

# RETHINKING THE TRADITIONAL IN ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM

## Representation, Ethics and Indigeneity

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Cinema has been an important instrument in the colonialist production of the ethnographic Other. Images create concepts as well as embody cultural concepts. They enact symbolic forms of power. Ethnographic film is not only a representation of reality but also a construction and an interpretation of another reality based on cultural conventions from the filmmaker's culture. Therefore we are challenged to discuss whether it is possible to present cultural knowledge "differently"; that is, to question historically, culturally, politically and ideologically bound hierarchies implicit in colonial culture? Do images embody cultural knowledge as Sol Worth and John Adair (1972, 1981) claimed? Whose knowledge do they present? What values images have in Western cultures as opposed to non-Western worlds? Do images necessarily "victimize" the Other (Ruby 1991; Kuehnast 1992; Hall 1993)? Ethnographic film theory has been an ongoing discussion of issues of objectivity, subjectivity, realism, and ethical questions of representation. In recent years ethnographic filmmakers have looked for solutions, and new approaches to documentary filmmaking have provided some answers to these questions.

**Key words:** ethnographic film, ethics, representation, Other

### Relocating the Other

The process of looking at the Other is not easily rationalized. The separation between "us" and "them" is deeply rooted inside both anthropology and ethnographic film. As Bill Nichols claims, "the location of anthropology's Other may reside less in another culture than in the anthropological unconscious, as it were" (1991:32). The unconscious is a common name that stands for all the features, conventions and forms that the Western viewer uses unconsciously when constructing knowledge about the Other. The romantic aestheticization of the Other is deeply embedded in the Western mind. The history of ethnographic film is thus a history of the production of Otherness. Kathleen Kuehnast calls this process "visual imperialism". "Visual imperialism is the colonization of the world mind through the use of selective imagery that acts as a representation of a dominant ideology or, as in many instances, a representation of the truth" (1992:185). Dominant culture's set of racial stereotypes conditions the image that the viewers get about the Other. In the fantasy produced by anthropology, the Other is apprehended as being closer to the "natural" state of humankind. The monopolistic control of the visual medium by the dominant cultural group inhibits subordinated, indigenenous and minority peoples to promote a counter ideology.

"Realistic conventions" that the ethno-cineaste uses can differ from the conventions of other cultures. As a consequence, the dominant conventions of ethnographic film make some societies appear accessible, rational and attractive and others strange (MacDougall 1998:141). The cultural incompatibility is deeply embedded in the representational system.

Visual images, just like our notion of reality, are socially constructed communicative forms. Therefore it is necessary to examine our inscriptions of the cultural Other to uncover the ways in which our interpretations reproduce hegemonic discourse. Positivist cultural anthropology was based on the assumption that visual anthropologists should represent the world as seen by the Other. Anthropologists were attributed with the power to witness the totality of an event. Visual representation was considered a privileged form of knowledge. It implied commitment to objectivity and the regime of veracity. The all-seeing and all-knowing ethnographic filmmakers expected no response from the subjects.

New and more collaborative approaches in filmmaking, that started appearing in 1960s, demonstrated that it was impossible to observe the Other and to remain unnoticed.<sup>1</sup> As MacDougall claims, “no ethnographic film is merely a record of another society: it is always a record of the meeting between the filmmaker and that society” (1998:134).<sup>2</sup> Nowadays it is a common practice for the filmmakers to cooperate with those who are filmed, which raises the problem of authorship. Collaborative, cooperative and community films are just some of the examples of new forms of shared authorship between the filmer and the filmed. The move towards multivocal ethnographic films has brought about a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between the observer and the observed. There has been a reassessment of the moral implications of ethnographic authorship. The demands for shared authorship call for profound changes in the way in which images are produced. The notion of objectivity is challenged as well as our assumptions about the nature of documentary and ethnographic films. In cooperatively produced ethnographic films, representing the Other raises the question of responsibility and legitimacy; of power and authorship.

According to Jay Ruby (1991:58), for the production of a true collaborative film, all parties must be equal in their competence and collaboration must occur at all stages of production. Ruby doubts that true collaboration is possible because there is no technical parity among all the participants. The other problem is related to the way of transmitting knowledge to the subjects. Ruby (ibid.) claims that ethnographic film is a tool for exerting power and control over the Other. Therefore, even in collaborative filmmaking it is impossible to teach the shooting techniques to indigenous communities without teaching them Western filmic conventions. We might argue that this assumption is the product of the colonial Western mind which presumes that indigenous filmmakers are not capable of developing their own aesthetics independently from the Western tradition. Or that they are inevitably bound to become victims of the Western media once they have acquired technical skills (together with the Western modes of representation). Jay Ruby (1995) argues that anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers can't escape moral responsibility towards the culture that they represent no matter what method they are using. At the same time they assume responsibility towards the viewers; they feel obliged to identify some of their strategies of representation through more referential textual constructions of the Other.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Films such as *An Argument about a Marriage* (John Marshall, 1969) or *The Feast* (Timothy Asch, 1970) were early attempts of a more reflexive approach in ethnographic filmmaking. They are still observational in the method of filming the subjects but at the same time they expose the process of filming. In Europe, Jean Rouch had huge influence on documentary cinema after having introduced a more interactive approach in the ethnographic filmmaking: “shared anthropology” and “participatory ethnography”, exemplified in the movies such as *Chronique d'un été* (1960), where Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin become “actors” before the camera, and *Jaguar* (1967). The turning point in the development of a more dialogic ethnography was the introduction of lightweight sixteen-millimeter cameras and synchronous sound recording equipment.

<sup>2</sup> MacDougall's method is visible in his movies *To Live with Herds* (1972), *A Wife among Wives* (1981), *Lorang's Way* (1980), *Under the Men's Tree* (1970), *Doon School Chronicles* (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Ruby's claim raises important questions of power and meaning that images have in different cultures. In his book *Picturing Culture* (2000:141) Jay Ruby enumerates four types of moral responsibility that the ethno-cineaste should take into consideration: personal moral contract to produce an accurate image, moral obligation towards the subjects s/he's filming, the institutions that provided the

While Ruby is skeptical about the changes in postcolonial ethnographic film, Faye Ginsburg (1995) sees postmodern ethnographic cinema as an opportunity to bring minority peoples' voices on the global stage. Despite the differences between the ethnographic films made by Western visual anthropologists and the subject-generated ethnographic films, visual anthropology should analyze both of them. Indigenous filmmaking should not be seen as a threat and it should not displace ethnographic film. It does not imply that in postcolonial visual anthropology the Other has disappeared or is lost, as Ruby (1995:77) claims. It has become a more complex entity. The aim of visual anthropology as a science is not to privilege or exclude any method of ethnographic filmmaking, but to acknowledge their parallel existence. That does not necessarily imply that collaborative and indigenous films have a destabilizing effect on visual anthropology. On the contrary, they are a step forward towards the production of self-reflexive ethnographic films that could replace disembodied and neutral Western type of representation. As such, they subvert the observational documentary as the dominant practice.

## From Shared Authorship Towards Subject-Generated Ethnographic Films

Postcolonial ethnographic film production has inverted the "salvage" model of representation (Clifford 1986:112) and has given space to different histories and voices. New voices have undermined authority and dominance of the Western discourse, which can be understood as a part of a larger process that George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) call "crisis in representation". If few decades ago exploring other cultures meant exploring films about them" as opposed to "us", the recent film production has made this clear-cut boundary quite blurred. "We" is not a universal entity and it does not imply predominantly white, male audience. "Their" voices are being represented too and they have an opportunity to engage in the ways others wish to represent them. With the appearance of new voices and new gazes, the process of the construction of anthropological knowledge has changed: it is not a one way process but a dialogical practice made from juxtaposing indigenous knowledge with the Western gaze. In postcolonial ethnographic films those who were filmed in the past are now asserting their right to control their own images. Filmmakers have no longer right to speak with disembodied and depersonalized discourses of knowledge and power. This Griersonian legacy<sup>4</sup> in documentary has been radically shaken in subject-generated ethnographic films. "Their" embodied experience on screen reconfigured the representation; they are no longer studied subjects, but active voices in the production of the "real".

