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Can An Anthropologist Learn Anything From  
Learning To Make A Film?*

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Recording The Senses  
Playing With Perceptions.

# Can An Anthropologist Learn Anything From Learning To Make A Film?

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by

Steven C. Wilson

## **Abstract**

Participant observation forms the bedrock of social and cultural anthropology but how good are our observations when we participate? Whilst many may consider a baptism by fire approach to fieldwork and years of subsequent reflection the best way to address these questions, I argue there are benefits to be gained through undergoing specialist pre-fieldwork training.

The training method I want to champion is filmmaking or more accurately digital video-filmmaking.

With few departments offering pre-fieldwork courses in filmmaking, this thesis aims to show how experience with the process, rather than the production of a film itself, can offer valuable insights into some of the issues confronting the anthropological observer in the field.

It is said that the camera never lies, but the camera can lie and so can our perceptions. If our perceptions can be wrong, what does it mean to observe? What does it mean to be a good observer? What is a lie? What are we doing when we construct meaning from our perceptions to write an account or tell a story?

This thesis aims to explore these questions and more by looking at the equipment used to make films and the process of recording sound and vision as one might do for a documentary, ethnographic or 'anthropological' film and then reflecting on the subsequent creation of meaning from them as is done in the edit room.

By focusing in on these processes and drawing analogies to the way we generate perception and create meaning, we can externalise, reflect and make conscious some of the qualities and problems of observation, perception and interpretation that we call experience. At the same time it provides filmmaking training allowing students to make beneficial use of modern audio-visual technologies in recording fieldwork and making films.

Recording The Senses  
Playing With Perceptions.

# Can An Anthropologist Learn Anything From Learning To Make A Film?

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By

Steven C Wilson

A Masters by Research Thesis

Durham University

Department of Anthropology

2012

# Table of Contents

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<b>Chapter 1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1-14</b>
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review .....</b>	<b>2-22</b>
1. A Brief Blink Through The Eyes Of Visual Anthropology.....	2-23
2. A Manifesto For A New Visual Anthropology .....	2-29
3. Exploring Ways of Seeing.....	2-30
4. The Senses .....	2-32
5. A Field Film School.....	2-33
6. A Rethinking of Observational Cinema .....	2-35
7. Being There.....	2-37
8. Reflexivity and Autobiography .....	2-38
9. Pushed to the Margins.....	2-40
10. Pioneers of Ethnographic Film.....	2-41
11. The Visual In Research.....	2-42
12. Visual Methods And Ethnography.....	2-43
13. Anthropological Cinema .....	2-44
14. The Promise.....	2-46
<b>Chapter 3 Methodologies &amp; Ethics.....</b>	<b>3-48</b>
1. Participant Observation.....	3-48
2. Legitimate Peripheral Participation .....	3-50
3. Interviews And Questionnaires .....	3-51
4. Active Listening.....	3-51
5. Imageworks .....	3-51
6. Grounded Theory .....	3-52
7. Technical Methods .....	3-52
8. Video Ethnography .....	3-53
9. Ethnographic Footage And Film .....	3-54
10. Visual Methods in Social Research .....	3-54
11. Ethics .....	3-56

12. Analysis.....	3-56
<b>Chapter 4 Case Studies .....</b>	<b>4-58</b>
1. Teaching, Exchanges And Communities Of Practice.....	4-58
2. The Problems With Observation .....	4-58
3. Views From The Filmographic Field.....	4-58
4. Qualitative & Quantitative Perspectives .....	4-59
5. Story Telling In Anthropology .....	4-59
<b>Section 1 Teaching, Exchanges And Communities of Practice .....</b>	<b>4-60</b>
1. Not Waving, Not Drowning, Hitting The Ground Running.....	4-60
2. First Contact.....	4-63
3. Evoking a Community .....	4-66
4. The Wider Context, Impact, Funding And Future Technology.....	4-69
5. Teaching & Exchanges .....	4-70
6. Filmmaking Equipment as Research Tools .....	4-71
7. Projects & Obstacles.....	4-75
8. Linking Communities .....	4-76
9. Practical Sessions.....	4-79
10. Different Perspectives on Research Methods .....	4-80
11. Learning by Doing in a Community of Practice.....	4-81
12. A One Day Filmmaking for Anthropologists Course .....	4-84
13. Anthropology Internet TV (IPTV) .....	4-94
14. Live Broadcasts and On-going Activities.....	4-97
15. Technical World, Technical Lock In.....	4-98
16. Summary .....	4-101
<b>Section 2 The Problems With Observation .....</b>	<b>4-102</b>
1. Seeing & Hearing .....	4-102
2. Ethics .....	4-104
3. Pushing the Boundaries.....	4-104
4. Different People Different Points of View .....	4-105
5. Make it Conscious.....	4-107
6. Two Heads are Better Than One.....	4-108
7. Nothing Is What it Seems .....	4-108
8. Meditation And Perception .....	4-111

9.	The Mind Is An Editing Room .....	4-112
10.	Optical Illusions and Tricks of the Mind .....	4-116
11.	Memories And Recordings .....	4-122
12.	Observation And Ethnography .....	4-124
13.	Active Listening - I can feel your pain .....	4-124
14.	Emotional Empathy .....	4-125
15.	The Horse Whisperer.....	4-126
16.	Speed Reading Vertov .....	4-128
17.	Summary .....	4-136
<b>Section 3 Views From The Filmographic Field .....</b>		<b>4-137</b>
1.	The Heightened Sense Of Weddings .....	4-137
2.	Filming With The Malim .....	4-147
3.	A Research Method seminar .....	4-151
<b>Section 4 Qualitative And Quantitative Perspectives .....</b>		<b>4-156</b>
1.	What the Camera Cannot See .....	4-156
2.	What's In A Place? .....	4-158
3.	The Hawthorn Experiment - qualitative and quantitative uses of cameras and microphones.....	4-164
<b>Section 5 Story Telling And Anthropology .....</b>		<b>4-174</b>
1.	Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School.....	4-176
2.	Watchability with Bob Long.....	4-180
3.	Making Films About Health And Medicine STORYTELLING IN A WORLD OF EMOTION.....	4-183
<b>Chapter 5 Results.....</b>		<b>5-186</b>
1.	Recap .....	5-186
2.	Background To The Results.....	5-187
3.	What Is It Anthropologists Can Learn...? .....	5-190
4.	No Observation Can Be Value Free.....	5-192
5.	Relativism Of World Views. ....	5-193
6.	AN UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE TARGETED, PRE-FIELDWORK OBSERVATIONAL TRAINING & FILMMAKING COURSE. ....	5-195
7.	Pre-Production.....	5-196
8.	Production .....	5-200

9. Post-Production .....	5-203
10. Delivery.....	5-208
11. Story Telling in Mainstream Observational Documentary .....	5-208

**Chapter 6 Conclusion..... 6-211**

1. Observations Are Not Value Free .....	6-211
2. Filmmaking Equipment Can Be Used As Effective Research Tools .....	6-215
3. Reflexive Filmmaking Brings The Inside Out And The Outside In. ....	6-215
4. Different Ways Of Seeing And Of Knowing.....	6-218
5. Concluding Statement .....	6-219

**Chapter 7 Reflections ..... 6-222**

1. Reflections on Methods.....	7-223
2. Philosophical/ Ethnographic Reflections .....	7-226
3. Reflections on Writing up .....	7-227

**Bibliography**

**Appendix**

1. Teaching Kit .....	7-238
2. Typical field Kit.....	7-241
3. Extras .....	7-242

# List of figures

---

Figure 1 What Can I Offer?.....	4-68
Figure 2 Research Methods and Representation - uses of filmmaking.....	4-74
Figure 3 Shooting Teams.....	4-82
Figure 4 Post Graduate Conference 2011 .....	4-83
Figure 5 Evolutionary Medicine Strategy Meeting on <a href="http://www.evmedtv.net">http://www.evmedtv.net</a> .....	4-84
Figure 6 The First One Day Course Outline .....	4-86
Figure 7 Equipment & Skills .....	4-87
Figure 8 What to Make? What to Consider! .....	4-88
Figure 9 Course Preparations .....	4-89
Figure 10 Sound, what does it do in a film? .....	4-90
Figure 11 Editing Level One Basics .....	4-91
Figure 12 Level II Editing .....	4-91
Figure 13 Bringing It All Together.....	4-92
Figure 14 On Into The Wider World .....	4-92
Figure 15 3 min One Day Course student film .....	4-93
Figure 16 Anthropology Web TV <a href="http://www.anthropologytv.org">http://www.anthropologytv.org</a> .....	4-95
Figure 17 Boinx TV Software Vision Mixer.....	4-95
Figure 18 Live Web TV Broadcast Studio Test.....	4-96
Figure 19 Durham Energy Institute (DEI) conference on carbon capture.....	4-97
Figure 20 Durham Energy Institute Live Webcast <a href="http://www.dei.whistlingmule.com">http://www.dei.whistlingmule.com</a> .	4-98
Figure 21 Film South Asia online Film festival .....	4-99
Figure 22 hands, windows, monkeys.....	4-106
Figure 23 The Cameraman's zone & The Soundman's Groove, meditation increases perceptual sensitivity .....	4-112
Figure 24 The Brain Is An Edit Room .....	4-112
Figure 25 Prosthetic Senses .....	4-113
Figure 26 We Are All Filmmakers .....	4-115
Figure 27 Escher, ascending descending 1960 .....	4-117

<b>Figure 28 Anon, FaceBook Viral image 2012.....</b>	<b>4-118</b>
<b>Figure 29 Anon, FaceBook Viral Image 2012.....</b>	<b>4-119</b>
<b>Figure 30 Anon, Email Opitcal Illusion Viral 2011.....</b>	<b>4-120</b>
<b>Figure 31 Sony Advertising Promo Image.....</b>	<b>4-121</b>
<b>Figure 32 A horse whisperer falls, why? .....</b>	<b>4-127</b>
<b>Figure 33 Vertov 1929 Man With A Movie Camera.....</b>	<b>4-129</b>
<b>Figure 34 setting up in a hotel to play a gig .....</b>	<b>4-150</b>
<b>Figure 35 sound check .....</b>	<b>4-151</b>
<b>Figure 36 Gnawan ritual music.....</b>	<b>4-153</b>
<b>Figure 37 cafe owner telling me about William Burroughs .....</b>	<b>4-154</b>
<b>Figure 38 change of expression just before I get arrested .....</b>	<b>4-155</b>
<b>Figure 39 Good Science combines different approaches.....</b>	<b>4-164</b>
<b>Figure 40 Google Sketchup accurate 3D modelling from photographs, far from complete .....</b>	<b>4-172</b>
<b>Figure 41 Video Stills For 3D Building Recreation .....</b>	<b>4-173</b>
<b>Figure 42 aid to fieldwork, reflection makes it concious.....</b>	<b>5-206</b>
<b>Figure 43 Knowledge Land .....</b>	<b>7-230</b>
<b>Figure 44 Thomas H. Eriksen (University of Oslo) Beyond dualism .....</b>	<b>7-239</b>

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Feb. 2012

# Dedication

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To my extended family, my special pies Yarah & Annik, Mum and Dad and to the unforgettable Paul, who provided my first opportunity to look deeper into our human mess through an anthropological lens.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

---

Durham had no film school, specialist media training or formal courses in postgraduate visual anthropology but there were individuals with interests in filmmaking and the anthropology of the visual.

I was a jobbing multimedia creative and filmmaker with an interest in storytelling and anthropology. I had practical skills and experience to offer and a fellowship to provide technical, aesthetic, format, marketing and distribution support to anthropologists interested in achieving the highest possible production value in their own ethnographic and audio-visual film productions. I thought I could create some synergies.

This thesis is built upon a series of meditations and reflections on the teaching of filmmaking and Internet media skills to anthropologists I undertook at the University of Durham between Oct. 2009 and Oct. 2010.

It is basically a reflexive qualitative thesis but with results and conclusions in which I consider the practical problems and issues of observation in fieldwork and the use of audio-visual recording and editing techniques as research tools; to create video ethnographies; to produce anthropological films as well as instruments to aid reflexivity in the field.

I will talk a lot about film, but the term film is more or less out of date, a misnomer which has been rendered practically obsolete in today's fast

moving digital media world but I retain it as a quaint historical reminder of the recent past and the important legacy the technology left behind.

It's worth bearing in mind that every 'film' one sees engages only two senses at a distance from us, what you see and what you hear, yet a well made film has the power to get in close and intimate, to 'touch' us and make us 'feel' as well as convey information.

Today audio video recordings and their manipulations are better understood outside of the constraints of the old technology of film but more as linear sequences or non-linear webs of sounds and images arranged, designed and delivered using a variety of technologies to serve the purpose of the filmmaker, that is to make an audience experience, feel, engage, learn, consider or to influence and control them.

My self-prescribed job in the anthropology department as a non anthropologist, was to demonstrate the possibilities of this new kind of filmmaking technology and empower them to make their own films. Fadwa El Guindi in *Visual Anthropology: essential method and theory* writes:

*To become an anthropologist, one must obtain a Ph.D. in anthropology, with training in the four-field discipline. Training filmmakers, ethnographic or otherwise should not be the business of anthropology departments. (2004, p. 91).*

She goes on to say:

*The dependency of ethnographers on filmmakers ought to be dislodged, which is more likely to happen now with the accessibility of digital video filming and editing technology (2004, p. 93).*

Under the banner of 'outside filmmaker', I proposed to teach the basics but with a particular focus which required me gaining an understanding of how these digital multimedia creation techniques are used or could be used by practicing anthropologists.

During my year of teaching I laboured to understand and describe the representational and media practices of this peculiar academic tribe. I discovered many prejudices, taboos, ritualistic practices and sacred cows and found myself thinking about vision, the visual, the notion of objectivity in ethnographic observation and about the generation of our own perceptions and internal narratives.

Now I must declare my own background. I was born in a small village close to Durham, my early teachers thought I'd become an artist or musician but apparently I was also not bad in the sciences, I could at least count. After 6<sup>th</sup> form, romantically moved by older hippy biker friends and freedom seeking 60s films I took a year off and moved to Brighton to try and woe a girlfriend as one does. This was in the mid eighties before the world became serious. I read physics at the Universities of Sussex and Uppsala working as a sound engineer in a jazz and blues club to pay my way. Feeling moody and pensive after the end of another relationship, this time with an anthropologist and rock drummer from Ann Arbor, I rode off on a 'boho dance'. A wanderer and sailor, I travelled the world, dived, rode motorbikes, played guitars and

lived in squats, vans and boats. My girlfriends were eclectic and oftentimes even madder than me, I never settled down and I rarely stayed still. I worked in theatre, renovated houses, got geeky with computers and supported peace centres and organised festivals. Being left of centre and 'far out' I supported minority 'far out' political parties, was involved in WWOOF (Working Weekends On Organic Farms) and wanted to be a shaman, pretty typical for anyone having lived in Brighton at that time.

By fortuitous accident around 1994 I met an old man on a plane out of Africa. I had been travelling this time with a Durham anthropologist and my sister. I had spent a year going on long walks with Buddhist monks through the Italian countryside whilst living in all manner of esoteric communities. The old man's words to me as we left the plane were "you're obviously mad but interesting, you might be interested in anthropology, give me a call". I drove south in my camper van and signed up for a part time masters degree in anthropology and computing at the University of Kent. Paul Stirling was his name and I stayed with him as a research associate until his death in 1998. During this time I developed an interest in documentary film working on his TV rushes and for RAI film festivals. After his death I wanted time to think about what I was doing, there was no more work for me in the department so again feeling moody and pensive I rode off to Germany to seek solace with a woman I had met on the world's first ever internet documented sailing expedition, got married, had kids and worked in film, TV and multimedia production. I took the family to Spain to do much the same thing when the NASDAQ collapse of 2001 made all my new media creative friends in Hamburg redundant. For the next ten years I ran my own multimedia video production company.

In the global economic downturn of 2008 things went a little 'pear-shaped' but by a remarkable coincidence a friend of mine had started teaching at

Durham University, in the anthropology department. He tipped me off about some fellowship schemes they were running so in order to strengthen ties with my home city and 'come home' I applied for and was awarded a DIBFS fellowship (Durham Industrial Business Fellowship Scheme) funded by the then One North East Regional Development Authority. My brief was to teach filmmaking skills and engage in mutually beneficial information exchange.

The vogue idea at the time, which I disagreed with but took the money anyway, was that universities should be seen as 'knowledge factories' and as such exploited by industry to create ever more consumable widgets to feed and kick-start a stagnant economy. As part of the deal I was also offered the chance to study. Such opportunities can't be ignored. I had been out of academics for twelve years, had some unfinished business in that regard and felt the need to challenge myself, all of which led me to try and turn my teaching into this masters by research thesis.

In order to turn my teaching into something I could write a thesis about I needed a research question, and to devise or utilise some methods to help me address the said question. My main methodology ended up being one that echoed what I had actually started to do before realising it had been formalised as a methodology. This was *Situated Learning - Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Jean Lave & Etienne Wenger 1991).

I set out to evoke into being a community of practice, to share experiences, teach filmmaking and try and cross the bridge from where I had been to the land where ethnographic films are made.

The bridge to ethnographic film land lies in the village of visual anthropology, which sits on the outskirts of the city of the four fold path of

anthropology. The bridge is long, convoluted, in parts very narrow and difficult to pass with little in the way of clear sign posts. It requires a sound understanding of anthropological theory, literature, fieldwork and filmmaking to cross and few have survived to bring back sacred knowledge from the other side.

This then was my 'camino', to find and cross the bridge and try and see filmmaking through the eyes of the sacred priests of the city. To meet with and parle with those who are concerned with the generation of visual anthropological knowledge and in exchange barter what technical skills I had to offer.

As my teaching seminars progressed, our discussions of fieldwork and participant observation combined with the practical cameracraft we were doing led me to conduct a series of experiments on perception and sense and sensitivity with my fellow pilgrims.

The students I taught were from very different cosmopolitan and international backgrounds and as we experimented with and discussed film and filmmaking, the experiences and insights made me more aware than usual of the relativism of our perceptions and world views. This in turn led to a questioning of observation in the field, participant observation and ultimately ethnography itself.

We all, regardless of where we are, live in our own bubbles. On the one hand its so easy and seductive to accept that what we sense, perceive, observe in the world around us is in some way objectively real but on the other experiment has shown this to be far from the case.

Different groups of people living in shared bubbles obviously have commonalities, we share cultures, values, world views and unless confronted by different 'others' its easy to get trapped into believing things are simply as we perceive them to be. Working with cameras, recording sounds, editing, filming, comparing perceptions across difference groups of people however reveals a fundamental relativism to this 'sense of reality', it reveals our bubbles.

I discovered not surprisingly that there was a wealth of anthropological literature surrounding these issues and through direct experiences over the course of the year I found myself confronting a lot of my earlier academic preconceptions about scientific methodology and observation and experiment. I began to see my own bubbles and I became sympathetic to what philosophers call the 'weak teleological form of social constructionism'.

More positivist scientific approaches to human societies had looked for laws that underpinned them in an analogous way to the natural sciences but the more I considered the matter, overlaying my earlier physics and science training on personal experiences since, human societies didn't seem to operate according to any fixed laws or the mathematics of formal systems, but with much more fluid self awareness, agency and imagination. We bounce around in bubble spaces of possibilities of our own making, physically constrained by the laws of physics of course, but directed more by story, narrative and the big sticks of other people than by anything that could be called a 'law'. I have nothing inherently against positivist approaches when they work or reveal insights but I began to take Marcus Bank's view in using *visual data in qualitative research* in which he:

*Advocates a largely interpretivist approach, but recognises the value of some quantitative procedures that often depend upon a naturalist stance towards data collection (2008, p. 22)*

Whilst considering agency, imagination, story, narrative and self reflection I began to ask myself if the actual process of learning to make a film rather than actually producing a film could be more useful as a learning exercise for anthropologists. The question I posed myself was:

### **Can An Anthropologist Learn Anything From Learning To Make A Film?**

What had started as an idea for a basic film school for anthropologists slowly mutated over the year into an experimental arena to explore perception and observation. It became my 'ethnographic fieldwork'.

The conclusions and results of this process or journey into the anthropology of the visual and auditory senses are best presented as a curriculum for a special sort of film school. A special pre-training film school that reveals in useful and dramatic ways some fundamental problems with ethnographic observations and illustrates a seemingly trivial but at the same time profound insight that when dealing with people and cultures:

### **Observation Can Never Be Value Free**

As a pre-fieldwork training course it prepares students to consider experiences and interpretations and thereby question what they think they're actually doing when participating and observing. Something I believe can only be beneficial to pre-fieldwork students of the discipline.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

---

In the post WWI arena of Malinowskian social and cultural anthropology, textual accounts have largely dominated the generation of anthropological knowledge. This chapter positions the research in relation to current thinking on the historical generation and production of that knowledge and the role of vision and the visual within the discipline.

I highlight theoretical concerns and practical examples of the use of visual methods within the larger anthropological discourse and pay attention to critical voices that feel frustrated by a textual hegemony.

I identify a space emerging through the recognition of a crisis of representation due to textual limitations for the generation of anthropological knowledge. These epistemological and ontological concerns in the wider sense foreground an emerging anthropology of the senses as well as a new agenda for visual anthropology.

I shall situate my study in this space, between a crisis of legitimation in the conventions of tradition and the exciting possibilities afforded by new technical tools and methods now ubiquitously accessible for the first time.

## 1. A Brief Blink Through The Eyes Of Visual Anthropology

In the Werner Herzog film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*<sup>1</sup> (2010), we are taken on an remarkable 3D journey into the caves of Chauvet in southern France to explore cave paintings from the Aurignacian era 30-32,000 years ago (or 47,000 – 41,000 years ago when using more recent calibrations of the radiocarbon timescale)<sup>2</sup>. Marc Azéma and Florent Rivère make interesting speculations about such paintings suggesting they be seen as the true beginnings of cinema and that we should give:

*recognition that cave paintings were intended to represent both narrative and movement (Azéma & Rivère 2012)*

There is an interesting visual demonstration of their argument in the free online culture and media magazine Open Culture

[http://www.openculture.com/2012/06/european\\_cave\\_art\\_was\\_it\\_the\\_earliest\\_form\\_of\\_cinema.html](http://www.openculture.com/2012/06/european_cave_art_was_it_the_earliest_form_of_cinema.html)

Other more recent rock art discoveries in Arnhem land in northern Australia could push the dates of Homo sapiens picture-graphic activities back even further by some 10,000 years (Collis 2012), this time connecting not to a dead culture as in the case of Chauvet, but directly to the culture of modern Aboriginal Australia, we live in a time of wonder, surprises and discovery.

Moving forward 30 - 40,000 odd years to the beginnings of modern film technology, its interesting that the use of film for scientific pursuits precedes its use to create cinema (Cohen (2001) cited in (Guindi 2004, p. 1))

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.caveofforgottendreams.co.uk>

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aurignacian>

Clearly what we see, how we see, how we create what we see and how we interpret what we see, is of central importance to what it is to be human. Depending on your viewpoint, an anthropology of the visual and of vision could be said to start some 32-47,000 years ago.

Fadwa El Guindi makes a useful academic distinction between pictorialisation, which she traces back to the beginnings of culture, and theories of vision and technology (Guindi 2004, p. ix, p. xii). She observes that both primates and humans pictorialised and suggests that more studies might insightfully:

*Refine conclusions on the qualitative differences in pictorially recorded activities between primates and humans (2004, p. x)*

To that end Ann Zeller is setting up a database of primate paintings (Guindi 2004, p. x).

She also makes the suggestion that:

*As humankind pictorialised its universe, it memorialised itself and made its ideas part of the visible material world to be learned, decoded and studied. (2004, p. x)*

From this point of view the human visual experience should lie central to any mainstream anthropology but the development of a visual anthropology has followed a much more convoluted path.

Edwards suggests that the 1860s might be a meaningful place to situate the beginnings of an academic anthropology, being a point of convergence of

anthropology, photography and colonialism ((1992) cited in (Pink 2006, p. 5)).

Early examples of the application of film in academic anthropology include Haddon's Torres Straits expedition<sup>3</sup> of 1898 and Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*<sup>4</sup> in 1922.

In a wonderful and illuminating report by Colin Young, assisted by Edmund Carpenter for UNESCO in 1966 entitled *Films Made By Americans In The Pacific Which Have Any Anthropological Or Ethnographic Significance*, we are given a small glimpse into the world of mid 60s American visual anthropology and its relationship to mainstream fictional cinematic story telling.

Young writes:

*Many European commenters on American cinema are often disappointed to discover how undogmatic are American fictional filmmakers, how little they are interested in the theories of what they are doing. Conversely American filmmakers are often bemused to see what happens to their work when put to the test of European critics' theoretical criteria ...*

*...Certainly it seems that few people working seriously with anthropological film in the United States do have a strong theoretical base for their work. Gardner bases his use of film on a theory of perception, Gajdusek on a precisely considered theory of*

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1R7Jo8om5vQ>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVbQVWkdcFk>

*research, and Mead on similar bases which we owe much to the Gesell-Ilg theories of categorising still pictures.*

This report which is an assessment and survey contains prescient statements by Carpenter in which he considers visual anthropology so important that he calls for the establishment of a library of 'classroom films' and berates the lack of an ethnographic-anthropological film reference library (Colin & Carpenter 1966, p. 46). At that time the RAI and the Museum of Primitive Art had already collaborated in producing an index of available films. For Carpenter, today's world of the Internet and global audio-visual resources should perhaps signal the start of a golden age of research into vision and the visual. He was writing in the 60s however at a time in which visual anthropology floated in a much more volatile sea.

As far back as 1894 the early pioneers of visual methods including Haddon, Franz Boas, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen all used innovative visual methods in their fieldwork (Pink 2006, p. 6), Morphy considers:

*Photography as an essential means of conveying the atmosphere and experience of the Australian rituals they witnessed (1996, p. 140-1) cited in (Pink 2006, p. 6)*

However bright and ripe for exploration this new anthropology of the visual might have seemed in the early years in the hands of these pioneers, it wasn't realised and was eclipsed after World War I by the emergence of a new social and cultural anthropology led by Malinowski, Boas, Radcliffe – Brown and Mauss. This new wave took approaches to the generation of anthropological knowledge, which oversaw a general dwindling of interest

away from sensory experiences and the visual in favour of text and more long term participant observation. (Pink 2006, p. 6)

Pink notes in regard to Malinowski and Boas:

*Although both were prolific photographers, their approaches actually limited the potential of the visual (2006, p. 7)*

This resulted in a period from the 1940s to 1980s in which visual anthropology was marginalised at best or considered by a more scientific anthropology to be mere context (Pink 2006, p. 9).

Out of sight but not forgotten visual anthropological practices continued to be refined as technological advances were made. Despite being displaced from centre stage, there have been numerous experiments and advances which have tried to resituate visual anthropology, Banks & Morphy (1997) in *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* take up the case in their introduction to a collection of essays on the subject as does Rollwagen's collection of articles in *Anthropological filmmaking: anthropological perspectives on the production of film and video for general public audiences* (1988).

Others have experimented with new technical developments. One example would be Paul Stirling's Turkish Village ethnographic data archive project <http://lucy.kent.ac.uk/Stirling/> led by Mike Fischer of the Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing (CSAC) at the University of Kent at Canterbury. Fischer has pioneered the use of modern computers for the representation and analysis of graphics and video in anthropology (Fischer 1994) and well as a broader range of computational techniques leading to a raft of innovative new approaches. This multimedia archive of Stirling's work from the early 1940s till the mid 80s unfortunately stagnated after his

death in 1998 without living up to its full potential but perhaps it was finally heading in the kind of direction Carpenter was calling out for in 1966.

In a world saturated by visual media its also not surprising that this reawakening of interest in vision and the visual has also sparked renewed debates surrounding applied visual anthropology and ethnographic films as social interventions and advocacy (Pink 2006, p. 79).

If the earlier decades of the twentieth century had all but closed its eyes to visual anthropology, the 80s saw a 'crisis of representation' in the social sciences (Pink 2006, p. 14). This has led to a general undermining of comparative and objectivity based projects and brought about a focus on more intersubjective and reflexive modes of enquiry. Since the mid 90s this 'crisis' has left holes in what was becoming a fragmented discipline. It is through these holes that visual anthropology is once again training its eyes.

Its emergent status was confirmed in 2001 when the AAA issued a statement:

*AAA STATEMENT Produced by the SOCIETY FOR VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY November 28, 2001*

*Ethnographic visual media (specially film, video, photography and digital multimedia) play a significant role in the production and application of anthropological knowledge and form an integral part of the discipline's course offerings. (AAA 2001)*

This came at a time when the equipment cost barrier to film experimentation and production had fallen dramatically. The rise of the internet and new media technologies for the creation and dissemination of media projects have given almost global access to audio-visual productions.

We now live in a world swamped by audio-visual media. This has led some, Pink amongst others, to position visual anthropology and by extension a broader anthropology of the senses or sensory anthropology as being poised to play a central heroic and unifying role in this fragmented discipline. Fadwa El Guindi concludes:

*Epistemologically and methodologically, visual anthropology is positioned today to assist towards this path of pulling together all aspects of the study of humankind into one anthropology (2004, p. 247)*

## **2. A Manifesto For A New Visual Anthropology**

In *The Ethnographer's Eye* Grimshaw (2001) argues for a new agenda for visual anthropology. By contextualising 'the visual' in the works of early pioneers of anthropology such as Rivers, Flaherty, Malinowski, Grierson and Radcliffe Brown, she investigates the role vision has played in the generation of anthropological knowledge in the twentieth century.

Her frustration throughout the book at the marginalisation of vision to text calls for a new engagement with the use of visual recording as a research method, its exploration in new reflexive contexts and a continuing critique of existing ways of seeing and knowing in documentary film such as the *observational* stance. In the preface to the book she states:

*There were plenty of accounts written by filmmakers of their ethnographic work; but there was little in the way of a reflexive engagement with the anthropological assumption built into the particular techniques and technologies used. (2001)*

Others have taken issue with a more prominent role of filmmaking in anthropology and hinted at problems they believe are inherent in visual representations: Lyon & Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou point out what they see as problems of ambiguity in film interpretation in a paper written for the JRAI *Waving, Drowning and Making Sense of Video in Communicating and Teaching*. They write:

*We realized in the course of mini screenings of the films, that the intentions of the filmer (Lyon), the editor/filmmaker (Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou) and the audience, although highly variable, were influenced and manipulated by previous stages of the process, but not necessarily in the ways intended. (2008)*

Despite such reserves Grimshaw makes a powerful case for the role an investigation of vision can offer in generating insights into the nature of knowledge production that lie at the very heart of the anthropological project.

### **3. Exploring Ways of Seeing**

The art critic John Berger (1972; 1982) illustrates how what we see in the world around us is affected by what we believe, what we know and what we think we know. He makes the case that our feelings and attitudes are intimately tied in to the way we vision the world and by extension the way we sense the world generally.

The traditional discourse on knowledge has been dominated by textual analyse and critique. Beneath the surface during the 80s and especially in anthropology dissident voices had been getting louder. The unsettled

murmur became a cry precipitating a crisis of representation spearheaded by *Writing Culture* (Marcus & Clifford 1986)

Berger illustrates the need for reflexivity and his emphasis on the visual highlights the inadequacies of text only based analysis. He encourages us to extend our thinking and provides arguments for foregrounding vision when considering fieldwork in an anthropological context.

The insights he brings to a contextualised visual analysis of culture underpin the social constructionist school of thought (Berger, P. L., Luckmann 1966) and extend and situate the scientific and theoretical work of earlier scholars such as Karl Marx and Max Weber.

The five chapters his 1982 book *Another Way Of Seeing* combine text and still images, which illustrate a reflexive approach to photographs taken of mountain peasants.

Written with the photographer Jean Mohr it includes brief autobiographies; reflections on the ambiguity of photographs; the questioning of the meaning of appearances; theoretical considerations of the implications of story telling in this form as well as 150 pictures shown without words.

Whereas it falls short of the possibilities of a full anthropological rendering and deals with the world of still images and text rather than moving images and sound, it is a exciting example of new directions and possibilities which should be of interest to anthropology.

His 1972 book *Ways Of Seeing* based on a popular BBC TV series of the same name brought his reflections on still images, paintings and the importance of context (or perhaps we should say conview?) directly to the

homes of a popular British audience interestingly using the medium of sound, text and moving images.

His stance amounts to a visual deconstruction of established meanings and interpretations in the world of art and beyond. His insights are particularly important in the theoretical analysis of modern mass produced and recorded media.

New technologies and the birth of the Internet have lead to a nuclear explosion of images clamouring for every second of our attention shot at us by every modern communication device imaginable.

Previously an almost exclusively text based communications medium, the ability to transmit sound, still and moving images has been the main factor in the world wide web's phenomenal expansion. This in itself provides evidence for the power of visual images to engage, persuade, entrance and manipulate us.

Rather than shy away from this and assume an arrogant and dismissive stance to the visual mode of cultural expression, it seems more important than ever that anthropologists embrace this *new literacy* and take on the task of exploring and experimenting with the tools of its generation.

#### **4. The Senses**

Eriksen (1995, p. 47) refers to Marx as having once said that the five senses were not of nature, but the product of all world history until the present.

Disagreements on the conceptualising of the term 'nature' and the number of actual senses aside, Eriksen addresses a problem which he says is often

overlooked in the discipline, namely the use of the senses cross culturally and the methodological issues it raises.

He draws attention to a visual bias in ethnographic writing and notes that sounds, tastes and smells are usually 'conspicuously absent'.

Citing the study of oral societies by Classen (1993)

*'the Tzotzil order the cosmos by heat, the Ongee by smell, and the Desana by colour'*  
(1993, p. 122 cited in Eriksen (1995, p. 47)).

and Stoller (1989) amongst others, he suggests there has been scattered attention but little systematic attention given to the treatment of the senses.

He points out the importance of studying the 'social use of the senses' and the general need for critical reflection on sense biases in ethnography (Salmond (1982) cited in Eriksen (1995, p. 47)).

## **5. A Field Film School**

Peter Biella focuses on both visual and applied anthropology and writes:

*My vision of applied visual anthropology is the production of films made primarily for the benefit of indigenous people -- secondarily for use in university classrooms: Such films are "interventions" offering information designed to influence and change attitudes and behaviour in the films' viewers. (2009)*

His current work with Maasai in Tanzania in east Africa involves the setting up and administration of a field school to produce interventionist films to bring about social change by illustrating for example the:

*catastrophic fate that faces urban Masaai migrants (2009, p. 1)*

In his paper *The idea of a field school in applied visual anthropology* (2009) given at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association he outlines the problems and successes of this project. In the second year he decided to place his film students in a single Maasai homestead and writes:

*The difficulties that I sensed would make this homestead a “useful” case study turned out in the event to be major crises. I realized, in the second season, that a field school for applied anthropology is a field school that seeks out trouble. (2009, p. 2)*

But when discussing the benefits of such a field school for students in terms of practical filmmaking skills aimed towards a real life interventionist goal he makes the following observation:

*when artistic anthropology students find themselves in the field tasked with making a film that confronts enormous social problems, they see not only the need for their aesthetic sensibilities but their moral sense, their analytical and strategic senses, and those aspects of the whole person that seek to integrate diverse talents into a work of art and action (2009, p. 2)*

Whereas I could not hope to replicate the pressure cooker environment of such a field school in the relatively tranquil and dormitory setting of Durham university, by condensing a training down to between one and three days of intense practical experience I hoped to be able to leave a useful and lasting impression to those brave enough to take part.

