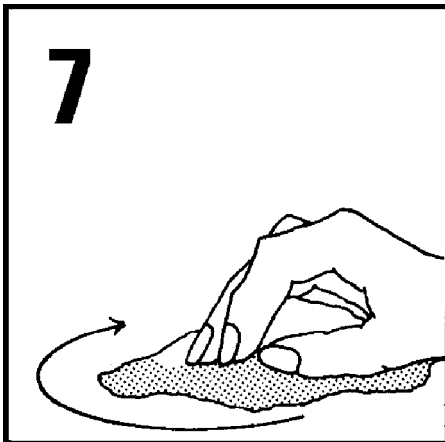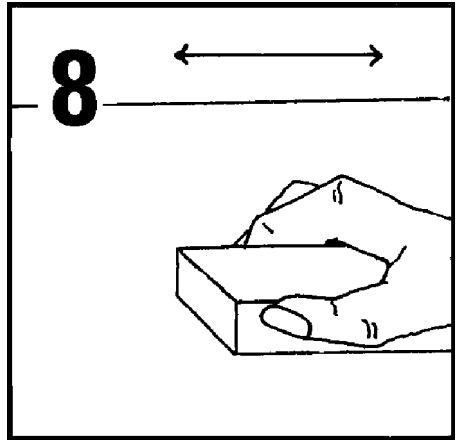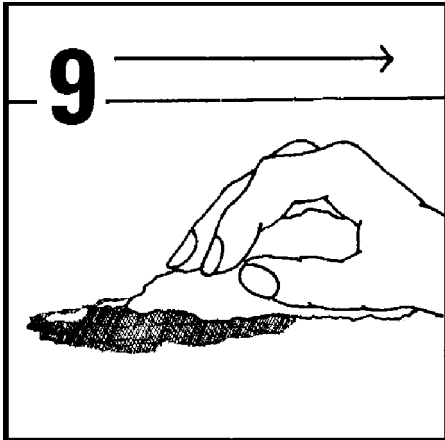
Amanda Ravetz trained as a painter at the Central School of Art
and Design and later completed a doctorate in Social Anthropology
with Visual Media at the University of Manchester, where she also
lectured. She is currently an AHRB Research Fellow at MIRIAD,
Manchester Metropolitan University.

News from Home: Reflections on Fine Art and Anthropology

Amanda Ravetz

Introduction

In his book *Downcast Eyes,* Martin Jay argues persuasively that a survey of French
thought in the twentieth century reveals a surprising *denigration* of vision in the
work of French intellectuals. He suggests that the suspicion surrounding vision, far
from being confined to French intellectual life, has become widespread. At the end
of the twentieth century, he writes, anti-visualist discourse is a pernicious though
largely ignored phenomenon in western thought.

Visual anthropology is not an obvious place to search for evidence of Jay's assertion
of a widespread distrust of vision. But I want to suggest that until now, even visual
anthropologists have considered the visual in visual anthropology to be a problem.
The films of David MacDougall – one of the leading figures in visual anthropology
– are constructed around tightly drawn arguments that have a strong literary base,
despite their observational approach and cinematic feel.[1] Gardner's film *Forest of
Bliss*, which visualizes funerary rites in Benares, is famous for the controversy it
ignited within visual anthropology on its release.[2] This controversy continues to the
present day and centres on the film's insistently visual as opposed to literary
approach.

If the visual has often been acknowledged within visual anthropology in a defensive
way, then as someone with a background in fine art, I want to argue for more than
just its legitimacy. I propose that the visual be given a much bolder and more
radical role in anthropological enquiry.

My interest in arguing for the visual in visual anthropology comes out of my attempt

to creatively fuse two strands of my current work as a teacher and researcher. In tracing my trajectory from fine art to anthropology, I will be asking what fine art can offer to anthropology and anthropology to fine art. I will argue that what unites these traditions is the commitment shown by both to what the anthropologist James Clifford has called 'ethnographic activity'.

For Clifford, ethnography is not a method restricted to the social sciences, but an activity that is constituted in and by the conditions of modernity. It involves the juxtaposition of similarity and difference and the disruption of old orders in a search for new understanding. Surrealism exemplifies ethnographic activity at its most radical, an irruption of the irrational through which other realities might be grasped. But Clifford suggests that ethnographic activity, the placement of like with unlike through the technique of 'montage', is not restricted to surrealism as an artistic movement; rather it is a deeply embedded characteristic of all modern art and anthropology – whether practitioners recognize this or not.

Exploring my own journey through art and anthropology and considering how I draw upon these two traditions in my current work, I hope to offer an example of how anthropology can be extended in creative ways through engagement with another field. If anthropology elevates social worlds then it is the visual imagination and what we might call 'the unreal' that is privileged by fine art. My discussion will move towards a consideration of how these categories of the social and the imaginative might be more effectively integrated.

This attempt to bring together anthropology and art is founded in a particular conception of social research as a process of making social objects. Such objects are shaped in the creative tension between social experience (participation) and reflexive communication (observation). The making of social objects demands the ability to reflect and communicate from a perspective forged from within social experience itself. Thus experience and reflection become part of the fabric of the research piece, whether in text, film, or installation art. This kind of research activity demands an *ethnographic* imagination. Clifford's notion of ethnographic activity – the juxtaposition of the familiar and the strange – suggests that to bring art and anthropology together in visual anthropology is not to collapse one into the other but to see how they can be creatively engaged.

Training and working as an artist
My training in fine art began in the late 1970s at the Central School of Art and Design in London. At this time an academic formalism hampered many British art courses. Painting was in crisis. Not only were tutors troubled about what and how to paint – some had abandoned abstraction after years of commitment – but there was a larger question of whether painting could survive the rash of new media, performance and body art. The Central School of Art and Design had the reputation of providing a solid grounding in the craft and theory of painting in the midst of this uncertainty.

We learnt life drawing, etching, lithography and painting. Discussions with tutors were grounded in an understanding of the broad aesthetic developments within European painting and sculpture. Critiques of historical and contemporary movements in painting were based on the aesthetic and formal merits of artworks, whilst social or political commentaries on fine art were considered to be irrelevant, even taboo. Despite the conservatism of art education at this time, I valued the skills I was able to develop. The most important of these was an unremitting focus on vision. We learnt to put vision before words in our approach to the world, an orientation at odds with the literary basis of secondary education.

The ideology attached to seeing, however, was deeply problematic. Fine vision, like fine art was claimed as the elite activity of artists, rather than a human skill. Furthermore it was assumed that the majority of good artists were and would continue to be men. Like some other young women of the time I was alienated by the mythical status of the male artist. I sought out the work of artists who were challenging this narrow conceptual framework. Many were doing this by focusing on their bodies. Women, in particular, were interested in using their experiences of everyday life in their work. Encouraged by performance art and landscape sculpture I moved away from conventional art-making – painting and drawing – and began instead to work with ephemeral substances and forms.

Between 1988 and 1993 I made a series of ephemeral pieces in the landscape. Moving out of London in order to find the space to work I chose the moors above Todmorden as my main site. I was drawn by the elemental landscape of the southern Pennines, beautiful, bleak, ancient – and one given tremendous poetic force in the work of Ted Hughes (Armitage).

Taking my body as a template I made forms that responded to the forms and substances I found around me. Peat, granite, pebbles, grasses, leaves, sticks, bracken, mud, clay and snow became my material. In some works, I drew around myself on the earth and traced the outline in pebbles, or built up a form from peat, lighting a strip of fire around its perimeter. Many of the pieces were made in response to the qualities of the specific sites in which they were located, making use, for example, of a dip in the land or the curve of a hillock. On holiday in France I came across cracked mud on the bed of a quarry and pulled away layers of the crusted surface to reveal the wet clay beneath in the form of a figure. I dug holes in the ground and covering myself in mud, I lay in them. On another occasion I used wire to create an armature in the shape of my body, then wrapped the armature in rags and set it on fire.

The pieces that I made in this way had a technical simplicity. They involved the choice of a site; the creation of a template from my body or the use of my body itself; the fleshing out of this form, mostly with found materials; the recording of the work photographically and the subsequent disappearance of the figure, predominantly through the process of weathering. Making such objects gave me an intimate knowledge of the sites where I worked. The ephemerality of the figures highlighted the way in which our knowledge of places must be continually renewed.

The decision about when a piece was complete was not a matter of making a judgement based on its visual appearance as an autonomous object; but it was about reaching some temporary resolution or moment of suspension in the ongoing relationship between the land and myself.

The figures I made on the moors above Todmorden were part of a much wider movement encompassing body art, performance, landscape art and time-based media. All of these practices were a manifestation of an interest in exploring the transitory through acts of making. In a seminal book on body and performance art published in 1974 Lea Vergine had noted that 'the body is being used as an art language by an ever greater number of contemporary painters and sculptors'. The common features of this concern with the body were, she noted, an accent on nature and the elimination of culture; a struggle against capitalist co-option of art production; the search for the specific in existence and the desire for intimate acquaintance with kinds of self knowledge that stem from the body; a rejection of encyclopaedic knowledge as opposed to the concept of consciousness; and an unsatisfied need for primary love. In the work of many artists, she writes: 'The body is stripped bare in an extreme attempt to acquire the right to a rebirth back into the world.'

Whilst critics of body art accuse its creators of being self-absorbed and narcissistic, Vergine connects this narcissism to agency. In myth, Narcissus protests and finds gratification through the agency of himself. Similarly, the narcissism of body art lies in the way that tiny private episodes are frozen by tape recorders, cameras, graphs and maps such that 'the artist becomes his object' (Vergine, p. 7). Quoting Merleau-Ponty, Vergine implies that the objectification of self as agent might become the basis for social knowledge. 'With respect to the bodies of others as well as with respect to my own, I have no way of knowing the human body other than by living it' (Vergine, p. 15).

The work I made in the landscape was an idiosyncratic form of ritual. It was also an attempt to report on an experience whilst being deeply immersed in it. Digging myself into the landscape and making photographs was a way of trying to merge with the landscape whilst also looking out from it. This repositioning of the body in order to achieve a renewed engagement with the world is captured in the phrase 'news from home'.

Although the movement away from the high aestheticism of my art training by working in ephemeral forms alleviated some of my discomfort with fine art, I still lacked a means of connecting my art with the sociality of the everyday. I wanted to find ways of recasting my artistic practice as a form of social knowledge. My sense that anthropology could provide such a means was influenced by its method. Fieldwork involved the immersion of the researcher in the lives of others. I hoped that this anthropological technique might form a bridge, enabling me to connect my individual practice as an artist to a more socially orientated exploration of the world.

Becoming an anthropologist

In 1993, I began to study visual and social anthropology at Manchester University. Here I met the anthropologist, Tim Ingold. His key interests – vision and the senses, knowledge and skills, material culture and the perception of the environment and his understanding of the *sociality* of tacit knowledge resonated with my own work. Ingold had abandoned any commitment to the rules of culture as the basis of social life. For him it was the very processes of engagement between humans and their surroundings that constituted sociality. Ingold's anthropological approach was an emphasis on lived experience as the basis for social life.

Later, when I developed my doctoral research project, I chose Todmorden as my field site. I decided to work as an ethnographer in the same location as my earlier artistic practice. Through my artistic practice I had become aware of other figures in the landscape – my neighbours, farmers and builders. I was interested in their different ways of being emplaced. Now, as an anthropologist, my approach to the 'field' was different. I wanted to explore other people's ways of understanding the landscape, their uses of vision, and their notions of belonging and identity.

Central to this new ethnographic project were questions of vision. Not only was this part of my own orientation to the landscape, but vision was also a way of getting at questions of knowledge. What we see and what we know are inextricably bound. One of my key concerns was to explore the relationship between how people in Todmorden see and what they know.

My way of opening up these questions was through the use of a camera – in particular, a video camera. It would, I hoped, allow me to approach questions of vision through the taking up of a new perspective, one located within my embodied use of it, and orientated towards visual worlds and non-verbal practices. Observational cinema has often been identified as the film-making genre which corresponds most closely to the participant-observational method of fieldwork. This was the filmic method I chose.

Fieldwork in Todmorden

In what follows I will use two case studies (located on a farm and council estate) to highlight some of the ways in which during fieldwork, aspects of my art and anthropological sensibilities came together. At other times, however, they did not converge. On the farm, my use of observational techniques provided a strong link to my landscape work. On the estate, imaginative aspects of my art training and phenomenological aspects of my anthropological training were at odds. Observational cinema ran counter to the experiences of the women I came to know. Their surrealist experience of place forced me to imagine a different form than the one I had envisaged for the ethnographic piece I wanted to make.

The case studies are presented in the opposite order to which they actually occurred. Only when I had finished editing the material gathered on the farm, did I understand what had been wrong with using the same approach on the estate. By

presenting the farm first, I want to make explicit many of the implicit assumptions in my approach to fieldwork.

The Farm

The Bracewells are a family of hill farmers. Jim and Dorothy, their grown-up children Helen and James and son-in-law Simon rent a 160-acre holding from a local landlord. They also have a butchering business, selling meat from an indoor market stall. James was 27 when I met the family, living with his parents on the farm and spending most days tending the stock and the land at home while the rest of the family worked on the stall. Dominating the family's engagement with place were the demands and rituals of productive work on the land and at market.

The approach I adopted on the farm was a combination of participant observation and observational film-making. I visited the family on a daily basis and helped out, spending a lot of time with James who was glad of the company and in need of an extra pair of hands. Although I always had the camera with me, I often went for long periods without using it, learning instead how to dehorn cattle, lamb sheep, repair drystone walls and help Dorothy with the cleaning, or ironing clothes for the family to wear at market. By sharing the family's tasks I began to develop an inner perspective on their work. Thus when I filmed James gathering a sheep with twins into the back of a trailer, I was observing his skilled use of the crook and his way of keeping his whole body low when close to the trailer so as not to alarm the sheep.

During the editing of *The Bracewells,* I let the material take its own shape. My aim was to be sensitive to the presence of people, events, places and animals as they appeared in the material; and to reorder this material in such a way that I might discover and communicate something I had not known before. The result was a film about the relationships between the family members, between them and myself and about their relationships with the animals and the land as these emerged through the ordinary activities of daily life.

Through the editing process, I came to understand how much communication on the farm involves vision and touch. Watching, as I had done both with and without a camera, are highly valued skills on the farm. Observation is pivotal to the way in which skills are passed on and things are known. Looking and touching are a major part of animal husbandry, land maintenance and shepherding. This kind of sensory engagement depends for much of the time not on a separation of vision from other sensory modalities of touch, voice, taste and smell, but on a fusion of whole-body sensing with the surroundings and the inseparability of one sense from another. The Bracewells' way of working, on the land and with the animals, was predominantly practical and tacit.

At the same time, editing led me to reflect on the character of anthropological knowledge. The process of shaping scenes, for example of James mucking out the shippon, allowed me to compare the farmer's approach to work with my own as an anthropologist and an artist. James approached certain tasks as a sculptor and a

performer. Mucking out cows in the shippon involved reshaping and remaking relationships between him, the physical space and with the animals. The repetitive character of the act, though arduous, is part of what and how farmers know things. Mucking out is not only functional but also exploratory since animals are touched and spoken to and equipment is checked. Repetitive acts confirm what is already known; but knowledge is replenished as new things come to light.

The anthropological approach that I had pursued at the farm was similarly based on acts of knowing through repetition, renewal and reshaping. In order to understand more about the farm I had immersed myself in place, work and social relations. I was both learning through the acquisition of new skills and through the act of filming. In editing the film, I was shaping an object out of 'found' pieces bearing the impression of those aspects of 'lived time'. The shaping of the film, by allowing new relationships in the materials to emerge, resulted in my discovery of new things.[3]

The observational method of film-making provided the mediating link between my experiences of anthropology and art. Observational films deal with social relationships through placing emphasis on the details of daily activities as they emerge in and through the passing of time. The sense of being inside experience is grasped in observational cinema partly through the presence and observation of detail and partly through the sculptural treatment of form. But if observational cinema involves an attention to detail, it also requires the imaginative surrender of the film-maker to the subjective reality of their subjects' world through a relationship based on trust.

While the conditions of such trust were present on the farm, I came to realize after editing *The Bracewells* that very different conditions existed on the estate. To have worked with these in a satisfactory way would have required a different kind of imaginative leap.

The Estate

Imagine an estate of long curved streets set into a hillside with houses built of yellowish composite block – hybrids of the sandstone terraces on the valley floor and the red brick of the houses two streets down – grouped into short rows with steps running between them and small front gardens with picket fences set on stubby walls, fences painted or creosoted or broken down with rusted nails protruding. Imagine signs on gates, 'Beware of the dog' or the dog itself, barking and baring its teeth, looking set to leap out. Picture the look of different gardens, some heaving with aviaries and bird-feeding tables and fancy planting and tiny neat lawns; and others with long sickening yellowed grasses with two blood-red poppies poking up between broken beds and smashed splintering panes of glass; some with nothing but a bit of grass and tidy lines of washing flapping in the breeze. Imagine in the summer how noises come out of the open front doors and windows, Radio One, the Spice Girls and something with a heavy bass line that throbs relentlessly under the raw shouts of children playing together, swearing and squealing and the

adult voices calling out in tones by turn neutral, harsh and kind. Picture a place where front doors are often open and where women sometimes sit 'doin' nowt' on their doorsteps, watching their children and each other and scanning the street for signs of impacts, of people 'kicking off' or 'grassing' or 'giving the eye'.[4]

My introduction to the estate began at the community centre in an area known as Dinely. The community centre was entered by two groups of people, estate residents and professionals – social workers, housing officers and the police who kept up day and night surveillance on the estate. During my first few days there I met two women, Tina and Cheryl, who were to become decisive in the direction my research was to take. At first the women allowed me to spend time with them in exchange for lifts in my car. Their access to transport was limited and although driving was not conducive to filming, it gave me an insight into how Tina and Cheryl saw their surroundings. Much of their pleasure in being driven around was the privileged view it gave them of the streets. They were acute observers, able to pick out people they knew from a crowded town centre, often winding down the car windows and yelling comments on people's appearances, or broadcasting snippets of the latest gossip and news. This visual scanning was carried through into their approach to the camera. If we were sitting on the street in a large group they sometimes borrowed the camera to use as a tool of surveillance, looking out for people and checking the streets for signs of trouble or 'kicking off'.

From my first days on the estate I had begun to film, but I soon found that the association of observation with surveillance caused problems. The women showed a lot of discomfort in front of the camera and I felt uncomfortable too. I offered to make a film with Tina under her direction, thinking that this would open up new ways of working together. The ten-minute video revealed Tina's ideal version of family life; it was a compilation of happy moments – Tina's young daughter at the fair, at the playground, in her best clothes. After this I was able to film in many different situations, concentrating on aspects of Tina and Cheryl's everyday lives – childcare, friendships, nights out and Tina's search for a new home. But I remained unhappy with the material. Although there was now a good relationship between Tina, Cheryl and myself, the 'ordinary' events that I filmed did not reveal what they imaginatively saw and knew about the world. I was unable to capture the erratic rhythms, the salience of talk, the volatile relationships and the hallucinatory sense of place that surrounded Tina and Cheryl's way of life on the estate.

The rhythm of Tina and Cheryl's lives was extreme and unpredictable. They would either spend hours complaining about boredom – or else everything would happen at once. Often it was talk that precipitated action. One night a rumour spread that a woman known as Fat Flora was moving into an empty house near the community centre. Tina and Cheryl believed she had 'grassed' on Tina causing Tina's younger daughter to be removed from her care. That night Tina, Cheryl and other youngsters from the estate wrecked the house that fat Flora was due to move into, smashing the windows, ripping the fence apart and throwing paint into the rooms.

The power of such talk to precipitate action meant that relationships between Tina,

Cheryl and their friends were volatile. Trust was frequently breaking down. After Fat Flora's house was smashed up, Tina was picked up by the police and charged with the damage, despite the fact that at least twenty people had been involved. Cheryl talked herself into going to the police station to support Tina. The police refused to hear her side. This failure on Cheryl's part caused a rift between her and Tina. It was one widened by rumours and counter-rumours about who had done and said what.

The juxtaposition of boredom and impulsiveness, loyalty and mistrust, a life lived in poverty alongside the prevailing dream of happy families and perfect homes created a surreal imaginary. One morning Cheryl came to my house to tell me what had happened in Dinely overnight. She conjured up a vivid picture of Mitchell who had spent the night in his garden with a gun to his head. He had paced the tiny piece of garden behind his picket fence in the glare of police spotlights, threatening to shoot himself. Everyone knew his wife had been having an affair and now she had left. Cheryl understood how he felt. 'Life's shit isn't it' she said. 'But you've got to dream.'

My attempts to cling on to the humanist values of trust and continuity by using the observational approach in a situation where the world was created from talk, sudden impacts and surreal digressions leaked the breaks and juxtapositions in Tina and Cheryl's lives of all their power in the film. The short film I eventually made reduced the social landscape of the estate into a flat, rationalizing explanatory form.[5]

Conclusion

The question of how to work as an anthropological film-maker in situations like the one I have described on the estate brings me back to the question of what art offers to anthropology and anthropology to art. I want to suggest that if shared reality and immersion in other lives is the bedrock of anthropological assumption, then at the heart of fine art is an assumption about the unreality of the external world – an elevation of and belief in the power of the imagination and untruth.

I began by describing my training in fine art and how it led me from conceptual and aesthetic notions of painting to a growing interest in bodies and situated knowledge. As an artist, imagination was an assumed prerequisite for artistic endeavour. Despite the conservative training I received, good work was measured in terms of how imaginatively one's skills were used. Vision was not tied exclusively to rendering the empirical world. The use of visual media in painting might ideally be said to integrate reflexivity about the materials used with something 'seen' or imagined, whether in the world or with the inner eye. Working in the landscape using my body as a central motif, I inhabited the landscape and myself in imaginative ways. My subsequent move from art to anthropology allowed me to extend my focus on embodiment into a form of situated and experiential

knowledge about the social world. Nevertheless, I continued to approach social worlds and anthropological ways of knowing them in a visually orientated way.

My work as an artist led me to think of anthropological study as a kind of knowledge-in-the-round, a process that involves objects that have to be made. My training as an anthropologist encouraged me to understand the social forms of people's lives, not from the outside but also from an imaginative position within. The crossovers between these two practices of anthropology and art became clearer during fieldwork because I was working in the same location as my earlier artistic practice. I discovered that the shaping of fieldwork data and materials into the written and filmic equivalent of sculptural forms gave new insights into the ways in which people imaginatively and materially shape their lives. At the same time however, when faced with Tina and Cheryl's surreal aesthetic, I was uncertain how to take forward my attempts to integrate aspects of anthropology and art. Later I came to believe that visual media currently situated outside the domain of visual anthropology would have provided more suitable forms of visual ethnography in this case.

Clifford's idea of ethnographic activity is that both artists and anthropologists are concerned with same questions of modernity. The methods of both disciplines involve playful juxtaposition of elements of familiar and unfamiliar. The project of visual anthropology necessarily straddles these fields. The bolder play of the visual in anthropology goes hand in hand with a rethinking of the role of imagination in the discipline. The renewal of visual anthropology requires *more* of the visual. I suggest that a greater range of experimentation is needed. Practitioners of visual anthropology must engage with areas of artistic practice that have traditionally lain outside the field. For too long visual anthropology has focused almost exclusively on a certain kind of documentary film. The new crossovers between fine art and other kinds of image-based practice provide plenty of scope for the extension of the anthropological imagination. Rather than threatening untruth, imagination is an essential part of the ethnographic task.

Acknowledgements

Notes
1. See for example the film *To Live with Herds* by Judith and David MacDougall and David MacDougall's book *Transcultural Cinema*.

2. For evidence of this debate see *Society for Visual Anthropology Newsletter,* 4:2.

3. In particular I understood how faced by unpredictability and economic pressures, the Bracewell family impose a sense of order and rhythm on each day and work together to subdue any underlying conflicts.

4. Kathleen Stewart's writing (1996) is the inspiration for this introductory text; her work helped me greatly in my efforts to understand the life of the estate.

5. This failure made me look again at the work of Jean Rouch. His interest in surrealism and his

work with migrants, people on the move both physically and imaginatively, led him to devise new ways of working. His 'shared anthropology' is rooted less in the trust created through work in the physical world and more through the dreaming up of tall stories and wild escapades. But Rouch's work has been variously represented as the result of one-off artistic genius or as arising from a specific historical moment. Rouch appears such a singular figure partly because his methods do not resonate in obvious ways with a broad anthropological approach. If observational cinema calls on the humanism and the long-term immersion of anthropologists in subjects lives – defining features of anthropological research – then Rouch's belief in the power of the imagination is ultimately linked to problems of verification, quackery and untruth, things that anthropology has long tried to hold at bay.

