Visualizing Anthropology

Documenting Culture with New Media

Prof. Eriberto P. Lozada Jr.
Dept. of Anthropology, Davidson College (USA)
复旦大学社会发展公共政策学院

My Research Interests

- China specialist, who has lived and worked in Japan, Korea – as a sociocultural anthropologist, I look at the impact of globalization on a variety of social, political, and cultural levels

- Religion and Politics

  Did fieldwork in a Hakka Catholic (客家天主教) village in Guangdong, Meizhou (广东省梅州市) between 1993-2001

- Food, Popular Culture, and Globalization

  Did fieldwork in Beijing (1993-1995) and rural Guangdong on fast food consumption and other elements of popular culture

- Social and Cultural Impact of Science

  Did fieldwork in Shanghai (1999-2007) on popular uses of computers and the internet, and other issues in science and technology studies; science fiction (科幻) studies

- Sports and Civil Society

  Most recent research project, started in 2001; fieldwork in Beijing and Shanghai.

- Diaspora Ethnicity

  Research on Hakka ethnicity, Chinese diaspora; Asian-Americans

- Visual Anthropology

  Did research on use of photography in ritual and the wider consumption of photographic technology by Chinese villagers

DAVIDSON

Anthropology and Ethnographic Film

- Long history between anthropology and documentary film, from anthropology's conception as a discipline

- Earliest uses similar to today – as a way to capture ethnographic detail (distinction between ethnographic footage vs. ethnographic film); filming as part of salvage ethnography

- Became a part of wider film genres with works such as *Nanook of the North* (1922), where ethnographic film became a way to express cultural complexities and particularistic human behavior.

- In the past, ethnographic film was primarily seen as a teaching tool. With the proliferation of choices in various forms of media (due to new technologies), ethnographic film has emerged from the museum and the classroom for wider public consumption.

DAVIDSON
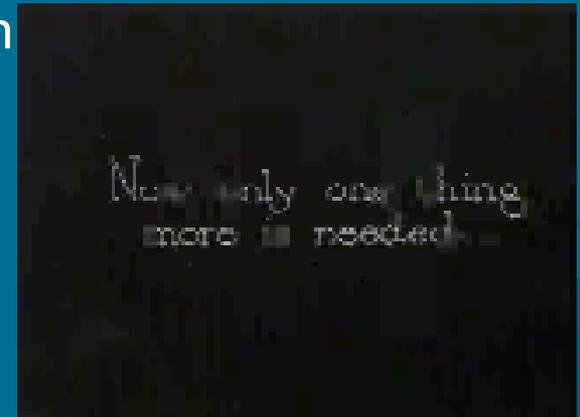
Ethnographic Film

- In the past, ethnographic film was primarily seen as teaching tool.

- Ethnographic film historically, and today, continues to be strongly influenced by technologies and narrative conventions of cinema and television.

- Past technologies required large film crews, and as a result lacked the intimacy and spontaneity of participant-observation

- As a result, historical ethnographic films, like textual ethnographies, objectified and disempowered the ethnographic subject; the camera, like the anthropologist/narrator, remained invisible: ethnographic film as part of the colonial project.

Thinking about the Visual

- Jay Ruby, a leading scholar in the field of visual anthropology, delineates three perspectives on visual anthropology:
  1. The production of ethnographic film for teaching and wider general consumption.
  2. The study of media, especially television and film.
  3. The anthropological study of visual communication: "all forms of visual and pictorial culture" (production, consumption, interpretation)
- the widespread consumption of popular culture and globalization makes visual anthropology an important aspect of anthropological research

Some theoretical issues to consider

- issues behind giving phenomenological primacy to the visual
  - Foucault's idea of the gaze and disciplinary power; the camera as panopticon
  - the flattening of reality by photography and film; from Roland Barthes, "spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority"
- the power of technology
  - from science and technology studies, photography and filmmaking as context-dependent, socially-embedded;
  - issues of access to technology and social stratification; fetishism of technology and issue of cyborg subjectivity (Donna Haraway)
- who is telling the story
  - narrative structures are created in the editing of films and photographs; seemingly universal technologies mask differences in local interpretations
  - the camera itself as narrator, constructing the field of vision

Tracking
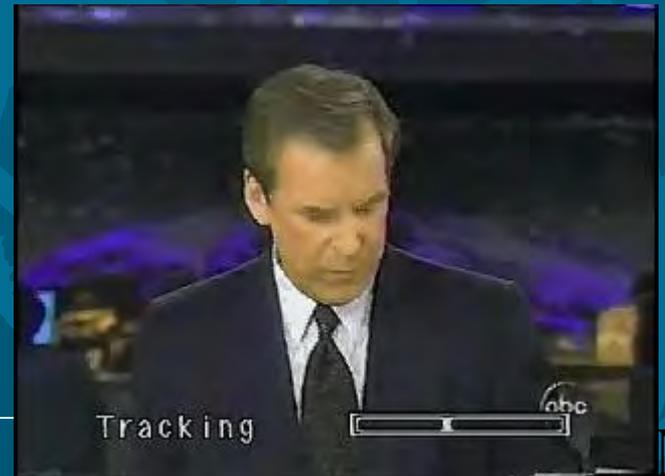
Examples of contemporary approaches

- Contemporary ethnographic films specifically address historical problems of objectification and disempowerment by situating the ethnographer, giving voice to the subject, and as has been tried more recently, having the subject move from in front of the camera to behind the camera.

- switching places: putting the subject behind the camera
  - Rolf Husmann's project (funded by EU) distributing video cameras to Indians to document social changes from economic development
  - similar approach used by makers of *Voices of Iraq*

- proliferation of ethnographic film: new technologies have freed anthropologists from media companies, allowing us to experiment in the field and choose more diverse subjects; internet distribution has also diversified the field and topics, allowing more voices to be heard.

- use of new media for collaboration and distribution
  - work of Michael Wesch

Number Our Days
1977 Oscar Winner

Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff

DAVIDSON

Web 2.0

Michael Wesch, Assistant Prof. of Cultural Anthropology, Kansas State University

DAVIDSON

- like the challenges faced by traditional news media, the internet has challenged conceptions of journalism

- the internet has not only created new distribution channels, but also allowed for auto-ethnography

- media such as Youtube are themselves the subject of analysis

- new media has also created new formats for ethnographic film

DAVIDSON

Learning and Teaching New Skills

- Digital video has made filming and editing ethnographic films much easier and more timely

- Examples from students of Davidson College in Charlotte, North Carolina

- Plaza de Toros Rio Grande: Mexican Rodeo

- This is India: Hindu Religiosity and the Immigrant Experience

DAVIDSON