## 6. A Rethinking of Observational Cinema

In the preface to *Observational Cinema* Grimshaw & Ravetz (2009) ask what is observational cinema?; Where did it come from?; What could it become? They make the point that the genre is still considered to be an essential reference in an exploration of social life despite heavy critique (2009, p. viiii). They are clearly passionate about the form and fight to illuminate the genre's obscured identity as a:

*sensuous, interpretive, and phenomenologically inflected mode of inquiry* (2009, p. viiii )

by exploring it as a distinct way of knowing they make a case for the relevance of visual methods in fieldwork and a rethinking of what is being called 'anthropological cinema':

*We underline the intellectual seriousness of observational work and argue for its significance as an example of experimental practice.*( 2009, p. viiii)

They examine the role of observation in ethnographic practice and the constitution of anthropological knowledge calling for more attention to what they call its 'epistemological and methodological merits (2009, p. x)'.

In a sentence, which reflects and underpins my own position they state:

*We wanted to transcend our intuitive sense of observational cinema's significance and articulate a more coherent argument for its value as means for engaging with social and cultural (2009, p.xi)*

In an on-going ten year exchange between art and anthropology they identify observational cinema, when understood as a special form of epistemological inquiry, as being a bridge that facilitates interpretations of visual practices that can cut across conventional areas of specialisation (2009, p. xii)

They consider observation as conceptualised through a history of science, from this point of view observation is seen as the special training of the senses which is both reflexive and rigorous requiring equipment, skills, locations and performances (2009, p. xiii)

In framing it in this way, we understand observation in a cultural context and become aware of the existence or possibility of other ways of seeing. This jolt to the deep entrenchment of cultural modes and habits in the self helps mediate against complacency and a lapse into habit. An awareness that something as basic as the way we unconsciously and automatically analyse our observations in order to 'know' the world is a valuable insight and an aid to reflexive thinking.

## 7. Being There

Watson in *Being There* (1999) acknowledges the effects of pre-training for fieldwork in establishing concepts and notions. He details the journey from training to fieldwork to reflection and reformulation that hallmarks contemporary ethnography. The journey is revealed to be a bumpy one as notions are unpacked and unconscious preconditioning revealed. He considers return visits to field sites and notes anthropologists:

*often return to the field. Pick up the threads and find themselves weaving a very differently patterned cloth from that which they wove so confidently during their previous encounter* (1999, p. 1)

He goes one step further and discusses similar reflections when revisiting previously written texts. The dust never seems to settle and the road is never clear.

The subsequent collection of texts on fieldwork highlight the temporal, fleeting and ever changing nature of knowledge generated in social contexts.

This of course is only a problem if it thwarts an intellectual desire to uncover universal and unitary patterns, to be isolated and held aloft as trophies in a cultural knowledge hunt.

Clearly the focus and domain of anthropology is different to a discipline like physics. The case studies and examples reveal the problems of over zealous positivist ambitions in ethnography and reveals yet again the need for reflexivity.

Watson's *Being There* challenges us to rethink and theorise the personal experience of ethnography and provide more argumentation for broader methods of inquiry beyond the taking of notes and the generation of text.

## **8. Reflexivity and Autobiography**

In a similar vein, Judith Okely & Helen Callaway (1992) examine autobiography in anthropology. This comparative collection of fourteen chapters relate to the lone anthropologist as fieldworker, working with an individual of a specific culture and the anthropologist as writer. They comment that:

‘The implications of this unique experience have not been fully theorised’ (1992, p. x1)

‘Race’ nationality, gender, age and many other factors play a part in what eventually emerges as ethnography and fieldwork practice is always concerned with relationships. (Cambell (1989) cited in Judith Okely & Helen Callaway 1992, p. 2).

Okely remarks that fieldwork:

*has* not been theorised because it has been trivialised as the ‘collection of data’ by a dehumanised machine. (1992, p. 3)

and claims autobiography dismantles this machine.

To note that personal history and experience cannot be removed from the ethnographic experience is not however to say that it in any way invalidates it.

Paul Spencer's work with the Maasai described in the same book shows how collecting autobiographies of informants, although also problematic in terms of exaggeration and self-projection, can be valuable resources when working with nomadic people. They gave an introduction to wider communities the anthropologist had little hope of meeting even if:

*distorted by tricks of the memory and trips of the ego* (1992, p. 51)

In his own reflexive evaluation he asks to what extent did the unresolved dilemmas of his own past and present distort his own accounts? (1992, p. 53-54)

In a wonderful passage he is able to compare his account of a chance meeting with Hilary Ruben he had in the desert. Years later they met and discovered they had both kept written accounts.

He notes:

*The two accounts are sufficiently similar to identify the same event but they differ enough to raise questions.* (1992, p. 55)

He says that his version of events had become a part of his self-image, a romanticised image in which he remembers being wrapped in a blanket whereas Ruben's account has him in shorts. (Ruben (1972), p. 160-1 cited in Judith Okely & Helen Callaway 1992, p. 55)

Insightfully, he recognises also that the anecdotes have revealed more than false memories, they have betrayed elements of their national character, stiff upper lips had been carried all the way to Africa.

He then goes on and in a good example of reflexivity re-works his ethnographic experience in the light of this new self-knowledge. He concludes that fieldwork can neither be value nor emotionally free.

Once fieldwork is understood as an essentially human endeavour, in which a lone anthropologist situates themselves in a foreign world of dense multi sensorial social relationships, it stops being a simple data collection exercise. The anthropologist becomes the instrument and it then becomes possible to provide a rationale to explore other methods of inquiry and potentially open the doors to new ways of knowing.

## **9. Pushed to the Margins**

In *The corporeal image: film, ethnography, and the senses* MacDougall (2006) takes us on an epic tour over the landscape and history of visual anthropology. He bemoans its lack of systematic development and failure to mature into a stable, principled and mature anthropological discourse.

*At one point the growth of visual anthropology into a mature discipline looked possible. I would place the date around 1898*  
(2006, p. 227)

He discusses reasons for its isolated 'dark' ages until its re-emergence in the early 1950s under the unruly hands of pioneer filmmakers like Jean Rouch.

*To make a film, for me, is like to write with one's eyes, one's ears, and with one's whole body* (2006, p. 251)

Admired as an 'ethnographic' filmmaker for his work in Africa, Rouch both resonates with the sentiments of Ruby (2000) who states that ethnographic film:

*has to be communicating ethnographic knowledge' but challenges any 'possibility of knowing others fully by means of the filmic image* (Cooper 2006).

## **10. Pioneers of Ethnographic Film**

In 1932 Margret Mead met Gregory Bateson and made a project proposal to the social science research council, in which she suggests using a camera to correct initial human observation errors and provide an automatic correction on the variability of the human observer. (Sullivan 1999, p. 4)

In a statement which reveals a legacy in regards to documentary film formats which build audiences by the use of emotional narrative and characterisation (Wilson 2009), she suggests filming: '*a few scenes with plots and which involve incidents in the lives of specially studied individuals'* but showing her commercial awareness remarks that this would not be at the quality required for the European markets. (Sullivan 1999, p. 4).

## 11. The Visual In Research

Jay Ruby in 'Picturing Culture' calls the development of camera recording devices '*A positivist dream come true*'. (Ruby, 2000, p. 44). He gives sound and practical examples of the camera in research, from revealing that which the eye cannot see to facilitating comparison between phenomena and shared infrequently occurring observations.

However effective the ambitions of positivist science may have been, the nature of the science method and objectivity in producing knowledge across all domains was overstretched. The objectivity of photographs and film when used in the lab was taken for granted and transferred to the study of the social world . (Ruby 2000, p. 44).

Ruby points to a general suspicion of cameras amongst social scientists and critics of positivism as having led to confusion and an obstruction to their use as research tools. He therefore suggests the need for new frameworks and a new rationale which by 2000 had not been forthcoming.

He identifies the need for simplistic and 'out moded' dichotomies between arts and science to be reassessed before the use of filmic techniques can reach its potential. He is convinced that the value of a properly aligned theory of film and anthropology can be achieved.

He believes that the potential for visual anthropology has barely been touched despite it being as old as the post Malinowskian anthropological project itself.

He gives the example of body movement and space, which he argues are culturally variant and therefore areas of legitimate anthropological inquiry. He makes the point that textual description could never match film

recording for the analysis of the way culture is signed by the body. He claims little work has been done in this regard and asks rhetorically why? (2000, p. 50). He makes further calls to practitioners to take up the challenge and instead of writing papers enthusing about the potential for a visual anthropology, start using cameras in the field so that methods and theory can be evolved.

Today however for the first time there are no substantial cost or technical hurdles to a new generation of students or established practitioners to heed his laments.

## **12. Visual Methods And Ethnography**

There are many books outlining and describing useful methods in visual anthropology and social science research. I have chosen to highlight Fadwa El Guindi's *Visual Anthropology: Essential Method and Practice* (2004); *Doing Visual Ethnography* by Sarah Pink (2006a); Also by Sarah Pink *Doing Sensory Anthropology* (2009); *Visual Methods In Social Research* and *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research* both by Marcus Banks (2001; 2008).

Together these books cover a wide range of contemporary ideas and methods, theoretical viewpoints, ethical considerations, research design and applied approaches for including visual and audio-visual components in ethnographic fieldwork and research projects. These ethnographic methods are not limited to anthropology or the social sciences. The general post 90s interest in more reflexive and qualitative research projects has benefited visual anthropology and its insights are spilling outside of its disciplinary boundaries. Pink remarks:

*The benefits of an ethnographic approach are being realised in visual arts and media studies and the use of ethnographic research methods and anthropological theory to inform photographic and hypermedia practice and representation (2006a, p. 1)*

I will refer to these works later when I deal with research design and methodologies.

### **13. Anthropological Cinema**

There has not always been an automatic and reactionary bias against popular box office success for ethnographic film. Boas attempted albeit unsuccessfully to forge a collaboration between the American motion film industry and anthropologist in the hope of both producing beneficial research and box-office appeal. (Jacknis 1987 cited in Ruby 2000)

Ruby states clearly that in his opinion ethnographic film should be an exclusive activity, the production of pictorial ethnographies by anthropologists.

He goes on to outline what this means, a complete split from the current world of documentary and other so called ethnographic films and the support they enjoy. He rejects the needs for an ethnographic film to be a useful teaching aid or a production for large audiences. He calls for the filmmaker to '*confound the expectations of the audience*' (2000, p. 239)

In a 2008 eSeminar he extends these thoughts and offers a new path and framework for the development of a new '*anthropological cinema*' (An et al. 2008)

*As we free ourselves from the domination of professional filmmakers and the conventions of documentary realism, the possibility of a true anthropological cinema is emerging.*(An et al. 2008, p. 4)

He concludes

*After decades of being in the doldrums and slavishly following a model established by documentarians, anthropologists now have the technical where-with-all to control the means of filmic production. A new form is needed if they wish to establish an anthropological cinema that utilizes the full potential of a pictorial transmission of their insights. Bold experimentation is required by anthropologists searching for a new way to pictorially represent their research. Whether the result will be a new cinematic form or a digital multimedia hybrid is impossible to predict. Ideally we will see both succeed in expanding how we can see culture. (An et al. 2008, p. 11)*

## 14. The Promise

In his lecture in honour of the late Prof. Paul Stirling, Henley (1996) refers to a multimedia compendium produced by Stirling and CSAC (Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing)<sup>5</sup> at the University of Kent, he writes:

*Comprehensive ethnographic accounts of this kind, particularly those evolved over many years and which make use of a variety of media, represent, in my view, one of the most valuable achievements of the anthropological project as a whole.*

He echoes Ruby and says that the promise of visual anthropology has not been realised mainly for intellectual reasons due to the historical development of the discipline but says:

*I am only too aware of the subjectivity and artifice involved in the practice of making any film. But just as ethnographic text-makers have become aware that the subjectivity of their accounts is something that should be built upon rather than denied, so too have ethnographic film-makers. (1996)*

There are clearly issues here to be addressed, not only by maverick specialists but also by the wider community of anthropologists at large.

The issue relates to the dominance of the textual mode of anthropological knowledge generation. There is a frustration amongst a particular group that despite a crisis of textual representation, few professional

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Stirling's Online Multimedia Compendium <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/tvillage/>

anthropologists take up the challenge to explore and experiment with new visual or sensory methods.

This thesis is the result of an effort to empowering the anthropological community in Durham to take up the visual challenge by exploring sound and vision and learning to make a film.

# Chapter 3

## Methodologies & Ethics

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The range of experiments, studies and reflections undertaken to address the question is a smorgasbord and many methodological approaches were taken at different times for different studies (T. H. Eriksen 2012). They appear here in list form.

### **1. Participant Observation**

The principal method of inquiry was Malinowskian participant observation with an emphasis made explicit in Anna Grimshaw's *The Ethnographer's Eye* when she considers *experiential* knowledge:

*Ethnographic understanding emerges from experience, bodily and sensory, as much as from observation and intellectual reflection.*  
(2001, p. 53)

Within the department my participation and observation involved:

- Walking, listening, talking and 'hanging out'.
- Attending seminars and open lectures.
- Attending staff and student parties and events at my postgraduate college after I enrolled for this masters by research degree.

- I chose to prepare my seminars in cafes, libraries, corridors, seminar rooms, labs, outside, in cars and in other peoples work areas. This led to a much greater level of exposure to students and staff than if I'd confined myself to one space.
- I joined academic online communities and social networking sites
- When I wasn't available physically to teach or meet I made myself available via eMail, Skype and FaceBook.
- I present a paper at the postgraduate yearly conference.
- I offered one on one technical and media consultancy for staff members and students. By arranging to go to them and meet in their rooms I had more contact and in a more relaxed setting.
- Assisted with film editing and film festival technical work
- Filmed numerous events with students both on and off the Durham university sites.
- Created a community of practice for filmmaking in the department.

Outside of the university:

- I attended the 2010 London Screen Writers Conference
- Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School
- Attended seminars and The Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in Manchester

My principal field sites were:

- The department of anthropology at the university of Durham
- With a Ganawi Malim in Northern Morocco
- Riding with a horse whisperer in southern and central Spain.

## **2. Legitimate Peripheral Participation**

The main method used for exploring filmmaking was the creation of a community of practice for filmmaking. The theoretical framework of legitimate peripheral participation (Jean Lave & Etienne Wenger 1991) I found particularly useful in three distinct areas:

- The community of practice I convened in order to teach film skills
- The community of practice for the teaching of anthropology which I became a peripheral member of due to my legitimate status as both external teacher and student.
- The community of practice at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology which I became a peripheral member of due to introductions from Durham.

Whereas I disagree in some places about the role of the teacher as facilitator and master with their treatise as regard my own work, the general outline allowed me to situate myself within the university communities of practice of anthropology whether the members of the departments consider it to be such or not.

I could see the development over time of some of my students from peripheral to full participation had we continued whereas my own status

was firmly confined to that of a legitimate by peripheral community member.

### **3. Interviews And Questionnaires**

When teaching film interviews or interviewing myself I used a mixture of unstructured, semi-structured and structured audio and audio-visual interviews using a range of recording devices from mobile phones to broadcast cameras. In one case I used questionnaires as well.

### **4. Active Listening**

Active listening is a listening method used across many disciplines.

I came across it during a counselling training weekend and as someone who talks a lot I found it particularly useful and insightful in many situations. In my filming work I switch off from 'being me' and get into the 'cameraman's zone and the soundman's groove' and I can spend hours in a state of quiet focussed meditation but day-to-day situations are different. Methods like active listening can help suspend the 'being me-ness' in normal life situations allowing a switch into a more receptive mode. For those of us with a tendency to express more than listen it's an invaluable self check both to engaging with someone else and taking in information.

### **5. Imageworks**

Research methods based on guided inner visualisation.(Edgar 2004)

*The imagework method is an active process in which the person 'actively imagining' lets go of the mind's normal train of thoughts and images and goes with a sequence of imagery that arises spontaneously from the unconscious. It is the quality of spontaneity and unexpectedness that are the hallmarks of this process. (2004)*

An interesting framework which inspired some of the visualisation techniques I used in my group work and has appeal for future work in shamanism, narratives studies, the world of stories and story telling.

## **6. Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory (Strauss 1967) as a theoretical approach to fieldwork was useful, if only because the general idea in some ways legitimises a back to front way of generating ideas from experiences in the field.

Because of the nature of the timing of the study it was necessary to start before the purpose of the study was decided. Only after the research question was posed did it become possible to retrospectively trawl through what was done. Meanwhile theoretical speculation had been generated from the study in what amounts to a reversal of more normative framework for research. In short I did things back to front!

## **7. Technical Methods**

A large amount of technical equipment was tested and used over the course of the study.

- Recording devices to capture sound and video in various formats and qualities
- Computer based editing methods for exploring and generating visual knowledge.

A more detailed list of specific equipment with descriptions appears in the appendix.

## **8. Video Ethnography**

Schaeffer notes the uses of videography in his work as being:

- Useful in capturing complexity in a natural surrounding over extended time periods supplementing written accounts
- Permits scientific rigor and later scrutiny of material
- Allows responses from scientists and informant-participants
- Is a constant reference point which allows connections between abstractions, inferences of the observed phenomena

(Schaeffer, (1995, p. 255) cited in Hockings (1995))

In various experiments all four methods have been used and his ethical considerations of voluntary consent and confidentiality noted (Schaeffer, (1995, p. 256-257) cited in Hockings (1995)).

## 9. Ethnographic Footage And Film

In the on going discussions of what constitutes an ethnographic use of film I took solace from MacDougall who makes a useful distinction between ethnographic footage and ethnographic films. Footage refers to raw video and sound data used for a variety of uses such as field notes, film refers to a structured work made from footage and presented to an audience. ((1978, p. 405) cited in (Guindi 2004, p. 95))

In this sense anything that was taken out of a camera was considered to be ethnographic footage and archived and in parts classified and any structured work such as student experimental or advocacy films considered to be ethnographic film.

In considering the different uses I could make of my ethnographic footage and different forms of filming produced in visual anthropological research I found Guindi's discussions in chapter 3 *Filming Others*, chapter 4 *Filming Selves* and chapter 5 *Discovery* (2004) useful. During the course of my study I experimented both with filming my students and letting the students film themselves for a variety of purposes including the production of what Guindi calls research film, film to collect data for analysis and discovery.

## 10. Visual Methods in Social Research

Marcus Banks takes the bull by the horns in his book *Visual Methods in Social Science*. On Interpreting images, Banks asks: *what can social researchers do with pictures?* (2001, p. 3) and proceeds to give examples and interpretations. His assertion that it is not only a question of

considering images closely but also the knowledge that the observer brings to the image which informs our interpretations is insightful. He then asks why the image exists in the first place and an analysis of the method of construction of the image leads to another but different interpretation. By considering many different readings on the image Banks paints a compelling picture of how images and films, can be contextualised into a social research project. He considers that social research with pictures involves three questions:

*(i) what is the image of, what is its content? (ii) who took it or made it, when and why? (iii) And how do other people come to have it, how do they read it, what do they do with it? (2001, p. 7)*

These and similar questions were useful in my own reflexive practice when I came to write up and re-considered what it was I had done and was doing with the ethnographic film and stills I had produced.

Bank's discussion on choosing a method (2008, p. 8) was also retrospectively insightful and useful. He gives example of research questions that may be posed, found to be of limited value, broadened and enhanced by an appropriate visual method. His examples in many ways parallel my own battle with reformulating my activities to address questions which turned out to be limited, too narrow or in many cases too big. It was comforting to see that many of the methodological problems I encountered had been more substantially considered here.

Other methodological books from which I gained retrospective insight into my activities were Sarah Pink's *Doing Visual Ethnography* and *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2006a; 2009).

## **11. Ethics<sup>6</sup>**

All of the activities I carried out in the university conformed to the ASA's code of practice guidelines and standard industry practices for filming.

When filming in Morocco or Spain risk assessments were made, insurances taken out and all necessary permissions procured. Confidentiality and anonymity was not necessary for the subjects and projects in question but off camera I made judgement calls which I would be happy to justify under the code. These judgement calls included decisions to abandon filming in order to avoid potential problems for us, or those being interviewed.

There is an informative section by Sarah Pink in her book *Doing Visual Ethnography* on ethics which broadens the basics I generally adhered to and gave ground for further reflection which will be useful for future projects (2006a, p. 49-52)

## **12. Analysis**

The analysis of results was envisioned as taking place reflexively on a week by week basis starting at the end of each practical film clinic, seminar or other such shared space I could evoke with the community. This method allowed for an organic appraisal of my methods, direction and results, which I hoped would give me insights and information which would allow me to flexibly adapt and change strategies as needed for the following weeks. In doing so I hoped to make the best use of what were short and intense working periods in which a lot needed to happen to satisfy the

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.theasa.org/downloads/ASA%20ethics%20guidelines%202011.pdf>

various agendas I was held to. In the end this approach proved itself as in many cases a more rigorous research plan and timetable would have floundered in the messy seas of the department and university I encountered trying to schedule, interest and entice students and staff to take part over the full course of the year.

# Chapter 4

## Case Studies

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The following case studies are ethnographic accounts of seminars, experiments, practices and documentary shoots conducted over the fellowship year grouped into thematically related sections.

### **1. Teaching, Exchanges And Communities Of Practice**

This section outlines the evocation of a community to practice and explore filmmaking in anthropology.

### **2. The Problems With Observation**

Participant observation is touted as the defining methodology of the discipline. This section deals with experiments in observation, perception and interpretation through the use of cameras and microphones.

### **3. Views From The Filmographic Field**

The use of documentary material from shoots in Spain and northern Morocco is used in a postgraduate research methods seminar. It raises

points about the use of film equipment in anthropological ethnographic situations.

#### **4. Qualitative & Quantitative Perspectives**

A walking meditation on what the camera can and can't see is paired with a videoed research trip to demonstrate the quantitative and qualitative uses of recording equipment in a real world research.

#### **5. Story Telling In Anthropology**

What is it to tell an engaging story? Could or should techniques from mainstream program making be employed to help with the accessibility and impact of anthropological film?

# Section 1

## Teaching, Exchanges And Communities Of Practice

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*“Never give up, Never Surrender” (galaxy quest, 1999)*

### **1. Not Waving, Not Drowning, Hitting The Ground Running**

I arrived in Durham at the end of Oct. 2009 at the start of the Michaelmas term on an industrial and educational information exchange fellowship to help stimulate and promote filmmaking within the anthropology department of Durham.

The fellowship, my means of entry into the department was novel and unconventional but I had a clear agenda to make a positive contribution in a particular area over a defined time period. I was answerable only to a co-ordinating group external to the department so would be perceived as an outsider but I had a freehand to operate as I saw fit.

I needed to know how anthropologists in the department used audio-visual media; film and video and how they thought it might be used in the future.

I wanted to know what the interest level was and then see how far I might be able to fan this interest. I was confident in my own technical filmmaking experience and ability but also prepared to have to adapt and learn, but how to start?

There are always politics and problems in complex institutions but I thought as long as I didn't step on the wrong persons toes, amplify myself too much and tried to find a niche and fit in, there were no apparent reasons for me to encounter obstacles.

In trying to make headway and address these questions, my first research method was simply walking and talking. I looked for ways to meet people and was, as much as I could be, open and friendly. I focused my attention firstly on what I was trying to do and secondly on where I was. I came up with a little mission statement that I thought was simple and catchy. I was going to: 'stimulate and promote the use of filmmaking techniques to help anthropologists further their own interests' but my first problem was, where could I work?

Although I was on a fellowship, I wasn't a visiting academic and there were problems with suitable free workrooms. Despite this I was able to scout out operating possibilities and turn this to my advantage.

I decided to do my preparatory work in the postgraduate common rooms, in the libraries and cafes and give seminars by booking a suitable teaching space when needed. This would force me to wander around and get to know the place rather than be stuck in a room. I had no need for bookshelves or a table, a MacBook pro laptop and access to the Internet was all I needed.

My first idea was simple, to spend time meandering around and meeting people, getting myself on the right email lists and then I would advertise a meet and greet introductory filmmaking clinic and see who turned up.

Initially there are always administrative issues to be sorted out. These situations also provide useful opportunities to meet people, absorb the environment and get a 'feel' for the place.

I 'recced' the buildings for possible seminar rooms for what I entitled the **'The First Durham Visual Anthropology Clinic** – exploring filmmaking/ audio video and multimedia production'. I eventually decided to try and book the 'monkey lab', not too big, not a lecture theatre but rather a teaching space with rows of tables and comfortable swivel chairs, laptop access to the computer systems, a nice AV projection system and glass cabinets full of plastic monkey bones.

My aims were modest, to formally introduce myself, stimulate a debate and from that gauge interest in the various skills and services I had to offer. I would then make plans.

During my 'scouting out' exploits, looking for corridor encounters and knocking on doors to introduce myself I generally found the natives to be encouraging and friendly, good will on my part was equally met and as time rolled by frame by frame I was presented to small groups of post graduate students around the campus by supportive staff members. We met in cafes and library points with AV screens and Internet access where I was able to show some of my work and get a feel for the departments specialisations and student interests.

There seemed to be little in the way of formal visual anthropological research or teaching methods being taught, but there were a number of staff members active and interested in developing the possibility. Later I was to refer to this group as the coalition of the willing.

I was pleasantly surprised at the overall interest shown in what I was trying to do and I found my nomadic wanderings around the campus to be not only fruitful but also enjoyable. It was liberating not to have a dedicated room.

I discovered that I was also eligible to apply for a one year masters by research degree. I argued to myself that it would help me with my mission and provide a focus for what I was doing. I would be able to attend courses and hang out with the postgrads as one of them, so I signed up.

## **2. First Contact**

My first clinic day arrived. I had been warned that a specialist non-mandatory seminar might attract a small crowd but I had 22 people, staff and postgraduates turned up.

I had brought a lot of production equipment, HD cameras, tripods, radio microphones, a mobile edit suite, portable hard disks for video capture and a selection of cables and breakout boxes that allowed me to connect anything to anything.

I unpacked, people arrived, I walked around and shook hands. The handshake touch and whiff of artistic eccentricity helps people warm to me I find but I don't think I have to contrive it. I was nervous, it's one thing to make independent commercial productions 'out there' but it's another to walk near naked into the spot light gaze of anthropologists. Nevertheless I was on a mission, I just hoped they would be kind.

I introduced myself and explained what I was offering to do and that I wanted to encourage dialog. I was immediately asked why I had chosen the word 'clinic' instead of workshop or seminar. Suddenly the room was alive with discussions of the medical metaphor. I'd forgotten a word can mean so much and made a mental note to use 'seminar' in the future to keep things simple.

I abandoned my planned presentation as the meeting took on its own dynamic, veering towards a free form discussion of the applications of filmmaking in anthropology and who was doing what in the department. One staff member left and returned with some of his short films burnt onto DVD which I was able to show. This generated a whole new discussion and by sitting back and just watching I was able to get a good idea of how he used film.

The film showed Teddy Boys in an ex-mining village social centre, big tattooed men with quiffs drinking pints seen through the eye of a small handheld camcorder moving around inside the club, wobbly, low resolution, laughing ladies sitting on lads laps. I could imagine myself in his position, holding the camera, being in these clubs. In my late teens I used to help a friend put on Christmas pantomimes in working men's clubs and watching it triggered memories which felt comfortable and familiar, another part of me was feeling claustrophobic and restless.

Growing up in a small local village, even with miners in the family, the local big man culture, 'fieten, smurken tabs, drinken twentee pints a neet an tha lash' and 'gannan oot ta shag lasses'<sup>7</sup> just didn't fit and between that and

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<sup>7</sup> Fighting, smoking cigarettes, drinking 20 pints a night and going out to chat up women

school I rebelled into music and motorbikes and then left. Now years later back in my homeland I was watching a video of lads having a good time in a social club and reacting to it as if I was there. The filmmaker seemed quite at ease in the club and watching it again he was obviously fascinated by what he'd filmed. Other people watched it like one might watch a mutant fish in a washing up bowl but I couldn't stop myself from falling into the frame and feeling I wanted to get out. I was slightly perplexed by my feelings and my reaction to the film but what had this anthropologist thought he was doing? Unfortunately that conversation was lost as the discussion turned to technical matters, the problems of filming, the limitations of the equipment, the use of lights and tapes.

Watching the conversational twists and turns I could see how the film provided a focus for debate. They would talk and on command I would stop and start the DVD as points were made or questions asked. My intention had been to bring people together and stimulate a discussion guided by myself but if I'd insisted on doing that I would have missed this spontaneous unfolding completely.

The seminar went well, I didn't feel like a complete idiot or a nervous wreck at the end and I was pleased with the results. What I found out was that there was certainly interest in filmmaking from people with absolutely no idea of how the black art was practiced to a few who had produced ethnographic films and seemed very well versed in the debates.

In the informal after-talks I received instant feedback. Some people had expected me to control, direct and present, not to listen to others they already knew. Others hadn't expected to take part in a free form meandering discussion but found it interesting anyway. A few gave me the impression all they wanted was to receive 'knowledge', some gift wrapped

and condensed packet of words and hand-outs from me that they could file in their note books under “ I can now make a film”. I’m not sure it works like that.

I took it as a lesson in academic culture and what I might be expected to deliver in the future. It was both a pleasant experience and a warning.

I realised no one was going to give up their precious time just to be part of my experiment to find out what I could do for them. They were all too busy with their own work and ideas. They wanted more of a pre-planned structured seminar on a topic they had an interest in, delivered in a format that fitted in with their expectations and could later use for their own purposes. I made a note to emphasis the ‘learning by doing’ practical side rather than the theoretical side. Actions speak louder than I do, these people needed to get experience using the equipment and then see for themselves what they could do.

At least it was a start. I was encouraged but I decided to enrol myself on some courses on seminar teaching and course structuring as soon as possible.

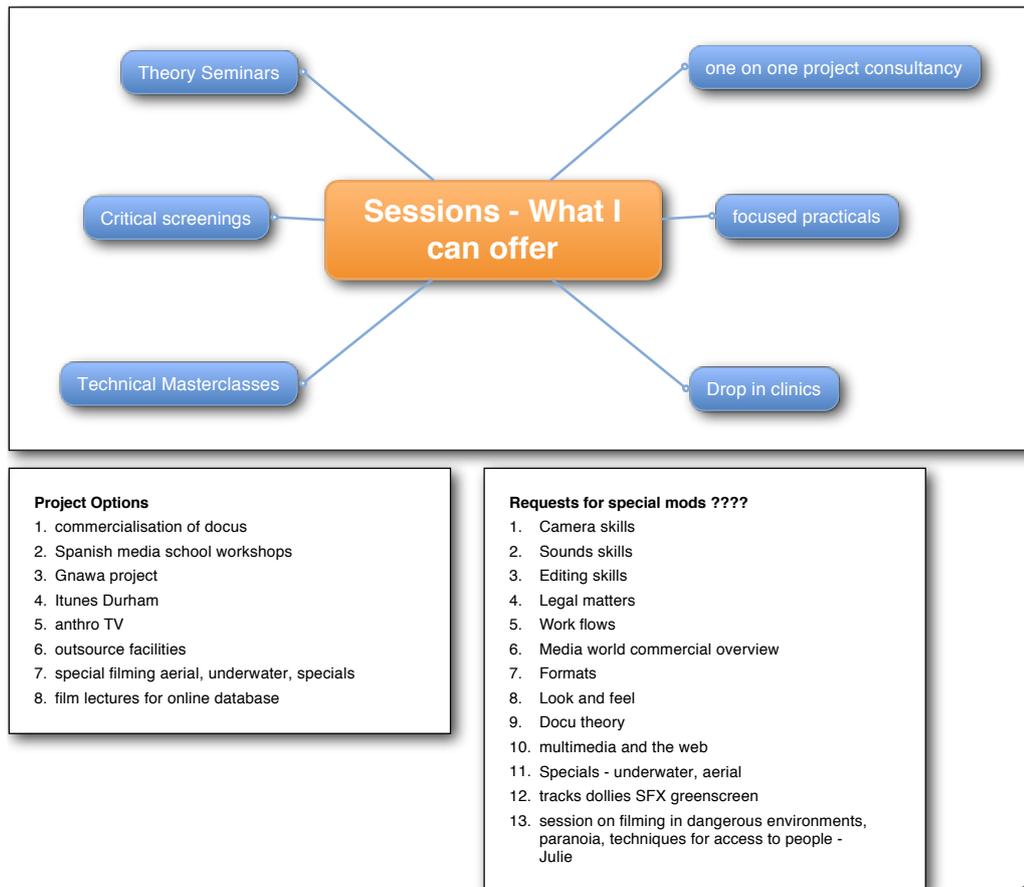
### **3. Evoking a Community**

After some deliberations I decided I could offer the following:

- 1) Bi-monthly half day clinics covering a variety of topics such as:  
choosing a camera for fieldwork, camera craft, sound craft, editing and post production techniques, distribution, sales, formats and how to interface with various parts of the industry as well as

occasional 1.5 hour back to back sessions covering theoretical and practical issues on demand in the forms of seminars and workshops.

- 2) Practical sessions in small groups of 3 - 4 to practice using equipment, shooting/ capturing sound/ editing, finishing and delivering content.
- 3) One on one hourly drop ins by arrangement to help individuals advance their own productions. I would go to meet them in a place of their choosing rather than they come to me so I got to see more of what was going on and where people were.
- 4) Critical screenings, a focussed discussion forum/ test audience session for productions nearing completion and to encourage critical debate along the lines of "does it achieve what you intended".



10

Figure 1 What Can I Offer?

To keep things flexible and because of the difficulties of pinning people down to dates for a voluntary seminar, I decided to organise myself only one month in advance, communicate via email, phone and Skype and confirm the program by email circulars at the beginning of each month.

The old language of film and video, print and other discrete communications tied to a particular technology doesn't reflect the sea change that has occurred. The man in the street may still refer to TV, cinema, online but they have all converged so a clearer way to think about the whole media world today is as a generator of digital audio-visual

experiences which can be bought, consumed, imbibed, digested, interacted with, absorbed and which have the power to engage us or repel us 24/7 across a bewildering array of devices which it's difficult to get away from.

Whereas to some this is truly a nightmare world of clamouring, never-ending voices all shouting to get attention, telling us nothing and selling us everything, the playing field is still accessible to all at various levels.

With this in mind and with a mind locked onto the idea that anthropologists could be making their own films very cost effectively and getting their anthropological knowledge 'out there', I was motivated into thinking, not about an anthropological attitude towards film, but about the discipline as a part of the ecology of the higher education in the UK and all the strings and constraints and demands that go with it.