References

Armitage, S., *Ted Hughes. Poetry selected by Simon Armitage,* London: Faber and Faber, 2000.

Clifford, J., 'On Ethnographic Surrealism' in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Ingold, T., *The Perception of the Environment*, London: Routledge, 2000.

Jay, M., *Downcast Eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.

MacDougall, D., *Transcultural Cinema.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Stewart, K., *A space on the side of the road,* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Vergine, L., *Body art and performance,* Milano, Italy: Skira Editore S.p.A., 1974 reprinted 2000.

Elspeth Owen is an experimental artist working with clay, photography and live art. She has taught and performed in many different settings village primary school, the Open University, special schools, the Museum of Mankind, the Taxi Gallery. She was one of the women who started the Greenham Common peace camp. She likes to forget the boundaries between life and art.
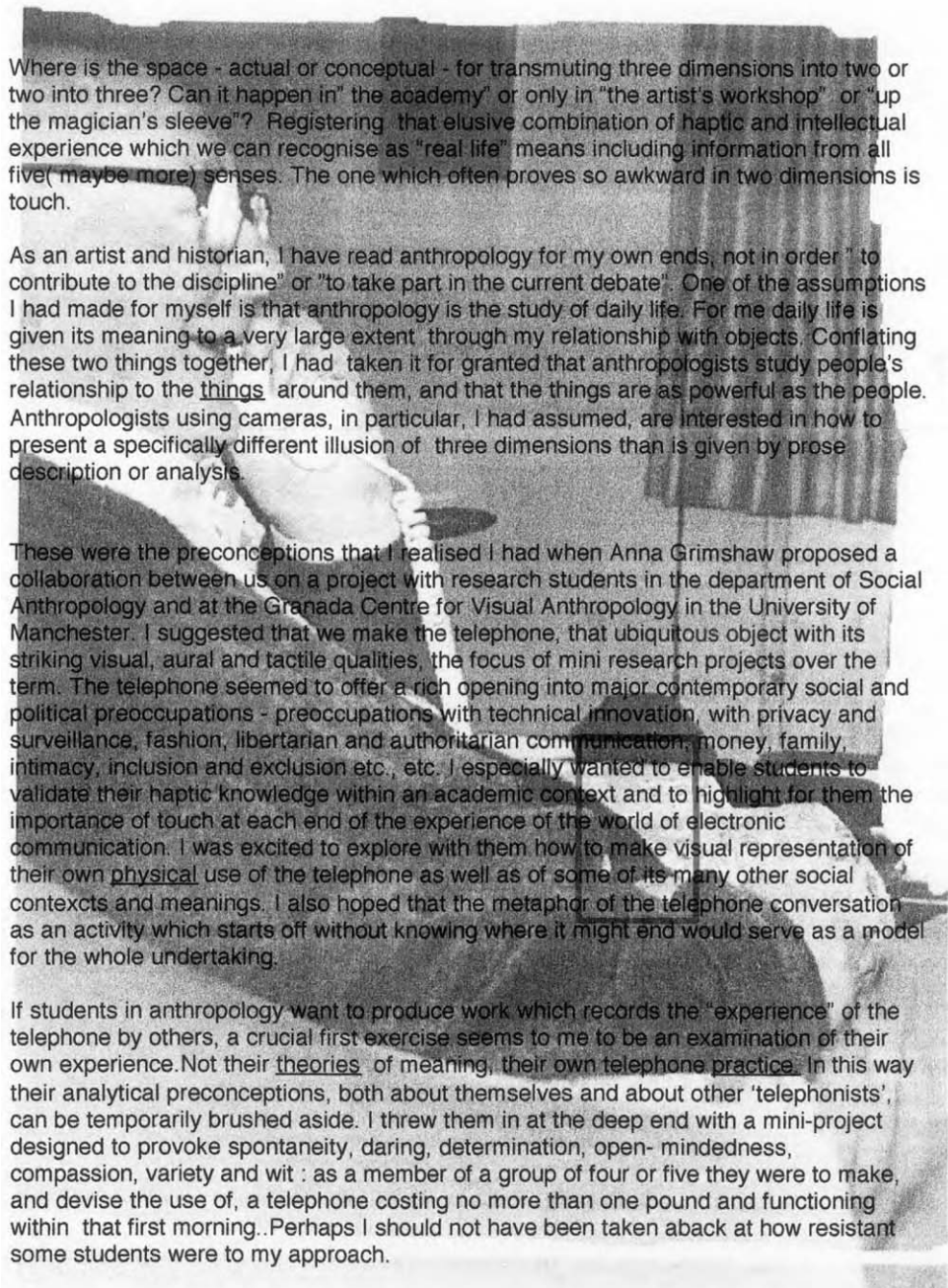
Give Me a Call

Elspeth Owen

GIVE ME A CALL

Elspeth Owen

My father Owen Jones telephoning his granddaughter
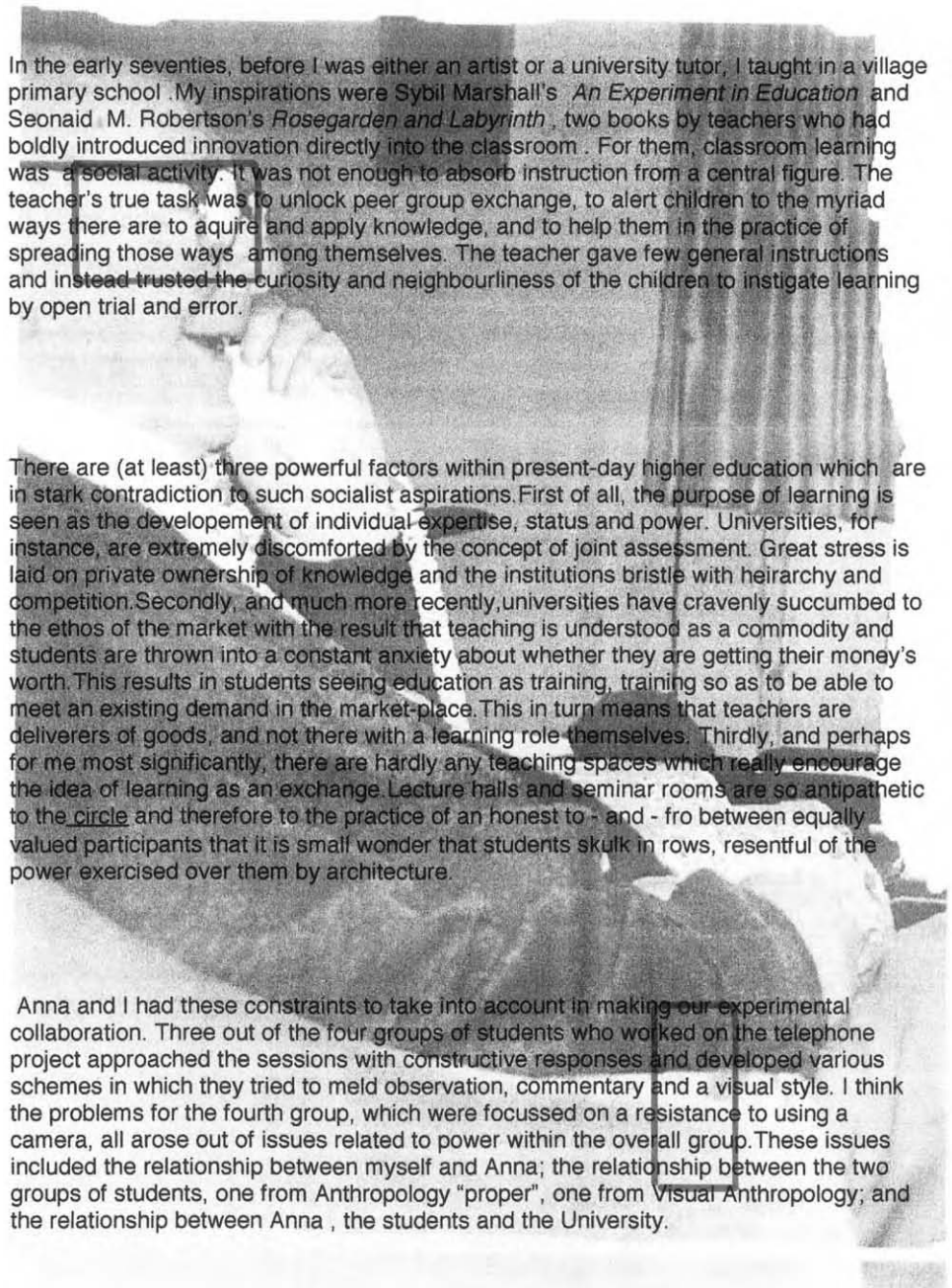Lucie on her thirtieth birthday 3 August 1998.

Where is the space - actual or conceptual - for transmuting three dimensions into two or two into three? Can it happen in" the academy" or only in "the artist's workshop" or "up the magician's sleeve"? Registering that elusive combination of haptic and intellectual experience which we can recognise as "real life" means including information from all five(maybe more) senses. The one which often proves so awkward in two dimensions is touch.

As an artist and historian, I have read anthropology for my own ends, not in order " to contribute to the discipline" or "to take part in the current debate". One of the assumptions I had made for myself is that anthropology is the study of daily life. For me daily life is given its meaning to a very large extent through my relationship with objects. Conflating these two things together, I had taken it for granted that anthropologists study people's relationship to the things around them, and that the things are as powerful as the people. Anthropologists using cameras, in particular, I had assumed, are interested in how to present a specifically different illusion of three dimensions than is given by prose description or analysis.

These were the preconceptions that I realised I had when Anna Grimshaw proposed a collaboration between us on a project with research students in the department of Social Anthropology and at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in the University of Manchester. I suggested that we make the telephone, that ubiquitous object with its striking visual, aural and tactile qualities, the focus of mini research projects over the term. The telephone seemed to offer a rich opening into major contemporary social and political preoccupations - preoccupations with technical innovation, with privacy and surveillance, fashion, libertarian and authoritarian communication, money, family, intimacy, inclusion and exclusion etc., etc. I especially wanted to enable students to validate their haptic knowledge within an academic context and to highlight for them the importance of touch at each end of the experience of the world of electronic communication. I was excited to explore with them how to make visual representation of their own physical use of the telephone as well as of some of its many other social contexcts and meanings. I also hoped that the metaphor of the telephone conversation as an activity which starts off without knowing where it might end would serve as a model for the whole undertaking.
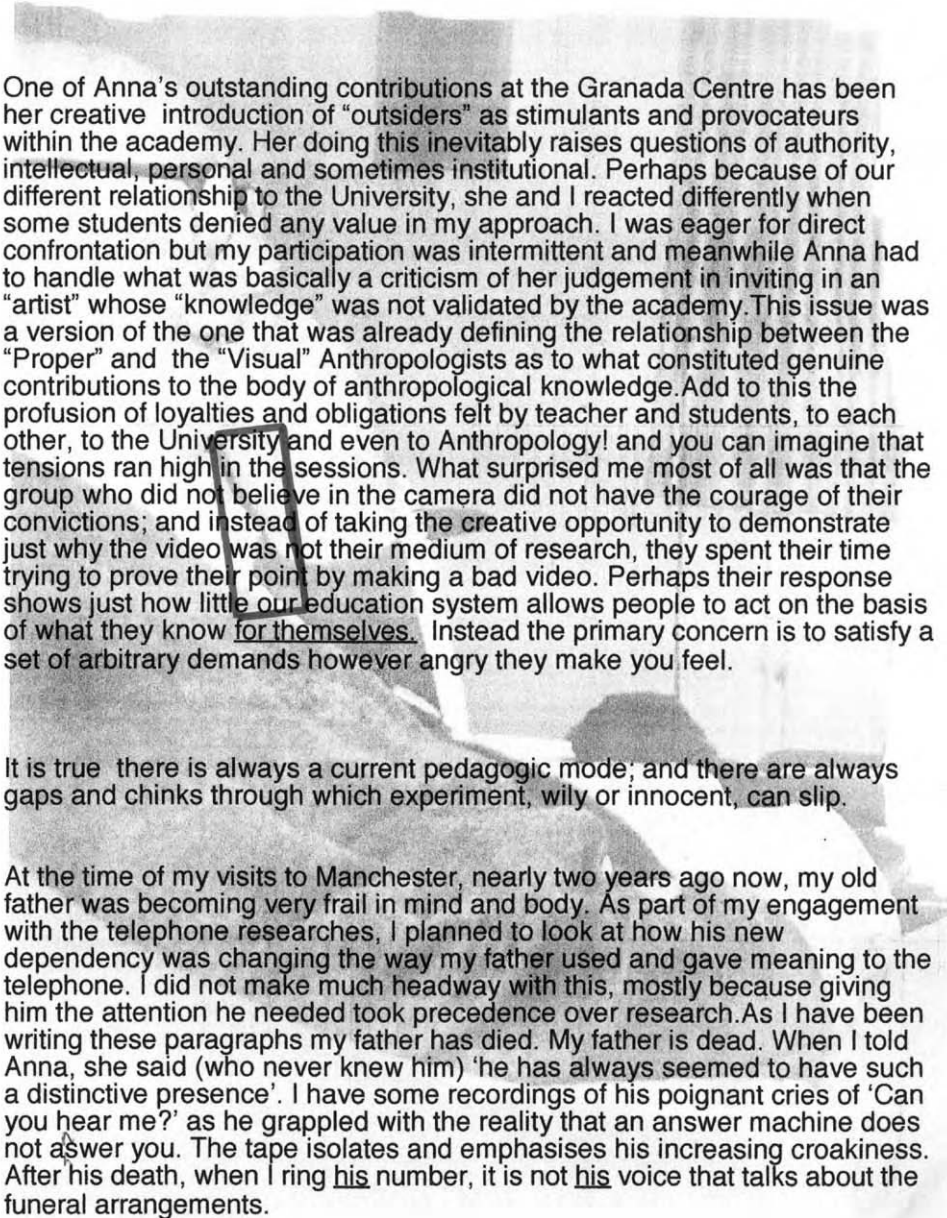
If students in anthropology want to produce work which records the "experience" of the telephone by others, a crucial first exercise seems to me to be an examination of their own experience.Not their theories of meaning, their own telephone practice. In this way their analytical preconceptions, both about themselves and about other 'telephonists', can be temporarily brushed aside. I threw them in at the deep end with a mini-project designed to provoke spontaneity, daring, determination, open- mindedness, compassion, variety and wit : as a member of a group of four or five they were to make, and devise the use of, a telephone costing no more than one pound and functioning within that first morning..Perhaps I should not have been taken aback at how resistant some students were to my approach.

In the early seventies, before I was either an artist or a university tutor, I taught in a village primary school .My inspirations were Sybil Marshall's *An Experiment in Education* and Seonaid M. Robertson's *Rosegarden and Labyrinth* , two books by teachers who had boldly introduced innovation directly into the classroom . For them, classroom learning was a social activity. It was not enough to absorb instruction from a central figure. The teacher's true task was to unlock peer group exchange, to alert children to the myriad ways there are to aquire and apply knowledge, and to help them in the practice of spreading those ways among themselves. The teacher gave few general instructions and instead trusted the curiosity and neighbourliness of the children to instigate learning by open trial and error.

There are (at least) three powerful factors within present-day higher education which are in stark contradiction to such socialist aspirations.First of all, the purpose of learning is seen as the developement of individual expertise, status and power. Universities, for instance, are extremely discomforted by the concept of joint assessment. Great stress is laid on private ownership of knowledge and the institutions bristle with heirarchy and competition.Secondly, and much more recently,universities have cravenly succumbed to the ethos of the market with the result that teaching is understood as a commodity and students are thrown into a constant anxiety about whether they are getting their money's worth.This results in students seeing education as training, training so as to be able to meet an existing demand in the market-place.This in turn means that teachers are deliverers of goods, and not there with a learning role themselves. Thirdly, and perhaps for me most significantly, there are hardly any teaching spaces which really encourage the idea of learning as an exchange.Lecture halls and seminar rooms are so antipathetic to the circle and therefore to the practice of an honest to - and - fro between equally valued participants that it is small wonder that students skulk in rows, resentful of the power exercised over them by architecture.

  Anna and I had these constraints to take into account in making our experimental collaboration. Three out of the four groups of students who worked on the telephone project approached the sessions with constructive responses and developed various schemes in which they tried to meld observation, commentary and a visual style. I think the problems for the fourth group, which were focussed on a resistance to using a camera, all arose out of issues related to power within the overall group.These issues included the relationship between myself and Anna; the relationship between the two groups of students, one from Anthropology "proper", one from Visual Anthropology; and the relationship between Anna , the students and the University.

One of Anna's outstanding contributions at the Granada Centre has been her creative introduction of "outsiders" as stimulants and provocateurs within the academy. Her doing this inevitably raises questions of authority, intellectual, personal and sometimes institutional. Perhaps because of our different relationship to the University, she and I reacted differently when some students denied any value in my approach. I was eager for direct confrontation but my participation was intermittent and meanwhile Anna had to handle what was basically a criticism of her judgement in inviting in an "artist" whose "knowledge" was not validated by the academy. This issue was a version of the one that was already defining the relationship between the "Proper" and the "Visual" Anthropologists as to what constituted genuine contributions to the body of anthropological knowledge. Add to this the profusion of loyalties and obligations felt by teacher and students, to each other, to the University and even to Anthropology! and you can imagine that tensions ran high in the sessions. What surprised me most of all was that the group who did not believe in the camera did not have the courage of their convictions; and instead of taking the creative opportunity to demonstrate just why the video was not their medium of research, they spent their time trying to prove their point by making a bad video. Perhaps their response shows just how little our education system allows people to act on the basis of what they know for themselves. Instead the primary concern is to satisfy a set of arbitrary demands however angry they make you feel.

It is true there is always a current pedagogic mode; and there are always gaps and chinks through which experiment, wily or innocent, can slip.

At the time of my visits to Manchester, nearly two years ago now, my old father was becoming very frail in mind and body. As part of my engagement with the telephone researches, I planned to look at how his new dependency was changing the way my father used and gave meaning to the telephone. I did not make much headway with this, mostly because giving him the attention he needed took precedence over research. As I have been writing these paragraphs my father has died. My father is dead. When I told Anna, she said (who never knew him) 'he has always seemed to have such a distinctive presence'. I have some recordings of his poignant cries of 'Can you hear me?' as he grappled with the reality that an answer machine does not aswer you. The tape isolates and emphasises his increasing croakiness. After his death, when I ring his number, it is not his voice that talks about the funeral arrangements.

② Divorced from the other w...
politics and dirt

'elephant as object · thing? · Heidi...
Anthrop as collaboration · tel. conversation
without knowing how it will end.
subjecting art to deconstruction before it be...

① Commodification of learning · students in go
of anxiety about whether they are getting
one model unable to see learning as collaborative and...
other provides dominance of i...
over knowledge and ...
de... to the concept of learn...
repetition of failures [They
it hard to follow an idea sider

10ᵗʰ Jan

1500 word

ben hooks

nunication, money, family, intimacy etc.
alidate their haptic knowledge within an
the importance of touch at each end of the
numication. I was excited to explore with them
alidate their haptic knowledge within as well as
the importance of touch at each end of the
numication. I was excited to explore with them
and physical use of the telephone as well as
and meanings.

Inga Burrows trained in Fine Art at the Royal College of Art in London. She subsequently studied animation/direction at the National Film and Television School. Recent work includes (2002), a large-scale light projection. She is currently researching 'Finishing Touches', a dance-for-camera project. She is Senior Lecturer in Media Practice, University of Glamorgan.

The Experience and the Object: Making a Documentary Video Installation

Inga Burrows

Introduction

This essay is about the process of making an installation for an exhibition, *Rites of Passage*, commissioned by the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester. The video piece, *The Times of Our Lives*, was to work alongside an exhibition of objects from around the world associated with rites of passage, birth, marriage, and death. The brief I was given by the Gallery was to make a film that documented the significance of ritual in urban communities. Three communities would be invited to participate (a primary school, an antenatal clinic and a residential home for the elderly) and the video was to function as an installation within a given space in the Gallery.

The Times of Our Lives shared the same title as the Whitworth Art Gallery's year-long millennium event. Over the course of 2000, the Gallery held three major exhibitions. The first, *Endings* comprised works of fine art; the second, *Rites of Passage*, was craft- and object-focused; and the final exhibition, *Beginnings,* brought together a range of contemporary work in various media.

The video installation represented a new departure for the Whitworth, as it had never before commissioned a film-maker to make a work. The aims of the project were firstly, to animate the space, bring the objects to life through juxtaposition with 'real people' talking about their lives and shared experiences; and secondly, it was hoped that the video installation would encourage new audiences to visit the gallery. It ran from July to September 2000.[1]

The primary question addressed in my paper is that of making an object, how I

used the materials and the space. Providing an account of this process has not been easy. For, as an artist, I find it difficult to go back over work and analyse its creation; and, in the case of my video installation for the Whitworth Gallery, the object itself no longer exists. Unlike a painting, a film or television production, an installation is dependent on a certain space and technology for its re-creation. Once it has been dismantled, it lives on only in the memory. The meaning of an installation object is created through the relationships between content presentation and the exhibition environment. This contrasts with television-oriented forms in which the meaning is produced through a single television screen.

An important motivation behind the account I provide of my installation work is to try to interest students to think beyond a rather narrow range of media forms. As a media practice lecturer, I find that many of my students are seeking jobs in the television industry and have little appetite for pushing against the boundaries of mainstream forms. Nevertheless it is the case that media practice courses currently draw some of the brightest undergraduates. It seems a pity that such students are not motivated to be more adventurous, since the primary outlet for their skills, television, is becoming increasingly impoverished as a medium of visual communication. I hope that this essay will stimulate discussion among colleagues about how media courses might encourage students to experiment with a broader range of forms and contexts of media production, including gallery work.

Background

I was approached by the Whitworth Art Gallery in the spring of 1999, some fifteen months before the exhibition was due to open. The commission immediately appealed to me for a number of reasons. Since my return to Manchester in 1996 I had wanted to make a film about my home city as a way of reconnecting with the place I had come back to after eighteen years of living elsewhere. I also wanted to re-establish my identity in the community of my childhood. The commission was offered to me at a time when I had already begun to research a documentary film. The project was to document the relationship between neighbouring institutions, a youth club and a residential home. In contrast to the painstaking process of developing a fiction script, a blueprint for a film, I was curious about the unpredictable and dynamic nature of documentary film-making involving human subjects. I recognized the similarities of practice between the documentary film-maker and the fine artist, both independent practitioners who use methods of production that could be described as organic. Both documentary production and the production of a painting involve a cyclical process, a series of stages involving the gathering of materials, a response to and organization of those materials, a continual dialogue between subject material and producer.

The Whitworth Gallery commission presented me with an opportunity to continue to explore themes that had preoccupied me in my earlier painting and film work. These were themes of love, birth, home and flight, expressed figuratively through symbolic imagery and often depicted as absurd ritualistic feats. My paintings and prints frequently contained human figures in physical conflict with other figures,

body parts, or objects such as trees, horses, eggs, houses, vases, or the moon. The source of my ideas came from my immediate life experience. Inspired by Surrealist artists Meret Oppenheim, Dorothea Tanning, Frida Kahlo, I aimed to create images that were humorous and metaphorical representations of common human struggles. These ideas continued in my work as I made the transition from artist to film-maker during the 1990s. A constant theme in my films was transcendence. All of my films involved a central character who escaped the confines of his or her mundane situation through imaginary interactions with a symbolic but commonplace object.

The project proposed by the Whitworth Gallery seemed to offer me a chance to extend these interests. I imagined working with other people's life experiences as the material content of the installation about contemporary ritual. Discovering what types of rituals different age groups underwent and whether particular objects had ritualistic functions at certain times in people's lives was of interest to me personally and professionally.

The Commission

The first stage in thinking about the commission was to consider the form the final presentation would take. The Gallery wanted the film to be conceived as a gallery installation, rather than a conventional single-screen presentation. Usually a video installation is conceived for a specific site. It can have multiple forms and exist in multidimensions. A single-screen presentation, however, is simply presented either on a monitor or large screen; the exhibition context is of no consequence to the viewing experience. The challenge of creating a video installation, in which meaning is created through the interplay of space, formal presentation and material content, fired my enthusiasm for the project.