Indigenous ethnographic films are assumed to give voice to the "voiceless"; the oppressed marginalized groups that were previously denied access to the means of production of their own image. The traditional "voice of God" has become one among many and it has lost its absolute authority. The shift between the observer and the observed deconstructs Geertzian interpretation of anthropology as the study of others. The act of representation is

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funds and the audience. Ruby's notion of the moral burden of authorship in postcolonial visual anthropology is related to his assumption that Western anthropologists should explore only their cultures. Otherwise they victimize the Other by representing him in accordance with the discursive practices of the Western culture.

<sup>4</sup> The Griersonian conceptualization of documentary film relies on asserting the factuality of the filmic text, without making distinction between evidence and interpretation. It is an unquestionably eyewitness account of the reality and it derives its authenticity from the indexical characteristics of cinema. The documentaries made on the model of John Grierson's work tend to centralize the meaning without questioning the subjectivity of the author.

not clear cut as it once was; the politics of location and the issues of embodiment address the filmer and the filmed. Indigenous ethnographic films eschew voice-over commentary that speaks on behalf of a collectivity. We are often faced with first-person testimonial discourse. New forms are more reflexive and interactive for both the filmmaker and the viewer. Postcolonial subject-generated films do not generalize or conclude; they build upon subjective narratives of subjects who are personally and bodily engaged in the production of meaning and representation. Catherine Russell (1999) calls these new subcategories of ethnographic film “experimental ethnography”, claiming that the postmodern ethnographic films are primarily politically and socially engaged works, and their main goal is not only to include the Other within modernity but to revise the terms of realist representation.

Experimental ethnography involves a reconceptualization of the historical nature of Otherness, including not only how the Other was (and is) constructed in colonial discourse but also how cultural difference and ‘authenticity’ are related in the postcolonial present and future (ibid.:11).

The process of empowering the subject does not automatically imply that the position of the anthropologist and the indigenous filmmaker are the same. The space given to indigenous filmmakers is in most cases reserved for the films about the life and culture of their own communities. They are often reminded of the territorial boundaries in which they are to remain. Documentary accuracy is guaranteed not by their education, like in the case of Western anthropologists, but by the fact that they, as insiders, can speak with authority about their own culture. Handing the camera over to a native filmmaker raises issues related to authenticity of the so called “indigenous knowledge”. It should not be assumed that the films about other cultures, even when produced by the members of that culture, are more objective or truthful. No group has a privileged insight into their own culture. Although the ideal ethnographic film was considered one in which the image of another culture was presented as a form of cultural knowledge, in postcolonial visual anthropology this “knowledge” is bound to the notions of race and ethnicity. Films about other cultures made by the members of that culture are not necessarily more representative of his/her own culture and people.

It is a paradoxical twist of the colonial mind: what the Outsider expects from the Insider is, in fact, a projection of an all-knowing subject that this Outsider usually attributes to himself and to his own kind. (...) Otherness becomes empowering critical difference when it is not given, but re-created. (Minh-Ha 1991:70-71)

The place of the native is always very well-delimited in the global cinema and media. Minh-Ha sees the new forms of self-reflexive ethnographic filmmaking as mechanisms of “uncovering the work of ideology” (ibid.:77), aimed at creating a more authentic image of the Other. She criticizes the conventions of ethnographic objectivity and the division between those “there” and us “here”. That division, in her opinion, implies that the Other is objectified and the filmmaker and the viewer are subjects of the perception. The utopian project of the postcolonial ethnography, claims Minh-Ha, is to overcome the binary opposition of self and other.

## Remapping Ethnographic Film in Digital Era

Ethnographic film takes on new meanings in postmodern age, due to the transformations of the Other in the digital age. Ethnographic film production blurs with video and new forms of

mechanical and electronic reproduction. The use of digital video has become a routine part of anthropological fieldwork. This has resulted in the revision of the established ethnographic film canon. Technological innovation in the means of production has brought changes in the manner in which ethnographic audiovisual footage is distributed. Increased international distribution channels and alternative channels (such as film festivals) have facilitated the dissemination of ethnographic film on the global scale. New media have given a chance to the indigenous population to be in control of the images. Contemporary indigenous film and video are used as persuasive tools for negotiating or maintaining cultural identity. The position of the Other in global and multicultural world is constantly being negotiated and redefined, which is conditioned by political, social and technological changes. Image is not perceived as a pure representation but as a political act and a tool for controlling one's cultural identity. New hybrid and intercultural identities are being enacted and constructed. Many collaborative project such as *Video nas aldeias (Video in the Villages)*, *Kayapo Video Project*, *Alaska Native Heritage Project*, *Chiapas Media Project*, *Ojo de Agua Comunicación*, have given possibility to indigenous population to get acquainted with video cameras and start shooting their own videos. Indigenous communities all over the world have benefited from the new media that have become their window into the world. Presenting their own images about their cultures has given them the opportunity to challenge cultural hegemony of the West and the mainstream official state narratives. Indigenously controlled media and films play an important role in cultural and political struggles. They are not used with the pretense of saving the vanishing native but as a tool for political claims and activist purposes. Ethnographic film has become a field for production of political and social realities. "The right to represent is assumed to be the right to control one's cultural identity in the world arena" (Ruby 1991:51). There has been an important shift in the way indigenous communities represent themselves; they use video and media to communicate with the structures of power and to "correct" the distorted Western image about their cultures.

The position of ethnographic film within visual anthropology has changed due to the transnational spread of new technologies that have had an impact on the aesthetics of ethnographic film. Faye Ginsburg has described the positive impact of indigenous ethnography on visual anthropology as a "parallax effect":

(...) one might understand indigenous media as arising from a historically new positioning of the observer behind the camera so that the object – the cinematic representation of culture – appears to look different than it does from the observational perspective of ethnographic film. Yet, by juxtaposing these different but related kinds of cinematic perspectives on culture, one can create a kind of parallax effect; if harnessed analytically, these "slightly different angles of vision" can offer a fuller comprehension of the complexity of the social phenomenon we call culture and those media representations that self-consciously engage with it. It is my argument that the parallax created by the different perspectives in these media practices is crucial in responding to contemporary critiques of ethnographic film that regard indigenous media and related practices as the genre's death knell. (1995:65)

Shifting the position of the subject has brought about the change in the production of ethnographic film. New forms of decolonized ethnographic knowledge call for the revision of the theoretical framework of visual anthropology. Ginsburg stresses the importance of the opening of multiple perspectives in visual anthropology and broadening the frame that can accommodate indigenous cinema, media and other social practices. It is expanding the boundaries of the field of visual anthropology that Faye Ginsburg (1994) is interested in. Only by analyzing the multiplicity of representational practices we can understand multiple ways in which

culture is understood. To understand ethnographic film today, it is necessary to consider it in relation to other cultural and media forms (reality show, home videos, cyber-activism, video art, TV and radio programs, etc.). For many years mass media were seen as almost a taboo for anthropology although the idea of “the anthropology of visual communication” appeared already in Sol Worth’s (1981) work. The increasing accessibility of media among people who were traditionally filmed, calls for revision and broadening of the field of visual anthropology. This critical revision is urged by the theoretical shift related to the questions of ethics, politics and poetics of ethnographic representation, and by the influence post-colonial studies had on anthropology. In order to frame the field of cultural production it is not enough to study only ethnographic film but all other forms of media consumption that are significant sites for the research on cultural practices at local, regional and transnational level.

