

AMBIGUITY

A2 Visual Anthropology – Ambiguity and Visuality

Convenor: Lívía Šavelková

The objective of this panel is to discuss films and possible ways of seeing them with a focus on exploration of possible cross-cultural understanding and translatability (David MacDougall 1998, Lucien Taylor and Ilisa Barbash 1997). While seeing is a universal human quality, ways of understanding are always “culturally”, “transculturally” and historically constituted.

How do specific cultural and situational settings influence possible ways of understanding by various film participants, viewers and audiences? How is the process of translation into another language and into different cultural context semantically limited or transformed? Is there any possible universality of transculturality of images? How do the global media form global and local images? Are there any differences between written anthropological texts and ethnographic films in terms of representation and possible ways of (mis)understanding? Is there any need to accompany the visual form of representation by a text in order to explain filmmaker’s efforts in depth, relations with film participants or changes of ideas during the process of creation of the film?

This panel investigates forms of visual representation in order to understand whether, why and how we can or cannot share meanings delivered through visual and audio-visual channels. The panel encourages alternative and experimental forms of (re)presentation of themes and subjects related to visuality and ethnography. Case studies presentation is preferred. The panel is also open to ongoing projects. The methodological and ethical matters related to ambiguity will be (self)reflected and discussed during the presentations of trailers, fragments of films, animations, and photography.

Saturday, October 1, 2016

Room A (Nr. 111) 11:30 AM – 1 PM

Chair: Lívía Šavelková

Unmaking Solaris: From Darkness of Shopping Mall towards Post-humanist Cinema

Pavel Borecký

<http://www.solaris-film.com/en/>
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Building upon the case study of an audiovisual project on Tallinn shopping mall and telling the story of a personal struggle for the embodiment of an object-oriented attitude, the paper presents the conceptual resources vital to the ethico-aesthetic agenda of sensory ethnography and links them with the ambitions of an emerging post-humanist cinema.

In order to do so, I will firstly examine the premises of dominating observational filmmaking style, a framework using „humanized camera“ (Grimshaw 2001) while basically operating within „a realist cinematic paradigm“ (Taylor 1996), and attempt to track epistemological and methodological limitations of the given approach. More specifically, I will ask what challenges recent interdisciplinary debates pertaining to object-oriented ontology, non-representative theory, speculative realism and Anthropocene possess for the creative practices of audiovisual ethnographers. Next, discussing the application of the concept of „atmosphere“ and „social aesthetics“ (MacDougall 2015) whereas shifting its human-centered foundations I will evoke the notions that have a potential to complement and, eventually, to alter traditional filmmaking methodology while prefiguratively extending the reach towards more-than- human sociality (Whatmore 2006, Tsing 2014). Finally, being provoked by abjective qualities and cinematic estrangement of „Solaris,“ I intend to argue it would be promising to start reorienting ourselves from historically important, yet seemingly unresolvable issues related to the epistemological problem of representation, and rather occupy ourselves with the development of a post-Kantian research programmes inspired by the horizons of current socio-ecological relevance.

Andy Warhol's conceptual cinema vs. ethnography

Milan Durňák

Institute of Ethnology, Charles University in Prague

In the 1960's Andy Warhol started to create films - motion pictures in the United States. These films could be considered as an avant-garde, but there is also a big anthropological approach which could be extracted from the art cinema. Andy Warhol's motion pictures is a portfolio of the experimental cinema (Screen Tests, Kiss, Sleep, Blow Job, Empire State Building) conceptualizing some kind of neutral point of view, neutralized camera. The main aim of the paper is to describe Andy Warhol's ontology of the viewing experience (Sitney, 1974). To extract anthropological knowledge from the cinematographical gaze (Russell, 1999) and represent the visualisation as the ethnographical process. Is the mode of cinematographical view ethnographically transparent or is there just one big ambiguity in the experimental view? Is it possible to find ontology of transcultural knowledge in the Warhol's films?

In my presentation I will also reflect trajectories of Warhol's alternative production in contemporary documentary films and reflect the symptoms of ethnographicity that we could discover in them.