#### **4. The Wider Context, Impact, Funding And Future Technology**

The governments 'impact assessment' had become important for funding, 25% at that time so any initiative for getting anthropological knowledge out to a wider audience with an ability to assess it's impact would be valuable.

IPTV (internet television) will be a major online media, TV and film distribution network in the future, in fact it's the distribution network of today but change takes time and some people haven't noticed. I had visions of a full facility low cost visual media, sense and sensorial anthropology lab that could produce, globally distribute, sell as a departmental revenue earner and experiment with anthropological film and other media content. I knew I could innovate a low cost way to do it and had the technical

expertise to build it but would the department be interested? I decided to build a prototype system and find out.

## **5. Teaching & Exchanges**

In order to get more out of the seminar exchanges I had to go beyond practical filming skills but be careful else attendances would fall. By the last seminar before Christmas I had a sense of what was working and it wasn't talking theory.

I combined a practical camera workshop with a discussion on any work originating in the department and asked people to bring in examples. One of my 'informants' had brought in a paper, '*Waving, Drowning and Making Sense of Video in Communicating and Teaching*', the ASA's 2001 statement on the relevance and acceptability use of visual methods in ethnography immediately caught my eye.

The paper catalysed a light discussion on ambiguity in the interpretation of film and language in general. This was followed by watching extracts from a film made by a permanent staff member about the effects of a new road being built in Nepal. We all found the subject matter fascinating but our interpretations and understandings differed and the comment was made that we should have invited the filmmaker there be present to answer our questions directly.

Documentaries for mainstream home viewing are often made in quite a closed questioning way, here with a more open format and an anthropological audience the film was provoking more questions than it answered. Rituals were presented but not explained in the depth to which

our anthropologists wanted, how could they be? Should there have been more explanation? More subtitles? More narrative? Perhaps it was the filmmakers intention to open a debate by leaving space for questions? What if this had been an interactive film with different levels of depth we could explore online?

We are used to being fed discreet self-contained TV documentary.

Should we be thinking at all about standalone linear filmmaking in anthropology?

A film, which could draw us in, but then signpost ways to explore an issue further sounded more like an anthropological type of film.

The world is talking in multimedia, academic departments talk largely in text, why?

A provocative discussion ensued about limitations in the production of texts in conventional ethnography and then the question was asked, 'why couldn't PhD's be submitted as films?' I didn't have an answer for this but serendipity intervened and an academic who was passing by just happened to drop in and delivered a prescient talk on the importance of the text based 80,000 word basis of the PhD. I filed this away for future consideration.

## **6. Filmmaking Equipment as Research Tools**

We finished off the session by detailing a basic list of points for the uses of AV equipment and recorded media in anthropology and thinking about

filming for an audience. I'd prepared my own list to compare with the group:

- 1) A camera records different things to your memory. Having both allows comparison and re-evaluations during the write up phase and can add dimension, context and detail to the account.
- 2) A recording can trigger memories not in field notes and bring a new perspective to interpretations no matter how good a trained observer you are.
- 3) The actual use of a camera when recording in the field can help gain privileged access to a situation I.e. to film a wedding, and be used as a research tool in its own right.
- 4) By giving cameras to informants interesting multi-vocal, multiple point of views of events or situations can be explored.
- 5) An AV recording allows accurate reproducible extended reflective engagement with the material for years, as well as allowing it to be shared globally for group interpretations. Your original memories cannot be so easily accessed and are always seen through the lens of time and what was written down.
- 6) AV recordings can be played back faster or slower and processed in many ways even in the field, advanced forensic analysis can reveal hidden information not seen or heard at the time. Time-lapse recordings can be made which can reveal details and scene changes which go unnoticed by the wandering observer.

- 7) AV productions, slide shows, web video, TV, mobile phone video can be used to communicate, educate, inform and entertain an audience, to get messages across (if we are skilful enough).
- 8) In the current funding climate in UK universities AV communication can help with departmental impact assessments.
- 9) As filmmaking is so 'sexy', it can help attract students into the discipline.
- 10) Recordings can be used to explore theoretical ideas, perceptions and their generation and used to examine aspects of experience not best rendered by written text such as the body language of a dancer or the facial gestures of an actor.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Uses

1. being a better aide-memorie than notes and paper alone in the field no matter how good a trained observer you are.
2. allowing extended reflective engagement with the material.
3. as a audio and visual sense data recorder - i.e. play back fast, slow, change, analyse to discover hidden info, both give us much more ability to analyse context; see and hear what we didn't at the time etc. - time lapse, revisiting a scene over time, changing frame rates for slow and fast, recording incognito using a Mac Laptop, Freeze frame, long shots, invisibility "Voices simultaneously convey a lot of different things about us," "If you speak to someone on the phone you can tell if they're a man or a woman, roughly how old they are, roughly where they come from in the country, if they're ill, if they're in a bad mood – that's all there. But also voices change a great deal so I sound different speaking to you than if I'd just been arrested.
4. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/nov/24/fiona-shaw-neuroscience>
5. Forensic visuals, digital file analysis, Visualising audio, discover hidden info, info your eyes and ears missed or you didn't record, time of day from shadows, from zoomed in clocks, facial gestures, nervousness, fast view, slow down, use tools to analyse & isolate sounds, bird song - where could this place be from the flora fauna, sounds of a city? of a village? dress style, make inferences about people, looking for the hidden removed from the "moment" of observation VIDEO RESTORATION
6. Google earth  
blimps, remote control helicopters,  
helicopters, balloons  
GEO DB's and GPS, measuring

## REPRESENTATION Filming for an audience

### What can we look at - modules

1. to communicate, education, inform, entertain an audience, to get a message across (if we are skilful enough) help with IMPACT, help get students into the discipline.
2. to illustrate points - multivocality, examine body language, show the relativism of view points, to show POV shots, detail, context
3. Commercially exploit material - documentary film
4. Promote Anthro to a wider audience
5. Anthro TV

QUANTITATIVE and QUALITATIVE research - describing, measuring

Physics Vs Social Science

physical reality is "out there", social reality isn't, it seems to be constructed as a dialog between our imagination and our physical constraints and theres a lot of room for interpretation in the gaps between. How to understand, see clearly without getting lost?

7

Figure 2 Research Methods and Representation - uses of filmmaking

Broadly speaking then, we divided the use of AV and filmmaking techniques into **representational tools** and **research tools** but opinion was divided about how these tools could best serve the production of anthropological knowledge.

It was a good information exchange. Through the seminars I hoped to learn what anthropologists in the department were doing, I got to discuss the issues with students and they learnt about professional film equipment through hands on practice. Fair exchange is no robbery.

## **7. Projects & Obstacles**

The department had enough equipment to allow basic filming and editing, nothing good enough for TV but good enough to play with. Seminar rooms had been equipped with AV sound and projection facilities.

I was approached to discuss many possible services such as: still picture restoration; film digitising and restoration; audio tape digitising with a view to cleaning up the sound; digital archive and annotation projects to preserve old audio, photographic and VHS video recordings. Every talk was revealing but overall the actual materialisation of concrete projects was weak. I wondered about this until I realised that most of the projects I'd been asked about were contingent on successful grant applications. My time in Durham was finite, the demand for services obvious, the funding to pursue projects limited. In this way I gained a little insight into the business side of academic life.

There was great potential at Durham but I'd already identified two main obstacles to further development.

The first was simply that seminar attendance was voluntary and unaccredited. During high load periods of the term it was difficult to find slots that suited all who were interested. My seminars were low priority when set against formal deadlines, assignments or normal staff duties. Without becoming an accredited module and having a formal place in the teaching program, attendances would most likely vary wildly no matter what I did. Class sizes over the year varied at times from more than twenty to just one. On one occasion I sat by myself staring at monkeys for an hour before giving up and going home.

Secondly I was not an academic, I had no status. I was legitimate in so much as I had technical skills to offer but I wasn't a practicing member of the anthropology community. I could stimulate all the interest I wanted but without a permanent staff member committed to carrying the idea forward, whatever I did was bound to stall as soon as I left.

During the Epiphany term 2010 I offered a mixture of practical filmmaking sessions with the focus on production equipment, the camera and microphone. Attendances varied and the continuity was weak, there was a lull in my enthusiasm.

## **8. Linking Communities**

My supervisor provided me with an introduction to the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in Manchester and I was invited to attend their

seminars. Academic networks I was finding open doors to interesting places.

One day in early March I drove down on a rainy dark afternoon to catch an evening Fieldwork and Film work Seminar by a filmmaker who was showing material recently shot in India about Tantric ideas of birth, death and well-being.

I managed to get lost even with a Tom Tom and ended up in a long street full of Indian take a ways and bright neon shop lights. When I finally arrived I had the choice of parking on a side street with signs that read “you car will be broken into here” – more or less, or a multi-storey car park overlooking what I hoped was the **Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology**. I didn’t have the right change for the car park.

A small but intimate group gathered in a nondescript seminar room with a screen and projector. There were the usual last minute technical hitches, dribbles of latecomers and thus an opportunity to eavesdrop on conversations whilst waiting for everything to settle.

The film we were there to see, a work in progress was compelling and illuminating. In a section that featured the consumption of burnt human flesh, the cameraman had used a pocket torchlight to illuminate a holy man in a graveyard at night. The candlelight was insufficient for the camera. Although the camera had a wider frame you could see what he was interested in as the torch danced around the scene. He laughed when I pointed this out, when you’ve done it yourself you recognise it. In another hilarious scene a drunken holy man on the tantric path starts insulting a guard in a train, this is either symbolised behaviour or real emotion I couldn’t tell but naturally the guard got annoyed. The cameraman must

have been sitting in the middle of all this filming and I know only too well what that feels like.

For filmmakers there were plenty of technical issues to discuss and problems to share, insights were open and freely discussed with a passion that reminded me of art college and it was refreshing. It was inspiring to be around a group of people with a passion for filmmaking, story telling *and* anthropology. The mixture I found both provoked the head and inflamed the heart, a good combination.

After the seminar we retired to a local pub to chew the cud and drink beer. The beer was good, the natives friendly. Here I felt was a real living community of filmmaking practice. I felt like a welcomed guest and as I took an interest in them they in turn took an interest in me. When it comes to production and my own professional and geeky experiences I can hold my own and was happy to share.

I was however also a visitor from another university, a visitor with an interest in film and anthropology and possibly from their point of view a visitor with an agenda. I was an unknown and an outsider. At times during the evening I felt gently probed and subtly examined to what end I can only guess, was I interpreting that correctly? Was it me? Sometimes it's difficult to tell.

What I took away from these sessions however was insightful. It felt, even with my very limited contact, like a real community with all the mess, intrigue and inspiration that affords. Such things take time to evolve but in the same way that my own development was accelerated through my teaching exchanges, membership of the right community *can* make

everything easier. Conversely lack of access to certain communities can make some things impossible.

I often joke with friends about my quest to find my tribe or as a retired BBC anchor man friend says, PLU's (people like us).

It's interesting to reflect on the roles we paint ourselves into or are painted into by others and the communities we create or are members of.

## **9. Practical Sessions**

One of the more popular workshops was focused on shooting and editing an interview using a range of kit from mobile phones to high end HD documentary cameras and radio microphones.

I sent groups of 3 and 4 off to interview random subjects they found on campus about a subject of their choice, return to base, ingest the material into an edit suite and in a very simple way using hard cuts only, edit it.

This free reign approach produced both serious and hilarious results with some teams opting to interview academics talking about research in their rooms or their reasons for coming to Durham and others opting to film friends or students body popping to the camera beside the library. The diversity of locations and techniques provided great material to discuss improvements and mistakes.

Another popular session was one I gave about special requirements and budgets for AV kit for anthropologists. We looked at the latest SLR small form factor stills & video cameras such as the Canon 550D; small covert operations cameras and considered features useful in fieldwork such as

weight, portability, flexibility, robustness, obtrusiveness, price and the latest trends in low cost guerrilla filmmaking techniques.

I was beginning to think both theoretically and practically in terms of what I could develop for the department: small crew shooting kits; single person filmmaking kits of low cost and high quality and training for the skills needed to use it and maybe even a distribution method for globalising any content produced but I was still thinking as a filmmaker only just on the peripheral of the anthropological debates.

## **10. Different Perspectives on Research Methods**

The weeks rolled by, spring was upon us and crocuses dotted the woodlands. I was able to attend some of the research methods seminars and found one particularly interesting and new. It was about using guided visualisation techniques, evoked images in individuals and groups and personal experience as a research tool. That this was taught in a research methods seminar at Durham was a wake up call and a liberation, perhaps I had been asleep or too wedded to more positivist ideas of 'doing science' or perhaps just out of touch with schools of thought in social science. Science for me meant looking for persistent patterns in the world around us and inside us that could be verified by independent observation, knowledge meant something more substantial than reflections on dreams. Here the focus moved from looking for 'facts' to trying to understand someone else's world view and it was legitimated by a respected academic I liked so instead of arrogantly dismissing it, I took it seriously and it was revelatory. This whole shift from 'what do I think' to 'what do you experience' as a research method struck a chord. I was reminded of a comment made by my

fellowship supervisor, “Universities” he said, “are complex, complicated and counter intuitive” but if you are prepared to move around, keep your eyes and ears open and ask questions, they are great places to explore knowledge and perhaps gain insight, don’t stick to just one perspective.

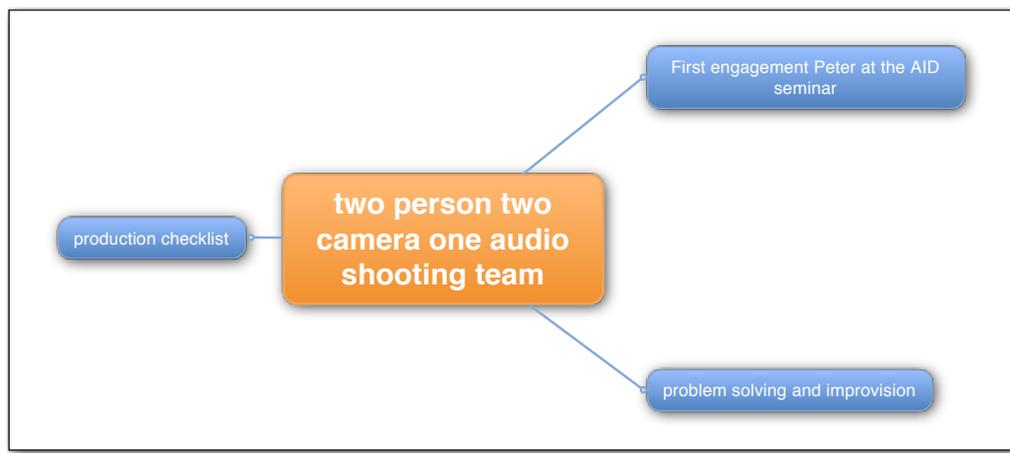
## **11. Learning by Doing in a Community of Practice**

I blinked and it was summer time and I was keen to take advantage of what was available to me in the wider community. I dug up bones on a forensic anthropology course for criminal investigators, enrolled in the Durham Entrepreneurship Summer School and applied for every Graduate school development course I could. I also turned my attention to prototyping a fully functioning anthropology IPTV channel. Perhaps as one of my old professors had argued, Universities should be community centres for learning for life, not just educational commodities to be sold to the young and the rich.

I had multiple agendas to fulfil at Durham, a professional services one to the department, a political one to the fellowship and a entrepreneurial one to my company. Where possible I tried to combine them. In this way I was able to tap into information networks, find out when special events were taking place in the university and offer to film them which in some cases generated an income.

Whatever video work I managed to get, I’d then use as a real life training ground for my little community of filming anthropologists and sometimes I used non paid gigs to test out new ideas for the IPTV anthropology channel.

From the early summer on we produced videos for web and DVD of high profile visiting speakers to the university. We recorded and live streamed a series of research group seminars and alumni promotional events for the department and digitally archived them for future use, in one case I coordinated the filming and watched the live broadcast while sitting in a record company's office in Köln Germany.



- Recce**
1. cables
  2. room
  3. power points
  4. camera angles
  5. access
  6. health and safety
  7. legal permissions
  8. directors dialog
  9. problem solving
  10. stock
  11. pre-production list

- First shoot**
1. audio kit from ITS
  2. mobile and web support to me if needed
  3. Judiths Tripod
  4. second tripod?
  5. fixed shots
  6. extension cables

- From Judith**
1. tripod
  2. Tape Stock/ Disk

Kara Fink MA dev anthro  
Betsy Hagestedt

Improvised tripod - discuss heights, spent £25 on Disks x 6 £25.99 on tapes - x 6

should think about writing up a paper on conference seminar filming using basic equipment problems, solution results  
Publish in DAJ - Claudia Research methods paper

**Figure 3 Shooting Teams**

We live streamed the Anthropology postgraduate seminars 2010 and 2011 using two cameras and radio microphones to 41 countries worldwide.

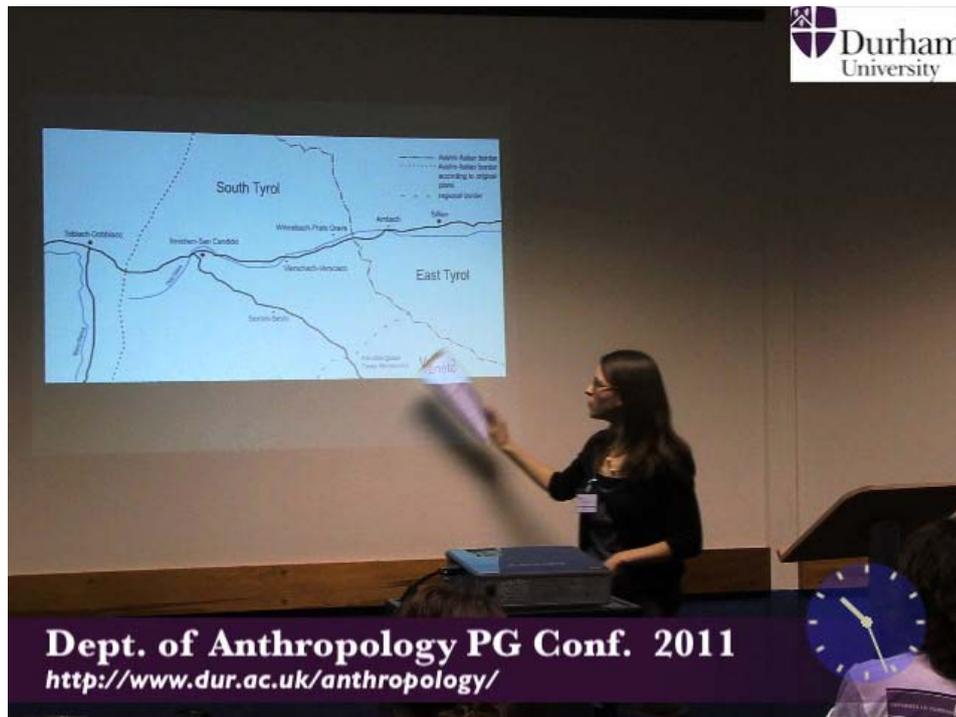


Figure 4 Post Graduate Conference 2011

We gathered usage and geographical data in real time and at the 2010 conference I was able to monitor the filming and simultaneously present a think piece presentation on universal story plots and the constructions of personal life narratives.

Making the conference a media event in a quiet way added a certain zing to the performances and it was satisfying for the closing speaker to be able rather casually to mention we had been viewed live on every continent.

It was a great playground to be able test out ideas which under the constraints of the commercial world I just couldn't afford the time to do.

A very useful and practical outcome came from being asked to film a strategy meeting for the creation of a new masters degree in evolutionary medicine. By creating an online web TV portal similar to anthropology TV,

the meeting could be viewed globally, something that I'm told helped effectively to get the message out and support and feedback for the program in.



Figure 5 Evolutionary Medicine Strategy Meeting on <http://www.evmedtv.net>

## 12. A One Day Filmmaking for Anthropologists Course

Late summer arrived and gave way to October the start of a new academic year. My time was coming to an end.

I wanted to bring everything together into a **'One Day Filmmaking Course'** and a demonstration of a fully functioning **IPTV anthropology channel**.

In a normal 8 hour working day I was sure I could take a complete novice through the conception, production, editing and presentation of a 3 minute short film for mobile phone, web or TV. With a few more hours I was sure I

could get them to convert the files and upload them to my live anthropology full facility IPTV system ready for the world to view.

If it worked well the next step was to get the course accredited as a teaching module and leave the department with enough equipment to film seminars, a possible course module, an archive of films, three WebTV channels and a mechanism for hiring me in piecemeal to run impromptu training seminars until they decided to get someone else or let the initiative stall. At least I'd explored my brief as fully as I could all things considered.

I advertised the one day course as my last offering. It proved to be so popular I ran it three times, each was seen as a developing work in progress.

The Outline I used for the first course is below:

2 courses 2 x groups of 4 inc. CDT people

9:30 start groups of 4

Talks 45 mins, break, tea Q & A till 10:30

ALL COMMUNICATION is from what you see and hear (mainly)

from this film making stems from photography and has advanced in 180 years a lot

illustrate simple camera to complex studio set up

so what can we do alone, with modern kit - a lot!

Intro - film making - studio to docu show images

- the look, lenses, DOF, drama, fiction, information, commercial, edu, shoot and run
- The process, pre, prod, post
- the kit - small crew anthro docu

Release forms, locations, legalities, radio mic license, 2012 Olympics, Problems in the UK - case studies, Spain and Germany, other parts of the world  
notes on senses, eyes, 80 fps, 18 Mpx, ears 20 – 20k Hz deviations take use away from reality - film look comes from 24 fps progressive, we have gotten used to this as a "fictional" unreal look. For docu, perhaps want different??

- What do you want to do - aims, research, memories, TV DVD Blu Ray or film
- film once, repurpose - distribute - today web, mobile, TV = Web, film
- Our aims course - to open your eyes to whats possible and give an idea of what to do
- the small crew - kit examples - prices
- the eye camera metaphor, looking and listening, all communications use what you see, hear
- 5 mins on audio visual meditation -
- Media trends - web = TV, Google TV, business models, Globalisation, lack of money, futures

Practical sessions Start 10:30

30 mins to think of an idea - short film, docu, interview, impression, explanation

60 mins story boarding pre production, problems, locations, script, angles, sound.

12:00 break for 30 mins lunch

12:30 start

30 mins on the kit demo - mobile phone, V1, Tom's Lumix, UW camera, Mac, tripod, Mics, 60 mins to shoot and get audio

back at 2:00

digitising till 2:30

30 mins review of editing

Start editing at 3:15 after 15 tea break

heads, tails, sound sweetening, titles, sub titles, credits

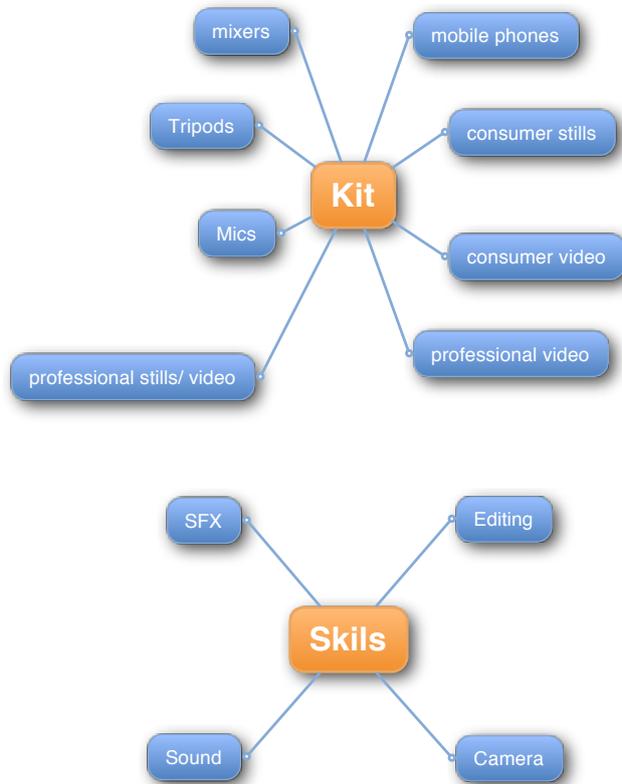
aim to finish at 5:15 - export and process ready to view 5:30

view, Q&A finish at 6:00

email notes and get feedback forms in

#### Figure 6 The First One Day Course Outline

Slides from the course are shown below:



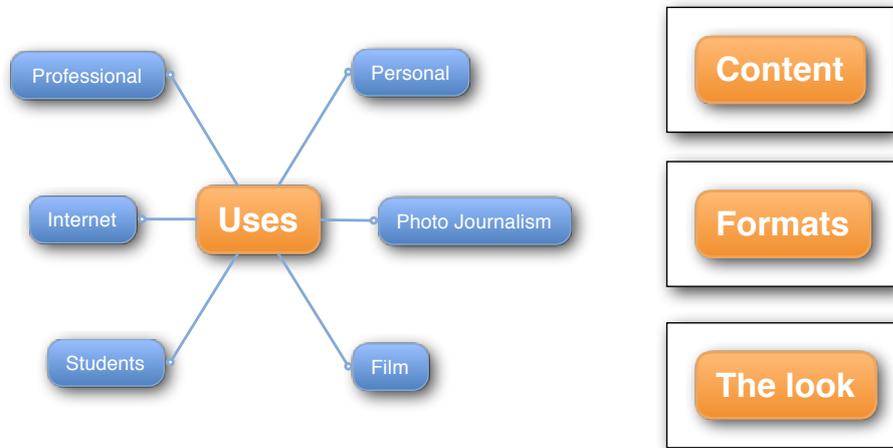
**HOW TO DO IT  
Tech.**

**Workflows**

Demo Departments kit  
Mobile phone  
EX1  
Accessories

Figure 7 Equipment & Skills

## What to make?, RE-PURPOSE

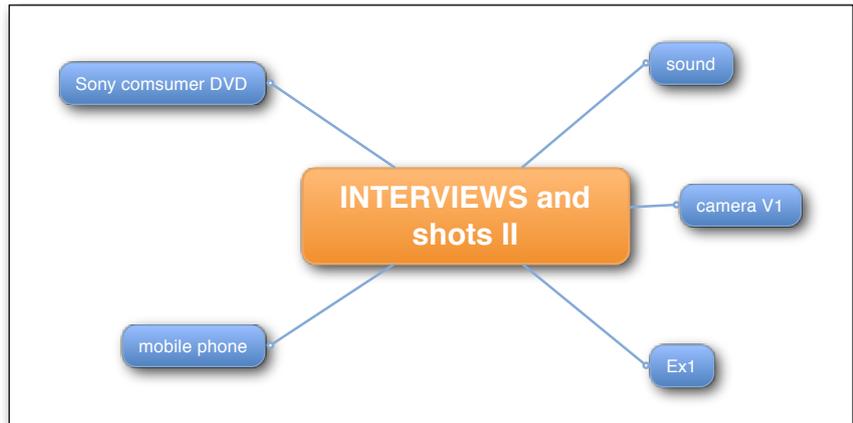


QUALITY of image, frames of reference,  
research verses uses for an audience  
why bad is NOT good enough - phones to EX1  
to 7D - show clips from above link as examples  
talk about perceptions, personality of the  
observer and perception of the kit - photo  
cameras compared to video  
perceptions of reality - eyeball to "the look"  
reality and unreality - what choices do you  
have?  
kit and budgets set up first practical sessions

Today wobbly and shaking isn't authentic  
- its crap and peoples "normality" will  
reject all but the most compelling  
images i.e. Kenedies assasination why  
waste material which is only good for  
personal research when its cost effective  
to  
get great images which can be  
repurposed? Why make it crap when it  
can be made good.

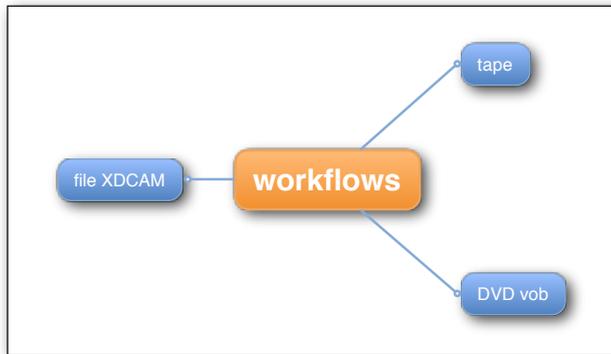
9

Figure 8 What to Make? What to Consider!



Teaching notes handovers  
weddings

**ingres FCP different formats**



You can do more by doing one film well than 100 films badly - one scale one candle!

from LBD I and II and earlier shoots I should have enough material to do LBD III editing

ARRANGE NEXT SESSION - Friday Afternoon? one on one sessions available

1. go shoot a report
2. Prepare two cameras for seminar shoots

**Figure 9 Course Preparations**

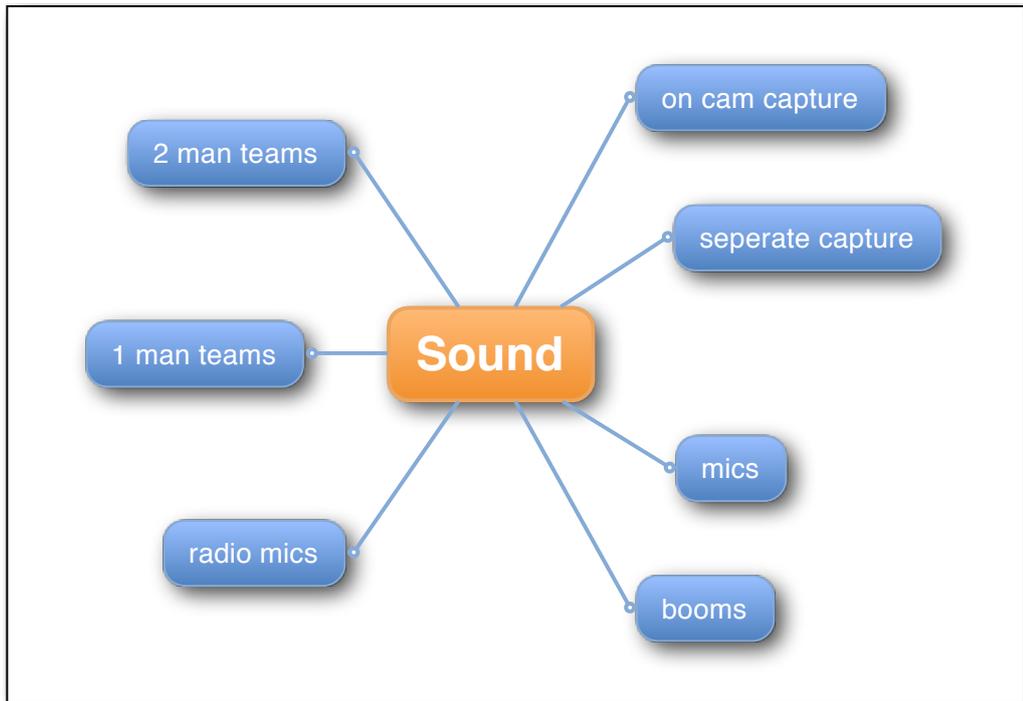


Figure 10 Sound, what does it do in a film?

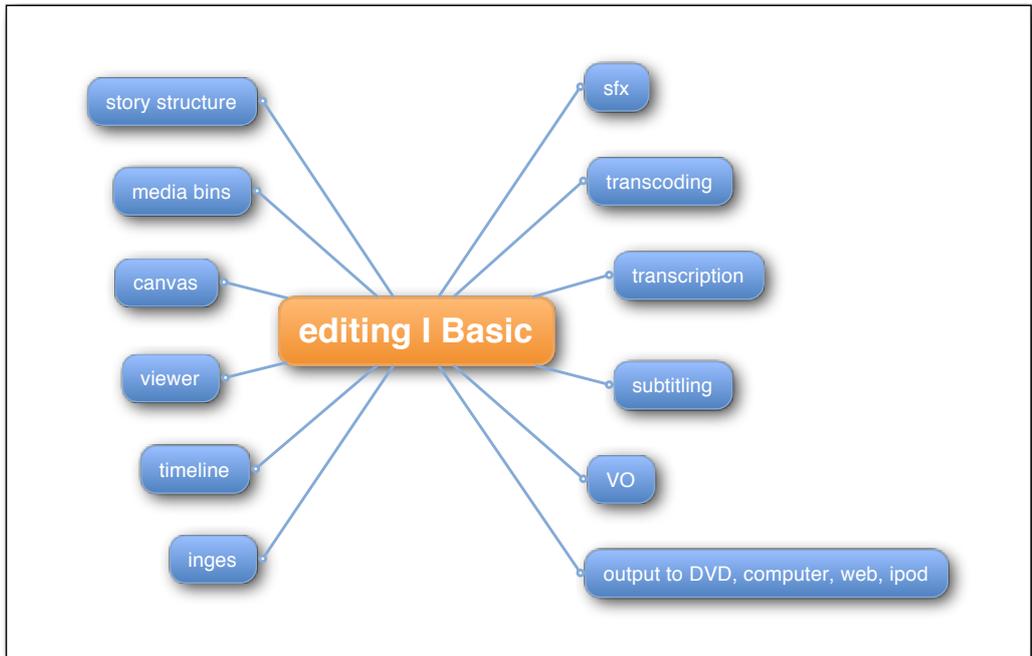


Figure 11 Editing Level One Basics

I taught a very basic level of editing in the course but more advanced levels were discussed and how to integrate with the wider world of media.