 COMMENTS

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## Ethnographic Video for the Twenty First Century

Throughout the twentieth century ethnographic film became established as a genre of ethnographic practice and representation, albeit with variations in style, purpose and in the ways it was practiced. Etami Borjan's discussion brings this process to the fore, along with some of the debates and issues that filmmakers raised and confronted during that period. Indeed during this time a series of key issues, were raised, as Borjan points out, relating to the right to represent others, and the ways that ethnographic films were (and still are) developed as part of activist projects. Borjan also notes in a timely way that the shift to digital video is impacting how ethnographic film is developing. In what follows I pick up on both of these themes to comment on the significance of two shifts and developments. First, going slightly in a different direction from activist film I focus on how ethnographic film can be 'active' in society, that is how can it can be used in applied contexts and what kinds of interventions it might be involved in. Second, I discuss further some of the implications of the fact that most ethnographic filmmaking is now digital ethnographic filmmaking. One key point to keep in mind when speaking of 'ethnographic' film in a contemporary context is, moreover, that we are no longer often actually referring to ethnographic *film*. Rather, the central medium for the making of ethnographic documentaries, and in the use of audiovisual media in ethnographic research, is digital video.

Parallel to the development of ethnographic filmmaking in the twentieth century, emerged a series of critiques of ethnographic film. Borjan highlights some of these, yet there are others that have been less frequently commented on. One of these less discussed critiques of ethnographic filmmaking focused on the question of the purpose of ethnographic film and how much ethnographic filmmaking did not fulfill what was seen as its applied potential (e.g. see Chalfen and Rich 2007). While leading ethnographic filmmakers continued to make films that were praised and screened at ethnographic film festivals, other key contributors to the field of visual anthropology were using film, and later video, to develop applied research. This work was produced in core fields of education (e.g. the work of John Collier Jnr., see Collier 2007) and health care contexts (e.g. the work of Richard Chalfen, see Chalfen and Rich 2007), in the context of projects that sought to make a difference in society.

My aim in this short article is to bring to the fore this other and now growing role of ethnographic film practice, to ask what the role and purpose of ethnographic film might be in society, beyond the making of ethnographic films to screen to other filmmakers at film festivals and to students of anthropology. This is not to say that such conventional and more academically oriented ethnographic filmmaking does not have an important role; I believe it does play a key role in the development of ethnographic filmmaking techniques, the generation of a filmic scholarship and in exploring and representing other people's worlds with them. However there is another related role for ethnographic film in the ways it can reach

beyond academia and this is my focus here. In 1999 I began to use ethnographic videomaking techniques in applied research projects (e.g. Pink 2004), realizing the potential of such methods beyond the making of films. Yet, simultaneously my work was influenced by that of the filmmakers I studied 10 years earlier, at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology (University of Manchester, UK). In the early 2000's I then began to seek examples of how other ethnographic filmmakers and visual anthropologists were also working with ethnographic filmmaking techniques, practices and products in the context of applied research. The outcome of this was eventually an edited book titled *Visual Interventions: Applied Visual Anthropology* (Pink 2007a), which brought together the work of a number of filmmakers and scholars whose practice crossed different sectors such as health, disaster and post-conflict work, and community development, as well as collaborations with industry. I added to this in a later essay, which updated on developments and also reflected on the digital context of these (Pink 2011). The ethnographic film practice of these scholars was, like my own, influenced by core themes in visual anthropology, including reflexivity, participatory and collaborative approaches, seeking to engage empathetically with the sensory and affective dimensions of people's lives, and by the work of leading ethnographic filmmakers and writers such as David MacDougall and Jean Rouch. As I discuss in the introduction to the book (Pink 2007b), in these works it was often not only the ethnographic film product that mattered. Rather other outcomes of the filmmaking process were important; for instance the impact that participating in the making of the film could have on identity and self-awareness processes for film subjects and participants, and how film subjects might get involved in the screening of the films, were in some cases significant elements of the making and showing of ethnographic films in applied research contexts.

In a contemporary context both applied and academic developments in ethnographic filmmaking and in the use of ethnographic filmmaking techniques in applied research is, as I noted above, little to do with film as a medium. Rather this work is predominantly produced using digital video. This means that there has been on the one hand a divergence in the types of technologies that we might use for the making of the ethnographic moving image; from camera phones to top of the range digital video cameras. On the other hand there is convergence in what one might be able to do using the same technology; one could video record, edit and distribute an ethnographic documentary directly from a camera phone. Thus, to understand ethnographic video making and its potential we need to now address issues and literatures beyond the traditional scope of ethnographic filmmaking. We need to turn to the study of digital media to comprehend how their ubiquity in our own practices as researchers, and in the everyday lives of film subjects and research participants opens up new potentials. These potentials offer us new ways to record, edit, and disseminate ethnographic documentary, which might be reflexive and participatory in new ways. It might involve working as a documentary maker or applied video researcher in places that are simultaneously online and offline. It invites modes of dissemination that can take advantage of the Internet, social media and a range of video hosting platforms. I do not discuss specific web resources, software or hardware, since I point out in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of my book *Doing Visual Ethnography* (Pink 2013), the technological and practical landscape of this context is rapidly changing.

To sum up, ethnographic documentary, and the use of ethnographic documentary techniques in research and representation are beginning to participate in scholarship and applied research in new ways. This creates an important context for the emergence of new forms of public visual ethnography scholarship, which digital media can support. This is part of the future of ethnographic video making and it is up to us to enable its emergence.



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### A Plea for Situating Knowledges

Etami Borjan's article summarizes the debate on participatory and collaborative approaches in ethnographic filmmaking from some years back. Arguing with Faye Ginsburg that "new forms of decolonized ethnographic knowledge call for revision of the theoretical framework of visual anthropology", Borjan also pursues theoretical and methodological discussions concerning indigenous cinema, the role of new social media and other social practices. Emerging from this review is the plea for a dialogical practice that involves the juxtaposition of "indigenous knowledge" with the "Western gaze". To avoid an oversimplification and a priori value judgment of these seemingly opposed or at least complementary positions, I suggest (a) taking a closer look at the potentials and pitfalls of how indigenous articulations of new media currently redefine social activism and (b) reconsidering Haraway's notion of *situated knowledges* as a viable theoretical approach to conceptualize visuality.

For a radical theoretical shift related to questions of representational ethics, poetics and politics in the field of visual anthropology it is not enough to simply claim that various forms of mass media should be studied anthropologically, as this article seems to suggest. In my view, it is just as crucial to be aware of new forms of visual imperialism camouflaged as educational or political activism, and to avoid the trap of privileging "subjugated" or "insider's" perspectives because they are "least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge", as Haraway reminds us (1988:584). Her warning about a serious danger in romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their position, holds true more than ever before. I therefore plead to keep in mind that there is no such thing as an innocent position, even when most favorably looking at how new opportunities, based on digital imaging and social media networks, evolve for political expression and organization – from Cairo to Tripoli to Wall Street's Zuccotti Park, and, most recently, to Gezi Park in Istanbul.

While public information supplied and circulated by social networking platforms (including the posting of photos and video footage on Flickr, YouTube and Vimeo) have become indispensable for many activists on the field, this process has also displayed certain downsides. Not only have oppressive regimes effectively managed to use the same technologies to spy, hack, subvert and misinform, as was the case in the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009; but a particularly deceptive form of politicking, commonly referred to as "slacktivism" has developed. A pejorative term for people who want to appear to be doing something for a particular cause without actually having to do anything, it refers to those who frequently click the Facebook "like" and "share" buttons, but whose measures have usually no other effect than to make themselves feel good.

