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COVER IMAGE: A young woman looking outside of her home window. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017 (photograph by Thomas Martin Ronald Groves)

VISUALISING THE EVERYDAY: PARTICIPATORY FILMMAKING IN RURAL INDIA

Sue Sudbury, *Bournemouth University*

ABSTRACT

Participatory visual research methods are increasingly used as a way to generate new forms of knowledge and to decrease the power differential between the researcher and researched. In this article, the author, who is both a documentary filmmaker and academic, draws upon her research experience working with a group of women filmmakers in Andhra Pradesh in southern India. She filmed the women as they made their own film, but also asked four of them if they would use their cameras to film their everyday lives. Some of the women chose to challenge their husbands from behind the camera, while others in the group spoke openly about their lives in video diary interviews. This way of working generated five different sources of footage, which were edited together to form a coherent narrative and create a 'third voice'. The author discusses her findings and what she learnt from this process and considers the strengths and limitations of this form of research.

KEYWORDS

Participatory filmmaking; documentary; video diaries; Indian women; the everyday

BIO

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Introduction

In this research, I wanted to bring together the techniques of both ethnographic and participatory filmmaking, with approaches used in documentary production. The former with its emphasis on the voice of, in this case, rural women in India, and the latter with its concern to engage an audience through narrative and imagery.

The idea for this research came from a promotional email I had received from the American charity, Video Volunteers. They had been asked by the Indian NGO, Velugu Society for Rural Development, to help them set up the Sneha Praja Video project in Andhra Pradesh. Over a six-week period, Video Volunteers trained eleven local village women were in video production and reporting skills and produced a film about child marriage, which was subsequently screened in villages throughout the region. The women had been selected by the Indian NGO on the basis of their proven skills as community newspaper reporters, a project similarly set up to give village women a voice and the right to self-determination. Through this video initiative they were, according to Video Volunteers and the Indian NGO, gaining confidence and challenging long-held domestic roles in their communities.

As an academic and a documentary filmmaker, with both doctoral research and a potential broadcast documentary in mind, I wanted to find out more about this project and the ways in which it might be changing these women's lives. So I contacted Meera Shenoy, the Project Manager at the Indian NGO, to find out if this would be possible. She agreed to this plan and suggested that I fly out to Hyderabad to meet with her and the women involved.

Attendant ethical issues

When I met with the women in the group I explained, through the translator, the parameters of my research (both the doctoral research and the broadcast documentary), and answered any of their questions. I made sure that I gained informed consent by fully explaining the project in their native language, Telegu. The ESRC Research Methods Review Paper (Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research, 2008) states that the researcher needs to ‘brief the participants about seeking permission (from others) and explain the purpose prior to taking images of others’. So I made sure that the women explained to their families what they were doing and how their footage would be used in my research. At the start of this research project I also consulted Bournemouth University Research Ethics Code of Practice to make sure that my intended working practice would comply with all ethical considerations and completed Bournemouth University’s online Research Ethics module and tests.

Another ethical consideration, when undertaking participatory research, is the subject of reciprocity. I discuss this in detail elsewhere (Sudbury, 2016).

Methodology

Four of the women were particularly keen to be ‘on camera’, while the other seven women took on roles behind the camera. I filmed them as they made their film for the Sneha Praja Video project and then each of the four women used their own mini-DV cameras to film whatever they wanted to about their own personal lives. To what extent can a combination of observational documentary techniques, video diaries and participatory filmmaking methods be used to explore the interior and everyday lives of women from another culture?

The visual anthropologist, Andrew Irving asked women in Africa to consider how they would tell their experiences to someone living in England (2011:29). I similarly asked my subjects to show us what their everyday lives are like. Irving noted, one of the main characters in his project “actively selected certain events, dilemmas and experiences that she judged would communicate...to imagined, unknown others she had never met, living in a far-away country she had never visited” (2011:29).

This collaborative way of working created 23 hours of footage from five different sources which are described below.

Video diaries shot by the 4 women	Facilitated and interviews conducted by me
Self-shot actuality by the 4 women	Facilitated by me
Film of the 4 women shot by other women in the group or relatives	Facilitated by me
Film of the 4 women, actuality sequences and general views (gvs)	Filmed by me
Sneha Praja project video about child marriage	Reflects the women’s own concerns about child marriage. Initiated and managed by Velugu and Video Volunteers. All these sequences in the film are shown in a Recording frame.

The Video Diary interviews

When I first suggested to the women that they could use their cameras to make video diaries it was evident that they were not familiar with them. So I decided to accustom them to looking directly down the lens by asking them to do this when responding to my interview questions; often they would hear the translated question and then, after a moment’s thought, switch the camera on and speak their answer directly to it. The advantage of this way of working was that the women were always very conscious of being recorded and could decide when to turn the camera on or off. The women themselves also chose where to place their cameras, in terms of both the room itself and the place within that room. So location became an important part of their representation.

When I have used video diaries in Britain, the main contributors often appeared self-conscious and did not know what to say. In stark contrast, in India, each woman, particularly Indira and Latha, spoke with such urgency into the camera lens and had so much they wanted to say. They were all keen to talk

about how the Sneha Praja Video project had changed their lives. Latha talked of how on the first day (of the training), she was scared to hold the camera, “my hands were shaking so much” but of how the camera has now “become like a weapon for us”. In these words she encapsulated a very powerful image. Latha was also keen to talk about the years of abuse she had suffered at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law. Indira even cried at the beginning of her video diary because she said she was so happy to have, for the first time, the chance to express her opinions. As one of the participants of the Witness Nakamata project (www.witness.org) said (Gregory, 2006:195), “this camera means that someone in this world cares about us, about our struggles, seeing this camera here today means that we are not alone”.

When Indira had stopped crying and I had ascertained, through the translator, that she was crying ‘tears of joy’ at the chance to speak, rather than feeling upset by the situation, she spoke with such feeling and fervour into the camera lens; ‘the situation for women is getting worse and alcoholism has become a real problem. Men are trampling on women. All because of this marriage necklace, women have to leave their families and friends... and do their husbands respect them?’. Although Indira was always speaking in the third person, it was clear from the passion in her voice that this was most likely a ‘first person’ narrative.



FIGURE 1: Indira's video diary

For the filmmaker Ross McElwee, if there is “something real at stake emotionally” the audience will detect it, while if not, they will “be turned off by it” (in Dowmunt, 2009:177). So in the end, the audience becomes both judge and jury, perhaps unsurprising in that all films are ultimately being produced for this imagined ‘other’. As a documentary maker, I am constantly trying to record such emotional moments but am also considering the context in which they are being revealed and also the repercussions, if any, for those that are revealing them. In the context of video diaries and autobiographical filmmaking, these ‘emotional moments’ can possess added power. Renov is one of many who have recognised the power of autobiography, “filmic/videographic autobiography has become a tool for coupling liberatory public testimony and private therapy” (2004:xvi). The confessional character of the diary promises a site of veracity and authenticity, partly due to the fact that ‘ordinary’ people are telling us ‘personal’ stories while looking straight down the lens. It feels as if we are watching something less mediated.

Indira's eagerness to speak her thoughts meant that she did not pause for breath and kept talking. I was keen to preserve her ‘speaking position’ and the integrity of her testimony, but at the same time my role as storyteller brought other conventions to bear on the situation; namely, I was thinking, how will I manage to edit this material. Other filmmakers have discussed how they feel conflicted by these

professional considerations; in a Masterclass (Sheffield International Documentary Festival, 3 - 7 November 2010), Kim Longinotto said:

At times, it makes me really hate myself...I'm filming...(and) I'm genuinely really with her and caring about her...but at the same time, I'm thinking I've got to hold the camera still...if you were being a normal human being and not a filmmaker, you would either be withdrawing in a respectful way or hugging them, you wouldn't be in-between, filming them. It's an odd job that we do.

It is in these moments that these tensions and power dynamics surface. In fact, as a documentary filmmaker, one has most likely facilitated this emotional moment by asking probing questions and so feel all the more uncomfortable with being concerned with the camera or thinking of the edit; one is seeking to capture moments of genuine emotion that will travel and speak to a global audience but the images also need to be in focus.

Parvati began her video diary interview by speaking in a very matter of fact way about her daily life. In order to tap into her feelings, I then asked her what makes her happy and sad and that was when in response to the last question, she disclosed the death of her son. At that point, not only Parvati but Jayasree, our translator, started to cry so I knew that Parvati was revealing something meaningful in her life. Here, I am clearly not the objective observer, simply recording what is present, but shaping the material by my questions; I am justifying this position because I am conscious of the imagined audience who need to be engaged with something beyond the superficial data of a person's everyday life. However, this process of mediation inevitably changed the message. I have appropriated a certain kind of filming discourse in which I have tried to be fair and transparent but nevertheless have shaped the nature of that discourse. However, though this interview delved into an area of emotion and trauma, this was entirely directed by the participant in that Parvati was able to, and did, switch off the camera when she felt she had nothing more to say. One could claim that one of the advantages of the video diary interview is that the participant is always aware of the camera as they speak into it, unlike in more conventional interview settings, when the interviewer is trying to get the interviewee to ignore its presence.

As a documentary filmmaker, I am trying to reach these universal emotions because I am wanting the audience to relate to the people 'on screen' and to be moved by emotional moments, to laugh *with* them and to cry *with* them; I am wanting the audience to empathise with them.

Hogan and Pink refer to the emergent anthropological focus on interiority – inspired by a question posed by Rapport “concerning the importance of interior dialogue, mood, reverie and imagination in anthropology” (2010:2). Hogan and Pink propose that these are shifting interior states, “fluid rather than reified” (2010:2) and that art therapy can become a “route through which interiority...not simply comes to the surface....as a static event...but through an anthropological paradigm that views inner states as being in progress, rather than ever static” (2010:2). Similarly, I consider these accounts as momentary ‘snap-shots’ of these women's lives; ‘true’ at that moment of articulation but these feelings, although still felt, will never be articulated in exactly the same way or manner again.

Vinodha spoke frequently about her religious conversion as she had, in common with many from the Dalit caste, rejected Hinduism, the religion of her birth in favour of Christianity. However, I did not include this aspect of her video diary testimony. As mentioned in the Introduction, I am in this research combining approaches used in both visual ethnography and documentary production so many visual ethnographers might see this as a limitation of this work. However, as a documentary filmmaker I am, at all times, wanting the audience to relate to the main characters; while we can all empathise with someone who has lost a child not all of us can relate to religious fervour. Interestingly, she was the only woman in the group who did not point out religious iconography when doing the ‘walk through’ of their home; the pictures of Christ were evident on the wall but, unlike Hinduism, there is no prayer corner so that may be the simple reason why she did not.

At times, it felt as if all the women were speaking to themselves and in that respect the term ‘diary’ is very relevant; I think this aspect of self-revelation and reflection is present in video diaries recorded in Britain, too. As Gibson argues, video diaries “provide examples of doing ‘identity work’, whereby participants position themselves in a given way for a perceived audience. Video diary accounts can thus be analysed not only for content but also for how participants engage in identity construction” (2005:36). Holliday has discussed how video diaries are pre-reflectively produced for an imagined ‘other’ and that how this other is conceived of is related to one's experience as a viewer of media productions; “we are

likely to imagine audiences of our productions through a strong process of identification; we imagine ourselves as audience for our own productions” (2000:512). Both Parvati and Indira had televisions in their homes; indeed, Indira is filmed, by her husband, having a ‘TV dinner’ with her children, while Parvati mentions how much she enjoys watching a particular television ‘soap’. Therefore, it is feasible for both of them to imagine their audience in this way. However, both Latha and Vinodha live in more remote villages, three hours’ drive south from Hyderabad, and Vinodha having no electricity, has no television.

Dovey (2000:106) refers to Foucault’s critique of the confessional act which, in Foucault’s opinion, always takes place “within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it” (1998:61). As I was instigating these video diary interviews, I was particularly conscious of my role as ‘authority’ figure and tried to be sensitive to the imbalance of power that existed in this exchange as not only the instigator but the editor of the material. However, like Dovey, I believe fundamentally that this process of making video diaries can elicit “empowering statements not just for the individual speakers but for the social body” (Dovey, 2000:107).

When I left the women with the tapes and instructions to make their own video diaries, Parvati was the only woman who did. One morning at dawn, she spoke directly to the camera for about ten seconds to say that she had got up early to get the house ready for visitors. However, this was the only video diary she made on her own and I did not use it as such a short and random statement did not fit in the final film.

Self-shot actuality

All the women were familiar with film conventions and their six-week training, provided by the charity Video Volunteers, as part of the Sneha Praja Video project, covered basic camera techniques, such as the need for ‘establishing shots’ and ‘close ups’. The training centre at Chilkoor was a six-hour return trip for both Vinodha and Latha, so they demonstrated agency in using the, often unreliable, local bus service to get there and back home afterwards.

The women used the same mini-DV cameras from the Sneha Praja Video project to shoot their everyday lives; the development of low cost, lightweight and easy-to-use video equipment made both projects viable. The advent of low grade cameras has produced a new aesthetic and increased the sense for the audience of accessing ‘the real’ and has made an advantage of the shaking camera movements; “the shaking camera movements, the embodied intimacy of the technical process, appears to reproduce experiences of subjectivity. We feel closer to the presence and process of the filmmaker” (Dovey, 2000:57). This use of mini-DV cameras was particularly beneficial to my research, in which I was attempting to get close to ‘the other’ through collaboratively producing ‘intimate media’.

a) ‘Walk throughs’ inside their homes

Irving (2007, 2011), in his own participatory research, invites participants to walk around urban contexts while narrating and photographing their memories of pivotal moments in their lives. There is a tendency now in documentary production to interview people as they are doing something. I believe this is, in part, because it is more visual to see someone in action rather than just sitting down with a static background and in my experience, when people are moving their speech and thoughts are also more ‘fluid’. As Irving says “the method plays on the capacity of significant places and practices to elicit interior dialogues and verbal testimonies” (2011:27).

I asked all four women if they would ‘walk through’ their houses and introduce us to their families and homes, while at the same time talk about what they are filming. When the four women did the ‘walk throughs’ both Indira, Parvati and Latha pointed out where they do ‘pooja’, as they all have Hindu shrines in the corner of a room. I did include Indira’s and Parvati’s family shrines in the film but I did not refer again to their religion because, as discussed earlier, I think different religions can emphasise difference rather than our shared humanity and this project was aiming to understand and empathise with the ‘other’. However, it was interesting that Sai Baba is the very first thing that Indira mentions when she enters her house and her sitting room, even before her husband and children who are sitting underneath his picture.



FIGURE 2: Indira's 'walk through'

When Indira enters her kitchen, she immediately tells us that she had left the children to clean up and that is why it is messy: "I have left the children to take care of the house so it is a bit disorganized". I kept this part in as it is a universal situation that we can all relate to. Likewise, when Indira shows us Tommy, her puppy on the floor, it is something a Western audience can relate to. However, just by owning a pet, we know that Indira's family is in a more privileged position than Vinodha's. Vinodha lives with her three children in one room: "we live with all our children in this room; everything is here, living here, cooking here".

b) Talking to their husbands

Only three of the women live with their husbands, Latha having left her husband, after the continual abuse. All three wives chose to use the camera, or while 'on camera' in Vinodha's case, to challenge their husbands. In some way, the camera affords them protection and from behind it, they appear liberated. Indira's husband is, at certain moments, visibly intimidated by the camera and when she confronts him from behind it, he loses. A clear example of the power of technology – the camera does not blink and, as Latha says, "it is like a weapon for us".

Vinodha did not herself challenge her husband while holding the camera but was filmed by another village woman as she did it. When Vinodha asks his permission to leave the house and go with the group to film, it feels as if this is what she has to do every time she leaves the house and her community. He hesitates before he replies and looks directly at the camera indicating that he is very aware of being recorded; then after a pause, he says "Go....but come back quickly" showing he has the power to dictate her actions. Of course, she is also demonstrating his power and allowing him to exert it, by asking his permission in the first place. In the West, women do not usually have to ask permission from their husbands to leave the house. However, because women are often assumed to be the primary carer of young children, she might still have to ask her husband to look after them, in order for her to leave to carry out 'adult only' tasks outside the domestic sphere.



FIGURE 3: Footage of Vinodha's husband shot by one of the village women

When Vinodha asks her husband “why do you work when you are not getting paid” and to his reply that “they will pay” she retorts “when will that be?”, it feels that she knows how to touch his own insecurities and he appears at that point, the victim – a ‘low-waged’ or rather ‘no-waged’ man from the Dalit caste, powerless and at the bottom of a hierarchical caste-based society. He is visibly uncomfortable and shifts from side to side and it feels that this conversation is an on-going tension in the household. These two sequences are very telling moments in the film and say a lot about the complexity of gender relations. However, such scenes are played out between men and women throughout the world. Highmore asks “is the everyday a realm of submission to relations of power or the space in which those relations are contested (or at least negotiated in relatively interesting ways)” (2002:5). One could see the derogatory term ‘nagging’, an activity most frequently associated with women, as a way in which women contest this, sometimes hidden but assumed, male power in the domestic sphere. Some people might see Vinodha’s questioning of her husband about when he will be paid for his work, as an example of ‘nagging’; in this way, the everyday is, in fact, “a site of invention and resistance” (Highmore, 2002:38). This material is a particularly strong example of the innovation of this participatory methodology; this footage would never have been generated by more traditional methods, such as observational filmmaking. Interestingly, all the husbands disappeared when I was there so it did feel that we are getting a view of a community that I would not have been able to capture myself.

Indira shot more tapes than any of the other women (six in all, though three were of her video diary interviews); she consistently used her camera to put her husband on the spot, trying to get him to admit to being against her participation in the Sneha Praja Video project. At times, these exchanges are very amusing as on one occasion he laughs with embarrassment and Indira’s daughter can be heard saying “Stop filming” – which Indira does, but only minutes later continues once her husband has decided on how he is going to respond to her question. The issue of obtaining consent from other subjects in a participatory film is complex but including these moments in the finished film means that the potential voyeuristic power that all filmmakers have over their subjects is exposed. It also helps the audience to feel they are accessing ‘the real’, something so ‘real’ that it cannot be revealed ‘on camera’ and creates a sense for the audience that they are privileged viewers, watching something that the subject has only just allowed to be revealed.

The scene in which Indira’s husband scolds her for knocking his watch off the side table, is shot by her husband himself but most of the domestic scenes which include Indira and her husband, are shot by Indira’s adult children. One could argue that Indira ‘othered’ her husband by exposing his misogynistic

attitudes when he finally admits that “if ladies go outside the home like this, we have small problems like cooking”.



FIGURE 4: Indira’s self-shot interview with her husband

Parvati uses her camera to ask her husband where he has been, though she is laughing while she does this. At first, he resists her question by asking her, “should I tell you where I go?”. He appears embarrassed and then, rather defensively, says that he “is taking care of all (her) worries, solving all the problems of the house”. She does not ask for any more detail and it is not clear if she fully comprehends his rather vague reply; maybe, she feels she cannot question any further or perhaps does not want to know. Many of the husbands (in particular Parvati’s and Indira’s – they told me this ‘off camera’) have a tendency to disappear for a while, not saying where they have gone, in sharp contrast to the women who have to account for their every movement outside the domestic sphere. It is interesting to note that when Parvati’s son is late back from school and she asks him where he has been, like his father, he questions whether he should tell her. Gender relations are established at a young age.



FIGURE 5: Parvati’s self-shot footage of her son

c) Filming their children

All four women have children and the footage they shot of them shows the importance placed, in their village communities, on education. The three women with younger children, Latha, Vinodha and Parvati, all filmed their children doing homework, or in Latha's case, was filmed by her father helping her son with his. Vinodha also shoots her husband working with some wood outside their house but focuses, in the main, on her children – doing their homework, reciting English days of the week, singing and playing outside. It is understandable that education is seen as a route to advancement and so is the Sneha Praja Video project for the women themselves. Parvati touches on this when she interviews her own mother to ask her if she is proud of her daughter's participation in it. This brief conversation between mother and daughter embodies a shared intimacy between the two of them which could only have been caught 'on camera' by using this collaborative way of working.



FIGURE 6: Parvati's self-shot interview with her mother

As Wang et al state when referring to their photo novella project with Chinese village women, "(they) are visual anthropologists. They use photography to record images to which outsiders are much less likely to have access...photo novella creates the opportunity for village women to promote outsider's empathy – rather than paternalism, condescension or idealism-toward their lives" (1996:1399).

Latha is doing an Open University course in computing, and was filmed by her father reading, next to her son while he was sleeping on the floor, at the end of the day. Signs of education and self-advancement were present in a lot of the footage. Indira's children are now young adults and when she is 'walking through' her house with her camera, she finds her youngest daughter, Sonia, in the kitchen; the very first question Indira asks her is about her education and Sonia replies that she is in "BSc final year". However, traditional India is never far away as in the next question Indira asks her daughter, when she will get married and her response, "when my parents make me" is received by Indira with both amusement and pleasure. Despite higher education, her daughter is still going to comply with traditional expectations.

Actuality of the 4 women shot by others

All four women chose to be filmed by the other women (or relatives) cooking and collecting water because these are important everyday tasks that they perform several times a day. Some of the women were filmed washing clothes (Indira and Vinodha), others were filmed washing dishes (Indira and Latha), cleaning the house (Latha) and tending to animals (Parvati). In answer to Highmore's question as to

whether “everyday life is characterised by singular, individual acts (an accumulation of particularity) or understandable as an overarching structure common to a large group of people” (2002:5) one could say it is a bit of both. All the women performed domestic duties but there were individual differences between them in the way they performed them. Sometimes these differences denoted difference in wealth; in particular their position in relation to water. Indira was the only woman who had her own well in the backyard of her house, while Vinodha had to walk some way from her house to collect water by bucket from the communal well. Both Parvati and Latha also used a communal village well but at least theirs had a hand pump so water was more easily accessible. So although there were differences in the particular ways women performed their everyday tasks (Vinodha washed clothes on a rock away from her house, while Indira washed clothes in a bucket in her backyard near to her own water supply) all these tasks were exclusively ‘women’s work’.

Some daily tasks denoted differences in religion; all the women, except for Vinodha who had recently converted to Christianity, were filmed chalking patterns on the ground in front of their house - an important daily task performed by women and part of the Hindu tradition and seen as bringing good fortune to the household.



FIGURE 7: Footage of Latha shot by her father

Most of the footage of Indira, performing daily tasks around the house, was shot by her teenage daughter or son. Interestingly, her son zooms in on his father’s bad tempered face as he stands above her mother washing the dishes. Latha’s father shot most of the ‘everyday’ footage of her and demonstrated strong filmic skills, despite the fact he had taken no part in the Sneha Praja Video training.

The footage I shot

As mentioned previously, I was there asking the women questions when they recorded the video diaries so as they spoke I used my camera to contextualise the situation, showing them in relation to their cameras recording the video diary material. Similarly, I filmed the women as they ‘walked through’ and introduced their homes.



FIGURE 8: My footage of Latha recording a video diary

I recorded two ‘walking’ interviews, one with Parvati in which I asked her general questions about marriage and divorce in India and one with Latha about their film screenings. I also interviewed Latha’s mother about Latha’s marriage; she was sitting in the room as Latha was recording her video diary and it seemed right to include her view of her daughter’s difficult marriage. I also shot some observational documentary footage of the women at one of their own film production meetings, watching rushes on their cameras, going around Parvati’s village telling everyone about the screening that evening and then the night screening itself.

I also shot landscape shots, ‘gvs’ (general views) of the different villages in which the women lived to give a sense of where we were; these types of shots are essential ‘bridging’ shots between different sequences and actuality and allow a film to ‘breathe’.

The Sneha Praja Video child marriage report

Dervin and Huesca make a distinction between ‘participation-as-means’ and ‘participation-as-end’ stating that the latter suggests “participation as a political and moral choice, a fundamental right regardless of outcome” (1997:48). In contrast, ‘participation-as-means’ has a more functional purpose.

I believe that the Sneha Praja Video project itself was both in that the project had two functions; that of empowering the women but also of producing educational films to screen in villages across Andhra Pradesh. All the women speak in my film of the empowerment they felt from taking part. Vinodha says “this (Sneha Praja) video training has changed my life” and later, talks more specifically when she says that now the “village elders treat me with more respect”. This is of great significance for her, not only because she is a woman but is also from the Dalit caste.

As they explained in my film, the women chose the subject of child marriage because they themselves had been married as children and had suffered a lot because of it. Video Volunteers had trained all the women to use the cameras over a six-week period and trained them in video journalist skills such as interviewing and how to construct a story. The women did not actually edit their own film about child marriage made through the Sneha Praja project as these skills were felt to be too complex to teach in a short timescale but the Video Volunteers team did involve the women in making editorial decisions.

It was clear from the content of their film that they were keen to uncover and expose some horrific cases of domestic violence and child marriage. Particularly shocking was the young woman’s story of her husband murdering their baby because she was a girl.

At another point in the making of their child marriage film, the women came across a group of traveling street performers and beggars who were living in the open, as they moved across the country. Among this group, they noticed a young girl wearing a marriage necklace; this was Jyothi who, aged nine, had been married twelve days previously to her 36-year-old brother-in-law. They interviewed Jyothi, her mother and sister about the marriage and went back to the training centre in Chilkoor with the footage. The women were deeply moved and upset by Jyothi's situation and discussed whether they should do something about it. They discussed their role as video journalists and decided they were not there to just record injustices but to intervene and prevent them. So they returned to the place where they had met the family but found they had already moved on. It was not clear whether the women intended to turn the family over to the police (child marriage is illegal in India despite continuing to be a common practice) or to try and 'remove' Jyothi from the situation; however, it was interesting that they had a ethical debate about their role as video journalists. This family, as travelers and beggars, with no 'fixed abode' were 'other' to the women themselves so this was yet another layer within this research. Not only are there layers of footage in my research film but also layers of relationships and positions and associated ethical questions surrounding them.