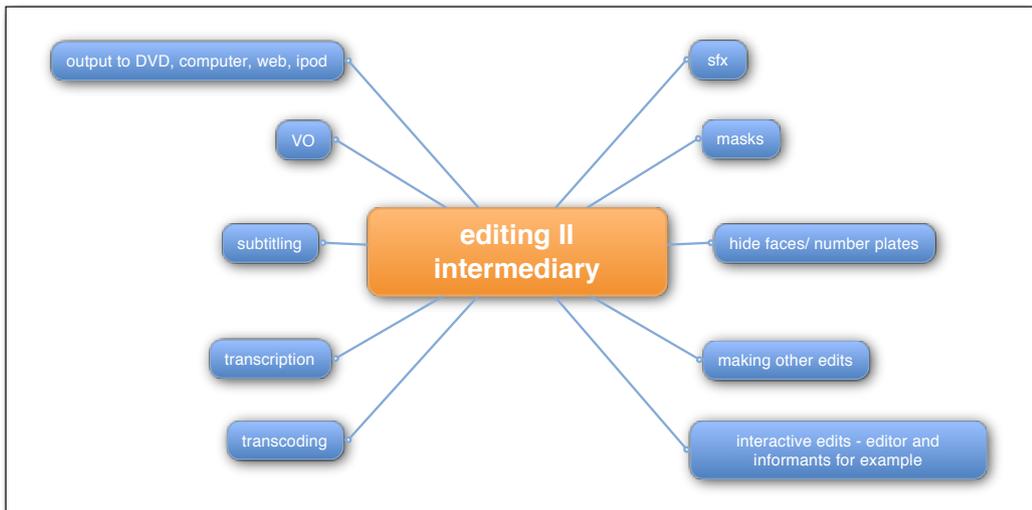


Figure 12 Level II Editing

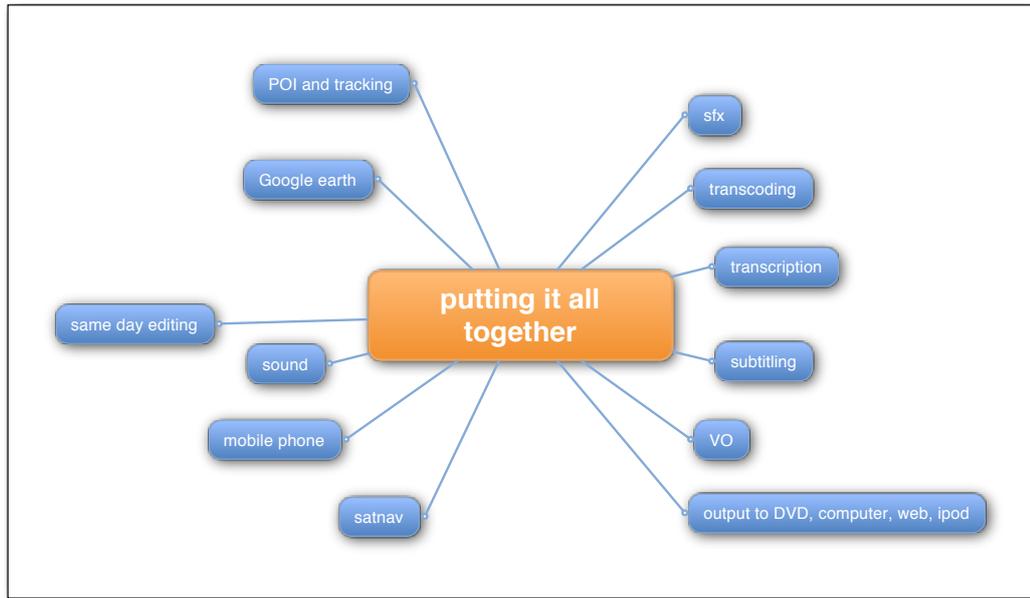


Figure 13 Bringing It All Together

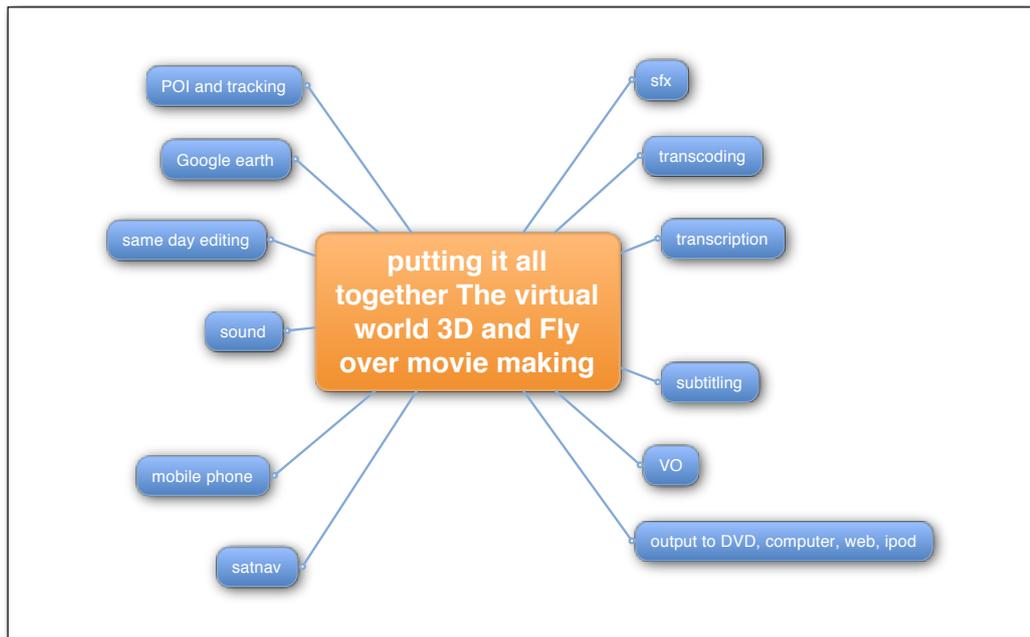


Figure 14 On Into The Wider World

One cross disciplinary student with no previous film story telling experience ran home with a camera, and returned an hour later with clips of domestic appliances, nice landscapes and industrial machines which he made into a

really nice 2 minute educational video which could be seen to be an example of applied visual methods as social intervention. It promotes the use of 'smart grid' technologies, useful energy saving devices that allow ordinary people to visualise how much electricity they use and thereby cut down their own costs as well as have an effect on national energy usage and therefore help impact greater issues such as climate change.

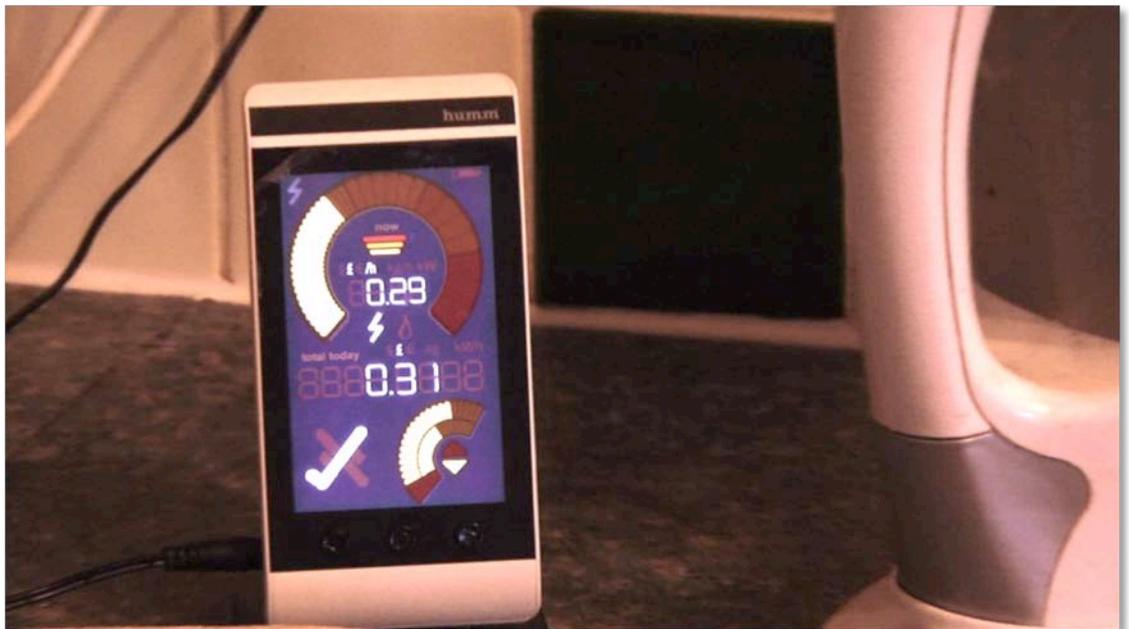


Figure 15 3 min One Day Course student film

Others on the course faced different challenges.

On the last one, three individuals left on a wet lunchtime each armed with a different recording device to shoot their films. One had a special underwater camera with integrated GPS and on-board laser beam, another a smart phone and another a broadcast shooting kit. I had to drive to the University offices for a quick meeting about my IPTV ideas but when it had finished, I still had an hour to wait and the Dun Elm pub beckoned. It had drizzled constantly all day but now the sky darkened, the air thickened,

there was a bang and boom and the air smelt of peat, ozone and wet dog. Maybe it's just me but there is something primeval and electrifying about being outside filming nature's fury. I finished my drink and in an act of uncharacteristic compassion motivated by concern for the cameras I decided to pick them up and drive them back to base.

Despite being totally drenched, the filming had gone well, apart from one person had forgotten to clean the rain off the lens of the underwater camera so we had a great film of streaky lines, and another forgot how to switch the mobile phone on and off, random clips of feet on muddy paving stones and the inside of pockets aren't that compelling. The lady with the broadcast camera however had been sensible and turned around, she'd had fun on the staircases, the camera was nice and dry and we were treated to a film about rain, windows and perceptions from the *inside* of the building. Such lessons in filming for the novice are priceless.

### **13. Anthropology Internet TV (IPTV)**

I completed my prototype of a complete, fully functional integrated WebTV system (IPTV) which is still live at [www.anthropologytv.org](http://www.anthropologytv.org)



Figure 16 Anthropology Web TV <http://www.anthropologytv.org>

The 'about' section on the webpage explains the system briefly. The event is live broadcast using a basic laptop computer with a webcam or more advanced laptops with external cameras and software vision mixers below:

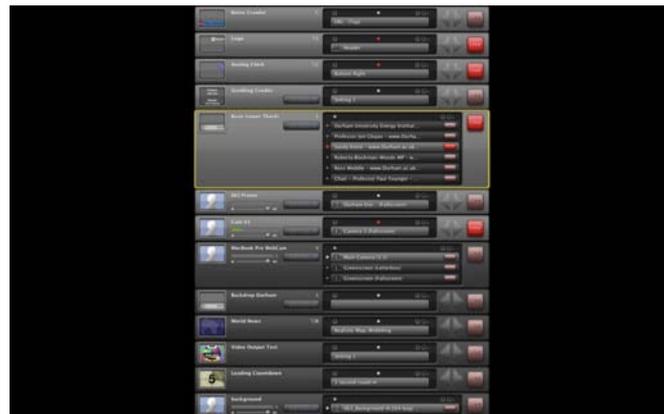


Figure 17 Boinx TV Software Vision Mixer



Figure 18 Live Web TV Broadcast Studio Test

The front page 'Anthropology TV' runs like a normal TV channel. Programs and content are scheduled and run continuously in a 24/7 loop. The viewer simply goes to the page, checks any program lists and starts watching whatever is running. This stream is powered by a system developed by the company 'Live Stream' and can handle in excess of 100,000 simultaneous viewers globally. In practice for this kind of niche content channel, a few hundred simultaneous viewers is considered good going.

The 'Video Archive' section allows you to upload a large number of video files and choose the archived program you wish to watch. Simply click and view.

This system differs from standard online video streaming providers as it allows for real time live broadcasting. Imagine the department had a very special guest speaker and wanted to allow distanced learning students, other universities and individuals all over the world to take part. With very basic equipment it's possible to connect (with a special password) to the channel, interrupt the scheduled program and broadcast the event live to in excess of 100,000 people.

## 14. Live Broadcasts and On-going Activities

All things come to an end, I handed over the equipment I'd bought, delivered my final report, said my goodbyes and drifted off into the sunset.

Since leaving Durham at the end of 2010 I'm glad to say I've maintained links and my skills continue to be put to good use. In early 2011 I was invited back to run a half day Final Cut pro editing session, provide technical assistance to a South Asian online Film Festival and live stream around the world a high profile debate from the Newcastle Centre For Life <http://www.life.org.uk> for the Durham Energy Institute (DEI) on carbon capture.



Figure 19 Durham Energy Institute (DEI) conference on carbon capture

Using the same kit and techniques I'd prototyped for the department I was able single handedly both to film and record the event on two cameras for a

DVD version and simultaneously live stream it around the world. This did however highlight the never ending law of sod, my kit worked as expected but despite best assurances, the Centre for Life's internal internet wi fi and then cable line intermittently failed leaving our audience blacked out for minutes at a time. I'm sure even the BBC had teething problems way back in 1932.

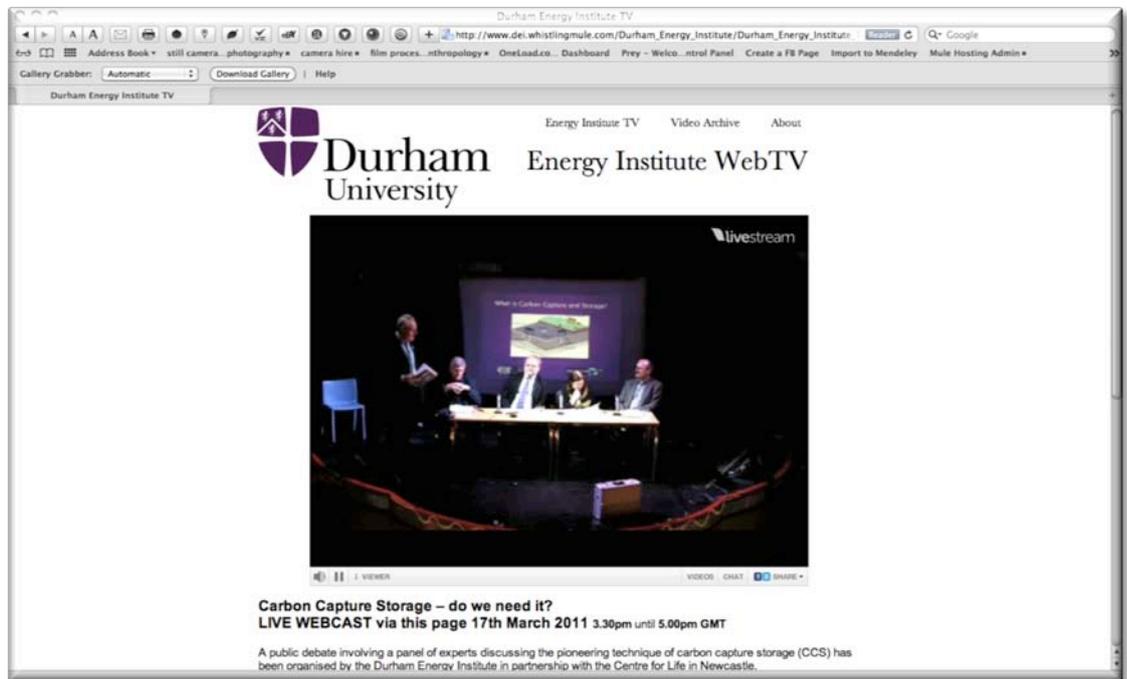


Figure 20 Durham Energy Institute Live Webcast <http://www.dei.whistlingmule.com>

## 15. Technical World, Technical Lock In

My final words in this section are reserved for the universal problem in a technical age of 'technical lock in'.

Humans are incredibly flexible, or they can be, machines aren't and as they grow in number and we become more and more dependent on them we get locked into limited ways of doing things.

Talking to members of this anthropological community of practice I'd been told numerous times that IT support was minimal for non standard computing platforms such as the Macintosh and support for innovative online media projects almost non existent.

This was also my experience and as most of my professional work is done on Macintosh's and most of my projects by the universities standards are 'non standard' there were problems. For my film seminars I'd bitten the bullet and just used my companies equipment and IT facilities but something that should have been simple became a real problem for a real project I worked on that had to stay within the university.

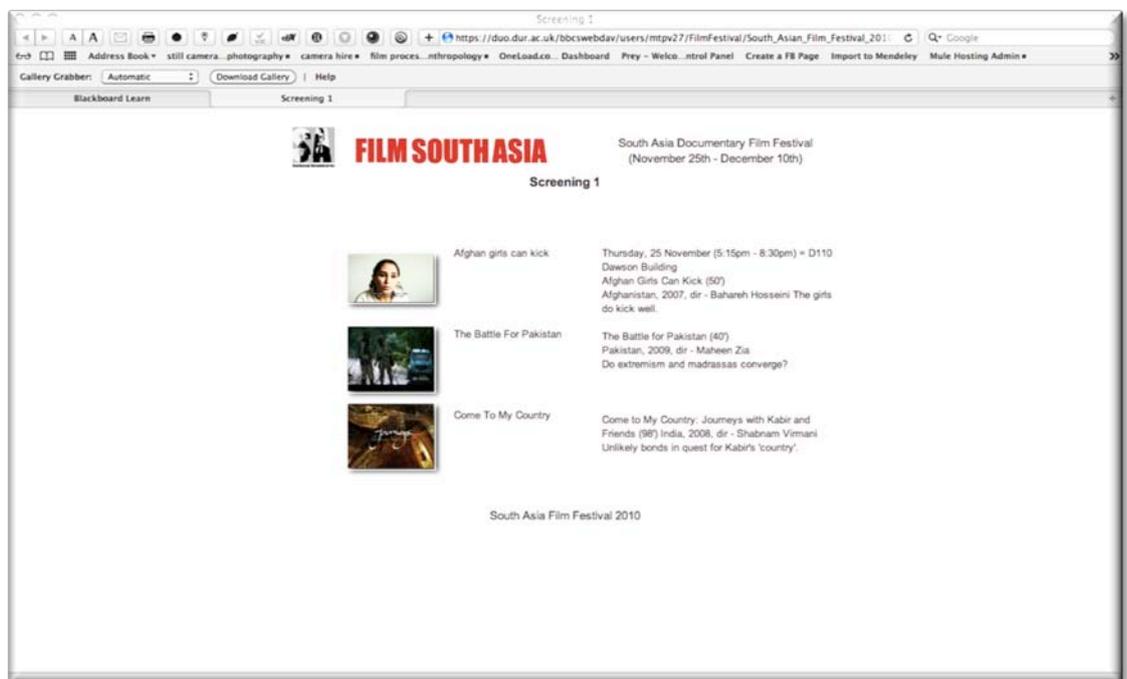


Figure 21 Film South Asia online Film festival

The **Film South Asia Film festival** should have been a fairly straightforward project but we didn't have much time.

Twelve films had to be digitised and made available online to students only for a limited time period.

Corporations can be deadly to innovation for two basic reasons,

1. Everything takes forever
2. Finding a way through the labyrinth by following normal procedures is likely to lead to death by brain ache.

At times one has to be quite creative to get anything done. So it was in this case.

After long chats with the high priests of techdom I was told to upload my self-digitised files (there was no digitising service) to a personal web space, which turned out to be too small. After increasing quotas it turned out a firewall was blocking access and then there were concerns about bandwidth usage in case of high user demand. I could have done the whole thing on cheap £10 a month external host in a day, this was taking weeks.

Durham is a well funded university so I doubt that the problem was financial. In the end we had to innovate and host the film files away from the university and build in protection so they could only be accessed by legitimate Durham students. I can do this, but any non technical person wanting to innovate in their discipline in this way would have given up.

Technology in a university of all places should facilitate and empower individuals and communities, not lock them in and block innovations or am I being idealistically naive?

## **16. Summary**

Section one concerns the evoking of a community of practice to teach and explore the use of filmmaking equipment and the processes behind filmmaking. It describes the practical seminars and the real world filming that took place. It explains how the development of the community lead to practical results in the use of cameras, microphones and editing equipment as research tool as well as tools to record, reflect and produce communication material and films. It relates the experience of linking to other communities of practice at another university and the exchanging of skills and ideas. The results were a one day filming making course and an online WebTV channel for anthropological content.

## Section 2

# The Problems With Observation

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*“We reflect on and evaluate the past through weighing up and sifting through our memories, just as with a set of old photographs.” (Edgar 2004)*

### 1. Seeing & Hearing

I wanted to explore what anthropologists did when they participated and observed. I convened a seminar which I hoped would dig into the heart of the matter. I entitled it ‘SEEING & HEARING – observation in participant observation and shoot and run documentary’.

To make documentary based on observation you might of course think you have to be a keen observer. In reality a mainstream commercial producer or director will have an idea and then try to get money. Depending on budget and who it’s pitched to researchers and writers prescribe what is going to happen and a director, camera and sound crew go and get what they need, the film and it’s ‘meaning’ are assembled in the edit room. The actual ‘observation’ during filming is very often limited as the director already has a pre-conceived idea in his or her mind, it would be unfair to say generally these prior ideas remain unchanged to the end of the film as every director and film is different but commercial constraints limit the time to observe and reflect. Perhaps wildlife documentaries are an exception, but even then stock footage is a lot easier to get than sitting, waiting and watching.

Anthropologists in the field presumably also need to be keen observers? From an advocacy and filmmaking point of view with their privileged access and extended stays they are in an almost unique position to produce something much more interesting, useful and relevant than standard TV, in the light of the terrible number of terrible programs that are flushed around the world daily misrepresenting people in so many ways, some would argue they have a duty to do so.

Anthropologists perhaps aren't generally under the financial pressure and time constraints of a commercial production or have an editorial board breathing down their necks. They are therefore in a precious position, they have the freedom and the possibility to really 'do something' when making their films. Independent filmmakers have important voices but anthropologists have uniquely different sorts of film to make. Films that benefit from a more systematic and deeply informed contact with a people.

We live in a time where it is possible to do incredible things with unobtrusive cameras and small budgets. long-term participant observation is the way, now is the time so my question was why wasn't the opportunity being taken more often and more widely?

With that in mind I wanted to explore observational skills.

The seminar was quite structured. I designed it to be meditation on the senses used in filmmaking, your eyes and ears.

As this was a practical and participatory seminar I had to discuss the ethics about what I was planning to do with the group before we started. No one was obliged to take part. Anyone could opt out at anytime. Everyone had to give consent to be filmed and that any recordings would stay within the room unless express permission was given.

## **2. Ethics**

I talked about media law in the UK, rights of privacy and confidentiality and saw it as my role to guide them on a 'safe' personal voyage of their senses. No covert filming was allowed although I did clarify that once we started I might switch on and off the equipment without telling anyone. Everyone consented to be my guinea pigs. The ASA's ethical guide<sup>8</sup> lines as a professional code of practice formed the basis of discussions.

## **3. Pushing the Boundaries**

The group consisted of postgraduates, post docs and staff, it was a mixed gender, mixed age and mixed culture group. I split people into pairs and asked them to just look at each other's eyes and skin. I had them alter the light by standing in front of and then to the side of a window, shading the eyes to see the effect of a changing pupil on what they saw. I got them to explore each other's faces close up examining every pore and blackhead. I asked them to practice comfortable relaxed looking, not staring, directly at the eyes (which people don't tend to do as it requires a genuine openness and intimacy). It's a question of time and safety. If you sit long enough in front of each other to get to the point where you can just look, hold the eyes, look at the skin and eyebrows, lips and nose hairs and forget your mental backchat, a person's face will change.

I had them invade each other's spaces and encouraged them to go outside their observational comfort zones (hopefully without stressing them too much).

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.theasa.org/downloads/ASA%20ethics%20guidelines%202011.pdf>

I had them close their eyes and describe the world around them using only their ears, listening not only inside the lab but outside and upstairs, how many people were walking around above? What do you hear in silence? Is that whirling noise a fan or the projector? What is the person next to you doing? I was concentrating on filmmaking so only looked at seeing and hearing although this could be extended to all the senses.

Each sense provides a unique way of knowing the world and they blend and communicate and alter each other. When things go a little astray individuals can experience synesthetic effects, senses cross over and people report seeing sounds and hearing what they see (Silberman 2012).

I gave a short guided meditation to calm the mind and increase their audio and video awareness and sensitivity. They were surprised at what you can perceive when still and attentive. The point of the exercise was to directly experience how what we perceive changes with our mental state.

In one fun experiment, I got them to pass around a camera whilst listening to me talking. I asked the person with the camera to try to be aware of their eyes and point the camera at whatever it was their eyes jumped to as I talked. I asked everyone else to make notes of whatever they were watching.

#### **4. Different People Different Points of View**

We reviewed the videos afterwards as a group and discussed what each of us had paid attention to and what we had remembered. Naturally there was commonality, everyone agreed I had been talking in the monkey lab, but the points of view revealed in the camera, the memory recall of what

had happened, the text notes showing what people had been watching and noting, what people had focussed their inner attention on, what they perceived and their interpretations were notably different.

A cursory appraisal of this small sample was that when I talk, women look at other people's hands, staff members stare out of windows and men look at plastic monkeys.

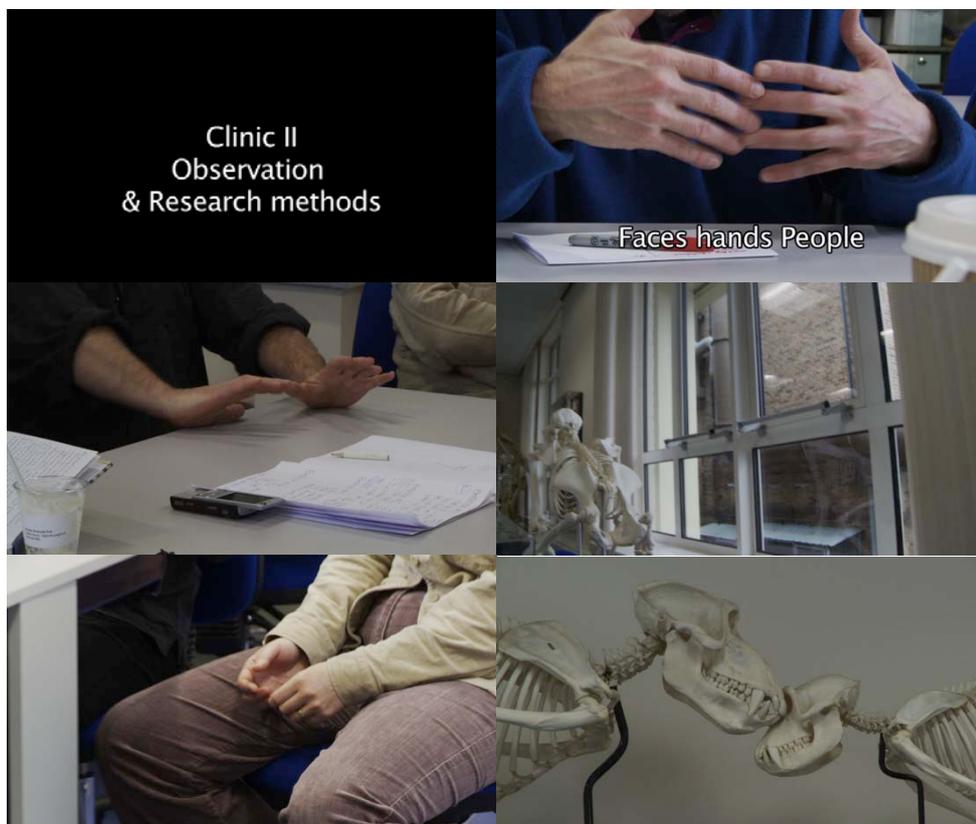


Figure 22 hands, windows, monkeys

The experiment could have been done just with pen and paper but not with the same dramatic effects and benefits. The camera acts as an arbiter between the members of the group. Memory is linked to visual and auditory focus, emotion, concentration and contrast so after the test if I'd asked what time was it on the lab clock or what colour was someone's top

or who had rings on their fingers most people didn't know. The camera reveals these details and generally people accept what they see even if it doesn't accord with memory. On the other hand the camera can't reveal inner thoughts so pens, paper and cameras and microphones compliment.

## **5. Make it Conscious**

It's no surprise that people perceive things differently but this game illustrated the point and more. By asking them to point the cameras where their eyes were moving it made them conscious of something they do subconsciously. Sharing the recordings with the group reinforced the obvious but perhaps overlooked fact that we all can experience the same event in different ways, similar or subtly and sometimes not so subtly different ways but always perceptually nuanced.

Some people were lost in intellectual daydreams and not very observant being more aware and captivated by their own thoughts than their immediate surroundings. Some couldn't 'see the room' with their ears, discriminate noises or see anything very clearly but some were very aware of the world around them and more observant than I was.

By discussing this we became aware of the others point of view. The sum of all these viewpoints enriched our own sense of the space we were in and we became aware of what we had perhaps missed. By being aware of it we could then see it, "ahhhh, that noise is a fan!" said one surprised lady who a few moments earlier hadn't even heard the noise.

## **6. Two Heads are Better Than One**

It was clear to me at least, each person had paid attention to different aspects of our shared reality. By talking openly and reflecting in this safe focused group we filled in the gaps for ourselves. The sum of our shared experience was far greater than any one person. It made me think of the phrase '*noone is an island*', Indeed, if we can miss so much as individuals, without other people what are we? I had a mental picture of a little mole scratching around the ground blindly unaware of the deadly Hawk above, without lots of good mates and lots of good eyes, it's safer to live in a hole.

## **7. Nothing Is What it Seems**

These experiment and discussions led to a cascade of thoughts. If our basic perceptions of a common experience can be so different, then our interpretations of the perceptions can be very different and it leads to the basic question of 'how can you be sure everything you think you see is what it seems to be?'

*Then the uncertainty strikes, perhaps 'nothing really is what it seems?'*

Intellectually many people sort of know this in an abstract sense, in the same way they know other people have a different point of view but spending time digging into it, literally seeing from the others point of view bring it out.

We must share a common sense of 'something' so the logic goes, else we couldn't talk to each other about it, so what is it? It is 'out there'? or 'in here'? or some mix of all of it? What's going on?

As all this was taking place, I was still looking for a research topic for my masters degree, I was hanging out with the postgrads, been to a few good parties, taken a number of really great courses for postgraduates, Durham gets a big thumbs up for its Postgraduate training program, I had many ideas but nothing concrete.

I went to see my supervisor.

In the course of what was a wandering explorative discussion of possibilities he mentioned a man I'd never heard of, John Berger.

Sometimes something clicks, sometimes it thunders.

This is an entry from my field notes from a few days after.

3:00 am, sitting in a cramped but pleasant guestroom overlooking a busy road on the outskirts of Hamburg, waiting for a text to say my family has finally arrived and needs picking up. I start watching Berger. I found his BBC series 'Ways of Seeing' in parts on YouTube. A crazy looking man straight out of the 70's with a big head, narrow shoulders and wild hair is talking about paintings. The lines of his vertically stripy shirt bow outwards emphasising his pot belly. He looks intense, continuity has slipped up, his hair changes from scene to scene, one minute Mic Jager, the next Pam's people. He talks with a cultivated accent, slowly and intensely, never smiling, almost a scowl, overly serious, I expect the camera to turn and see him holding a smouldering cigarette, deep, pensive, perplexed,

determined, his eyebrows are living creatures, I find him comical. The format reminds me of Bronowski's *'Ascent of Man'*. His theme, that the ability of technology to copy and distribute original creative works, in this case paintings allows us to experience them in changed contexts. This changes our perception of the painting and the meaning we subscribe to it. He's talking about paintings and still images, what about moving images and sounds?

Film and TV use only engage two senses, what you see and what you hear,

Apart from people really close to us that we touch and smell and taste, we communicate with the rest of the world at a distance largely with what we see and hear and what's in our heads.

From that point of view in some ways aren't we all already filmmakers making our own films inside our heads second by second and calling it realTV? Our eyes are cameras, our ears microphones and our mind an editor.

I should try and use this as a teaching metaphor.

When I'm filming I say I get into the 'soundman's groove' and the 'cameraman's zone'. For hours I watch and listen, there but not there, visible but invisible, still but alert. How different when I'm actually *in* the party, and really *at* the gig, a guest at a wedding not a recording eye!

I can be in the same physical space with the same people but depending on mood and the relationship to the event, what is experienced is different, what is remembered is different and therefore what I think and write is different?

It must be the same for an anthropologist writing up notes after a day ‘in the field’? as well as observing and experiencing what’s ‘out there’ aren’t we also projecting what’s in here? Berger is right, there are many ways of seeing.

## 8. Meditation And Perception

Although I don’t practice on a regular basis, the meditation I came across in a Theravadan Buddhist community<sup>9</sup> in northern England is particularly useful.

An interesting recent study by looked at the effects of meditation on visual perception<sup>10</sup> which concluded that:

*Training produced improvements in visual discrimination that were linked to increases in perceptual sensitivity and improved vigilance during sustained visual attention. (MacLean et al. 2010)*



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<sup>9</sup> Harnham Buddhist Monastery <http://www.ratanagiri.org.uk>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3132583/>

Figure 23 The Cameraman's zone & The Soundman's Groove, meditation increases perceptual sensitivity

## 9. The Mind Is An Editing Room

The most insightful period for me came during the Easter term.

I convened a practical seminar to give more hands on camera and sound training but I wanted to follow on from the seminar experiments in seeing and hearing, perception and interpretation I had started earlier by using cameras and microphones as prosthetic senses.

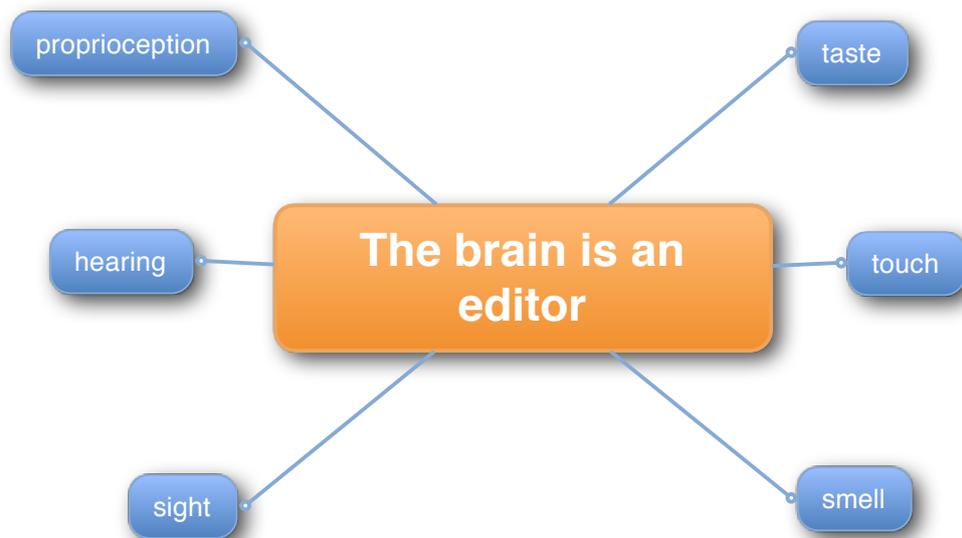


Figure 24 The Brain Is An Edit Room

I used a projected cartoon image of a quickly sketched crazy looking orange stick creature with large bulging blue eyes and bush baby ears holding a microphone and camera to illustrate the idea and make it a bit memorable.