However, the worst example of how participatory video or collaborative filmmaking has been misused as a seemingly appropriate tool for representing an indigenous group's struggle for international recognition is the 55 min. film *Shooting with Mursi* (2009) by Ben Young and Olisarali Olibui. According to the official website:

this unique film tells the story of one of Africa's most isolated tribes – the Mursi – through the eyes of one of its members Olisarali Olibui, who carries in one hand a Kalashnikov and in the other a camera. An Ethiopian pastoralist tribe, Mursi are beset by potential threats

from other tribes, proposals to convert their land into a national park, and the arrival of a new road bringing tourists. The film provides a compelling and, at times, disturbing insight into everyday life of a people whose culture, in the words of Olisarali, “faces extinction”. (<http://www.shootingwithmursi.com/>)

As the viewer is presented with an oversimplified “juxtaposition between indigenous knowledge and the western gaze” (Borjan), Olisarali takes the classic position of a cultural broker who takes an insider’s perspective on the difficulties his community is facing in an era of restricted land rights, tourism and inter-tribal warfare. But instead of primarily using Olisarali’s original filmic footage, he is turned into a character in the film and reduced to the banal but universally subscribable statement that he finds the camera a more useful tool to “give his people a voice” than the Kalashnikov. *Shooting with Mursi* does not broach the issue that most of the visual material used in the final version of the film – highly exoticizing shots of Olisarali and the local Mursi community – was shot by Ben Young while appropriating Olisarali’s perspective to “explain” the events to the Western audience. In my view, the film is not only a bad example of ill-informed salvage anthropology; it also, even worse, romantically aestheticizes and exoticizes Olisarali as a technologically apt and English-speaking version of the “noble savage” who intends to assist his people via the objectifying medium of film.

I have used this film in classroom teaching to encourage students to critically reflect on questions of power and ethics of representation; in my experience, however, the majority of the viewers tend to buy the collaborative composition of the film narrative and are convinced that this film is a “true” or at least “truer” representation of Mursi reality because one of the filmmakers is a Mursi. They do not often ask the question of who controls or who owns this film, or even whether the film medium had a performative and/or informative function within the Mursi community. The working of this film is particularly deceptive because it momentarily excites audiences who are not used to “hear the subaltern speak,” but fails to consequently address questions regarding power relations, agency and visual imperialism. The fact that this film was internationally successful and won a number of awards, amongst them the UNESCO Award at the Millenium Film Festival in Brussels, is an indication of the prevalent confusion about the decolonization of knowledge in general and decolonization of the ethnographic gaze in particular.

Along these lines, the visual anthropologist Martin Gruber points towards the “new tyranny” of participatory approaches in development contexts (Gruber 2012). In his recently submitted PhD dissertation on “Participatory Ethnographic Filmmaking in Applied Contexts” he illustrates how participation can conceal and reinforce oppression and argues that participatory methods are embedded in power relations and are themselves exercises of power (ibid.).

This is of course not to say that there are no truly excellent examples of indigenous media and collaborative ethnographic filmmaking that really *do* help to overturn subaltern positions in the political arena (Prins 2002:72). Some of the examples I appreciate the most are the films, videos and TV programs produced by Igloodik Isuma Productions, Inc. in Canada (<http://www.isuma.tv/isuma-productions>). A platform for indigenous filmmakers, Isuma TV produced a unique style of “re-lived” drama and released the 13-part dramatic TV series *Nunavut (Our Land)*, along with a number of non-fiction works on “Testimony”, “Documentaries and Youth” as well as “Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change”. Telling authentic, original-language Inuit stories to Inuit and non-Inuit audiences worldwide, Isuma develops new and original forms of storytelling, dramaturgy and aesthetic composition and continues

to enhance Inuit community culture and language. Another successful example is *Children of Srikandi* (2012), the first film about queer women in Indonesia:

Eight authentic and poetic stories are interwoven with beautiful shadow theater scenes that tell the story of Srikandi, one of the characters of the Indian Mahabharata. This collective anthology transcends the borders between documentary, fiction and experimental film. (<http://lauracoppens.com/#/films/>)

The challenge, however, remains to confront the continued dominance of Western ways of seeing/showing and knowing without abandoning the project of visual ethnographic representation altogether. Nobody has, in my view, outlined the conundrum better than Donna Haraway, who, speaking from a radical feminist perspective, states:

So, I think, my problem, and “our” problem, is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own “semiotic technologies” for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a “real” world (...) (1988:579)

This comment is directly transferable to the dilemma that ethnographic film and indigenous media have now been facing for the last decades. And so is her plea:

We don't want a theory of innocent powers to represent the world, where language and bodies fall into the bliss of organic symbiosis. We also don't want to theorize the world, much less act within it, in terms of Global Systems, but we do need an earthwide network of connections, including the ability, partially, to translate knowledges among very different – and power-differentiated – communities. (1988:579-580)

Furthermore, she confirms that subscribing to a partial perspective does not mean abandoning the pursuit of accumulating knowledge and establishing truth(s). With this in mind, I suggest that visual anthropologists and collaborative filmmakers start accepting that there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated and that the fear of taking a “biased” position – whether it results from an ill-conceived “political correctness” or a cultural relativist position – often tends to obstruct the production of sensible accounts of the world we inhabit and hence also obstructs the production of stimulating and innovative (i.e. multidimensional, multi-genre) films.

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## Without the Colonial Other: Ethnographic Film at Home

The text offered by Etami Borjan as the lead text for this discussion of visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking can be definitely called a starting point in the development of a more serious approach to visual anthropology in Croatia.

As a discipline, it is undoubtedly a new one in Croatia and the neighboring countries, the region popularly known as the SE Europe. The courses in visual anthropology have been taught at Croatian universities only for the last ten years or so and there are a few ethnologists and anthropologists today who would say that what they do is ethnographic filmmaking. Half jokingly, I could easily claim that I could name them all. However, it has to be said

that the development and “embodiment” of visual anthropology in ethnology and cultural anthropology in Croatia has followed certain general trends of the development of those disciplines in Croatia, the so-called anthropologization of ethnology and the turn from “Eastern ethnology” to “Western anthropology”, the process which had its good points but also a few major drawbacks. As Western anthropology had to “apologize” for the colonial approach of its pre-1960s past, which was also applicable to the practices of visual anthropology and which Borjan very thoroughly presented in her overview of the development of visual anthropology, ethnology had to get rid of the brand of a national science dealing with national cultural phenomena, rooted in the Rural Other, often with implicit or, sometimes, explicit, nationalistic undertones. Fortunately, I think, the last period of re-thinking of both disciplines has overcome those issues once and for all.

Hence, return to the past theories found in the leading text is an excellent starting point for the new discussions in the combined approach to visual anthropology which takes into account some other traditions, not straightforwardly “Western” ones, of filming the Other, whoever He/She might be in the non-colonial traditions of the culture research. Namely, one of the major drawbacks of the anthropologization of ethnology, including the introduction of visual anthropology, was the non-critical, West-to-East-copy-paste of the existing theories which, in the world of academia, gave us the “license to teach”, but, in the world of ethnographic filmmaking, urged us to forget that we were the carriers of almost a century long tradition of filming of Our Other. Of course, I am not claiming either approach as being better, I will just try to outline an alternative history of filming an alternative Other.

At the beginning and almost through the whole of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Croatia was an exotic destination for many adventurers and travelers who were seeking the wild, untouched, even savage Europe. Even a century and a half earlier, from the time of Alberto Fortis, the Dalmatian Hinterland was famous as the home of the very backwards, very “primitive” people called the Morlacks (Fortis 1774). Not Morlocks (Wells 1895), but almost as savage. When camera arrived at the scene, the Morlacks, the real ones and their invented image, were long gone, but the camera-carrying travelers were equally mesmerized by the nomadic shepherds, non-pasteurized home-made cheese, cottages in which cattle and people slept (almost) side by side, pottery, textiles, sheep skins, animal masks and the simplicity of life in its pure form. Sarcasm aside, without the colonial situation as defined by anthropologists, the approach was equally – let’s call it, for the sake of discussion, colonial.

Roughly at the same time, meaning the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, living and filming in Croatia, was the Croatian first visual anthropologist, Milovan Gavazzi. His ethnographic filmography spans the period from the 1920s to 1970s, he was the author of numerous ethnographic films, but his subjects were his Own Others, or, to be more precise, the Others from his own culture – Croatian “peasants” and their rural everyday existence. Hence, strictly speaking, he was doing ethnology and visual ethnography at home and hence, should have been freed from the superior Western gaze over the indigenous other, the very gaze which determined the definition and development of ethnographic film. So was he really?