Backstage and frontstage

These different sources of footage have combined to produce an account of the frontstage and backstage of the women's lives. We first meet Vinodha in the film as she brushes her hair while looking in a small mirror on the floor. She is very much 'backstage' (Goffman, 1990:114-122) but also one could say 'backstage' before appearing in the film itself, putting on her bangles and packing her camera in a bag. They are extreme close-up shots, filmed by one of the other women in the group, which adds to their intensity and intimacy. For De Beauvoir these moments of backstage activity are usually ones from which the male audience is absent:

With other women, a woman is behind the scenes; she is polishing her equipment, but not in battle; she is getting her costume together, preparing her make-up, laying out her tactics; she is lingering in dressing-gown and slippers in the wings before making her entrance on the stage; she likes this warm, easy, relaxed atmosphere (1949, 1984:557).

I have used other 'backstage' moments in the film, for example when Parvati is putting on her bindi, before attending the screening of their child marriage film. I shot this myself because, as a filmmaker, one is always looking for these intimate 'backstage' moments. They add to the sense of access (the audience is really seeing all that there is to see) and contrast well with 'frontstage' moments.



FIGURE 9: My footage of Parvati

Another ‘backstage’ moment is when Parvati’s son is doing his homework and spelling out as he writes the word ‘milk’. It is an extremely intimate moment that could have only been recorded by the child’s mother, Parvati herself.

One could argue that when I was there with my camera, I was very much ‘frontstage’, openly there and ‘performing’ in the role of documentary filmmaker. While at the same time, the husbands were ‘backstage’ to me as they never acknowledged my presence or even said ‘hello’.

Ethical considerations are fundamental to filmmaking because ‘backstage’ moments become ‘frontstage’ once they are shot and then selected in the edit. Therefore, there were some ‘backstage’ moments that I decided to leave out precisely because of ethical considerations. For example, Indira’s footage of her husband doing pooja (praying) with a bare chest, naked except for a cloth over his lower half. This footage felt too intimate and in any case, did not advance the storyline.



FIGURE 10: Indira’s self-shot footage of her husband

Similarly, Parvati’s daughter shot her mother, father and brother one evening, in bed on the floor, laughing and joking. Although her father appeared ‘good natured’, it was clear that he was drunk at the time and the scene felt a little too intrusive so I decided not to use it. I also did not include a sequence shot by Indira’s daughter of Indira having a difficult exchange with her mother-in-law; it felt that the mother-in-law did not want to be filmed as she was trying to move away from the camera. I did, however, use the first few seconds of this exchange until Indira raises her hand to ask her daughter to stop filming. Although her daughter continued to film, I decided to respect that signal myself and cut at that point. Even this short sequence cuts well with Indira’s impassioned video diary words about the problem of mother-in-laws.



FIGURE 11: Indira with her mother-in-law shot by her daughter

In television and theatre, the 'half-way' place between back and front stage is the 'green room'. This is where the actor goes after they have come out of their dressing room or the guest goes on arrival at the TV studios, perhaps for coffee/tea with the other guests, before appearing on stage or TV. There were several 'green room' stages in the film, in particular when the women were together in the street about to tell the other villagers about the screenings.

The edit

In this research, there were logistical and resource implications of involving the women in the edit. There was so much footage generated by this way of working (23 hours of it) and editing is a time consuming process. However, I did send a DVD of a cut to Jayasree, the translator, who screened it to the women before I finalised the film to make sure they were happy with the way their lives were represented and for them to be able to feed back any concerns and comments. For some people working with participatory media, the fact that the women were not actively involved in the edit will call into question whether this project is really participatory. However, I believe one can justify a 'sliding scale' of participation. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, this project aimed to combine techniques of both ethnographic and participatory filmmaking, with approaches used in documentary production and it is at this point in the production process where documentary production methodology 'took over'. I believe that my concern with audience engagement led to the project having great visibility, fulfilling the women's own expressed desires to have their stories heard by a wider public, beyond the academy. This research resulted in the production of three different films - a short 20 minute cut for Al Jazeera's Witness strand which, after transmission, was viewed over 56,000 times on their YouTube channel, a longer 23 minute version that was screened at many international film festivals and a 45 minute version that was the subject of my doctoral thesis.

However, I am sensitive to these issues of power and authority and aware that it is in the editing of this material that I am preserving a degree of authorial control. The women viewed the film before it was finished so they consented to how their lives are portrayed but, ultimately, I am reaffirming my power in the edit, by deciding not only who gets to speak, but how and when. As Ruby notes:

Being able to hear people tell their stories...represents a major shift in attitude about where one looks for authority and authenticity...however, editorial control still remains in the hands of the filmmaker. The empowerment of the subject is therefore more illusionary than actual. While new voices are heard, traditional forms of authorship have not been significantly altered (1991:54).

Gadihoke also acknowledges that the power between a filmmaker and her/his subjects can never be equal because of the director's final control over representation. "Even a first person narrative ultimately represents the subjectivity of the filmmaker who selects, edits and crafts the film or video" (2003:280). Gadihoke suggests that one way of dealing with this is to delineate 'our' narrative from 'their' narrative, to foreground subjectivity, to be aware of the process of filming as 'constructed' and to be reflexive about one's own positioning vis-à-vis one's subject (2003:280). I think there is a tension here between this need to 'foreground subjectivity' and the danger of detracting from the women's own stories. Because of this I decided to keep my narration to the minimum, using it at the beginning of the film, to foreground my 'authorial voice' and to set up the film and explain quite a complicated situation in which there are two separate video projects, the Sneha Praja Video project, which existed before I arrived, and my research which generated the different actuality footage shot by the women, the 'walk through' footage and the video diaries.

Early ethnographic films attempted to film 'whole' contexts and as Pink observes Collier and Collier even insisted that "the spatial and temporal order in which images were recorded must be maintained" (2001:105). They also rejected 'cutaways' and close-up shots for the same reason that they interfered with the objective recording of 'reality'. This approach has been now superseded by the work of MacDougall, among others, and Pink acknowledges "a linear visual chronology may not consistently represent the way in which reality was experienced or conceptualised by all the individuals involved" (2001:106). The documentary tradition has never attempted to edit shot material chronologically but there is an understanding that the inherent meanings of the situation, as perceived by the filmmaker, must not be distorted in the edit.

Regardless of stylistic choices, all audiences need clarity and with so many different layers of footage, some of it self-shot by the four women, I decided it was important to clearly distinguish each woman's story so that the audience could identify them from each other. Not only do I have a sense of responsibility to each woman to make sure we know which is their footage but also too much confusion in a film is known to disengage an audience.

My research film also attempts to show the ways in which the Sneha Praja Video project was transforming these women's lives, both financially (the project pays them more than field work) and in terms of gaining respect in their communities. Therefore, it was important to include clips from their own video reports; these give the final doctoral research film another layer, and also a different tone because these clips employ a journalistic register.

All the women had voiced that there was a problem with domestic violence in their communities so it was important for me to include this. Latha's story was a good way to safely raise the subject as she was now living many miles away from her ex-husband and protected by her new location in her parent's home. In Latha's walking interview she had said that "when the women go to meetings, sometimes the husbands get drunk and when they return home, their husbands harass them" and I was able to place this voice-over over footage of the women's meeting without being too specific about a particular woman's relationship. It is interesting that when the women move out of the domestic sphere, that it is then that there is a particular risk of domestic violence. At that point, the wife is directly challenging their husband's masculinity, a masculinity that has been observed by others as being built and maintained on a greater use of physical space (Wex, 1979).

Highmore, when referring to the study of the everyday, says it is "precisely to go behind the scenes and reveal underlying structures and latent contents" (2002:8). However, one can only guess at these structures and 'latent contents' because they are not necessarily visible so this is one of the limitations of visual research. However, I believe, it is through editing that one can hint at these structures.

Conclusion

To an extent, I have democratised the filmmaking process by putting cameras in the hands of subjects and opened up alternative discursive spaces. I believe that participatory filmmaking in this instance has produced footage that would not have come from using more conventional methods; certainly not of the area focusing on gender experience and familial relations in rural India. In the edit, I have interwoven different elements of this footage to tell a story with the aim to engender fresh insights into complex issues for the benefit of distant others, some of whom have never been to India. I have considered the different sources of film material, which I was able to generate and believe that the combination of methodology

used, participatory and observational filmmaking and video diary interviews, produced a nuanced picture of the interior lives of four rural women. In screenings, some audience members have been moved to tears as the stories they heard resonated with them.

However, according to Frota (1996), when Western news teams went to the Kayapo Indian villages, this tribe would often 'enact' the behaviour expected of them (that of being aggressive and bellicose) because they understood very quickly that this would give them visibility. So, it is very important to acknowledge the limitations of visual research and participatory video projects and to rigorously question any 'findings'. What we see may not be what is really there.

Moore, also referring to this Kayapo Indian project, notes that in the videos made by the Kayapo Indians themselves, men are shot in dynamic movement while the women are relatively immobile, "framed off-centre and close-up; when they are moving they are shot with a static camera, closer up than men thus weakening the dynamism of their movement" (1994:128). Moore asks; "are these conventions learned from television and anthropologists, or do they reflect the general state of affairs there as well?" (1994:128). The argument that power relations get magically transformed at the grass roots, 'assumes that indigenous video-makers are immune from "hierarchical power structures' and ignores the possibility that image making itself carries its own hazards" (Moore 1994:128).

Inevitably the camera has a 'blind spot' and is as partial and subjective as those that wield it; but this can be a strength if the camera is democratised and more and more people in the world have access to it. The 'blind spot' has often been, as well as class and ethnicity, gendered but this 'blind spot' is coming into visibility as feminist methodology concerns itself with, and appreciates, women's subjective experience and recognises its significance.

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THE DSLR REVOLUTION AND ITS IMPACT ON DOCUMENTARY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the involvement of digital single-lens reflex cameras (DSLRs) with video-capturing capacity in the making of documentary and ethnographic films. More particularly, it examines whether and to what extent these genres were influenced by a trend called the “DSLR revolution,” which arose mainly between 2008 and 2014. Firstly, it acquaints the reader with the phenomenon of the DSLR revolution from a technological point of view. Secondly, it provides a qualitative analysis of the testimonies of ten documentary and ethnographic filmmakers, who used DSLR cameras in making their films; this is the main contribution of the article. The article evaluates the role of this phenomenon and considers the future involvement of DSLRs in the genre of documentary and in visual-ethnography research.

KEYWORDS

DSLR, Digital Cameras, Film and Video Technology, Documentary film, Ethnographic film, Visual Anthropology

BIO

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FIGURE 1: A DSLR camera (Max Pixel n.d. CC0 Public Domain)

Introduction

The involvement of DSLRs (i.e. digital single lens cameras which were primarily designed for still photography, cf. Fig. 1) in video- and filmmaking began almost a decade ago. Authors have referred to their appearance as a “DSLR revolution,” some even claiming that “there’s been nothing like it in the history of cinema” (Lancaster 2011:44). The revolution played a crucial role in a democratisation of filmmaking and helped to bring about a number of topical phenomena (such as vlogging, YouTubers etc.). One sphere in which the DSLR revolution found a significant application was the genre of ethnographic and documentary film.¹

Since the very first attempts of non-fiction cinema, shooting equipment has had a significant formative influence over the results of the filmmakers’ work. The dimensions and functionality of Robert Flaherty’s camera “Aggie,” for instance, crucially determined the way *Nanook* was shot in the 1920s (Ruby 2000:67–93). The genres of cinema vérité, direct cinema and observational cinema in the 1950s and 1960s were influenced by the invention of synchronised sound and light 16mm cameras (Gauthier 2011:83–117). And the emergence of lightweight video camcorders in the 1980s and 1990s offered a cheap and durable alternative to fragile and expensive film material, allowing shooting for significantly longer periods of time (Banks and Morphy 1999:5). This development is considered to have increased the level of intimacy between filmmakers and film protagonists by simplifying the shooting workflow (Barker 1998:352) and is credited with providing some additional features, such as the ability to review

¹ This article aims to analyse both genres, documentary and ethnographic films; that is, this study included different films that their authors consider either documentary or ethnographic, and that were screened at festivals of either documentary or ethnographic films (cf. Methodology). The terms documentary film (Hardy 1966:13) and ethnographic film (Liotard, Samivel, and Thevenot 1950:13) were introduced in different times and contexts and they have both been widely used in visual anthropology for years. Nevertheless, it has not been clearly defined what the relation is between one term and the another (cf. e.g. Ruby 1975; Ruby 1998; Basu 2008:94–96). With respect to the authors of the examined films (i.e. the research participants), I will be using both of the phrases “ethnographic film” and “documentary film” throughout the article. I do not consider them synonymous, but do not explicitly distinguish one from another here as it is not necessary in this study.

footage in the field and to discuss it with research participants or film protagonists (Pink 2007:97). DSLR cameras represent one of the latest important steps in this on-going technological development.

The potential of DSLRs in these genres was discovered especially during the years 2010–2013, in a significant number of cases yielding notable results in completed films. For instance, all the films awarded the Audience Award at the International Documentary Film Festival Jihlava, in 2011, 2012 and 2013, were shot on DSLRs.² Despite the possibility that DSLRs might offer benefits to documentary and ethnographic filmmakers, they have received very little scholarly interest to date. This is presumably because film technology is changing faster than ever before. Scholarly texts can only keep up with technology at a significant delay, but on the other hand, they can provide deeper evaluations from a long-term perspective.

As the DSLR revolution started around 2008, it seems to be the right time to critically evaluate how the technology has influenced the film genres under examination here. And, as there are a number of documentaries and ethnographic films in which DSLR technology has been involved, there is now solid basis for scholarly work.

The aims of this article are:

- to acquaint the reader with the phenomenon of the so-called “DSLR revolution” in the context of video-capturing technology
- to present the results of a quantitative research project on the involvement of DSLRs in the genres of documentary and ethnographic films
- to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of this technology with a special focus on the genres of documentary and ethnographic film
- to discuss the potential involvement of this technology in the future of these genres.

What Was the DSLR Revolution? – A Brief Overview

SLR (i.e. single-lens reflex) cameras have been used for more than 150 years in the world of still photography. At the beginning, the additional letter D (standing for digital) was received with a great amount of scepticism. When the first digital SLR camera, the Kodak DCS 100 (priced around \$30,000 in 1991) appeared with its 1.3-megapixel resolution, it was regarded as a curiosity with an uncertain future. In less than 20 years, however, DSLRs have almost completely replaced the traditional film format for professional still photography. Surprisingly, DSLRs have also caused a revolution in the field of motion pictures. Even today in 2018, the world of cinema continues to be influenced by this revolution, which started about a decade ago.

The beginning of this revolution was very inconspicuous. It started in 2008 with the Nikon D90, the first DSLR with video-capturing capability. This model was able to capture images with a resolution of 1280x720 pixels, using MJPEG video standard. It caused an upsurge in the world of the amateur video, but it fell far short of attracting the attention of the film industry. Similarly, the Canon 500D and the Pentax K-7 appeared, but due to the former's non-standard frame rate (20 fps) and the latter's non-standard frame resolution (1536x1024px), their uses for the purposes of professional filmmaking were very limited.

The real revolution started with the Canon 5D Mark II (hereinafter 5D MkII), announced in September 2008. Rumours have it that this model's video-capturing capability began life very accidentally; when a Canon video engineer visited the company's still photo division and saw the upcoming 5D MkII, he supposedly said: “If you like, I can add video to that camera” (Lancaster 2011:33). The camera offered Full HD resolution (i.e. 1920 x 1080px) encoding to H.264 video standard. This was easily comparable with the best video cameras available at the time. Owners of the first 5Ds soon noticed the exceptional quality of its video capacities and, consequently, attempts to involve the camera in small film projects began to appear. At the beginning, there were experimental short films made as ad hoc tests of a DSLR's performance, such as *Reverie* shot by Vincent Laforet (2009), *The*

² These were *Solar Eclipse* [Pod sluncem tma], directed by Martin Mareček in 2011, *Fortress* [Pevnost], directed by Klára Tasovská and Lukáš Kokeš in 2012, and *The Great Night* [Velká noc], directed by Petr Hátle in 2013. Each of the three films was screened at the IDFF Jihlava in the year of its release (Mareček 2011; Hátle 2013; Tasovská and Kokeš 2012).

Last 3 Minutes directed by Po Chan (2010) and The Chrysalis directed by Jeremy Ian Thomas (2010). Soon after that, DSLRs began being used in commercial films (e.g. the movies *Iron Man 2* [2010], *Black Swan* [2010], *127 Hours* [2010]) and projects for TV broadcasting (e.g. the series *House* [2010], *Portlandia* [2011] and *Dexter* [2012]). Since the 5D MkII was able to produce almost the same quality material as professional film cameras but for significantly less money, shooting with DSLRs spread very quickly within the professional filmmaking community and soon even crossed its boundaries. A virtual community of DSLR shooters came into being.

A great number of specialist weblogs on DSLR filmmaking (such as Planet5D.com, Cinema5D.com, DSLRVideoShooter.com etc.) emerged as meeting places for this virtual community (Aunger 2008; Behiri, Leitner, and Wöber 2008; Pike 2008). Similarly, several “celebrities” of DSLR filmmaking began to be recognised. Filmmakers like Phillip Bloom, Vincent Laforet, Dan Chung, Jon Fairhurst, Stu Machwitz and Shane Hurlbut were some of the personalities of this growing movement. The word “celebrity” can actually be used with no exaggeration; Phillip Bloom, for instance, whose fame grew after blogging about DSLR video, now has more than 178,000 followers on YouTube, 143,000 on Twitter and 208,000 on Facebook. Comparing him, for example, to the fashion icon and former football star David Beckham (YouTube: 22,000, Twitter: 22,000 and Facebook: 53,000),³ it is obvious that we no longer need to put the word celebrities into quotation marks. Video-capturing DSLRs gained massive popularity around the entire world. Bloom himself referred to this growing global phenomenon as a “democratising of filmmaking” (Bloom in Lancaster 2011:405).

The reason that the movement was so democratising particularly involves the quality of the DSLR’s image, which was closer to a film look (also known as cinematic look) than a video look. One of the most popular DSLR cinematography guides, written by Kurt Lancaster, has a subheading “Crafting the Film Look with Video” (Lancaster 2011). In the book, the video look is described as an “uncinematic, flat, overly sharp look that makes cinema-makers and photographers cringe” (2011, 20). Video look originally emerged alongside video cameras that were designed for ENG (i.e. Electronic News Gathering) in the 1970s. The priority of such devices was not their aesthetic qualities but a simple and fast workflow (Sugimoto, Ogusu, and Ikegami 1975). On the contrary, film look has been shaped by the physical appearance and properties of film (16, 35, 70 mm and so on). This physical object, with its all advantages and disadvantages, influenced not only how movies were shot, processed and distributed, but also how they looked. The film look is described as “soft, creamy, as well as smooth and sharp” (Lancaster 2011:121). With the DSLR revolution, filmmakers gained the freedom of achieving the film look while remaining independent of the corporations that had completely controlled prices of equipment for the whole film industry up to that point. Jared Abrams, a Hollywood-based filmmaker, stated: “Anyone with a good story and a good eye can produce high-quality imagery with these cameras” (Abrams in Lancaster 2011:34).

The online communities built around the DSLR filmmaking movement started actively forging the course and the progress of the emerging revolution. In 2009, Trammel Hudson introduced a firmware hack for the 5D MkII called Magic Lantern, which was then developed further by a community of filmmakers/hackers into a complex tool providing features of high-end professional cameras (such as zebras, histogram, focus peaking etc.) for most of the Canon models (Guncheon 2009). The firmware itself was open-source and available for free. Similarly, “hardware-hacking” appeared; the community started sharing tips for achieving the film look without the need for expensive additional equipment. A number of manuals emerged that dealt with, for instance, producing home-made tools for camera stabilisation and operation, cinematic camera movement and mounting old lenses onto modern DSLR bodies. Many shooters considered lightweight DSLRs a basic component of their kit, knowing that they could be modified in an almost unlimited number of ways. With the massive democratisation of the film look, it is clear that the appearance of DSLRs was a crucial step in the history of cinema.

Documentary and ethnographic filmmakers were interested in this technology from the very beginning of the revolution. Due to their technical, aesthetic, economic and other advantages over other shooting workflows, DSLRs found widespread applications, resulting in a great number of remarkable documentary and ethnographic films.

The rest of this article will present an analysis of testimonies from ten filmmakers. These are filmmakers who involved DSLR shooting technology in the making of films between 2011–2014. First,

³ Accessed November 12, 2018. All numbers rounded to the nearest thousand.

the method of participant-selection will be presented. Then, the most significant aspects distinguishing DSLR technology from other shooting workflows, in the opinion of the research participants, will be explained.

DSLRs in Documentary and Ethnographic Films

Methodology

At the very beginning of the research, 20 European festivals of ethnographic film and 21 European documentary festivals were contacted with the aim of compiling contact information of relevant filmmakers. Altogether, 23 responses were received; fourteen festivals were willing to provide information about the authors of the films they screened, either in the form of an electronic database or in the form of festival catalogues.

To avoid redundancies and obtain a representative and manageable sample of participants, the focus was finally narrowed to the films screened at the International Documentary Film Festival Jihlava (representing documentary films) and Antropofest International Film Festival (representing ethnographic films), both of which are international in scope and based in the Czech Republic. Both festivals agreed to provide information (i.e. the titles of films, the names of directors/producers and their e-mail addresses) for the purposes of the research.

From these resources, a selective database was created, consisting of films that were: 1) screened in one of the two aforementioned festivals between 2011 and 2014, 2) were finished between the same years, and 3) were created with a digital camera (i.e. films shot on film such as 16- and 35 mm were excluded). In the end, around 500 films from IDFF Jihlava and about 90 films from Antropofest fit these parameters.

A web script, which modified salutations, names of filmmakers and films in order to maximise returnability of the request, was used to send an email to selected contacts. The email contained, among other information about the research project, the question: “Did you involve a DSLR in making of your film project?” It required an answer of either “Yes,” “Partly,” or “No.” The response rate to these emails was 39%. In the charts 1–4, results are given in relative numbers (i.e. %) of the involvement of DSLRs in films screened at the IDFF Jihlava and the Antropofest festivals for the years in question. Chart 5 shows trends in use of DSLR technology throughout the years 2011–2014.