The lecture theatre of The Whitworth Gallery was allocated as the site for the installation, a self-contained space with doors leading into the gallery. It was both separate from and yet connected to the surrounding galleries where the objects were to be exhibited. The space for the installation contained a stage area to the front, and large tiered auditorium with a 100-seat capacity. From the moment I walked into the lecture theatre I was struck by the rows of empty seats. They had an intensely haunting appeal, evoking a presence through absence. It was this absent audience that suggested to me the physical form of the installation. I envisaged television monitors placed at head height above the seats, heads in close-up illuminating the darkness.

Given the space, I decided early on that I would use and exaggerate the 'talking head' convention of television documentaries, framing each interviewee in extreme close-up. As an artist familiar with gallery environments, I felt confident developing the physical form of the installation. As a first time documentary film-maker, however, I felt much less confident. I decided that the 'talking head' convention, with its narrow restriction, would give me a sense of control in the development of the work. Although the talking heads were to be central to the space, I also wanted

to juxtapose them with more abstract audio elements. From the notion of an audience of 'talking heads in conversation' came the idea of treating the interview material musically. I began to think of how to manipulate the audio material through patterning syllables, repeating phrases, and echoing sentences. I imagined sharply contrasting the familiar visual element, heads fixed in tight close-up, with the audio element that would stray out of synch, overlap and merge with other voices to generate a chorus, or a cacophony. I invited a composer, John Bisset, to work with me to produce a score from the materials. We planned to use the audio material musically, heightening the rhythm and pace of speech in order to make abstract the emotional essence of the interviews.

I wanted to intensify audience involvement by presenting a spectacle of close-up heads speaking continuously, but synchronized to be heard singularly. The viewer would listen to the voice from the one monitor whilst watching the other talking heads. I hoped they would imagine for themselves what the unheard talking heads may be saying.[2]

Production

A primary concern of staff at the Whitworth Gallery involved in the commission was that the video produced should be representative of the communities surrounding the gallery. They were particularly keen that participants be from social groups they wished to attract into the gallery as part of their 'new audiences initiative'. The idea was that the Gallery's Education Officer would identify and develop contacts with certain key groups – for example with St Mary's maternity hospital (opposite the Gallery), a local primary school and a residential home for the elderly. Once participation was agreed, I was to work with each community on their premises in small focus groups. By filming groups rather than individual interviews, we anticipated that participants would respond less self-consciously, stimulated by collective discussion.

The first session took place in the residential home. The planned filming approach was quickly abandoned. People interrupted one another and the presence of the home's activity worker added to the lively chaos of the session. As a novice documentary film-maker, I felt I needed a more restricted/limited strategy in order to get the intimacy of address I saw as necessary for the documentary to be successful. Although the material from the first session was unusable, I had been introduced to a quartet of distinctive individuals – Bill, Nella, Margaret, and George. All of these residents agreed to be filmed in their own rooms. I wanted to make their romantic experiences the focus of the interviews, in contrast to the proposed subject of interviews conducted with the primary-school children: death. Bill related his experience of falling for a young woman who was shot whilst he was in Burma serving in the army. Nella spoke of the loss of her husband in the Second World War, just two days after they were married. George gave an account of how his wife enticed him into marriage with the offer of a cigarette. Margaret described in vivid detail her courtship attire. They provided testimony that was both ordinary and extraordinary, moving and amusing; and it set the tone for the documentary as

a whole. I was struck, too, by the confidence of Bill, Nella, George and Margaret when speaking to camera. Without much of a relationship being established between us, all four were individually willing to share very personal stories with me.

My approach altered as I moved on to film in the primary school. I already had some experience of working with school children. I knew I would need assistance. John Bisset, the film's composer, had been a primary-school teacher. I asked him to collaborate with me on this part of the filming process. We began by discussing with the children their earliest memories. Then we asked the children to bring in their favourite object from home for the following week. John worked in the classroom with the children, getting them to draw or write about their objects. This activity was good preparation for filming the children individually; and as John did this, I interviewed the children one by one in a separate room. The use of the tripod in filming had the advantage of allowing me to interact more with the confident children; but it probably discouraged the shyer children. Had we been allowed by the school to work with a single class for four sessions rather than four classes over four sessions, I would have involved the children much more as interviewees. Taking care to film every child who wished to take part was a manic operation at times; but the children's confidence in speaking about their personal experiences, especially about death, was remarkable. In comparison to the other groups I worked with, ritual appeared to play a more significant role in their lives.

Whilst filming the children and contacting expectant mothers, it occurred to me that although three generations were represented in the film, there was a conceptual and structural imbalance at this stage in the production. One of the most significant contemporary 'rites of passage' which marked the change from adolescence to adulthood was missing from the film. As a lecturer I was aware of how graduation had replaced marriage as a rite of passage into adulthood. It was characterized by debt problems and a desire to travel the world. Hence, following consultation with the Gallery, I decided to work with a group of five illustration students that I had taught at the Manchester Metropolitan University. The student group had entertaining and absorbing stories to contribute about their experience of adolescence. It seemed important for the film to include some material in which male and female subjects spoke about anticipated changes from one life stage to another.

The question of future expectations was the supposed topic of interviews with the pregnant women; but I was concerned that this might have limited scope. I decided to search for women who had recently had babies, hoping to contrast the expectation and reality of motherhood. I filmed these subjects in their homes with their children. It was something of a film-maker's nightmare, as children suckled, cried and clambered over their mothers. But the children's presence, a chorus to the mothers' monologues, generated a distinctive soundtrack, creating a very different atmosphere from other sequences of the film. It was only with this section of the film, with the mothers-to-be, that I wanted to replace the talking head with a broader view. I wanted to show the women's possessions or swollen bellies.[3]

Following discussion with a number of people about the shape and balance of the developing film, I decided to conduct two interviews with fathers. The inclusion of experiences of fatherhood worked well in juxtaposition with the mothers' interviews. Both fathers were, however, unusual. The experiences of one included a shift in sexuality from being a heterosexual family man to becoming a homosexual parent living alone. The other father's experiences involved adoption. Here the father talked eloquently about the ambivalence of becoming a parent and about his and his wife's complex, intensely emotional experience of adopting a child.

As the project progressed, I began to appreciate the storytelling skills people I filmed each had. What I found surprising was how open and willing people were to be filmed talking about their personal experiences. Not a single person I asked refused to be filmed. I was especially struck by how, when we speak about our lives to camera, we frequently structure our stories into roughly similar-length episodes of a few minutes.

The interviews with the two fathers brought the fragmented three-month production period to a close. The move away from filming within institutions to filming individual subjects in their homes, had given renewed momentum to the project. But in assuming greater responsibility in researching the subjects made me aware of the limitations in the material already gathered. I was worried that much of the interviewee material conformed to stereotypical notions of community arts film production, that is, it defined people as members of disadvantaged communities. I began to feel that contributions from Manchester's newly established inhabitants would have helped provide a more comprehensive document of ritual in urban society; but time constraints prevented me from pursuing the idea.

Editing

Once I looked through my materials, the original idea of orchestrating fragments of speech into an abstract score no longer seemed appropriate. Much of the interview material was characterized by its own distinctive narrative, stories told in a few minutes and so engaging that I felt they should not be broken up in the editing process.

Whilst I considered the next stage of the project I visited the Citadel Gallery (St Helens) to see George Barber's video installation, *Discrepancy*. In the piece, two points of view concerning the same incident are heard through two separate speakers at opposite ends of the gallery space. The coherence of the two narrators depends on where you stand in the room, on how much of the story you hear from both of the speakers. The concept was tantalizing but I found the overlapped narration frustrated my involvement in the piece. As a consequence I decided that the voices in my own video installation should be synchronized so as not to disturb the content of the individual stories.

The editing of the documentary material was essentially a process of

simplification. The question was how to structure 8 hours of material into a coherent 30-minute film. I was somewhat daunted by the amount of material, since as an animator and live-action director I had never had to deal with such high shooting ratios before. I was 'waiting for the big idea' before I felt I could do justice to the material. I began editing by selecting what I saw as the strongest interview material and I abandoned the initial idea of organizing it into sections around different ritual themes – e.g. birth, marriage, death as if everyone was part of a group discussion.

I started to see that the talking head aesthetic would be made more powerful by structuring the material differently. Aware that the Gallery's aim was to encourage new audiences into its exhibitions, I wanted to create certain predictability in the film's structure. This I hoped would help viewers to involve themselves more readily in the piece. To encourage audiences' sustained attention, comfortable seating was installed – a rare occurrence in installation spaces. Among curators and artists themselves, there is often a sense that too much soft seating will induce a 'telly-watching' mentality and therefore undermine the high culture experience of the art gallery. Film-makers, too, often reject the gallery as a context for showing their work. For example, Malcolm le Grice bases his rejection of time-based art in galleries on 'the transience of the viewer's engagement' and the fact that the viewer's mobility causes gallery installations to 'veer towards concept rather than an engaged experience'.[4] By creating the intimate atmosphere of a personal conversation, I felt I could avoid this problem, persuading the audience to get absorbed in someone else's story without the obligation to respond as they might do face to face. From this semi-detached position the audience could sit in the darkened space and contemplate their own life history and future expectations.

Budget constraints reduced the number of monitors by a half from the total I had originally planned to use. The seven monitors were carefully situated to effectively illuminate the empty seats, suggesting many other untold stories. The intimate

address of the talking heads transformed the formal setting of the lecture theatre. Unlike the television talking head where once a subject has spoken they are edited out of view, in *The Times of Our Lives* viewers had the opportunity to return their attention to a particular subject present on screen some time after that subject's story had been heard.[5]

My intention was to create a video installation that would work in relation to the surrounding gallery exhibition. I wanted people who had experienced the installation to leave the lecture theatre with a renewed interest in the objects of the exhibition. I hoped that the installation would lead them to approach these objects with a heightened consciousness of their *own* experience of ritual.

Conclusion

If I was asked to undertake a similar video installation project in the future, there are a number of aspects of the process I would treat differently. Most importantly, I would want much greater collaboration between the gallery curators, the anthropological adviser and myself as the artist. In the case of the Whitworth Gallery commission, it was left to me to consider how the installation would relate to the surrounding exhibition. This was difficult, since my project was not considered an integral part of the developing exhibition; but rather it was viewed by the Gallery as a separate, special feature. Hence I created my installation without access to the objects being selected for display. I was not a participant in the ongoing discussions among the curators about the content and style of the exhibition in which my own installation piece was to be placed alongside other objects.

I was fortunate to be able to draw on the advice of the Gallery's Education Officer whose primary concern was that the installation had to be accessible in content

whilst possessing the status of an art object. The consulting anthropologist focused my attention on the material content of my interviews – what did each say about the nature of ritual? Nevertheless I feel my project would have benefited enormously from a greater involvement by curators with their particular expertise. Closer collaboration might have generated new ideas about the animation of objects within a gallery space, leading to a more creative relationship between exhibition and installation.[6]

I accepted the commission from the Whitworth Gallery at a point when I was uncertain of my direction as a film-maker. The experience of completing the video installation served to clarify the future development of my work. The use of minimal technology gave me freedom and immediacy, enabling me to return to a way of working akin to independent fine-art practice. I do not discount the possibility of producing work for television; but, like many film-makers, I feel discouraged by the dull schedules on national television. It is ironic that with the advancement of technology, with the increasing sophistication of television production, that the quality of ideas informing programmes appears to be diminishing. By contrast the art gallery is growing in importance as a site for innovative media practice. Artist film-makers have begun to borrow conventions from television as a way of articulating their ideas; and it may be that this gallery-based film work might stimulate a broader debate about television itself. As public interest in installation and video art increases, perhaps television's commissioning editors will become more adventurous in the kinds of projects they choose to support.[7] Persuading media practice students to think more broadly and radically about what they produce is part of the same challenge.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The initiative for the video installation was largely that of Esme Ward, the Gallery's Education Officer. Once I accepted the brief, I discovered that despite the strongly anthropological theme of millennium exhibitions, the Gallery had not drawn on the interests and expertise of Manchester University's anthropology department. Given her familiarity with both the filmic and ethnographic issues raised by my project, I invited Anna Grimshaw to work with me as an informal consultant.

2. In working this way, I was following the example of a number of other video artists who have appropriated documentary techniques to create their gallery installations. For instance, Gillian Wearing uses documentary elements to powerful effect in *Confess All On Video* (1994). The piece is a series of 'talking head' interviews in which each person talks about their traumatic experiences, their identity and emotional expressions hidden by masks.

3. Only in one other place do I show an interviewee's belongings, a wedding ring. I decided to include the shot of Bill Dove's wedding ring because, held in his open palm, the ring showed how objects can continue to hold intense significance in people's lives. The image of the ring was also linked to the next set of interviews in which a group of elderly people speak about romance and marriage.

4. 'Improvising Time and Image', *Filmwaves* 14:1, p.18.

5. Working with my editor, Liza Ryan, we arranged for the seven separate timelines to be

synchronized. Seeing a mock-up of the seven screens, it was clear that more talking heads were needed to sustain the sequencing of ageing faces across all the monitors. Filming additional talking heads heightened the possibility of the viewer's speculative involvement in the piece as these heads remained a mute presence.

6. This being my first documentary I approached the editing tentatively with a simple creative aim, to organize the material content to enhance the emotional content of the interviews. Given the opportunity to work on a documentary project in the future I would explore questions of how can an artist both use documentary material respectfully and be playful with it. To what extent is it possible to find unique shapes and forms within documentary material without destroying its integrity?

7. Visiting art galleries has never been more popular. Video art and installation art are now familiar to the general public, not least as a result of the publicity generated by the Turner prize.

Arnd Schneider is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of East London and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Hamburg. He has published on his fieldwork in Sicily and Argentina (*Futures Lost*, 2000) and the relationship between contemporary art and Anthropology ('On Appropriation', *Social Anthropology*, 2003). He was co-organiser with Chris Wright of the international conference 'Fieldworks' held at Tate Modern, 2003.

Setting Up Roots, or the Anthropologist on the Set:
Observations on the Shooting of a Cinema Movie in a Mapuche Reservation, Argentina[1]

Arnd Schneider

Prelude

One common perception of cinema is that it is an extreme, hyper-real construction of reality. Field sites do not seem to escape this fate; and, in due course, they become locations and, in turn, locations become sites of fieldwork. Rather than thinking of two discrete entities, field sites as observed 'reality' here and locations as the places of scripted 'fictions' there, both are site specific, constructed realities. From an analytic point of view, we can consider the roles of anthropologist and director in their creative interventions into local realities. The ethnographic research design is comparable to the script, as is the shoot, with its creative derivation from and interpretation of the script. However, in terms of declared aims, there still appears to be a main difference between the field site and location, one is about fact-finding (ethnography) while the other is about fabricating fantasies (cinema). Whilst they might differ in their aims, both the practice and writing of ethnography strive for truth values and verisimilar representations, and so do many genres of cinema. In this sense, both field sites and locations are constructed realities, or 'hyper real'.[2] Field sites and locations are also to some degree interchangeable, the boundaries between them blurring depending on which group of 'actors' (artists, ethnographers, cinematographers) interacts within them.

Fig. 1: Salvatore 'Totò' Marino on the set of The Sicilian (Michael Cimino, 1987) in Sutera, Central Sicily, 1986. Photo: Nino di Prima.

This situation arose in my first site of fieldwork in Sicily.[3] A year after my departure in 1985, the mountain village of Sutera became one the many locations for Michael Cimino's *The Sicilian*, starring Christopher Lambert. After the enormous lorries, that hardly fitted into the village square, left Rome's dream factory, *Cinecittà*, I returned the following summer, people proudly pointed out to me how the village had been transformed during the shooting. Facades had been painted and locals had participated as extras. One take featured the shoemaker, Totò, repairing shoes on his stool in the *piazza*. When I saw the finished film, however, there was just a glimpse of him. It was cut indiscriminately against scenes from other unnamed villages in Sicily. The motive of pride, participation and comment for local people became, in the film, just one of many generic picturesque shots without any local reference. People – whose life-worlds and environments have become locations – especially when the story is based on specific historical events or characters (the bandit Giuliano[4] in the case of *The Sicilian*), are usually aware of cinema's quality to transform the local into a generalised impersonal discourse, dictated by script, commercial interests, and the tastes of the supposed audience (in this case, primarily American and European). Quite different expectations are created, though, when a director promises the people of the location more than just a cursory view or generic representation of their place. If the real name of the place is put forward and is selected as the main location, as was the case of *El Camino* shot in the Patagonian town of Aluminé, then the local people feel they have become the chosen ones!

1. Introduction

The subject of this chapter is the recent production of an Argentine feature film, *El Camino* (105 mins., Javier Olivera, 2000). It was shot in part in a Mapuche reservation and in a neighbouring town in Patagonia. The issues I want to address are complex and include the perspectives of the film crew, villagers and indigenous people. The intricate web of politics and ethics of representation which are

Fig. 2: Illuminated billboard of El Camino when it was released in Buenos Aires in 2000. (All photographs by Arnd Schneider, except Fig. 1).

involved in the practical preparation and execution of shooting in a reservation of indigenous people in Argentina is my principal concern. I also address the political agenda, or 'indigenism' of the movie – that is, the explicit aims as they were spelled out to me in meetings and interviews with the director. Thus the main emphasis here is on the production process (especially the shooting) rather than on the finished film which was screened in Buenos Aires and other parts of the country. Finally, I take up the issue of how, as an anthropologist, I became complicit with the film crew. My intention was to be an observer but I became a participant, intervening in the production process.

Research was carried out in April 2000. I accompanied the director, Javier Olivera, and the film crew in Patagonia for ten days. Originally I had approached Olivera in his capacity as a painter who incorporates indigenous symbols into his works; and it was from that first encounter that the opportunity arose to follow the development of his film project, *El Camino* (figure 2).

2. The film and its background

The story line
El Camino is a 'road movie', incorporating elements from the thriller genre with a fast moving story in order to appeal to a young Argentine public. The protagonist, Manuel, is in his early twenties. He is a pensive, good-looking young man from a well-to-do Buenos Aires neighbourhood. He never got to know his father, but a funeral notice for his grandfather in the provincial town of Azul leads him drive there on his motorbike in the hope of meeting his father. Although the father remains elusive, an uncle tells Manuel to search for him in Aluminé (Neuquén Province, Patagonia). On his motorbike, our hero starts a long trip through the Province of Buenos Aires. During the journey many things happen. Manuel falls in love with a young woman, Caro. He witnesses the murder of a young man in police custody and he is pursued by the police officer assassin. Manuel arrives in Aluminé and is reunited with Caro; and together they visit the Mapuche reservation of Ruca Choroi. Manuel's father, an anthropologist, is absent in Germany; but Casimiro, a Mapuche and good friend of his father, shows him the house and a workshop his father has set up on the Mapuche reservation. Meanwhile, Ferraro, the corrupt police officer has arrived; he searches for Manuel and threatens to kill him. His

attempt, however, is foiled by a number of unarmed Mapuche who encircle him and persuade him to put down the gun. Eventually, Manuel gives evidence in a court and Ferraro is convicted.

The film's agenda

The film's young director, Javier Olivera, son of the renowned Argentine director Héctor Olivera (best known for his *La Patagonia Rebelde*, 1974) had already made documentaries for the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs and one feature film (*El visitante*, 1999), based on the story of a veteran from the Falklands/Malvinas war. In *El Camino*, Olivera's aim was to show, as he expressed in various conversations, 'another reality, contemporary indigenous people', and to open the eyes of a largely 'white', European-descended inhabitants of Buenos Aires and the coastal provinces. Although not called *indigenismo* in Argentina (as in Mexico or Peru) his motifs were akin to these ideologies, in that he sought to vindicate indigenous otherness from the perspective of the white or Creole (*criollo*) population. After the 1871 Desert Campaign, in which the Argentine army took territories south of Buenos Aires and in Patagonia, the resistance of the Mapuche was broken. Indigenous people were pushed into reservations, resettled, and above all, marginalised, geographically, economically and culturally.[5] In the construction of the nation-state there was no symbolical space for indigenous people, or for that matter, for the few remaining African Argentines.[6] Although much mythologised in Argentine arts and literature, a partly indigenous past or present is rarely acknowledged. Film directors, such as Olivera, and other intellectuals are a minority, creative individuals who search for 'roots', inspired by past and present indigenous cultures, and who try to convey a political message of cultural resistance. Sometimes this is paraphrased as resistance against North American influence and globalisation. Their perspective, the viewpoint of the urban, 'white' *porteños*, the inhabitants of Buenos Aire, is a construction or appropriation.[7] It is not the perspective of indigenous people themselves. Nor is it the approach of indigenous ethnic leaders, some of whom, like Juan Namuncurá (a musician and director of the foundation *Instituto de Cultura Indígena* in Buenos Aires), were very critical of the film. It is also not the view of the few established indigenous artists, such as the Mapuche singer Pichi Malen, or the video-maker Paula Coliqueo.

The film had several objectives. First of all, it was planned as a commercial project.[8] Secondly, it represented an attempt to combine the separate and mutually alien worlds of upper middle-class 'white' Buenos Aires, with the interior, the Province of Buenos Aires and the 'South', that is Patagonia. But thirdly, and more importantly, the aim was to include the indigenous people of Patagonia, traditionally excluded from Argentine mainstream culture, in the film's narrative. An analysis of the script and the finished work raises questions about how these images were fabricated, what kind of stereotypes of indigenous people did the film convey and how were they received by the audience. Above all, it is important to ask whether indigenous people were represented differently or whether, once more, they were used just as a picturesque background.

My emphasis here, however, is the process by which reality was fabricated during the shooting of the film, the ethnography off-screen as it was observed first-hand. Of course, the film was also constructed in pre- and post-production; but, apart from interviews with a handful of production executives and editors, I had little opportunity to witness these parts of the process.

On location

By the time I reached the film crew in northern Patagonia in early April 2000, they had been travelling by bus and car through the Province of Buenos Aires for about two weeks. The crew was booked into a huge alpine-style hotel at the outskirts of the village of Aluminé, Neuquén Province. From there a small gravel road led to Ruca Choroi ('Singing Parrot'), one of the largest Mapuche reservations in the country. Our schedule was first to shoot some scenes in the town of Aluminé. These were to include outdoor shots, street scenes (the arrival of the female protagonist, Caro, at the bus station) and interiors in the supposed house of Manuel's father as shown to Manuel by Casimiro, his father's close Mapuche friend.

The story of the making of this film can be told be from different vantage points. In the presentation of my material, I attempt to represent the agendas and expectations of the diverse groups and individuals involved – namely the film crew, the villagers of Aluminé, and the indigenous people of Ruca Choroi.

The crew[9]

What were the crew's expectations of shooting in the Mapuche reservation? The crew clearly perceived a difference between the earlier part of the shoot in the Province of Buenos Aires and the final part of the film set in and around the reservation. During their journey to the reservation, crew members were curious. I remember the second director's assistant wondering how the indigenous people would receive them. This contrasted with the producer's verdict that the trip to the Indian reservation was wholly unnecessary and that the final part of the story could have equally been shot elsewhere, for example, in the province of Buenos Aires. The assistant producer, a young woman in her twenties, wondered about the 'authenticity' of the Indians she was to encounter. She expected them to be 'fake' and 'dressed up' for tourists.

However, the principal concept used by members of the film crew to describe their intended rapport with the Mapuche, or more generally their attitude towards them, was *respect*. They expressed respect for people whose social and cultural situation was completely different. This was coupled, in some cases, with an admiration for the natural beauty of the indigenous landscape and customs. It has to be emphasised that a sense of guilt for the historical appropriation of indigenous territories arguably underlay this concept of respect – a trope familiar from other settler societies.[10] Nevertheless, apart from the director, assistant director, and

possibly some other members of the crew, few were aware that this was also another historically loaded encounter between the victors and the vanquished.

The villagers of Aluminé

A different narrative of the film shoot was obtained from the villagers of Aluminé. Aluminé is a small town with aspirations of becoming a tourist centre, offering hiking and wild-water holidays in a remote part of Argentina. The villagers' interests and expectations became very clear during a reception organised for the film's director in the great hall of the hotel. The mayor was present as well as several councillors and representatives of the local tourist board. In their speeches they welcomed Olivera's choice of location, saying that it was an opportunity to make Aluminé and its tourist attractions known to a wider public. Emphasis was on nature and on the ecological and adventure tourism that had provided a livelihood to many villagers. It was perceived as an area of future growth.