CARGO/(im)materiality: envisioning future collaborations between art, anthropology and museum ethnography

Piotr Cichocki

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Other authors: Weronika Plińska, Daniel Rycharski, Marek M. Berezowski, Teresa Kutkowska

The multi-disciplinary exhibition CARGO/(im)materiality was aimed to reinterpret complex relationships between everyday objects and humans traced in three different socio-historical locations. The notion of the term, CARGO, relates to undefined role of social scientists, since, according to Bruno Latour: "the idea of a society has become... a big container ship which no inspector is permitted to board... Is the cargo empty or full, healthy or rotten, innocuous or deadly, newly made or long disused?" (Latour 2005: 68). The authors of the exhibition referred also to Melanesian cargo cults treated as a strategic reinterpretation of the Western goods. They used experimental methodology to create objects and installations that would enchant the visitors and establish a nexus of relationships between the artworks, (im)materiality, things and the self (Gell 1998). The contributors included experimental anthropologists (M. M. Berezowski, P. Cichocki, A. Nikolotov, W. Plińska), fine artists (I. Chamczyk, T. D. Dang, D. Rycharski), professionals from Asia Pacific Museum in Warsaw and students of anthropology, fine art and cultural studies. The curators conducted ethnographic research preceded by research in the archives and they also experimented with imaginative fieldwork on speculative futures. The presentation consists of a short film directed by Teresa Kutkowska and Magdalena Swiatlon (33', 2015) and one photograph created by visual anthropologist Marek M. Berezowski. Film presents the process of preparing the exhibition and the event itself; the photograph refers to one of its core themes: East European grey zones (Knudsen, Frederikssen 2015).

Room A (Nr. 111) 2 - 3:30 PM

Chair: Milan Durňak

Epistemological confusions about ethnographic filming

Tomáš Hirt

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In my presentation I will address ambiguity of the term 'ethnographic film' as used in Czech and Slovak academia. On the one hand, that expression is used on the conceptual background of the still living descriptive ethnography (in the sense of "národopis"), on the other hand, the term 'ethnographic film' is simultaneously defined in the context of social and cultural anthropology where the word 'ethnography' means participant observation as interpretative or critical enterprise. I'll illustrate the epistemological difference that exists between the two ways of use and understanding of the term on citations of the relevant texts and films and also on the notable controversy that took place in the 1960's in connection with the film Moravian Hellas of Karel Vachek. My presentation will be guided by the intention to differentiate consistently the two traditions of ethnographic filmmaking and thinking about it. I will try to show that the ambiguity of the term ethnographic film confuses the debate on the quality, value and meaning of ethnographic films, and that it also complicates the practice of ethnographic filmmaking on the level of production, university teaching and festival screenings.

Imagined/virtual rurality and its construction in the competition "Village of the Year"

Hedvika Novotná, Dana Bittnerová, Martin Heřmanský

Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague

Ethnographic research of countryside favours the perception of every village as a particular place of specific actors, ideas and practices (Hoggart 1990). However countryside is also a homogeneous social representation, which is produced and reproduced through the means of various cooperating discursive formations and practices (Cloke 1996, Murmont 1990, Cloke – Goodwin 1992, Bell 2007). In our paper we will focus on mechanisms of this production and reproduction of countryside construct using discursive analysis of the competition Village of the Year in Czech Republic.

We argue that the competition Village of the Year leaves significant traces in public space, particularly (but not exclusively) in virtual one. However these traces are not imprints of lived rurality, but of the imagined one. The so called virtual rurality (Cloke 2006), as a representation of countryside which is not based on any particular locality but „freely flows in space“, is further reimaged in practices connected to the competition.

Ethnographic drawings – between writing and experience

Jacek Wajszczak

Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw

Drawing accompanied ethnography from its very beginning. It was a popular way of documentation and description. The first ethnographers drew architecture, tools, human types and patterns of habitats and lineages. On the one hand, researchers used specific tools as "Machine sure and convenient for drawing the silhouettes" or other which enabled pictures to be drawn "by nature". On the other hand, by drawing ethnographers wanted to show a beauty of peasant's culture or curiosity of "the Other". Invention of photography was useful from both perspectives, because it connected ethnography to the visual aesthetic and realistic ideals. Today drawing is replaced by modern visual technologies like photography, video and audio-visual interactive forms. As Susan Sontag said the photography changed not only our way of seeing but also our way of experiencing and producing knowledge.

In my presentation, firstly I would like to sketch different ways of drawing in ethnography. Secondly, I would suggest coming back to drawing as ethnographic practice. Not yet, but I propose to use drawing not only as a way of documentation, but as a strategy of ethnographic engagement in the field.