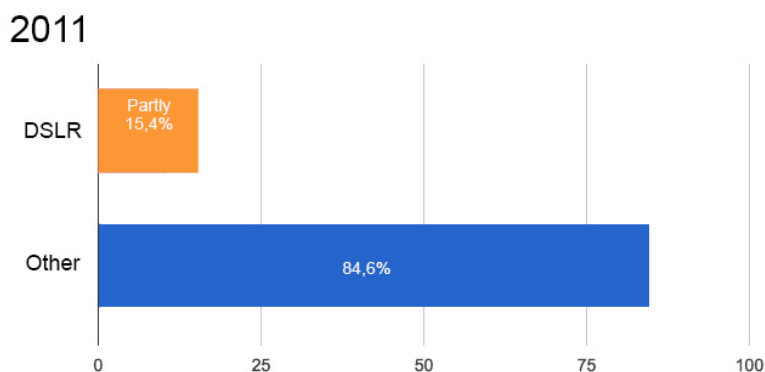


CHART 1: Involvement of DSLRs compared to other cameras in films screened at IDFF Jihlava and Antropofest - 2011

2012

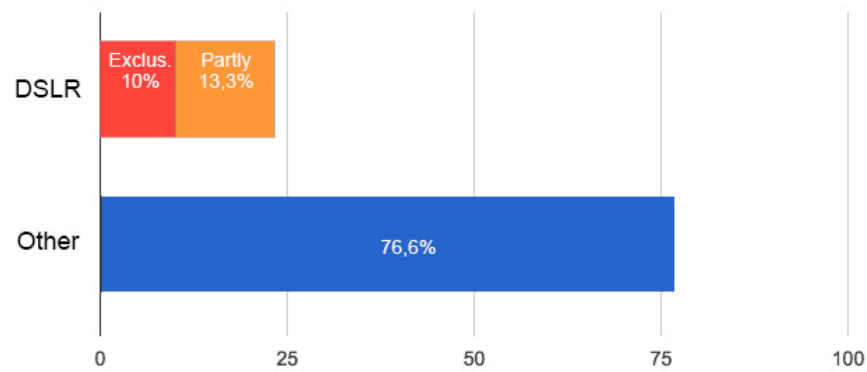


CHART 2: Involvement of DSLRs compared to other cameras in films screened at IDFF Jihlava and Antropofest - 2012

2013

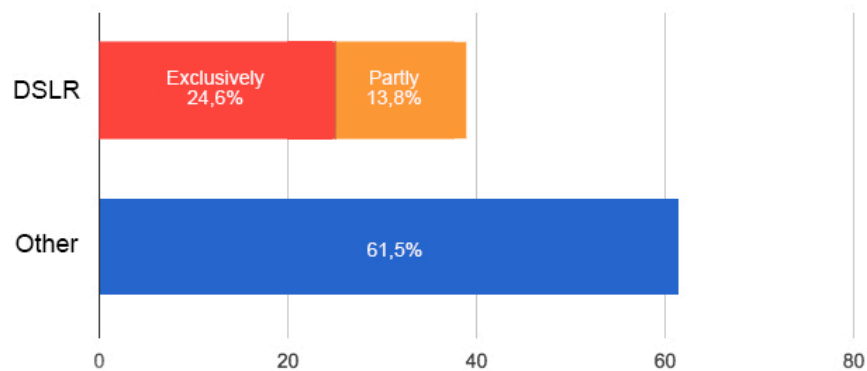


CHART 3: Involvement of DSLRs compared to other cameras in films screened at IDFF Jihlava and Antropofest - 2013

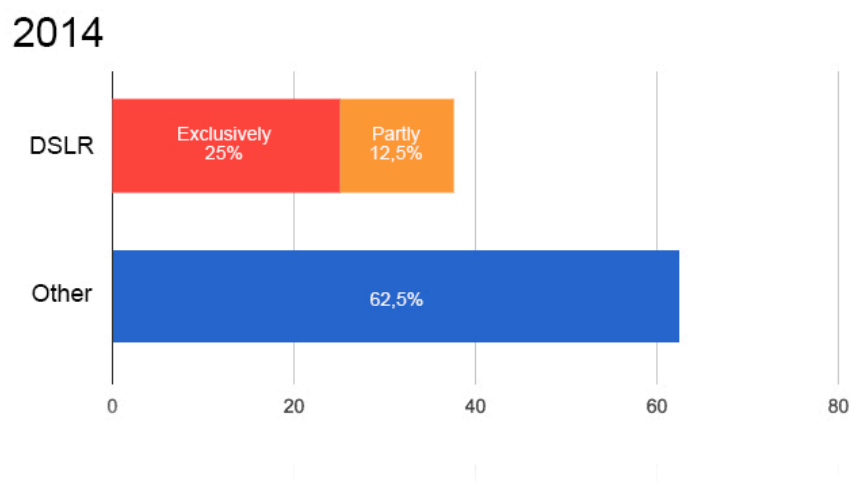


CHART 4: Involvement of DSLRs compared to other cameras in films screened at IDFF Jihlava and Antropofest - 2014

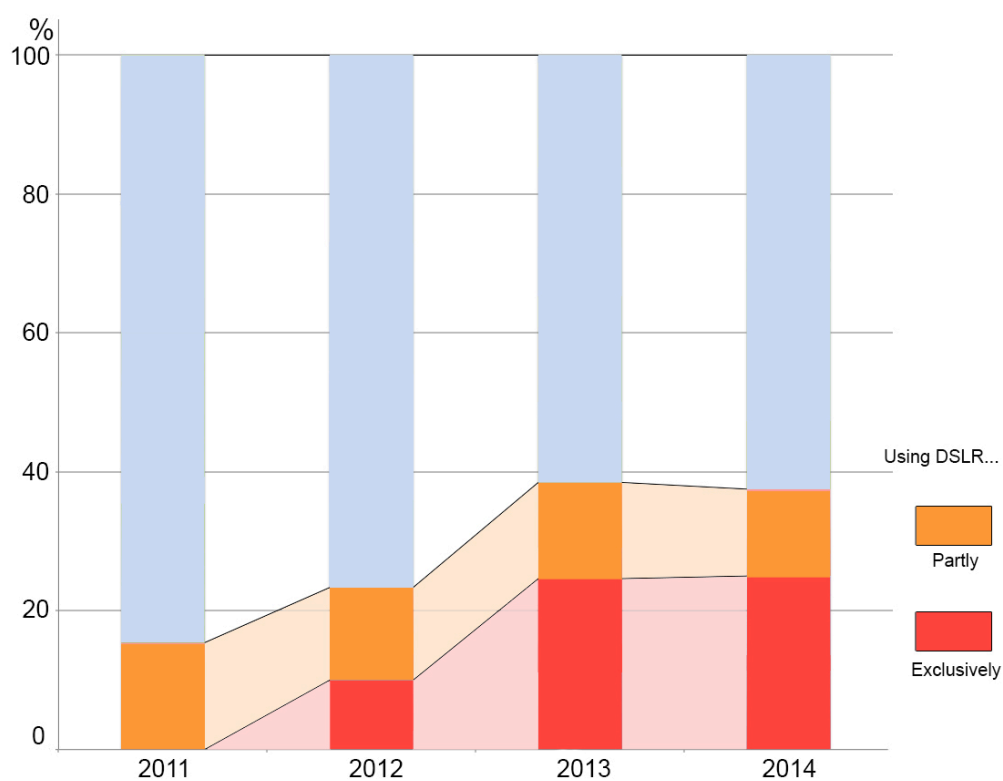


CHART 5: Trends in the involvement of DSLRs (IDFF Jihlava and Antropofest 2011–2014)

Although the charts are based on a relatively small data pool, they suggest that DSLRs were used to create a significant number of films, and that there was substantial growth in the percentage of projects using the DSLR technique from 2011 to 2014.

Those who responded that they used DSLRs in their filmmaking (partly or exclusively) received a second e-mail, which requested further participation in the research through an interview about their experience with using these cameras. In the end, a participant sample size of N=10 was selected. This selection was based upon the principles for qualitative research per the phenomenological approach (Creswell 1998) and per judgment sampling (Marshall 1996). The sample contained various kinds of film projects (differing in such things as available budget, character of workflow, target audience and country of origin) to account for maximum variation sampling (Patton 2002). All of the participants agreed on being represented under their real names, therefore, the data were not anonymised. The participants in the research, and basic information about their film projects, can be found in Table 1.⁴

Participant	Ppts' Role	Film Title	Completed	Involvement of DSLR
Andran Abramjan	Direct or, DOP5	To Rule, to Work, to Earn, to Pray, to Collapse	2013	99% (just one take is shot with a camcorder)
Konstantina Bousmpoura	Direct or	Working Dancers	2014	80% (alternated with a digital video camera)
Marcell Gerő	Direct or	Cain's Children	2014	100%
Jari Kupiainen	Direct or, DOP	Kastom Twelve	2014	97% (alternated with a mobile phone)
Johann Lurf	Direct or, DOP	Reconnaissance	2012	100%
Jaroslava Panáková	Direct or, DOP	5 Lives	2016	20% (alternated with 8mm, HDV, GoPro and other cameras)
Radovan Sibrť	Direct or	The Prison of Art	2012	100%
Jiří Stejskal	Direct or, DOP	My Home	2014	25% (alternated with digital video cameras)
Aleš Suk	Producer, DOP	Marija's Own	2011	95% (alternated with 8mm film)
Liwaa Yazji	Director, DOP	Haunted	2014	50% (alternated with camcorders and mobile phone)

TABLE 1: The Research Participants

Four of the participants agreed to a live interview while the remaining six completed a 30-page qualitative survey with open-ended questions (Nuska 2014). Both the interviews and the questionnaire were structured as evaluations of the technology's performance in the process of film production

⁴ More information, including links with additional information (film annotations, credits, details about distribution etc.), can be found in the references (Abramjan 2013; Heimann and Bousmpoura 2014; Gerő 2014; Kupiainen 2014; Lurf 2012; Panáková 2016; Sibrť 2012; Stejskal 2014; Suková 2011; Yazji 2014). The figures in the "Involvement of DSLR" column are based on filmmakers' estimates.

⁵ Director of Photography.

(including pre-production and post-production) and to address the significance of the technology for visual-anthropological and documentary work. Where possible, the filmmakers provided me with a link to their work through a film distributor so that I could see their testimonies in the context of their work. The testimonies were clustered into sub-sections according to the main advantages of the technology that the research participants mentioned. The closing sub-section discusses its drawbacks.

Affordability: The Economic Reasons for Involving DSLRs

To understand one of the main pros of DSLRs over other cameras, we need to consider the market situation for digital cameras around the year 2010. While today, the vast majority of smartphones are capable of capturing Full HD video (i.e. 1920x1080 pixels) and there are over 60 smartphones on the market capable of shooting in Ultra HD (i.e. 3840x2160 pixels) with prices starting at less than 200 USD, back then, this capacity was the domain of just a very few high-end cameras on the market. Examples from the rank of digital film cameras include the ARRI Alexa, valued at about 60,000 USD, and the RED One Mysterium X for about 25,000 USD. From the available video cameras, there was, for example, the Sony F350 XDCAM HD priced at about 14,000 USD. However, such cameras were equipped with relatively small sensors, so their ability to achieve a film look that could compete with the aforementioned film cameras was very limited. The DSLR Canon 5DMkII, however, was equipped with an even larger sensor than the ARRI Alexa and the Red One, and it was available for just 2,500 USD. This price range was very attractive for documentary and ethnographic filmmakers as these film genres traditionally operate with tighter budgets than feature films.

None of the participants indicated that the budget-savings argument was the exclusive or crucial one, but most of them highly appreciated the affordability of DSLRs. Jiří Stejskal, the director of the film *My Home*, said that the cost of renting an appropriate camera for 30 shooting days would be the same as buying a whole DSLR shooting kit. I was also told by Aleš Suk, the camera operator of Željka Sukova's film *Marija's own*, about a similar experience:

It was a great saving [...] we simply bought the camera and there were no renting costs. Originally, we wanted to rent a camera with Zeiss lenses but the cost of the rental would be higher than the cost of the camera body itself.

Filmmakers who purchase rather than rent equipment are afforded a more flexible production schedule. Andran Abramjan, for example, was a film student who used a DSLR for making his graduation film *To Rule, To Work, To Earn, To Pray, To Collapse*. He bought this low-end DSLR camera despite being able to use equipment from his school for free, in order to be independent of the school's production timetable.

There were also those participants whose decision to use DSLRs was not at all influenced by budget, but for whom a DSLR was simply the most suitable choice among other high-end cameras. Marcell Gerő, the director of the film *Cain's Children*, described his decision-making process as follows:

We started the project with an extended workflow test where – as a first step – we tested 5 cameras: Canon C100 (internal recording), Canon C100 (external NINJA recorder), RED Scarlet, Iconoscope, Canon 5D MarkIII. The decision was not budget-driven. The RED seemed incapable of shooting 1.5–2-hour interviews continuously (overheating risks). The Iconoscope's cards were not able to record long shots and its image was not persuasive. The C100 was on the same image level as the 5D and did not have more information in it – as the colourist said to us. On the other hand, the mobility and the 'non-camera-character' of the 5D seemed to have physical and psychological advantages in the circumstances we were planning to shoot in.

Thus, it was the attractive price/quality ratio not just the attractive price that was considered to be an important advantage for research participants over alternative cameras available that time.

The Film Look

Another reason that DSLRs brought about such an upheaval in the world of documentary and ethnographic cinema is their ability to craft the film look for very affordable costs, as it has already been mentioned in the introductory section.

The film look differs from the video look especially in technical aspects such as resolution⁶ (higher than video), dynamic range⁷ (greater than video), progressive scan⁸ (on the contrary to interlacing typical for video), depth of field (can be varied; from shallow to deep) (Roberts 2002; Lancaster 2011), specific ways of grading and appearance of picture artefacts (Prince 2004). DSLRs have demonstrated their ability to outperform other video cameras in most of the mentioned aspects (Lancaster 2011). The most visible technical-aesthetic aspect which significantly distinguished DSLRs from the other cameras is the potential for using shallow depth of field (hereinafter DOF).

The powerful effect of shallow DOF was established in the 1950s quite as a virtue of necessity, when filmmakers with insufficient budgets for proper lighting needed to open the camera's aperture wide, and this led to blurred (i.e. unfocused) backgrounds (Bordwell 1998:238). From this virtue of necessity, one of the most important aesthetic means of expression in cinema was developed. In the world of digital video, however, this effect was very hard to achieve,⁹ until DSLRs appeared. Jared Abram, a Hollywood cinematographer, commented on this new ability: "The use of depth of field to help tell the story had been missing from the video toolkit for some time. [...] Now with the shallow DOF of the [...] DSLRs, we have that tool, and it comes at a bargain price" (Lancaster 2011:34).

Achieving camera image with shallow DOF is possible due to a large CMOS sensor.¹⁰ DSLR cameras had been using this type of sensor for still photos for years. With DSLR bodies now having the video-capturing function, users were achieving film look at an affordable price and were able to create a video with varied DOF, resembling the highly valued film look.

Many of the research participants involved have used varied DOF with DSLRs and regard this feature as a favourite artistic means of expression. Marcell Gerő, the director of the film *Cain's Children*, commented on this feature as follows:

I always wanted to concentrate on only a few things in the image. When two people were talking to each other, I often wanted to concentrate on the one who is momentarily silent and wanted to 'lose' the speaking one. This technique created an interesting 'inner monologue' effect which is an important tool of our storytelling. (cf. Fig. 2)

Similarly, Aleš Suk confirmed the importance of the shallow DOF:

"Visual isolation of your subject is a very important story telling tool. We always try to use as small aperture as possible using dynamic neutral density filters¹¹ as an aperture in order to be able to capture 1/50 in f/4 in the sun during the summer. Also when making *Marija's Own* the highest aperture was 5.6." (cf. Fig. 3)

⁶ As already mentioned, at the beginning of the DSLR revolution, the aspect of resolution was crucial because only top-class video and film cameras were able to capture in Full HD resolution (i.e. 1920 × 1080px) or higher. It should be noted, however, that even Full HD resolution is lower than the resolution of 35mm film, which is estimated at 6K (cf. Lancaster 2011, 410). This can be achieved with high-end devices equipped with 6K resolution (Red Epic Dragon, Scarlet Dragon), or even 8K resolution (Red Weapon Dragon or Sony F65), which are slowly taking over from 2K and 4K cinema standard nowadays (Kitamura et al. 2011).

⁷ Dynamic range (hereinafter *DR*) is defined as the ratio between the brightest and the darkest parts in the picture and can be expressed in stops (f-numbers). The DR of classic film, for instance, is estimated at 14 stops, while Digital Video only reaches between 5 and 6 stops. The DR of current DSLRs varies approximately from 9 to 15 stops (Sudhakaran 2013). At the very beginning of the revolution, the dynamic range of DSLRs (though closer to the lower end of today's range) was spectacular in the comparison to the video cameras of the time, which were far more expensive.

⁸ While video/TV systems (such as NTSC and PAL) use an *interlaced* scan, where the image is split into odd and even lines (decreasing the picture clarity), digital cinema works with *progressive* scan, where the image is depicted at once, without splitting it into lines (Weise and Weyand 2007:126).

⁹ The only way to achieve this look was to involve 35mm DOF lens adapters, but this work-around would result in loss of light, colours and autofocus capabilities (Sharma 2013:23).

¹⁰ i.e. a sensor based on complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor technology (Fossum 1997).

¹¹ Neutral density (ND) filters decrease the intensity of light coming to the lens. The typical use of ND filters in DSLR filmmaking is for helping keep the aperture wide-open when creating the shallow DOF effect.



FIGURE 2: Shallow DOF - *Cain's Children* (2014) (shot by Rudolf Péter Kiss)



FIGURE 3: Shallow DOF - *Marija's Own* (2011) (shot by Aleš Suk)

Nevertheless, shallow DOF also raises the challenge of maintaining proper focus. Jaroslava Panáková, a visual anthropologist who produced the film *5 Lives*, complained about having to discard a relatively large number of interview shots because they were out of focus. Most DSLRs have a relatively small display and, thus, it can be challenging to verify sharpness without the help of additional hardware (e.g. external displays or viewfinders) or software/firmware (e.g. Peak Focus provided by Magic Lantern). Because of this, the shallow DOF of DSLRs was also not fully appreciated by filmmakers filming fast-moving objects or scenes, as the shots could go out of focus. Jari Kupiainen commented on this issue: “I

usually did not want to go to extreme shallow DOF [...], because the objects were live and moving, and I would risk sharpness.”

The filmmakers were sometimes forced to close the lens aperture in order to get more field into focus. This, however, might have an undesirable side effect as the adjustment may require an increase in ISO, which, in-turn, increases the capture of background noise. This issue was reported, for instance, by Andran Abramjan, who always needed to consider this trade-off between a secure focus with shut aperture at the expense of undesirable noise, or noise-less images with wide-opened aperture but with the risk of out of focus shots.

To conclude, shallow DOF was considered a valuable tool for imitating a cinematic quality, which, in some cases, highly influenced the artistic look of the film. For documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, however, it demanded some extra care for focus operating, which can be challenging in field conditions.

Cameras Seeing in the Dark

Another technological-aesthetic advantage of DSLRs that comes from the large CMOS sensor is strong performance in low-light conditions. An excerpt from Martin Mareček's *Solar Eclipse* (2011) (Fig 4) illustrates this feature. Lighting conditions for this film were very challenging; for some of the scenes, the only sources of light were candles, headlamps or cell-phones. Despite this, the cameras performed very well and mediated a clear cinematic picture. This was not possible in the cinema before the emergence of DSLRs.



FIGURE 4: Performing in low-light conditions – *Solar Eclipse* (2011) (dir. by Martin Mareček)

This feature is widely valued by documentary and ethnographic filmmakers as these genres often do not allow for the preparation time or use of additional lighting. The experience of the research participants slightly differed according to the particular model of DSLR used, but overall performance was regarded as excellent. For instance, Liwaa Yazji, the director of the film *Haunted*, which was filmed under difficult conditions in a war-oppressed Syria, noted: “Working in these conditions, it was very hard to have light equipment with me, so it was very important to have a camera that can work in low light conditions.”

Being freed from the necessity to have additional lighting equipment, the participants could shoot in unusual places, where it would be impossible to work with different cameras. Konstantina Bousmpoura, the director of the film *Working Dancers*, described her experience with shooting in low-light conditions as follows:

In my project, we had to film a lot under low-light conditions and the DSLR cameras performed very well. We used this aspect in order to show for example the preparation of the dancers a few moments before they go out to the stage, the last minutes before a premiere and the last words of the choreographer beside the scenes rehearsal footage.

The capacity of shooting under extremely low light conditions is one of the most appreciated aspects among documentary and ethnographic filmmakers, as fieldwork conditions most typically only allow for work with the natural light of the scene.

Compact Film Camera in a Small Body

Considering the cinematic quality of the image, DSLRs cameras are much smaller than other cameras that can achieve similar image-quality. This simple fact gives DSLR camera operators two great advantages.

Firstly, it allows them to bring camera equipment into nearly inaccessible areas and to shoot under challenging conditions, where other shooting equipment may not succeed. For instance, Marcell Gerő noted: “It was great that it allowed us not to bring a camera assistant with us and, as we were able to carry all the gear on our body and [in] one not-too-huge bag, to change position (interior-exterior as well) in no time.” The dimensions of the camera are not the only factor in this aspect of mobility; the high-end DSLR models use magnesium alloy for body-construction, which makes them weather-resistant and, therefore, ideal for working in conditions which may unexpectedly change. Aleš Suk mentioned that his camera is “superbly weather resistant” compared to the other digital cameras he has used so far.

Another great advantage of DSLRs is that they can be operated in very little space and, thus, they can shoot from very unusual angles, contributing to their original aesthetic. The director Radovan Šíbrt told me that this was the essential aspect of his film *The Prison of Art*. His crew was working in a prison where space was extremely limited. Marcell Gerő summed up that wherever the director of photography found a nice place for shooting, it automatically meant there was also enough space for operating the camera. Gerő also described the artistic use of this aspect in one particular scene of his film: “We were able to enter a small chicken-house with a girl. The door was 60cm tall but we were able to ‘walk in’ with her.” Many other participants reported that they shot on board planes or boats, and in other confined spaces that would be impossible with other kinds of camera. The DSLRs’ dimensions allowed audiences to see cinematic images of unusual places and angles. This is one of the main reasons that DSLRs have earned a special place in film history.

A Tool for Intimate Observation

As DSLRs are smaller compared not only to film cameras but also to some hand-held camcorders, they can provide a significant advantage for documentary and ethnographic filmmakers: an intimate perspective. Indeed, all of the participants greatly appreciated this advantage; for some it was even one of the main reasons for involving DSLRs in their film project. Marcell Gerő, for instance, noted: “All of the film’s key interviews and discussions have an intimate character and I am persuaded that one of the reasons how we succeeded to create this intimacy is the [DSLR] camera.”

Two aspects of this advantage were recognised by the participants. Firstly, filmmakers might be allowed to approach restricted areas where a camera operator would be seen as too intrusive but a still photographer as acceptable. Johann Lurf, for instance, whose film is based upon observation of a decommissioned military torpedo-testing area in California, noted: “I was able to film restricted areas and police did not intervene although recognising me using a camera” (see Fig. 5). Similarly, Andran Abramjan shot a building construction through a storefront of a shopping centre in Prague. “Had I had a bigger camera I would probably have been asked very quickly to leave,” Andran said (see Fig. 6).



FIGURE 5: Shooting in restricted areas – *Reconnaissance* (2012) (dir. by Johann Lurf)



FIGURE 6: Shooting in restricted areas – *To Rule, To Work, To Earn, To Pray, To Collapse* (2013) (dir. by Andran Abramjan)

Secondly, people who are being filmed, might behave differently in front of a still photo camera in comparison with a video/film camera. The aspect of intimacy is not determined just by the dimensions of a camera but also by its form, i.e. the form which most people recognise as a still photo camera. Consequently, in some cases, DSLR camera operators might be perceived as still photographers, not as

cinematographers. It has been shown during the research that this aspect has played a significant role in the DSLR success.

Marcell Gerő noted: “It does not look like a [video] camera. People, even if they know that it is, act differently – not just around but in front of the camera as well.” Jiří Stejskal said that shooting with a DSLR was similar to face-to-face communication. It is as if larger cameras established an asymmetrical relationship between filmmaker and protagonists while the relationship established by DSLRs was “more equal.” Jaroslava Panáková noted that people in Chukotka, where her fieldwork took place, conceptualise both devices differently.

They know well what film cameras look like as there have been recently a German crew with a huge camera [...] they immediately recognised these people as professionals. I, on the other hand, was regarded rather as a sociologist with a camera. They knew: ‘This is Jaroslava who’s taking some picture for her keepsake.’

Several participants stated that some of the key shots in their films were captured as a consequence of a protagonist being unaware of being filmed. For some film projects, it was even the key approach of the film. Aleš Suk commented: “This was the concept of shooting Marija’s Own – all the participants of the project were not aware they are actually protagonists, they were thinking that me, as a cameraman, is just taking some stills.”

This completely changes the relationship between filmmaker and protagonists and contributes to the effect of intimacy in documentary and ethnographic film. However, it also opens up ethical questions.

It sheds new light on a very old skeleton in the closet of visual anthropology. In the era of observational cinema, it was believed that ethnographic film should portray “people doing precisely what they would have been doing if the cameras were not present” (Goldschmidt 1972:1). This idea was soon the target of profound criticism: there was no way to make the film camera truly absent (Ruby 1975:106). As a consequence, ethnographic filmmakers needed to reconcile themselves to the fact that they are also actively participating in the process of filmmaking, and this led to an emergence of more participatory genres of ethnographic and documentary cinema. Moreover, it has become an ethical standard to make the participants aware of the fact that there are being filmed, and contemporary ethnographic and documentary practice requires informed consent from all persons present in front of the camera. The participants’ conscious awareness of their participation in a film project has become the norm.

The confusion that some filmmakers described surrounding still-photo cameras and motion-picture cameras, however, seems to suggest that some participants are unaware of being filmed. Certainly, it can help develop the sense of intimacy that is highly valued in these films, but an important question to ask is “whom does this intimacy serve?” It seems that in some cases at least, this intimacy emerges from practices that are less than transparent and do not seem designed with the interests of the film protagonists at the fore.

It seems likely that this issue will continue to develop as technology progresses. Nowadays, for instance, devices such as smartphones, which were primarily meant as tools for communication, are capable of capturing highly cinematic footage. It is likely that these developing technologies will cast a brand-new light on ethical questions surrounding the awareness research participants have of being involved in visual research. This is something that had been taken for granted for many years. It seems that now is the appropriate time for the international ethnographic and documentary filmmaking community to open up discussions on new ethical guidelines around this issue.

The Cons of DSLRs

Besides the wide range of advantages, my participants also encountered many disadvantages in using DSLRs. The most significant and most frequently mentioned will be described in this section.

The first significant difference between DSLR cameras and other video cameras in documentary practice is the inability for DSLRs to shoot synchronised sound of a quality that would fulfil industry standards. This fact almost automatically demands use of dual-system sound, that is, having an external sound-recording device, often operated by an additional person. Especially in the genres of ethnographic and documentary film, this might be regarded as a great drawback. Although a majority of the

participants did use a dual-system sound, for some it made film workflow more complicated. Konstantina Bousmpoura explained: “I consider it as a drawback for the documentary work because it demands presence of a soundman and that means more budget and bigger crew. And, of course, less mobility.” From this point of view, DSLRs do not seem to be the best option for one-person-crew documentary filmmakers or film projects on a budget, for which the presence of a sound operator could be a financial burden.

Another known drawback of DSLRs is over-heating. This occurs as a downside of the same large CMOS sensor that is the source of the major aesthetic and technical advantages. As the cameras are a priori designed for still photos, from time to time, they suffer from over-heating. This may lead to an increase in the noise level or to the camera suddenly shutting down. This can have highly undesirable consequences for documentary and ethnographic filmmakers. Experiences of the participants with this issue were varied, especially depending on the climate of the region of fieldwork. For instance, Jiří Stejskal and Jaroslava Panáková, who filmed in Ukraine and in Russia respectively, did not experience this problem whatsoever. Jari Kupiainen, however, who shot in the Solomon Islands, noted: “This was a constant issue in the tropics, especially daytime in the sun. I could not shoot all I wanted because of heating.” The over-heating issue, of course, always depends on the particular model of camera being used and the particular conditions for shooting. Generally, it might be said that DSLRs may not be suitable for long shots because of the increased risk of sensor-overheating. Thus, they may be limited to shooting interviews, nonetheless a crucial part of a documentarist’s work.

Another related drawback for filmmakers is the time limit of a single shot. This has various lengths for various cameras, but the maximum is set at 29:59 minutes due to a tax regulation.¹² Not many participants, however, reported this as a major problem, since they rarely shot such long takes. Radovan Sibrť compared DSLR shooting with shooting on old film reels:

have never done such a long take. And if I have, what would I do with it? [...] One can actually learn how to shoot smartly as you have to think before you shoot [...] It is similar to shooting with film reels. You cannot shoot a half-hour shot as the reel is simply not that long.