Olivera was especially praised for his decision to mention the real name of Aluminé in the film, instead of just using Patagonian landscapes as fictional background settings. The director responded politely. He praised the villagers for their co-operation and avoided controversial topics – obviously, he did not want to endanger the smooth running of the shoot.

In fact, in the speeches of the representatives from Aluminé no mention was made of the Mapuche of Ruca Choroi, or the conflicts surrounding their occupation of lands in the area of Pulmarí. During the discussion it fell to me to ask the delicate question about the indigenous community at Ruca Choroi. People replied rather hesitantly, saying that Aluminé should be known as much for its nature reserves as for its indigenous reservation. The indigenous people had become another kind of local flora, a tourist attraction, rather than people who had legitimate rights and their own voice.

The Mapuche of Ruca Choroi

When writing about the Mapuche of Ruca Choroi, I should point out that I visited their reservation as the anthropologist of the film crew (wishing to study the process of film production) *not* as an ethnographer of the Mapuche. Although I had briefly stayed with the Mapuche of another reservation, Anecón Grande, in the Province of Rio Negro and had contemplated doing research on economic and political relations in that reservation, I cannot claim any special familiarity with their culture, and less so with Ruca Choroi. My position was substantially different from that of an anthropologist conducting long-term fieldwork. The Mapuche perceived me as part of the crew. Nevertheless crew members would ask me, 'What are you doing here?', as *they* assumed that as an anthropologist I had come with them for the opportunity to visit a reservation, to study the Mapuche *not* them. I was, however, part of the film crew and I participated *ad honorem* in some production activities, such as helping the assistant director, Aldo Romero, to cast extras. (Figures 3 and 4)

Figs. 3 & 4: Aldo Romero (Assistant Director) casting Mapuche extras, and preparing reminder notes for extras to present themselves for a shoot on one of the following days. Note the script and the list of extras.

A different narrative of the film shoot was provided by the indigenous Mapuche from the nearby reservation of Ruca Choroi. They told me about pre-production meetings with the director, their experiences of and participation in the actual shooting, and their expectations of the post-production period when they were hoping for a screening of the film on the reservation as promised by Javier Olivera. He kept his promise and the film was shown there in spring 2001. So, what were the expectations of the Mapuche? When shooting started, not all the people on the reservation actually knew about the film. The motivation to participate was mostly economic, as there were very few opportunities for paid work in Ruca Choroi or in Aluminé. The economy of the Mapuche is based on a few cattle and the nuts of the monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria* or *Pehuén*). For participating in *El Camino*, film extras were paid $15 a day. This agreement was reached only after long and protracted talks with the indigenous council (headed by the elected chief) and with the support of the traditional *lonko* by descent, Amaranto Aigo, after whose descent group's name the Mapuche group of Ruka Choroi still calls itself.[11]

The agenda of the film remained an abstract entity for the Mapuche, as did the entire story, especially since they had not seen the first part shot in Buenos Aires and the Province of Buenos Aires. They were keen, however, to ensure that they were portrayed as 'modern', not 'backward' indigenous people. The elderly people remembered the shooting of Jorge Prelorán's documentary, *Araucanos de Ruca Choroi* (1971, re-released as *Damacio Caitruz*)[12] that involved the whole community. According to accounts given to me, when Prelorán later showed the film on the reservation, the response was largely favourable but people disagreed with the inclusion of a funerary scene which went against their religious sentiments. The Mapuche I spoke to were keen to point out that they should be portrayed as they live today, neither as 'backward Indians', nor in terms of romanticized images held by Argentine society. One charge levelled against the film crew (as against tourists who visit the reservation) was that the 'white' people just take photos away and make money. Coming as complete outsiders to the reservation, and invading it with unfamiliar technical apparatus and production schedules, the crew was met with both curiosity and indifference.

The Mapuche see themselves as the rightful communal owners, not only of their settlement of Ruca Choroi but also of the grazing grounds in nearby Pulmarí which they have occupied from the *cooperación*, a military institution that holds land in the area. The Mapuche are well aware that their lands, historically speaking, are territories of retreat, marginal places they were forced into after the defeat in the 1870s 'Campaign of the Desert'. Their claim for land in this area has then a double-significance. It symbolises their ability to survive with their livestock and it is an act of resistance against the military as representative of the 'white' nation-state that stole their homeland in the province of Buenos Aires more than a hundred years ago.

Impersonating fictions

Last but not least in this account there are people who fabricate another narrative, that is people like myself, a visiting anthropologist, who while not officially participating in the film occasional help out. It is one of the creative dilemmas of fieldwork with artists that anthropologists, trained according to Malinowskian parameters (as I was at the LSE in the 1980s), usually try to take more of an observer's, rather than participant's role in activities. Although anthropologists have been consultants to documentary film-makers and practice visual anthropology themselves, when it comes to the visual arts they have confined themselves mostly to observation and interviewing.[13]

Other people became involved, for example Damian Petronca, who uncannily impersonated characters from the film. He was a young man from Greater Buenos Aires, whose soul-finding quest, led him to embark on a hitch-hiking journey that followed Rubén Patagonia, the indigenous rock-musician, who plays the part of Casimiro. Just like Manuel in the film, Damian was looking to escape from his alienated urban existence in the South.

Had I also a double? The protagonist, Manuel's father, an anthropologist, was absent in Germany – a strange coincidence. Javier Olivera had written the script before knowing me. I was already cast in the film, blurring the porous boundaries between fact finding ethnography, fictitious cinema, or "enacted theatre" as George Marcus's notion of the 'mise-en-scène character' of fieldwork suggests (1997a, b, 2003).

4. Shooting and Representation

I now wish to turn my attention to the problematic and complex interaction between local people, indigenous people and film crew. I will present a few specific episodes. Using these examples I want to highlight features that are crucial in any understanding of this feature film production and its impact on the local community. The first concerns the reaction of onlookers, including their own filming and photographing of the shoot. The second example deals with the participation of indigenous extras, who experienced the invasive, unfamiliar presence of technical equipment and repetition of simple actions. Finally, I will

Figs. 5 to 7: Crowd with Luis Martínez (with sun glasses); Sergio leaning against the wall; Aldo giving commands with the megaphone.

address the representation of indigenous people in this feature film. One particular episode will serve to demonstrate the constructed nature of 'Indianness'.

SCENE 1 *Shooting and Onlooking*

For one particular scene (a reunion between Manuel and Caro) a camera track and dolly had to be mounted on a road junction near the village square of Aluminé. About 150 spectators had to stand back, amongst them Luis Martínez, a schoolteacher, who had taught for many years in Ruca Choroi, and Sergio, an extra who had to drive a car in a later scene (figs 5–7). The scene was typical for the formalised, almost ritualised shooting of sequences. After the scene or stage is set up (lightning, sound, camera), sequences are repeated, rehearsed first and then shot again and again until the director, in consultation with his cameraman and sound engineer, was satisfied. Sometimes the rehearsal was split into the actors' rehearsal (including acting and dialogue) and the camera rehearsal (to find the best camera positions and moves). Eventually the two would be tried together. The assistant director gave the command '*¡silencio!*' (silence). It was directed both at onlookers and crew. This was followed by the director's commands for camera and sound, then the second director's assistant announced the scene and take numbers with the clapperboard, the director called '*¡acción!*' (action), prompting play by the actors, and finally, the whole procedure ended with '*¡corte!*' (cut). This sequence was repeated until the director was satisfied. For the onlookers, the most intriguing and amusing part of cinema in the making was this seemingly endless repetition, waiting, and watching, that recalls the sensations experienced when one winds back a film or more likely a video.

Fig. 8: Aldo Romero (Assistant Director) explains to Mapuche woman how to cut vegetables. Javier Olivera (Director) stands to the right of the camera.

Multiple representations

The film crew were not the only people who had cameras at their disposition. Spectators of the shoot often took photographs and shot their own videos. The Mapuche on the reservation had experience of stills photography and video used by tourists and journalists (including TV crews) but they were completely unfamiliar with large-scale movie production. Although journalism documentary film and docu-drama often involve the staging of scenes, I contend that the situation with a feature film is significantly different. Here takes are repeated many times over and shooting itself is planned down to the most minute details. This is the case even with very short scenes, which in the final cut occupy only a few seconds.

To the indigenous extras, however, the extraordinary length to which the crew went in order to accomplish particular scenes seemed extremely tedious, if not redundant, especially when familiar daily routine activities such as cutting vegetables were involved. In some ways, this is also the experience of indigenous people with large, professional documentary crews who obey the 'dictates of filming' as Jeffery/Jeffery point out in their analysis of an Open University documentary shoot in Northern India. Their description resembles closely what I observed in Ruca Choroi: "Villagers were hustled into place, scenes set up and shot – and then the film-crew usually moved straight to the next location. (…) We worked as energetically as the rest of the crew at crowd control, barring the way and pushing people back, silencing bystanders while the tape was running … (Jeffery/Jeffery 2000: 158)."

SCENE 2 *Mapuche woman cutting vegetables*

The second unfamiliar experience for the Mapuche was the large and extremely lavish technical equipment used in a fully scripted 35mm feature film production. Lightning, reflector boards, extended boom microphones, and electricity generators are much more invasive than a small stills or video camera. Michael Taussig (1993: 31-32), following Walter Benjamin, and Christina Lammer (2002b) have both spoken of such visual procedures as quasi-surgical operations, where the equipment begins to assume the function of surgical instruments in a operating theatre. "Truth" has to be extracted.

One can sense from the startled, almost frightened expression of the indigenous

Figs. 9 & 10: Final preparations are made for this scene. The cameraman, Christian Cottet, measures luminosity with the light meter (Fig.13) A reflector board is placed behind the doorway in the next room. The Mapuche woman is clearly distracted, if not distraught by all this activity, whilst Antonella Costa (as Caro), the female protagonist, just looks on, and being an actress, has seen it all before.

woman how she must have felt (fig.8). The shooting for this scene must have seemed to her an endless repetition of a familiar daily task. The invasion of unfamiliar technical equipment, such as light meter, boom microphones and reflectors is clearly visible (figs 9-10). For those unfamiliar with movie production, it might be shocking and surprising that an apparently lengthy and cumbersome procedure might only result in a very short scene in the final movie. But small "insert" scenes can take as much time to shoot as long scenes (fig. 11).

SCENE 3 *Getting the beat*

Here Casimiro beats the *kultrún*, the ritual instrument drum of the Mapuche culture that is used in the '*rogativas*' (rogations) and the *ngillatun* or *kamaruka* ceremony in February. The particular *kultrún* used on this occasion, however, was painted with four crossed lines by the film director, indicating the four directions or cardinal points. This he thought was more authentic than the "blank" offered by the Mapuche of the reservation.[14] This scene is arguably the most revealing of the constructed 'Indianness' in the film. For instance, when this scene was being shot, Casimiro was unable to beat the drum and sing at the same time (figs 12 and 13). This meant that Javier Olivera, the director, had to beat the drum. What we see then in the film is an indigenous actor, Rubén Patagonia (as Casimiro), playing and singing, whilst on the soundtrack we hear actually Javier Olivera drumming the kultrún (figs 14 and 15). This seemed to me to be symptomatic of the film's split representation of "Indianness" – there was authenticity and a staged event. In the latter, an urban indigenous rock musician-cum-actor, with no local connections to Ruka Choroi, joined forces with a white film director from Buenos Aires to impose their 'Indianness' onto the film.

Who is Indian or Whose Indian?

One might ask, provocatively, who were the 'real Indians', if any, in this film and its

Fig. 11: Finally, the scene can be shot and the third assistant director announces the take number with the clapperboard.

production? At the very beginning of the shoot – and early in the film – there was Sergio, a Mapuche from the reservation, who was asked to drive the old *Torino* (an Argentine car of the 1970s) to fetch protagonists Manuel and Caro from the bus station and bring them to the reservation. In between the shooting of different sequences, one would see him as a withdrawn observer. I wondered what it all meant to him, but did not dare to speak to him (see fig. 7). Perhaps, the "real Indians" were the Mapuche on reservation who had invited city-based Rubén and I to their modest houses to share *maté*[15] (fig. 14). But the Mapuche in this encounter insisted that *they* were modern, claiming that they had dressed like Rubén in the past. They were voicing an unveiled criticism of the Rubén's claim to authenticity; and they were making a statement, more generally, about the representation of indigenous people in the film.

Perhaps the twisted story of Damian Petronca was about yet another but equally "real" Indian'? A young uprooted man from Greater Buenos Aires who, looking for spiritual enlightenment, had hitch-hiked all the way to Ruka Choroi to meet his idol Rubén Patagonia whom he had got to know in an earlier live concert on the periphery of Argentina's capital. When he took on Rubén's cloths and played the *quena*, the indigenous flute, his dream seemed to have come true. But although he believed that he was close to the indigenous roots of his idol, his cultural paraphernalia were those of an urban musician and actor. In this *off scence* life-embedded performance, it is now Damian Petronca who has come to embody the "Indian" of this shooting trip, constructing, borrowing and re-appropriating elements as he searches for roots to make his own (fig.15).

Conclusion

There have been a number of movements in cinema, Italian neo-realism, cinema verité in France, and direct cinema in the United States, that have sought to forge a close relationship with reality. Often the cast includes lay actors, real settings are used and there is an attempt to preserve authentic dialogue. The boundaries between fiction film and documentary have also become very fluid – not least with recent productions of indigenous cinema, such as '*Atanarjuat – The fast runner*' (Canada, 2000) by Inuit film-maker Zacharias Kunuk.[16] All of these genres, despite their different pretensions, are in the business of constructing reality, or making fiction. Films with an indigenist agenda, such as *El Camino* are yet another

Figs. 12 & 13: Rubén Patagonia practicing the kultrún with the artistic director, Vera Arcó, standing to his right. (Fig. 14) Javier Olivera indicates the beat to Rubén Patagonia. The second assistant director, Federico D'Auria, holds the script. (Fig. 15)

instance of this. At their best, such films offer what Jean Fisher has called 'dramatized ethnography' where indigenous people are presented as 'neither *irrationally* savage nor sentimentally noble' (Fisher 1991: 32). Whilst *El Camino* was a low-budget film and did not have the ambitions, artistically or commercially, to compete in the same league as, for instance, *Dances With Wolves*, it is worth remembering some of the observations that were made by critics on Kevin Costner's epic. Jean Fisher, whilst giving some credit to the films artistic achievements, sees *Dances With Wolves* as yet another picture of native Americans as an idealised other. There is a glorification of the individual heroic soldier, coupled with nostalgia for a lost community that is irretrievably in the past. Such a representation fails to comment on the present situation in North American reservations (Fisher 1991: 30, 33, 39). Native American, Ward Churchill, acknowledges that Costner, for the first time in Hollywood's history, cast indigenous people in his film. They were not just extras but actors, representing human beings with real 'motives' and 'emotions' (Churchill 1992: 244). Yet, like Fisher, he also laments that the film fails to engage with the squalor and political and economic issues surrounding contemporary reservations (ibid.: 246).

Unlike *Dances with Wolves*, *El Camino* is set in the present and it is located on a contemporary indigenous reservation. In the latter part of the film story, there is an encounter between a wise Indian, Casimiro and a young man from Buenos Aires, Manuel, who is on the run from a police officer and his family's past. The

Fig. 14: Rubén Patagonia with a Mapuche who had invited him and the author to his house to drink mate.

Fig. 15: Rubén Patagonia and Damian Petronca, wearing Rubén's poncho and playing his quena flute.

encounter is an idealised one, especially the portrayal of Indian spirituality. According to the director, Javier Olivera, the idea was to portray indigenous reality to a white public in urban Argentina. However, this portrayal functioned more according to the stereotypes held by white, if well-meaning, intellectuals such as Olivera than it afforded a voice to present-day indigenous communities in Argentina.

An ethnography of feature film-making, apart from giving insight into artistic processes comparable to research into theatre, dance, and performance more generally, will have to ask difficult political questions of productions. Whilst anthropologists and visual anthropologists, have looked at the finished products, little ethnographic research has been carried out on the production process of feature film-making itself. Hortense Powdermaker's early study, Hollywood: the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist looks at the Movie-Makers (1951), is an important exception (although it contains little documentation of her fieldwork on the sets). Roger Silverstone's ethnography of a BBC documentary is another example. He writes: "I had to treat this small society in some way as anthropologically strange, question even the most obvious and familiar parts of their routine." (Silverstone 1985: 200)

Cinema is a case of an artistic production site that is open to ethnographic, participatory research in sociology[17] and anthropology. Following Becker, we can see that it constitutes an 'art world' (1982). It is distinguished by a certain size (at least in medium-sized productions); and there is the closed and continuous working together of people over a period of time (a marked division of labour and a ritualised process of shooting). Cinema functions as a site of mediation (encompassing artistic ideas, public reception and critical writing), and it has global diffusion. The anthropologist's role here, as in other ethnographic sites, is one of reflexive engagement with his or her research subjects. Depending on the subject of the film and the degree of participation, it might also be one of creative intervention. The making of feature films, documentary and, arguably, anthropological fieldwork, can all be considered interventions into local realities.

Fig. 16: A scene is shot, where Antonella Costa (as Caro) hands her stills camera to Mapuche children.

Each one is dependent on collaboration with local people, with the aim of producing narratives of different kinds that are directed at specific audiences. As suggested in the opening of my essay, cinema and ethnography are both hyperreal additions to, and secondary representations of, reality.

Coda

Feature film production (at least on the set) because of its specific, almost ritualised working practices leads to a kind of alienation from the surrounding reality. In the case of *El Camino*, the film became alienated from the indigenous people of Ruka Choroi, the very subjects who the director wished to incorporate into the film. A self-focused crew, involved with routinised requirements of shooting, is largely cut off from any meaningful dialogue with indigenous people. The Mapuche participated as passive extras, experiencing the shoot as an intrusion of alien technical procedures. Of course, there is conversation, the token granting of visual agency (through the handing over of a stills camera to the Mapuche, the now ubiquitous gesture adopted by reflexive filmmakers, see fig. 16) and some exchange of opinion. The economic inequalities, however, persist. The Mapuche find it necessary to grant access to the reservation and to work as extras. Inevitably, relations between the crew and the local people continue to remain problematic. Attempts at dialogue with the indigenous Other was largely restricted to the pre-production process, when Javier Olivera discussed the project with the Mapuche elders, and the post-release phase, when the director went back to the reservation to show *El Camino*.[18]

Notes

2. Hyper Realism's critical potential was highlighted by super realism (or hyper realism) and photorealism in 1970s' contemporary art, when painters, such as Chuck Close and Duane Eddy, deliberately 'copied' photographs, and sculptors, such as Duane Hanson, casted living people (reflecting on the camera's partial representation of reality, and making the beholder aware of artist's verisimilar additions to reality). For hyper reality as an act of simulated reality, see Baudrillard (1988: 28).

3. Cf. Schneider (1990).

4. Despite myths surrounding them of being Robin Hood-like social bandits, Salvatore Giuliano (1922–1950) and his gang were used by the Mafia and the Christian Democrats against left-wing peasants demonstrating for land reform and occupation of lands. On labour day, 1 May 1947 at Portella delle Ginestre (near Piana degli Albanesi) in the Province of Palermo 11 peasants were killed and 33 wounded in a massacre, when Giuliano's gang opened fire with machine guns (Blok 1974: 205).

5. On the Desert Campaign and its aftermath, see Sarasola (1992).

6. Cf. Quijada/Bernand/Schneider (2000).

7. On appropriation (as an art practice) more generally, see Schneider (2003).

8. Although failure at the box office meant it remained on the screen only for one week.

9. For *El Camino*, the core of the crew consisted of director, assistant director (and up to three assistants), director of photography, assistant camera man (plus his assistant), producer, director of production, assistant producer, sound recordist and assistant, art director (and four assistants), Make-up artist, director of lighting/gaffer (with two assistants), grip, stills photographer, and a varying number of drivers. To this a varying cast of twenty-four actors was added, two of them young stars in Argentina, Ezequiel Rodríguez (*Manuel*), known to the Argentine public from the TV sit-com *Verano 98*, and Antonella Costa (*Caro*), who already had some film credits (e.g. *Garage Olympic*).

10. Cf. Thomas (1999, 2001).

11. In the present, the Mapuche are politically represented through federations at the provincial and national level, and locally through an elected *lonko*, or chief, a structure imposed by the Argentine government which is supposed to replace the traditional *lonko* by descent.

12. On Prelorán see McDougall (1998: 113 -114), and Rossi (1987), Taquini (1994).

13. See, for example, Plattner (1996); two notable exceptions are Moeran (1990) and Graburn (2001). For a more general discussion of the porous borders between contemporary art and anthropology, see Schneider (1996).

14. However, *kultrúns* have been documented with a variety of ornamentation, with only two lines, or none at all; cf. Schindler (1990: 174–179), Pérez-Bugallo (1993: 39–62).

15. Maté (ilex paraguaiensis), is a herbal infusion widely drunk in the southern parts of South America.

16. For a comparison between Canadian ingdigenous feature films and ethnographic film, see also Schneider (1993), and more recently Ginsburg (2003) and Brydon (2004). More generally on the borders between fiction and document in cinematic and visual anthropology traditions, see Grimshaw (2001: 71–89).

17. For a recent example involving ethnographic observation and scripted events, by a team of sociologists, artists and documentary film-makers, see Lammer (2002a).

18. Apparently, as Javier Olivera told me in one of our conversations, the reactions were mixed. About 40 Mapuche saw the film, were quite reserved and did not follow the story line very much, but reacted positively when they could identify themselves in the film.

References

Films

El Camino. 2000. Javier Olivera. Aries (Argentina) 105 mins.

Araucanos de Ruca Choroi. 1971. Jorge Prelorán. Universidad Nacional de Tucumán (Argentina), 50 mins.

*The Sicilian*. 1987. Michael Cimino. Universal Pictures (U.S.A.), 141 mins.

Books and Articles

Baudrillard, J., *In America*, London: Verso, 1988.

Becker, H., *Art Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Blok, A., *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860 –1960: A Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974.

Brydon, A., "Art, Politics & *Atanarjuat*: Whatever do we do with beauty?", paper delivered at EASA, Vienna, 8-12 September, 2004.

Churchill, W., "Lawrence of South Dakota: *Dances with Wolves* and the Maintenance of the American Empire", in ed. M. Annette Jaimes *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*, Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1992.

Fisher, J., Dancing with Words and Speaking with Forked Tongues, *Third Text*, 14, 26 – 41, 1991.

Graburn, N., "White Evaluation of the Quality of Inuit Sculpture", *Inuit Quarterly*, 16(3), 30-39, 2001.

Ginsburg, F., "*Atanarjuat* Off-Screen: From 'Media Reservations' to the World Stage", *American Anthropologist* 105(4), 827-831, 2003.

Grimshaw, A., *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R., "Bollywood in Bijnor? Making an Open University Film in Rural North India", *Visual Anthropology*, 13, 149–168, 2000.

Lammer, C. ed., doKU: *Wirklichkeit inszenieren im Dokumentarfilm*, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2002a.

 – – – "Horizontal & Vertical Penetration: The 'Flesh and Blood' of Image Fabrication in the Operating Theatres of Interventional Radiology", *Cultural Studies*, 16 (6), 833 – 847, 2002b.

McDougall, D., *Transcultural Cinema*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Marcus, G. E., "The Traffic in Art and Anthropology: How Fieldwork in Theater Arts Might Inform the Reinvention of Fieldwork in Anthropology", *Keynote lecture* at *Fieldworks: Dialogues between Art and Anthropology*, Tate Modern, London, 26 September, 2003. (for an audiovisual record of the lecture see http://www.tate.org.uk/audiovideo/fieldworks/default.htm).

 – – – "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-scène of Anthropological Fieldwork", Representations 59, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997a.

 – – – "A Report on Two Initiatives in Experiments With Ethnography - … A Decade after the "Writing Culture Critique", *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 6 (2), 9 – 23, 1997b.

Moeran, B., "Making an Exhibition of Oneself: The anthropologist as potter in Japan", in eds. Eyal Ben Ari, Brian Moeran and James Valentine, *Unwrapping Japan: Society and Culture in Anthropological Perspective*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.

Pérez-Bugallo, R., *Pillantum: Estudios de Etno-organología Patagónica y Pampeana*. Buenos Aires: Búsqueda de Ayllu, 1993.

Plattner, S., *High Art Down Home: An Economic Ethnography of a Local Art Market*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Powdermaker, H., *Hollywood: the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist looks at the Movie-Makers*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1951.