He was a University Professor of ethnology, admired and remembered by many of his students, and he used to stand up when they would enter his office during office hours. He would never call himself visual anthropologist, although he was familiar with the discipline and during his many years of writing ethnographies and making ethnographic films (even though some of the films were lost, there are more than 20 films he made himself or in cooperation with other filmmakers). He never problematized the concept of ethnographic film or visual ethnography, until the very end of his working life in an interview which specifically

dealt with the topic (Križnar 1992) and on the insistence of others and not from his own urge to explain his theoretical and methodological framework. In the interview, he admitted being fascinated by *Nanook* and greatly admiring Jean Rouch. None of that was obvious in his films. Very much like Franz Boas in his insistence on visual but not very film-like accounts of material culture and, specifically, “rural” technology (Gavazzi seemed to be fascinated by it), Gavazzi was simply making the visual counterpart of his ethnological theory, salvage ethnography. On purpose, not by chance. From his own culture and for his own culture.

In all of his works, it was also notable that he was fascinated by, what the theory would call, *indigenous knowledge*. He was an excellent fieldworker, had a good network on informants *in situ* and would not miss the opportunity to film, for example, a very complex process of changing a location of a house, a specific way of fishing, boiling milk with a hot stone, carrying the deceased on a large wooden sleigh, specific weaving techniques, etc. According to anecdotal accounts, which are still being re-told at my Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, he was known to rush out of his office with his camera in his hands after he would receive an information that there was something out there worth filming. According to his colleagues and the students which accompanied him on his travels, he was able to establish a great rapport with his rural interlocutors. After all, he was a Professor (as everybody called him), he was a guest in the house, he could and would chat of everyday struggles of his rural co-citizens, he was interested in what those people had to say, offer and show. His silent filmed subjects often readily gazed at his camera, as if asking whether they were being cooperative enough. However, his interest in them and their lives stemmed from his own scientific motifs, he made the selection of what was representative and what was not, he had the upper hand in this exchange of knowledge and interests and, of course, as I already emphasized, he was the Professor with a big capital letter, a “knowledgeable”, “learned” guest, a member of the “elite”.<sup>5</sup> Hence, his ethnographic filmmaking was also an imposition of a superior gaze, a gaze which could also be called colonial, but without the colonial situation and without the Colonial Other.

Another equally intriguing approach to ethnographic film at home was happening at roughly at same period, from the 1930s to the 1970s and the “perpetrators” in this case were the physicians and their colleagues from the School of Public Health “Andrija Štampar” from Zagreb. Their ethnographic filmography was enormous. But, their ethno-filmic gaze at their own Rural Others was even more superior and exclusivist. It was the gaze of public health officials, professionally (not necessarily individually, but that was also quite probable) astonished and shocked at the hygienic, socio-economic and medical conditions the rural population lived in. Hence, the “colonial” character of their gaze was scientific and professional and was based on the politics and power of the medical system.

The decades have passed, some visual ethnography was done at the Institute of Ethnology and Folkloristics from Zagreb, and then came the period of the import of visual anthropology I was talking about at the beginning. The students of ethnology, (socio)cultural anthropology and cultural studies at Croatian universities were watching the amazing and ingenious ethnographic films by Flaherty, Rouch, Gardner, Marshall, Ash, MacDougall, read theories by Hocking, Heider, Banks, Ruby, Ginsburg, Pink, el Guindi, Minh-Ha; some Croatian ethnologists and anthropologists were making their own films (low-budget or, more often, no-budget) and festivals of ethnographic films started to emerge, some completely new ones (in the town of Rovinj), some re-kindled ones (in the town of Đakovo). However, the

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<sup>5</sup> It has to be said that his styling also probably did not help; on some of the field photographs he looked exactly like E. E. Evans-Pritchard in his Azande photographs.

selection and the awarding process at some of the festivals gave the impression that we were trying to prove that we have learned visual anthropology and, without even a re-course or a second thought as to why was this happening, the festivals, in order to get funding and a broader audience, were inviting and, later as they grew in popularity, attracting films which won awards at other international ethnographic film festivals. The audience at the festivals thus (not really numerous, but who's counting) got good films, about people and places they have never seen or ever dreamed of seeing or never even cared about seeing, but these are all good aspects of the production of ethnographic films, the organizers have proven their organizational skills and we, the ethnologists and cultural anthropologists of Croatia, have proven that we have learned the theory. The things we have missed to ask ourselves is whether this theory was applicable, to what extent and, the most importantly, in what way, to what we have been doing for the last 200 years in writing and roughly 100 years in visual media – ethnography at home or, more precisely, the ethnography of our own culture.<sup>6</sup>

In the discussion of ethnographic film festivals and, subsequently, the reception of ethnographic films, we have to mention one important element, noted by Ruby and Hockings, among many others, some 20 or more years ago – the audience. I'm quite sure that Professor Gavazzi, from the beginning of this story, did not care at all about the "mass" reception of his films. His students and colleagues were good enough audience. Even though the *Forest of Bliss* is a master piece for me, a film I am bedazzled with, to a not that enthusiastic viewer, it is difficult to understand and to follow. If ethnographic films were "made to be seen" (Banks and Ruby 2011) does it mean that somewhere along the road of present or future development of ethnographic films, in order to "please" the audience, and here we can go back to Aristotelian theory of literature, they will have to be more film-like and use film more dexterously as the medium of expression of knowledge, meaning, emotions...? (Sensory visual anthropology and ethno-fiction seem to be good examples.)

We can, of course, claim that the motifs for making ethnographic films were never to please the audience, but, ideally, to teach them something, to educate them, to stir an emotion, to make them think, to take sides, to act possibly and, above all, to give voice to the voiceless and to give rise to the multivocal existences that make our world. A very noble task, I agree. Can it be done?

Even if our Others were not in the inferior position of the Colonial Other, but were, in Gavazzi's time, exclusively Rural Other and today, for the lack of a better term, Our Other (from rural and urban settings alike even though the difference is increasingly hard to establish), our filmmaking process of selecting and interpreting the data, knowledge, impressions, thoughts, emotions we have about them and packaging those in a visual form which is "made to be seen" by some Other Others, is a very "colonial" process indeed. Misusing Foucault's claim of medical gaze as the one which sees and knows (Foucault 1963), I would say that the ethno-filmic gaze is the one which sees and "knows", in the analytic process of making up the filmic story, creating it, developing it, asking the questions and providing the answers. The answers can and should be multivocal, as many contemporary ethnographic filmmakers have proven in their works, and the Author's voice can be a full scale vibrato or a deliberately hushed whisper, but there will always be more voices hidden behind the spoken ones. Indigenous cinematography can not escape that trap either. As all other cinematographies, shared,

<sup>6</sup> The concepts "ethnography at home" and "ethnographic film at home" are a paraphrase of the well-known theoretical concept emerging roughly in many text during the 1980s, the "anthropology at home", which meant research of one's own culture. A more appropriate concept might be the "ethnology of the familiar" offered by Croatian ethnologists Čapo Žmegač and Gulin Zrnić in 2000s.

participatory, joint, collaborative, etc., it can just be very fair about revealing the choices it made.

As far as collaborative ethno-filming is concerned, today it is simply a logical way to do this job properly. Of course you will pay attention to what your “objects” want, of course you will take into account their disagreement with something you’ve just offered as the interpretation of what they say or do. In particular, of course you will allow an old lady being filmed baking bread “traditional” way to take off her everyday apron and put on “a better one” if she loudly protests at camera being on and catching her in the apron she did not want to be filmed in. Some schools teach we should urge her to stay in her everyday apron, others to film her plead at changing it, with us even perversely waiting for her to say loudly that she has to change her apron because of the camera, which would prove we have disclosed our setting and our methodology. Both seem a bit unethical towards the old lady herself. She was kind, very ready to show us what we wanted, talked to us, gave us food, some of us slept in her house and she had the right to want to be filmed in something we will detect as “ethnographic fraud” or a sensitivity to camera “being there”.