An additional significant difference between DSLRs and other hand-held cameras lies in the ways that they are handled and controlled. Their smaller size and their shape mean, for example, that they cannot easily be leaned on the shoulders. In a typical video production, this drawback is compensated for by the use of additional tools. Alongside traditional tripods or monopods, there are shoulder rigs, chest rigs, hand grips, handy steadicams, run-and-gun adapters and so forth. Surprisingly, not many of these accessories were used by the participants. Some did report troubles with the control of focus, as most of the DSLRs of the time were not equipped with autofocus,¹³ or zoom, which almost always resulted in shaky takes. However, very few of them compensated for these issues with additional tools. Radovan Sibrť said that the production company for his film secured a number of additional tools for more precise ergonomics. During the actual production, however, the film crew preferred to simplify the workflow, and they ended up using a hand-held DSLR. Sibrť mentioned that although the ergonomics of the DSLR is not ideal, it might be considered as a virtue of necessity as it contributes to a specific look. Nevertheless, another aspect which needs to be taken into account is that intimacy can

¹² In the EU context, this is the Combined Nomenclature Regulation of the EU (European Commission 2015). Digital cameras with video-capturing capacity are considered *video camera recorders*, unless they “are not capable, using the maximum storage capacity, of recording, in a quality of 800 × 600 pixels (or higher) at 23 frames per second (or higher) at least 30 minutes in a single sequence of video.” According to this regulation, digital cameras with the capacity for shooting videos of longer than 30 minutes are treated as video camera recorders, and therefore, they are subjected to an extra 4.9% tax. At the beginning of the DSLR revolution, however, this issue affected not only EU customers but all DSLR users, despite most DSLR manufacturers producing regional models, including for regions that were not subject to this extra tax. Among the virtual community of early DSLR filmmakers, there was a lot of speculation that this tax issue was actually put forward by the manufacturers as an excuse for not being able to sort out the technical problems affecting the early DSLRs (overheating and the FAT32 filesystem).

¹³ Though DSLRs at that time were equipped with accurate AF systems for still photos based upon passive phase detection, there was no way of using these systems while filming. They did not operate during filming because the hardware responsible for phase detection was located between the DSLR’s mirror and the sensor. Light could not reach the sensor because the mirror was cast down for recording. This is no longer an issue today. All manufactures have applied a solution to their new models, either through a software solution (e.g. *contrast detection*) or a hardware solution (e.g. *DSLT* semipermeable mirrors).

easily be lost with too many additional devices. Aleš Suk, for instance, stated that he was willing to sacrifice some ergonomic comfort in order to gain intimacy and discreetness.

Thus, even though the ergonomics of DSLRs is often mentioned as a crucial drawback in comparison to other cameras, for documentary and ethnographic filmmakers, it represents an important advantage: a simple and compact shooting workflow that can develop the sense of intimacy between the filmmakers and the film protagonists (with all implied ethical consequences).

Conclusion: Evaluation of DSLRs and their Future in Documentary and Ethnographic Filmmaking

In evaluating the overall performance of DSLR cameras for use in the documentary and ethnographic film genres, the participants offered different kinds of responses. Some participants were very impressed by their strengths, considering them a game-changing tool in filmmaking. Aleš Suk, for instance, noted: “For me the DSLR is generally a great step forward [...] I love the discreet feel, the possibility to capture both pictures and videos and the look of the image.” Replying to the question of whether he would use it for future projects, he replied “Yes” without hesitation.

Nevertheless, there were those filmmakers who were not impressed at all. Jaroslava Panáková stated:

I can imagine using DSLR for some web projects, but for my kind of filmmaking I would definitely choose [a] different kind of technology [...] The worst thing was the issue with ergonomics. Due to these problems, I did not feel free and so I could not really appreciate the pros of the camera.

Most of the participants belonged neither to the committed DSLR enthusiasts group, nor to the sceptical group; they pragmatically considered DSLRs an option well suited to their project, in the context of other available technology. Marcell Gerő summed this stance up, saying that “different productions require different gear,” and adding: “DSLR is not the best choice for every situation. In our case it was.”

The participants were also asked for their opinions on the future roles of DSLRs in documentary and ethnographic filmmaking. Radovan Sibrť, who has worked with various types of video and film cameras (including high-end products), said that DSLRs were miraculous performers for their price and that they saved financial resources of many film productions around 2011. “Today, however, the situation is different. Canon C100, for example, costs approximately the same as Canon 5D. So, why would anyone spend money for a still photo camera if one can have a good film camera with much better compression than a camera for stills?” said Sibrť in March 2015.

At the time of this research, however, the future of the DSLR for video shooting was already starting to be thought of as uncertain. A report about expected developments in shooting technology released in 2014 said: “We are currently witnessing a significant shift in dynamics, with DSLRs falling out of favour with the professional video producers [...] End users are turning to more affordable CSCs as well as turning back to professional camcorders” (Price 2014). The report predicted a drop in the involvement of DSLRs in professional video-making from a 31% market share in 2013 to less than 4% by 2019.

This report seemed quite accurate in its predictions about the potential of what it refers to as CSCs. CSC stands for Compact System Cameras, also known as Mirrorless Interchangeable Lens Cameras (MILCs), and popularly as “mirrorless.” According to CIPA,¹⁴ more than four times more DSLRs were sold in the global market than MILC cameras in 2012; precisely 16.2 million DSLRs vs. 3.6 million MILCs. By 2017, DSLRs sales had dropped to 7.6 million, while those of MILCs had risen to 4.1 million (CIPA 2018). The market is especially dominated by the MILCs introduced by Sony, Panasonic and Fujifilm. The major DSLR manufacturers (Canon and Nikon), however, are now releasing mirrorless models in an effort to catch up with these rivals.

It is important to note that MILCs are very similar to DSLRs from the perspective of this study. Most advantages that were mentioned by the filmmakers (such as the film look, affordability, low-light capacity, compactness and intimacy) are applicable to MILCs as well. Similarly, MILCs share many of the disadvantages mentioned for DSLRs (issues of ergonomics and the need for dual system audio

¹⁴ The CIPA (Camera & Imaging Products Association) is an international industry organisation based in Japan. Among other activities, it regularly releases statistical data about sales of photographic equipment (CIPA 2018).

recording) while, at the same time, other issues are fixed or significantly improved (overheating and focusing). MILC cameras can, therefore, be considered successors to the tradition of DSLRs in cinema, as there are more similarities than differences in these technologies. It is highly likely that those documentary and ethnographic filmmakers who favoured using DSLRs have already started switching to MILCs.

On the basis of this research, however, it is reasonable to predict that, in the world of documentary and ethnographic film, DSLRs will be used for a little longer. There are at least three arguments for this assumption.

Firstly, it has become apparent in the research that, especially for academy-based ethnographic filmmakers and documentary film-school students, there is a trend to use available technology rather than the newest technology, i.e. using disposable equipment which can be provided by academic departments or production companies for minimal costs or for free. This inertia will likely continue in the case of DSLRs. The academic departments and production companies equipped with DSLRs will likely continue to use them in the near future as well, since they have proven their suitability for both ethnographic research and documentary filmmaking.

The second argument indicating that DSLRs may stay popular, especially for academy-based ethnographic filmmakers, is the capacity of DSLRs to take excellent still pictures. Jari Kupiainen commented on this two-in-one functionality as follows: “[DSLR] cameras were used for stills, which were taken systematically on certain topics. Stills also appear in the film. I use photos also in exhibitions, publications and lecturing.” As still photos often accompany visual anthropologists’ publications and/or exhibitions, this functionality may be an important advantage over other video cameras. It is, however, expected that MILCs may substitute for DSLRs in this role in the future.

Thirdly and finally, DSLRs nowadays represent probably the most affordable and a very convenient educational tool for the practical learning and teaching of film production. They are used not only in the training of new generations of documentary and ethnographic filmmaker, but more importantly, they can also be used by indigenous people to embrace their own visions of their cultures. Placing video cameras in the hands of indigenous research participants has already been part of the methodological toolkit of visual anthropologists for some years. Nevertheless, achieving the film look has always been the domain of those who have money and power. Presumably, DSLRs will continue to play a great role in democratising the film look in indigenous contexts.

To conclude, the importance of DSLRs in the world of contemporary documentary and ethnographic filmmaking seems to be slowly but surely coming to an end. There should be no doubt, however, that these cameras played a crucial role in the history of cinema and they were a significant part of forming the genres of documentary and ethnographic film at the beginning of the 21st century. Their story also shows that the role of technology will continue to matter in forming future visual-ethnography practice and that a broader theoretical frame for considering technology should not be overlooked (e.g. ethical aspects of visual-ethnography research), and that it should regularly be updated as technology progresses.

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COLLECTIVE AND COLLECTED MEMORY: PHOTOGRAPHY AS FAMILY HISTORY RECLAMATION IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA¹

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ABSTRACT

The paper compares social functions and perspectives of family memory in the era of traditional media and that of user generated content through Web 2.0. Family photograph as a component of family history reconstructing projects made in the conditions of completely different communication technologies is in the focus of the paper. Project of Nikolai Schapov (1881-1960), amateur photographer and family historian, is put into comparison with the practices of users of the family social network FamilySpace.ru.

KEYWORDS

family photograph, family history reconstruction, images collecting and sharing, memory, communication technologies, Internet, Russia.

Bio

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Introduction

The article compares social functions and perspectives of family memory in the era of traditional media and that of user generated content through Web 2.0. It focuses on different forms of social interaction and connection facilitated by online photo sharing practices in contrast to the more static practices of printing photographs. The matter concerns interaction of photographs and family memory. The idea is that the photographs posted on the Web are imbedded in communication, especially verbal, differently from the way they were before the era of Web 2.0. They differently shape the space of interpersonal communication and how family members talk about and visually construct the past.

The aim of the research is to present the difference between making family histories visible by means of traditional photography of the end of the 19th – first half of the 20th century, and with the help of contemporary online photo sharing practices. The material to analyse is the heritage of Nikolai Shchapov (1881-1960), a muscovite, hydrotechnology engineer, professor of the Bauman Moscow Higher Technical School, family historian, and passionate amateur photographer who left one of the richest family photo collections in Russia. By contrast, the contemporary mode of images collecting and sharing is analysed through the family social network FamilySpace.ru, launched in 2008. It was the first family social network in the Russian-speaking Internet, and its purpose was to study family trees, to reconstruct and often to rediscover family histories, and to contribute to the development of existing group narratives and identities. These represent amateur attempts to reconstruct histories of the family in the conditions of totally different representation and communication technologies. In either case, to make this reconstruction, a family historian forms a representative version of the family archive.

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Nikolai Shchapov lived at a time when family photographs and albums were an essential part of the Russian middle class social life. His 'photo-culture' was developing on the basis of studio family photo portraits that filled the houses of his parents and relatives. As Nikolai grew older, he turned into an amateur photographer that was quite typical for that time. "... There was also amateur photography, which after 1880 evolved from the hobby of the elite, to a global, popular pastime. The power of snapshot photography lay not in the quantity of pictures it produced during the period, but in the means it gave ordinary people to consider, judge, and promote the people in their lives. The photo album of the 1890s was a sort of Victorian Facebook, in the sense that dozens or even hundreds of portraits were preserved, displayed, and circulated among social and family networks. This new ability to "collect" friends was as empowering for the ordinary individual as it was for the artist or official utilizing photography as an investigative tool (I am thinking here of naturalists' scrapbooks or police detectives albums)" (Hudgins 2010: 564-565). Nikolai's another interest was to collect family documents. His archive comprised with time both the documents of several related families, and numerous photographs and negatives. Relying on this archive, Nikolai tried to write several books dedicated to family's history. In the Soviet time, his records as well as pre-revolutionary family photographs and documents were kept at home, and it looks like they were hidden and hardly shown to anybody (his archive was published in part only in the end of 1990s). The Soviet power forced people to abandon their history, their ancestors, and to ignore or even to hide the genealogical and social origin issues. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and soviet ideology, there was a surge of interest in genealogy to the issues that had long been unpopular and often dangerous, both in historical sciences and public life.

The social network FamilySpace.ru is the contrary example of amateur reconstruction of family history and genealogy. It appeared during the post-Soviet period which is characterized by active exploration of 'communicative memory'² space (Assmann 2011) – a turn to oral evidence, neglected, and even feared in previous decades. It was the period when "... alternative representations of the past were publicly recalled, recharged, and even relived in ways that would have been impossible a decade earlier. There was a sense that ordinary people were recovering pasts that, because they contradicted official history, had remained hidden and protected" (Watson 1994: 6). The events of the Russian political history of the 20th century destroyed the (feeling of) connection between generations, the chain of handing the information down to the generation that follows. Thus, one of the main sources of self-determination of people, namely, the awareness of family roots and the right to possess this knowledge was destroyed. While amateur family history reconstruction projects in the traditional model aimed mainly at retaining and rescuing family history as important part of family and personal heritage, the similar projects undertaken in the post-Soviet period are primarily aimed at revising, completing, and reformatting of personal and group identity. As a result of the family genealogical amnesia imposed by the Soviet rule, these projects apparently acquired compensatory properties. In addition, in the 1990s, after the abrupt break with the Soviet past, there was a fear of losing 'living memory' of the last witnesses of the 20th century's historical events that had a direct and often tragic impact on the life of families. The allowed access to public archival collections containing a whole set of genealogical sources was one more reason of the surge in interest in the subject.

A burst of memoirs, happened after the collapse of the USSR, is concentrated primarily on the recent past, especially World War II and Soviet socialism. This coincided with the emergence of new communication technologies, in particular, the Web 2.0 which affected commemoration practices in radically new way. Online communication resources, including interactivity, user-generated content, connectedness, and multimedia, stimulated appearance of a great number of memory-related groups in the Russian-speaking Internet, where many alternative histories and multifarious memories began to coexist. As Ellen Rutten argues, social media are pivotal to memory culture in the former Soviet Union now, where the past is as alive as the present (Rutten, Fedor, and Zvereva 2013). Amateur family history reconstruction projects as a special case of web-mediated memory in the post-Soviet space could be supposedly explicated in terms of the 'work of mourning' (*Trauerarbeit*). It implies positive process of creating of a new cultural product, which replaces the trauma of the people who lived either immediately during the totalitarian regime or right after it. "Trauma is response to a condition that had been experienced by the self; mourning is a response to a condition of the other. An individual subject who

² Communicative memory, according to Assmann, is shared and conveyed within a social group defined by common memories of personal interaction through the means of verbal communication over a time span of only 80 to 100 years.

has suffered a trauma [...] cannot represent the traumatic situation; this representational inability is precisely what constitutes trauma. In contrast, mourning is all about representation” (Etkind 2013: 14). To reconstruct family history online means to make the family past visual and thereby open, variable, and even unexpected. Social media provide people with the tools to do the ‘work of mourning’ together and to contribute in different ways to (micro)historical narratives in the process of their continuous development.

Comparative analysis of traditional and online family history amateur reconstruction requires answering to the following questions: who is the author of such a reconstruction? Whom a reconstruction is being created for? What is the main impulse and source of a reconstruction? How words and images interact in both cases? To make this analysis we made use of some provisions of memory studies, first of all, the idea that memory is a communicative phenomenon (Assmann 2011). Then, the idea that memory has a narrative nature, so, people remember what they can talk about (Riceur 1991). Memory exists in the present and for the present, although its contents is the past, but this is ‘the past for the present’, or ‘the past in the present’ (Mead 1929). That means that a family photograph, being a manifestation of the past, may be manipulated at present. Photographs live the family members’ life and help individuals and groups to create biographical narratives, as any picture is more about people’s attitude to the past than just a captured moment of the past. The attempts to reconstruct history of a family are aimed at representing the family photo collection (archive) as a set of the most significant images at present. As Manovich noted, the archive represents the world as a set of events without putting them in order, contrary to the narrative that creates cause-and-effect trajectory of events outwardly unordered (Manovich 2001). To make a family history reconstruction means to transform the archive into the narrative in such a way as to represent a family group as a shared idea of a number of people, united by horizontal and vertical family relations. Thus, a number of photos of quite different origins and age can be arranged into a complete picture in the form of a composite portrait, or mosaic, or album. Susan Sontag gives an example of a traditional family photo album as an image of a ‘large’ family that does not exist in reality (Sontag 1977). The way the photos are collected and social perspectives of the whole archive much depend on the technologies available to a person who performs this reconstruction. Internet has created new ways the stories are narrated, and family photograph online reconfigures the idea of family group, influencing its structure and boundaries, and finally transforming its identity.

Nikolai Shchapov (1881-1960): amateur photographer and family historian **Short biography**

Nikolai Shchapov (picture 1) was born in 1881 in Moscow and lived there until his death in 1960. He came from a family of rather wealthy Moscow merchants. He was a famous engineer in hydrotechnology, Doctor of technical sciences, and an author of several books and more than 170 articles on water engineering published in 1910-1960. In 1910, he started to teach at the Imperial Moscow Technical School (in the Soviet period it was Bauman Moscow Higher Technical School) supervising students’ projects on hydroturbines. Later, teaching became professor Shchapov’s main activity and he trained many specialists in hydraulic engineering. In the years of the First World War, Nikolai organized a bookshop and a publishing company to sell books on technology in his house. In 1918, the publishing house was nationalized. The 1917 October revolution dramatically changed Nikolai Shchapov’s life: he lost a lot. His two-storeyed mansion at Novobasmanaya street, inherited from his father and where he lived with his mother and his sister’s family, his father’s bank account and jewellery – everything was confiscated by the Bolsheviks. Nikolai did not take part in the political life of the country, but at the same time was not going to emigrate, as he believed in Russia and its future, no matter what political forces ruled there. He hoped that the Soviet power would use water resources of the country to develop the economy and culture, and he was right. In the Soviet time, Shchapov not only designed hydroelectric power plants and taught students, but also conducted a lot of research almost until his death in 1960. He became one of the first engineers to study hydrotechnical machines in the process of their functioning when they served as research laboratories. The results of this research were applied to constructing new machines and facilities. His life is a rare example of a successful career both in the tsarist Russia and later in the USSR.



PICTURE 1: Nikolai Shchapov in students' uniform of the Imperial Moscow Technical School. October 11, 1901 (Central Archive of Electronic and Audio-Visual Documents of Moscow)

The brightest manifestation of Nikolai Shchapov's life and career is the awards he received during his lifetime. In 1913, he was presented with medals – “In memory of the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, 1613-1913”, in acknowledgement of his public and community work; in 1914 – “For excellent carrying out full mobilization of 1914th”; in the Soviet period – the Orders of Lenin and of the Red Banner of Labour, medals “For the Defense of Moscow”, “For Valiant Labour in Great Patriotic War 1941-1945”, “In memory of the 800th anniversary of Moscow” and a medal of a participant in the VDNH (The Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy). He was the laureate of the Stalin Prize in 1948 for development and standardization of small-scale hydroturbines and their manufacturing application.

Family history reconstructing project

The book “I believed in Russia: family history and memories” (*“Ya veril v Rossiyu: semeynaya istoriya i vospominaniya”*) was prepared by Nikolai during the 1920s-50s and was published with the help of his son Yaroslav in Moscow in 1998. As Yaroslav Shchapov (1928-2011) argued in introduction to this book, Nikolai started reconstructing his family history since his youth. His grandmother Alexandra Ponomareva (1823-1906) was the first to arouse his interest in family history. She often came to Moscow from Rostov to visit her family and told him about their family. Later, Nikolai regretted that he had not made any notes. He only started to write down the memories of his elder relatives in 1930s. Once, two printed books on the 17th-18th century population census of the city of Rostov-the Great fell into Shchapov's hands, and on the cover of one of them there was drawn a family tree of the Shchapov family made in hand by his father's cousin. Thus, the names of his ancestors living in the 18th century became known to his family. Nikolai Shchapov himself tried to draw family trees, and one of them, dated 1898, is still kept safe. Nikolai's second marriage and his children's birth in 1920s inspired him to find out more about genealogy. Nikolai obtained his wife's family's documents from Tulchin (Ukraine) where she was

born. Among them, there were photos, written and printed documents, and portraits. In the 1920s-30s, Nikolai collected his family archival documents from his cousin Piotr Shchapov, whose three sons had died at different time and Piotr, anxious to preserve these documents and knowing about Nikolai's interest in collecting family documents, handed it over to him. Shchapov's archive comprised the documents of several related families.

Meanwhile, the keeping of family archives was a very difficult issue in the Soviet period. At first, the archives could present a certain danger: the non-proletarian and non-peasant origin of Nikolai Shchapov could be revealed through the archival documents, entailing serious consequences for him and his family. Then, beginning from 1918, archives ceased to be considered as an object of private property (due to Lenin's Decree on centralization of archiving in the RSFSR). In other words, any private archive could be requisitioned on government's request at any time. At last, waste paper campaigns (1920s – the beginning 1930s) were one more danger for private archives. Any paper documents could be classified as waste paper and eradicated. The personal archives were under threat, and people could only keep them at home, despite of confined spaces.



FIGURE 2: Nikolai Schapov's family at the summer house in Perlovka (Moscow region). May 25, 1898 (Central Archive of Electronic and Audio-Visual Documents of Moscow)

Living in strained circumstances in two rooms of the shared apartment, Shchapov could not afford to study the family archive in detail and systematically. In his books, he mostly relied on the verbal memory passed on by his elder relatives. But it seems that the main reason of this was not because working with the archive was hard, but mainly because Nikolai believed it was better when the narration of family history was supported by a preceding narration from older relatives (oral, as a rule, and handed down from generation to generation). He believed that the main source for family history reconstruction was oral history. Despite all available sources (including written and printed documents in Shchapov's case), oral history likely serves as the main source in the family history reconstruction projects. And we will see further, this type of source will keep its relevance in many aspects in the era of Web 2.0.

Photo taking exercises

In Nikolai's childhood, he received a present – a 6x9 small camera with six small cassettes. At the age of 15, he developed a real passion for photography during physics lessons when he studied the topic “Light”. Nobody taught him to take pictures; he learned to do this himself and did it using his own system. He wrote: “My mother gave me a 13x18 photo camera for Christmas. [...] The camera was universal – with tripod and bellows. I take a lot of pictures – portraits and landscapes – in winter and even more in summer in Perlovka village. When I travel, I sometimes take this camera or the 6x9 one bought in Sweden. It is not that heavy to carry but the photos' quality is worse. I have a lot of busy work to deal with developer and fixer solutions. I number every picture and write down the name of an object, lighting, exposition, development and the quality of the picture into the note-pad. I order photo albums from the famous Moscow bookbinder Petsman and glue in chronological sequence the photos – successful and not very – into albums” (Shchapov 1998: 157).



PICTURE 3: Repair of pavement at the Krasnyje Vorota district (Moscow). April 2, 1905 (Central Archive of Electronic and Audio-Visual Documents of Moscow)

Since that time, he always had his camera on him, wherever he went. He took a great deal of ‘home’ photos (picture 2), as well as a photochronicle of life in Russia and Moscow (picture 3), and wherever he travelled starting from the end of the 19th century (picture 4). In many ways, this collection is typical for an amateur-photographer living at that time; however, it is beyond an ordinary family photo album. Nikolai as amateur local historian depicted much the cityscape (both Moscow and the Moscow Region), with ethnographic emphasis on everyday life of city people. He was intensely patriotic for Moscow, his native city, and concerned himself much with the city's past and present (he was the City Duma Deputy for a few years before 1917). Another part of his photographic heritage comprised the pictures related to his professional activity. They were made both in Russia and abroad during his numerous work travels. He took pictures of bridges, engineer constructions, hydraulic works, and other objects related to history of hydro engineering and technologies.

Nikolai Shchapov's collection also contains photographs not taken by him. Having become a sort of family archivist, Shchapov received some photographs from older relatives, together with documents telling the history of other branches of the family. Other photos used to belong to different members of the family, and with time, they became part of his collection too. A number of photos were taken and

given to him by his classmates, friends and colleagues. All the pictures represent a mixed collection of images inseparably linked with textual documents and forming a large personal archive.



PICTURE 4: On steamboat near the bridge in Coblenz, Germany. May 25, 1905 (Central Archive of Electronic and Audio-Visual Documents of Moscow)

In the Soviet time, the pre-revolutionary amateur photos taken by Shchapov, were kept in his personal archive together with the other documents, and it is doubtful that they were showed to anybody. His shots became the ‘family’ photos in the full sense of the word (namely, they found the audience in the opinion of which they evidently related to a family) much later. In the post-Soviet time, the members of Shchapov’s family, being anxious about the physical conservation of old family photographs, handed over about 100 negative images to the Central Archive of Electronic and Audio-Visual Documents of Moscow, where they had been treated as a rich pictorial source related to the history of the way of life in pre-revolutionary Russia and Moscow. In 2008, in PhotoCenter, Moscow government held an exhibition of photos and documents “Family Album” linked to the Year of Family, with Shchapov’s photos taken before 1914. His son Yaroslav, while preparing his father’s book “I believed in Russia: family history and memories” (*“Ya veril v Rossiyu: semeynaya istoriya i vospominaniya”*) to be published, provided the book with many pictures taken by his father. However, Nikolai, as family historian and archivist, tended to regard the photographs, most likely, as a backdrop and second source in comparison with written and (especially) verbal narratives. It follows from his memories that the reconstruction of family history and genealogy is mostly of written character; and, at the same time, the primary impulse for making such a reconstruction is oral histories. Photographs serve rather as an additional tool here, and as if ‘running behind’ the verbal narrative (it was the idea of Yaroslav Shchapov to add photographs to his father’s book, whereas, for Nikolai, the images and the words seemed to be too separate from each other). The relationship between words and images change substantially in the case of the family social network, where, unlike the Shchapov’s case, photographs often become the starting point of verbal narrative and communication.