Quijada, M., Carmen B. and Schneider, A., *Homogeneidad y nación: con un estudio de caso: Argentina, siglos XIX y XX*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2000.

Rossi, J. J. ed., El cine documental etnobiográfico de Jorge Prelorán. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Búsqueda,1987.

Sarasola, C. M., *Nuestros paisanos los indios*, Buenos Aires: Emecé.

Schneider, A., *Emigration und Rückwanderung von "Gastarbeitern" in einem sizilianischen Dorf*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1990.

– – – "Inszenierte Mythen: Indigener Spielfilm als Dokument und Fiktion", ed. G. Becker *Fernsehen und Ethnologie , Mitteilungen des Hamburgischen Museums für Völkerkunde*, NF., 23, 177–180, 1993.

– – – "Uneasy relationships: contemporary artists and anthropology", *Journal of Material Culture* , 1 (2), 183-210, 1996.

– – – "On 'appropriation': a reappraisal of the concept and its application in global art practices", *Social Anthropology*, 11 (2), 75–89, 2003.

Schindler, H., *Bauern und Reiterkrieger: Die Mapuche-Indianer im Süden Amerikas*. Munich: Hirmer, 1990.

Silverstone, R., *Framing Science: The Making of a BBC Documentary*, London: British Film Institute, 1985.

Taquini, G., *Jorge Prelorán*. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1994.

Taussig, M., *Mimesis and Alterity*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Thomas, N., *Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1996.

– – – "Appropriation/Appreciation: Settler Modernism in Australia and New Zealand", *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*, ed. Fred R. Myers, Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001.

HOW TO MAKE IT COME BACK

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8
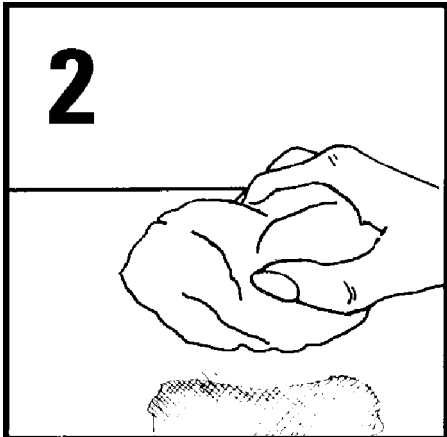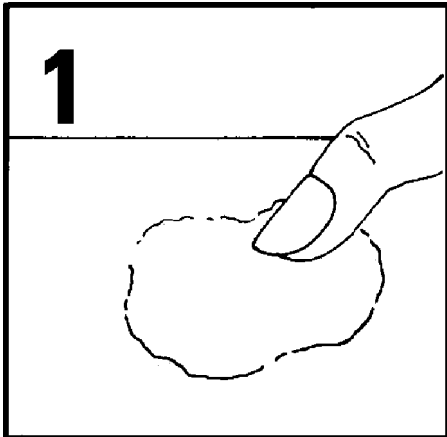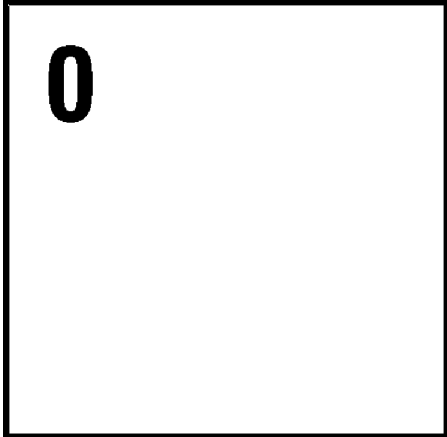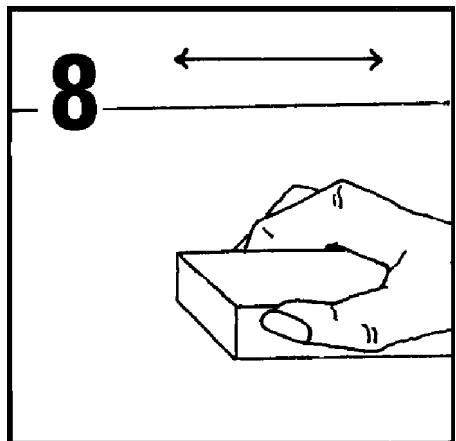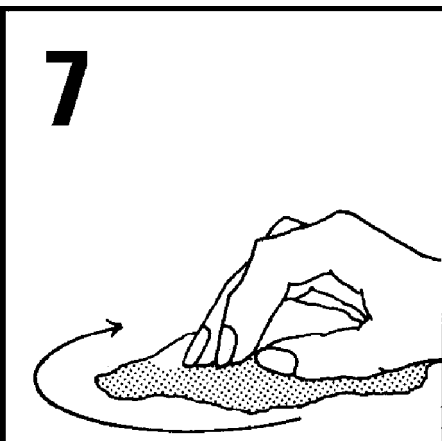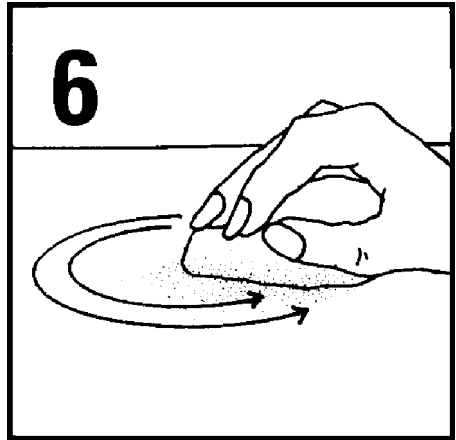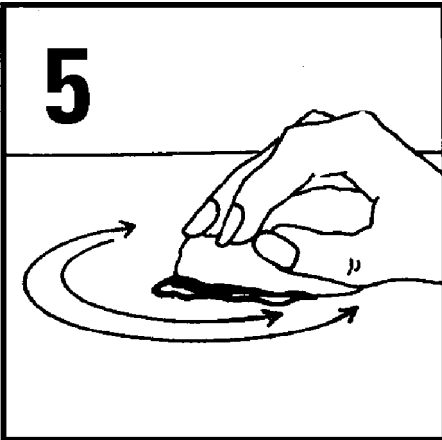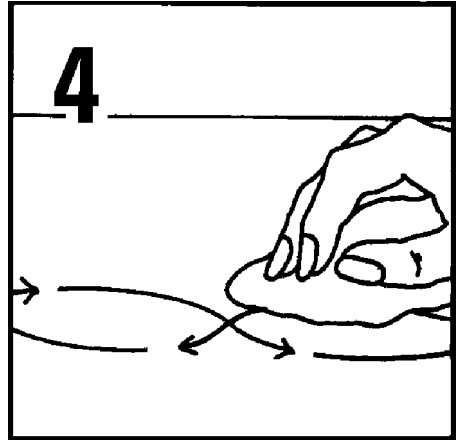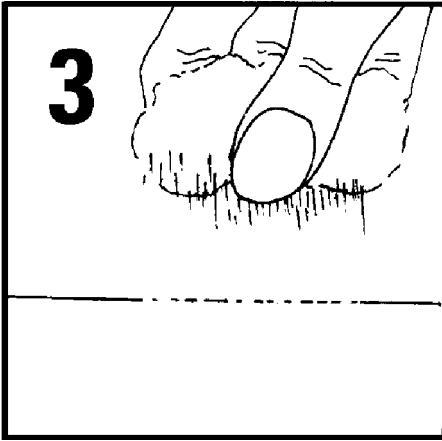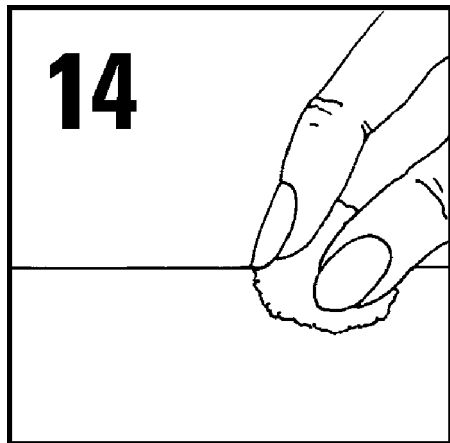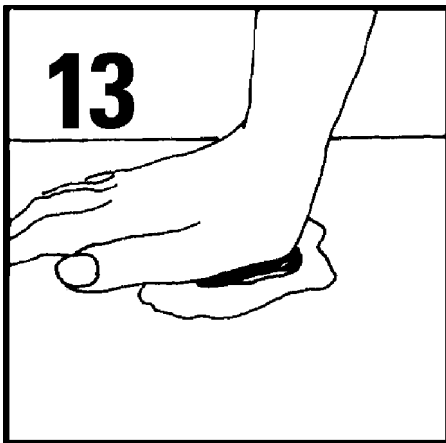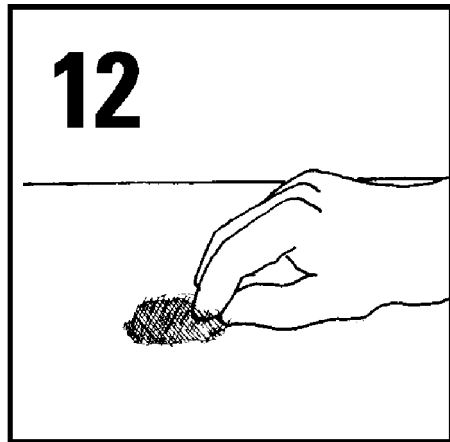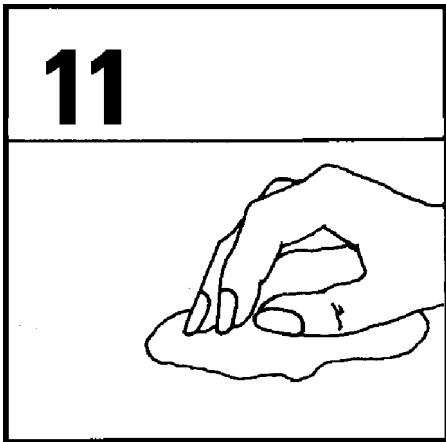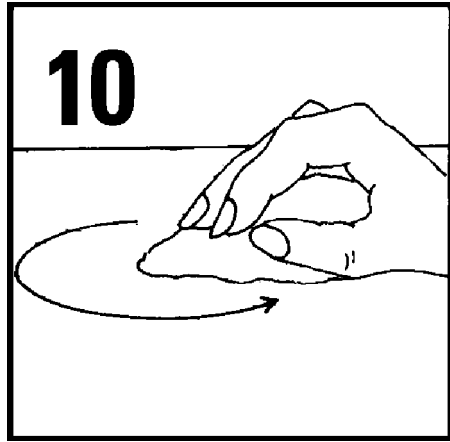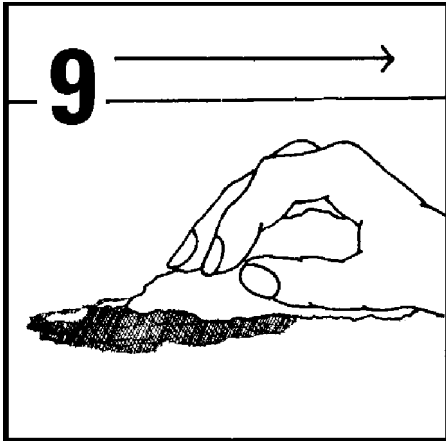
Judith Okely, Professor of Social Anthropology, Hull University, studied at the Sorbonne, Oxford and Cambridge. She has held positions at Durham, Essex, Edinburgh and Copenhagen Universities. Her publications include: *The Traveller-Gypsies* (1983), *Simone de Beauvoir* (1986), *Anthropology and Autobiography* (1993), *Own or Other Culture* (1996), 'Visualism and Landscape', *Ethnos* (2001) and 'Hybridity, Birthplace and Naming' in *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* Vol 13, no.1 2003.

The Filmed Return of the Natives – to a Colonizing Territory of Terror

Judith Okely

Contrasts and Context

Claude Lanzman in *Shoah* (1985) aimed to evoke the Holocaust without any contemporary footage or photographs from the concentration camps. He believed that viewers came with too much baggage from their repetitive showing. He interviewed surviving prisoners, personnel and local inhabitants in their current location or back in the changed sites of the camps. The grass had grown over burial pits, the buildings were few. The viewers have to recapture the past through spoken reminiscences and half-obliterated spaces, and to evoke invisible images from the changed, relatively benign landscapes.

In this article the writer explores her return to a place of terror; but one which has been at the centre of the hallowed British national tradition – and indeed exported (MacDougall 1999; Said 1999). Boarding schools are not seen as an aberration to be ploughed up in shame. There were no trials and executions for the educators. Most film work drawing on British boarding schools (the latest being *Harry Potter*), with the remarkable exception of Lindsay Anderson's 1968 film, *If*, (perhaps influenced by the French/Belgian film *Zero de Conduite*) celebrates these institutions as places of nostalgic fun, enviable privilege or neutralized aesthetics.

Witnessed by a camera, the author and a former fellow inmate embark on a private quest. They are not grappling with images in the public domain of suffering, although death did linger round secret corners. The film's protagonists are making public a private unpublicized place of terror that viewers may not anticipate. For the public, prior baggage about such institutions is mere adventure.

Studying up

Anthropologists have traditionally studied the distant and exotic other. Knowledge about those to be traded with and or subjugated was useful to Western rulers. In this instance, however, I turn anthropology back on itself. I want to look at the social reproduction of the colonizers, and more precisely in England. Nader recommended studying up. This also entails studying within and taking the notion of participant observation to more extreme forms. The anthropologist is obliged to treat herself as subject and object.

In 1998 the author returned to the boarding school where she was incarcerated for nearly a decade. Established on a seemingly remote island, the Isle of Wight, the school shared a location with a prison housing Britain's most dangerous criminals. It was also surrounded by holiday and retirement homes. I was accompanied on my return by an anthropologist/film-maker, Anna Grimshaw, and Susan Caffrey. Susan was slightly younger than me and she had attended the school for three years, in contrast to my nine years. I had met her by chance in the period between deciding to make the film and travelling to the school. She had already read my article (Okely 1978b; 1996) and had recognized her school.[1] When we met at a conference, we talked compulsively and exchanged horror stories. We met once again before the trip and talked through some aspects of the proposed project. Even these proved flexible on location. We got to know each other through our pasts on camera. Anna was a friend. Gender and mutual trust were significant. Sometimes I addressed my comments to her and shared laughter with her behind the camera.

Before I made the journey, I spoke to a psychotherapist about my plans. She became very excited saying that a great deal of her work involved getting clients to think back to their childhood. Here I was proposing to go back to the very location. I realized it was an ideal space for free association. The analysand in classical psychoanalysis is encouraged in retrospective recline to say whatever comes into his or her head. I knew that back in that territory of terror, all sorts of memories, images, and events would be evoked. While open to the stream of consciousness we would also be moving through the landscape and standing in the original places of the past. The fact that Susan and I were being filmed enhanced the sense of drama and urgency.

The school was largely closed; and I had discovered that it was shortly to be sold. We had one last triumphant chance for recording our testimony. It was self-conscious. It was a performance; but in no way scripted. I had briefly walked in the grounds a month before we set out with the camera. It was then that I conceived the idea of making a film. Susan and I were to be filmed in locations we had left as adolescents decades earlier.

The boarding school – the total institution

Until the 1970s or even beyond, sexual and social fidelity was essential for upper-middle-class English women. They had to preserve the cultural capital of their class. This was never intellectual capital but distance from declassed others. In the English, if not the British tradition, the core ruling class was educated spatially separated from

those deemed below them. This was achieved primarily through the boarding school, which was set invariably in rural, or non-metropolitan areas. The total institution formed bonds of shared deprivation and a controlled circulation of narrowed views in both the ideological and visual sense. For females, once destined to be the servers and breeders for male colonists, subservience and a lobotomized intellect were essential, along with the protection of reproductive power. Their bodies and imagination were rigorously controlled.

As with our boarding school, the landscape was often beguilingly beautiful with expansive gardens, but within which the girls' movements were severely restricted. For us, distant hills and the coastline remained far places to be visited on special and regimented excursions. The sea coastal setting gave the diverting distraction of paradise; a Garden of Eden, where again knowledge was treated as the forbidden apple into which we should never sink our teeth. Girls were destined for finishing school, smart domestic-science colleges and suitable marriages. University was exceptional and for the unmarriageable.

The hockey and netball pitches carried foreboding for those who preferred intellectual and aesthetic pursuits. Sport has been a major arm of British colonial indoctrination (Mangan 1981; 1998). The regimentation of the body and team spirit were in opposition to the nurture of individual originality in intellect and imagination. The 1950s was the era of austerity and moral control through family, church, class and empire and almost a riposte to the potential post-war egalitarianism heralded by the 1945 Labour government. A large part of the British Empire was intact. So there was still a functional link, however crude and possibly in some time lag, between education and the needs of the larger society. The middle-, if not upper-class males were educated to be administrators of empire, colonial farmers and traders. Women had to accompany them, but like the indigenous peoples whom the men ruled, they were not to be autonomous critical beings. Like men, emotion was seen as something dangerous and out of control. Books and ideas were a terrible threat when lurking in the middle ranks. It was all right for the aristocrats to have huge libraries of leather-bound first editions, as long as nobody read them.

Upper-middle-class women had to preserve the cultural capital of their class; not brainpower but class boundaries and distaste for others. In addition to the representations of racialized others, the institution fostered the creation of persons othered by class. In the English, if not the British tradition, the core ruling class was brought up separate from the classes below them.

The body is the receiver and the unconscious bearer of class and the hidden curriculum (Bourdieu 1977). This has specific significance for females. In this place where I was incarcerated from nine to eighteen years of age, supreme importance was put on the control and marshalling of the body in mindless and deliberately unimaginative ways. The body was not exercised for neutral health reasons. We were not encouraged to dance, to move to music, to run free over the nearby hills and beaches. Only a privileged few whose parents paid the extra, could

go riding, thus learning to subject another, an animal's body to our own, but also gaining the freedom of speed and movement across the Downs. Even strolls were forbidden. Until the age of sixteen, we had to walk two by two in what was called crocodile formation in conspicuous uniforms outside the school gates. There was swimming, but there again it had to take a certain form in competitive rows. Never for us swimming in the sea. In any case summer swimming would have brought contact with 'day trippers' and the holidaying working classes on the beach.

There were added consequences of the school's geographical location, namely its position on an island. This was an enclosed order. Its isolation meant that there was little mobility both spatially and in the recruitment of new teachers. In even greater contrast to some boarding schools, many of the teachers remained employed there for their entire careers. Locked in an historical time warp, three of those present when my sister had first arrived in the 1950s had been on the staff when our mother had been a pupil in the 1930s. The games mistress, recalling previous pupils, visited the sins of our mothers upon their daughters.

Returning to a place of terror

This was the background to Susan's and my return to our school on the Isle of Wight. Both of us had defied our institutional destiny by attending university; achieved despite the discouragement of the school. We were both university lecturers – I was an anthropologist; Susan, a sociologist. Our knowledge as social scientists doubtless affected the articulation of the experience of our return; but both of us were spontaneously grappling with complex ideas while speaking. Our hesitancy reveals we are thinking literally on *the* spot.

A study of women writers highlights their strategies of 'inversion and transgression' (Humm 1991). This is what I later realized was inadvertently happening to us in front of the camera. There were patterns in our spontaneous responses. Susan often pointed to the unusual and happier times in contrast to the usual times of misery; in the gym she first remembered the end-of-term reorganization of the gym as an obstacle race. This was an inversion of the regular practices three or four times a week. Susan recalled the celebratory, liminal events. I slipped in references to tabooed sexual partners or liaisons. Sex and extramarital destinies were tabooed topics in an all-female virginal institution.

Alongside memories of the institution's total control, we recalled our escape strategies, usually through disembodiment and dreams of other places in time and space. I envisaged France as the other utopian place where I could escape in fantasy. After leaving school, I went to Paris, enrolled at the Sorbonne and independently took my entrance exam for Oxford (Okely 1986; 1996).

Unexpectedly, we made frequent references to our now dead mothers. We were both, it seems, seeking them. Susan's divorced mother had been housekeeper at the school. This was a practical way to earn a living while being near her daughter, with reduced school fees. When my mother was widowed, there was similarly little

childcare for working women, so she sent my sister and I to an institution where our fees were paid by my father's former employers. My mother had been at the same school for five terms, having had a private governess until sixteen. For her the school had been paradise; meeting other girls and far from a destabilized home. Thus in this place of emotional desolation, Susan and I reached out for family ties, however fragmented. Our identities as the daughters of downwardly mobile single-parent families adds a sociological explanation for our early scepticism of the dominant political ideologies of family and conservative, institutional complacency in the 1950s. The personal is unique but not isolated. The outsider's liminal view reveals the dominant structure (Turner 1969).

Another unanticipated response once in the location, was our reverence and sweet memory of the chapel as a genuine retreat. I said on camera that I had had fantasies of lying on the altar in black lace underwear as ultimate sacrilege. Once there we did not pervert a sacred place by inversion and transgression. It had always been our *own* sacred place of escape. Durkheim's argument that religion is a social fact became vividly convincing. Both of us were now agnostic but we could not destroy the religious succour we had once found there. It was there where not only I, but also my mother had been confirmed into the Anglican Church. Her experience had been captured in an oil painting which was displayed in the main hallway. That image of my mother in a white veil had been an icon of my childhood and something I could now never deface.

There was a thorough contradiction between our terrorized past and our frequent laughter on camera. Again, unexpectedly, the whole enterprise, stretching over three days, became a cathartic and happy experience. It was the triumph of the powerless over the powerful adults of the past. They could not capture our bodies again. Although there are articulated memories of past pain and some continuing anger, we had grown and escaped childhood.

There are some very personal scenes when we returned to the dormitory and tried in vain to open the sick room or find the matron's surgery. I pointed out the spy hole in the dormitory door; a perfect weapon of the matronly gaze (Foucault 1980). Always watched, we began to watch ourselves for any errors which could displease our captors and bring deprivations. Thus most inmates were turned into obedient, 'nice' girls.

I re-enacted the way we had to stand for hours at night facing the wall in the passage as punishment. Spontaneously I compared it to forms of disorientating torture. The school's management of death, suffering and illness could now be redescribed as child abuse. Susan concluded that the institution could not cope with crises. When with high temperature close to dying, she was expected to pull herself together. The matron forbade my sister and I from crying over our father's death.

Rule breaking, like 'talking after lights out' when in our little iron dormitory beds, was treated in the severest fashion because surveillance over us was limited by the blessed and enfolding darkness when the bell ringing and regulated activities were

absent. This was also the time for our wandering in nightmares of homesickness and internal darkness. Children let go of their defences and bodily armour in the silence made solitary by decree.

We revisited classrooms, the dining room, once out-of-bounds kitchens and Susan's mother's now dilapidated bedroom. We rediscovered the swimming pool, art room and residential houses. I select just a few of the locations.

Sites of memory

The gym: the temple of the body

This was our spontaneous name for the place, so designated decades later. Built in the late 1950s from finances raised by the games mistress now vice-headmistress. Susan and I noted how it was larger than the ballroom which had been converted into the library. The previous gym had been a large timber-framed hut. Now the new gym, rather than the elegant former ballroom, became the main assembly room. Girls at the daily roll-call from henceforth were surrounded by the equipment of bodily torture; the ropes, the climbing bars and rib stools. The gym's huge square concrete, flat roofed shape ruined the symmetry of the courtyard and country-house lines of the main building. The future proprietors we learned would knock it down and restore the courtyard to its former nineteenth-century elegance. The games mistress' achievements would thus be reduced to rubble.

What memories and actions and reactions were triggered by our entry into this now doomed and deserted space?

Susan recalled a pleasurable inversion of order when on the last day of term, the equipment like the 'horse' and other loose objects were scattered around and presented as an obstacle race and hence now commanded fun for the girls: a true ritual of reversal. I called the rib stools 'the Rack' evoking something worse. My body knew exactly how it was supposed to perform as I clambered up. Susan pulled out the ropes. Our ageing bodies and corporeal incompetence in these spheres were a matter of ribaldry. This was the first time we had been alone and uncontrolled with this once-sacred equipment.

A major memory was of the compulsory flat-feet exercises which deprived the designated ones each evening of limited free playtime. It was seemingly arbitrarily decided who would have to undergo compulsory remedial exercises. Out of the depths, I recalled what the games mistress, 'Pig', said to me on my arrival at the school; my sister and I had flat feet because we were a 'Bradford' i.e. our mother's maiden name from the 1930s. I said 'the sins of the mother would be visited on the daughters'. The games mistress had picked on my mother who also never had flat feet.