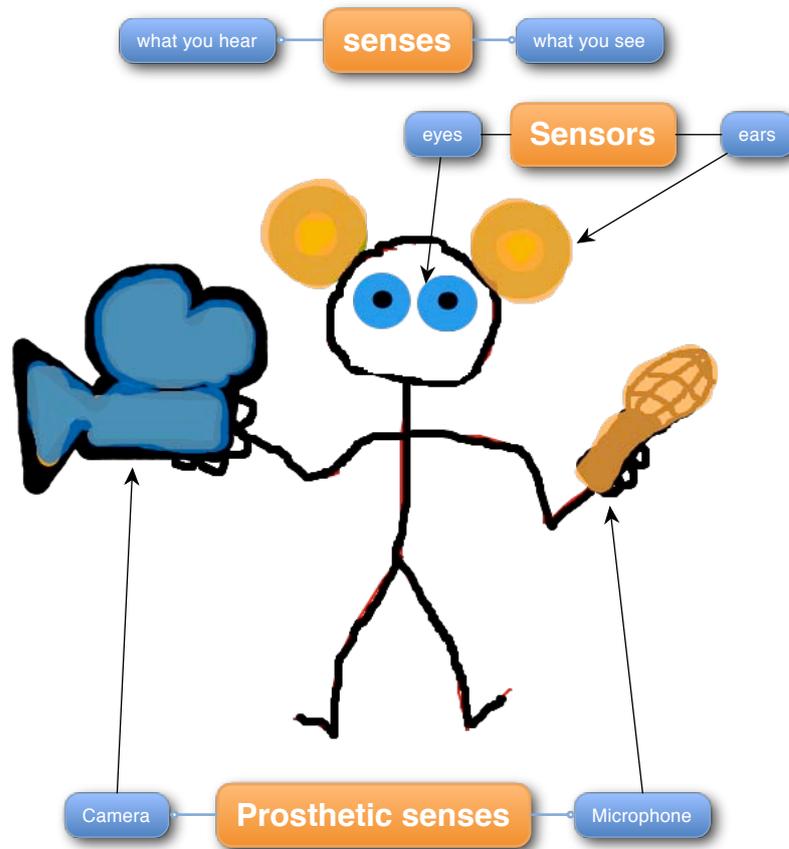


Figure 25 Prosthetic Senses

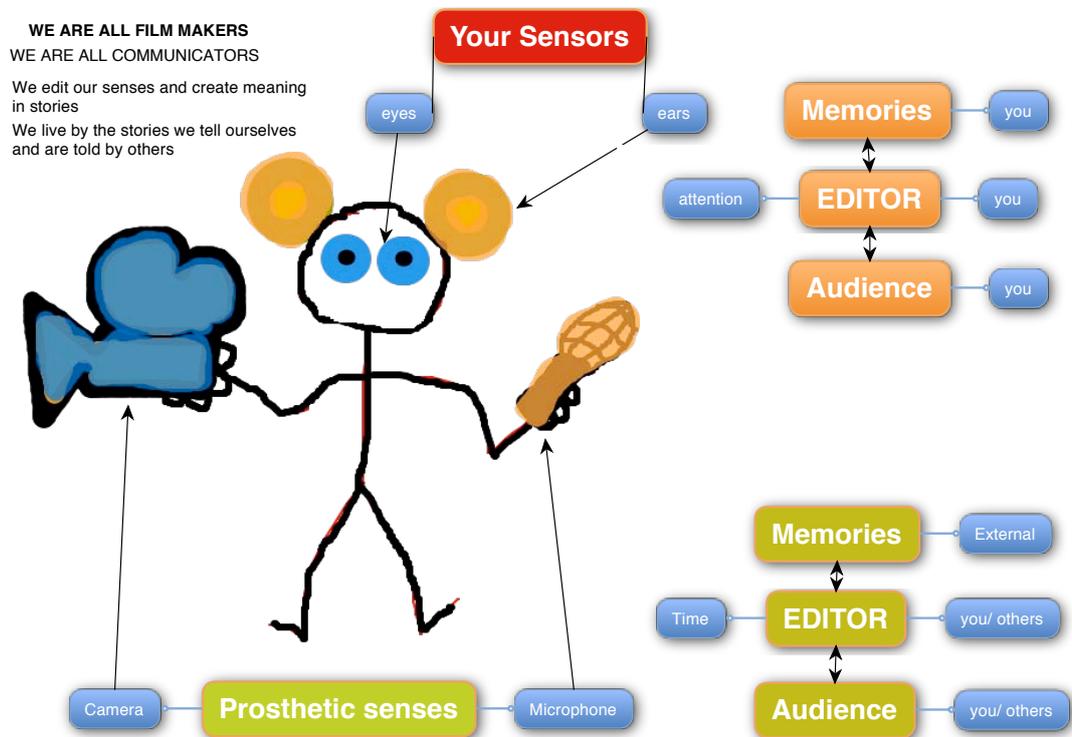
The scenario was that bushbaby man/woman/thing was meant to be doing some observational ethnographic writing of something or other, maybe a wild music Muppet event, and at the same time as describing it as text, record everything with his/her/its prosthetic senses and make a film to communicate what was experienced. We had to imagine going through the processes of producing each account and then consider and compare the differences.

Generally to make a film we first have to have an idea of what we want to do. This can be either very tightly defined or very loosely conceived but it's

not a good idea to just switch the camera on and swing it around for hours. The idea frames our actions, locations and camera angles rather like a fieldwork proposal might for guiding the reflections of an anthropologist. In the field the anthropologist might use their eyes and ears (and every other sense), and a note pad to record their daily experiences. In the filming field we have cameras of various sorts and microphones all recording. The anthropologist might at the end of the day sit and write up field notes, the filmmaker might review the daily rushes and make a provisional edit.

The differences became apparent. The filmmaker has the original recorded camera rushes and afterwards can review them accurately time and time again and share them with others to interpret. The anthropologist cannot retrieve the original experiences to share. The original sense impressions in the 'moment of experience' have already been processed and unconsciously edited in complex ways before the conscious mind perceived those impressions and wrote them down.

Our eyes and ears imperfectly and with large individual variation perceive sights and sounds, our mind ingests these impressions and edits them, consciously we experience this processed and edited version of the reality out 'there' and think the 'film' just made in our minds is real. Looked at this way, we are all already 'filmmakers'? How could we explore this idea further what would the consequences be?



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Figure 26 We Are All Filmmakers

In talks about editing and post-production we had already seen how different we can make our video clips look by applying filters and colours and effects, just think of a MTV music video. If our unconscious mind was also editing our perceptions and could have this degree of latitude to change things, how might the film in our mind differ from a film we might make from the raw recordings from the camera of the same event?

If we then took both field notes and recordings and generated an ethnographic account and an account writing from field notes alone what might the differences be? What might this illustrate? Are we tricked by our minds, deceived by our perceptions? Lied to by an evolved quirk of biology?

What is going on? What can we trust? What is truth? Big questions from a little thought experiment.

For the most part we seem to be able to deal with a fair degree of perceptual variance, all senses must combine to stabilise and compensate from a variety of common referents cultural or otherwise, but for all of us some of the time, or some of us all of the time, reality will be well outside any normal variance, I was reminded of the condition of synaesthesia (Silberman 2012) and a book by Oliver Sacks called 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat' (Sacks 2009). From the social and cultural anthropological point of view, people react and act based on the realities they experience, so the mechanisms of variance are interesting but not of primary concern here.

## **10. Optical Illusions and Tricks of the Mind**

At this point it's fun to show a few of the commonly used and freely available online images that we know trick or confuse us.

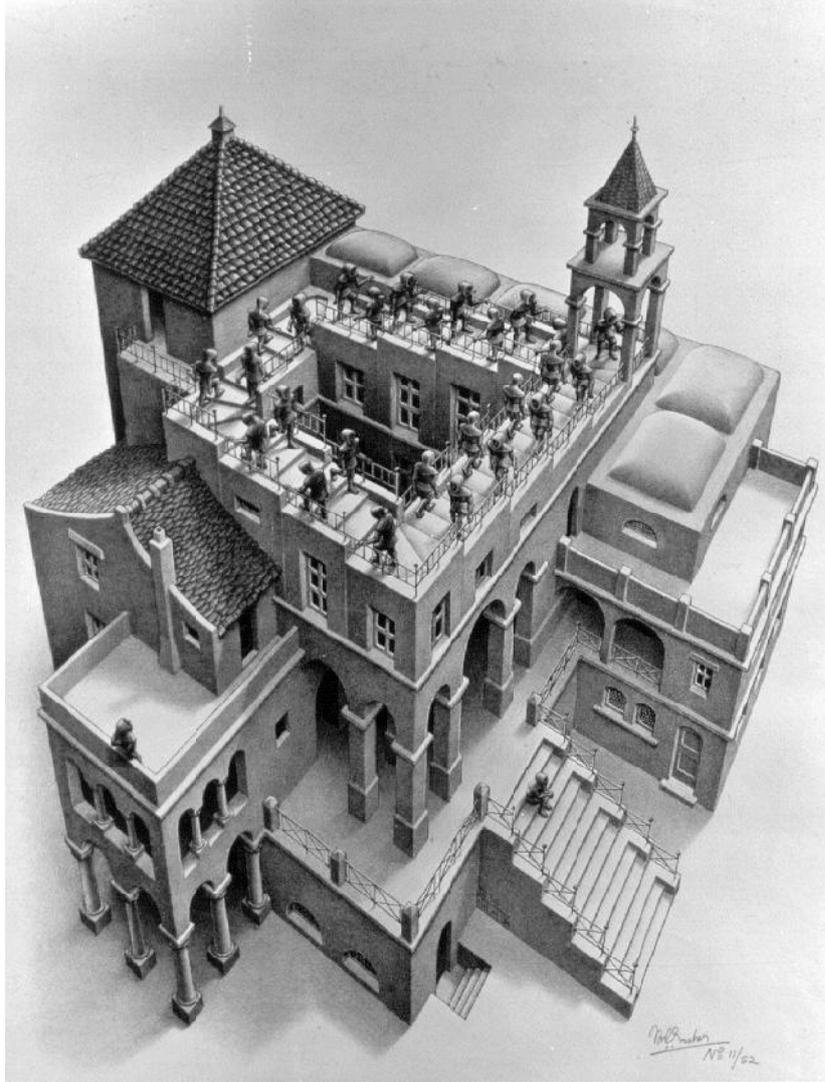


Figure 27 Escher, ascending descending 1960

Optical illusion, an impossible staircase



## **It's that Horrifying Moment**

**...when you realize that your friend's fat arm makes you look naked in that office party photo.**

Figure 28 Anon, Facebook Viral image 2012

This reminds me of those 'look twice' moments when what we see doesn't seem to fit the context we see it in.

# OCCUPIERS



What my friends think I do.



What my mom thinks I do.



What society thinks I do.



What the liberal media think I do.



**What fox news think I Do.**



What I actually do.

Figure 29 Anon, Facebook Viral Image 2012

This reminds me of childhood games playing 'what do they think of us' but as adults maybe to often we judge only from our own point of view?

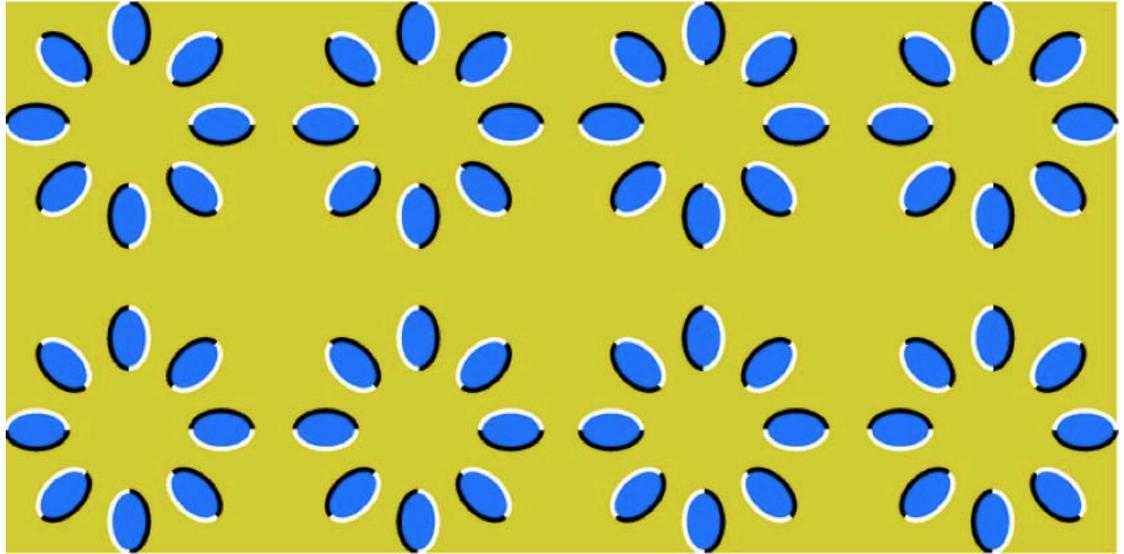


Figure 30 Anon, Email Optical Illusion Viral 2011

Something strange is going on in my mind, are they moving?



Figure 31 Sony Advertising Promo Image

Stare at the three dots for 30 seconds and then look at a white wall.

We live in increasingly visually literate cultures and so for many these tricks are easily recognised and discounted but it doesn't take a huge leap in imagination to put yourself in the place of someone who'd never seen anything like this before. Is it a trick? Magic? Am I going mad? It's good to be reminded of these things least we become complacent.

A heightened awareness of things and being constantly on guard for deception is good when observing. Maybe a new foreign field site helps heighten our sense of things? With a recorded image I can go back and rethink, with my impressions written down I can't, they become locked in. Nothing is what it seems.

## **11. Memories And Recordings**

*Complete description is impossible. Consciously or otherwise, our ideas and assumptions lead us to notice certain aspects of people's social life, but to disregard others. (Layton 1998, p. 3)*

Of course this is not just other people's social lives. We can only observe through our senses a small amount of what is going on around us. We remember even less. Whether the little that we remember is 'accurate' is even more debateable.

I asked the group to consider whether an anthropologist working thus could not help but impose unconscious editing on their supposed 'primary source' sense of experienced reality. If so, what might we imagine that unconscious editing to be and how might that affect what we record in our

notebooks? What are we doing when we observe and write and then reread or observe, record, integrate recordings and field notes and then reread and write?

The discussion became one of how might the written account of an event recorded in the mind and interpreted in that moment differ from the written account of an event in which the original perceptions could be reviewed again, shared with others and then interpreted before being written?

We all suspected that they could be worlds apart. Does this go some way to accounting for the views different people can generate from the same reality?

An inherent and inescapable problem of sense, perceptual and interpretive variation compounded by cultural differences in how information and perceptions are shared or often aren't?

I can edit the same film rushes in different ways to tell a very different story. In editing a film we edit sounds and images often by editing time. In our minds maybe we edit our experiences through the attention and focus we give to our senses?

It's perhaps useful in an evolutionary sense that at each level diversity seems to be built in, an evolved solution or consequence of biology and information systems theory? Whichever way we look at it, we all experience the same world in different ways. To use a computing database example, there are many 'views' to be had on the same data. What the data actually is or represents, is a different question.

## **12. Observation And Ethnography**

If the basic act of participation and observing might actually be so relative, if we really were in some ways inventing stories we tell about others as well as actually experiencing their worlds, if what we experienced was some mixture of all of this then we could be tricked, deceived and lied to not only by others but by ourselves, what were the consequences for how we view and practice ethnography?

At the very least the exercise highlighted some interesting questions and perhaps rendered conscious, aspects of ourselves that we are not normally aware of, aspects relevant to fieldwork. Was trying to lift the stone on these deep inner processes to make them more conscious in these ways useful?

It was time to get dirty and put both hands into the heart of the edit suite starting with the importance of sound.

## **13. Active Listening - I can feel your pain**

I took part in a training weekend for active listening counsellors based on practices developed by the Samaritans.

The techniques are straightforward but take time to master.

The practice takes place in a framework of confidentiality and non judgementalism and the skill is simply just to listen and let the person talk.

Active listening as a more or less formalised methodology for engaging with others and was totally new to me.

There are ways of Active Listening through the use of:

- Open questions
- Deflection of direct return questions
- Direct questions
- Minimal prompts
- Matching tone and meter of voice of the caller

We practiced this in role playing sessions and I was amazed how after a little practice consciously giving the other person space and listening carefully brought me into their world.

#### **14. Emotional Empathy**

During the lectures I was intrigued to hear therapists talk of 'feeling' what their clients felt, taking on board the stresses and pains or joys and loves of the people they were in therapeutic relation with.

During my last role play I had to deal with a caller who had lost her family in an accident and was committing suicide by taking pills. It would be trite and superficial to say that a role play with actors was anything like the real thing, but these were very good actors and from the way I felt afterwards I wasn't so sure

Despite all the ways in which we see the world, in some ways it's only too easy to make connections. I thought of my own relationships, the difficult ones and the easy ones. Intellectuality may be important so is a hot bath and a hug

## 15. The Horse Whisperer

If attention to sound is important, so is attention to vision and we can always be tricked. Dagma<sup>11</sup> is a horse whisperer who is riding alone with two horses and a dog back to Germany from southern Spain, a journey of over 3000 km. She wants to find a new home for herself and her horses. She wants to feel the landscape, approaching villages, towns, cities on horseback is a totally different way to 'know' the land and the people. It's slower, there are no roads and there is more time to reflect. She has little money and works where she can on route.

Dagma is a friend and I asked if I could come along and meet her every few weeks and film her. The project is on going, we have to find money, we need to sell the film, but the journey is real and her motivation authentic and we plan to produce much more than a travel video but for her it's a nice thing to do but totally secondary. High in the mountains of Teruel in Northern Spain she is working with wild horses. It's feeding time and she is kicking open a hay bail.

The camera is on but unattended, she is centre frame. We see a horse moving towards her from the front when suddenly it appears to shoulder charge her and down she goes. It's a heavy punch and she's hurt. Everyone who sees this clip thinks the horse did it deliberately and gets either upset or expresses amazement. Even I was convinced the horse did it deliberately and I was standing nearby and watched it happen.

Dagma on the other hand knows horses. 30 seconds later she gives an explanation on camera which just doesn't sound right, I don't believe her, I

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<sup>11</sup> The Long Ride Home <http://www.thelongridehome.com>

know her, I'm impressed by her but I believe my eyes not her explanation until we look at the film again.



Figure 32 A horse whisperer falls, why?

There is a second horse to the left, a dominant lead horse. He wants to get to the food first and the first horse is in the way. There are 20 horses running around but this one always gets the food first. There is a moment, 5 frames long where his head drops and his ears fold back as he approaches.

The first horse sees this and knows he has to get out the way. The shoulder charge is the result and the impact an accident.

Dagma knew immediately what happened and when she explained it and I saw it on camera for myself, suddenly my whole view of the situation changed. We can't always believe our eyes, in this case the camera did show the truth, I got it completely wrong.

On a mountain surrounded by wild horses I learnt once again that our minds can deceive us but by using all the tools we have, we can gain insights, more importantly we can remember them.

## **16. Speed Reading Vertov**

Whilst reading Anna Grimshaw's 'The Eye of the Ethnographer' I'd come across a name that many filmmakers mention but who to my shame I've never spent time getting to know, Dziga Vertov.

His 1929 silent black and white film '*Man with a Movie Camera*' is considered to be revolutionary. I wanted to use my ignorance as an advantage and watch it without having read any anthropological appraisals.

I started watching the Cinematic Orchestra sound version, the sound is off-putting so I switched it off. I wanted to watch it as a black and white silent film.



Figure 33 Vertov 1929 Man With A Movie Camera

The Russian titles read:

An experiment in cinematic communication of real events,  
without the help of intertitles,  
without the help of a story,  
without the help of theatre.

This experimental work aims at creating a truly international  
language of cinema based on its absolute separation from the  
language of theatre and literature. (Vertov D, 1929)

Vertov's ambition and experiment was intriguing.

Unfortunately I was under a lot of time pressure to view the film. I noticed myself getting too drawn in to the images so I fast forwarded the film at 4X to get through it.

A film is a sequence of images that are linked through time. Filmmakers make use of the pacing of imaging to alter our perceptions. Our perceptions are altered by the images themselves, their context and slowing up or down the rate at which we see them. This is demonstrated well in an article for AbelCinema online magazine by Mitch Gross in which he discusses ultra high speed filming<sup>12</sup> (Gross 2012) but whether speeding up, slowing down or interlacing key images amongst other less memorable and impactful images, the effects on perception are experimented with and utilised by filmmakers.

I sat and watched this sped up silent film, one hour's viewing in fifteen minutes and wrote my thoughts in real time as a stream of consciousness.

I wrote:

Many perspectives, day night, birth death, voting, divorce, close ups, wides, tracking shots, dolly shots, up high down low all compressed – a deaf mans world if a deaf man could see what many people see all at the same time!

This must have been mind blowing when it came out.

Work, industry, but nothing too negative, the city is cast in a progressive industrious light, a call to modernity and the

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<sup>12</sup> <http://blog.abelcine.com/2012/11/14/altering-perception-with-ultra-high-speed-image-capture/>

cameraman is always present, the camera is compared to an eye as if to say wake up, this is your world, celebrate and change.

An injured man is seen but in an ambulance that will save him, the clean shiny cogwheels of industry are shown, the daring exploits of the cameraman bringing the audience these perspectives are revealed, under a train, under the wheels of moving carts.

The eye is superimposed against the camera.

We see shining modern fire engines going where? to help?.

The whole film shouts out modernity, the time of machines, all is new, this will help you, all is good, rejoice and change, and the camera, the mechanical eye is there to watch it all unfold, racing faster ever forward the great momentum of progress.

Besides this we see the dirt and grime of manual workers, the old and the new, out with the old, in with the new.

Everywhere the camera marvels at the clean dream machines of the modern age and looks back at the grim of yesteryear. It feels contemporary, a woman's naked leg, bathing suits, bikinis, leisure time, holidays.

The special effects are all so modern as well, a magician is introduced materialising from thin air to play his magic games.

Using time lapse we seen sticks forming themselves into patterns, the veil of time itself is lifted, the camera and editing reveal all, the magic of cinema knows no bounds. There are no grim faces, the pain that is shown is being helped, we see naked breasts on women having a mud bath. Communal naked showers, life had never been so good, so free, so equal.

Fitness classes, fitness machines, a collective cooperative effort, look what you can do, and it's all revealed to you using the greatest machine of all, the eye that shares its memory, its truth.

Woman playing sports, basketball, again I'm amazed it's all so contemporary but in black and white. Fit bodies, athletic, muscled, here a slow motion effect revealing the curve of a ball, the saving of a ball by a goalie.

Vertov shows a high density of happy smiling faces – I do this when editing to alter mood in wedding videos. Even a camera on a bicycle, the camera goes everywhere. A picture of Lenin on an arch. Women shooting guns at a figure with a Nazi symbol on his hat.

There are no subtitles but we read what the filmmaker wants us to read, the sign above a club reads 'Lenin Club, Yalta, the first five year plan'. Women are featured everywhere, they want women to feel important. We see a bust of Marx, all this in the last 10 minutes climax.

We've shown you how great things are, this is why, this is who we thank.

We see inside the club, men playing chess, a modern audio speaker, an accordion appears and then an ear so we know what it is, accordion music for the men, piano for the women. Frame record, stop gap to show the camera moving as if alive and then a return to the theatre where we started, the journey starts and returns.

There is a story, this is the way, Lenin, a 5 year plan, progress, modernity, isn't it great shouts the film, equality, liberty, working as a collective.

Its modernist and political propaganda very well done, subliminal, we the viewer connect via the use of the theatre shots, we put ourselves in the place and watch the message.

A man with a gun shoots at a plane, the message, you must protect all this, these marvels that are your lives. We watch ourselves watching the film and we watch the audiences faces and these are our faces, we react as we are told to, what to think, what to do.

Some faces, mainly men are neutral, unconvinced, but many women's faces smile and engage, the message is clear 'men, if you want a happy woman embrace your future'. The clock pendulum swings, a state building collapses, it is time it is time! The cameras show us the crowds (another trick shot - tiled crowd shots), huge cameras in the crowd, we are watching but we are also being watched.

By speeding the film up I realised that instead of getting drawn into the many images and becoming distracted, I was noticing certain key images that seemed to link together outside of the filler images surrounding them. At normal speed its unlikely that I would have made the links so dramatically. When I re-read my stream of consciousness text and reflected on my impressions I came to the conclusion that far from being an exercise in truthful cinema, this was indeed a masterful propaganda film.

By setting up expectations in the audience at the start with text, calling it 'experimental' and 'real' and 'without story', this lulls the audience into accepting more openly what they are about to see, we are more receptive and critically disarmed.

Vertov claims this is a film without theatre but in fact from the key images shown at the beginning we are situated in a theatre. We watch the film from beginning to end as if we were in a theatre and we are led through a series of key propaganda images conveying a very particular message.

Vertov has directed his message in particular at women. He wants them to realise the benefits of Lenin's 5 year modernisation plans and to persuade them that change and progress is good, progressive, necessary and that the old ways have to go. It was also a call to women to persuade their men to fall in line. It's TIME to change it cries, through the camera YOU can see the truth, *forwards*, embrace Stalin's vision and commit.

This was my immediate and post reflection interpretation. I thought Vertov HAD succeeded in his experiment, the visual language was clear and understandable but what he was saying was not what a general audience would consciously understand as propaganda when seen at normal pace with theatre music. However this wasn't an experiment in truthful, clear, real world communication, this was powerful, manipulative, sneaky pro Stalin propaganda for the masses. Was I right?

I looked for other critics' points of view. I found none that matched my reading, most talked only of his search for a pure language of cinema and his use of special effects.

I need to find some corroborating evidence so I set about researching the political and historical context of the film. I found political documents from the time which lent weight to my reading:

Joint Plenum of the C.C. and C.C.C., C.P.S.U.(B.) 1 January 7-12, 1933

## The Results of the First Five-Year Plan

Report Delivered on January 7, 1933

*But the most brilliant confirmation of the correctness of Lenin's words has been provided by our five-year plan of construction, by the emergence of this plan, its development and its fulfilment. Indeed, it seems that no step taken along the path of economic development in our country has met with such a response among the most varied strata in the capitalist countries of Europe, America and Asia as the question of the five-year plan, its development and its fulfilment (Stalin n.d.)*

I felt that by almost accidentally speeding up the film and making the time between key sequences shorter, stripped of the surrounding distractions I could see the links that conveyed a propaganda message supporting the five year plan of the time. I felt I understood what Vertov was doing. Under the guise of an experimental cinema of truth he had produced a clever subliminal pro Stalin propaganda film.

Whatever Vertov was really doing cannot be easily verified and is beyond the scope of this cursory enquiry. My interpretation can only be argued not proven, however I would urge any interested person to watch the movie via the link below and repeat my experiment. See if you agree with my reading, speeding up this online version may be difficult but not impossible for those with the curiosity and will to discover how:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ley9YIbra2U>

Whether you agree or not, the validity of this 'positivist' interpretation depends on the building of consensus, it depends on you following my experiment and seeing if you see what I saw and accepting my conclusion: namely that *Man With A Movie Camera* is NOT as Vertov claims an exercise in creating a truthful universal language of film, but a well designed propaganda film aimed at convincing the masses of the benefits of Stalin's five year plan. Perhaps it is both – or more?

Regardless, the possibility of such multiple readings of Vertov's film and the possibility of hidden meanings embedded in filmic works serves to illustrate again the problems of decoding and ascribing meaning to our visual observations.

## **17. Summary**

This section is about observation and the inherent relativism of perception. Various experiments are made and examples given to illustrate this. Emotional empathy and imagination is touched on. An example of a very hard to interpret film sequence is shown and explained and an experiment in understanding a purely visual form of language by speed reading Vertov is undertaken.

## Section 3

# Views From The Filmographic Field

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### 1. The Heightened Sense Of Weddings

Every summer I film a number of weddings on the south coast of Spain. It started with music videos, now its weddings. My clients were Irish and international couples until the crisis. I've had a small studio base and a plot of land down there for some time. One day it will be turned into an organic finca and art space for music, video and experiments in sustainable off grid living. Ahhh one must have dreams!

It was that time of year again so I sallied forth to point cameras at pretty brides. This time however my mind was full of thoughts from Durham. Instead of being 'wedding film man', I imagined myself as an intrepid anthropologist 'hanging out' with the couple and guests, 'walking and talking' with the crowds, mingling, participating and observing, but what was I observing them for, what was the focus of my gaze and why?

Using the camera I have a very privileged access to a private ceremony, arguably one of the most important and intimate ceremonial days for any family. I have fun but take it seriously and want them to have good memories therefore my agenda is clear from the start.

This year two weddings stood out. One was a gypsy wedding in one of the most prestigious hotels in Marbella, the other a large family affair in a private villa. Normally a lot of what I do is automatic and just obvious to me, but as a participant observer, albeit an observer with a clear agenda, I was trying to make notes about what caught my eye and what didn't, how I was reacting to people around me and how that affected what I saw and ultimately what would be filmed and remembered.

The Gypsy wedding was big, flamboyant and full of colour, at least on the women's side. The men wore normal suits, kept to themselves, drank beer and talked business. The young bride looked like a fairy princess and was wearing the most expensive wedding dress I had ever seen. She wasn't taken to the church in a horse and carriage or a classic car, it was a brand new top of the range Bentley upholstered in red leather.

Very quickly I made an assessment of what was important to these people from what they had obviously spent most time preparing. They would want to remember the expensive items, the 'show', the hotel, the cars, the flowers, the rose petal water baths, bedrooms and the women would want to see their hair, dresses, shoes and all the small details. I'd met the bride's parents a few weeks earlier.

The father was a down to earth wheeler dealer, a short man with smiley eyes but a sharp 'canny' mind, he checked me out man to man and warmed to me when we found common ground and exchanged warm handshakes. But he was only the gatekeeper. The mother needed to know that she felt comfortable with me, that I would be allowed into the bride's bedroom as they were all getting ready and she could relax with me there. She reminded me of other people I know, I could make her relax with some

gentle flirty cheekiness, she liked my work, she liked me, I passed the test and was given the gig.

Some people like me, some don't, obviously I only get the gigs where they do, I have my style and way to get on with people, there are things one can contrive like giving more attention and laughing at their bad jokes if one has to, I have even been known to dress for an occasion and play theatre but its better to just be yourself. Pretension is easy to see and no one likes a 'suck up'.

I arrived at the church early and set up by the alter. I had a panoramic view of the pews. The groom wore a radio microphone and by the time his bride arrived I'd filmed close ups of the whole family, checked out faces, listened to conversations and joked with the groom. He was a young, proud and good looking man, the oldest brother, a hard worker, fit, a fighter, a bit of a prima donna but easy going with his family. He was nervous in the church and respectful to the priest and to get on with him I knew I had to just relax and be calm and confident myself.

Feeling relaxed and at ease is the key then I just watch, I don't move a lot, I choose an unobtrusive place for the tripod and stay still. Then I can close in on faces and watch expressions or take the camera in my hand and get up high, get down low, get an overview, get close, move far away, get involved or remain aloof. The crowd generally don't mind, sometimes individuals do so I have to be sensitive but largely I'm accepted and I'm expected to film.

This day I managed to develop a good relationship with the photographer early on. She was a little overwhelmed, a little nervous, a good photographer but outside her comfort zone and caught between burly drunken men, sassy colourful women and a groom that didn't like standing

around and being flashed in the eyes by her cameras. Later that night we had a drink and chatted about the day and compared notes.

Undoubtedly her emotional state affected what she shot, what risks she took to get a shot and therefore what she saw overall and how she understood the whole event. She confessed to having felt out of control and intimidated by the women, consequently her interpretation of the day was completely different to mine. Whereas I had seen ordinary men drinking beer, catching up, doing deals and obeying cultural protocols (the men stay separate from the woman for most of the time), she had seen aggressive dodgy blokes she wouldn't trust, whereas I had seen colourful flamboyant ladies on a night out enjoying themselves together, she saw rivalries and felt threatened.

Her photographs I'm sure will be good and tell a story, a story that looks just like the story my camera recorded, the story of physical spaces and outward appearances, familiar faces and particular events but if we had both had to write down our experience of the day and what was going on and to describe the people, would our accounts have been so recognisable? Two observers, one event, two very different accounts.

Late one night at a wedding in a coastal village called Nerja I was filming the guests being forced to mime to 'duelling banjos' by a celebrity DJ in an underground dance bar with one glass wall looking into the bottom off an outside swimming pool.

Underwater blue and red lights danced and flickered through the glass jousting with the stage show, naked swimmers pressed their noses against the window and pulled faces. In the midst of this surreal mayhem my

camera and I added a paparazzi zing that this particular group really liked. It must have appealed to their sense of narcissism and bling.

I got the guests to pose, act out, perform to camera which they loved, it was MTV meets reality TV. Afterwards at the bar I was able to show the scene on my laptop to the couple and best man. For that night at least I became their best friend and was invited to stay all night and drink endless beers.

I had the energy and the time and an excuse not to drink much as I was driving. I could have listened all night to the stories they wanted to tell me. The more they drank the more they told. What a perfect way to get insights into their world, privileged access to private stories. Of course this comes with professional ethical and moral responsibilities to respect confidentiality even if contracts grant me all rights, all territories usage of the recorded material.

I filmed a wedding of New York bankers in a castle in 2008 high in the Sierra's, it's easy to play the idiot video man and ask leading questions. Even now as the consequences of 'the crisis' unfolds in Spain and beyond I recall the cavalier attitudes, daring tales and confidence expectation of bailout, protection and atonement of sin from these masters of money.

What was very obvious this time with my participant observer head on was how much my personality, my approach, my attitude affected my own experience of the events and what I was drawn to film.

Simply put, if the crowd was warm and friendly and I was felt open, what I noticed was very different to when I felt closed and defensive i.e. because it was a wild night and there was a good chance of my camera equipment being bumped into or a fight breaking out. I have filmed events where I

really didn't fit in and in some cases could have gotten into problems because of how I choose to look. In those cases the camera becomes not a tool to gain more intimate access, but rather a screen and a weapon to hide behind.

Sometimes I'm pleasantly surprised that my preconceptions are just wrong but when we arrive in a new situation our assumptions and imagination fill in the gaps to and our feelings can reflect more the story in our heads than the reality in front of our eyes.

I arrived at the private villa wedding to find that it was more or less a south London gangster wedding. There were some disturbing looking men and some beautiful women all shouting at each other in strong accents. I really wasn't sure what the day would turn out like, even the flamenco dance act tried to steal the film I'd made of their act.

When I came to film messages to the bride, half the men were loud playboys and the older gents talked openly of their times in the 'scrubs'. I noticed I had narrowed my focus and was avoiding filming certain groups or moving into certain spaces, I was alert and cautious, I wasn't feeling warm and free until the bride's father came to chat. He loved how his daughter looked, insisted I had a drink with him, introduced me around and suddenly everything was fine.

Was I sensing real hostility to me beforehand? As a cameraman? As a long haired bohemian? Was it all in my mind? I can't tell, but as the night wore on I forgot my caution, relaxed and had a great time. It was one of the best films I'd made that year.

Back home in the edit suite the work really begins and as I edited I reflected. The wedding frames the experience of all the people taking part. I

have my point of view towards it and it's my job to make a memory of it looking at it from many angles. The choice of camera angle, lens, shooting styles and framing come from me and my sense of aesthetics.

I am already imposing my experience onto what is being recorded. I can't help but reflect a part of myself onto the event. I get inside it and it gets inside me. I take the raw recording which are already pre-edited snippets of the whole experience pre-edited by my choices which come from my history and experience. I then boil and edit and re-edit them down to 80 minutes. In doing so I leave in big moments and discard the rest, I edit and edit and edit away until only the essentials are left and then I string them all together to tell a watchable story with a beginning middle and end and emotional highs and lows. I add music to alter mood and enhance colours to bring out moments and further amplify emotion and then add effects and some descriptive text. In the end I present a film, a master memory of the day, a shortened, compressed, digestible happy pill which will trigger memories and make the couple smile.