Family social network: FamilySpace.ru **Internet-based family history reconstructing projects**

FamilySpace.ru is another example of amateur reconstruction of family history and genealogy that was launched in 2008 for Russian-speaking users. It was the first family social network on the Russian-speaking Internet³. It includes functions of both regular social network (corresponding, adding friends, participating in interest groups, creating photo albums) and the possibility of genealogical portals (building a family tree using collaborative editing tools, importing GEDCOM⁴ files, creating a family calendar, etc.). Users also can store albums of rare photos that the family members saved, constantly replenishing and restoring the family history and where family members can make appointments to share the news. On the website, there is a "Library" section, an archive in the form of scanned and digitized census data, address books, registers of births, commemorative books and other documents. Users enter the results of the research in their own family tree. There is also a possibility to combine online family trees of all relatives registered on FamilySpace.ru into one large and branched ancestral tree. Four million users have already been registered on the website (which is small in comparison to Myheritage.com with 64 million users and 1 billion profiles). Currently, however, this is a significant achievement for Russian-speaking family social networks.

In our research, we invited participants of genealogical forum "All Russia Family Tree"⁵ and family social network FamilySpace.ru to complete a questionnaire. They were asked 14 questions (appendix 1, 2). The total number of the respondents was 63, the age range – from 17 to 66 years old. The respondents appreciated the role of the Web in the revival of genealogical interest and admit that before the era of Internet they just did not know how to start searching. Nowadays there are a lot of sites and forums where they share their experience and information about the sources revealed, how to look for the information required and how to start the search. "The Internet has given us new opportunities" [Gennady, age 57], "My Interest has increased with the advent of the Internet" [Olga, age 61], "The Internet allowed independent, state-free search for missing relatives" [Irina, age 48]. Most often, people seek to learn more about relatives, lost during the 20th century, to find living relatives as well as to communicate more closely with distant ones. "The generation which survived during the last war, through repressions, etc., is not eager to tell their children about themselves or their relatives. That is why, with age, the younger generation discovers that they know practically nothing about their parents, not to mention grandparents: just a black hole" [Elena, age 43]. Moreover, people often got rid of family archives, unless a family member made it his or her special aim to conserve the archive, as in case of Shchapov, and took, intentionally, the risk in this connection. The last of the mentioned respondents [Elena, age 43], when asked about the type of photos often used in family social networks, said: "In my opinion, people use what they still have. Given the turbulent history of the 20th century (revolutions, repressions, wars, emigration, and so on), some people have no photos that survived, and not because the photos got lost during the relocation or perished in the bombing. People destroyed many photos themselves in order not to get into trouble".

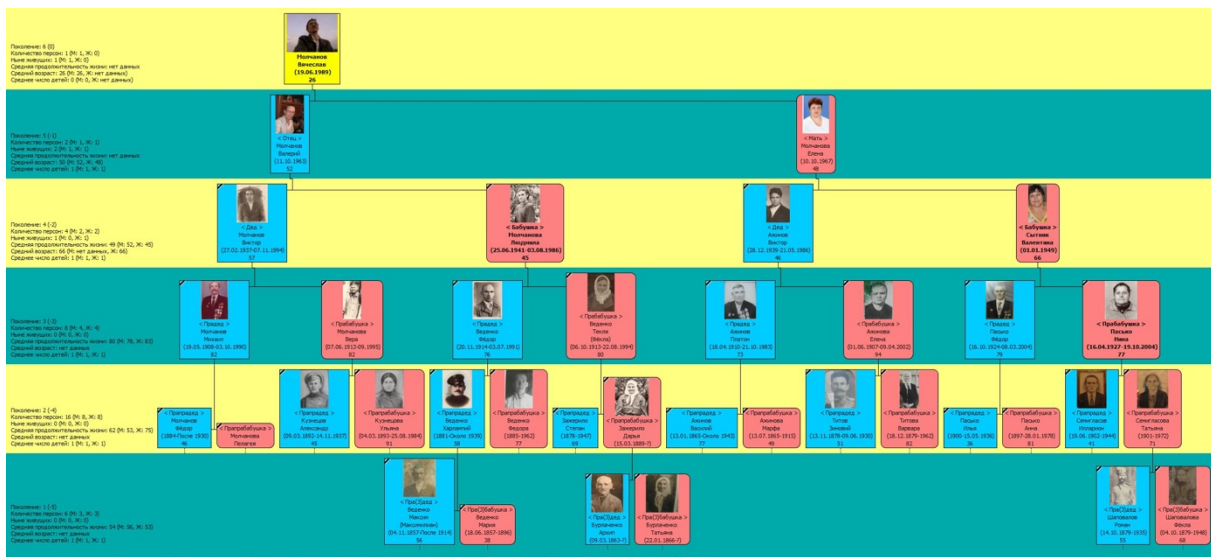
Most respondents indicated that they visit family websites occasionally, 'from time to time': on average, one or two times a week. Those who have only recently started working on the development of an electronic family archive and designing their family tree visit family websites daily. The rest come to the website either when they find new information or the calendar reminds them about family dates and events. It means that these networks are rarely used for everyday communication with family and friends, although FamilySpace.ru allows you to 'add friends' – anyone you are familiar with. It is most likely that the niche of daily communication is largely occupied by popular networks like facebook.com, while family websites operate in the mode of data storage and sharing. The answers to the questions showed

³ FamilySpace.ru launched in 2008 proclaimed by president Putin a "Year of Family". During the following years, Russian mass media did a lot to promote traditional family values. For example, weekly TV program "My Family Tree" that was being broadcasted from 2009 till 2011 by Channel One: "Each release is not a simple description of how a famous searches his or her family tree, but a bright example for any viewer - just look, it isn't so difficult!", was said at the website of Channel. As a respondent noted, "after these releases the number of visitors in archive had been increased next day" (Vyacheslav, age 25).

⁴ Genealogical Data Communication (shorten to GEDCOM) is a specification for exchanging genealogical data between different genealogy software. It was developed in the 1990s with the aim to help to conduct genealogical research. See: <http://www.eogen.com/GEDCOM>

⁵ "All Russia Family Tree" is one of the largest Russian Internet projects devoted to genealogy (covering first of all the territory of the former USSR). It was founded in 1999. Now it combines the guide to genealogical search, large genealogical forum, and genealogy database.

that users of family social network seldom use any archival institutions, unlike members of the genealogical forum which deal with the reconstruction in a more professional way. They do not limit themselves to family archives or memories of the immediate and distant relatives. They research census records, registers of births, church records, library directories, local history books and other printed sources and electronic databases. The majority of the participants have never used archives, but less than half of them hope they will soon (“I have not used the archives *yet*” [Anna, age 26]). Mostly, those who were looking for the information in the archives, or at least among the network of archival resources, are disappointed. “There’s very little information in the network and the search engine (in the form of digitized pictures) is inconvenient” [Elina, age 20], “efficiency is low” [Ivan, age 28], “I searched through the archives, but in vain; I feel disappointed” [Olga, age 63], etc. Very few noted that “the effectiveness of sources is high” [Olga, age 54]; “if you want more information, you can always find it. The main thing to know is where to look” [Margarita, age 17]; but they had not given specific information on this issue. Typically, users of family sites are satisfied even with a rough picture they get and which relatives can confirm. Thus, the sources are mostly “stories told by older relatives and documents that have been kept in the family” [Artyom, age 22], “family photos and letters” [Alyona, age 23], “family archive and my aunt’s letter, written at my request”, [Olga, age 54]. The basic unit in the family history narrative is a person defined by the researcher depending on this person’s kinship. Typically, family trees are narrower at the top and at the bottom, while the maximum width we can see at the level of grandparents and great-grandparents (picture 5).



PICTURE 5: Respondent's family tree (family archive) [Vyacheslav, age 25]

This level is easier to fill in, because, as the respondents admit, basic material was provided by the elder relatives personally. In most cases, the memory span is four or five generations. It is exactly the length of time that can be reconstructed on the basis of ‘living memory’. The reference to the elderly is the main thing an absolute majority of respondents do. Being no more active members of society, senior citizens begin to play an important role, keeping memories of the past, sharing and telling them to the younger members of the family. Apparently, both in Shchapov’s family history reconstruction project and in online family social networks the immediate verbal communication (‘oral history’) is the initial condition and impulse for the creation of a new narrative about a family’s past.

Two types of online family history reconstruction

The analysis of the activity in the family social network Family.Space.ru shows that there are two common types of amateur family history reconstruction:

- a. Solo reconstruction, which is undertaken by one member of a family. He or she collects and stores information, involves archival sources to maximize the temporal and spatial scope of

ancestry. Other relatives either do not take part in the development of the family tree or their participation is nominal (in questioning such users recognize that they “tried to involve other relatives – for some time, but not for long” [Rafkat, age 55]). However, researchers often say that they have ‘listeners’ and ‘helpers’ among relatives (for instance, those who help organize the material found). The ‘listeners’ and ‘helpers’ do not search for the information independently, they might do it ‘at the request’ of the family historian. Perhaps, the author of the reconstruction has already done extensive research, and other relatives realize that searching for the new information will require additional time and effort.

- b. Collaborative reconstruction, which is undertaken by a family group. This type of reconstruction is the most common. Here we see the strategy of ‘collective enterprise’, and its aim is to create a space of ‘shared family memory’. While working on the family tree, each participant refers to the ‘living memory’ – their own and the memory of their immediate and distant relatives. Finally, more relatives are getting involved in the activity – as contributors or, by this moment – investigators, even if they have never been interested in the search process. This is what one of the investigators told us about his achievements in inviting the family to work together: “I involved two more relatives, or even three, although with varying degrees of their enthusiasm” [Gennady, age 57]. Another possibility to expand the community of family genealogists is to get acquainted with the relatives already keen on knowing more about the family history. “I have also found three more relatives who are doing some genealogical research, and even have moved ahead of me in some ways” (...). “Two years ago, I found a young relative who is interested in one of the branches of my family tree, and now we are exploring it together” [Olga, age 61].

These two types of family history reconstruction in the Web rarely operate in pure form. The ‘investigator’ constantly seeks the help of relatives (basically, at the initial stage of gathering information), so that the ‘collective enterprise’ may at any time inspire somebody to work personally with the use of archival sources. Participation in the family social network promotes a shift from the predominance of individual activity of the ‘investigator’ to relatives working together. Eventually, we draw a conclusion that family history reconstruction – is primarily a collective project, while the ‘author’ of the reconstruction is rather the initiator of the activity. The genealogical tree then grows by itself due to the efforts of each relative interested in the reconstruction. At the same time, living memory continues to play a key role in the construction of amateur family history, despite rich technical possibilities of updating the family archive, compared with those of Shchapov’s collection. The main source of the reconstruction still comes from verbal narratives of older relatives.

Photographs in the family social network

Virtual family photos, alongside verbal narratives, become an important impetus to create and participate in the family history reconstruction of the network type. As opposed to classical amateur reconstruction created by Nikolai Shchapov, network reconstruction is based not only on ‘living memory’, but also on photography as ‘a reservoir’ of family heritage. “To say the least, a photo can rouse people’s interest. In my opinion, photos (rare and old) are one of the most valuable and attractive genealogical sources. It is always interesting to trace common features throughout four to five generations, and it is amazing just to have a look at the person who gave you life and who was born 100-150 years ago” [Vyacheslav, age 25]. “A photo is posted on the site primarily to attract attention. As a rule, only one member of the family is engaged in the search while others are only waiting for the results. That is why a picture on the site is a good result. It is something that people can see. A record of service, for instance, will hardly interest a lot of people, while a picture provokes discussions, and, looking at it, family members can say: “We look very much alike” [Andrei, age 27] (picture 6). “Photos are extremely important in the search process. The smallest details can tell a lot about people, their character and the details of their biography as well as providing the key to further searching” [Elena, age 43]. “Yes, photos play a very important role. As a rule, the same photo, possessed by different families, proves their relationship, and this relationship can be confirmed, even if the documentary evidence is lost” [Irina, age 48]. “I posted a photo depicting my missing grandfather and an unknown person on a social network (later, the unknown man turned out to be my father’s brother who had died in the Great Patriotic War. My father and I argued – he said it was grandfather’s friend while I said that that was his brother, because they looked very much alike). I have found dozens of people of the same surname and decided

to write to them. Incredible, but two or three of them answered that they have the same picture, but of worse quality” [Vyacheslav, age 25] (picture 7).



PICTURE 6: Respondent's great-grandfather with parents, 1940 or 1941 (family archive) [Andrei, age 27]



PICTURE 7: Respondent's missing grandfather and his brother who had died in the Great Patriotic War (family archive) [Vyacheslav, age 25]

Besides, the photographs provide a visual component that makes the perception of information easier and adds some emotional touch to the whole project. “Photos accompanying the text make it sound more emotional and nostalgic and evoke surprise, admiration, memories of the relatives and of the past” [Elena, age 43] (picture 8). “A family site without photos is not interesting. Nowadays very few people

will read long texts, so photos divide them into parts, thus helping them to understand, and also to create a familiar modern video series” [Irina, age 48].



PICTURE 8: Respondent's great-grandfather with two senior children. Moscow, 1914-1915, the New Year (amateur photograph from personal archive) [Elena, age 43]

Also, it should be noted that the majority of respondents emphasize the importance of their personal interest and involvement in the reconstruction project on the Web. This is one of the basic functions of family photos: to facilitate communication between people. The Internet helps to do this much simpler: you only have to find the page and the album you need and read comments about where and when the picture was taken. This simplified access lacks personal contact: photographs are not shown by someone personally who comments on them, or tells the story of their origin, or shares his or her attitude; the pictures become impersonal and lose their main quality of 'family photos', i.e. there is no personal touch of someone of the family. "When you show photos, say, to the relatives, in the usual way, it is very important how you do it. You may succeed in arousing interest in them, or you may fail. As far as sending family photos via the Internet is concerned, it only makes sense if the relatives are interested in these photographs. If they are ready to perceive – then there will be an effect. Otherwise, it is like sending a post-card with cute kittens" [Andrei, age 27].

A family photo, regardless of the method of its existence, appears a contextually conditioned medium. The context of its functioning as an object becomes verbal communication – or rather, verbally expressed attitude to it. Thus, verbal communication precedes and in many ways serves as a condition for communication by means of pictures.

FamilySpace.ru: summary

The family social network FamilySpace.ru is at the same time the archive of a new type, online database, communicative platform and space of group identification. In this sense, family archive in the Web represents a primary narrative created by the author/initiator of family history reconstruction. This narrative, as an intermediate product, is subject to further processing by other people. The family archive, in this case, turns into a narrative in the process of continuous expansion and development. It makes the family borders flexible and penetrable, and promotes intra-group co-operation. Besides, this archive has an 'audience' – those who have no opportunity to populate an archive, but who are interested in family history, monitor the results of investigation and want to be in touch with relatives.

Family history reconstruction represents, in this case, the interactive multimedia project where texts and photos complement each other. A photo functions as a family photo, being 'inside' the verbal and written layers of interpersonal communication, but, for all that, placed on the Web, it is not a part of immediate verbal communication of family members. Perception of a photo demands from a person to make his or her own efforts to include a photo in a 'family zone', i. e. a zone of his or her ideas of a family, its parts and its boundaries. Written comments to the photo and experience of previous communication with the author/initiator of reconstruction are intended to help users to do this. FamilySpace.ru thus helps to consider photographs, following Elizabeth Edwards, as "relational objects": "The relational view is not simply different people bringing different readings to images. Rather, it is an engagement with the whole social dynamic of photographs over space and time, in which photographs become entities acting and mediating between peoples. The engagement with photographs as socially salient objects both encapsulates and defines relations between people" [Edwards: 31].

Conclusions

The examples of amateur family history reconstruction projects carried out with the help of different communication technologies allow to draw the following conclusions.

The author of offline reconstruction is a single person, as a rule; this is a solo reconstruction. Whereas the author of online reconstruction often acts rather as the initiator of the basic narrative which is subject to further processing by other persons; this is a collaborative reconstruction. In this connection, offline reconstruction seems to be a 'vertical' project carried out and transmitted by the senior family member to younger one in the form of some kind of 'heritage'. Online reconstruction is more likely a 'horizontal' project that is carried out at the same time by several persons belonging to different branches and generations of a family and living in the different cities and even the countries. In either case, 'the archival consciousness' of family members becomes more active. They feel that documents belonging to someone personally is important matter for a wider group. Activity of family historian 'liven up' imagination of other family members concerning what the group is in the past, the present and the future. Family history reconstruction is the source of ideas of a family as the 'imagined' community consisting of the past, present-day and future generations. Shchapov's project was a long work on the family history book, which was published a few decades later after he had died in 1960. Relatives who transmitted their family documents to him were aware of his intention, that was going to be implemented in the future. They had no opportunity to see the results of the project and all the more to take part in its development. While in case of family social network the relatives become immediate viewers of created reconstruction and often become its co-authors. For them it is the project existing in the present and for the present. Family history reconstruction can serve as a 'result' in one case, but as a 'process' in another one. In some way it could be interpreted like autobiography which "... can be understood as both a practice (e.g., "I am doing autobiography") and a product (e.g., "I wrote an autobiography")" [Adams and Manning 2015: 351].

In both cases family historian reproduces his or her idea of identity of a group: its boundaries, structure and number, as well as its development and continuation (both in temporal and geographic sense). Both examples showed that the main impulse and source of such reconstruction are the verbal memory transmitted by the senior family members. Thus, family historian should be located at the level of "communicative memory", which is one of the basic conditions of such a project. Historian develops the narrative transmitted personally by senior members of a group.

Family historian searches and selects family documents with the purpose to place them in newly created narrative. Here it becomes obvious that family history (re)constructing is the project carried out

for readers/viewers/users belonging to the same family group as an author, or for those who will belong to this group in future. In the first case the target audience is *future* generations of a family (Nikolai Shchapov writes family history, being anxious for keeping it 'for children', and his son Yaroslav completes Nikolai's book, and provides it, inter alia, with archival family photographs). In the second case this audience is rather *present-day* generations (respondents restore family history, first of all, in a search of lost and still unknown relatives, and for keeping regular contacts with family members).

The same logic works for family photographs used in the projects of amateur family history reconstruction. Nikolai Shchapov collected old family photos and kept them for *future* viewers. Nikolai's own shots become in full sense 'family photographs' later in the opinion of his son Yaroslav, who included in his father's manuscript the pictures taken by him. For Yaroslav, these pictures are the important history of his father's life and memory of him. As for online reconstruction, the old family photos become the important consolidating part of life of a group *here and now*. It is the photos that become sometimes the main sources of genealogical information, unlike offline projects where information is mainly looked for in verbal and text sources. There is the effect which could be called the 'ageing of medium'. In Nikolai Shchapov's epoch, the photograph was a quite 'new' medium, whose value was not yet rooted so strongly in its link with the past. The past imprinted those years on the photographs was still rather 'recent' past. While for founders and users of FamilySpace.ru, the 100-150 years old photograph is already 'old' medium. The past connected with it is the 'old' past. In case of placement of such an old family photograph online, it starts carrying out the function of expansion of a group toward the past, changing its boundaries at present. Within Shchapov's project the 'old' photos expand the already available information about the persons represented on them, and they play a supporting role in relation to verbal communication. Online project testifies that the 'old' photos often are the only source of information about ancestors, they alone "play a role in voicing a silenced past" [Birkhofer 2008: 53], and they are capable to initiate verbal communication between family members even if those at first did not suspect about each other's existence. Here the photo becomes the source of *collected* (rather than *collective*) memory (Arthur, 2009) of a group, which is being restructured and has been changing its boundaries in the course of such a collecting⁶. Shchapov's project treats photograph rather as a part of *collective* memory of a group already determined in its boundaries. Offline family history reconstruction project means that family memory is something that is intended to be transmitted in an unchanged form to the future generations, while online projects are aimed at family memory constructing with the purpose to realise and to answer a question what the family is at present.

We see that area of 'communicative memory' – the information transmitted to family historian verbally – appears to be in the center of both types of reconstruction. As the oldest members of the family, whom Shchapov managed to see while they were alive, were born at the beginning of the 19th century, it is the 19th century that attracted his special attention. We also can note that Shchapov's project confirms on microhistorical level the idea that the "century" is a historical period defined by the "semantic, tangible or personal characteristics" (Savelieva, Poletaev 1997: 35). The formal chronological period of a century may not coincide with the period of the same century as the 'place of memory'. Thus, Shchapov's personal 19th century, like the 19th century for the European historiographic tradition, is a 'long' 19th century that finishes in 1914³. In the same way, the users of family social network FamilySpace.ru have their own 20th century, namely 'short' 20th century that finishes in 1991.

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⁶ 'Collective vs. collected' memory might be potentially linked to the G.C. Bowker's terms "recorded vs. potential" memory (Bowker, 2007: 26).

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Appendix 1

Questions to the participants of genealogical forum "All Russia Family Tree"

- 1) Your name and age
- 2) When did you experience the interest in genealogy and history of your family for the first time and what was your first steps in this direction?
- 3) Do you conduct research alone or are there other family members who conduct research as well?
- 4) How could you explain the increased interest to genealogy in the last decades?
- 5) What sources of information about the family do you utilize?
- 6) Have you faced difficulties in getting access to archival records?
- 7) How do you estimate efficiency of archival sources on the Internet?
- 8) What do you think about the differences between traditional and online study of genealogy?
- 9) Was it easy enough for you to place your family archive in open access on the Web? (Have you had any apprehension in this connection?)
- 10) Do you focus your attention mostly on the intra-family events or at the external political events which affected your family?
- 12) Did the study of the family history and genealogy have any influence upon you and your family? (if yes, please specify how)
- 13) Which type of family photo, in your opinion, is most often used in creation of genealogical web-page?
- 14) Which role does the family photo play in creation of genealogical web-page? (Which purposes could be reached with its help?)

Appendix 2

Questions to the participants of family social network FamilySpace.ru

- 1) Your name and age
- 2) When did you experience the interest in genealogy and history of your family for the first time and what was your first step in this direction?
- 3) Do you conduct research alone or are there other family members who conduct research as well?
- 4) What was your purpose when you registered at the family social network?
- 5) How often do you visit the family social network?
- 6) What sources of information about the family do you utilize?
- 7) How do you estimate efficiency of traditional and online archival sources?
- 8) How could you explain the increased interest in genealogy and family history in the last decades?
- 9) What do you think about the differences between traditional and online study of family history?
- 10) Was it easy enough for you to place your family archive in open access on the Web? (Have you had any apprehension in this connection?)
- 11) Do you focus your attention mostly at the intra-family events or at the external political events which affected your family?
- 12) Did the study of the family history and genealogy have any influence upon you and your family? (if yes, please specify how)
- 13) Which type of family photo, in your opinion, is most often used in the family social network?
- 14) Which role does the family photo play in the family social network? (Which purposes could be reached with its help?)

CREATIVE PLACE-MAKING: CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE AND URBANIZATION IN DHAKA

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the creative ways in which contemporary artists in Dhaka approach a specific locality within the city, its architecture, its communities and its histories. I show how they not only make sense of these encounters in their art works but how they actively claim the right to shape alternative images of and approaches to these localities. The analysis draws from my ethnographic material on Imile², a research-based public arts project organized by the Britto Arts Trust for the second time in 2014. Although many of the participating artists today live in the northern parts of the city, Britto chose to carry out the project in Old Dhaka, the erstwhile center and most southern part of the capital of Bangladesh. The article brings together considerations on ethnography, transculturality and creativity. I use these theoretical ‘building-blocks’ to discuss the (re)negotiation of urban space through the lens of place-making practices and the production of site-specific art works.

KEYWORDS

place-making, ethnography, city, urbanization, translocality, creativity, public art, site-specific art, heritage

Bio

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Introduction

In this article, I explore the creative ways in which contemporary artists approach a specific locality within the city, its architecture, its communities and its histories. I show that the practices of place-making involved in their production of site-specific art works are not only creative ways of representing but also critically engaging and actively producing the urban space. Localities such as Old Dhaka are continuously (re)shaped by translocal dynamics that connect different communities and localities within the city, the country, the South Asian region, and on a global scale. I argue that the strength of an ethnographic approach to the topic of art and urban space lies in the actor-centered perspective and its focus on the intricate fabric of daily life. This approach allows me to develop a nuanced and dynamic analysis of the city of Dhaka and work towards overcoming a persisting bias in the city’s popular portrayal as overpopulated and polluted ‘megacity’.

As traced by geographer Jennifer Robinson (2006: 4–5), this dichotomy goes back to a hierarchizing mechanism prevailing notably in the discipline of urban studies. It opposes ‘wealthy global cities’ (qualified by ‘success’ and the achievement of modernity) to ‘poor megacities’ as stagnant ‘elsewheres’ (characterized by ‘things they lack’). Dhaka has too often been reified exclusively as the latter. Looking at the city through the lens of the creative place-making of actors like the Britto Arts Trust, I argue, encourages a rethinking of this trope. I am therefore interested in the artists’ motivation, possibility and agency to critically engage the themes of urbanization, neglect, heritage, and recovery. In what ways does contemporary art stimulate the imagination of an alternative city?

I draw from my ethnographic material on 1mile², a research based, public arts project organized for the second time in 2014 by the Britto Arts Trust.¹ I collected this material in the frame of my PhD thesis, which deals with the translocal mobilities facilitated by artist collectives on various scales from the inner-urban to the national and global space. I use the present article to engage in more detail with the urban scale.

Britto (BNG: 'circle') is an artist-run, non-profit organization dedicated to the furthering of contemporary art. It was founded in 2002 by a group of young artists (5-6 trustees, 17-18 regular members) working and living in Bangladesh, with the aim of creating an alternative space for critical thinking, experimental approaches to art, and for enabling exchange between creative individuals and groups. Besides fostering artist exchange across borders through international workshops and residency programs, Britto brought about Bangladesh's first participation at the Venice Biennale in 2011. The collective also partnered with the newly established Dhaka Art Summit in 2014 and Chobi Mela, the biggest photography event in Asia, in 2015. The workshops they organize on a smaller scale aim at encouraging the use of unusual materials and unconventional mediums, from traditional artisanry, for instance a Raku (Japanese pottering technique) workshop in 2009, to emerging art forms, such as the PIXELATION workshop series on new media art (Britto Arts Trust 2016).