Susan enjoyed re-enacting the near-comical feet exercises. She entered into the spirit of the thing by demonstrating the ideal posture in caricatured and motionless

form. I recalled the deportment badges we could win like military medals on our uniform if we had the correct posture for a year. Neither of us showed anger. It was fun and a release to return with ridicule and a new middle-aged power, however much our bodies had changed.

I take psychoanalytical free association seriously and therefore see significance in my insertion of a memory of a former partner, a lover, an American (i.e. not the ideal 'Brit' for whom we were to be groomed) and one of those tabooed males from which we were always cloistered. The fact that I called my partner a boyfriend, (and mentioned his children from an early marriage), would have been retrospectively shocking, i.e. he was never my husband. He really did have flat feet which I described and gestured in the film. I inserted the fact that this was a protection: flat feet had saved him initially from being drafted for Vietnam.

The chapel

This was the most unexpected play with the memory. I had brought a long silk pale scarf and placed it as a veil on Susan's head. She instinctively adopted the humble pose. Her reproduction of this past posture was thus visually recorded. This experience of the veil, she said, explained now why she never likes wearing hats. There was another spontaneous gendered statement. After finding the priest's embroidered vestments, I put them over my black shiny jacket and scarlet miniskirt. Susan gasped at my transvestite seizure of power. Anglican women priests were first sanctioned in the 1990s but way back they were tabooed. With the cross, I processed authoritatively to the altar steps to give the last blessing. Earlier on film, I had declaimed 'Go forth into the world. Render no man evil for evil'. Once dressed as a priest, this time, with a Freudian slip, I missed out 'no man', thus inverting the meaning. Was this revenge surfacing? Susan found a tattered Union Jack and with great deference proceeded up and down the aisle, solemnly bowing her head to the altar. Although a sceptic of nationalism, she showed patriotism in her body. The Armed Forces, she informed us, had been billeted at the school before the Normandy Landings.

The chapel had reformulated itself as a hallowed place and was recalled as such by two now religious sceptics. I had had cherished fantasies of lying semi naked on the altar as ultimate blasphemy; the whore we had been taught to hate. But only days before, I had unthinkingly purchased and then brought to the chapel a white linen coat. It was, I slowly recognized, a replica of the coat we had to wear at confirmation.

We re-experienced and articulated the meaning of that sacred shelter. Our bodies were again confronted with images of purity, virginity, but most rewardingly with ethereality. We recalled that past comfort in this sanctuary where we had detached ourselves from the body. We were freed from what Susan called 'the torment' to which elsewhere our bodies were daily subjected. In the chapel we had been protected from the games mistress' destructive gaze. Susan read out verses of hymns. Again in minor transgression, I read excerpts from my adolescent diary at

the lecturn. This was both an intonation of the past and an adult controlling performance.

Without irony, I recalled how in Sunday sermons, the chaplain regaled us with the evils of Nasser at Suez and Soviet communism in contrast to the redemptive power of the British Empire. It had been prophesied in the Bible, he declaimed, that British planes would circle over Israel when founded, because the text had referred to 'great birds' in the sky.

The hockey pitch

My recollections, when returning to the sports arenas, were enhanced by familiar sections in my publication. Nonetheless, there are still selections made *in situ*. The camera catches glimpses of the distant sea. This pitch is still well cared for. Susan laughs at my description of the marching in the form of the Union Jack at the annual sports day. I re-enact with exaggeration the feminized march; not quite the Nazi goose-step with pointed toes.

But there is the tabooed intervention of sexuality combined with a cross-class encounter as we are in that controlled sporty place. Welling up is the celebration of resistance; one isolated instance recalled out of nine years' acquaintance with that location, and one which I had never witnessed, only recreated through schoolgirl whispers. Two girls had used the groundsman's hut for bodily embrace with two 'local' boys, i.e. working class. The girls had then rode on the backs of the boys' motorbikes to 'the land slip', a wild zone of crumbled cliff edges. Susan's response to this daring transgression was typical middle-class English irony: 'Too much fun!'

Ruins

Walking and standing in sight of the rubble of a half-demolished building the camera tracks over the desolation which for us was a good sign of things changing. In front of one of the outhouses, Susan recalls the happy times of the holidays when she was the only child in the place and the remaining staff treated her as a loveable individual.

The cliff-top hockey pitch

Right on the cliff edge, it was now thoroughly overgrown with bushes and rough grass. I spontaneously resurrected Virgil in ironic triumph: 'O tempus O mores'. Susan recalled the cold fog blowing up from the sea in those winters of daily compulsory hockey. We remembered our 'liberty bodices'; post-war encasements.

The chapel again.

We unexpectedly encounter a contemporary; Cecilia and her husband. She has come to collect her chapel chair before the contents are dispersed. We recalled Miss Lamb, the scripture mistress, with black plaited greasy hair. Then her insistence

that the only reason people's hair went grey was that they washed it. Amid merriment and uncontained laughter, Cecilia described Miss Lamb changing the evening hymn to 'O Lamb of God I come'. Again inserting sex into the hallowed place, I asked if she understood the double entendre.

At the end of term Cecilia had diligently mended the hem of her cornflower blue tunic with the only available white cotton. It was while she was reading the lesson, to the whole school that the headmistress had thought fit to concentrate not on the Holy Text but the girl's apparel. Cecilia was summoned and reprimanded for not using blue cotton which at the end of term she had packed. Cecilia's husband saw it as a permanent scar of self-consciousness and lack of confidence: 'Whenever we go out, she asks me how she looks, whether her sleeves etc. are in place.'

Visual repertoire

We return to the nearby local church, its lichen-covered stones largely unchanged. The yews had grown thicker. I had a strange déjà vu. It transpired that a repertoire of localities such as this churchyard had been long imprinted in my visual memory. When reading descriptions, for instance, of a churchyard in a Thomas Hardy novel, I had unknowingly interposed previously encountered images near the school to fit the novelist's own. A return to that churchyard eerily transported me back to fiction read years *after* I had left that location. Hitherto, I had not recognized the images as memory but imaginative invention.

Other good memories were associated with outside walks with friends when, once aged sixteen, we could walk in threes without escort. We walked the high meadows, white with ox-eyed daisies, which we placed on the altar of that little church. On the filmed return there, I was near to weeping. Having once preserved the layers of armour within the school, outside we found a parcel of freedom and gave ourselves to the long grasses, the sensuality in stillness, gazing at clouds, while hidden from surveillance. We read the books smuggled in our knickers. Susan revisited the Downs to celebrate her favourite pony galloping at exhilarating speed to the horizon.

Wandering unattended through the school was a spectacular experience with no being there to hate. We ghosts come back to haunt and for resolution through revenge. Some of the buildings were already being dismantled. That gendered and colonial-class place has not only been institutionally reformed, but is now physically erased.

Regrettably, we didn't take a photo of the three of us on the hotel lawn. There we were autonomous beings able to pay the bill, sit in the sun, and view the sea at leisure. We were claiming space from that straitjacketed past.

A month later, Cecilia wrote to say that where the chapel once stood, there was nothing but a hole in the ground. We had indeed held the last rites. Our ghostlike presence is now reality on celluloid; a magical proof. Where once we had laboured to escape surveillance, on returning, we gladly opened up to an anthropologist and

friend's collaborative camera. It became our weapon of emancipation from old terrors.

Conclusion

What can we think about the visual significance of the return after decades? Realism is not appropriate. This is a changed location. The once-spectacular gardens are thoroughly overgrown. The bindweed, unpruned bushes and bamboos hide the once distinctive stream and ravines which were the main features of the grounds. We could only hear the stream, no longer see it, let alone the pathways alongside, where we once played in our 'free time'. We did not notice that an extra floor had been built on top of the main classroom and dormitory block. We looked for an attic stairway which was no longer there. We remained confused. Our vision in that place was also selective. We did not always see the changes, which later became apparent on camera, what Hastrup has called the show-up effect.

So we imposed our memories on the landscape. Viewers have also to take on trust what we describe. They do not see what we saw and felt in our bodies and souls. To that extent, they are dependent on our verbal accounts rather than the images. Our memory is different from straight description. There is the continuing paradox of contradiction between a lost past and the present, as captured on film. The past is recaptured also in a different way, because both of us were now university social scientists. In the midst of anecdotes of reminiscence, there are intellectualized critiques bearing the marks and insights of our adult learning. There were also the effects of publication. I had refrained from rereading my article, but past readings may have focused some of my themes.

The film has not as yet been made. In showing excerpts at conference presentations, I selected tiny clips from six hours of footage.[2] We entered through the main gate, a rare privilege for inmates who normally arrived and left by the side gate. I said this was the avengers' return. On the way to the former assembly room/ballroom later made into a library, I trespassed in triumph to the headmistress' once-hallowed study. The antique furniture was gone, the floor was scattered with detritus and the windows were darkened by unkempt creepers. There she had told me I would be 'selfish to go to university', because I would be 'depriving a more worthy person of a place'.

The film footage is an example of ethnography in action. Both Susan and I were spontaneously grappling with complex ideas while speaking. Our hesitancy reveals we are thinking literally *on the spot*. The camera records the process and events as they unfold. This is of course a standard practice in visual anthropology.

Filmed over three days with triumphant escaped 'informants', the visual and verbal content remains a special means for experiencing and reliving through landscape. There are implications in the fact that the two returning inmates are recording their reactions on camera. It is no longer a privatized experience but also a performance and one with vengeance and unexpected cathartic release. The decay and overgrowth

of the gardens, the empty buildings and modern ones neglected or in ruins, the decaying weed-infested netball courts and now-vanished hockey pitch add to the impending destruction of the place.

Visual recording is very different from field notes, or even a tape recording of the events. Anthropologists recognize that note-taking involves selection. Note-taking already cerebralizes the material, making it logocentric. The visual gives images, which are open to the viewer to judge and assess. Again there are selections concerning the positioning of the camera. Anna Grimshaw convincingly chose to include Susan and I in many of the frames. Naively, I had originally seen the use of the film as a personal record of the interiors, buildings and landscape for which we would provide voice-overs (Okely 2001). I imagined replaying the scenery for later reminiscences. On the other hand, we had both dressed in anticipation and stood or walked around as performers for the camera. In any case, future viewers would not have been able to make sense of visually uninhabited landscapes. Far better, the rushes provided a record of our animated engagement with place and persons, including other individuals we met on the way.

A Greek anthropologist shown extracts at a conference, alerted me to nuances in our bodily postures according to scene, location and context. Unconsciously, we moved with full reverence in the chapel. Most visibly we parodied the games mistress' legacy in the gymnasium. The topics, reminiscences and our bodies changed as we moved between places.

Notes

1. A younger or state-school-educated audience found my article (1978b) shocking in its detail and perverted class, colonial and gendered aims. When I presented the first draft at the Oxford Seminar on the Cross-Cultural Study of Women in 1977, most of the audience was incredulous but others of my generation who had attended a similar institution wept in painful and long-suppressed recognition.

2. There were cross-cultural and class-specific reactions to the footage: when I gave a presentation at a conference at my university, I was assailed by two English academics for being 'ungrateful' for the fabulous facilities the school had offered. A mature woman student (public school) rebuked me for hating hockey and games. Thus the film footage, with public-school voices, can evoke hostility and misplaced envy in ways which my silent published words have never done. The uncontrollable impact of sound over sight on viewers is comparable to Stanley Fish's 'reader's response theory', but here transformed as 'viewer/listener response'. By contrast, when I presented the same material to academics in Denmark, Finland and Norway and American undergraduates, it was met with astonishment and near-tearful outrage at the barbarism and sexism of elite British education.

References

Bourdieu, P., *Outline of the Theory of Practice,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Durkheim, E., *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1964.

Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980.

Grimshaw, A., *The Ethnographer's Eye*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Hastrup, K., 'Anthropological visions: some notes on visual and textual authority', in P. Crawford and D. Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

Humm, M., *Border Traffic,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.

MacDougall, D., 'Social Aesthetics and the Doon School' in *Visual Anthropology Review*, 15: 1, 1999.

Mangan, J.A., *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Mangan, J.A., *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, London: Frank Cass, 1998.

Nader, L., 'Studying up: up the Anthropologist', in D. Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing Anthropology*, New York: Vintage, 1974.

Okely, J., 'The girl and her body', *New Society,* [1978a] reprinted in Okely 1996.

Okely, J., 'Privileged, Schooled and Finished: Boarding School for Girls', in S. Ardener (ed.), *Defining Females*, New York: Wiley, [1978b] reprinted in Okely 1996.

Okely, J., *Simone de Beauvoir: a Re-Reading*, London: Virago, 1986.

Okely, J., *Own or Other Culture,* London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Okely, J., 'Landcape, Visualism and Anthropology: Looking and Seeing in Normandy' in *Ethnos* 66: 1, 2001.

Said, E., *Out of Place: a Memoir*, London: Granta Books, 1999.

Turner, V., *The Ritual Process*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.

Roanna Heller studied Anthropology at the University of Sussex before completing the Masters course in Geography at the University of Sheffield in 2003. She is currently based in Sheffield where she continues to practice as an artist-ethnographer, co-ordinating interactive art events in city spaces and investigating collaborative practices.

Becoming an Artist-Ethnographer

Roanna Heller

I am walking up Freedom Road in Sheffield. I walk up here most days; sometimes I cycle halfway up, before getting off to walk. For the first two years I lived here, I didn't take a lot of notice of the world around me. Lately I begin to see more, testing out my senses, making each walk up here an adventure. So much is familiar, yet every day it looks different. I look at it differently…paint on the houses, tarmac, wheelie bins, pockets of view across to the peaks, the man with the crutches. It is a place I rework each day in my imagination, bringing to it other journeys, memories, experiences. This is my entry into the rest of the world, where I walk, run, cycle, escape, relax, chat, meander. A quiet, leafy, road, straight, yet twisted through colour, winding plants and passages.

I leave the house, go up to South Road, Walkley shops, 95 bus, I follow the edge to the university, or down, off our road and west towards Hillsborough, or before that the allotments, or beyond that the Rivelin Valley, down Whitehouse to the tram stop on Langsett Road, Betty Tigers, Safeway or down and further east through Philadelphia, a park, a cut through, to Upperthorpe and my brother's house, cross country into the city centre. My eye picks out what I know, looks into what I don't know, imagining other worlds within buildings, streets, people, emotions. Looking down, up or across I remain small. Other people are looking up towards me and the sky, down to their feet, across to the house opposite. Living in this topology, views tantalise. My vision is a collage of far-sightedness, mid-sightedness, near-sightedness; what I can't see on the other side of the hill, where I might be when I finish this journey, where I was, what happened before. On the edge of these hills movement is easy.

It wasn't always like this. Sheffield used to leave me feeling indifferent. I returned here after a summer in Berlin. There I had lain on my back in Mauer Park, on short, dry grass, absorbing the city through my limbs alongside bold buildings, bicycles, and movement. I was bewitched, drunkenly in love with the city. Coming home to Sheffield, I stumbled, unconnected, disengaged.

Beginning to explore city spaces

This piece comes out of my experience of doing an MA in geography, which I undertook because I wanted to look at people's interactions with city spaces. I was inspired to research this subject after reading an academic, but lyrical, piece of writing by Alan Latham about Berlin (1999). In it he interweaves psychology, sociology, geography and literature to explore the possibilities of engagement with city space. He suggests that spaces that are complicated and multifaceted, resisting stable interpretations, are more open to interaction than others, inviting the individual to recognise the city's own existence. Doing so enables us to create a dialogue between ourselves and the world around us – buildings, vistas, objects and people we encounter as we negotiate the city. After my experience of Berlin, Sheffield seemed to lack atmosphere, engaging places and possibilities, and I was tempted to believe that this simply confirmed Latham's position: some spaces are more engaging than others. At the same time I wanted to see if it was possible to extend his argument. Surely how we engage with cities is not simply down to how the city presents itself, but is also dependent on our own actions?

As my experiences of Berlin and Sheffield had been so strikingly different I decided to use myself as a starting point for my research. My method was to focus my attention on my surroundings in a number of new and different ways. I tried new ways of walking, exploring new spaces and disorientating myself, testing the familiarity of the streets. I started taking photographs, creating opportunities for stopping and looking differently, importing another technology into the shifting relations between myself and the world. I looked out for signs of other people's relations with the city, sweet wrappers on the street, garden designs, exhibitions of city-related artists' work.

Almost without knowing it my decision to look at urban space through my own subjectivity, rather than from a distanced objective position, or 'god's eye' (Haraway 1988), led me away from traditional paper research methods and into forms of creative practice.

As a student of anthropology and geography I had been taught to research social life using textually dominated methods, maintaining an analytical distance from my subject. Although participation and observation are recognised as the key techniques, each practical experience is rapidly translated into text, as fieldnotes, analysis and 'writing-up' (see Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995, and Clifford and Marcus 1986). When visual images are used during the research process they are almost always framed by text (Wright 1998). However, once I considered my own experiences of space I realised that text-based methods could not adequately express the synaesthetic qualities of experience (Tilley 2000) – what it feels like to run down a hill or choose a particular path. Exploring Sheffield on my own and with others I became aware of an ever-widening range of possible embodied experiences that demanded an equally wide range of different methods of expression.

Noticing that many artists were also exploring different experiences of urban space I began to examine their particular methods and techniques. I realised that the artist, like the ethnographer, is concerned with learning about and communicating experience; however, artists learn through making (research by practice), exploring the world through imaginative material and conceptual interventions, whereas the ethnographer is trained to retain an analytical distance, to learn through text-based interpretation. To pursue my project in Sheffield I decided to try to bring ethnographic and artistic perspectives together, making images, sculpture and using bodily movement, as well as different forms of text. I sought to create a space where I could use both the different mediums and imaginative, subjective approach of fine art with the theoretically informed and socially concerned critical ethnographic approach. As I was using experimental practice–based methods to explore urban experience and was keen to challenge the analytical authority of the researcher, I wanted to show in the dissemination of my research, some of the different interactions and practices which had led me down this particular path – from visits to Berlin, to encounters with community art projects to the papers and books I read. This chapter, therefore, is one way of telling, presenting some of these processes and interactions, interweaving theoretical analysis with lyrical writing and visual materials.

Researching engagement through community art

My practice began with photography, reorienting myself to a tactile, sensory world where everything matters. The camera gave me a chance to be in space differently, to stop and focus on light and colour, signs of interactions. As I walked across the city, along ridges and in and out of valleys each object I saw became a potential image, worth looking at and therefore worth exploring. Looking through the lens not only suggested new ways of moving and looking but also challenged my aesthetic conceptions. Through entering into a dialogue with what I saw, smelt and felt, I became engaged with the city.

To work with both artistic and ethnographic perspectives I needed to find a way of using my own experiences to learn about other people's relationships with city space. I began to do more social activities in public spaces, joining a community allotment and playing football in the park, talking to the people I was with about their experiences of Sheffield. What I needed, however, was the chance to work creatively with people, using cameras and other technologies to explore different ways of being in the city. In a local community newsletter I saw an article about an upcoming neighbourhood arts festival, organised by The Garden Rooms, a community arts organisation in the area. I was invited to come along to their initial open planning meeting and then to run a workshop as part of the festival. I worked with two other people who were also interested in urban spaces to develop a workshop in the Pondarosa, a local park. We felt there was potential for developing a social, creative forum for exploring the different uses and possibilities of the park space through photography, sculpture and creative writing. I was interested to see my research ideas crossing disciplinary boundaries. Working on a community arts project, through collaborating with artists, project workers and participants, I was moving towards an artistic-ethnographic perspective.

We attracted fifteen people to the workshop by putting up posters around the local area and through word of mouth. The participants were all interested in doing something different in a space they used regularly and sharing their everyday experiences of the park. We gave out some materials and information which might prompt different creative explorations of the site, including disposable cameras, paper and pencils, dowsing rods and a short history of the park. Participants split into groups and roamed around the park, developing a dialogue with objects and each other through creative interventions. Climbing up a bank, a space was cleared and a serpent was made from blue plastic and piles of twigs. Stopping at the other side of the path and crouching down, someone stapled together leaves in an urban homage to Andy Goldsworthy's intricate stitching. Looking with the camera we created new views through a plastic bag handle, at someone climbing a tree, at each other, at something very small or very large. Through moving towards, moving away and moving back again, meanings and experiences shifted. Through practice we became engaged.

During the workshop we attempted to create opportunities for people to express themselves through different mediums and engage critically with the ideas behind the project. As I worked with The Garden Rooms and read more about community art practice, however, I became more aware of the challenges of participatory art and some of the dangers of using categories and concepts uncritically. The following section explores in more detail the possibilities for artistic-ethnographic practice as a way of learning about engagement and as an approach that can be explored in other areas of social research.

Towards artistic and ethnographic practice: making an installation

I continued to develop different projects that explored the possibilities for learning through making, building on my experiences to develop a critical awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of participatory art. As well as organising more workshops, I worked on an installation project combining objects salvaged from a junk shop and a series of my slides. As I experimented with practice-based research, moving between the fields of academia and art, I examined my own and other people's artistic and ethnographic practice, identifying spaces for potential collaboration and exploring how particular relationships to the city were supported through each approach.
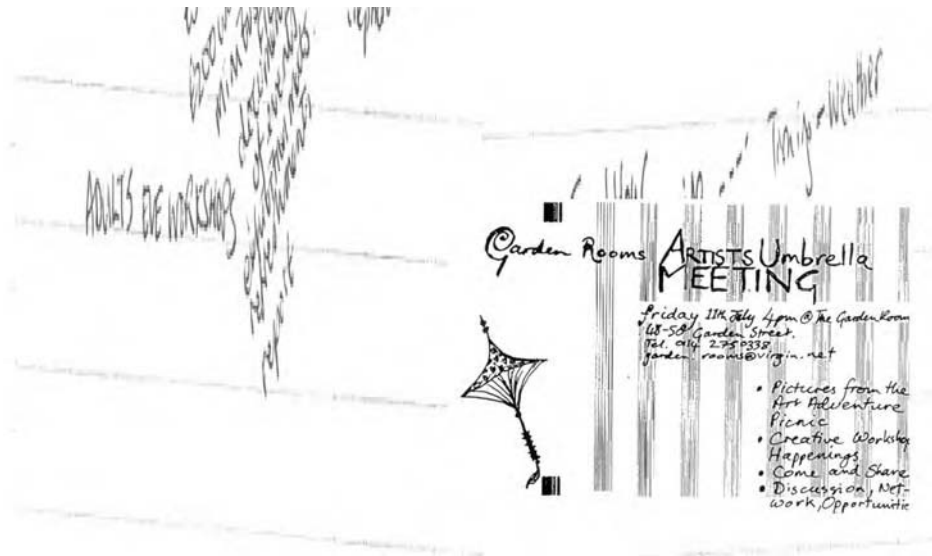
To explore possibilities for developing my own work and in order to find people and organisations willing to collaborate with me, I began to attend artists' meetings, discovering sources of information, employment opportunities and different forms of practice. The city became marked with possible ways of working and different events. I visited studios, joined e-mail lists, read the Artist's Newsletter and talked to artists about their work and their relationship to the city. It soon became apparent that rather than existing as isolated creative individuals, as the stereotype suggests, artists rely on developing complex social networks in order to make themselves known and to find creative employment opportunities, being willing to engage with a wide range of different organisations and individuals. As a postgraduate researcher I also relied on social interactions in order to practice my research, interacting with other researchers, at the university, online and by attending conferences. However, I found it much harder to develop contacts within the university than through the artistic scene. The departmental structure and the pressure to perform created an environment where people were often unwilling or unable to develop interdisciplinary connections. As well as being encouraged to retain a critical distance throughout the research process, academics often remained distant from individuals and organisations in the rest of the city, missing potential opportunities for collaboration.

Despite working in different social contexts I discovered that artists and ethnographers both have to be proficient in certain shared skills in order to be successful. Abilities in research, planning, negotiation and delivery are crucial, as well as the ability to work with many different possibilities at once and to develop social networks (see Kwon 2002). As my research shows different skills are particular to each discipline, for example, the sensory techniques and critical social analysis which I attempted to bring together in my own practice (see also Ravetz, this volume).

I was inspired to draw on this new web of possibilities after visiting a community arts project called Encounters. Two artists had rented out a shop for a month and worked with local residents to make installations and videos that explored their relationship to the area, transforming everyday materials into critical pieces of art. Anyone was free to come in and suggest particular projects as well as being invited to respond to collective pieces.