We have a natural tendency when talking to each other to describe our lives in terms of stories, a string of perceptual events strung together in a sequence with beginnings, middles, ends, conflicts and resolves, tensions and relaxations made memorable by emphasising emotional aspects and responses.

When I listened again to the reception babble from one of the wedding receptions, I could hear all these little stories, dramas and resolutions being told and thrown around, mostly bland, inconsequential, boring to an outsider but occasionally a 'character' would hold the court and grab

people's attention. What was different, what set this person apart? What did they say? How did they say it? I started seeing story telling as something much more profound and much more basic.

One night at a wedding shoot, in a hotel that looks like a large white sandcastle overlooking a cherimoya orchard, I showed a ten minute edited sequence of the long curly black haired bride coming down the aisle in her stunning flowing red dress.

I set it to Charlotte Church's 'Ave Maria' and rendered it in slow motion fading from black and white to full colour as she meets the groom. I projected it against a white wall beside the dance barn.

The crowd had been impersonating Michael Flatley after the first dance and came outside for some air. It was a surprise, timed for when the bride came out with the groom. The white wall darkened and the music started. Her red dress against the white wall was quite effective.

The crowd went quiet, all turned to look and stood pints and glasses in hand motionless and after 10 minutes they burst into spontaneous applause. She was in tears. She looked at me and said "oh my god thank you, it was just like a cinema film".

A few weeks later the wedding planner called me and said the next day, all she heard from people was not how beautiful the bride looked coming down the aisle but how amazing she looked in the film against the wall. This is what people had remembered and talked about.

Why? Was she really more beautiful as a two-dimension image against a wall than in real life in a church during the real event?

I Think what happens is this. I had boosted the memorability of the bride's aisle scene in all sorts of ways, in the size of the projected image, in the contrast of colours red and white, with the music volume and the slow motion. In doing so I made it 'larger than life', I made it more emotive leaving a more powerful memory with the crowd.

The scene was also dramatic, it's the classic moment, anticipation before she arrives, questions 'will she come?' and tensions build. Time passes and everyone turns as she arrives but stands in the doorway and pauses, a silhouetted bride and father black against the white haze outside stand before us. The music begins and she walks slowly down the aisle, savouring every sensation as do we by watching her in slow motion.

She is walking a path from which she will emerge changed forever and we feel this. It's a sacred artistic moment in black and white. We experienced the beginning, this is the middle and soon will come the end. We hold our breath and then there she is by her man, the father shakes hands, the bow is passed to the bridesmaids, everyone is crying and cameras are clicking, flashes like lightening herald this moment, the gods themselves are present, this is a moment to remember for a lifetime, her veil is lifted and we have a resolution as they smile at each other and she takes his hand in hers. Our tensions dissolve and we feel calm as the couple approach the sacred alter as the serious part of the ceremony begins.

Memory seems to be coloured by emotion and the stronger the emotion, the stronger the memory.

Often when I ask people "what is a story" they will say something that isn't true. Certainly we are able to lie, the imagination takes us beyond all the normal constraints and allows us to turn things upside down.

We can and do tell untrue stories, but I wondered if “untrue” can have a different nuance here and refer to something taken from life, enlarged and made more colourful and emotive, still containing some essential truth but somehow removed from the more mundane background stories we tell?

In this sense we relate to each other through stories, *Stories* and *stories*. A lot of human effort and energy has gone into story telling and making special moments memorable and I mused about the origins of memory?

Almost a year to the day later I had a discussion with an academic friend in Spain about memory and his remarks made me remember this story and want to include it here.

Whatever human memory evolved for it's not good at storing accurate representations of the physical world in the way a camera is, but is very good at remembering social relationships, faces, emotional states, good deeds and bad deeds and high impact moments.

After the screening of the red dress scene I sat alone on a table making sure all the rushes were backed up before I left. Some of the crowd watched me from a distance and then came over to talk and wanted to see a few scenes.

Normally I wouldn't allow this but in keeping with my 'anthropologising' I showed them some selected moments.

They all had comments to make but very nearly all of them to do with how people looked, the relationships between people and histories. Typically I heard remarks like “oh that's Judith, doesn't she look beautiful, yes she's married to Damian, Emma's cousin, ohhh I didn't realise he had such blue eyes, he used to go with that girl from the next village whose father was the bank manager, ahhh they made such a nice couple”.

No one ever said “ahhh look, the camera is distorting the dimensions of the villa, that wall looks like it’s 100 meters long and it’s only 70 but I can see that the dance barn occupies a floor space of 80m<sup>2</sup>”.

I dare any English person to use their own memories to calculate the surface area of their house. (German’s talk about their rooms in this way so don’t count).

On the other hand if you look at any still picture or better a moving one of your house, it’s quite possible to work this out very accurately.

## **2. Filming With The Malim**

I was planning to film a project about music and mental health involving the Gnawa in northern Morocco and an English musician. What happened on that ‘field trip’ would need a full account in its own right. Suffice to say in terms of the equipment I used, the way I approached the project and documented it, the way I reflected daily on what I was doing drew on everything I knew. It was the moment when everything I’d been thinking about came together. There are some points worth mentioning here.

My camera gained me privileged access and gave me some status but the agreement had conditions. I wanted to make a film, other parties wanted to use me for their own purposes: to use some of the concerts I filmed as promotional material to get more gigs; and to help start documenting what had been until that moment a 400 year old oral tradition. A good relationship and my personal integrity was paramount.

I first met the Malim in a recording studio in the Kasbah palace overlooking the city of Tangerang. He knew my friend and accepted him as a musician but he didn't know me.

I set up to film a jam session of flamenco guitar, hajhuj (a plucked lute), djembe (a drum) and voice. Just before we started the Malim said "Jamie tells me you're a musician as well, I'd like to hear you, pick up the guitar, play with me".

The camera wasn't running, I had no choice, I had to make some noises. There is a conversation that takes place in all improvised musical traditions, more of the heart than of the head, playing and listening is about synchronising rhythm, mimicking melody and trading new melodies, rising and falling tempos, building emotional tensions and giving way to the music to enter an 'in the moment' place.

It's in this space that musicians can feel each other, the sensitivities, the tones, the playfulness, cheekiness, the fight, the daringness or timidity, the spirit of a person is revealed. It is far away from a simple technical rendering of musical forms and the conditioning of years of 'music lessons' which can all too often inhibit personal expression rather than liberate it.

We played for 10 minutes or so and burst into laughter as we finished. This was the moment when the Malim decided to allow me a little closer.

Later in different places, hotels, private houses, ceremonial spaces, when we filmed I was able to directly show what had been recorded and in this way a trust was built up.

I hung out with the musicians, a lot of musical movements shared and I made some very candid interviews. Because of this intimacy and openness

my own feelings guided my judgements, I felt close to the Malim and would have no more betrayed him than I would my own family.

In talking about this particular trip and way of working I have been called naïve by some of my more cynical media colleagues.

For them money, interpreters and their own agendas ensure they get what they want and for a mainstream film person the images and sounds are all important.

With time and an anthropological hat on, the images and sounds I recorded were just part of the whole experience alongside written field notes and personal video dairies. Suitably used the camera enriched the encounter and created possibilities which would have been impossible any other way but more importantly, behind all of that was an openness and trust born of being able to see inside a person through the sharing of music.

A few days later a Spanish flamenco guitarist famous for TV voiceovers but recovering from a breakdown and taking refuge with the Malim suggested we play a gig and that I film it.

His agent organised the deal, the trio would play and I would film in a conference room in a big named hotel, we could start anytime we wanted but had to wind down by 7:00pm. This seemed strange as the musicians had agreed to play for free.

All day the guys worked to build a floor stage, sound system and get things ready but things were running late. By 6:30pm they were ready to play and a crowd started to gather. The floor manager had no issues with them being late, I had the camera set up, they started playing and we were all looking forward to a good night when the manager arrived.

Precisely at 7:00pm he asked us to stop and leave. Our agent discretely took him to one side and after a few minutes came back to us. At 7:00 pm a select group of wealthy locals came every week and used the room as place to smoke, drink and where men and women could meet freely.

The band could have played but the manager had wanted a back handed payment to let me stay and film, that was until one of the guests had taken exception to a camera being in the same room, a room for activities that should never been filmed.

I'd recorded 10 minutes of concert, we packed and quietly left. The camera can provide privileged access, it can also create waves, discretion and sensitivity are called for. I hadn't got my film, I had learnt something about where I was.



Figure 34 setting up in a hotel to play a gig



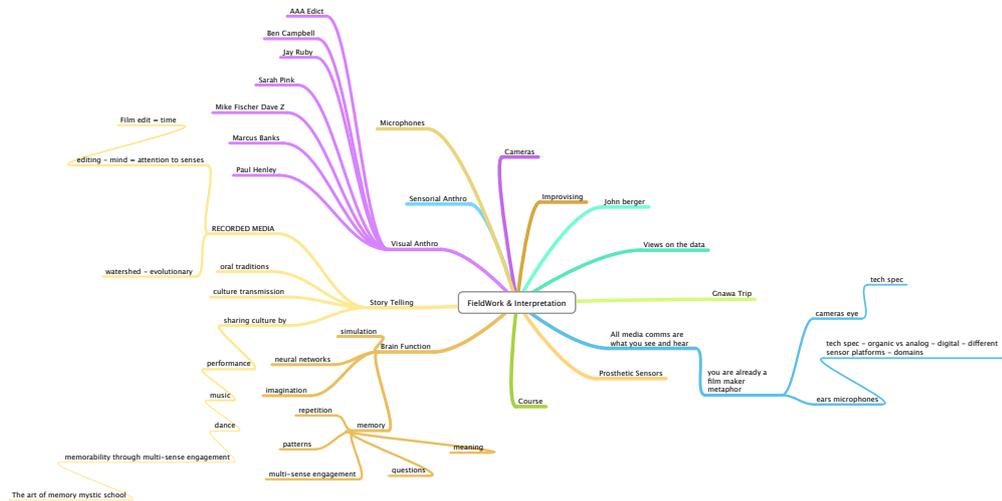
Figure 35 sound check

### 3. A Research Method seminar

There was one more surprise waiting for me when I returned from Morocco which provided the perfect end to my time at Durham. My filming trip in Morocco had been intense and my head and heart was full of it, a few days after I returned I received an email asking if I would present to a post graduate research methods seminar. I was delighted but nervous. As a lone traveller between worlds I'd had some insight into this strange tribe of other travellers between worlds, people who thought professionally about other people but I really wasn't sure if I had anything interesting to say to a research seminar.

I decided to make a mind map of all the practical and theoretical issues that my learning to make a film seminars had touched on, print it out and then

just improvise my way through in the manner of a musical Gnawan jam session.



It was a buzz, the seminar convener kept me on track and picked up skilfully where I could have floundered. It was possibly the best academic buzz of the year.

Apparently from some later feedback I was told I had suitably stirred the pot and provoked interested debate.

I'd also chewed it over and a few details are worth mentioning here.

By bringing in the small, light, portable editing equipment I used on location I was able to connect to the seminar room AV system and jump between mind maps and video clips at ease.

I could play my clips directly through the projector and skim through hours of rushes and play moments to illustrate points which arose spontaneously during the questions and answers.

The use of new, fresh material brought a energising light to the debates and talking on my feet was a great way to rework myself through the experience.

I was able to show Gnawa ritual music and dancing and my own arrest in a Tanger's café. The arrest generated particular interest.



Figure 36 Gnawan ritual music

I was filming an interview with the Gnawan master in a local café. The café owner was friendly and insisted on telling me all about the place. It turned out it was one of William Burroughs favourite hangouts in the 60s.

As I was with the Malim, I felt to a certain extent, accepted, 'protected' and welcomed. I felt at ease and relaxed. On the one hand this is good, on the other it can take you off guard. I hadn't noticed the looks I was receiving from some others in the café who had taken exception to the camera. I have a recording of the moment when during an interview with the owner, his face turned from happy smiles through anger to nervousness when a

police informer came up behind me and asked me to accompany him to the station.

I had to show my passport and papers and explain myself, always difficult moments but as I wasn't doing anything wrong I was delivered back safely by a frustrated and visibly nervous and annoyed informer.

later in the same cafe I learnt more about what goes on in the local scene that I could have ever imagined from just that one incident.

Even now as I look at those rushes I see things I hadn't noticed at the time or since. All of that context and detail would have been lost if I'd just written up notes from memory. I would never have captured such a moment on a stills camera, it had to be a video camera, it had to have been on, it provoked the situation but I learnt a lot from it.



Figure 37 cafe owner telling me about William Burroughs



Figure 38 change of expression just before I get arrested

Using cameras without sensitivity can be dangerous, but so can being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm all for anything that can help keep our self-awareness high, keep us conscious but I think there are times and places for all these tools.

I was arrested for many reasons but partly because I didn't read the situation around me well enough, or perhaps I wanted to do what I was doing so ignored it. I mis-interpreted the situation.

No matter how aware and sensitive we become and how well we understand and empathise with the people around us mis-interpretation is impossible to rule out as we can't have complete knowledge.

It seems to me that we just have to accept its reality and be on our guard and when it happens try to learn. For students of anthropology I would argue learning to make a film is great pre-field training and used wisely, a great tool in the field.

## Section 4

# Qualitative & Quantitative Perspectives

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### 1. What the Camera Cannot See

I had started exploring the camera as a research and teaching tool rather than a production tool. In doing so I'd become much more aware of the limitations of my own memory and the effects of focus and attention on the senses and had managed to demonstrate this with my group. I was more than ever convinced that pre-fieldwork training using these evolving methods could improve anthropological observations.

In the seminars it had been easy to see how a group which was prepared to share their perceptions could build a more comprehensive picture and fill in each others gaps about their surrounding and what was happening, two heads are indeed better than one. In the field however most doctoral anthropologists are lone animals on personal quests without the benefit of a trained 'knowledge hunting and gathering group' to help them.

There are fundamental problems of variation in sense acuity, focus of attention and problems of interpretation to be considered in observation.

Some people are just more socially aware and sensitive than others, personality and likeability plays a decisive role in acceptance and access but even an anthropologist with a record of poor or thin observational skills, a charge even levied at Radcliff Brown (Grimshaw, 2001, p64) can obviously achieve insights so it's not the be all and end all, it probably just helps. With the addition of suitable recording equipment to supplement fieldwork notes, and with suitable training and exercises in reflection and reflexivity, I felt the quality of ethnography could be improved for all fieldworkers.

Good observation is good science. By using the kind of small unobtrusive but high quality reasonably priced camera that are now available to capture the visual and auditory reality of the moment, I reasoned that by comparison with field notes and memory, the lone anthropologist could explore different points of view, ruminate over interpretations, focus on details they missed and by rendering conscious some of the tricks of perception early in their fieldwork experience, be more conscious of the problems and produce better ethnography.

Two heads are better than one but in the absence of another head maybe three eyes and four ears would help put things into perspective and not only improve the basic ethnography but allow for a more comprehensive range of useful research outputs to be created simultaneously such as field blogs, digital searchable field notes, video diaries, multimedia presentations and films etc.

For the anthropologist with the right training, I imagined the small overhead of carrying such tools could pay back in dramatic and new ways.

I had considered the problems of what we can see, what we think we see and what the camera sees at the moment we perceive so I decided to explore the effects of pre-conditioning on the way we experience moments, in other words the effects on us of things the camera cannot see.

## **2. What's In A Place?**

Take away the people and what do you have, buildings, streets, empty cars and empty shops, in Durham a large empty cathedral surrounded by a river empty of rowing students where only the kiss of the wind on the water could be seen, or the rustle of the trees in the evening breeze heard, (if there was anyone around to see and hear them).

Take away the people and you have a different space altogether.

The holes left by our sudden absence would, in time, most likely be filled by new life, new creatures maybe with eyes and ears and noses, creatures who could also feel the cold of winter and the warmth of the summer sun, creatures with perceptions and brains and memories. Durham would be for them very different than it is for us.

But what about us? How do we experience Durham?

Imagine we all have similar cameras strapped to our heads and microphones in our hands and we all walked the same route through Durham at the same time, and as we walked through cobbled streets feeling the same cold biting air on our fingers and cheeks, we recorded what we saw and heard. If every head turned left then right, up then down and every microphone pointed in the same direction, when we played back the results, would the recordings be the same? There would be variability of

course, some cameras might see things a little redder, some a little bluer, the apertures might respond slightly differently to light, light might dance across the lenses in different ways at different times and depending on exactly where we were standing when birds fly by, some will pick up the sound of the wings and some not, but more or less I think we would agree that we had been to the same place, Durham.

The essentials would match, we would have common references to orientate us, here Elvet bridge, there the Cathedral, below the river. Even with slight differences in cameras and microphones and points of view, we and anyone watching the recordings could agree we were in Durham.

But what if our memories record different things to cameras? What if it's not only our eyes and ears that are slightly different and observe different things but also the focus of our attention that is different so we are aware of different things in different ways.

What if as well as these differences in our senses, we can experience Durham not only as it is right now at the very point we look at and see it, but also a Durham from the past from earlier experiences earlier memories and emotions from other times all layered together? How does that effect what we see and our relationship to the place. What does Durham mean to you? What does Durham mean to me?

I went for a walk around Durham. I was brought up here, my parents ran businesses here, my mother had a shop for 52 years and as a child I walked every street and sat on every corner.

I've been away for a long time, places and people change. Today as I walked, thoughts, feelings, memories kept popping into my mind triggered by sights and sounds. I retreated into these thoughts and wasn't really

paying attention to where I was, I was lost in my own wandering world moving hither and thither when my mothers voice suddenly sounded out inside me saying “you look but you don’t observe”. I snapped out of myself and immediately my world changed.

There was Dun Elm bridge, a ‘mature concrete award’ proudly stuck to a wall, its surface stained and uneven like the paving slabs that line the walkway, crooked like old men’s teeth. There ahead was the large stained glass window of the Cathedral looking like the eye of Mordor staring over the river towards me, a blazing red. Below I heard the shouts and whistles and the rhythmic splash splosh splish of a passing rowing boat. The air turned to ice in my nose and I pushed my hands further into my jacket pockets.

I turned away, passed a bakers and from the smell memories swam up from the murky depths. Gardeners was a bakery beside my mothers shop, I could imagine and smell the old white bread sandwiches as I ordered a steak pastry, 80 pence – cheap I thought.

I was both here and now and lost in a world from 30 years ago. I walked past the Old Vic pub covered in thin flakes of pastry and decided to go in, sit in the back room and read.

It was like walking into the slaughtered lamp from ‘American werewolf in London’, new faces turned, old memories returned and I felt at home but I didn’t.

Sitting alone in the small back room on a green backed chair listening to the quiet murmur from the bar it was as if I was not only in the here and now,

not only crowded by my old memories, but also in a theatre of my imagination creating a new romance of the past.

I could sense ghosts of old drinkers sitting all around me, and I felt suddenly sad. Why? Why did I feel sad? for the loss of my childhood world? For my aging parents? Because things change and all must die? I must die? Where did that feeling come from? I was only sitting in an empty room.

Everywhere I walked these three friends met inside me, here and now, memory and imagination. Sometimes I couldn't tell one from the other or at least had doubts. In some places the memories were vivid and my feelings strong, in others I was more in the here and now and less drawn inside myself.

I know I'm not the only one who relates to places in this way. Of course in the chatter of company, in the hectic buzz of the daily rush this liminal space between us and where we are, can be submerged, but in quiet times, awakening times, receptive open times they can surface and come to life.

So what is a place? It's both the real objects we perceive outwardly combined with the ever changing old and new memories and feelings we associate with it. You and I could sit in a pub together and yet be miles and years apart. Isn't it this that binds us to a place, the stories we attach to, the memories we have, create, change, re-invent? Isn't it this that we live as ordinary people and which informs our real actions in this world?

Given the many layers at which we can perceive, interpret, experience a place, isn't it a great arrogance to insist that there are no ghosts in the pub, it's only an empty room? That there is only one way of seeing and only one story worth telling?

If anthropology contributes as Eriksen (2012) says to the long conversation about what it means to be human, then measuring the spaces, counting the objects, looking for the external systems that control us in a place, has its place, and certainly can bring insight, but it isn't enough to understand people and places. To understand how we identify with a place, isn't it essential to understanding the memories, the histories both personal and shared that bind us to a place or send us fleeing from it?

As a child I wasn't much aware of the university, the occasional student would saunter by wearing a straw hat and we'd see them doing cunning punts on the river during the summer, but Durham for me wasn't about students, it was a world of family and familiarity.

Today as I wandered I wondered. Just about every local accent I heard belonged to someone serving pies, digging the road, sitting at a reception desk, patrolling the car parks or working outside in the cold clad in body warmers and green day-glo jackets.

The students, lecturers and 'officials' had 'foreign' accents. Had it always been so? Was this just the new perceptions of an older man? I was a stranger in a strange land, not only that, I'd crossed over into the university, from the dark side to the light side, from The Angel to The Gala. A world of southern and public school accents in the heart of my city.

I've lived all over the world, I'm sure I'm normally oblivious to such things but here the contrast was suddenly stark.

I could feel myself emotionally and unintentionally taking sides feeling distant from the invaders and close to people I had nothing in common with apart from a diluted accent and perhaps shared formative memories. Who were these people in my town?

The university seemed bigger, ubiquitous, intrusive, a parking place for rich children from other places and all around me the locals were servants in an apartheid of accent.

There stands a road worker 'smurken<sup>13</sup> tabs', cigarette held between the fingers but vertically inside the palm hanging by his side, here sits his 'marra' who says he's 'alreet and canny like', across the street and down the street in a hurry runs a 'locull lass' to catch the bus and behind me a rugged fresh faced bunch wearing Durham University sweat shirts in Palatinate purple jostle with a rugby ball, Hurray Henries as they were called when I was growing up.

At these intersections of people, accents, gestures and mannerisms betray origins. It was said when I was young you could tell which village a man belonged to because of the way he spoke, is that still true today? It would be interesting to have a map of Durham city houses by accent and job with perhaps a grey zone for those locals who either never had or have diluted their form of speech, this would include me.

When I think of anthropology, and 'ways of seeing' it's these personal cultural landscapes that give real insight into what it 'means' to live in a place. The alliances, bonds, acceptances and exclusions that make life easier or harder.

It's at times like these that the insider who has left but returns becomes an outsider for a time, and in this liminal state sees other things which the camera can't film nor the notebook record but which give a richer picture of the social world beneath the mantle of appearances.

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<sup>13</sup> Northern Geordie speak, in order: smoking; workmate; he's alright and all is fine'; local woman

### 3. The Hawthorn Experiment - qualitative and quantitative uses of cameras and microphones

A fortunate incident a few days later provided the perfect opportunity to combine a study of both here and now quantitative observations of a place and its people and a qualitative exploration of evoked inner worlds of the type I had been exploring by walking through the landscape of Durham.

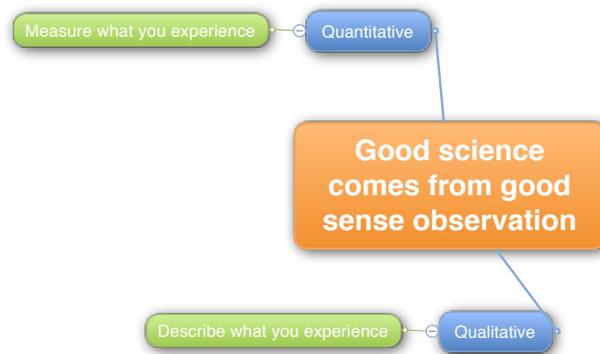


Figure 39 Good Science combines different approaches

It just so happened that my father had been invited to Newcastle to visit the house his mother grew up in.

My father had never seen this house before, he'd found out about it whilst working on the family tree. It was second in a row of terraced cottages on the banks of the river Tyne. Some stonework survives from the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the core of the house dates from a rebuild in the mid sixteen hundreds. The street was taken over by the engineering company Hawthorn Leslie during the great age of steam on the Tyne and my great grandmother's father had lived in it as a worker.

This had great emotional value to my dad and he'd been invited by the new developer to come and see it before it was stripped and rebuilt. My dad had asked me to come along with my camera. I knew a group of us would be there, we would see for the first time the inside of the house. I imagined this would stir memories in my dad and he would 'imagine' lots of things as he joined dots in his mind. We would only have about 30 minutes with the director of the development company and I wanted to capture the house on camera and compare it later to what we remembered, then record my dad's memories as we walked around and ask him if it was what he had imagined it might be before we arrived. I thought it would be interesting to use these three conceptual categories: the present moment; triggered memories and prior imagination as a guiding schema to look at our common experiences in the house, to dig a bit into our collective and individual experiences in a way which could be shared and illustrate both the similarities and difference in our perceptions on these three levels. I expected the here and now of the actual building to be a link, we would all see that, but I wouldn't have access to my dad's memories apart from what he told me on camera, in this way he would experience the building differently and I certainly couldn't imagine in his way what to expect and what the reality would be.

We met the developer on time during his lunch break on a noisy weekday, workmen were erecting scaffolding on a grandiose building opposite.

We hadn't asked for permission to film prior to the meeting but he had no objections, quite the opposite, he seemed to be comfortable in front of the camera.

I took a small handheld camera with me, the Sony EX1. This is a full HD broadcast quality hand held camera whose onboard stereo mics are fine for

recording voices in confined spaces. I set the exposure to automatic as we'd be moving in and outside, from dark to light and I set the white balance to auto tracing meaning it would adjust itself slowly as we moved around. The stereo audio mics were set to manual 65% volume and wind noise filter off so more or less I could just point it at what my eyes were looking at and it would do a good recording job in all conditions, no need to fiddle around with set-ups, no need to stage anything or interrupt the flow, simply record my POV (point of view) of what happened.

We met the developer outside. I took exterior shots, brick work, adjoining road, nice slow panorama of the scene to situate it and then over the shoulder shots, side profiles and close ups of dad talking to Ian and looking at maps.

There is a precise mathematical relationship between the image a camera records and what it's pointed at. It's good positivist science so using special software and a computer it's possible to take still pictures from the video and generate accurate 3D models of the physical spaces visited. This can have useful applications in material cultural studies, forensic anthropology and archaeology for example.

After the building shots I took a few cut aways of the maps, close ups of the doors, arches and then I ran ahead to catch dad and the entourage walking past me to the main door to capture the human element.

Once inside my father, my sister, the developer and his manager walked and talked for 30 minutes and I filmed. The talks were detailed and the useful information dense, I could have never kept up with a notepad and I would have missed so much body language, smells, the spatial relationship of rooms, the building aspects that were pointed out.

Maybe if I could have combined my fathers points of view, mine and my sisters afterwards we could fill in the gaps?

When we all left my father was 'chuffed' with what he'd learnt and later at the house we fell to talking.

There was an immediate disagreement as to how many rooms we'd been in, certain high impact highlights we all remembered such as the floor stones dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the who's who of the industrial revolution engineers who has at one time or another had association, lived or worked there but useful detailed information was already fuzzy.

Combining our points of view to get a coherent and expanded knowledge started looking shaky.

A day later we met and I conducted an audio interview session using my MacBook Pro and its on-board microphone.

I chose a quiet room at the top of the house and made a list of questions grouped into the same simple three level schema: shared experiences, triggered memories and imagination and an 'others' category.

To test my own grasp of what was going on I pre-judged their answers and wrote them down for later comparison.

I interviewed myself and then stayed in the room 'Actively Listening' to their answers, making notes and prompting them, this also allowed me to interactively adjust the questions and ask new ones on the fly.

## **Key**

H = Common elements in the here and now

M = Triggered memories

I = Imagination

O = others

The questions are listed below:

1. (I) How did you imagine the house before we arrived?
2. (H) Describe the walk through the house from beginning to end focusing on the buildings and physical spaces, give as much detail as possible
3. (H) Describe the people
4. (H) What information did you learn about each room
5. (M) Describe what if any memories were triggered as we walked, looked and talked.
6. (I) How was the house different to what you imagined before we went inside?
7. (O) Describe your feelings if any as we walked around.
8. (H) How many rooms did we walk through?
9. (H) What was the developer wearing?
10. (H) What was his manager Wearing?
11. (H) What colour was the developer's hair?
12. (H) What colour was manager's hair?
13. (H) What colour were the developer's eyes?
14. (H) What colour were manager's eyes?
15. (H) What was my sister J wearing?
16. (H) What was I wearing?
17. (H) Who seemed to smile the most?

18. (H) Who frowned the most?
19. (O) How would you describe everyone else's feelings?
20. (O) What was the most interesting thing you learnt about the house?
21. (H) At what point did I turn the camera off and why?
22. (O) Was this a good decision and why?
23. (O) Did your discovery of mutual friends help open up the meeting?
24. (H) What did they offer to do for you afterwards?
25. (O) Do you think they would have been so forthcoming with help if we hadn't recorded?
26. (O) What was the advantage of taking the camera?
27. (O) What were the dis-advantages?
28. (O) Did it matter about the quality of the camera?
29. (O) Is it useful to have the recording?
30. (O) Why?
31. (O) Will anyone watch it? If so why?
32. (O) Do you think the way the video looks will matter i.e. wobbly amateur or TV look?
33. (O) What good does it do to offer them a copy?
34. (O) What do you think the camera recorded that our memories didn't?
35. (O) What are your strongest memories of the meeting?
36. (O) What CAN'T the camera capture?

This was a simple, quickly designed proto experiment and not to be taken seriously but it was a useful exercise whose results were revealing.

From the questions about common physical elements we all had the sense that we remembered the place and the people equally however there was a

strong consensus about the general feelings and facial gestures of the group and what people were wearing but disagreement about the number of rooms in the house ranging from 5 to 9. We decided this was likely to be because they were all white with little contrast of distinguishing features between them making them not very memorable. The camera provided useful arbitration.

We all managed to remember the conversations and details but talking amongst ourselves filled in gaps and corrected a few errors so that when we listened to the recording we were quite pleased that we had remembered and agreed on all the interesting content from the 10<sup>th</sup> century stones to the design office for Stevenson's rocket.

From the questions about memory, no one reported any triggered memories at all which I found surprising. I expected that maybe parts of the conversation would evoke and trigger old memories of his mother or relatives or for my sister memories of our grandparents, even I didn't find my mind was stirred or triggered. We were too focussed on the present moment and conversation and had simply no real memories attached to this place.

The pre-conceived imagination questions were interesting. We all had imagined the inside of the house to be smaller, darker, more primitive and basic than it was. In the event the rooms were large, the ceiling high, the original windows light so that we all felt the space they had to live in by today's standards very generous. We all had imagined some cramped black and white shabby dwelling, an impression from our modern interpretation of old black and white images of the past no doubt, with their unmoving posed mechanical people. Seeing these rooms made us rethink that prejudice.

Three people, three levels of questions revealing three different experiences of that day and yet despite our relativistic viewpoints, it turned out we had a good shared consensus of what had happened but in matters of physical space we all deferred to the camera, it never lies.

Interestingly no one thought that there were any disadvantages to having the camera there but equally they didn't think that it made much difference to the relationship to offer a copy of the film as a gesture of good will.

It was clear to all of us how much more information we had pulled out of a 30 minute meeting by using a camera and microphone then if we'd just been there alone, not just in terms of the descriptive qualitative data but in terms of hard quantitative data to the extent that we could recreate the house, streets and calculate living volumes and a host of other physical world data we just don't hold accurately in our memories.

The use of the free program Google Sketchup<sup>14</sup> and a plugin Photosketch<sup>15</sup>

Allows photographic reconstruction and 3D modelling which then be dimensioned and used as accurate tool for physical world measurements.