1mile² differed from these events as it took place on the streets of the city and presupposed a long-term, intense engagement with one specific urban neighborhood. For the public arts project, Britto launched an open call, which was answered by 42 artists and researchers including the majority of Britto's members. The participants were asked to physically and creatively engage with Old Dhaka over the course of one month and on the last day, show the outcome of their engagement – be it in the form of video screenings, performances or site-specific installations – to the public.

Anthropologist Martha Radice (2018: 52) suggest that a characteristic of 'public art' is the negotiation with (rather than a participation of) 'various publics'. The targeted viewership for the outcome of 1mile² was mainly Dhaka's cultural community including collectors and patrons of the art who received a personal invitation. Britto also distributed flyers at the major cultural institutions and through Facebook reached out to a broad network of people. The research phase, as expressed in the project description, however emphasized the communities of Old Dhaka and the protection of the area's biodiversity. Further, the accompanying talk program entitled 'Heritage, Transformation and Recovery'² set the tone for a close engagement with the history and especially the tangible, architectural heritage of Old Dhaka (Britto Arts Trust 2014).

What I find most interesting about Radice's (2018: 46) approach to public art is the second part of her circumscription of the notion. Based on Patricia C. Phillips (1989), who argued that art's 'publicness' is based on the topics it engages with, Radice contends that public projects do not necessarily need to physically intervene in public space. Rather, it is their effect on and their implication for the public sphere that constitute their 'public' quality. I show that 1mile² effectively changed the artists perception of Old Dhaka. Further, it questioned hegemonic claims to the city and offered new vantage points for envisioning a more socio-culturally inclusive urban space

After a more detailed introduction to the project, its organizers and their localization in the city, I present the methodological and theoretical frame that I use to address the urban space. In the main part of this article, I then zoom in on a selection of site-specific works realized during 1mile² and outline how the artists' creative place-making has led to their creation. I structure my analysis along the artists' engagement with neglect, heritage, transformation and recovery. I put a specific emphasis on Mahbubur Rahman's project as he simultaneously occupies the role of organizer and participating artist. Moreover, he is a former residents of Old Dhaka, and as such represents one of the main a 'spatial-brokers' in my research.³

¹ I would like to thank the Graduate Program for Transcultural Studies at the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe" (University of Heidelberg) for making this research possible. Further, I would like to express my gratitude towards the Britto Arts Trust for letting me work with them.

² The talk program included activist, social worker and trustee of Britto, Khushi Kabir, the chairman of the Centre for Urban Studies, Prof. Nazrul Islam, and the architect-planner, Salma A. Shafi. It took place at Britto Space in Dhanmondi on December 20, 2014.

³ Following Gisela Welz' (1996) concept of 'cultural brokerage', anthropologist Esther Baumgärtner (2009: 146) uses the term 'spatial broker' to refer to people who are actively involved in the representation of a specific locality. This includes not only professional actors behind the scenes but also institutionalized or legitimized (through the local communities or other means) representatives of a neighborhood.

Localizing 1mile²

1mile² was launched in 2009 by an organization called 'Visiting Arts' in London.⁴ The pilot program took place in eight countries (Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, England, Iran, Scotland, and South Africa) and since then, has included more than 13'500 artists, ecologists and researchers from ten countries around the world. The overall aim of the initial project, as Britto's co-founders of Tayeba Begum Lipi and Mahbubur Rahman explain, was to explore the natural and social ecology of the specific square mile that participants are most familiar with, the neighborhood they live and work in (AR, TBL/MR, February 2015). When Dona Vose, 'Visiting Arts' program manager for 1mile², approached the Britto Arts Trust regarding the project, its founders were eager to participate. However, they dismissed the idea of working in their own neighborhood:

At that time we were in Hatirpool, so we found it is not – of course it is an interesting place, wherever you do it, really interesting – so we thought, why don't we do it in Old Dhaka. This area [New Dhaka] has the look and attitude, it is very common. The people's lifestyle, the job facilities, the movements, are very similar. In Old Dhaka, every lane has differences, in architecture, in jobs, in professions. Massive shifts within short distance. So we thought, why don't we do it there because the possibility is there only. (AR, TBL February 2015)⁵

In the first decade after its foundation, Britto shifted its base seven times, moving from one rented space into another. At the time of the first 1mile² in 2009, it was operating out of Hatirpool, an area in the center of the city. In 2011, the collective bought and established Britto Space in a mixed commercial and residential high-rise building in the nearby area of Dhanmondi. Through its flexible design (movable walls, invisible doors) the permanent space can simultaneously function as studio, workstation, space for residencies, gallery, and meeting place. Especially the latter is important to the members, as there are not many alternative, open spaces in Dhaka where artists can simply meet and 'hang out' without having to spend money. Additionally, landlords and guards are suspicious of frequent gatherings, outside visitors, noise and other impairments. This is especially true for the primarily Muslim middle class residential areas around Dhanmondi, which like Hatirpool is located in New Dhaka.

The name 'New Dhaka' developed from the novel attention that was given to the areas around Ramna, Shahbagh and Dhanmondi with the establishment of Dhaka University (1921) and the demographic shifts entailed by the partition of India in 1947 and Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971.⁶ Replacing Old Dhaka, New Dhaka slowly developed as a cultural center. Today it accommodates the National Academy of Fine and Performing Art (Shilpakala), the National Museum,⁷ the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University (Charukola) and important cultural centers, such as the Goethe Institute and the Alliance Française. The first art gallery in the city 'Art Ensemble' opened in the 1960s and was located on Road 2 in Dhanmondi. Drik Gallery (1993) and the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts (2000), Dhaka's most important galleries today, are located in close proximity.

Researchers such as Florida (2010), Meusburger, Funke, and Wunder (2009) show that a creative environment, the opportunity to interact with peers, and a corresponding infrastructure – the right milieu – constitute important factors in the artists' potential of working creatively. They also influence the artists' choice of living and working space. In fact, many of Britto's members live in and around New Dhaka. Those who do not, often questioned their living situations in my interviews, and regretted not being more closely involved with the art world. Britto's reasoning (in the quote above) suggests that Dhanmondi, although a place of dwelling (residing, working, meeting peers) for many artists, is not

⁴ Visiting Arts was founded in 1977 as a department of the British Council, and has since then worked as a platform for the promotion of intercultural understanding through the support and connection of artists around the world. The organization was registered as an independent charity in 2001 (see <http://www.visitingarts.org.uk/about/> Accessed October 1, 2018).

⁵ AR = audio records, transcriptions from interviews collected in Dhaka (2014 – 2015).

⁶ The most salient demographic shifts in Bangladesh resulted from the displacements of Hindu and Muslim communities after Partition (1947). More followed during the conflict with West Pakistan and the independence from Pakistan in 1971. For detailed information on the partition(s) in South-Asia, see Yong and Kudaisya (2008). For an account of Bangladesh's recent history refer to Raghavan (2013).

⁷ The Museum was established in 1913 and received the status of National Museum in 1983.

considered a suitable venue for a public art event and the creation of site-specific works – it is too ‘common’, too uniform (AR, TBL February 2015).

The mixed residential and commercial area of New Dhaka comprise busy streets, markets, hospitals and institutions of higher education. In our interview, the director of the Center for Urban Studies⁸ Nazrul Islam describes Dhanmondi as a ‘typical’ Bengali middle class neighborhood. Its inhabitants continue to be attracted by the institutional facilities, such as sports clubs, renowned schools and hospitals in the area. Further, the area formerly known for its modernist architecture, has been overrun by ‘imitative and reckless building practices’, that according to Ashraf (1989: 55) employ ‘remorselessly neo-classical devices’ and ‘pseudo-Islamic motifs’ (see Hoek 2012: 35). In other words, uniform concrete high-rise buildings dominate the area.

Old Dhaka is the erstwhile socio-political and cultural center from which the city slowly extended to the north. In contrast to Dhanmondi, the 1mile² organizers characterize this part of the city as having many ‘differences’, citing diversity as one of the main incentives to hold the project here (AR, TBL February 2015). The participants and observers of the 2009 edition of 1mile² agreed with their decision and described the venue and the project as a ‘success’ (see Visiting Arts and Britto Arts Trust 2010). Mahbubur Rahman remembers the project as very ‘vibrant’. He lists the collaboration with local communities in Old Dhaka, the large variety of used mediums (video, film, photography, sound work, installation, and performance), and the multisensory engagement with the area especially the smell of the local spice markets as reasons for this vibrancy (AR, MR, February 2015). Based on the 2009 experience, Britto chose to continue working in Old Dhaka. The collective applied for its own funding and organized a follow-up edition in December 2014 independently from Visiting Arts. It is during the 2014 edition that I conducted my participant observation.

Participant Observation in the City – A Mental Map of North, New and Old Dhaka

Fiona Siegenthaler (2013: 738) argues that contemporary artists “increasingly emphasize social practices, networks and processes as constituting the actual artwork”. For her, this emphasis also entails a necessary shift in the academic research focus, away from representational spaces (museums, galleries) to more practice-oriented contexts. She claims that ethnography is well suited to facilitate this shift, as the method enables researchers to follow artists into alternative spaces of practice and exhibition.

In my research, the practice of walking became a central part of this ‘following’. On the one hand, walking can be considered as an ordinary and modest activity “[...] that leave(s) behind fixed or elevated viewpoints in favor of mobile, grounded, and partial perspectives” (Pinder 2011: 675). It is related to class and economic status; many people in Dhaka cannot afford a private car and, for safety, financial or other reasons do not use public transport. Knowing where and how to walk in the city sets a difference between newcomers and frequent dwellers.

Walking also constituted a big part of 1mile². In contrast to the rest of the city, there are not many cars in Old Dhaka; the streets are often too narrow and interwoven for four-wheelers to pass. One exception are trucks that use the few bigger streets and crossings to transport goods produced locally or arriving at the harbor. On the other hand, walking in the form of the ‘go-along’ was a good method to access the artists’ experience of place. People usually do not comment or reflect on what they are doing in their daily life, thus bringing participant observation to its limits. Furthermore, interviews frequently take place in isolation; there is no other activity than the interview, which mostly takes place indoors to guarantee privacy or recording quality. Many of the addressed topics stay theoretical and maybe even superficial (Kusenbach 2003: 459). Sociologist Margarethe Kusenbach therefore suggests the ‘go-along’ a combination and supplement of basic ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interview techniques and note-taking/recording. It involves accompanying one or more ‘go-along’ partners on an outing (in this case to the venues of 1mile²) asking questions inspired by a certain behavior or place along the way and listening to/recording the explanations (Ibid: 462-463). The ‘go-along’ allows insight into “how personal sets of relevances guide [...] informants’ experiences of the social and physical environment in everyday life” (Ibid: 466). It can “illuminate the social architecture of natural settings such as neighborhoods” and inform about possible hierarchies, groupings and community-making

⁸ The Center for Urban Studies (CUS) is a self-supporting independent non-profit research and training organization working in and on Dhaka (see <http://cusdhaka.org/> Accessed October 1, 2018).

processes (Ibid: 466). And most importantly, it gives access to the manifold forms in which people engage with their environment, their personal life histories, self-location and daily practices.

Through the specific method of the 'go-along', the more classical participant observation and interviews, but also by simply dwelling in the city, I slowly developed a mental map of Dhaka.

In 2009, I came to Dhaka for the first time to intern with an NGO that was, among other projects, working in cultural preservation. I was surrounded by colleagues and friends from North Dhaka, one of the most recently developed parts of the capital city. Translocal dynamics, often of a global scale and in form of neoliberal, capitalist and developmentalist conjunctures, are most visibly territorialized here; the area is home to international and national aid and development agencies, embassies, five-star hotels, international clubs, countless restaurant and coffee chains like Pizza Hut or Kentucky Fried Chicken. The people that frequent these spaces are mostly upper middle and upper class affluent Bangladeshis, often graduates from universities abroad, or foreigners like me. While I was constrained to North Dhaka by my internship and my lacking knowledge of the city, my acquaintances chose to remain in the area. Their choice is encouraged by the government who uses police in plain clothes and CCTV surveillance to guarantee the locals' safety (AR, NI, August 2015). For them, New Dhaka, where started my PhD research in 2013 was a good shopping destination, but 'dangerous'. My colleagues and friends were used to private cars; they told me buses were unsafe, CNG (motorized three-wheelers) drivers could not be trusted and taxis were a rare sight. Old Dhaka, even further to the south than New Dhaka, would be even more chaotic, dirty and dangerous. Here, I would surely get lost, robbed or worse.

For many of the artists I then met during my PhD research in New Dhaka, Old Dhaka is out of reach. Despite their artistic interest in its appealing versatility and 'otherness', they do not want to face the city's dreaded traffic, unless they are in need of something they can only get from the local wholesale markets. A trip to North Dhaka in contrast, is often vital because of its hotels, restaurants and popularity with foreigners; meetings with collectors, curators, gallerists and friends from the national and international art world often take place there.

The observations, comments and warnings I gathered over the last years resulted in a 'mental map' of Dhaka in which markers of globality, innovation and development are closely linked to the areas in North Dhaka. From there they gradually decline, with New Dhaka being the cultural center for the largely middle class Bengali population, and Old Dhaka a place of history, a remnant of Mughal and colonial times. This map is shaped by the people I encountered and engaged with, the experiences I gained, and the place-making I continue to perform. Like that of every city dweller, it is incomplete, constantly re-shaped and often based on over-simplifications, gathered from brief encounters or hearsay. It is therefore not my intention to presuppose that this is the only possible mental map for the city. Rather, I suggest that it points to the fact that many people I met, especially from the middle and upper classes reproduced the tropes of modernity and development that Robinson exposes.

National and international media, NGO's, development agencies and often also the city's inhabitants characterize Dhaka by its lack of proper planning and safety, its density, traffic chaos, the smell of burning trash and 'slumization' (Khondker 2016).⁹ In urban studies, the label of the 'megacity' is often employed to demarcate cities in the global South. This is part of a practice "of dividing, categorizing and assuming hierarchical relations amongst cities" (Robinson 2006: 2) which has been criticized notably by Ananya Roy (2011) and Jennifer Robinson (2006, 2011, 2013). This practice is largely based on tropes of modernity and/or development which place 'megacities' in opposition to 'wealthy global cities' marked by 'success' and the achievement of modernity (Robinson 2006: 5). Megacities of the Global South become 'elsewheres' (Ibid: 4) characterized by 'things they lack', representing a 'noir futuristic urban genre of decline and despair' and the need to be developed. While these hierarchizing tropes apply to the city of Dhaka as a whole, they are also used to distinguish certain areas (and communities) within the city from others. I argue that the inhabitants of the North use notions of modernity and development to demarcate themselves from inhabitants of the southern part of the city. Robinson argues for an abandonment of the labels and associated categories of 'global city' (Sassen 2006) and 'world city' (Hannerz 1996) hypotheses, in favor of a post-colonial urban studies that draws 'inspiration from all cities' and understands them as 'autonomous and creative' (Robinson 2006: 2, 10). I therefore approach

⁹ In her 2011 article on 'Slumdog cities', Ananya Roy (2011: 224) explains how slums have become one of the biggest identifiers for Third World or megacities. For examples of similar portrayals of Dhaka, see for instance Erik German and Solana Pyn (2010) or Habibul H. Khondker (2016).

the city as a space for creative engagement and show how artists through their practice enable new vantage points beyond prevailing hierarchizing tropes. Yet, the concept of ‘creativity’ itself has a difficult history.

The City as a Space for Creative Engagement

The way in which ‘creativity’ is commonly understood in relation to urban space – as innovative practice, as tool for economic development and image branding – originated from the European Capital of Culture concept (Comunian 2011: 1158). One of its latest and most prominent applications can be found in Richard Florida’s (2010, 2012) elaborations on the ‘creative class’. Florida’s understanding of creativity, as the production of “meaningful new forms” (Ibid: 293-294), is located at the interface of art, the global market and a rapid, global expansion of neoliberal mechanisms. But while his ‘creative capital thesis’ “can help us to estimate the presence of certain kinds of creative occupations in different cities” (Comunian 2011: 1174), it does not offer an approach to how different members of the ‘creative class’ actually interact with the city and its infrastructure. Furthermore, the idea of the ‘creative city’ has the potential of serving as a further hierarchizing category, declaring certain cities (or particular areas in the city) more creative than others. Especially the latter point is assisted by the fact that the vast majority of academic research on art and the city takes place in the ‘global cities’ of the West.

In order to overcome these tropes, I offer a twofold theoretical approach: for one, by assuming a translocal perspective and then, through the concept of creative place-making.

The concept of ‘translocality’ grew out of a critique of the western-centric and unilineal perspective of many globalization theories (Freitag and Oppen 2010: 1). A translocal approach recognizes the ‘local’ as more than “simply as a site of negotiation of the global – a place where globalization is experienced by social actors” (Brickell and Datta 2011: 5). Rather, it looks at the ‘local’ from the perspective of spatial movements (Freitag and Oppen 2010: 6). In other words, it draws attention to the versatile spaces and scales of locality by emphasizing the connections between them. As a research perspective, ‘translocality’ thus supports ethnography’s commitment to the in-depth analysis of a specific locality. Yet, it de-essentializes prescriptive images pertaining to this locality (Greiner 2010). It allows me to take my research-partners’ claims to localities and about ‘local’ distinctions in the city seriously, instead of playing them against each other (Freitag and Oppen 2010: 6).

As a second part of my approach, I argue for an extended, twofold understanding of creativity: first, manifest in ordinary, daily practices, such as walking, talking and meeting people – as dwelling in the city – and second, expressed in specific, more reflected and conscious actions, such as the creation of site-specific art works. The examples of 1mile² and its participants combine both aspects of creative place-making. Friedman (2010: 153-155) describes place-making as an interplay between inhabiting/spending time in a certain locality, infusing it with value (‘In-Wert-Setzung’: Busse and Warnke 2014: 2), turning it into a center for encounters and thereby offering a new vantage point for future place-making. 1mile² thus becomes a “magnifying glass”, as Christiane Brosius (2015) has shown for a similar type of public arts festival (entitled 48°C) in Delhi, that reveals alternative narratives, “stories and voices that would otherwise remain silent, forgotten, or repressed” (Ibid: 116).

The notions of neglect, heritage, transformation, recovery, which I borrow from the talk program organized in the frame of 1mile² (see fn. 2), guide me through my discussion of the specific art works.

Neglect

One early morning in December 2014, I join Mahbubur Rahman for my first visit to Old Dhaka. I consider myself lucky to make my first experience in this part of town guided by a ‘spatial-broker’: somebody who was born and brought up in the neighborhood. We hire a cycle rickshaw for the morning, but frequently get off and walk for a while. The ride from New Dhaka is much shorter than I anticipated on the basis of what I had heard before. Rahman moves through the narrow, winding alleys and streets with ease, illustrating his familiarity with the place. Between giving directions to the rickshaw puller or avoiding people and carts, he points out relatives’ houses and places of childhood memory such as a formerly well-known and frequented cinema hall or the hospital he was born in. The latter, like most of the other buildings he mentions, is recognizable only through its face. The inner walls and rooms have gradually vanished between, behind, and beneath newer constructions. More compelling than the

remaining old buildings and their place in Rahman's personal history are his memories of 'emptiness'. He points at newer constructions and describes how they used to be empty open spaces: gardens, fields and courtyards with fountains and verandas.

His memories are imbued with a sense of nostalgia, reminiscent of Tabassum Zaman's¹⁰ observations in an article entitled 'Imagining Dhaka' (2014). She argues that the perception of contemporary Dhaka is always pitted against something that is absent: either the past, "what was and is not any more" or rural Bangladesh, seemingly untouched by modernity. She sees this mechanism as a way for the city's inhabitants to "cope with the madness that is present-day Dhaka" (Zaman 2014: 112). If this is the case, Old Dhaka is particularly well suited as a starting point for this imaginary. Ahsan Manzil, the Nawab's Palace for instance visually represents the Muslim leadership of the region. Bahadur Shah Park (until 1947 'Victoria Park') named after the last Mughal emperor is a reminder of the 1857 failed Sepoy Revolt and the British rule in South Asia. Bara Katra and Chhota Katra (mid-seventeenth century) the caravanserais of Dhaka, are gateways to the former Mughal city, places to rest and meet for merchants from all over the region.¹¹ Apart from the visual, architectural history, the composition of the local population bespeaks a history of displacement, social conflict, and migration. But despite the massive emigration of Hindus to Indian territory in the aftermath of 1947 and 1971, a considerable Hindu community still lives in Old Dhaka. Apart from these large-scale shifts, there is a slower but steady influx of people to the city from rural regions of Bangladesh, in search of labor and prosperity (see Hoek 2012).

Places like Hindu Street,¹² lined with sites of Hindu worship and shops for Puja items, the Armenian Church,¹³ the Collegiate School (founded by the British in 1835¹⁴), as well as the close proximity of temples, churches and mosques, all point to the diversity of communities in Old Dhaka. These sites display a large visual contrast to the other parts of the city, marked by concrete, high-rise buildings and mosques for the predominantly Muslim population.

From Mahbubur Rahman's descriptions, two different conceptions of neglect emerge: first in terms of an eco-political and second, in terms of a socio-cultural neglect.

On a public, institutional level, Rahman explains how developers and government authorities like RAJUK¹⁵ focus their attention on the more recently planned and economically prosperous middle and upper class neighborhoods of New and North Dhaka (see Islam 2005: 67). Further, the Department of Archeology officially recognizes only a handful of heritage sites in Old Dhaka, among them the aforementioned Bara Katra and Chhota Katra (Department of Archaeology 2016). Even fewer buildings such as Northbrook Hall or Lalkuti¹⁶ have actually been restored under their supervision (AR, NI August 2015).

Through 1 mile² many other historically important buildings so far disregarded by the city authorities came to the attention of the artists. Through their interactions with inhabitants especially their negotiations over access and permissions, the artists brought to light a possible reason for the neglect: many of the houses are subject to ownership dispute. According to collected statements and rumors, either the government, the military or illegal squatters are said to have seized the buildings after they were abandoned by their owners. This topic is difficult and sometimes even dangerous; many of the original owners were victims of religious prosecution and displacement, as I will elaborate further below. This circle of informality and sometimes even illegality, partially explains why the actual inhabitants, local communities or even the government are not able (or willing) to look after the maintenance of the buildings. The lack of economic value and resources are other reasons.

On a personal level, Rahman describes how all his childhood friends have left the neighborhood. He too has left and moved to New Dhaka and its middle class neighborhoods. Rahman also mentions the

¹⁰ Tabassum Zaman is an Assistant Professor of Media Studies and Journalism at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh.

¹¹ For an overview of the most important monuments of Old Dhaka and Bangladesh, see Ahmed (1984), Mowla (2011) and Hafiz (2011).

¹² In this article, I am using cursive font to highlight names for specific places and buildings found in the vernacular. Often these terms are not known beyond the local use.

¹³ The church is named after the Armenian Colony that settled in the area in the eighteenth century.

¹⁴ The Collegiate School was the first educational institute in the present-day territory of Bangladesh.

¹⁵ The Capital Development Authority of the Government of Bangladesh.

¹⁶ Northbrook Hall, also known as Lalkuti for its red color (in BNG *lal* means 'red') was built in honor of Lord Northbrook's visit to Dhaka (viceroy of India 1872-1876). The building was conceived as a town hall, but a public library was added on the southeast side a few years later. Until recently, the building was used as a theater hall (Ahmed 1984).

exodus of the cultural elite from Old Dhaka and the entailed disregard of formally important cultural institutions in this area:

[...] after the partition in 1947, the whole area became abandoned. All the buildings of Hindu owners became abandoned. And those are very important, vital buildings. Overnight it is not working. So the cultural shifting is quite big, it is quite upside down. We are still carrying that part of the culture. They say we are modern. In Old Dhaka, they use slang. [...] Those who tell you in Old Dhaka all the people talk slang, what about their roots? Where are they from? It hurts me when the people treat us in that way. My work. That is kind of my nostalgia. If I do anything here it is ok. If I don't do, I am here sitting, I can recall the past. I don't need to visualize my memory. When I talk, I just compare the situation of my time and this time. The situation, it wasn't like it is. [...] It is badly maintained, [...]. It was more clean, people came, all the cultural people who have an aesthetic notion. (AR, MR, February 2015)

The quote illustrates the complex, translocal connections and different layers of place-making that the artist engages in during 1mile². As a former inhabitant, an organizer, and a participating artist, Rahman constantly shifts between different positions. He observes the change his childhood neighborhood has undergone from the perspective of a former inhabitant. He is self-conscious about the nostalgic imaginary he creates as well as the opposition between valorization (past, history and memory) and neglect (present) it entails. Through his own experience with prejudices about Old Dhaka, for instance in reference to its inhabitants' use of 'slang', he exposes a deep-rooted asymmetry within the urban population mirrored in the city's landscape: Old Dhaka is qualified as an 'elsewhere' (see Robinson 2006: 4). Rahman criticizes the attitude of the inhabitants of the North, and inherently also reflects on his own position towards the communities that live in Old Dhaka.

As an organizer of 1mile², he is moreover in charge of the overall conceptualization of the project. By choosing Old Dhaka as venue, Britto marks the place as potentially interesting and creatively challenging for other participants. While Rahman emphasizes Old Dhaka's 'otherness' (as more diverse, more multi-faceted), he also enforces an engagement with the place, offering the project as a way to rethink the current perception of Old Dhaka. He wants to raise awareness not only among the other artists, but also among the wider public that the value of history and its preservation need to be addressed.

In the role of a participating artist tasked to create a site-specific art work, Rahman connects his perceptions of the neglect of Old Dhaka to his individual experiences in the area. In the account above, he suggests a correlation between the discrimination of the urban North against the South and the exodus of the cultural elite from the area. Together, these two processes fostered a disregard of Old Dhaka as a place of cultural production. He then specifically refers to the Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA)¹⁷ and expresses his frustration over the fact that the institution today is physically and 'aesthetically' neglected. The choice of BAFA as a venue for his project is strongly tied to the fact that this is the place where he started his training as an artist. The institution does not only have a general relevance for cultural production in the country, it is also an important creative space in his personal artistic development.