I was also concerned about the fate of a collection of objects in a second-hand shop which was part of a recycling project. The shop was about to close and anything which didn't sell would be recycled or thrown away. It was an extraordinary place, piled from the floor to the ceiling with anything you could imagine. Collaborating with a friend whom I had met on a video course, we took several boxes of objects away, unsure what we would do with them, but determined to explore how we engage with objects and places through making a tactile, participative installation.

At the same time I decided to develop my photographic exploration of Sheffield into a series of slides, inspired by the varied use of projections and videos I had seen by different artists in galleries and other spaces. I wanted to show how

engagement is a process of layering: a space is experienced through past encounters with people and places which become part of an ongoing dialogue; I felt that I could do this most successfully by creating a visual piece.

I combined slides I had taken over the last three years with new slides that I made from postcards of places people had sent me and other images I had made or found. Placing the postcards on the pavement outside my house I used the camera to transform this personal collection into film, framing each postcard with the road surface. Between each postcard slide I arranged three of my older slides, pictures of Berlin, Ghent, Norwich, Sheffield. They were selected so as to suggest possible stories and connections, short imaginative bursts of cities and scenes, inviting the viewer to respond with his/her own experiences of place.

The opportunity to make an installation using the objects and the slides came from a bar in the city centre which held a weekly art and music night. On two nights we created installations (which had to be dismantled at the end of the evening). Arriving at seven o'clock we emptied out our boxes of objects from other people's lives, kitchen gadgets, bike parts, games, dolls etc. and constructed a sculpture in full view of customers sipping cocktails and bar staff serving customers. The installation suggested some of the dangers and thrills of movement and travel, (dolls escaping from suitcases into chip pans, a row of stopped clocks, snapshots of places forming a race track), which together with the slides, projected on to the space behind, made tangible some of our imaginative encounters and interactions.

Unfortunately, however, we were not able to make the project as participative as we would have liked. We had planned to invite other people in the bar to help in the construction, providing an opportunity to engage and respond to the objects. But due to a lack of time and very loud music it was difficult to communicate and make decisions between ourselves, let alone in a larger group. We would also have liked to work with others connected to the junk shop – those who donated items, the volunteers, the co-ordinator and the customers. Although this project has not yet

fulfilled its potential as a critical piece of community art, it still made an impact, challenging the aesthetics of a fashionable bar as well as recognising the different ways we engage with spaces and objects.

Through developing my own practice, as well as responding to other people's work, I became aware of the different ways that art and anthropology engage with everyday experience, using techniques of defamiliarisation to invite audiences or participants to reconsider what may be taken for granted (see Clifford 1988). Through working on the installation project and the workshops, I explored how ethnographic research into everyday experiences – participant observation, fieldnotes, theoretical analysis etc. – can be expanded through artistic practice. As well as my research benefiting from the range of collaborative possibilities that opened up, I was able to learn about imaginative relationships to place through my own creative engagement. I was also struck by the interactive possibilities of art. An academic chapter, such as this one, will be read predominantly by people already interested in the subject, and is dominated by the textual format. An exhibition or workshop, on the other hand, can communicate subjective experience through multi-sensory media, creating different social spaces for interaction and participation and potentially challenging the interpretative voice of the author which often prevails in ethnographic texts. However, as my account of the installation project, and my own experiences with The Garden Rooms show, it is not easy to create social spaces where people feel comfortable participating at different levels.

Conclusion
My experiments in combining the interpretative, social practices of ethnography with creative artistic practice have drawn on the many points of connection between the two disciplines. I have shown how we can communicate the tactile, sensory experiences of living in a city through making social objects. I have also shown how one can change one's relationship to city space through creative practices, extending Latham's idea of interaction and engagement to one acknowledging the power of our own actions and imagination.

However, as Miwon Kwon points out such experimental work is not easy (2002). Working with new people and ideas can create feelings of uncertainty and practice-based work can also take up a lot more time, as specific practices need to be

developed for each piece of research (Grimshaw 2000). It is also inevitable that researchers who attempt to combine both perspectives will struggle with conflicts between artistic vision and social/participatory interests. This is as relevant to community art practices as it is to artistic-ethnography. Organisations, such as The Garden Rooms, aim to change people's lives through art. At the same time many of the accepted categories that participatory art operates through, such as 'community' and 'empowerment' demand critical interrogation, something that ethnographers and theorists such as Rose (1997) and Kwon (2002) are trained to do. Working on the installation project, I realised how participation demands careful planning, negotiation and critical evaluation. Although it was a struggle to create social spaces which could support both critical discussion and personal expression, such a challenge was stimulating and productive. Throughout my MA my experimental practice was limited by institutional boundaries manifested in an inflexible course structure; my work would have benefited, for example, from training in visual methods. In advocating research by practice I don't want to deny the differences between disciplines, or simply usurp the methods of artistic practice. Rather I suggest that ethnographers and artists join forces to create a shared critical space from which both could benefit.

References

Clifford, On ethnographic surrealism, *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1998.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G. eds., *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986.

Emerson, R. Fretz, R. and Shaw, L., *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Grimshaw, A., Notes towards an experimental anthropology, Harris et al. eds. *The child in the city: a case study in experimental anthropology*, Manchester, Prickly Pear Pamphlets, 2000.

Foster, H., The artist as ethnographer, *The return of the real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1996.

Haraway, D., Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of the partial perspective, *Feminist studies* 14, 3 575–599, 1988.

Kwon, M., Experience vs. interpretation: traces of ethnography in the works of Lan Tuazon and Nikki S. Lee, A. Coles ed. *Site specificity: the ethnographic turn*, London, Black Dog Publishing, 2000.

Kwon, M., *One place after another: site specific art and locational identity* Cambridge MA, The MIT Press, 2002.

Latham, A., Powers of engagement: on being engaged, being indifferent and urban life, *Area* 31, 2 161–168, 1999.

Ravetz, A., (this volume).

Rose, G., Performing inoperative community: the space and resistance of some community arts projects, Pile, S. and Keith, M. ed. *Geographies of resistance*, London, Routledge, 1997.

Tilley, C., Ethnography and material culture Atkinson, P. ed. *Handbook of ethnography*, London, Sage, 2000.

Wright, The third subject: perspectives on visual anthropology, *Anthropology Today* 14, 4 16-21, 1998.

Erik Knudsen is a practising filmmaker whose credits include both feature and documentary films. He is the Programme Director of the MA in Television Documentary Production at the University of Salford, Manchester, and was recently awarded a PhD for practice-based research.

Creation and I, Me and My Work: A Personal Account of Relations Between Film, Film-maker and Teaching

Erik Knudsen

Drift, Wait, Obey

For the film 'artist' or film 'poet' the relationship between the film-maker and the work is an intensely personal one, in that the process of action and reflection is part of a finely balanced evolutionary process. I use the terms 'artist/poet' here to distinguish between the film-maker primarily driven to create out of an inner necessity, largely independent of market demand, as opposed to the film-maker primarily creating to satisfy the perceived demands of a marketplace. Most film-makers do, of course, think of their audience, but as I hope will become clearer later, the role of the audience and its needs can be identified differently.

Whilst significant studies have been made of relations between film and audiences, comparatively little exploration has been published of the personal process of creation. Perhaps the word 'intimate' might be more appropriate, for by personal I do not mean it in terms of possession or as the I, but more what C.G. Jung might call the Self. As Andrei Tarkovsky points out, if we look at the greatest works of art, 'we see that they exist as part of nature, part of truth and independent of author and audience'.

The language of film, its socio-political and cultural contexts and its cultural heritage can all provide valuable insights to the student of film-making. But what of that delicate relationship between the creator and the work created?

These thoughts do not seek to put forward a thesis, nor to pose an academically driven question. In my experience, it is relatively easy to engage in a discourse

A still from Erik Knudsen's film, Brannigan's March.

about the work of others, particularly when dealing with the sociocultural contexts of its language and representation. Analysis of one's own work, especially an exploration of that intimate, sometimes mystical, relationship one has to the work and the process, is perhaps more challenging. In fact I would contend that it is not desirable to seek to do so.

I was once advised by a tennis player that whenever playing someone better than myself I should stop the game for a moment and get my opponent to explain to me some of the techniques they use. My friend insisted that once my opponent started playing again, he would be conscious of this rationalization of instinctive action; this would interfere with his performance, thereby giving me an advantage.

Certainly in my case, the use of intellectual discourse is a direct contradiction to all that I try and achieve in my work and as an educator, this is a challenging dilemma. Yet reflection is an important part of my work and its ongoing development.

This reflection can of course take many forms and in the current debate about media practice research the question of what that form is goes to the heart of the issue. Arguably, conventional approaches to university research rely on positivist approaches to 'evidence', drawing on concepts of 'proof', 'qualification', 'quantification', 'rationality', 'dialectic', 'argument', 'conclusions', usually presented in the written form. A Zen philosopher might describe such an approach as essentially dualistic.

To experience means to become aware of, but not in the way in which we become aware of the world of sense-and-intellect. In the latter case, we always have a subject that is aware of something and an object of which the subject is aware, for the world of sense-and-intellect is a dichotomous world of subject and object. To be aware of sun-

yata, according to Zen, we have to transcend this dichotomous world in such a way as not to be outside it. (Suzuki, p. 261)

In contrast, for me, the key ingredients in artistic expression are centred around its 'irrationality' - an attempt to express 'feelings' and 'emotions'. When I distinguish between feelings and emotions, I do so in the physiological sense: feelings, as belonging to our participatory emotions (such as rapture, longing, grief, awe, love and so on), usually associated with our parasympathetic nervous system; and our self-assertive emotions (fear, anger, lust, excitement, jealousy and so on) usually associated with our sympathetic nervous system. (See Koestler 1970). I might even - to draw on a Jansenist or Jesuitical context - turn to the ultimate of all irrationalities, the grace, or otherwise, of 'God'.

Add to this the problem of methodology. The process of creation and the process of reflection are not necessarily definable, nor necessarily logical. Indeed, inspiration is in itself a mystical experience, as is the whole issue of necessity and drive. Take, for example, Stanley Burnshaw's impressive list of quotes from prominent creative artists concerning the issue of how work emerges:

Mozart: 'My ideas come as they will, I don't know how';

Kipling: 'When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait, and obey';

Spire: 'All truly poetic thought begins to sing by itself, unless the poet is clumsy enough to prevent it from singing'. (Burnshaw, pp. 53-54)

The process of reflection is often a retrospective part of the process of creation and is meant to be a living part of the overall creative process. More often than not, I am overwhelmed by my creations, which take shape largely without my intellectual intervention. And when I then reflect, my first thought is 'did I really create that?' This is not very 'academic' and as a film-maker, I would not want it to be so. It is therefore with great care that I conceptualize my creative activity.

Nevertheless, intellectualization is of course part of my whole experience. There are practical problems to solve, things that must be explained to others working on a project and so on. However, the core of the process is intensely intuitive. Reflection serves to help me become aware of that intuition, to help me develop some conscious understanding of the process, while at the same time ensuring that my rational intellect does not interfere to such an extent that it smothers the life out of what is created.

In the following sections, I present a brief selection of edited extracts from notes I have taken as part of my reflective process while making films. I have excluded many notes that would only make sense to me - such as dreams, notes on specific problems, impressions and incidents that would make little sense out of context and observations so personal I would feel embarrassed to have them generally

revealed. I have chosen to focus here on philosophical reflections, rather than practical notes. I hope, through these examples, to highlight the fact that film-making is not merely some objective process of craft, but a living experience which cannot necessarily be qualified or quantified rationally. Later in the paper, I will try and briefly illustrate how these reflections impact upon my teaching.

Creation and I

A1. I have a definite notion, a strong drive, a restless craving to search for an abstraction, a spirit, an energy, a force - whatever - that animates me and my world. I somehow want to trace, to feel, to handle, to experience this abstraction in its purest form. This is not a drive I seem to have any control over.

A2. *A mystery is not necessarily there to be solved; but there to make you think, experience, feel and seek. And out of all of this, perhaps emerges a living creation.*

A3. I feel the sense of crisis in my culture; as if my culture is trapped in a rigid cage of definitive notions, bursting dangerously at the seams. So many of humanity's problems cannot be adequately or fundamentally tackled because of our narrow and rigid perception of life. It is an invisible crisis ... slowly creeping in on us. How often have I found myself unable to solve a problem simply because of the limitations of my perception?

A4. *As in a mother, my imagination is the womb within which a work is conceived and developed. The more I can allow this work to grow and mature without my conscious intervention the better. When ready, labour begins ...* [Koestlerhas explored what he calls the 'ripening effect' in the context of scientific developments (1964)].

A5. Experience, not meaning ... Meaning suggests something static, something finite and final.

A6. *If I can truthfully say that an articulation came from the depths of my being, filtered through all the experience and aspirations of which I am made, it doesn't matter if it seems simplistic and incomplete. Say it, articulate it. Allow it to the surface; it is probably a first step in a larger articulation, the end of a string to which other things are tied.*

A7. When I think of experience, it's not necessarily what happens to me that is important, but what I feel about it ... Look at your subjects this way.

A8. *Accept that everyone's conscience demands different things of them.*

A9. I am ultimately not responsible to my ego, anyone else's ego, laws, conventions and moral codes: my deepest conscience, the one that goes beyond social indoctrination, is what I must follow. This conscience is my intuitive voice whispering in my ear, in an effort to steer me through my experiences. I must learn

to hear this voice, to recognize it amongst the bombardment of the voices of prejudiced morality.

A10. *Without humility towards my subject, I will fail to see its essence. My subject will become polluted by my own arrogance.*

A11. How can I fail to be humbled by the overwhelming feeling of the presence of an omnipresent spirit - life itself? How can I fail to be humbled by the means to articulate the inarticulateable, to reveal the hidden, to touch the untouchable? How can I fail to be humbled by the presence of another human being moved by something I have created?

Me and my Work (B)

B1. Confusion can be a positive sign of an inquiring mind which is constantly reappraising. If confused, I shouldn't be discouraged. Quite the contrary, I must take it as a healthy sign and make the most of it. An interesting development of this theme can be found in Robert Graves' poem *In Broken Images*.

B2. *Vision is the result of the hard, and at times painful, work I have put into gaining a higher awareness through exploration. And the more refined my vision becomes, the more I will feel like a child discovering a new world for the first time.*

B3. The more possessions I have, the more of my life is concerned with keeping these possessions working. It is the same with film-making: it is easy to become a slave to the complex machines, to the mechanisms of finance and the routines of the trade.

B4. *People often think of children as particularly creative. Why? Could this not be that children often juxtapose what for us adults are unrelated ingredients, only to be pleasantly surprised when such a combination makes us see afresh? Never lose this sense of childish exploration, in which I might combine elements which conventional wisdom tells me should not be combined.*

B5. Sound and image are different dimensions of the same experience. They must coexist and be inextricably entwined.

B6. *'To be, or not to be', that is indeed the duality of light and sound as our senses perceive them: light and dark, sound and silence. But this principle goes beyond the basic elements to the mood, the movement, the emotional and intellectual aspects; all governed by their own duality. Only the spiritual qualities of the film - that formless 'white light', the heart and soul of the film - is not subject to laws of duality.*

B7. The primary purpose of constructing images and sounds is not to create meaning, but to create the means to an experience. The experience will then trigger associations in the audience from which they can then construct their own meaning (if they need or want to).

B8. *Make the everyday experiences of daily life epic in scope: life is full of small, momentous moments; seek to discover these, to reveal their beauty and power. The microcosm and macrocosm are one.*

Sharing

If conscious reflection serves to help develop an awareness of unconscious processes, then when I reflect on the processes and outcomes of my film-making I start to see patterns: patterns of concern, patterns of interest, patterns of expression and so on. These patterns include what can only be described as fortuitous events and influences on my work which only become apparent when looking back. With an increased awareness of these patterns, I think it is possible for the film-maker to make incredible strides in their art by being simultaneously conscious and unconscious of their practice, without one negating or conflicting with the other

How does one translate such ephemeral processes key to creative expression into teaching? The short honest answer is: I don't really know. I am reminded of a conversation I had with the director Bill Forsyth, in which he explained that the first time he taught a group of film students he had no real clue what he was going to teach. Only once he had begun, did he start to realize how much he actually knew and then quickly evolved a way of disseminating this, which he could not have imagined in advance. Nevertheless, teaching is an important contribution anyone can make to an ongoing development of new generations and is, as such, crucial. Furthermore, I have found that the process of reflection required to teach, and the consequent interaction with students and their work, has been instrumental in shaping my own practice through a process of 'enforced' reflection and articulation. Consequently, the process of my own learning and development as a film-maker and that of my students are one and the same.

My journey into education has been, at times, a painful one. Essentially, I have felt my way forward (A6 above) to developing a teaching practice which revolves around certain key principles and features that lie at the heart of my own practice, and which I hope some of my notes allude to. I'm not sure it is possible - or indeed should be possible - for a creative person to separate her inner drives from the acts she carries out. If I were to single out one key feature which I believe permeates most of our Western civilization's problems, it would be the separation of our nature (and Nature) and our acts. But that is a whole different debate ... What follows is a sketch of a few things that I have attempted to include in my teaching, with references to how they might be rooted in the reflections on my practice.

Passion

Passion for the subject is a crucial ingredient in any teaching. Whatever the source of that passion is (A1 and A11), I do not believe it is necessarily directly relevant to the student; nevertheless, the fact that it is present is essential. It has a palpable effect on student enthusiasm and engagement in the various learning processes, while also helping to shape, for example, the content of materials used for teaching,

such as films being shown and discussed and the depth of any insights being offered. The decisions I make as a teacher, with regard to emphasis, does relate directly to what I feel to be important in my own understanding of the subject and is not guided by my assumptions of what I might think is expected (A9). This is not with a view to encouraging similar passions, but to help the student allow their own passions to emerge (A8).

Student Aspiration

The quality of the student's learning experience and their achievements are largely determined by their own aspiration. As a teacher, I see one of the first and most important steps in this process as helping the student establish a sense of what their aspiration is (and their reasons for seeking learning) and then to establish a connection between this aspiration and the practicalities of the content and delivery of the course (see Knudsen 2000). This connection also goes as far as the details of tackling particular creative and technical problems, where students are able to contextualize the challenges they face within their overall aims and objectives, which in turn will vary from student to student. (and I should say at this point that my particular experience relates to postgraduate study). In practice, this process takes the form of regular tutorials, from which the student develops a 'learning agreement' in which they identify key aspirations, learning objectives and challenges. The student is guided and invited to identify their prior experience and creative achievements, qualify where they feel their strengths and weaknesses lie and chart what and how they intend to use the course of learning to develop their creative and technical skills within the context of their overall aspirations. This document is referenced at key stages through their academic year, as well as being referenced during assessment.

The quality of the outcomes of student study can also be related to this approach to targeting their aspirations, in that the student's expectations of him/herself is an important factor in raising the standard of their own work. A sense of ownership of one's own learning is hopefully the impetus with which the student drives themselves forward (A6).

Creative Challenges

The greatest challenges are usually the barriers of the mind (A3, B1, B2, B3). The process of learning is as much about unlearning as about learning (B1, B2, B4). However, as the mind does not exist independently of the body, and vice versa, so the creative substance does not exist independently of the craft and form (B6). It is the interplay between intuition, reflection and action that creates a living work. It is therefore crucial for me that theory and practice are not seen as separate elements, but as two aspects of the same thing (B5), inextricably linked.

The theory of practice and the practice of theory should, in my view, be based primarily on the student's own experience. With key objectives in mind, I will tend

to set specific exercises around problems and challenges which allow the student, through a process of practice and reflection, to gain an understanding of their own limitations and then through that process begin to challenge assumptions, habits and prejudices which are often the main barriers to successful articulation (B4). The key is to always have objectives, even if the experience and the discoveries vary from that objective. I try to design exercises in ways that they demand reflection, and create reflective objectives which demand practice. I also feel it is important for me to explore ways of looking at the form reflections take, in that I question whether the written 'analysis' indeed is always the most appropriate form of reflection. One may look to presentations, parallel practice, discussion, referencing to other works, identification of influences and, indeed, the work itself as alternative modes of reflection which the educational system needs to be able to accommodate.

Ideas

With reference to my earlier comments about the separation of individual aspiration and the acts they carry out, I believe this is often a problematic area when it comes to generating ideas. I often see students trying to generate ideas in an objective fashion, as if they and their subject are fundamentally separate (A2, A4, A5, A7, A10, B8). Later problems in a project and the quality of a work are more often than not affected by the original seed having essential shortcomings.

Here, again, I think it important to take the student through a process of linking subject and themselves in order, on the one hand, to establish a perspective which may have some element of uniqueness, while on the other also being able to engage fully with the themes and approaches being taken. The key to a unique and innovative approach to a subject often lies in the nature of the relationship or connection between subject and film-maker. Indeed, this can also be approached from a collective point of view. A group of students can be encouraged in seminar situations, for example, to identify and discuss shared thoughts and feelings about a theme or subject, with a view to developing an idea.

The emphasis of identifying the connection between student and subject also helps to strengthen the student's feeling of ownership and empowerment, which in turn relates to the comments I made earlier about passion.

Final Thought

I hope that these few pages of thoughts, reflections and postulations will help to encourage a debate about creative expression within the context of higher education. I have not sought to catalogue specific teaching practices, but merely to create pointers towards issues which may underpin teaching practice. In the ongoing debates about assessment, the nature of practice research and approaches to pedagogy we should perhaps not forget that the moving image medium is, in

relative terms, a young medium and the formal education within this medium even younger.

References

Burnshaw, S., *The Seamless Web,* New York: George Braziller, 1991.

Jung, C.G., *The Undiscovered Self,* Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1958.

Knudsen, E., 'Fear Eats the Soul: Working with Creative Content and Purpose in Media Practice Education', *Journal of Media Practice* 1: 3. pp. 165-171, 2000.

Koestler, A., *The Sleepwalkers*, London: Hutchinson, 1968.

Koestler, A., *The Act of Creation,* London: Picador, 1970.

Suzuki, D.T., *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of...,* New York: Image Books, 1996.

Tarkovsky, A., *Sculpting in Time,* London: Bodley Head, 1986.

Pavel Büchler is Research Professor in Art and Design at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has recently co-edited *Saving the Image: Art after Film* (2003) and is working on an anthology of contributions based on an Arts Council of England sponsored conference, *Not Forms and Colors: The Artist as Activist in Western Democracy* to be published in early 2004, and a major exhibition 'Whatever Happened to Social Democracy?' (co-curated with Charles Esche and Gertrud Sandqvist, Rooseum, Malm, 2004).

Making Nothing Happen: Notes for a Seminar[1]

Pavel Büchler

'And if (art) deals with concepts, how does it deal with concepts? Why does it not look like philosophy? Like sociology?...'[2] Or, for that matter, why does art not look like anthropology?

It seems a good idea to start with an apology. For one, what can an artist say to a gathering of anthropologists? True, artists are agents of culture or even, as current jargon has it, 'culture producers'. What they do and how they go about it should be of professional interest to anthropologists and other observers of society and culture. And even if, in fact, artists no more produce culture than they are produced by it, their views, and their collective identity shaped in and by specific cultural circumstances, should concern anthropology. And yet, the most distinctive feature of modern western culture that artists collectively represent is the idea, central to the culture's self-image, of the diversity of art and its practices. This is underwritten by the convention that the value and validity of each individual artistic practice is in its nonconformity and uniqueness (or 'originality'). A single artist's practice represents the culture at large by being first and foremost an exception. For an anthropologist then, every artist is an embodiment of the non-representative. Or in other words (those of Frank Stella), what you see is what you see.

Anthropology has a lot to learn from its encounters with art and art can do much worse than pay attention to anthropology. After all, both often try to trespass on the other's territory, sometimes borrow the other's tools, and both are concerned with description and discovery rather than invention. Anthropology and art are well disposed to understand one another. But the traffic of ideas and inspiration

Sorry, Liverpool Billboard Project, May 1999

between conceptually different modes of engagement with the world is more likely to thrive on curiosity (which I take to be the search for similarity and difference) than comprehension; and understanding, in a categorical sense, is not always the point. And so, in what follows, little or no concession will be made to specialist interests: rather than trying to reconcile the priorities of social research and methodical enquiry with those of an artistic practice, I will try to present some specific outcomes of that practice as if they were merely so many ways of pointing out the obvious – that which is already there, stares you in the face, and yet still demands to be shown so that it may be looked at.