The work is not complex and the video based online help system is comprehensive. I didn't complete the full model in the case of Hawthorn but initial tests looked promising. For more advanced modelling see ArcGIS.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <http://sketchup.google.com/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.brainstormllc.com>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.esri.com/software/arcgis/index.html>

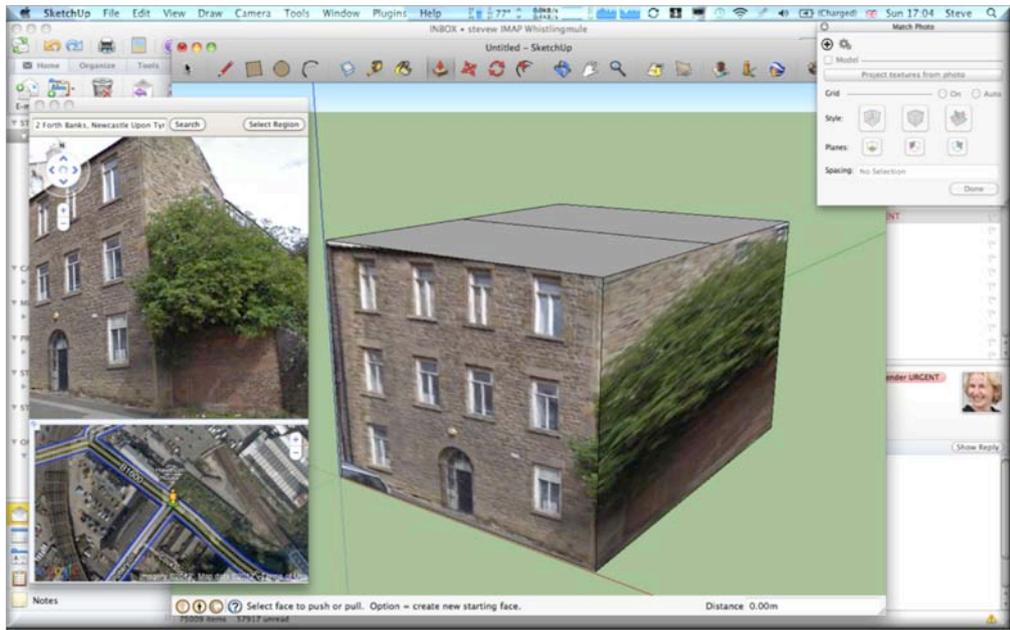


Figure 40 Google Sketchup accurate 3D modelling from photographs, far from complete

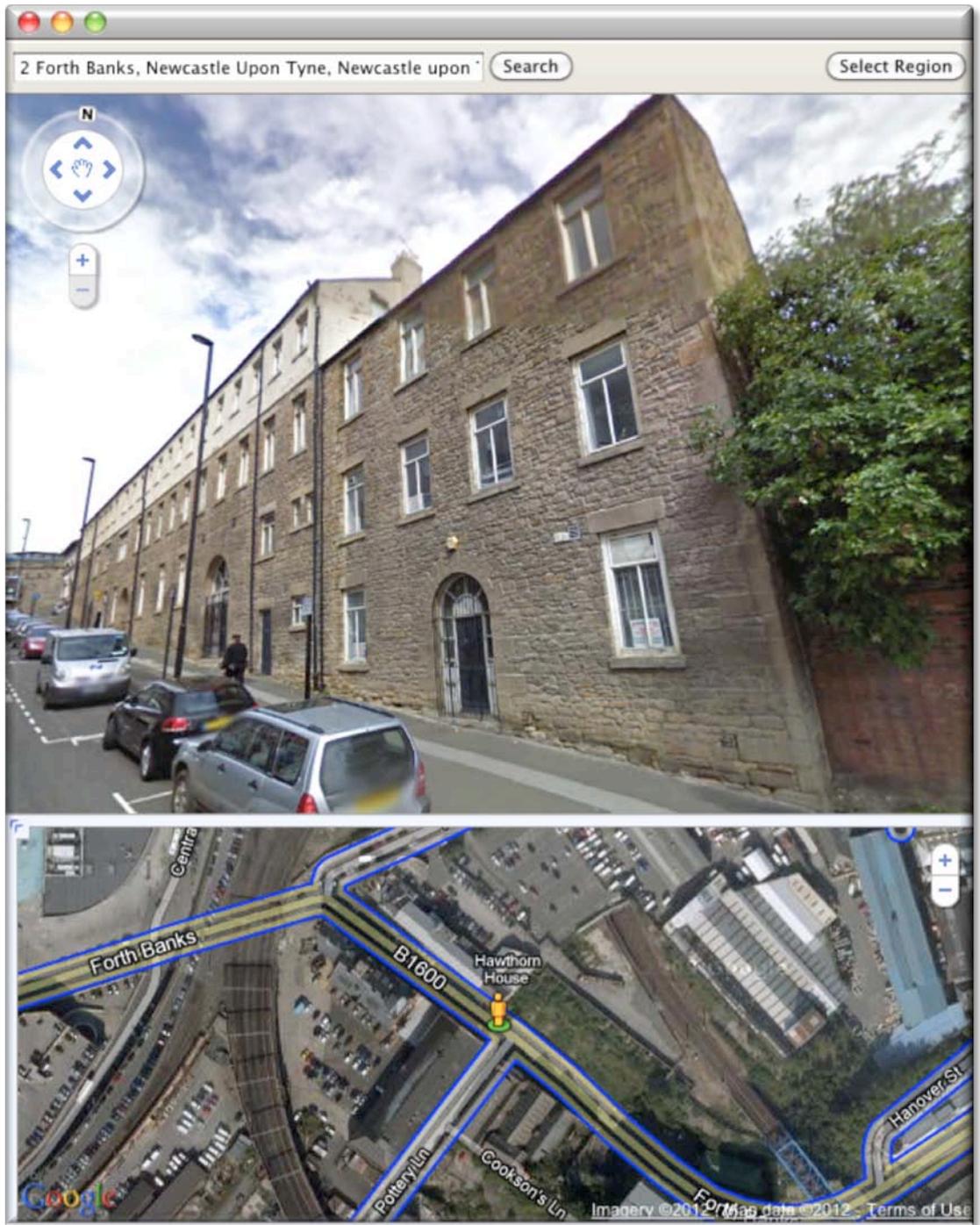


Figure 41 Video Stills For 3D Building Recreation

## Section 5

# Story Telling and Anthropology?

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I presented an explorative think piece called 'What Are Stories' at the 2010 Postgraduate conference to see what it felt like to give a presentation, to get my face known, provoke a reaction, participate and observe. I was supposed to be teaching practical filmmaking skills, we make films to tell stories, it seems like a sensible topic to talk about. I started with a classic story plot called *the hero's quest* popularised by Joseph Campbell (1993). I then told the story of my life and shaped it to resemble this plot, the facts are real, it's a question of how we choose to join the dots, here are some extracts:

*So ladies and gentleman, that's a true STORY.*

*But now lets analyse it, firstly is it really TRUE?*

*When To the best of my ability from my memories, dairies, confirming accounts from friends and family, videos and photographs, what I've just given you is an account that joins all the critical observational dots and accords with all the evidence but is it true? Is it a truth? Did I see it unfolding like this as I was experiencing it?*

*How would I know now even if I had? Have I just retrospectively looked into my memories and joined the dots with some creative writing?*

*Apart from what's written down, much is forgotten. When I do reflect and remember, I only have my perspective on what was*

*happening around me at the time and that is re-interpreted through distance, mood and context.*

*This particular view on my life and this particular way of telling it came into existence only at the moment I wrote it down for this presentation, a revisiting of the past. Its culled from my own "field notes" whilst doing my own "fieldwork" in my life. On a different day, in a different mood, in a different place for a different purpose I could have written something else that fits all the observational evidence and data but would be very different.*

*Asking "is it true?" then is problematic and if this is problematic, surely writing ethnographic is problematic?*

This all raises many issues about what we think we are doing when we tell our stories or collect and interpret stories from others. It raises huge epistemological and ontological questions.

Jay Ruby in *Is An Ethnographic Film A Filmic Ethnography?*

Writes:

*ethnographers have a theory of culture which causes them to perceive and to collect their data in certain ways, and subsequently to present them in ways that reflect their point of view. Thus, a Marxist ethnographer will stress the means of production and a British structuralist will concentrate on social relations. (1975)*

In the preface to *Anthropology and Autobiography* Judith Okely and Helen Callaway make a call for autobiography in ethnography:

*Social anthropology, more than any other discipline in the humanities and social sciences has developed the practice of intensive fieldwork by a single individual... the implications of this unique experience have not been fully realised. Yet the 'race' nationality, gender, age, and personal history of the fieldworker affect the process, interaction and emergent material.*

*There can be no future for tribal ethnography of a purportedly objective kind. Ethnographers must admit the reflexivity of their activities, they must become autobiographical..... to contribute to the better understanding of historical ethnography. (Edmund Leach 1987 ASA conference)*

## **1. Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School**

The film school was a highlight of my year. it is described on his website as:

"not for the faint-hearted; it is for those who have travelled on foot, who have worked as bouncers in sex clubs or as wardens in a lunatic asylum, for those who are willing to learn about lock-picking or forging shooting permits in countries not favouring their projects. In short: it is for those who have a sense for poetry. For those who are pilgrims. For those who can tell a story to four-year-old children and hold their attention. For those who have a fire burning within. For those who have a dream."

This is a description of a very special sort of anthropological filmmaker.

A group of 60 of us met in a hotel near Gatwick airport for 4 days in November 2010 we were greeted by Herzog personally who immediately

impressed by having bothered to learn our names, who we were and what we'd done.

We watched films until late at night, discussed poetry over breakfast, heard Herzog's own stories, flagged down cars in the middle of the night and hitch hiked around Crawley to drink beers in local pubs.

A woman with a bloodied nose, more angry than upset, ran pass our table as a group of men started jostling each other beside a fruit machine. A fight broken out and two of them crashed onto our table, drinks, bodies, chairs went everywhere. They picked themselves up, apologised to the ladies, walked into the back room and started slugging each other again. The barman apologised and renewed our drinks.

Was this Gatwick or the wild west? This collection of crazy people and the energy at the film school seemed to have blurred all boundaries between fantasy and reality or maybe we just didn't know Crawley.

Herzog didn't claim to make truthful documentary, he claims to make ecstatically truthful documentary. His responsibility then is to be honest, 'to thine own self be true'. He has been heavily criticised for 'making things up' in his films but seen this way he merely uses what he has to get at a greater truth in recognition of the limitations of what is knowable. His is a truth of revelation not illumination.

In his evocative documentary *The Bells of the Deep*, Russian pilgrims on the frozen river seek atonement by crawling across an ice lake on hands and knees. These it turns out were paid drunks, look carefully and in one scene you can see that one has fallen asleep. It is a memorable filmic moment, it a staged shot but its what people actually do, he has heightened this moment to illustrate his point and sees no problem with its falsehood.

A messiah featured in the same film is real and does exist. He has a name and a history but that he was a corrupt police officer is not told, at least in the film, it doesn't matter to his followers, Herzog shows him as they see him.

In the making of his 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo* fake filming permits were made from photographs taken in a local market, men died in plane crashes deep in the Amazon jungle, the world press hounded him, he got caught in a border war and was abandoned by many including his leading actor. What drives a man like this who once walked around the borders of Germany and proclaims "to understand the hearts of men you have to walk through the landscape alone" (Herzog 2011)

His is a complete rejection of cinema vérité as a useful or meaningful concept in today's world of recorded mass media and manipulated images. He turns inwards for truth and relies on the filmmaker's passion to find their own ecstasy and represent it cinematically by whatever means. For Herzog perhaps nothing is what it seems and everything is what it seems. He does not pretend that his documentaries should be objective, nor are they purely invented fiction, for him, they are ecstatically true and for that he is loved and hated.

Over the four days of the film school recording was banned, discussion of the technical aspect of film was banned, we watched each other's films, talked about our feelings and reactions to film, we dreamt impossible dreams and the possibilities in such impossibilities. This was a film school more of the heart than of the head using our own senses as the arbiters of our own decisions. This was a rejection of studio systems, a rejection of conformity, a rejection of psychoanalysis and a celebration of the marginal, the passionate and the rogue.

In person he is calm, quiet and thoughtfully deliberate before speaking. His is not a vitriolic personality but he smoulders deep inside. He isn't charismatic but he has presence and gravitas.

A tortured German art film director with a love of Opera, a man who almost became a priest but since rejected all religion. Herzog has been walking the landscape alone for many years. His mantra is 'don't be afraid of solitude' and he is admired but rarely idolised. People came because of him as much as his films and his knowledge. They came because of what he has done and because of his calling. When he says every filmmaker has a responsibility to grab an audience for every film his commitment is real. He holds open the doors of possibility and every filmmaker wants to believe they *can* make their films.

Herzog's field diary of the making of *FitzCarraldo 'Conquistador Of The Useless'* is an extraordinary collection of the minutiae of daily details he observes during the making of the film. As good a seminal ethnography of filmmaking. Rarely introspective it is full of factual observations of the animals, people, everyday life and problems. His is the diary of a focussed camera not the diary of emotional reflection. Herzog doesn't question he just describes and occasionally analyses a political or economic situation in which he displays understanding, compassion but absolute determination to complete his film. Where he feels he is direct and it is clear he understands the limits and relativism of his own perceptions but one never gets the feeling that Herzog could ever get lost in self analysis paralysis and his observations are the better for it. Herzog would never claim to be or want to be an ethnographic filmmaker but he has a cult status amongst people attracted to anthropology. The reason I've included him here is that he has all the sensibilities, all the experience and he doesn't wait for others to frame him or limit him. He doesn't ask "is this an anthropological film"

the very notion would be an absurdity. His quest is impossible to define but his work often involves the darker sides of human nature. His fearlessness must be an inspiration to 'bold experiments' and in going his way and articulating himself outwardly he reveals much more of anthropological interest than those too intellectually straight jacketed or fearful to try looking. It may well be as is often stated, that the cinema that moves us is the activity of misfits, rogues and mavericks that combine personal insight, emotion and storytelling to revealing aspects of ourselves than a systematic arid academic approach never could. I've heard often purists cry that anthropological film must serve the discipline and convey anthropological knowledge. Where are the good examples? Where are the watchable examples? If anthropological knowledge cannot be understood, passed on, used to enlighten a general public, verified or related to anything outside the discipline then what it is? Storytelling has been around probably as long as we have. What would an anthropological film be if it could use the greatest power of sound and vision and that is to move emotions? There are many ways of seeing and of knowing, perhaps the academy by its very nature can only peer curiously and more than half blind from the side lines at some of them?

## **2. Watchability with Bob Long**

Whatever anthropologists produce someone hopefully will read. If they want to make a film for a non specialist audience maybe they want it to be watchable?

I decided to ask some established and acknowledged professional filmmakers about how they told a story and what sorts of stories they tell,

perhaps I reasoned, there were some insights to be had that could be useful to my seminar group.

BAFTA award winning BBC documentary filmmaker Bob Long was a producer of BBC2's Video Nation, a mass observational participatory media series. He's retired but lives in my village in Spain and works as a wedding photographer. As a friend he was easy to contact and as arguably one of the most awarded UK documentary filmmakers of his generation I thought he would have something to say about visual story telling. I called him and recorded a 'Skype' online video chat outside the University library sitting in my car using the universities WiFi to get Internet access.

*"Observational documentary has been the most successful documentary format on British TV - From Kino Pravda, a Russian newsreel in the 1920's to Cinema Verite - (Cinema Direct, fly on the wall)... ...Today its possible with suitable training to produce the highest quality films and videos using a single person or very small crews in ways that allow us to begin to realise the promise of earlier pioneers." (Wilson 2009)*

Bob condensed down into a 40 minute chat something he spends two days teaching but some of the more obvious points are simple to make and I'll paraphrase them in bullet points here.

- Telling a story is like driving a car. Out of gear you don't go anywhere so you need to engage a gear. Like driving, the road ahead bumps and swerves, goes up and down. If the road is boring you'll fall asleep, speed up, slow down, make the drive smooth but interesting but don't crash.

- On narrative structures his advice was to use them loosely but tell a story with a conventional beginning middle and end. It worked for Aristotle and it still works for general audiences today.
- Use anticipation so sign post the action ahead and give people a question, what's going to happen?
- Build tension, film and TV is an emotional medium, don't bore people by being too dry and academic.
- Use characterisation, find a sympathetic hero, let the audience identify with a person and let the character carry the audience.
- Care, the audience has to care about a person in your film, only then can they be taken through BIG issues
- Empathy, the audience should be able to attach to a person.
- Nuclear war is too big to tell a dry story about, see the issues through the eyes of a person, likewise telling the story of a whole village or city or country is too big, break it down to personal stories told by real people an audience can care about. Give points of view.
- The audience must LIKE you

I asked him specifically what he thought an anthropological film might be and he reiterated, to keep an audience they must *care about somebody* probably the best would be the anthropologist who can then lead an empathy driven narrative. The anthropologist then has to talk to the audience in a personal way, let them identify with the main character but use subplots to diversify.

- Talk to the camera, in "in bed with Chris Needham" one of the video dairies films the young boy Chris shares secrets with the camera. We

are the camera so we feel confided in and we see the world through his eyes, if he's likeable we'll ride with him.

- Be unobtrusive with sound, use lavalier mics and radio transmitters.
- At the BBC when documentary researchers were assessing a new idea in a new place they would try and identify main characters that people would care about will care about. They would find 4 or 5 and over time reduce this to 1 or 2 for the actual program.
- Don't try to tell the full story, you will lose the audience break it up into series if you think there is enough interest.
- Use theatrical asides always look to increase tension.

When asked what his single biggest top tip would be to make an engaging film he answered the key word is CARE, the audience has to care about you and the most gripping thing in observational documentary is honesty.

### **3. Making Films About Health And Medicine STORYTELLING IN A WORLD OF EMOTION**

MARG/CEEC joint seminar:

Martin Freeth

Director, [www.MFreeth.Com](http://www.MFreeth.Com)

*"Making a film is as much about politics, deals and managing expectations as it is about the creative act of story telling"*

*"All films are lies – the question is, is the lie justified?"*

(Freeth 2012)

I met Martin at this seminar during my write up and a small group of us sat and talked after the session, I felt his insights could be included here as being relevant to aspiring anthropological story tellers. He needs no introduction by me apart that he is an incredibly accomplished filmmaker that commands enormous respect for his work. All other details can be found on his website.

I asked him if he used focus groups to measure the success of his films and his answer was no, he doesn't use them, it's not a science, it's an art and you have to practice and just do it till you feel it's right and it works for you. The BBC use them all the time. There are focus groups and audience appreciation indexes and total audience viewing figures but doubts have been cast on their usefulness. In many cases large swings in numbers have been put down to the weather, the film title and the choice on the opposite.

This reflects other opinions that despite the importance given to ratings, audiences ebb and flow due to the rhythms of home life rather than a proactive quest for particular content.

When queried about the future he noted that the big challenge and one which TV doesn't want to acknowledge is that online media and the internet will totally transform the organisation of the mainstream media.

The question was raised, 'how do we start?' and his reply was 'it's difficult' the rise of the internet and current budgetary constraints have fragmented media career paths.

At its most basic he echoed Bob Long, a good film is about storytelling skills, point of views and emotion and in a sobering thought for those hoping to

change the world through mainstream TV documentary he claims 'studies show audiences remembered 3 facts from a 1 hour Horizon film'. (Freeth 2012)

To paraphrase him, 'program making is about attitude and atmosphere, its great strength is the ability to emotionally engage an audience and draw them in and provide a stimulus for debate'.

In an online world a good documentary film should be seen as a starting point not an end in itself, as a way to guide people to further study.

Standalone well made films can act as signposts to other resources including interactive resources.

As a final thought and accepting the global change in communications which is forcing a re-categorisation of how we understand, media type, a number of years ago video games companies were generating more profit than Hollywood and computer based learning through simulation has been shown to be very powerful. In one short minute film for the BMJ (Freeth 2009) surgeons who had trained on VR simulators were from day one performing on real patients with the experience level of surgeons with 30-50 operations under their belts. Simulation can have power learning benefits.

# Chapter 5

## Results

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### 1. Recap

The study addressed a question, by **Recording The Senses, Playing With Perceptions. Can An Anthropologist Learn Anything From Learning To Make A Film?**

This was approached methodologically in a variety of ways.

I was unfamiliar with the current anthropological debates at the start of the study so I cast a wide net because I wasn't sure where the study would go and I really wasn't sure there was an answer as such, or perhaps that there were many trivial ones.

I think however that what I've learnt is that there is one main result and a lot of corollaries of interest as to what it is an anthropologist can learn by learning to make a film.

The best way to present the findings is as an outline curriculum for a special kind of short film school and that is what I shall present here.

The result actually *is* a film school, one that is built on reflections of the final output of my fellowship which was a special One Day Film Course for anthropologists. Before I outline this I want to recap some more to situate it.

## 2. Background To The Results

MacDougall (2006, p.227) notes that visual anthropology has yet to emerge as a stable anthropological discourse, Henley (1996) talks of its unfulfilled promise, Grimshaw & Ravetz (2009 p. xi) speak cogently of wanting to '*transcend our intuitive sense of observational cinema's significance*' and Ruby calls for 'Bold experimentation' (An et al. 2008, p. 11)

All are agreed that visual anthropology should be an important discourse within anthropology and all more or less agree that an anthropological film should be one that conveys anthropological knowledge, which for my own clarity I have to keep reminding myself is '*knowledge produced by anthropological methods*' namely participant observation which by and large is produced and conveyed textually. Knowledge produced by participant observation visually therefore would also constitute anthropological knowledge and the best way of conveying that would be visually i.e. ethnographic film?

*My view is that a necessary feature of any film one might describe as "ethnographic" would be the fact that it had been made under circumstances conforming to the norms associated with the characteristically anthropological fieldwork method of participant observation. (Henley, 1996, p. 14)*

Which all adds up to lots of hope, lots of words but '*Bold experimentation*' to me means going out and just doing it. It would be useful therefore if as well as being able to write, the field anthropologist could also make a film.

However a good Film school training is expensive and takes time.

*The acquisition of film-making skills remains both essential and time consuming.* (Henley, 1996, p. 5)

To enter the filmmaking world in the broadest sense as an ethnographic, anthropological, documentary or whatever other kind of filmmaker such training is still necessary either in a film school like the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology<sup>17</sup> or 'on the job'.

If we follow Ruby's argument and his call for bold experimentation and a new 'anthropological cinema', there should be no initial need to learn complex technical equipment to fit into the standards of mainstream media, no need to study form of script writing and characterisation, no need to learn to weave music and voice into a climatic symphony that will bring an audience to tears, in fact no need to recognise any other conventions at all. The slate is clean and waiting for keen anthropologists to write their '*pictorial ethnographies*' on it.

The '*scattered attention*' Eriksen (1995, p. 47) previously given to visual anthropology becomes not a problem but new exciting intellectual challenge. What it lacks is a commitment from up and coming anthropologists to engage with the '*new literacy*' and shape it to their own needs.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/socialanthropology/visualanthropology/>

With scant regard for a commercial audience or sponsors and only the watchful eyes of their community peers to worry about, all that is needed is just the right kind of equipment and training to allow interested adventures to heed the call, grab a camera and 'go for it'.

In the current climate of austerity the costs associated in buying in full time specialist academics could prove to be prohibitive. The general lack of 'qualified guides' in anthropology departments with an ability to bridge the technical and visual worlds needs other ways of re-visioning the problem.

*The demand for opportunities to acquire these skills is presently much greater than the supply as we know only too well at the Granada Centre. (Henley, 1996, p.5)*

Despite the twelve years that have passed since this lecture I understand the situation is still the same.

A potential way forward could be a sort of mobile anthropological movie caravan. Such a caravan, physical or virtual as a dedicated online service supported by real people advising via technologies like Skype<sup>18</sup> could help kick-start students on the visual path and empower them at a basic level, to make films and explore with the hope that over time systematic moves could progress to a more stable and perhaps principled discourse. (MacDougall, 2006, p. 227)

This much I could offer but a low cost mobile film school didn't answer my research question in anything other than a banal and trivial way. What can

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<sup>18</sup> [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) video conferencing software

anthropologists learn from learning to make a film? They learn how to make a film!

I needed to unpack the question.

We ask questions to gain knowledge, but we have to be careful about the question!

**Recording the senses, playing with perceptions.**

**Can anthropologists learn anything from learning to make a film?**

The question had been bothering me since I proposed it.

### **3. What Is It Anthropologists Can Learn...?**

Anthropologists, doctors, lawyers, the man in the street can learn to make films if they want to. Today it's relatively easy and comparatively cheap to record images and sounds and mix them together. It may not tell a story or motivate people or evoke emotion or as the BBC's motto says: inform, educate and entertain, (tell, teach and amuse), but you can do it.

Be that as it may, the multitude of technical possibilities lead to another problem, like the walker in a strange land whose path suddenly divides into a hundred small '*caminos*', the difficulties of choice can keep you standing in the same place.

In such a position a friendly Sherpa is needed. I had the tracking skills to be a filmmaking Sherpa. I could teach the basics of using a camera, recording sounds and images and editing them together to produce 'something', but

what do they learn from learning to make a film? What is special about learning to make a film for someone who is interested in human knowledge?

Participant observation is the key. In social and cultural anthropology there has been a general epistemological shift since the 70s away from a Meadian positivism. The practice of reflexivity and a growing awareness of observational relativism, coupled with the understanding that social relations are dense networks that cut across time and space invisible to the mechanical eye, has led to a rethinking of ethnography, at least by some.

For all of Mead's brilliance and prescient use of cameras as research tools, the idea of placing a 360 degree in the middle of a village as some form of modern camera obscura in order to 'study the natives' from the veranda seems strange and repellent. This view she was still offering in the early 1970s is the worldview of a later day Victorian colonial positivist for whom primitive natives were flies in a petri dish.

The quest to try and see the world as others see it is a more contemporary albeit problematic anthropological project. Theories of weak teleological social construction<sup>19</sup> have been useful to me so far. (Pinker, 2001, p. 202)

The density and depth of human social and cultural relations are beyond the eye of the camera and the ear of the microphone, the anthropologist has to be the instrument and participant observation coupled with a reflexive approach is the method.

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<sup>19</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_constructionism#cite\\_note-37](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_constructionism#cite_note-37)

As earlier more positivist agendas have receded and fieldwork as 'data collection' become more difficult to justify, the bringing into anthropological consciousness the realisation that:

#### **4. No Observation Can Be Value Free**

This has had a major effect on the discipline. Easy for the initiated and conceptually simple, sometimes subtle and others dramatic, this awakening for the field novice is I believe essential if they are to even begin to try to see the others point of view. I don't speak here as an anthropologist but it's precisely this relativism of points of view that filmmakers that make certain kinds of films know only too well. This then is the value I believe that learning to make a film can bring if approached in the right way. It's a path that leads to the acceptance and understanding of complexity, messiness in social life and the wonder of many stories. We tend to construct unconscious egocentric worldviews. From an anthropological perspective this leads to the *Danger of the Single Story*<sup>20</sup> (Adichie 2009).

Anthropologists not surprisingly are people too and need to keep reminding themselves of this. Constant conscious consideration is required. This then is what Anthropologists I believe can learn from learning to make a film.

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<sup>20</sup> Chimamanda Adichie: The danger of a single story  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg>

## 5. Relativism Of World Views.

For students the following film school offers a dramatic and revealing way to demonstrate the relativity of sight and sound. For practitioners this insight may seem trivial:

*I am only too aware of the subjectivity and artifice involved in the practice of making any film. But just as ethnographic text-makers have become aware that the subjectivity of their accounts is something that should be built upon rather than denied, so too have ethnographic film-makers.*(Henley, 1996, p.2)

Relativism doesn't mean 'anything goes' of course, else any form of communication would be impossible, so would life itself.

A course that can demonstrate this is valuable I believe, doing it this way has the added benefit of equipping students with filmmaking skills at the same time.

A multimedia filmmaking could be leveraged to provide:

- A 'jolt' into the relativism of one's own worldview
- An introduction to the problems of perception
- An introduction to multi-perspectives in fieldwork
- The use of cameras and microphones as research tools
- Demonstrations of the joys, perils and pitfalls of using cameras in real world situations.

- Multimedia and film production as a means of creating '*pictorial ethnographies*'
- Distribution of these anthropological films to a wider audience via cost effective WebTV (IPTV) channels

The later point now in 2012 has consequences for UK departments having to undergo impact assessments for funding. Who could with suitable argument use such a WebTV channel as evidence of social engagement.

## **6. AN UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE TARGETED, PRE-FIELDWORK OBSERVATIONAL TRAINING & FILMMAKING COURSE.**

I have modified and extended aspects of the actual course which I ran. The whole experiment should be seen as a preliminary on-going work in progress.

I shall outline the central ideas of this one day course below. It can be extended to two or three days and offered ad hoc. For the sake of this section I shall be brief but inclusive. Shortened versions are used for shorter course.

The technical requirements are trivial and the details are presented in the Technical Appendix.

To see how learning to make a film accomplishes these aims and more, we have to start at the beginning and break the process down.

Firstly, before we touch a camera or microphone we look at the act of observing itself and the generation of our perceptions and the way we interpret them.

I use conventional filmmaking terms to describe the stages of development during the day which is envisaged as a standard eight hour day divided into four sessions: **pre-production; production; post-production; delivery.**

## 7. Pre-Production

The case studies that relate to this section are mainly in (Chapter 4, section 2)

**Aims of the exercises: to explore the statement OBSERVATION IS NOT VALUE FREE**

In (Chapter 4, Section 2, 1.1. ) I describe a group practice in observation, looking and seeing. The group is convened in a comfortable familiar place and made to feel open and safe.

The practice is based on the idea that each sense has its own way of knowing the world and that we integrate all of this to make coherent sense of what we are observing and generate our immediate world view.

The objectives of the practice are to draw attention to one particular sense at a time. In the case of filmmaking everything revolves around just two senses, sight and hearing, what we see and what we hear. In further extensions of the idea we could include others.

*I split people into pairs and asked them to just look at each others eyes and skin. I had them alter the light by standing in front of and then to the side of a window, shading the eyes to see the effect of a changing pupil on what they saw. I got them to explore each others faces close up examining every pore and blackhead. I asked them to practice comfortable relaxed looking, not staring, directly at the eyes (which people don't tend to do as it requires a genuine openness and intimacy). It's a question of time and safety. If you sit long enough in front of each other to get to the point where you can just look, hold the eyes, look at the skin and eyebrows, lips and*

*nose hairs and forget your mental backchat, a persons face will change...*

*...I had them invade each other spaces and encouraged them to go outside their observational comfort zones (hopefully without stressing them too much). (Chapter 4, section 2, 3. )*

By asking the student to move out of comfort zones and push their normal social behavioural boundaries whilst foregrounding one sense, it generally results in mental back chatter which is more directly aligned with the way of 'knowing' of that sense. Concentration on using the sense combined with reflections on the inner feelings and thoughts until a new comfort level is reached can help bring into consciousness triggered memories, associations, feelings all of which help situate the particular way of knowing. Care needs to be taken and sensitivity is needed to avoid letting anyone overstep the mark. This is not a game for everyone. In the case of sight:

The same is done with hearing, eyes are closed and I will leave space, then talk quietly and guide them to listening to things around them, often people just need to have their attention directed before they 'know' something new related to that sense.

*"ahhhh, that noise is a fan!" said one surprised lady who a few moments earlier hadn't even heard the noise. (Chapter 4, section 2, 5. )*

I then lead a short meditation session for 15 minutes and we do it again.

**Aims of the exercise: to explore the statement MENTAL STATES EFFECT  
PERCEPTION & OBSERVATION**

*They were surprised at what you can perceive when still and attentive. The point of the exercise was to directly experience how what we perceive changes with our mental state. (Chapter 4, section 2, 8. )*

Not all groups react in the same way, it's an act of meditation and self awareness to be aware of everyone is feeling, some groups can go further some less but the aim is simply to make them aware that what they sense is contingent on mood, focus, prior conditioning.

We then look at basic filmmaking equipment, a camera, a microphone and a computer with editing software. I give a short talk on each and let them play with the equipment.

After this we continue with more group work exercises.

**Aims of the exercise: TO BE AWARE OF OTHERS WORLD VIEWS AND  
INTEGRATE THEM**

I describe the group work in (Chapter4, Section 2, 4. ) this time there is no meditation or special attention to any one sense. The camera is passed around the group and people write notes, whatever they are thinking about or experiencing as they listen to me. We then view the videos together and compare notes. In this case people are not just confronted with their own subjective experience of their own senses, they can compare their experience with others and share the 'views'. In the case study with a mixed gender group it was fun to see that many woman looked at hands.

Conclude what you will. Comparison with the written account illustrates differences in observation by pen and observation using a camera. We discuss how the recordings can be used reflexively at a later stage to re-visit the visual and auditory moments of the experience.

In this case the camera acts as a bridge (see Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009, p. xii) to help people interpret an experience and share these interpretations.

The sharing of these experiences provides a greater picture of the general environment and the collective relationship to it can be explored. (Chapter 4, section 2, 5. )

Breaks are taken at regular intervals and the groups reactions continuously assessed. The observational work above concludes the first session and is ended with a group summary discussion.

It is not the aim of the course to go into details, merely to raise issues.

There are many ways to interpret these experiences and general ideas surrounding discussions of cognitive biases<sup>21</sup> and holistic approaches<sup>22</sup> to knowledge production are readily available which is what I provide.

In session two the focus moves to production.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30548590/Cognitive-Biases-A-Visual-Study-Guide>

<sup>22</sup> <http://blip.tv/creating-knowledge-vi/the-three-domains-of-value-why-il-practitioners-must-take-a-holistic-approach-4161945>

## 8. Production

The case studies that relate to this section are mainly in (Chapter 4, Section 1)

**Aims of the exercise: TEACHES CAMERA AND MICROPHONE SKILLS as production and research tools.**

With the tools available today and the digital convergence revolution, words and concepts are in turmoil, a camera is a camera but it's also a sound recorder, GPS tracker, video camera, a film is a film but it's also an online video or part of a multimedia presentation, seen on a big screen or on a mobile phone.

The world is awash with readily available cheap and expensive devices as small as key rings and as large as TV sports cameras all recording sounds and images for a bewildering variety of purposes, the limit as they say is your own imagination.

The equipment I use here is basic but high definition. The specs are in the Technical appendix.

Once the observational work is done the concept of *active listening*<sup>23</sup> (Chapter 4, Section 2, 13. ) is introduced. After some very basic group work introducing the concept people are paired off to make a short 2 minute interview in turns. Both make notes and compare their text notes with what was said and what was heard along side the video. During the playback of

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<sup>23</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active\\_listening](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening)

<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/activel.htm>

[http://www.samaritans.org/your\\_emotional\\_health/active\\_listening.aspx](http://www.samaritans.org/your_emotional_health/active_listening.aspx)

the video, attention is given to body language and facial gestures, rarely do note takers pay attention to these forms of language and therefore miss these ways of 'knowing'. The difference between text notes and the AV recordings are discussed and the benefits of recording with the possibility for future reflection discussed.

The next exercise involves filming outside (Chapter 4, Section 1, 9. ).

**Aims of the exercise: MIMICS THE HAWTHORN CASE STUDY (Chapter 4, Section 4, 3. ) the use of recording equipment for qualitative and quantitative research.**

In this exercise small teams leave the seminar room with film equipment and have 15 minutes to interview a stranger, ask permission, explain its just an exercise, film, ask a question, listen, make notes and return.

On a longer course we would take the video, remove still frames and recreate the space using special but cheap 3D software (Chapter 4, Section 4, p. 85). We would estimate spatial sizes from memory, work it out from the model and check against the real space. This again is followed by summary discussions

Using the notes, shared perceptions and the audio video recording we discuss what 'rich data' we have, and imagine fieldwork situation where this might be useful. The use of specialist cameras such as underwater models with integrated GPS and accelerometers.

They then leave as individuals with nothing, engage a stranger in a brief chat and return to make notes. We discuss the differences of the experiences.

We finish by considering what other uses for film equipment:

1. A camera records different things to our own memory. Having both allows comparison and re-evaluations during the write up phase and can add dimension, context and detail to the account.
2. A recording can trigger memories not in field notes and bring a new perspective to interpretations no matter how good a trained observer you are.
3. The actual use of a camera when recording in the field can help gain privileged access to a situation I.e. to film a wedding, and be used as a research tool in its own right.
4. By giving cameras to informants interesting multi-vocal, multiple point of views of events or situations can be explored.
5. An AV recording allows accurate reproducible extended reflective engagement with the material for years, as well as allowing it to be shared globally for group interpretations. Your original memories cannot be so easily accessed and are always seen through the lens of time and what was written down.
6. AV recordings can be played back faster or slower and processed in many ways even in the field, advanced forensic analysis can reveal hidden information not seen or heard at the time. Time-lapse recordings can be made which can reveal details and scene changes which go unnoticed by the wandering observer.

7. AV productions, slide shows, web video, TV, mobile phone video can be used to communicate, educate, inform and entertain an audience, to get messages across (if we are skilful enough).
8. Recordings can be used to explore theoretical ideas, perceptions and their generation and used to examine aspects of experience not best rendered by written text such as the body language of a dancer or the facial gestures of an actor.

This concluded the second section.

## **9. Post-Production**

The case studies that relate to this section are mainly in (Chapter 4, Sections 2,4)

**Aims of the exercise: to explore VISUAL KNOWLEDGE GENERATION, perception, interpretation, meaning, relativism and worldviews.**

There are many ways to approach this exercise, it's the most important and the most difficult to describe effectively in words. All that is required is that the group film a number of clips of their choice of subject matter and try to edit them together to convey a visual message.

This is also an introduction to real film editing and with a little guidance, with modern software I can have people cutting clips together in a very short time.

To create an unambiguous visual message with little or no text is difficult to do. Each member of the group will take the clips and cut them together to try and convey some meaningful message to the others, it could just be DANGER LEAVE – a flashing red box for example or something more complex like bring a drink, its basically a simplified game of charades only using the same set of video clips.

Everyone will try and they will all come up with different ideas using different lengths of edits, sequences of shots etc. so starting with the same 'data' they produce different results to tell the same message. As each person tries they come to see how different minds can take the same images and sounds and make different messages to try and convey the same meaning.

This is analogous to telling different stories based on the same set of social 'facts' some can this lying or being creative, it's a question of intentionality and point of view and is also a jump in point to talking about roles, actors, agents personal narratives and autobiographies. Imagination helps but we are an imaginative animal.