As for his art work, it was inspired by the oil spill catastrophe in the Sundarbans that happened during the research phase of 1mile² on December 9, 2014. This incident prompted Rahman to rethink his approach to the city and to open a dialog between the cultural heritage of Old Dhaka and the natural heritage of the Sundarbans.

Heritage

[...] and then the incident happened in Sundarban and that made me really crazy. We talk about the society; we are trying to do something. We talk about the citizens in Old Dhaka; why don't we think about the Sundarban citizens? Tigers are also citizens [...]. Every animal is a citizen of this country. They are part of our society. So, I made a link. We were hanging around this place [Old Dhaka] and then we went there [the Sundarbans]; we took some equipment to help them. It was not like making a story, it was more

¹⁷ The Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA) was founded in 1955 by the widow of dancer Bulbul Chowdhury who promoted dance and music throughout his life. The Academy is an important space for the celebration of pahela baishakh (the Bengali New Year) and the anniversaries of cultural persona such as renowned poet Rabindranath Tagore and master-painter Zainul Abedin (see Debnath 2017).

an emotional involvement. And then, I filmed everything on the iPhone. I thought, I can merge these things together, so I can cover my job as an organizer [of 1mile²] and I can cover my social responsibility. At the same time I also cover my art practice. It is merged together; otherwise, I would have been stuck. I want to be an artist all the way, but not out of the society. (AR, MR February 2015)

The Sundarbans, one of the largest mangrove forests in the world, is situated in the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal.¹⁸ The oil spill that Rahman refers to was caused by a tanker which sank after being hit by a cargo vessel (see Ghatak 2014). In the course of our go-along, Rahman explains that he heard about the catastrophe while working on his 1mile² project and decided to look into it. He realized that the Sundarbans lacked the protection, support, and maintenance they would need in the face of the ongoing effects of human expansion. He observes that neither the UNESCO nor the Bangladeshi government made any efforts to help save the inhabitants and their habitat. Rahman decided to open up a communication between the area of southern Dhaka and the area of the Sunderbans. Although both localities are at first sight marked by oppositions (cultural/natural heritage, densely/scarcely populated, urban/rural, nature/concrete), Rahman established a translocal connection in their shared vulnerability and disregard. In his artist statement, he describes how he wanted to witness the ongoing change – often caused by human domination over nature – that both the mangrove forest and Old Dhaka's ecosystems are susceptible to. Local communities, he felt, were often left to their own devices, without much support by the government or institutions such as the UNESCO. They themselves cannot afford or have access to the required resources. As an artists and a member of society, Rahman felt obliged to take action; together with a group of friends and artists, he bought equipment in the markets of Old Dhaka and travelled to the Sundarbans to distribute aids in order to fight the spreading oil slick.



FIGURE 1: Mahbubur Rahman 'Shower with Oil' 2014-2015, six channel video installation with wooden structure (photograph by author)

¹⁸ The forest extends across the territories of India and Bangladesh. It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1987 (for India) and 1997 (for Bangladesh) (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 1992-2016).

The videos he recorded along the way constitute the material for his final 1mile² work, a six channel video entitled 'Shower with oil'. The wooden construction supporting the six projectors alludes to the structures – social, cultural and physical – people 'build' in their environment, often without care for the consequences. Rahman's installation and the thought process proceeding it, illustrate the reflective and conscious creative place-making that is employed in the production of site-specific art works. It exemplifies what anthropologist Thomas Fillitz (2002: 213) calls *kultureller Raum*. In his work on contemporary art from Africa, Fillitz argues that such a 'cultural space' refers to the art work as the matter in which the inter-linkages between the artist, his relation with the 'landscape' (physical composition of natural and social environment) and the meanings given to that environment are presented in a condensed way (Ibid: 212).

Rahman's work addresses different kinds of heritage: tangible, in the form of the buildings and 1mile² venues, natural as in the Sundarbans, and intangible as in the film industry and the literature produced in Old Dhaka. Their commonality, as I understand from Rahman's explanations, is their connection to people's roots, their role as a reminder of where Dhaka's (and in extension Bangladesh's) inhabitants come from and who they are today. How people presently treat their heritage defines what kind of future role they want to play in society and as a society. Rahman sees his own creative engagements as part of a bigger social responsibility, in which the people's heritage needs to be recovered and become part of contemporary thinking.

Mahbubur Rahman is one of the only participants of 1mile² who actually grew up in the area. However, the project includes several participants who have established a long-term relationship with the place prior to the project. Munem Wasif, a graduate and faculty member of the Pathshala South Asian Media Institute, has been working in Old Dhaka for over a decade. His 2013 published book 'Belonging' is the result of his prolonged photographic exploration of the area and the daily life of its communities (Wasif and Caujolle 2013). The artist grew up in Comilla, a small town near the border to the Indian state of Tripura. He recently joined Britto as a member and uses 1mile² as opportunity to highlight the 'box camera'. The simple mechanism consists of a box which contains a lens and a film on opposite ends. According to Wasif, it is one of the oldest methods of photographing and an important part of the history and development of photography in the region. Today, there are only very few people left who know how to process and work with this technique and the artist located them in Old Dhaka. His 1mile² installation "Paper Negative" draws connections with memory and history, thus becoming a reflection of his long-term engagement with the local specialists, the history of photography in Bangladesh and the documentation of the process of this particular technique. It is also exemplary of the translocal dynamics that form part of the creative place-making he engages in. In an excerpt from 'Belonging' published on his homepage Wasif relates his childhood in rural Bangladesh to the neighborhoods of Old Dhaka: Old Dhaka "is where I had come to rediscover the same small town pulse of holding on to things rather than letting go" (Wasif 2014). Like Rahman's nostalgic approach to the past, this is reminiscent of Zaman's assumption about the 'imaginary Dhaka' conditioned by the past and/or by the rural Bangladesh. It suggests that in Old Dhaka, one can find what has been lost elsewhere in the city: tradition. Wasif's work however goes beyond this pure nostalgic engagement with tradition and its assumed opposition to 'modernity'. The artist's aim was to document the technique of the 'box camera', to show it in Old Dhaka and to raise people's (locals and photographers from other parts of the city) awareness towards its fine mechanism. Rather than 'resurrect' a dying tradition, he wants to learn from it and experiment with its different possibilities from the perspective of contemporary art (conversation with the artist, January 2015).

These first two examples highlight the oppositional relation between the perception of neglect and the (re)valorization of heritage as two crucial parts of creative place-making in Old Dhaka. Both Rahman and Wasif's work inherently already address the artists' aspiration to transform (physically or mentally) the locality of 1mile² through site-specific art works. This is even more prominent in the work of other participants.

Transformation

Shimul Saha grew up 100 km north-west of the capital city and moved to Dhaka to study fine art at Charukala. The University of Dhaka, which Charukola is a part of, is lodged between Old and New Dhaka, and like many other students, Saha remembers spending much of his time roaming the streets

of the old part of the city. During our go-along, he confidently guides me through the neighborhood, recounting the histories of places and buildings which he has gathered over the years. His main interest is in Puthi-ghar, the house of one of the region's first publishers located along Ruplal Das Lane. Although the building still exudes a glimpse of its former grandeur, its untended state is clearly visible; the paint is chipped and the facade has slowly crumbled. The ground floor has apparently been taken over by a business of sorts and plastered with concrete. Saha explains that most noticeable to him however, were the imposing front windows on the first floor; they had been closed up with bricks and scrap. While exploring the area, the artist noticed that this sealing of openings is very common in old buildings, often giving them an even more abandoned appearance than they already have.



FIGURE 2: Shimul Saha 'Whose Decision It Might Be' 2014-2015, installation (photograph by author)

"Whose Decision It Might Be", the project that grew out of this observation, is an installation of small white and open windows fixed on top of the actual closed up windows of the building. Similar to Rahman's place-making Saha's engagement with Old Dhaka and especially its architecture, is imbued with the idea of absence and neglect. The artist's foregrounding of the covered-up windows however, transforms this absence into an aspiration; although his windows are artificial and temporary, they point to the possibility of renewal and recovery. In his artist statement, he dares onlookers to open the windows and look at the history of Old Dhaka and the region of Bengal anew.

During our walk-along, we continue on Ruplal Das Lane and pass by Ruplal House. The nineteenth-century mansion with its long waterfront and its series of columns characteristic of the Renaissance style constitutes an important architectural heritage in the area. Most importantly, it physically represents the history of the Bangladeshi people, marked by conflict, migration and forced resettlement. Shimul Saha who unlike Rahman did not grow up in the area and thus is not able to rely on his own personal memories about the neighborhood, gathered most of his knowledge from historical books and personal accounts. He recalls that the impressive building used to belong to two Hindu merchant brothers. After the Partition in 1947, the brothers left Dhaka with their families and 'exchanged' their home with a Muslim family from India who immigrated to East-Pakistan. This was a strategy employed by many wealthy families in the aftermath of Partition. After Independence (1971) Ruplal House was supposedly

first claimed by the government and then brought under the control of the military.¹⁹ Several sections, I am told, have been taken over by ‘squatters’.

The geometrical shapes of Ruplal House, the impressive courtyard and its rows of columns, motivated artist Shubho Saha to choose it as a venue for his project. The artist spend endless rounds of negotiation with different branches of the government and the military to receive permission to work inside Ruplal House.



FIGURE 3: Shubho Saha 'Brick on Brick 1' 2014-2015, installation and performance (photograph by author)

His work “Brick on Brick 1” not unlike Mahbubur Rahman’s work addresses the relationship between human and natural landscape and the connection between past and present. While the orange cloth, hanging from the center of the courtyard is supposed to symbolize the fluid relation between what was and what is, the human civilization is represented through the bricks at the base of the installation (conversation with the artist, February 2015). Although the pile of bricks forms a foreign body within this confined space, the installation quickly blends into the architecture and the everyday life – the playing children, the drying laundry – of the house. The participating artists and the audience gain access to this daily life through the installation, which was only made possible due to Shubho Saha’s effort to get the necessary permits.

¹⁹ Political Scientist Meghna Guhathakurta (2016: 318-320) describes how the controversial ‘Vested Property Act’ (prior to Partition known as the ‘Enemy Property Act’) has allowed successive governments of Bangladesh to seize the property of its Hindu population.

Above, I quoted Radice's (2018: 52) characterization of public art as a negotiation with (rather than a participation of) 'various publics'. Saha's art work is an important example for this type of public art. The negotiation with the different communities over access to the space became an intrinsic part of the work.

Collaboration with local communities also was one of the intended goals of the overall 1mile² project. To my observation, this did not play an important role in the majority of the 42 projects. When I asked the organizers to comment on my observation, they mentioned that in the 2009 edition, the interaction was stronger; artists had for instance collaborated with children from local schools. But during the latest edition, many schools were closed because of the December holidays (AR, MR & TBL, February 2015). Only a small number of artists made collaboration the central focus of their art work. This might also be related to the strong emphasis on intangible heritage that caused my artists to bypass inhabitants and engage directly with the materiality of the building.

Yasmin Jahan Nupur's work is one of the only works that combines architecture and inhabitants. The artist approached the inhabitants of Boro Bari (BNG: big or tall house) and recorded their histories and memories in relation to the building. Her place-making was conditioned by the way Boro Bari's inhabitants connect to and transform the place through their daily lives and practices. Rather than identifying the building's value for herself, she focuses on its meaning and value for the people actually dwelling inside. During the open studio day she displays recorders inside the rooms, urging visitors to enter and engage with the otherwise hidden interior of the house and its residents, in search of their stories.



FIGURE 4: Reetu Sattar 'Rising of the days' 2014-2015, all-day performance at different venues (photograph by author)

In a similar line, Reetu Sattar's performance draws attention to the sharing of history. In versatile venues, she reads aloud passages from the diary of Monoda Devi, in which the author retrospectively describes her early life in the 1880s. Through this narration, Sattar intends to create a connection between 'a housewife from those days with the housewives of today' (artist statement). Her performance leads from the main 1mile² meeting point at Beauty Boarding to the private courtyard of a Hindu family, and to Farashganj Orphanage. The later is named after the Farashis (BNG: the French) who established a market at this location in the late eighteenth-century, pointing again to the translocal connections that

continue to mark the area. Through her engagement with multiple venues and communities, Reetu Sattar weaves a spatial network across Old Dhaka, creating a link between herself and the daily lives of women, past and present, from its various communities.

Each artists' place-making is very different and the four projects I discussed in this section address the issue of transformation differently. Shimul Saha and Shubho Saha's works take the architecture of their venues as a focal point, whereas Reetu Sattar and Jasmin Jahan Nupur emphasize collaboration with inhabitants. Their mediums are equally versatile and span from installation to audio recording and performance. Looking at the way these four site-specific works engage the public however – the audience invited on the day of the open studio, but also the participating artists – the relation to the notion of 'transformation' becomes clear. All four artists transform their 1mile² sites into 'places of encounter', thus realizing especially the last part of Friedman's (2010: 153-155) description of place-making. Shimul Saha forces onlookers of his installation to realize the disregard of tangible heritage. At the same time, he offers an option for the transformation of the contemporary state. Both Subho Saha and Yasmin Jahan Nupur underwent great effort to open the insides of otherwise closed houses to the public, thus transforming the outsider view of the onlooker into the perspective of an insider; letting visitors take part in the daily life of the buildings and their inhabitants. Finally, Reetu Sattar unfolds a network of stories and localities, thereby creating a multitude of spaces of encounter, between different times and nodes that would otherwise have stayed isolated.

Recovery

The term recovery invokes two different meanings: one refers to the restoration of a state that is considered normal, the other to the process of regaining ownership or control over something that was lost. Both definitions are involved in the artist's individual and collective creative place-making during 1mile², as I show in the last section of this article.



FIGURE 5: Ayesha Sultana 'Rupture' 2014-2015, site-specific intervention (photograph by author)

Ayesha Sultana's site-specific work was inspired by the impressive brick pattern and the multiple layers of meaning that qualify Panch Bari, her chosen site. Panch Bari is named after the five (panch in Bengali) brothers sharing the house. Due to the intricate lives of five families, the building is marked by

a maze of interwoven corridors, staircases, living rooms, and courtyards. The space Sultana chose for her installation however, consists of one single roofless structure, used for religious ceremonies by the Hindu community and regularly turned into a cricket ground for the children of the neighborhood. Sultana applied gold leaves to the fissures and cracks that run along the crumbling walls of the building. In a conversation with the artist (February 2015), Sultana explains that her idea is based on the Japanese kintsugi, a technique of repairing broken ceramics with lacquer dusted or mixed with gold or silver powder. The gold applications simultaneously conceal the slow decay of the architectural structure and high-light its devastating effects. By using the kintsugi technique, the artist also refers to its underlying philosophical appreciation of simplicity and of embracing of the flawed or imperfect. Her project is not about preserving the 'traditional' in the name of heritage, or overcoming it in the name of modernity. Rather, the site-specific work offers a vantage point from which to imagine a middle ground; Sultana highlights the neglected, flawed walls and offers a way of repairing their cracks without obscuring their provenance.

Regarding the overall project, the aim and course of 1mile², especially the second understanding of recovery is salient. The project is not about reclaiming ownership or control over Old Dhaka however; it is about allowing people – participating artists and other onlookers – to realize that it could be lost if current developments notably progressive urbanization and pollution are not reevaluated. As I mentioned in the beginning, many people I encountered in the northern parts of the city do not consider Old Dhaka a safe or pleasant place to spend time and dwell in. Over the course of 1mile², I saw this perception change among the participants. The more time the artists spent in the area, the more familiar they became with it. They learned to trust members of the community, who in return started to regard the artists as more than 'foreigners'. They learned where to get the best breakfast, where to stop for tea and how to walk the streets without getting lost. In the end, many told me that they planned to spend more time in Old Dhaka, even after the project was finished. The artists intended to raise awareness of the audience – mostly people from New and North Dhaka, but also locals – towards the knowledge they gained and the research they had done. Through their works, they allowed access to a new imaginary of the city. This imaginary was often conditioned by the past and the rural Bangladesh, but it also challenged viewers to reconsider notions of modernity, history, and heritage. Rahman's installation for instance inspired questions about the meaning of modernity and the side-effects of focusing exclusively on economic development. What are the consequences for the environment and the people living in it? The artist's creative place-making stimulated the imagination of a more open, positive, inclusive idea of history, of the city and its population. For the audiences, this was realized through the site-specific art works. Shimul Saha's work for instance suggested hope for the disintegrating buildings, and Reetu Sattar's performance facilitated a connection between women from different generations, religions, and different parts of the city.

1mile² however did not only generate positive effects. I have previously mentioned that the collaboration with local communities was one of the main objectives of the project, but was only realized in a small number of individual projects. Those that did involve local collaborators often visualized power asymmetries between the artist – as creative actor – and the local collaborator – as the subject of this creative action. Furthermore, the concept of site-specific works, as consciously inter-connected with the place in which they are created/exhibited,²⁰ caused debates among the participants; several works were criticized for not being related to Old Dhaka enough, others for looking forcefully emplaced into the local landscape.

Conclusion

In this article, I pursued three topics – the translocal dynamics embedded in place, the creative ways of place-making that artists engage in, and the renegotiation of the city through creative action and from a translocal perspective.

All the artists I followed approached 1mile² inspired by their personal background, interests, and experiences. Their conceptualization and final works exemplify the fact that localities such as Old Dhaka are never isolated and always cross-referenced with, compared, valued and related to other places. These

²⁰ This definition is based on how 'site-specific art' is commonly understood among the artists that I worked with during my research. For a more elaborate discussion of the topic, see for instance Kwon (2004).

relations to 'other places' form the translocal connections that play out on several scales: within the city, the national borders, the region and globally. In relation to the city for instance, they become obvious in the mental map that fixes markers of globality (international organizations, restaurant and coffee chains) and modernity (modern architecture, cultural institutions like the Shilpakala) in the North of the city, while Old Dhaka is cast as an 'elsewhere' characterized in contrast, by stagnation, decay and neglect. With reference to the country of Bangladesh, translocal connections highlight Dhaka as a destination for a steady influx of migrants from the countryside hoping for a better life in the city. This process goes hand in hand with Zaman's (2014) imaginary city, which is conditioned by the rural Bangladesh as pristine and peaceful alternative to the crowded, hectic city. The demographic shifts and political, religious conflicts caused by the events of 1947 and 1971 translocally connect Old Dhaka to the wider South Asian region, especially the neighbors India and Pakistan. Moreover, the focus on Old Dhaka serves as a counter-narrative to the rise of Islamic Nationalism in the country; the diversity of communities in Old Dhaka bespeaks tropes of naturalized peaceful coexistence, tolerance and secular 'Bengaliness' which have long been part of Bengali self-conception (see Rahman 2013; Hoek 2012, 35). This relates to a global rise of consolidated national, ethnic and religious identities. Finally, the 1mile² program was created in London and from there 'exported' to the world. Despite its very local and site-specific character, 1mile² employs globally mobile forms such as visitor maps, panels, footprints, and Facebook as an translocal advertising platform.

Further, I have argued that creative place-making is part of ordinary actions like walking, as well as more conscious and reflected actions, like the production of site-specific art works. The analysis of this place-making, through methods such as the go-along, exposes not only how the city is represented in contemporary art but also how it is critically engaged and actively produced. I referred to Fillitz's concept of the 'cultural space' to show how artworks such as Mahbubur Rahman's 'Shower with Oil' become manifestations of the social and natural landscape in which they are produced; they embody the artist's relation and valorization of this landscape. I have argued that the 'making-of-place' always comprises a 'making-of-difference' which often relies on tropes of modernity and development. Rather than reifying the hierarchization practices Robinson (2006) exposes, the creative processes foster a critical negotiation of the artists own position. I have further shown how creative place-making can foster the imagination of an alternative city. Mahbubur Rahman, while walking through one version of the city imagines and actively produces a more inclusive Dhaka, which serves as a home to various communities, animals, ideas, and histories. It is a city in which does not see modernity and tradition or history as opposites, but allocates space for one within the other. It is also a space where people are aware of the negative impacts of human expansion (urbanization, pollution) and support each-other in dealing with them.

Lastly, I have suggested that through the frame of creativity and recent writings on translocality, the city can be rethought as both creative and autonomous. 1mile² served as an example to redefine creativity beyond Florida's (2010, 2012) understanding of innovation and as a source of economic development. Creative engagement is present in both ordinary everyday practices, like walking the streets of Old Dhaka in search of the best tea shop, and in the conscious reflection over neglected heritage. These everyday and particular practices encourage the renegotiation of the artists' role in the city. As an individual artist, the role can be to raise awareness concerning the gradually vanishing tradition of the 'box camera' and its importance for the history of photography. As an artist community, it can be the revalorization of a place that used to be an important hub for cultural production in the past. And as an artist collective, the role can be that of the initiator of such renegotiation; through projects like 1mile², Britto offers the possibility to imagine a more open, positive, and inclusive idea of the city, its population, its collective identity and history. The project also opens new spaces for experimental and critical engagement that are otherwise rare in Dhaka. Through public projects such as 1mile², Britto actively contributes to the promotion of open discourse and as such forms part of the public sphere (Radice 2018).

Finally, the ethnographic method in combination with a translocal perspective allowed me to regard global and local dynamics not as binaries but as two scales of translocal connections played out in a specific locality. The analysis of ordinary and exceptional activities, the interaction between artists and the city's infrastructure, and the focus on actions and imaginaries enabled a rethinking of the tropes of modernity and innovation that persist in the research on art and urban space.

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ANIMISM AND ARTEFACT: THE ENTANGLED AGENCIES OF A DiY [DO-IT-YOURSELF] MAKER

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ABSTRACT

Using images from my own creative practice, the entangled agencies of DiY [Do-it-Yourself] making are expressed through a messy, intuitive and exploratory engagement with materials. The combination of animism and material are used to describe a techno-animist approach to technology and investigated visually through notebook sketches, photographs of the workshop and the artefacts produced, highlighting parallels between the material turn and more ancient belief systems which recognise a spirit or life force within objects.

The notebook is of particular importance as a space of creativity and as a support for mental processes: an 'extended mind' of material agency which plays an important role in the production of artefacts. As an ethnography of both materials and human practice this article challenges the human-centred focus of autoethnography, or self-ethnography, acknowledging materials as active forces in the production of artefacts. DiY maker culture offers a unique contemporary context in the generation of a type of knowledge which is contained within both human and the material substances of the artefact.

KEYWORDS

Animism, creative technology, ethnography, Do-it-Yourself

BIO

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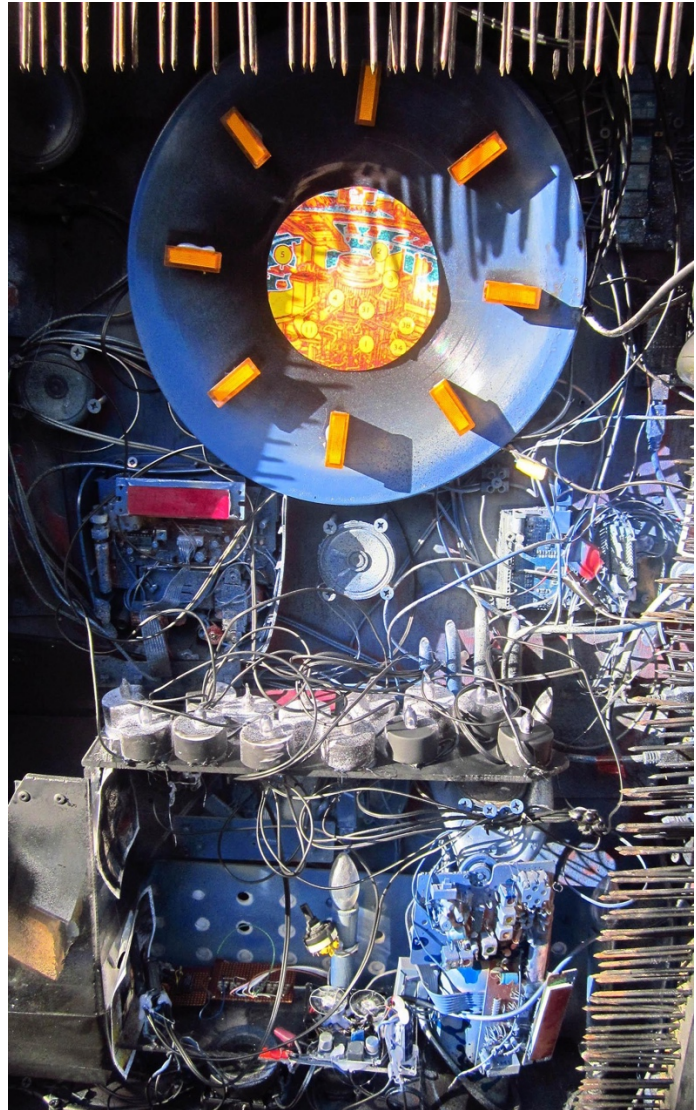


FIGURE 1: Detail from the Cledonomancy 418 Machine: divination machine under construction by the author.

The Cledonomancy 418 machine (shown above), a device made by the author in 2017, selects and plays randomly-selected sound-snippets from several different spoken word folders within its built-in MP3 audio player. As seen in the image, the machine incorporates a baffling array of recycled materials and re-functioned electronic devices in a confusion of wires, electric candles, objects and materials: suggesting an ambiguous technical function. In response to a question, the result is a mishmash of words which are equally baffling and occasionally, extremely pertinent and to the point. Cledonomancy, a form of divination sacred to the Greek god Hermes, traditionally involved using scraps of overheard conversations as a source of receiving messages for the purpose of fortune telling (Hyde, 2008, 135). The purpose of this device is to access configurations of words and sentences beyond human conscious intention, that is, to playback pre-recorded words in a random order with the assumption that these new sentences will have some kind of new message for the listener. On the insertion of a coin, as well as through the desire of the listener, the Cledonomancy 418 machine becomes part of the ‘extended mind’ of the operator, allowing access to the loosely formed meanings which occur as a result of randomly configured words and sentences.