What about the lady herself? What did she want? A better pension, more people in the little Adriatic village she lived in, less tourists, more regular supply of groceries and for her granddaughter to graduate from the University. No, she did not care about ethnographic films, but she liked our interest in her life. My point here is that giving the camera to the ones we film is just another illusion that we will get more “closer to the truth” and more away from our colonial gaze.

Many of the Our Others I have met, especially those of younger generation, have the enthusiasm and frequently, quite good cameras, to do the story themselves. Of course they can learn the basics of filming, no problem there. But if they want to say something about their region, their everyday life, their activities, they want to talk about things that interest themselves personally. Some would film a local football match, some their prom, some a very nasty beach party, some, who paid attention at school, the story of the town’s old tower, some, of the broken water pipe at the town’s Riva, etc. But they will all have their own agendas for doing it and those multiple voices will not necessarily oppose the mainstream hegemony or bring about cultural and political changes. For me personally, activism is my chosen way of doing ethnography and, paraphrasing Ruth Behar, for me it is the only way for doing ethnography. However, activism as such should not be the leading thought for making ethnographic films.

In conclusion, ethnographic filmmaking is an imposing, superior(istic) and very authorial and authoritarian(ish) overlook of any given society, culture or person. Even without the colonial position which defined the development of ethnographic film and without the Colonial Other, its practices are deeply “colonial” in imposing the filmer over the filmed. The camera can change hands, or even the direction of the filming, with the filmed one filming the filmer, but the discourse of the film as a whole is set at a third reality (Edwards 1997:56), beyond the ethnographic encounter as such. Even when we do ethnography at home, we are making the same “mistakes”.

Hence, indigenous cinematography can be great, very pragmatic, needed and practical sub-genre of ethnographic film, extremely important for the future development of the genre itself and equal in importance with all other types of ethnographic film, maybe bringing a new boost to the old form, but it will never eradicate the issues of authority and gaze in ethnographic film.

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## Ethnographic Filmmaking in Shifting Contexts

Etami Borjan's article introduces some of the main tropes in anthropology positioning them in regards to ethnographic film: the Other, shared authorship, multivocality, objectivity and subjectivity. Even if we nominate them separately and analyze them separately, they are unquestionably related to each other and dependent on each other. Discussing ideas about one of them leads us to rethink ideas about the rest of them, and about their nonlinear connectedness. Hence, I enclose here some thoughts of how are these concepts intertwined in the rethinking of ethnographic filmmaking in shifting contexts.

When discussing elsewhere<sup>7</sup> the relations between mainstream anthropology and visual anthropology, I wrote: "Visual ethnography as a method is nowadays not in question. It showed from the early years notable ability to adapt itself to demands of theories that are constituting it. A big part of anthropological theory focuses, in turn, on discipline's methodology rendering its usage more and more thought-out. Ethnography is not just a practice that makes the world explainable, it is acknowledged as a practice of world making. In that sense, complexities of our world are made and remade through our explanations of them. Ethnographic film in particular seems to succeed in surpassing a space of ocularity and in converting images into a unity of sense."

By "unity of sense" I meant the ability of ethnographic film to evoke lived reality cinematically. In such instances, the complexity of film's form is intertwined with the complexity of the phenomenon in question. Taken in this way, I argued, ethnographic film is the exploration of the particular phenomenon and is, at the same time, the phenomenon to observe: it is the 'site'. This is the site of material, theoretical and sensorial presence.<sup>8</sup>

We can visit the site, analyze it, experience it and try to understand what it evokes with its content and its form.

Similar understandings of ethnographic film used to be labeled as experimental ethnography (Russell 1999, Webster 1993<sup>9</sup>), but it seems to me that in this contemporary fragmented world no other form of (visual) ethnography serves its purpose. For ethnographic film no longer represents Others (unless it simultaneously represents us), is no longer objective (unless it is simultaneously subjective), is no longer univocal (unless it is simultaneously multivocal).

And let us not forget, the contemporary world is not only the postcolonial world, it does not consist only of former objects turned to subjects; it consists of the new subjects, too. Of never before observed subjects, if not by themselves. So called "little ethnologies" (Prica 2001), as ours is, should pay attention to the ways in which use of determining terminology shapes observation and interpretation. Most films that were filmed in our region in the last century, that we may call ethnographic, were not made by representatives of some distant colonial powers, but by members of the same (national, regional, state) community. The problem of objectifying as implicit process in observing and analyzing is not overlooked

<sup>7</sup> In the paper "Construction of a Place in Ethnographic Film" (Puljar D'Alessio 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Pink recently proposed the idea of "ethnographic places" in sensory ethnography that somehow corresponds to here exposed idea of site in visual ethnography (Pink 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Webster defines experimental ethnographic form as ethnographic account that reproduce in textual form the hermeneutic or reflexive theory of fieldwork or of social change: it seeks to integrate with, rather than represent, the social practices that are their objects (Webster 1993).



here; as long as there is observation, there are objects of that observation, even if it is Us. But witnessing the era of “anthropology at home” in the big world, and having the legacy of European ethnologies (that were always more or less at home), we are more than aware of overlapping of Others and Us, objects and subjects, objects turned into subjects. What I am trying to say is that in doing visual ethnography (as well as written ethnography) one objectifies her/himself as well as the Other, naturally, always applying current theoretical tools, be it multivocality, reflexivity, or something else.

Therefore, when I film in Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina or in Croatia, I have to surpass the invisible gaps, sometimes walls, have to find passages (for they always are) in an effort to evoke the senses and lived reality (processes) of the community (of fishermen in Naples, or Muslims and Croats in Mostar, or working community in Rijeka). In some way, I am always an outsider to the phenomenon I observe, even if it takes place in the same street I live in (as does shipyard “3. Maj” in Rijeka). The “outsiderness” I am talking about here is different from the one developed in postcolonial theory (Minh-Ha 1991 cited in Borjan, this issue) and therefore we should restrain from using that terminology without pointing out the nuances of difference.

Who can claim today to possess “indigenous knowledge”? Working as an anthropologist in her own culture, one learns to understand that the possession of that kind of knowledge shifts together with the shifting contexts she works in. And what remains is being an anthropologist, with analytical and documentary accuracy guaranteed by her education, the same way this accuracy is guaranteed by her “outsider” colleague.

In accordance to the widely accepted acknowledgement about today’s world as a heterogeneous ‘global village’ that is *not* just a scaled up version of a local village writ large (Cheater 1995), and as a world inhabited with local subjects who can shift to cosmopolitans in variable contexts of their everyday life (Abu-Lughod 1997), we should reconsider concepts such as “local anthropologist” and “indigenous filmmaker”. As our subjects change, so do we.

### **Aleksej Gotthardi-Pavlovsky** **Croatian Radio-Television, Zagreb**

#### The Problems of Visual Ethnography/Anthropology.

#### Ideas about the Other – Misconceptions about Oneself

For how long will the Western point of view and approach to other cultures be considered as the Original sin of visual anthropology, which is then automatically pinned to every (audio) visual ethnographic production? For a long time, the films are not produced only in the West and neither are the methods and principles of western cultural/social anthropology the only legitimate way of analyzing and interpreting culture. Furthermore, I really do not understand why an ethnological/anthropological work should necessarily be activist, i.e. why should every interpretation of the Other automatically imply fighting for their (various) rights? Ethnologist/anthropologist is not primarily a politician nor an activist. He/she can be one, but doesn’t need to. What he/she has to do, no matter what topic/culture he/she is dealing with and regardless of one’s own imperfections and limitations, is to be an expert and, as such, be loud and clear about the conclusions he/she made about a particular topic/culture/community and the reasons for such conclusions. This is his/her right and obligation. Hence, why

should we deny an ethnologist/anthropologist the right to interpret the culture of others/Other? After all, that is what he/she is supposed to do. An expert should always be capable of seeing a “broader perspective”, because that is what he/she was educated for. Of course he/she can make mistakes, but this is not and cannot be the reason why he/she should be denied the right to his/her primary profession, or be banned from it, just because somebody made a colossal mistake in the past.