Secondly, for an artist there is always something to be sorry about, not least because he or she is permitted to do so much and yet able to achieve so little in the social world and daily life which provide the raw material for all artistic practice. Or perhaps, and for the same reason, the artist can hardly avoid moments of doubt and self-pity, feeling sorry for him or herself, for the vanity of his or her commitments. Either way, the basic operative condition of the social performance of art is futility: an artist can do almost anything, provided that everything the artist does as an artist passes for art –

that is to say, for an exercise of speculative imagination without a real, immediate consequence. This is artistic freedom – the freedom to make nothing happen.

'If art is to nourish the roots of our culture,' J. F. Kennedy famously declared forty years ago, 'society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.' In Kennedy's formulation, the onus is on society – and so is the incentive. The artist seems to be a somewhat passive intermediary in this trade-off. To make his contribution to culture, he must, says the president, throw himself at the mercy of a 'vision' which may lead him through the most unpredictable routes to the most unexpected places. Needless to say in this orthodox account of artistic freedom, such unexpected destinations are always presumed to be well outside everyday social relations, the concerns of politics or commerce, or the production of factual knowledge. Society will 'set the artist free'; in return, the artist will realize (acknowledge and articulate) his independence from the rational, practical considerations that routinely dominate society's operations for and on behalf of those who are guided by the demands of political expediency, economic pragmatism, utility and accountability. This makes the artist's practice both a celebration of the society's liberal ideals and critical benevolence, and a ritual compensation for its shortcomings and failings; both a paradigm of human imaginative potential and an exemplary compromise.

Kennedy was speaking of art, without qualifications, in the generalized sense of 'the arts'. He did not single out 'visual art' as the domain of 'vision'. Yet it is the tradition of visual art that has come to claim for itself the abbreviated designation of 'art'. This, in part, is a result of a collision between the visual image and the material 'essence' in the preoccupations of high modernist visual art. Paradoxically, it is also a result of abandoning the modernist art's claims to autonomy vested in the physical object, in pursuit of conceptual definitions of the idea of art. While the concept and historical genesis of 'abstraction' in modernist painting and sculpture parallels, for instance, that of atonality in modern music or certain experiments of visual and concrete poetry, and while the 'ready made', the utilization of found material and automatic or chance procedures are present in virtually all contemporary art forms, the notion of the 'dematerialization of the art object' (a term coined by the American critic Lucy Lippard in the early 1970s to denote an array of radical conceptual forms of artistic practice 'with occasional political overtones') has no significant equivalent outside 'visual art'. Likewise, the idea of the 'post-medium' condition of contemporary practice (articulated recently by Rosalind Krauss), with its connotations of the end of specific artistic traditions,

conventions and means, seems to be reserved for discussions of 'visual art'.

And there is another, seldom acknowledged reason why the 'visual' has become generic in contemporary conceptions of art. Unlike books, recorded music or films which economically (and to some extent critically) rely on multiplication or dispersal, if not necessarily mass distribution, works of 'visual art' are still largely sustained by an economic, institutional and critical culture centered on the sense of their singular identity and existence. This is true whether we are talking about private one-to-one patronage of a collector, specific site and location of a public commission, or the location and timing, the 'here and now', of an exhibition and the one-off placing and juxtapositions of the works in it. Strange as it make sound, this makes 'visual art' less dependent on the physical form of the work.
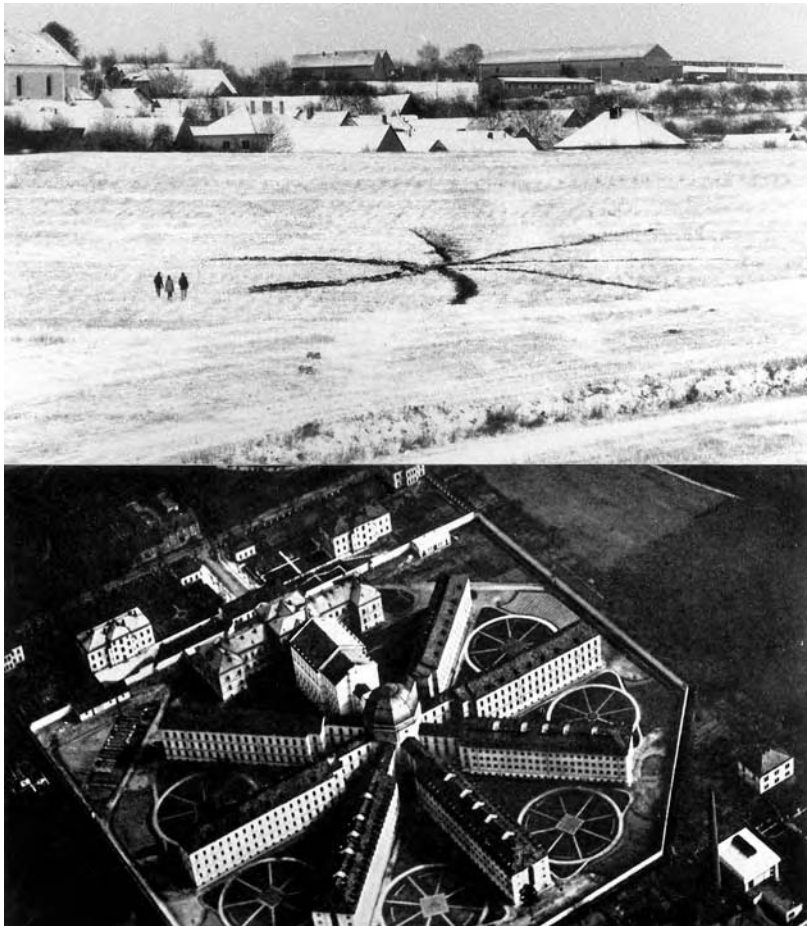
Material Facts, 1975-79
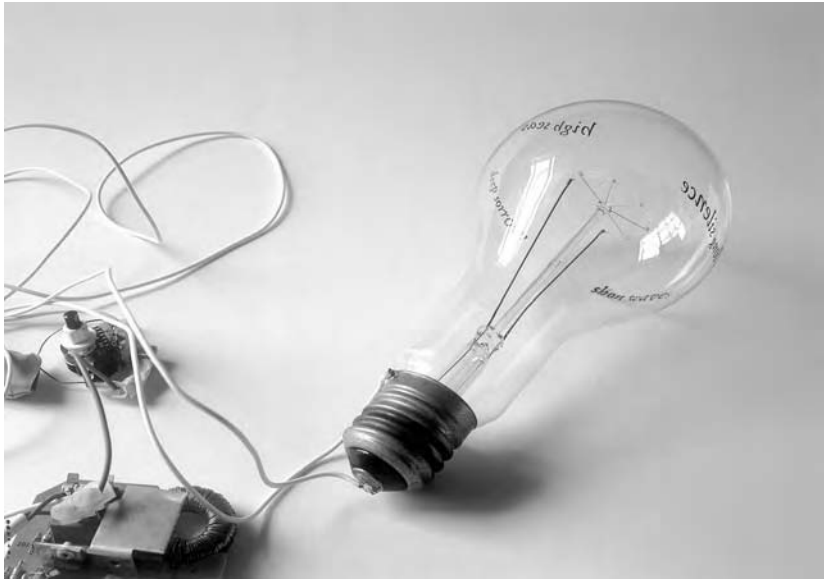
High Seas Short Waves Deep Sorrow Long Silence, 1996
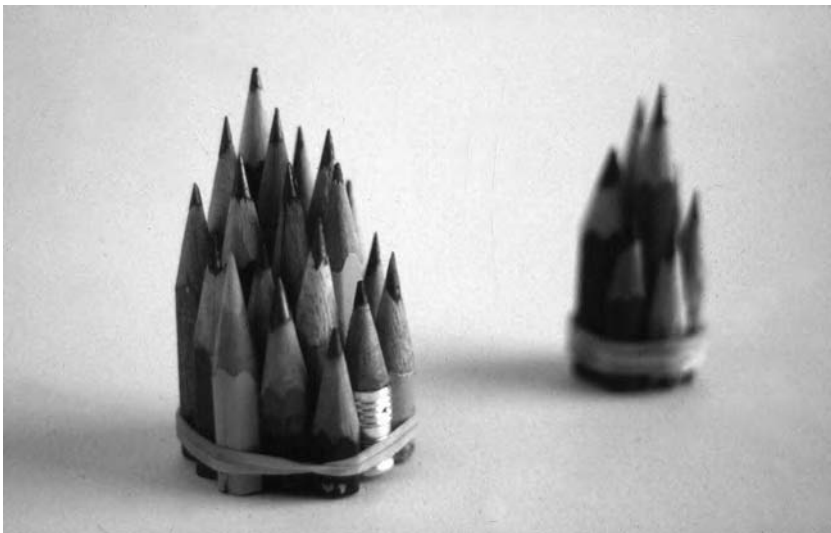
Short Stories, 1998

Short Stories, detail from an installation at Art Centre Mältinränta,Tampere, 2000

*Untitled (Psycho Analysis),
installation photograph from
Disquieting Strangeness,
Centre for Freudian Analysis
and Research, London, 1998*

*Outer Space, installation
photograph from Blind Spot,
Artspace, Sydney, 1998*

Flux No. 34, 2002, p.107, 2003

... up on the mountain like a ship at sea: a conversation via a satellite, Stunt, Hordaland Kunstersenter, Bergen, 1999

... up on the mountain like a ship at sea, 1999, video stills

Suspect Packages, 1999-2000

Temporary Architecture (Things to see this summer), installation photograph from ManMoMA, The International 3, Manchester, 2000

Of course, the work nearly always simultaneously exists as representation through documentation and reproduction, and indeed many contemporary artworks are produced and distributed in the formats associated with literature, music or entertainment and popular culture. But it is still the tradition of support for the making and placing of individual objects, or series of discrete objects that has provided the potential, and the critical impetus, for the 'non-making' and displacement of which those artworks that use the production methods and distribution channels of other art and cultural forms are one manifestation. Under these conditions – and together with the characteristically non-narrative, non-linear structure of visual work – the 'visual' identity of the work of 'visual art' has a scope for reduction that is not easily available in their respective ways to, say, literature or music. In fact, to make an artwork in the form of a novel or song, is to activate precisely this potential. As long, then, as the work positions itself, however critically, in relation to this tradition of 'visual art', the 'visual' can be removed. And as long as the 'visual' is nominally present, subsumed in the term 'art', it hardly matters what such a work actually looks like. (But because the 'visual' is still nominally present, the work will never 'look like philosophy' or anthropology.)

 Since, strictly speaking, society must free the artist even from the obligation to produce artefacts or from doing anything that, by convention, characterizes the production of art; and since, by it own account, the artist's 'vision' cannot be constrained by formal requirements, the artist's contribution to the world would seem to be channeled by artistic intention alone, transcending any attachment to the particular and adopting any means available. This may mean that the expertise of (visual) art is becoming secondary or

even redundant. But it may also mean that art is becoming an open testing ground for observations and thought for which there is no use or place anywhere else – for those things that are lost in the thoroughly professionalized system of social relations, and for what established liberal visions of the role of art in society and its culture prevent us from seeing.

'Material Facts' (1975-79) is a work which will serve, on this occasion, to introduce one source of my current interests. In the present form, as a juxtaposition of two photographs, it has no definitive status: it is a biographical document, or even a personal souvenir, as much as it is a work about making an artwork and an artwork in its own right. Of the two photographs that comprise the composite image, the first one comes from a landscape 'action' performed privately with a group of friends in a snow-covered field outside a remote village in Czechoslovakia in 1975. The second photograph is an aerial view of Bory prison, Western Bohemia, reproduced from a rare 1930s' postcard. The pictures clearly belong to different categories of representation and separate registers of private and social experience. The reverse symmetry of their pairing, entirely incidental, does not resolve the friction between the factual and symbolic content of the two images, but it does justify their encounter as almost inevitable: an act of 'least resistance' to what the pictures already are in themselves.

A large 500W light bulb from a Glasgow shipyard inscribed with the words 'High Seas Short Waves Deep Sorrow Long Silence' (the work's title, 1996), reversed as in a mirror, is an homage to the Dutch artist Jan Bas Ader who tragically died in 1975 on a sailing voyage across the Atlantic 'in search of the miraculous'.[3] The light bulb is connected to the speaker output of a modified radio receiver in such

The List 2001-2003

LIVE, site photograph from Trace, Liverpool Biennial, 1999

LIVE, installation photograph from Ateliergemeinschaft Gramophon, Hannover, 1999

LIVE, illustration from Trace catalogue, Liverpool Biennial, 1999

a way that the changing intensity of the signal makes the filament faintly shimmer.

The first in a series of works entitled 'Short Stories', dating from 1998, are two miniature sculptures made of pencil stubs collected over the years from public libraries in Cambridge and Glasgow. Subsequent versions of 'Short Stories' often extend the minimal input of physical shaping, limited to sharpening, which authenticates the work both positively and negatively (as 'fabrication' and a 'leftover'), onto other parts of composite works. These deploy such mechanical graphic or sculptural procedures as tracing or casting and include, for example, 26 pencils found in Glasgow between January and December 1997, used for a wall drawing based on the shapes of the typographical gaps (word spaces) between the first and last letters in the alphabetical groupings of the names of stations on the City Rail Network map of Sydney; the pencils were then resharpened and arranged by colour into three batches tied with elastic bands (1998); 12 identical pencils from a children's workshop at Tate Liverpool used to make the same number of drawings derived from (the memory of) the floor plans of all the display spaces in the Museum of Natural History, Bergen (1999); and a bronze cast of both halves of a broken pencil found in the entrance of a hotel in Manchester, displayed alongside the original fragments (1998). The series continues with recent large drawings directly traced from the shadows of various found (i.e. 'lost') objects, such as the shadow of a pierced balloon traced with a pencil taken from the children's section of a public library. Once completed, the drawing was erased and the pencil shaved so that only the eraser from its end remains (2002).

'Outer Space', made in July 1998 for an exhibition at Artspace, Sydney, was some two- metres-tall column made of 26 audio speakers and electronic components from five radio receivers bought in Sydney's suburban flea markets during a weekend shopping spree. The radios were tuned to points of 'white noise' in roughly 5 MHz intervals across the FM band to produce 'amplified silence'. As the quality of the radio reception constantly changed, a residue of music or speech was discernable from time to time or, at other times, fragments of the broadcast programme came through quite clearly for a few seconds.

The work 'Untitled (Psycho Analysis)' from the same year was made by installing a capacitor in an existing provisional light fitting in the staff bathroom in the meeting rooms of a psychiatric training group in London. Bypassing the light switch, the capacitor disrupted the flow of the electrical current, causing the light flicker and flash on

To the World Outside (summertime 10:30am), from Conversation Pieces, Art Centre Mältinränta, Tampere, 2002

and off in irregular intervals; the effect was clearly visible through a half-opened door into the adjacent seminar/exhibition space.

The subtitle of the work was picked at random from suggestions made subsequently by a group of students on the basis of a verbal, and entirely factual, description of the piece (alternatives included 'Unfunny', 'Mental Health and Safety Officer's Nightmare', 'Unfinished Business', and 'Unlucky Find' among many others).

The last of the potential subtitles for the 'Untitled' work above evokes 'an accident waiting to happen'. In 'Flux No. 34, 2002, p. 107' (2003), a pure accident did actually take place. The piece was commissioned for the 'artists pages' of the style magazine *Flux* (No. 36, 2003), and is a (magnified) reprint of a mistake that escaped the attention of the proofreader in a previous issue of the same publication.

In 1999 I was invited by the Norwegian artist Laila Kongevold to collaborate on a piece for an exhibition entitled *Stunt*, in which the curator, Eli Okkenhaug, offered four artists the opportunity to produce week-long gallery projects with partners with whom they had no previous working connection. After several months of frequent international telephone consultations we responded to the brief by presenting a version of the preparatory consultation itself: continuing our conversation during the gallery opening hours from two adjoining telephone boxes in front of the art centre. Live images of the conversation were relayed to two monitors in the gallery via a video link. The transmission was silent but the recorded sound of sea tide was played from audio speakers placed under the floorboards.[4]

'Suspect Packages' (1999-2000) was my response to the invitation by the artist/curator Elizabeth Price to take part in *Dot*, a project which offered the participating artists the use of Price's studio facilities, including the postal address and telephone number, as a means for the production and distribution of artworks. When it was exhibited after six month, the work was presented as a small pile of letters and a framed letter to the curator which described the intentions of the project, telling her that:

> *I returned from a trip abroad and found your letter on the top of a large pile of mail, most of which looked like invitations for openings or press releases for shows that I have already missed. Although I can't be sure what they really contain, I am for- warding the unopened envelopes to you as my contribution to your project - and will continue to send you all such suspect packages as they arrive from now until 31 March 2000. You (or anyone) will be free to open the mail under the condition that you take the action envisaged by the sender...[5]*

'Temporary Architecture (Things to see this summer)' was one of my two contributions for an exhibition conceived as a call for proposals for an imaginary

Manchester Museum of Modern Art. The work started with a batch of invitation cards for current exhibitions of contemporary art in the UK and abroad received in the few weeks before the exhibition. The names of the featured artists, 342 in total, and the closing dates of the exhibitions were listed on a free handout. New cards were added every week throughout the show and the gallerist was instructed by letter 'to use these to build a house of cards (any shape you like) and keep adding to it as the cards arrive.' The letter also stipulated that, for the selling price calculated per name of an artist, 'the potential buyer would acquire the right to build his/her own house from any cards that he or she may receive.'

The letters from the two projects above were later shown in an exhibition of artists' cards and printed ephemera at the London Print Studio Gallery (*Private Views*, 2002), together with correspondence between Kaatje Cusse Downsborough and myself. Kaatje Cusse Downsborough approached me with an inquiry about a postcard which her partner, the artist Peter Downsborough, had sent to me sometime in 1980. In my reply, I explained that 'around 1980 I moved from Czechoslovakia to Britain and since then I moved house a great many times' and that Downsborough's card may have been among those of my possessions that were lost or mislaid in the process. I proposed that I would submit her original letter to the exhibition in the hope that 'the participants in this show and those attracted by it will be the kind of people who collect cards. There just might be someone among them who could have some information about the missing postcard...'

'LIVE' (1999) is an aggregate of 351 live concert recordings from my record collection, spanning a variety of musical styles from improvised jazz to rock, pop, folk and classical music. It brings together the sounds of audiences recorded over four decades in many parts of the world, from New York's Carnegie Hall and Brixton Academy and from massive outdoor festivals to obscure clubs in Talin or Cape Town. Every live album in the collection was digitised. The sound of the music was then deleted, leaving bursts of applause distributed over the playing time of the original recording, separated by periods of silence. All the resulting tracks were then mixed together, so that in some parts of the final work very large 'audiences' have been created by random overlay, whereas in others a single pair of clapping hands can still be heard for a brief moment; or there may be no sound at all. After its inauguration in Liverpool, where the soundtrack was continuously played from the open balcony door of an empty concert hall, 'LIVE' was released on a vinyl LP in a limited edition of 351, the same as the number of records used in the production of the work.[6] The LP was launched in October 1999 at an artists-run gallery, Ateliergemeinschaft Gramofon, in the former Deutsche Gramophon-Fabrik, where the world's first phonographic record was commercially pressed in 1898. Apart from the record playing on a record player and a pair of speakers, the installation included a wall-mounted shelf with 350 record covers plus a vintage copy of Ornette Coleman's *Friends and Neighbors* purchased at a Hannover flea market during my initial site visit to the gallery.

In its initial form, 'The List' (2001-2003) did not anticipate an audience, although it did aim to address unconnected individuals as though they were members of a

self-defined dispersed 'community' or network. The project followed the logic of unsolicited appeals, random distribution patterns and the mechanical identification between personal data and people in the techniques of 'personalised' direct mail marketing. In October 2001 I began replying to every ostensibly 'personal' sales or promotional letter with a note to the nominal sender (typically a person in a senior executive position) 'your name has been added to the list.' The sender's signature was reproduced below in the same position in which it appeared on the original sales letter. Every reply thus contained all the signatures of the previous senders/addressees (plus my own), building up into a dense unintelligible 'abstract' scrawl.[8]

It is quite ironic that one of the most 'visual' (visually effective as well as perhaps the most visible) works that I have ever made cannot be reproduced here.[9] Its title, Red Flag (1997), is an accurate description of the effect of illuminating at night (for one week) the St George's Cross on the spire of the Church of England Manchester Cathedral by a beam of red light projected from the window of the reading room in Chetham's Library where Marx and Engels studied in 1845. Black and white reproduction, however, is more than it takes to present a recent piece which, while relying on the visual and made for a gallery exhibition, was intended to be imagined rather than seen by the audience. Here, in contrast, the ambiguous title, To the World Outside (summertime, 10:30am) (2002), is all that the gallery visitor had. This strange constellation of reflected and direct sunlight, created by re-positioning one of the gallery's inner windows, only appeared on the wall for a brief moment every morning around an hour and a half before the space opened to the public.

Art, in general, it is often said, is a verb. It makes a difference to the world and to our perceptions of it not by producing works, but by working in the world: where and as it can, pursuing and activating opportunities which lie close to life and discovering not what may, but what needs to happen.

Instead of a conclusion, here is a question. What happens when an artist succeeds in making nothing happen?

Notes

1. This text is a revised and updated version of material originally prepared for a staff and postgraduate seminar at the department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, February 2002.

2. Sarat Maharaj interviewed by Maureen Wynants, 'Thinking and Doing Documenta', *Janus*, No 11, 2002, p.15.

3. Ader is perhaps best known for his 16mm film *I Am Too Sad to Tell You. In Search of the Miraculous* is the title of his last (and unfinished) work planned in three parts, the middle part of which was to include the documentation from a solo crossing of the Atlantic Ocean from Cape Cod to Falmouth in a small sailing boat.

4. The work was produced for a group exhibition on the theme of the uncanny, or 'disquieting strangeness', conceived and curated by Sharon Kivland as part of a series of projects which took

up the Lacanian proposition that the work of art occupies the place of the analyst. The normal schedule of the training seminars was maintained during the exhibitions.

5. The title of this work, ... up on the mountain like a ship at sea, comes from a passage in Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* in which the author describes the unusual acoustic properties of a ballroom in a mountain hotel. It alludes to the location of the gallery on the crest of a hill above Bergen and the maritime tradition of the town.

6. The envelopes were readdressed, by means of a rubber stamp, in Elizabeth Price's own handwriting reproduced from the address she had written in my notebook.

7. The record was released by the by the Foundation for Arts and Creative Technology, Liverpool. The retail price, 19.99, derived from the year of the release, was constant for any given currency. Thus in Germany, gallery visitors were able to purchase the work (at the time) in Deutschmarks for about a third of its price in pounds sterling, or a half of its dollar price in the United States etc.

8. By the time of publication, the second phase of the work will have been shown in *Incommunicado*, curated by Margot Heller (Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, October – December 2003 and touring). The exhibited work reverses the build up of signatures in the first set of letters, informing each of the 242 addressees that 'your name has been removed from the list.' All the letters will be mailed out at the close of the exhibition.

9. This work concluded the original seminar presentation.

Questions of vision and knowledge are central to debates about the world in which we live. Developing new analytical approaches toward ways of seeing is a key challenge facing those working across a wide range of disciplines. How can visuality be understood on its own terms rather than by means of established textual frameworks? *Visualizing Anthropology* takes up this challenge. Bringing together a range of perspectives anchored in practice, the book maps experiments in the forms and techniques of visual enquiry.

The origins of this collection lie in visual anthropology. Although the field has greatly expanded and diversified, many of the key debates continue to be focused around the textual concerns of the mainstream discipline. In seeking to establish a more genuinely visual anthropology, the editors have sought to forge links with other kinds of image-based projects. Ethnography is the shared space of practice. Understood not as a specialized method but as cultural critique, the book explores new collaborative possibilities linked to image-based work.

'This volume will serve to stimulate the idea of a new and vital synthesis for the future of this discipline.'

Roger Crittenden
National Film and Television School

Anna Grimshaw (above right) studied Anthropology at Cambridge. She published a personal memoir of her doctoral fieldwork, *Servants of the Buddha* (1992); and recently completed a book about anthropology and cinema, *The Ethnographer's Eye* (2001). She is Associate Professor of Visual Culture, Emory University, USA.

Amanda Ravetz (above left) trained as a painter at the Central School of Art and Design and later completed a doctorate in Social Anthropology with Visual Media at the University of Manchester, where she also lectured. She is currently an AHRB Research Fellow at MIRIAD, Manchester Metropolitan University.