Scores for best try can be awarded by each team to the person who most accurately gets the message across, turns it into a memorable game.

**Aims of the exercise: TEACHES ABOUT VISUAL LANGUAGE**

To compare their novice work with a master I get them to speed read Dziga Vertov's 1929 film '*Man with a Movie Camera*' (Chapter 4, Section 2, 16. ) and we make comparisons as to how similarly they read it. Did he succeed in creating a universal language of film?

**Aims of the exercise: TEACHES THAT SENSES EFFECT EACH OTHER**

We play a portion of it again with music and ask how does this change the meaning of the film. This way we start to get a feel for preferencing other senses, eyes and ears in how we know the world.

In order to link this to reflexivity in fieldwork. They are asked to imagine their own mind as a edit suit, putting together and editing the incredibly complex multisensory data of their senses creating something like a multisensory real time film (Chapter 4, Section 2, 9. ) which they believe to be real. In this sense they are asked to question the 'reality' of what they think they experience. It is my belief that a conscious awareness of the problems of perception can increase awareness and sensitivity to fieldwork.

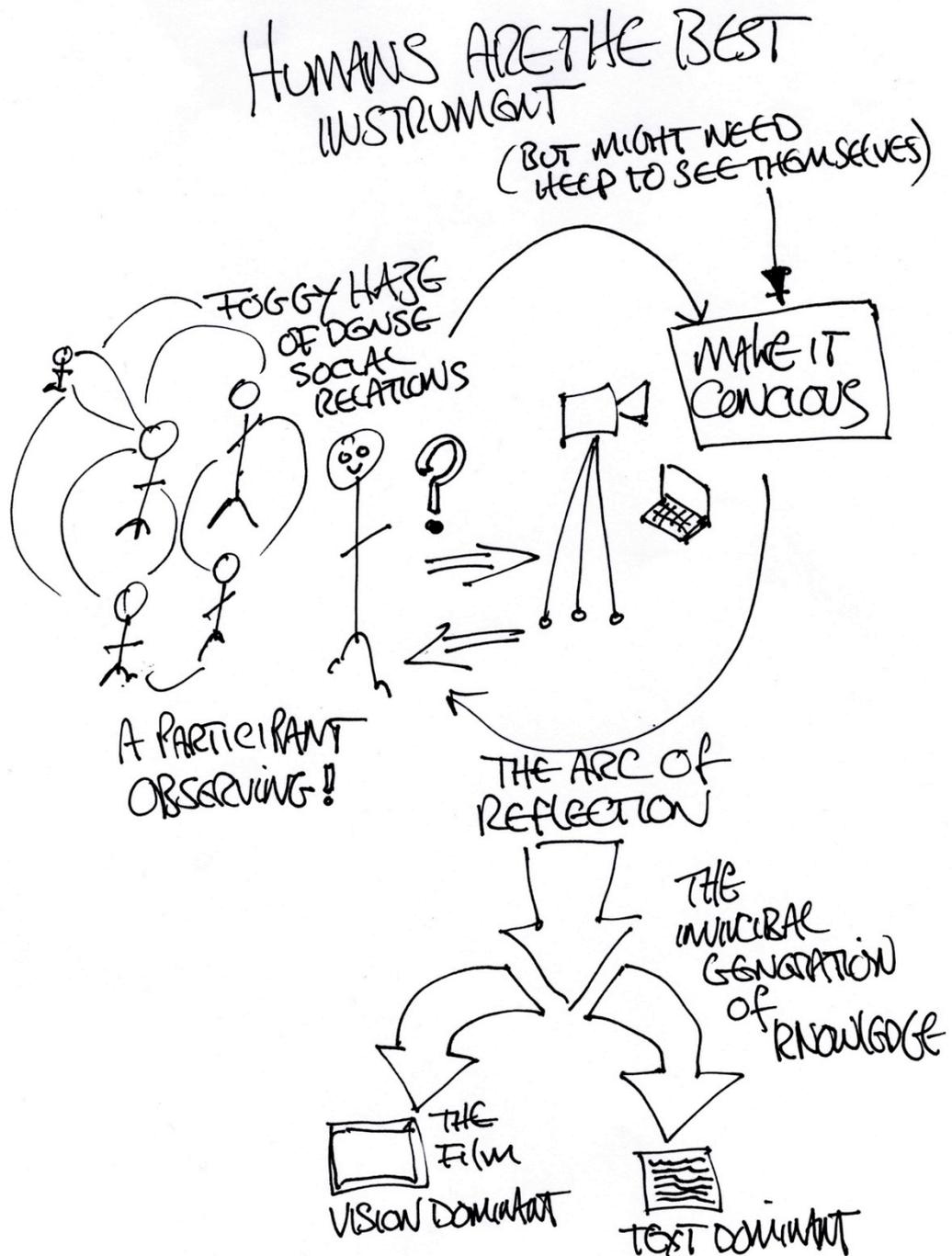


Figure 42 aid to fieldwork, reflection makes it conscious

**Aims of the exercise: REAL LIFE FILMING, PROBLEMS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

At this point its time to move to real life filming examples and problems.

I use a series of examples from real life situations to illustrate

- Visual illusion (Chapter 4, Section 2,10. )
- False interpretation (Chapter 4, Section 2, 15. )
- The use of camera as access and the dangers of misreading situations (Chapter 4, Section 3, 2. )
- The effect of editing on mood and the creation of memory (Chapter 4, Section 3, 1. 9. )

And we conclude with a discussion of ethics using the ASA's 2011 guideline and codes of practice<sup>24</sup> We talk of judgement calls, responsibility in the field, risk assessments, care of equipment. An open Q&A session.

#### **Aims of the exercise: TO MAKE A 2 MINUTE SHORT FILM**

In the final section the group are given time to film and cut a short film of their making. I guide and supervise. The film can be sound and vision but hard cuts and dissolves only, no effects or text. On longer courses this can be included and it is based on the original **One Day Film Course** (Chapter 4, Section1, 12. .)

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.theasa.org/downloads/ASA%20ethics%20guidelines%202011.pdf>

## **10. Delivery**

**Aims of the exercise: to provide an ENGAGEMENT POINT FOR EXPERIMENTS IN VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL IDEAS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CINEMA**

The **IPTV** system prototyped and fully operational can be used to share film projects for discussion and display. The system is shown and end projects uploaded. (Chapter 4, Section1, 13. ). There is an extension to this to allow global live streaming for shared conferences and special events. This is discussed in (Chapter 4, Section1,14. )

## **11. Story Telling in Mainstream Observational Documentary**

Story telling is as old as we are, I argue that story telling conventions can be useful in attracting and keeping peoples attention. There is a lot of critical discussion on the idea but I have included a section culled from some of the best BBC documentary filmmakers of their day on 'watchability', how to keep an audience. The points I have outlines are only introductory ideas but I believe worth keeping in mind not matter what sort of production you do if your intention is to attract non specialist views (Chapter 4, Section5,15. - end)

There are many issues that can be raised during such a course, a partial list appears below:

- What they learn, is that there are many ways of seeing.

- There are many ways of explaining, it just needs a little creative imagination to join the dots in new ways.
- The social and cultural world is a messy complex place not reducible to formula and science?
- They learn not to trust the evidence of their own eyes.
- They learn scepticism.
- They learn that what they think they see and what they feel and experience is probably as much about them as it is about the people they observe.
- They learn to start to tell visual stories and in doing so see the stories they tell and the stories they are told in different ways.
- They learn to look behind the story.
- They learn not to believe any story.
- They learn about the power in stories.
- They learn to question the 'truths' fossilised in books
- They learn to question 'authority'.
- They learn to recognise the tyranny of the single story.
- There are as many points of view as there are people.
- They learn that people aren't mechanical, they are imaginative.

- To relate to a place the way the people who live there, you have to try to see it from their point of view.
- What they learn is that what they think they know is probably just projections, dreams and fictions.
- They will be equipped to analyse the global visual mass media world we live in.

There are hooks from this work in so many directions in terms of future work. Stories, narratives, cultural co-evolution etc.

The results address timely and topic issues current within visual anthropology, sensorial anthropology and the wider community. In the following conclusion I shall draw out the key findings and offer a surprising tale.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions

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**What can an anthropologist learn from learning to make a film?**

### **1. Observations Are Not Value Free**

This study shows that by exploring recorded images and sounds, and comparing them to written and remembered details of guided observations, the relativism of human observational experiences can be dramatically demonstrated. We all remember things differently and have different points of view, not only sensorial but conceptually.

The group work undertaken in the guise of an anthropological film school evoked as a community of practice within the anthropology department of the University of Durham illustrates the sensorial and perceptual variations, experiential nuancing and existence of soft limits to knowledge. The results of the study question assumptions that underlie historic and contemporary claims of objectivity in social science.

Apart from inherent perceptual differences in observation, there are many ambiguities involved in individual and collective interpretation. Through the use of real life filmic examples from my own work we were made aware of the many situational instances in which we alone or with others just 'get it wrong'.

Properties of 'the way our perception works' allow the dramatic visual demonstration of illusion as another example of 'what to be aware of' in the field.

Although the study is primarily concerned with sight and sound, it suggests practical methods for exploring knowledge produced by a particular sense or cluster of senses by comparative experiments using recording devices that act as prosthetic senses.

The results of this study encourage further work which would address the need for a rebalancing of knowledge production away from but not in isolation of dominant text based practices.

It explores these limits in relation to a solo researcher or as a member of an research group.

The results question but do not invalidate ethnographic practice as a whole but rather suggest the need for alternative interpretations and call into question the notion of ethnography as objective data collection.

I conclude that observational experiences which lie at the heart of the method of participant observation cannot be taken at face value or as objective truths, rather they are better understood as both projections and receptions, a mixture of the interplay of memories that meet in the *perceiving moment*.<sup>25</sup>

As participant observers therefore it would follow that we are as much on the stage playing a role as the people and cultures we observe. This doesn't

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Kahneman: The riddle of experience vs. memory  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel\\_kahneman\\_the\\_riddle\\_of\\_experience\\_vs\\_memory.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_kahneman_the_riddle_of_experience_vs_memory.html)

invalidate us taking part or seeking to gain understanding, it just situates our perspective.

This outcome directly addresses issues raised by (Berger, Chapter 2, 3. , (Watson, Chapter 2, 7. ) and (Campbell (1989) cited in Judith Okely & Helen Callaway 1992, p. 2).

Without memory there can be no culture. What we remember and under what conditions we remember must also have a bearing on what we can know. This study reveals the subjectivity not only of perceptions but also of memories.

We can compare subjective and intersubjective memories between members of the group during filming sessions using the recording as a common reference or bridge to link our experiences.

It is not necessary to explain the camera recordings as objectively true when compared to our own, this may or may not be the case, what is required is that the group can share the experience of another view and compare it to their own memory and written notes. It is the ability to 'share the memories' of the camera and the detail which it captures which demonstrate to the group the relativism of their observations.

Interpreting these experiences led to results concomitant with the story of Paul Spencer's meeting with Hilary Ruben in Africa as an example. Many years later they were able to compare written accounts. (Ruben (1972), p. 160-1 cited in Judith Okely & Helen Callaway 1992, p. 55).

*The two accounts are sufficiently similar to identify the same event but they differ enough to raise questions. (Judith Okely & Helen Callaway 1992, p. 55)*

In later writings he expresses surprise at some of the glaring differences of the accounts. He also concludes that '*observation is not value free*', with which, as a result of this study, we must concur. Having been through pre-fieldwork training such as that outlined in this study we would expect future generations of anthropologists participant observers to be unsurprised.

If one of the aims of an ethnographic study is an understanding of what might be called cultural world views, understanding and experiencing observational relativism is essential. To paraphrase Eriksen (T. H. Eriksen 2012), its ok to go for a helicopter ride and look down on humanity from above but you also need to get down on the ground, crawling about examining every grain of sand.

Complete knowledge as pointed out by Layton (1998, p. 3) is impossible.

*Consciously or otherwise, our ideas and assumptions lead us to notice certain aspects of people' social life, but to disregard others.*  
(1998, p. 3)

On the basis of this study I must concur.

In the wider epistemological frame, we cannot escape observation as a method for knowing. A understanding of the problems has to be built into our theories. As Henley states:

*that the subjectivity of their accounts is something that should be built upon rather than denied.* (1996, p. 2)

New methodological approaches to the investigation of human knowledge i.e. *Imageworks* (Edgar 2004) might prove fruitful in reorienting the debates.

## **2. Filmmaking Equipment Can Be Used As Effective Research Tools**

The study demonstrates the usefulness of audio-visual recording devices and editing machines as research and representational tools, as well as knowledge transmission and communication tools. (see Chapter 2,10. )

An important corollary to this is the observation that in this mode they are acting as prosthetic enhancers. To understand humans and empathise with different worldview I make the claim that one has to be human. Only humans can 'get inside' other humans in the areas of interest to social and cultural specialists.

## **3. Reflexive Filmmaking Brings The Inside Out And The Outside In.**

To know something we have to be conscious of it. (See Chapter 2, 8. ).

This statement is obviously predicated on the assumption that there are conscious and unconscious aspects to our existence. The use of filmmaking equipment helps us explore the relationship between these realms.

If films were made of initial fieldwork as well as notes, the nature of the medium is such that it can trigger memories and feelings whilst away from the site better than field notes thus prompting reflexive consideration.

During subsequent revisits, experiences can further be compared allowing comparative temporal assessments to be made far more substantially than text notes alone. In doing so we become more aware of the ways in which we spatially and temporally 'join the dots' of our experiences in order to create meaning and write accounts or produce pictorial ethnography.

Making the process more conscious in this way may not immediately satisfy a desire to 'know' but at least it draws attention to all the ways we 'don't know'.

The special place of writing in the generation of intellectual knowledge is that it allows the aggregated messages of all our senses in the form of *thoughts* to be captured and stored.

These thoughts can at a later date be revisited, reconsidered and over time insights accumulated. In this sense pens and papers facilitate a generalist approach to knowledge generation.

Until the end of the last century there were no readily accessible cost effective tools to help focus in on impressions stimulated more by a single or cluster of senses such as sight and sound.

**A camera and an edit machine are the pen and paper in the age of visual literacy.**

Combined with sense training these techniques may help to render conscious more sensory focussed 'ways of knowing' which may in turn yield insights into worldviews that are different to our own.

More simply put, if we don't try to consider what it might mean to be blind, without taste or that we ourselves may be lacking sensitivities more developed in others, we may never question the ways in which we have become habituated to knowing the world and never be able to conceive of other ways of knowing.

**The consideration that there may be other ways of experiencing and knowing the world to that to which we are accustomed should be a prerequisite for the explorative fieldworker.**

We have seen that by ourselves our perceptions and experiences are limited, our memories are inaccurate, our perceptions unreliable, our interpretations diverse and various but most of the time we can agree on commonalities.

By being able to share thoughts with others we increase the 'knowledge' of the group by filling in the gaps. In this way we realised that not only were our individual perceptions of the monkey lab different, but by sharing our experiences we created a group understanding of the space. It was interesting to ponder the generation of our 'culture' arising through the sharing of personal experiences in relation to a shared situation. Culture at a very basic level then be understood as shared memories of a place. Its interesting to ponder this in a world of globally shared memories which generally have little to nothing to do with our actual place.

By focusing on sound and vision we slant our knowledge towards the visual but with suitable training and self-reflection we can extend this to other senses and learn to be more 'sense' aware when in the field (see Chapter 2, 4. (Classen 1993, p. 122 cited in Eriksen (1995, p. 47)) who call for more focus on the senses.

#### **4. Different Ways Of Seeing And Of Knowing**

As Berger (John Berger 1972; John Berger 1982) brilliantly shows, the way we perceive something is dependent on the context and our relationship to it. Each sense 'knows' the world in a different way. A world only of vision is qualitatively distinct from a world of sound or touch or taste or movement. Our way of knowing ourselves and others, our social and cultural world, is filtered through these senses and anthropologists like everyone else suffer from dominances and biases in experience (See Chapter 2, 8. ) (Cambell (1989) cited in Judith Okely & Helen Callaway 1992, p. 2).

The quest then is to explore points of view, our own and others. Colin Turnbull's controversial ethnography of the Ik of Uganda in *The Mountain people* (1987) warrants in this sense a critical re-evaluation. Using tools like a camera and a microphone help externalise what we experience. Used in groups it can provides an 'interpretive bridge' (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009, p. xii). Whenever I have been travelling and couldn't speak a language, drawing images has been a way to communicate. The use of cameras, films used in a reflexive context promises much more and thus help reveal many

'ways of seeing and knowing' this openness to many stories thus helps in some way to avoid the **Tyranny Of The Single Story**<sup>26</sup>.

## 5. Concluding Statement

As I walked down the road away from the department and on past Ustinov college, Eriksen's words from his seminar *Beyond Dualism*<sup>27</sup> floated back to me out of the mist:

*YOU might not realise it, but I know, I know that you think this table is real, but in reality we are we are nothing more than molecules, nothing more than!*, (T. H. Eriksen 2012)

I could feel the cold on my nose, see and hear the traffic coming towards me, my feet, locked inside stout boots crunched on the frozen wet grass underfoot, I turned and saw a grand old building off to my right in the middle of a field, I have lived in Durham half my life and had never seen this before, the full absurdity of '**nothing more than**' hit me.

Eriksen was talking about a certain form of reductionist thinking that gets expressed in the media, its catchy and provokes a reaction, very few physicists or good scientists would ever subscribe to the view that we are

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<sup>26</sup> Chimamanda Adichie: **The danger of a single story**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg>

<sup>27</sup> Thomas H. Eriksen (University of Oslo) **Beyond dualism 2012**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWevyFqsE2E>

‘nothing more than molecules’ but seen from the trained, studied world of the mathematician or thinker that doesn’t get out much, it might be a fair conclusion to make.

The point is anecdotal, to the natural scientist the statement ‘nothing more than molecules’ may seem to make empirical verifiable sense. To the dancer or painter or sensuous artist inhabiting a different ‘way of knowing’, its ridiculous.

Questions of which view is right or wrong don’t come into it. We all inhabit the same world and act on what we believe. The game of persuasion of worldviews and the consequences of that are a different matter. Our actions effect others.

So unless imperialistic dominance is your game, an understanding of someone else’s point of view is at least a start to building bridges and to understand the actions of others. These bridges into the dense webs of social relationships and shared memories are crucial to an understanding of culture, understood from within, as a human researcher rather than probed from outside like a mechanical data collector.

For myself, arriving at the, in some ways trite and yet in some ways profound conclusion that observations are never value free, was insightful. However it would be a mistake to conclude that social science and indeed anthropology is still full of early twentieth century positivist thinkers sending students off to collect data which they can interpret in the lab like the controllers of the Mars lander **Curiosity**. The trend seems quite the opposite. Malcolm Walker in his 2003 book *Science and Commitment in Social Research* gives an elegant and clear exposé of the differences between positivist or naturalist and humanist approaches in the social

sciences. He asks the question, what happened to positivism? And answers:

*Well, it got itself killed off by a philosopher called Karl Popper (1989, Chapter 11). Though he took quite a lot of his long career to say it. (2003, p. 12)*

He then goes on to give a clear delineation of current methods and approaches used in social science. From this one could conclude that any contemporary social scientist would understand from day one that observations are not value free and to them this thesis must appear naïve. However I would argue, although its outside my scope here, that the situation is more complex and depends on the depth and familiarity the researcher has of quantitative and qualitative methods as used in social and natural sciences. I would argue BOTH have their place and BOTH yield insightful results used appropriately, it all depends on the **questions being asked and the projects undertaken**. There will be many examples of social research such as computer modelling of historical social processes like migration that provide useful insights into human societies that would be naively and pejoratively called today by many 'positivist'. This doesn't invalidate any insightful results. In a human world which appears to comprise both hard physical constraints which yield to 'value free' observational approaches and complex social relationships which are nuanced and not revealed with 'value free' observations, in order to advance anthropological knowledge I would argue we need both and perhaps even more transcendent approaches. We gain insight from both what we can measure and what we can describe, from both quantitative and qualitative methods. It surely all comes down to the nature of the questions we ask. Perhaps the problems lie in over reliance on one set of

approaches? This thesis can also be read as being the start of an attempt to reveal in parts where the boundaries of these approaches lie.

This study illustrates one way for keeping a healthy relativism in mind when conducting fieldwork and that is reflexive use of a video camera and edit machine. Used as a comparative research tool a camera and editor are machines for exploring visual knowledge and in fact all symbolic knowledge. Not only that, the skills learnt in filmmaking allow the anthropologist to produce visually rich anthropological cinematic ethnographies.

The skills learnt are transferrable and can be employed to make any film of any kind should one find a way to fund it and the desire to do it. One could even cross over to the dark side and make commercial entertaining popular documentary, the strategy was ok for Boas and it would be ok for me.

In the visually literate of tomorrow's anthropology I can imagine herds of freshly minted anthropologists armed with mobile phones and iPads wandering, reflecting and distilling from earths bounty a new crop of rich smelly knowledge. Ahhhhh, doesn't that smell good!

I started out on this journey thinking I had a job to do. Somewhere between the community of practice I evoked to teach filmmaking and the community of anthropological practice I became a peripheral member of, I changed. I thought my eyesight was good but it seems I'm wearing glasses.

Perhaps Anthropology doesn't produce knowledge widgets in a knowledge factory at all, perhaps it produces knowledge more from reflections upon human journeys and experiences both inside and outside the factory.

# Chapter 7

## Reflections

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### 1. Reflections on Methods

When I started teaching filmmaking skills at Durham I was a jobbing filmmaker with only a faint recollection of social science research methodologies from a taught masters program some 12 years earlier.

I had to align my research question with my teaching, as there simply wasn't time to do anything else.

The question I decided on was designed to create a link between what I was teaching, what I knew, and what anthropologists were doing with filmmaking. That at least was the idea.

I needed to become familiar with the department quickly and generate interest quickly. The way to do this was by offering regular meetings to discuss and share ideas and information. I reasoned that I would discover over time what would be useful to teach and I'd also benefit from an exchange of information.

The first seminar was a success and I dreamt of a group of passionate interested students and staff eager to take up the opportunity to make film or improve the films they made, a community of mutual interest in the free thinking world of the academy bound together on a filmic multimedia

sensory voyage of discovery and knowledge. My fantasies of what could be, was just that, a fantasy.

I quickly realised that although there was definitely interest, pressures of work or assignments, periodic interruptions around exam times or holidays, a lack of visual anthropological teaching at the postgraduate level and the fact that my seminars were neither official nor accredited meant attracting and maintaining interest was difficult.

It was also apparent that there is something akin to a culture of conformity at the university in terms of the presentation of seminars, formats and student expectations.

I attended many postgraduate training courses and although excellent in many ways, were delivered in the same style almost as if to the same template. Seminar culture had become a chicken farm clucking to the same hymn book.

I realised that far from being free thinking academics, even the anthropologists were constrained by institutional expectations, power hierarchies and influence from higher places.

The best I could hope for was to prepare my seminars, deliver what I could and hope that my hard work met with the needs of whoever turned up.

The next blow was to realise that if I convened seminars on theoretical issues, no one would turn up. Many people wanted practical hands on experience with filmmaking equipment, very few wanted to talk about why. I had to be patient.

Nonetheless, that said, I did manage to gather together and maintain a regular community of interested people over the year numbering 1 or 2 to 10 plus, occasionally more and to those who gave their time and enthusiasm, and hopefully gained something from me I am very grateful.

The idea of a community of practice is a powerful one and as my seminars became more practical I found that I was able to physical join other communities for example the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology as well as virtual ones online.

The reflection here is about the importance of belonging to a specialist community.

Perhaps the best lessons whilst going on a journey like this are reserved for the end. There were a number of books I now WISH I had read during the year but wasn't even aware of until I came to write up. I think given the context under which I undertook this endeavour my ignorance can be forgiven but if there were three books I wish I'd read before I started or at least as I was doing a literature review while I was still teaching they would be:

Marcus Banks: *Visual Methods in Social Research* 2001

Fadwa Guindi: *Visual Anthropology: essential method and theory* 2004

Sarah Pink: *Doing Visual Ethnography* 2007

The authors were pointed out to me in the examiners report for which I am now doing the corrections for tomorrow I submit. Had I discovered these authors earlier instead of blundering on trying to do too many things at the same time, this would possibly have been a very different thesis. On the

other hand perhaps that's not a bad thing. We can never know everything about where we want to go and why we want to go there when we first step outside the door to adventure and possible insight. If we did why would we leave? If I had known then what I know now I might have never benefitted from the bizarre way in which I conducted my work. Maybe the most important knowledge is generated upon reflection of our travels when we finally get back?

## **2. Philosophical/ Ethnographic Reflections**

Cultural studies, economics, social work, education, ethnomusicology, folklore, religious studies geography, history, linguistics, communication studies, performance studies, advertising, psychology, usability and criminology and more use ethnography.

Relativism may have epistemological and philosophical consequences, but in practice ethnography is ubiquitous and often untroubled by such problems.

In applied anthropology and the practical realities of daily life where real problems need real attention and solutions the observation that observation is not value can seem trivial.

In the rush to "do something" however I'm minded of a Buddhist quote:

*Don't just do something, sit there*

Is this sense relativism is merely a pause, a reality check, a way of thinking twice before action, a critique. We would have to act regardless of the

concept of relativism or not, People do what they do regardless of abstract theory. However in a world of dogma and a belief in false stories it's a useful way to attempt to describe and understand different worldviews without falling into the trap of attaching to them. Its value then is in keeps us conscious of the problem.

### **3. Reflections on Writing up**

Due to personal circumstances the writing up of the thesis took place over six weeks one year after completion of the fieldwork. I had undertaken the masters as an optional extra to my fellowship. My fellowship was nominally half time and the masters was meant to be a vehicle for consolidating my thoughts on that and aligning my interests with the agenda to teach filmmaking skills and take an anthropological view on the process. It seems reasonable enough when I started. Even the question I asked seemed to tick all the boxes. When I left I had a years worth of experiences and countless notes and recordings covering a bewildering array of thoughts, topics, experiences, reflections.

Life goes up and down, 2011 was as down as I've experienced as an adult in terms of long term intense stress. I'd arrived back in Durham more or less on my ass. I hadn't found time to write up but I was dammed if I was going to give up. I had a Jan31<sup>st</sup> submission deadline which was impossible to meet, I just hoped my 'reasons' would get me a final extension.

I had just six weeks to try to pull something together.

I was sure I could do it and laboured night and day, until a week ago when after writing up all my field notes and case studies I realised I really didn't know really what I was doing.

I got into a blur of speed reading the literature but with one week to go I was brought to a shuddering halt by revisiting the question:

**But what is it that anthropologists can learn...?**

I hadn't understood my own question, I was floored!

At points during the last two weeks I experienced moments of extreme adrenaline rushes, high anxiety, panic and mental white out. During one particular night a week before the submission deadline I call the 'long night of frights', I was pacing up and down the kitchen pinning pieces of paper to walls with points to remember, drawings covered the tables and I was talking to myself, doing push ups and martial art carters I hadn't done for years, just to burn off some of the stress. Even though I KNEW I should take 20 minutes out and meditate to calm down I couldn't. I began obsessing about the layout of the document rather than concentrating on the content and had to fight with myself to sit down and just write. There is a scene in Boorman's film *Excalibur*<sup>28</sup> where Lancelot fights with his own demons and wakes with the sword through his side. This night I felt I was fighting my demons, I had gone completely mad and at one point I shouted out insanely:

*"this is all just a silly pointless illusion, for fucks sake get a grip, its NOT IMPORTANT if you finish this – my god Steve GET A GRIP!"*

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082348/>

I sat down and wrote.

At three o'clock in the morning I was so angry at myself and so just drowning with thoughts that had nothing to do with the bloody dissertation that I just had to blow off. A steam vent opened somewhere and I shouted into space:

“THIS REALLY DOESN'T BLOODY MATTER – JUST FORGET IT! “

Calmed and having practically given up on the whole thing I sat back. A moment of total stillness washed over me and without thinking I automatically just started to write again. I had my experiences, I had the question, now then:

**what was it that anthropologists could learn from making a film?**

I had a Eureka moment, the penny finally dropped:

**All observations are nuanced!**

And I realised:

**The design of the film school WAS the result.**

I had cracked it, I had my answers and went to sleep knowing I could at least finish.

The reason for relating this little personal story is simple. The context in which one ponders and writes up is crucial to the results. Is what I felt then and what I've written now any different to what any fieldworker might write when in a difficult and challenging situation under pressure? It will take some time before I can look back at what I've written but what would I

do if I had the chance to write again? Would I take my time if I could?  
Would that change things? Mood and emotion colour what we write, who  
we are, what we think and what we observe. I had written what I had  
written and come to my conclusions under a particular set of  
circumstances. As I sit here now however my conclusions seem obvious and  
trite.

So be it!

If the hard facts of the natural sciences are high granite mountains, and soft  
luscious pools of warm tropical water are the fairy lands of fantasy, then  
anthropology must lie somewhere in between in the soft middle lands of  
blurred vision. I can accept blurred.

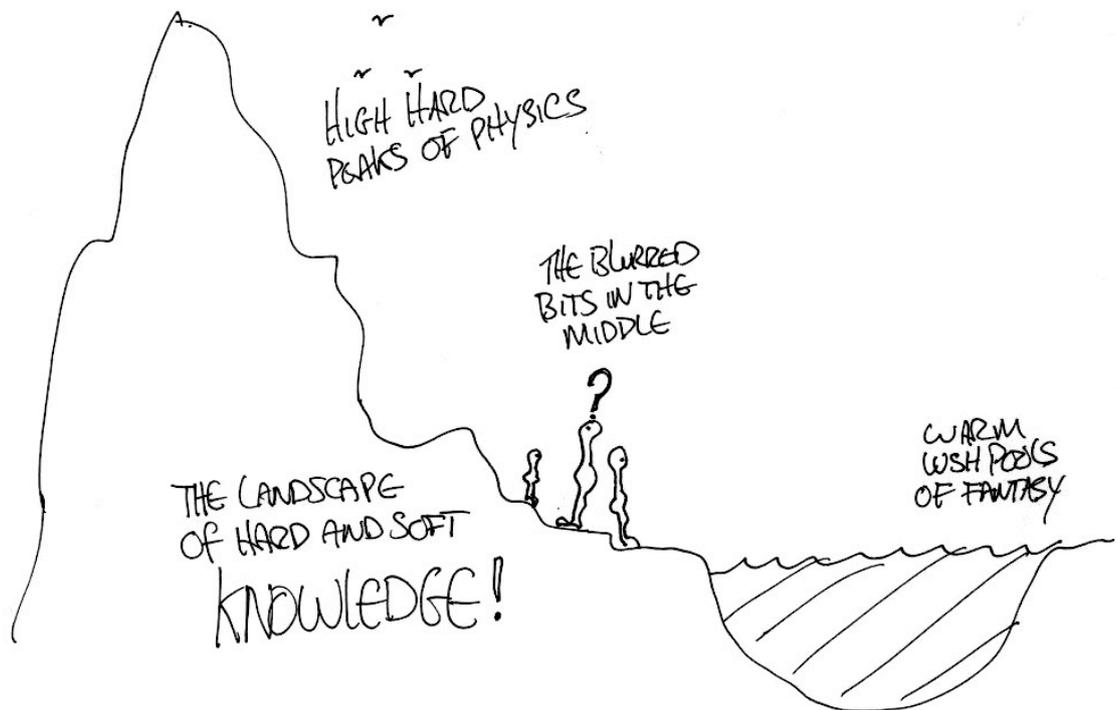


Figure 43 Knowledge Land

I feel that its only now with the hindsight of the last six weeks that I'm ready to really consider the things that come out of my year at Durham. Isn't that always the way?

I suspect my experience reflects what many other students who work and have kids and live in many different bubbles experience. Which leads to the real insight of this thesis for me, as individuals we can achieve, but no one can really stand alone, whatever it is I've written comes from me being in the department and we can see much further when we have:

**The benefits of belonging to a community of practice.**

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# Appendix

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## 1. Teaching Kit

In order to film and teach I bought and left in the department:

- Two HD Kodac cameras the Kodac Z18<sup>29</sup>

These can be bought cheaply at around £90 each.

- Two tripods,

We aren't going to be panning and titling for professional programs and Jessops had suitable models in for around £45 each.

Mac Computer running Final Cut Pro – now Final Cut Pro X

A suitable machine and software will be around £1100

- A Sony directional Microphone

This is used to get better sound during seminar filming.

This is all you need and can be sourced for less than £1300

We used this kit to produce seminar videos such as the

**Thomas H. Eriksen (University of Oslo) Beyond dualism**<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> [http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/?ie=UTF8&keywords=kodak+zi8&tag=googhydr-21&index=aps&hvadid=7183566633&ref=pd\\_sl\\_ioppu3yq2\\_b](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/?ie=UTF8&keywords=kodak+zi8&tag=googhydr-21&index=aps&hvadid=7183566633&ref=pd_sl_ioppu3yq2_b)

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWevyFqsE2E>

Thomas H. Eriksen (University of Oslo) Beyond dualism



Figure 44 Thomas H. Eriksen (University of Oslo) Beyond dualism

### Thomas H. Eriksen (University of Oslo) Beyond dualism

whistlingmule [Subscribe](#) 62 videos ▾



This video is public.

### Thomas H. Eriksen (University of Oslo) Beyond dualism

whistlingmule [Subscribe](#) 62 videos ▾



This video is public.

## 2. Typical field Kit

### Morocco Gnawa film equipment list

- Mattrax MXO2 - need later in the studio for colour grading
- Matte Box
- ME66 or audio technica Gun mic hypercardio
- Rode NT4
- Marshall video assist monitor
- Paq Lights
- Sennheiser HD 25 Enclosure headphones
- Spare MacBook Pro Battery and solar charger
- 18% Grey card
- White card
- Sony EX1 HD XDCAM EX Camera + UV Filter
- SxS memory cards
- Adapter for sdhc + shdc card
- 2 sets of radio mics + me2 lapel mics
- Spare batteries
- XLR cables
- micro mic stand
- Manfrotto 503 head on a wilderness tripod - check and clean - make head smooth, check shoe
- Camera Action Pad
- Action Cam + extras
- Rucksack
- MacBook Pro, charger
- HD's - take 3 x Lacie rugged 500 GB
- Polariser Filter 77mm
- FA66 Audio box
- Headphones
- cables
- mobile phones charged
- solar charger for phone
- boots, sandals, clothes, toiletries
- bank cards, passport, cash

All this packs into two rucksacks. The tripod is secured by the side.

### 3. Extras

<http://www.cameracorps.co.uk/Q%20Ball.htm>

QBall remote cameras

[http://magiclantern.wikia.com/wiki/Magic\\_Lantern\\_Firmware\\_Wiki](http://magiclantern.wikia.com/wiki/Magic_Lantern_Firmware_Wiki)

<http://www.gh1-hack.info/>

Firm ware updates to increase functionality for the Canon 5D Mk II, 600D, 550D HD DSLR cameras.