The text by Etami Borjan is a very thorough overview of the history of the developments and concepts in the area of (anthropological) visual presentation of culture, but with the emphasis on the problems of the research of a culture that is not our own, i.e. the culture of the Other/Others. However, it is obvious that the author has accepted the Western view on those problems, since she analyzes them referring exclusively to the Western view and framing her thoughts accordingly. It seems to me that this particular view (as well as the author in her text), constantly fails to understand and accept some simple facts when it comes to (audio)visual interpretation of cultures or, conditionally, the production of *ethnographic films*.

The main problem here is this “eternal”, or, should I say, mythical, concept of the Other as the “poor” and “subjugated” Other. However, things are actually completely logical, self-understandable and – crystal clear. The Other is always “subjugated”, simply because It is defined as – the Other.

To carry this point a bit further, I will try to define who exactly is that Other, primarily in the context of film, which is the main point of this discussion.

I see it like this: just because I exist, I am Myself/Me. And, besides me, there are Others, all those who are not Me. It goes without saying that my position has been shaped by upbringing, education, culture, i.e. attitudes that I have acquired. Hence it is completely natural, inseparable from me and unavoidable, that those attitudes are the framework through which I observe, document and interpret everybody else and they are the Others. Logically, then, those are the conditions under which I make My ethnography of the Other. In anthropology, the consensus about those issues has been achieved long ago and Etami Borjan emphasizes it in her text.

However, unlike Borjan, I think that, if we take into account those basic aspects of the way we perceive the Other, it is completely irrelevant whether film ethnography is made on tape, electronic or digital technology or era. It is true that the development and accessibility of recording technology, especially digital, have given the possibility to many people to engage in this activity and hence, have democratized it. However, I would say that the main issues surrounding the interpretation of the Other have not moved an inch, which is something the filmmakers have known all along, while the ethnologists/anthropologists keep lamenting on it and still use it as a bone of contention.

First of all, the production of visual interpretation (video-recording, video-presentation, TV broadcast or film) is technically/technologically a very complex process, which is highly conditioned in itself. This additionally complicates and relativizes the ethnography done in this way, since those conditions are unavoidable, they are *conditio sine qua non*. Besides that, the essential ingredient remains the same – I interpret the Other. It is completely irrelevant whether I have made my commentary directly or indirectly – it is always there. It is a misconception that the ethnologists/anthropologists have given voice to the Other the moment when they decided not to use the direct personal commentary in the form of the spoken (narrator’s) text and when they started to interview the Others (which, to be honest, they could not do in the past, i.e. until they started using sound camera). This is a misconception simply because the whole film is, in itself, always a commentary. Because, who decides what

will be documented/recorded? Me (the one making the film). Who asks the questions, i.e. chooses the topics? Me (the one making the film). Who makes a selection of the answers? Me (again). Who puts all this into a final narrative (i.e. edits the film)? Hey, again Me. Hence, through all this, through the whole process, I am interpreting the Other. The same rule applies when the Other takes camera in his/her own hands – if the Other will do an ethnography on him/herself and his/her Own people, then he/she becomes I, and his/her Own become the Others; if I make an ethnography on Me and my Own, I become the Other to myself and, consequentially, my Own became the Others to Me.

In doing this, and it is important to emphasize it, I am always the colonizer! As soon as I step on the set, I conquer the space and (partly) the people in it. Ethnography done by paper and pen might be a little less aggressive in this, i.e. less conquering. But the ethnography done by camera (especially if I have decided to do a film and not only a video recording, i.e. decided to interpret the Other), implies a more intensive (more selective) interpretation, because it inevitably undergoes technological processes (shooting, cut editing and sound editing), which includes multiple (starting with the film planning) decisions on selection and is hence more intensive. In this sense, it is completely irrelevant whether the filmmaking ethnographer/ethnologist/ anthropologist is coming from the country which is (used to be) the colonizer of the state in which he/she is doing ethnography, whether he/she is doing ethnography in one's own state/community or in a third space which was in no way connected with his/her state/community; he/she is always the colonizer since he/she, and I repeat, through the sheer process of filming, conquers the space and people in it – such is the nature, i.e. psychology of making films.

Of course, we can always discuss whether a certain author managed to present the world-view/pattern/context of the position of the Other and how “fair” was he/she in that process, meaning, for example, that the author allowed the Other to express things which are contrary to his/her personal standpoints, but again, we should not neglect the fact that this is never the “real” voice of the Other, it is just an interpretation of that voice, which, directly or indirectly, is provided by the author of the ethnography/film, i.e. Myself. I simply do not understand why the filmmaking ethnologists/anthropologists don't recognize that once and for all.

Isn't it indicative that (visual) anthropology laments on the same issues for over 50 years, with the only conclusion, about which any consensus has been achieved, being that anything goes and that we have a bunch of different and equally legitimate approaches, each of them imperfect? Science is generally an imperfect endeavor and the film production even more so due to a large number of conditions (technological, financial, organizational, ethical) and, hence, limitations. In my earlier works I have claimed that we cannot have the same expectations from filmic and written ethnography since those are different media, with different “languages”, methods and limitations, but of course these are not the reasons to give up on any of them (or, better, not to combine them). Furthermore, I also claim that film approach in general cannot be proclaimed scientific, due to, as I said, a too large number of coincidences and limitations in the production of the film, which are unavoidable. Film as ethnography is useful, since “one picture speaks thousand words”, however, it is simultaneously a “damaged good” and this “damage” is inseparable from it and, hence, unavoidable and that is something we should all bear in mind. And that's it – the perfect solution does not exist.

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## EPLY TO COMMENTS

### Etami Borjan

The introductory text points to some of the basic theoretical and, partly, practical problems ethnographic filmmakers face in ethnographic filmmaking. At the beginning, we should briefly refer to terminology and discuss the legitimacy of the term “ethnographic film” in the period when ethnographic audiovisual records are decreasingly made on tape and increasingly in digital format. As Sarah Pink claims, ethnographic film is a widely accepted term today. Even though the term was once used mainly to refer to audiovisual work in analog recording, contemporary ethnographic film is a much wider term, encompassing not only films recorded on tape, but also audiovisual work made in new formats. However, I think that it is still justified to use the term “ethnographic film” in the context of film taxonomy. The term ethnographic film is used as a synonym for a certain type of film, which, as is the case with all film types and gender, does not automatically imply the homogeneity of works or the strictness of boundaries. New forms of ethnographic filmmaking appear under various names, depending on topics, the relationship with the filmed subjects and the authors: autoethnography, self-reflexive ethnographic film, collaborative film, community film, indigenous ethnographic film ... Regardless of their differences, it is certain that they all share a unity of genre which allows them to be categorized as the film type called “ethnographic film”. In contemporary ethnographic audiovisual film production genre crossing and the overlapping of the modes of representation is frequent, especially between feature, documentary, and sometimes even experimental film, but in those cases the main criteria of determining boundaries between genres are their dominant characteristics, regardless of the fact that those movies share secondary characteristics with other genres. Therefore, I think that, regardless of the different subtypes of ethnographic films and their different formats, we can still use the term ethnographic film. New media have introduced changes into the mode of representation, production and distribution of ethnographic audiovisual works and we can now speak of ethnographic video, digital ethnographic video and other subtypes of ethnographic films, depending on topics, style and format, but I think that new formats don't change the genre classification in film studies significantly.

However, what is important to emphasize is what Sarah Pink points to in her commentary and books, and that is the fact that the new media have affected the social function of ethnographic audiovisual work. This has, to a certain degree, modified the nature of ethnographic film which isn't and doesn't have to be of a classic scientific type. I am not saying, of course, that contemporary ethnographic film should be exclusively activist. I also don't think that social activism is the only goal of contemporary ethnographic film, just as the exclusive production of a scientifically elaborated audiovisual work led by principles of written visual anthropology, as was the case with classical ethnographic film, was not its' sole purpose. The purpose of my article was not to “rob” or deny the ethnologist of the right to interpret the Other culture or turn him/her into an activist and claim that activist ethnographic film is the only acceptable discourse of representing different cultures. The purpose was to point to

issues and dilemmas ethnographic filmmakers and directors face when representing other cultures. Let us not forget that ethnographic films were not and are not made only by anthropologists, ethnologists, ethnographic filmmakers, but by directors and cineastes as well. Even though the adherents of Heider's and Ruby's uncompromising variant of hardcore ethnography might question the classification of works made by "non-anthropologists", I think their films can, in the widest sense, be also classified as ethnographic films.

Digital media changes the concept of ethnographic film, changing also its goal, purpose, target audience, distribution and production. Contemporary ethnographic film is no more an exclusive domain for academics, which is evident in the increasingly rich production by indigenous populations which, of course, doesn't decrease its value. On the contrary, it opens up new possibilities in the thematic, stylistic, but also sociological sense. One of them, as Pink points out, is the importance of the process of filming for indigenous communities. Evidence of this are numerous examples of collaborative projects, as well as independent indigenous projects producing films of ethnographic value, with different types of participation by local community members. This is evident in two projects: the already mentioned *Video nas aldeias* [Video in the Villages], which started as a collaborative project and today is an indigenous project and the Igloodik Isuma Production, mentioned by Michaela Schäuble. Together with the already mentioned *Nunavut* [Our Land] (1993-1995) series, it seems interesting to mention another initiative originating in the same community: the Arnait Video Production which was established in 1991 as a part of the workshop for indigenous female directors – Arnait Ikajurtigiit [Women helping Women] – of the video production center, Tariagsuk video center. The first videos recorded by Arnait center were related to the issues of labor and women's health (Evans 2010:15). The center was established by Marie-Hélène Cousineau, and it serves as a place for video training and provides recording equipment. Some of the workshop participants are currently making their own films produced by these two centers: Marie-Hélène Cousineau, Madeline Ivalu, Julie Ivalu (Cache Collective, 2008).

The process of participation in the making of audiovisual works of ethnographic value plays a significant part in raising individual and collective consciousness in the community (Pink). Media and new technologies are greatly responsible for this, since the phenomenon can be viewed in local, global and transnational context. The ubiquity of mass media (video, television, radio, mobile phones, the internet ...) has radically affected the production and distribution of ethnographic films. Although collaborative or indigenous ethnographic films were frequently made for the needs of respective communities, in the last two decades, indigenous films, with the help of television and festivals, are circulated among other indigenous groups who are not necessarily members of the same ethnic groups or speak the same language. Globally, indigenous films are mainly low-budget local projects, made for non-commercial purposes, independently of *mainstream* film industry and are still not easily available to the wider audience; they are distributed in festivals or local indigenous television stations. Producers and directors of indigenous audiovisual works have started organizing transnational networks as early as the 1990s, through festivals, organizations, conferences and co-productions. Even today, the distribution of indigenous films mostly depends on indigenous film festivals, the number of which is on the increase each year. The listserv NATIVE-L was launched in 1991, dealing with the problems of indigenous populations around the world, and it served as a basis for subsequent launches of smaller specialized sites (Native Net, Native Web, Native Networks), platforms for creating global virtual indigenous communities in the 1990s. Social networks helped connect regional projects. One of them is the organization CLACPI (*Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Cine y Comunicación de los Pueblos Indígenas*).

*nas*, [Latin-American Network for Film and Communication of Indigenous Populations]), established in 1985 in Mexico. Since its foundation CLACPI has organized many indigenous film festivals, workshops and seminars (Salazar and Córdova 2008). The transnational networking of indigenous populations is simultaneously national and non-national in character; the ideas of unification of indigenous peoples are active at the level of national states, but also imply cooperation, association and strengthening of collective consciousness regarding indigenous issues at the global level. The media have become means through which indigenous communities, sharing common experiences, build a sense of belonging to a form of pseudonation – a transnational community of geopolitically disunited groups which are able to maintain dialogue regardless of national, cultural and language barriers. It is no surprise, therefore, that new theories in visual anthropology are focused on the social role of contemporary indigenous filmmaking and media in specific communities and that they draw from communication studies, cultural studies and film theory and semiotics of the media (Abu-Lughod i Ginsburg 2002; Ang 1996; Appadurai 1996; Dornfeld 1998, etc.).

Thanks to the changes in the hierarchy of observer-observed relation and the impact of new media on its production and distribution, contemporary ethnographic film articulates new epistemological issues already present in the works of Jean Rouch, Sarah Elder, David and Judith MacDougall, John Marshall and Barbara Myerhoff – filmmakers move away from the traditional observational ethno-documentarism and turn to reflexive documentarism. However, it opens some new questions related not only to the position of the ethnographic filmmakers, but of the Other as well. Postcolonial ethnographic film questions indigenous knowledge which becomes an interactive and interpretive discursive process. The position of the observed globalized multicultural society is continually redefined, shifting between observer and subject, depending on the context; hence, the identity of the Other is not unambiguous, as pointed out by Bukovčan, Puljar D'Alessio and Gotthardi-Pavlovsky. The problem with the “we”–“they” dichotomy, which has been a topic in Anglo-Saxon visual anthropology for a long time, was clearly illustrated by Bukovčan with the example of the development of ethnographic film in Croatia where the Other is at the same time “them” and “us”. Although my article deals with the position of the Other in the context of “colonial” visual anthropology, colonial gaze and representation, it is clear that ethnographic films made in a non-colonial context articulate these issues differently, due to the fact that they originate in a different social setting and with a different purpose; it is also clear that in the case of “little ethnographies” it is impossible to blindly apply all theories and insights of visual anthropology (Bukovčan, Puljar D'Alessio).

In the context of ethnographic film in general, it is risky nowadays to refer to the “we-they” dichotomy, because it is impossible to establish where the Other begins and ends. It is especially evident in autoethnographic and contemporary indigenous films, where the Western “Other” becomes the authorial “I” (Gotthardi-Pavlovsky, Puljar D'Alessio). As Bukovčan and Gotthardi-Pavlovsky state, ethnographic film is “colonial” by nature, because in it, the author imposes his/her point of view, vision, interpretation of a culture. However, I think this is the characteristic of all films, even documentaries, which are subjective by nature. Documentary films (which in my view include a large portion of traditional ethnographic films) are seemingly objective and truthful testimonies, based in real life, but they are simultaneously the construct of a subject determined in terms of ideology, gender, culture and history (regardless of whether he/she is the “Other” or “I”). This is also the case with contemporary postcolonial ethnographic films diverging from the persuasive-demonstrative discourse (typical of classic documentaries), having as their final goal not the observational-narrative

exposition, but referential alternatives of representation. What is changing in contemporary indigenous ethnographic film and media is the position of the “Other”, who becomes “I”; the author of representation of him/herself. New technologies and media have contributed to the democratization and I think that the Other/postcolonial I is no longer and doesn't have to be subjugated, because he/she is able to control the process of creating and producing films, and, by extension, the image of his/her own culture. However, it is important to emphasize that “giving voice” to the Other, democratization of the media, autoethnography and indigenous film are no guarantee for the Other's “privileged” position or “privileged” gaze, which is evident from Michaela Schäuble's comment. Also, it would be naïve to think that these films are “more truthful” or more “trustworthy”. Thanks to the nature of film, we always speak of the construction of the “effect of the real” (Bettetini 2001:71), whether we are referring to fictional or non-fictional film. Today the realism of visual representation is not perceived as an ontological characteristic of the image and the notion of persuasiveness is “more a strictly rhetorical category than an accurate aesthetic characteristic” (Peterlić 2001:182).

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