Given the above description of the electronic shrine to Cledonomancy it is, of course, a subjective experience of the user of such a device as to how far these claims can be verified. In a similar vein, the extent to which the technologies of the artefact can become an extension of human (or material) forces is the subject of this article: using examples of my own creative-technology practice to observe and identify the role of material agency as a contributor to the form of artefact created.

Material agency is something we may sense when we feel that ‘technology has a life of its own’: that technology doesn’t always do what we want or in a way we want it to. The functions of technology can be mysterious and unexplainable, particularly when we are not sure how a device works, or we are blinded by the complexity of its operations. Often when I build a machine of some kind I find that the materials have their own ‘idea’ about how they want to function and what it is they want to ‘be’. Working with broken technologies and recycled materials heightens the occurrence of things ‘going wrong’, that is to say, objects deviating from the intention of the person making the artefact. Whilst my own work is with electronic sculpture, the artist working with marble, or the wood carver, has been known to utilise this trait of materials ‘wanting to be something else’: observing the forces within the stone or the grain within the wood; recognising the ‘intention’ of the materials as the dynamic forces involved in making something (Malafouris, 2013). The role of the sculptor is often said to merely consist of revealing the object which already exists beneath the surface of the raw block (Malafouris, 2013), or else “they’ll talk about how the marble ‘wants’ to become something else” (Bryant, 2014, 50) in contradiction to the intention of the artist. In a contemporary context these forces can be explained as ‘material agency’ - the ability of materials to contribute to the final shape of the artefact, to influence our thinking, and to exert a force similar to human intention. Malafouris defines agency as being “of actual practice and being-in-the-world [...] [or as] intention-in-action” (2008, 30) meaning that intention is linked inextricably with action and practices within the material world. When it comes to building complex technological devices, I find that there are two distinct paths, that: materials can be chosen for their supposed utility; but also, artefacts can come from seeing what functionalities emerge during the making.

Before the material turn, agency was generally considered as an exclusively human intention, the will of the maker imposed onto the materials to make an artefact. However, ideas of material agency recognise the important role that materials play in the process: acknowledging a two-way interaction between materials and the human (Barad, 2003; 2007; Bennett, 2010; Guerrini, 2016; Latour, 2005), that extend beyond the flesh and blood of the artist.

In another ethnographic context the material forces discussed above might be labelled as belonging to an animist belief system. Postmodern anthropological approaches to animism challenges the traditional dichotomies between human and material, animism as nature and scientism as the view that science is able to express every truth within the world (Richardson, 2016; Hornborg, 2006; Bird-David, 1999). In following this approach techno-animism is a term I have employed to connect material agency with postmodern concepts of animism: to articulate the dynamic relationship between human and material object in the making of an artefact. Techno-animism suggests that material forces within technology are capable of operating as ‘agents’ of change: there is an agency to the materials which ‘animates’ the process of making something. Techno-animism can be thought of as a form of knowledge which emerges between the human and materials; and an agency which cannot be entirely situated within either the human or the materials of making.

The aim of this article is to articulate a specific engagement between human practitioner (AKA myself as researcher) and materials to draw out the various forces involved. To do this this article involves self-reflection on the processes of making a series of artefacts: a self-ethnography (autoethnography) in which the researcher explores their own practice using visual data. The three (mini) case-studies focus on three fields where the different material agents, *notebook*, *workshop* and *artefact*, are emphasised respectively.

In a wider scope, this article examines a new materiality emerging from ‘maker culture’, a significant social movement, described as the “fourth industrial revolution” (Hatch, 2014, 3-10). Maker-culture has been described as involving “novel applications of technologies, and the exploration of intersections between traditionally separate domains and ways of working” and is a significant contemporary global phenomenon affecting ways in which we perceive and organise diverse fields of knowledge such as education, technology and the material environment (Sharples, et al, 2013, 33). Using the maker-culture slogan of “make something” (Hatch, 2014, 189-191) as the entry point into this autoethnography of practice, the aim is to observe the processes of material agency in the production of the resulting artefacts. Through examining my own practices, as a DiY (Do-it-Yourself) maker, I will employ an autoethnography that blurs the divisions between the practitioner, the researcher and the various material forces of notebook, workshop and materials of the artefacts produced. David Butz and Kathryn Besio see autoethnography as focusing on the researcher and their relationship to the formation of knowledge, looking at: “*agents of signification* [who] strive self-consciously to understand themselves as an important part of what they are signifying” (2009). This is expressed in the aim of this article to

understand and articulate some of the otherwise unconscious strategies and creative processes involved in the making of artefacts. Since material agency, as well as human agency, is an integral element of this article, the visual materials of notebooks, workshop space and artefacts produced become part of these “*agents of signification*”, since they are also considered to be an important part of the process of making. Autoethnography is also used to articulate the tacit or unconscious knowledge which is supported through the use of notebooks and objects, allowing these unconscious processes to become visible. Another role of this autoethnography is as tool for incorporating marginalised voices into the academic world. In this sense, these marginalised voices are those of material agency and tacit knowledge which comes from practical making rather than from a realm of academic study (Butz & Besio, 2009). In this manner, autoethnography becomes a way of adding different forms of knowledge and ‘unspoken’ voices from within the accepted traditions of academia: “to cross, straddle, or inhabit the boundary between non-academic and academic subject positionings” (Butz & Besio, 2009). Additionally, by capturing the ‘subjective positioning’ of the DiY maker is a way in which the voice of the ‘amateur’ maker can be brought into an academic context which is biased towards the idea of the expert as a specialist within their field.

I consider myself a DiY ‘amateur’ since I am constantly working in field of making which I am not an expert of, but instead ‘tinkering’ with materials and technologies with which I am unfamiliar. This seems to be a process of learning to work with materials which opens the door to accidents and chance encounters, unexpected discoveries, a feeling of ‘not knowing’ and confusion, which often outweighs any feeling of expertise or clarity. This fits with Bochner & Ellis’ idea of *Evocative Autoethnographies* “that investigate life’s messiness, including twists of fate and chance” (2016, 10) and include the expression of changeable, ambiguous or messy situations which are common events within the tangled processes of making. Another influence has been Stuart McLean’s aspirations for anthropology, *Fictionalizing Anthropology: Encounters and Fabulations at the Edges of the Human*, which are well suited to a study of creative practices which include the ‘other than human’:

as distinct modes of engagement with the materiality of expressive media—including language—that always retain the capacity to exceed and destabilize human intentions [...] less as the study of an objectified humanity than as the open-ended, performative exploration of alternative possibilities of collective existence—of new ways of being human and other than human (McLean, 2017, x).

The inclusion of material agency as an “other than human” force is both “open-ended, [and] performative” in displacing the human as the central, exclusive, figure of agency within the context of creative practice. In this sense, this article is an autoethnography which includes the material extensions of the self, and the forces of material agency at the edges of (conscious) human experience.

The specific project examined in this article is my own processes of working towards a sound installation which interacts with environmental triggers, as part of the *Hull, UK City of Culture 2017* festival. The project begins through an exchange of emailed texts brainstorming ideas for the commission, descriptions of various spaces available for the project and as research into historical practices which originated in the particular cultural environment of the city of Hull. The starting point for my designs comes from parallels between my own work and the historical practices of the sound-art-performance group *Throbbing Gristle* (TG, 2017), and in particular the sound device invented and made by TG member Chris Carter called the *Gristleizer* (Carter, 2017): a home-made DiY electronics device that breaks sound into small fragments to be re-configured in new assemblages (Logue, 2015, 40:13). For the purposes of the Hull exhibition my adaptation of the *Gristleizer* has the working title of *Bingo-Splicer*: since it uses random numbers similar to the popular lotto game, to select between different sound sources; breaking the sounds into fragments for use in re-assembled rhythms.

TG were a post-punk group which drew inspiration and influence from the industrial environment of Hull and east London between 1977 and 1983. As soundscapes for decaying post-industrial environments the combination of ritual performance and home-made DiY electronics are part of the context influencing my practice for the Hull project.



FIGURE 2: Electronic shrine combining industrial materials with relics - made in 1993 (photo by author).

The interface between DiY electronics and materials is a particular interest of mine and over the years I have built numerous devices and machines, including a series of coin-operated electrical shrines, one of which is depicted above, which explored religion and technology (Snake-Beings, 2018A). These early practices have influenced my thoughts on the connections and intersections between technology and ritual spaces and in particular influencing my thoughts on the practice of *techno-animism*. In traditional ethnographic reports, animism is entrenched within a religious-based world view which regards ‘fetish’ objects, divinatory oracles or objects which display some evidence of sentience. Postmodern views on animism recognise a more fuzzy boundary between human and materials and begin to resemble concepts of material agency which have recently emerged in the social sciences (Richardson, 2016). In the ideas of techno-animism, developed in this article, material objects and technological objects are viewed by the practitioner as active agents in the making of artefacts: whereby the materials of technology are somehow ‘living’ actants: as Jane Bennett’s ‘vibrant materials’ (2010, 23) where ‘vital forces... [create] an open-ended collective’ (24) involving a ‘neo-animist ontology’ (Bennett, 2011, 120). This ‘open-ended collective’ of a neo-animist worldview, is the space I will explore in this article and in practical terms indicates a way of making which allows materials to exert influence over the final artefact. In techno-animism the hypothesis is that certain aspects of animist practice can be extended to objects of technology.

In a more scientific field, the quantum scientist Nick Herbert suggests that objects on a quantum level operate a form of consciousness similar to animism:

animism', [is] the belief that every object possesses sentient "insides" like our own. The quantum consciousness assumption, which amounts to a kind of "quantum animism" likewise asserts that consciousness is an integral part of the physical world (Herbert, 2002).

Although I am not familiar with the intricacies of quantum mechanics, I find it interesting that there is a scientific parallel with the hypothesis of animism. Herbert continues in expressing that quantum animism recognises the forces of agency which exist outside of the human brain:

If the world is truly quantum animated, then there is an immense amount of invisible inner experience going on all around us that is presently inaccessible to humans, because our own inner lives are imprisoned inside a small quantum system, isolated deep in the meat of an animal brain (Herbert, 2002).

In terms of the tacit knowledge of making, the processes involved are similar to the “invisible inner experience” of quantum animism: whereby cognition and the creative process extends the confines of “the meat of an animal brain” to include the materials of technology. This is an idea which is similar to Clark and Chalmers’ extended mind theory, which describes a form of material consciousness echoing the “cognitive artefact” as a seemingly sentient object (Malafouris, 2013, 67). The ‘extended mind’ views the space of cognition, usually restricted to the physical brain, to include objects and materials as forces of extra-bodily agency (Malafouris, 2013; Clark, 2011; Clark & Chalmers, 1998). The idea is that the extended mind occurs because material artefacts are entangled as part of the mental process. A simple example of this can be seen in the everyday use of a notebook as an extension of memory, with the notebook becoming a support for the mind. There are other more complex examples which I am experiencing myself, such as, the use of the computer keyboard or the printed word to access different modes of authoritative or visually objective thinking. I can see these different modes of thinking when I look at the handwritten scrawls, uncertain notes and sketches of my own notebooks, compared to the organising principles of the computerised word processor. Yet the notebook remains a valuable asset in the process of extending thoughts, since it retains the physical marks of ambiguity, trial and errors which can so easily be erased by the word processor program.

Following on from the entanglement between human and materials, the idea of the artefact is influenced, in this article, by Anita Guerrini’s work on the material turn in the history of life science, where she describes the artefact as combining “the brute matter of things and the incorporation of human labor in their design, making, and use [so that] these things are artifacts as well as facts” (Guerrini, 2016, 470). This suggests to me that these types of ‘facts’, contained within the artefact, represent a merging of human and material traits which combine science and art: “turning attention from facts to artifacts” (471). Technology, and the science involved in its making, is driven by facts, whereas the arte(fact) also contains an additional form of knowledge which comes from a more intuitive and humanist realm. By combining art with science the artefact becomes useful in the “discovery of [scientific] laws” with the purpose of explaining how nature “operates”, whilst, at the same time, also useful in exploring art as “subjective and intuitive” forces aimed at the “discovery of the self” (Lapointe, 2015). The intention here is to use artefacts (arte-facts) as tools in exploring intuitive practice as well as the forces contained within technological materials.

Through my own experience of making I can observe that artefacts emerge from an indeterminate process filled with human error and constant changes in design, as the mind interacts with the materials. Making is an indeterminate and messy process which diverts from an exclusively human intention to incorporate a multitude of forces and agencies. To represent these indeterminate processes I have included several designs and sketches which illustrate some of the numerous twists and turns involved in the making of the Hull project. This embraces the idea of the “perpetual prototype”, in which the process is an ongoing, important and visible aspect of the artefact (Snake-Beings, 2017A; 2017B; 2017C; 2016; 2014).

The significance of the notebook in this article is as an object of cognition: as part of the process of cognition which extends beyond the human. This extension of cognition, or extended mind, allows material agency to become a visible aspect of ‘thinking’, as Lambros Malafouris observes: “a cognitive

process is not simply what happens inside a brain; a cognitive process can be what happens in the interaction between a brain and a thing” (2013, 67). This means that the notebook and the artefact can be viewed as extensions of human thought processes: a material engagement which goes;

beyond the individual in order to accommodate broader cognitive events [...] [so that material] space is not simply the passive background against which the activity unfolds; it is something that can be used as a cognitive artefact (Malafouris, 2013, 67).

The extended mind supports my own intuitive feeling that materials and objects exert their own form of animism through technology and that the use of notebooks, objects and even the general workshop space, is vital in the development and support of cognitive processes and ideas which lead towards the generation of artefacts. I believe that these materials support a form of tacit knowledge: the “unconscious trial and error [of making] [...] without specifically knowing how we do it” (Polanyi, 2005, 65) and as such, have become important aspects of methodology. In this sense, notebooks are not seen as a source of data in a world filled with stable “facts” but as complex assemblages of forces of agency. This is the kind of messy research which Andrew Pickering recognises, that:

start from the idea that the world is filled not, in the first instance, with facts and observations, but with *agency* [...] as forces upon material beings (2010, 6).

This can be related to my own practices of making and the way in which the artefact emerges from an experimental engagement with materials and technologies, evolving in an indeterminate way which could not have been entirely predicted by the person making the machine. The notebook, the objects within the workshop and the materials used in constructing the artefacts play an important role of negotiating a path through the indeterminate. Through emphasising actions and practices within the world, I am following a performative research, as an attempt to incorporate these multiple “forces upon material beings” resulting in the making of artefacts.

Case Study One: Notebooks

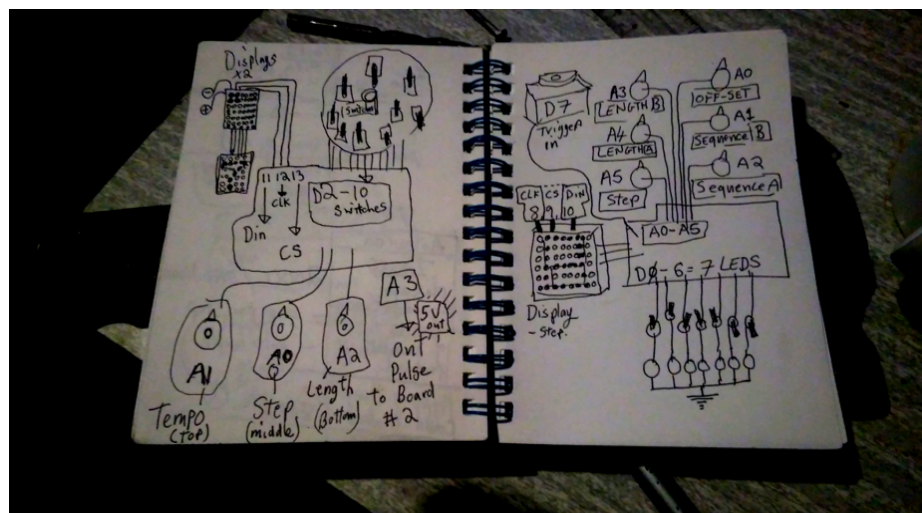


FIGURE 3: Workshop diagrams drawn from the prototype (photo by author).

The above image shows a functional diagram of the connections used in a prototype device for the environmental sound installation designed for Hull, UK city of culture 2017. The image, found in one of my notebooks of the time, depicts both ‘completed’ parts of the projects as well as components which I had yet to be make. The drawing functions as a technical diagram to aid with the ‘thinking process’ of

making complex mechanisms, including pin numbers of the Arduino such as 'A1, A0 and A2'. Through the process of creating the circuit diagram from a semi-finished artefact I noticed an appealing aesthetic emerging from the technological content, or technical process of making. This is a kind of unconscious art emerging from the technical diagrams which dwell at the intersection of art and technology – a process with the primary function of aiding technological cognition which can be re-situated as an aesthetic object. In this way, lettering such as A3, A0, A4, A1 relate to the wiring pins on the Arduino circuit boards used in the construction, but also, function as part of the hieroglyphic mystery of the object.

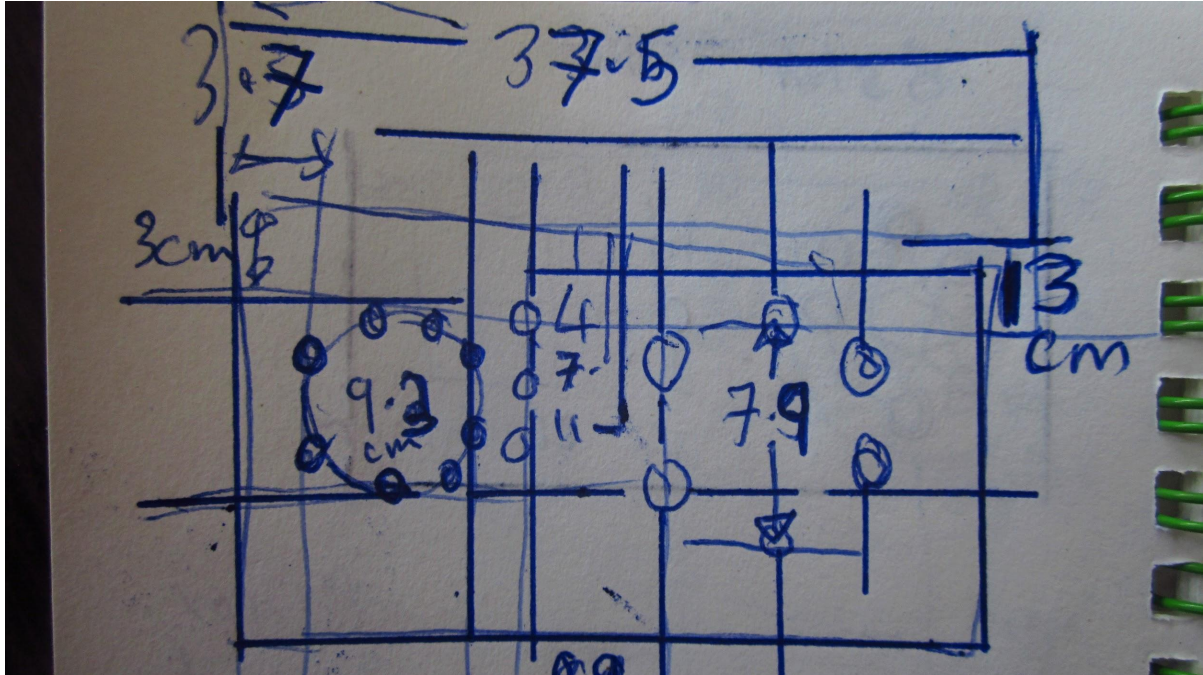


FIGURE 4: Notebook sketches of distances (Image: Author)

The above image, a notebook sketch made by the author, shows a working diagram used in the placing of holes in the control panel of the Bingo-Splicer. The numbers represent the distances to be measured but also, interestingly, have been adapted, where possible, to include prime numbers. This is reflected in the video clip of the finished artefact (Snake-Beings, 2018D) which generates prime numbers between 0 and 100 and displays them on a primitive dot matrix display. It is one of the many sketches and working diagrams produced as a side product of manufacturing the device and although the purpose was purely functional I have found that there is also a working through of aesthetic ideas that have found their way into the finished artefact. In this way, I find that there is a cross-over between the functionality of the technical sketch and more abstract sketches and compositions which evoke intuitive and subjective responses. Perhaps this is because, when making, using and observing the sketches, there is a part of me which disengages the dichotomy that separates art and technology and the notebook sketches become viewed as objects of creative-technology: entanglements between human and technology.

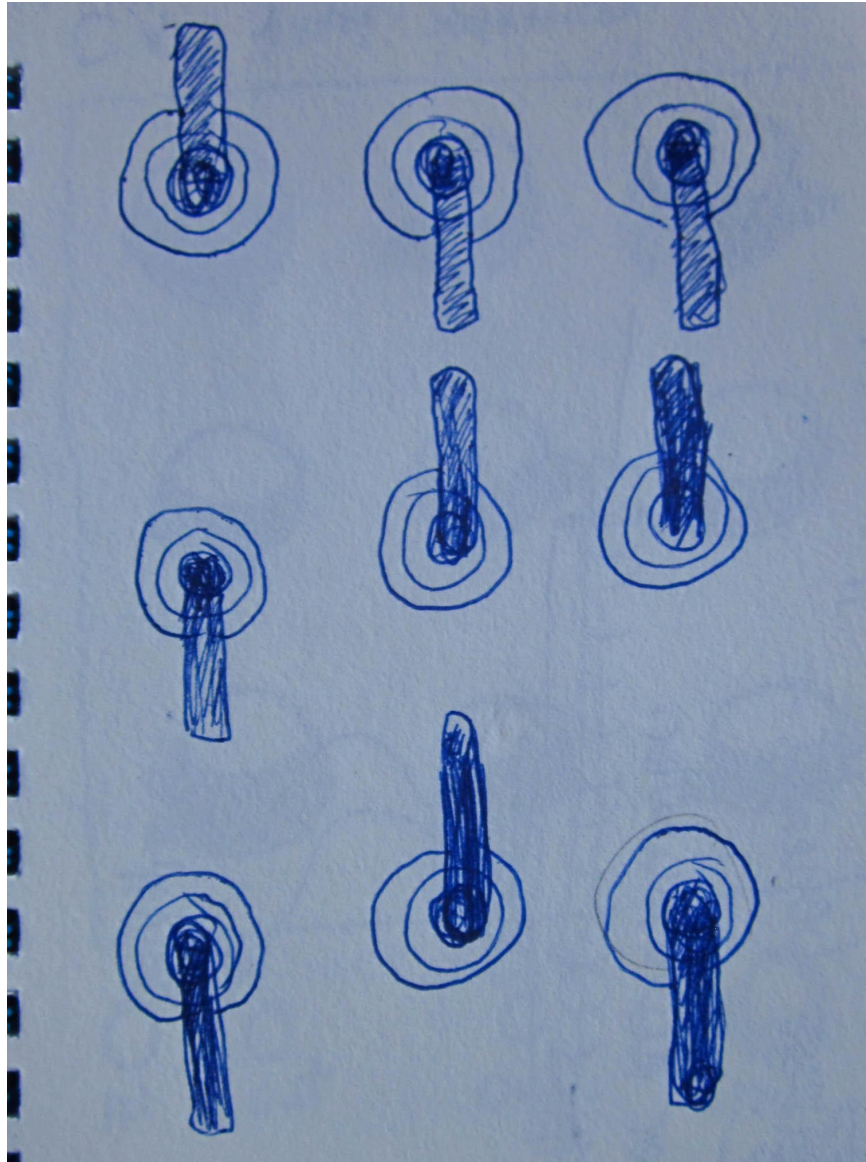


FIGURE 5: Functional switch diagram which create visual motifs in operation of the 9 step sequencer (photo by author)

The image above depicts a sketch made in my notebook of nine switches used in the *Bingo-Splicer* design. In the above sketch I was interested in the clearance space necessary for the positioning of the switches and the way in which this would affect the operation of the switches if placed too closely. I find the positions and shapes made by the switches of particular interest and it was this image which prompted me to include visual artworks, influenced by the working diagrams, in the final exhibition. Whilst the intention of the drawing was initially as a design sketch for potential layouts for the control panel, for me the drawing symbolises a cross-over between visual art and functional design. Whilst making the sketch I realised that the positions of the switches held an aspect of visual signalling: an unconscious, tacit understanding, that material objects hold the potential for influencing living entities; operating beyond the simple functional qualities assigned to them by their human operators. For me, the sketch is suggestive of a techno-animist current: that the images and materials of the switches are unconsciously influencing my practice at a level of material intelligence. This initial sketch has led to the practice of producing new sketches which experiment with the representation of functional aspects of technology: incorporating programming flow charts, circuit diagrams and schematics used in my practice of building and programming functions into the electronic circuits used in the *Bingo-Splicer*; as visual works which blur the borders of function and aesthetic: technology and art. Observing these diagrams as artefacts, and as objects of expression in themselves, interests me because of the way they

have come into existence as by-products of the main intention of making the Bingo-splicer artefact. These sketches are left-over remnants from the processes of design, made as supports for the human designer to imagine what the switches would look like in their various positions. Not designed to be shown to anybody else, these drawing have been produced in a different way to something that is intended for display: the engagement between the human drawing and the materials of the paper and pen has been intended as an extension of thinking processes; the actual image is redundant beyond that function - except as an indicator of material agency.

One place where material engagement is most emphasised is in the space of the workshop, a space where many of the ideas extend their materiality from brain via notebook to actual artefact.

Case study two: Workshop

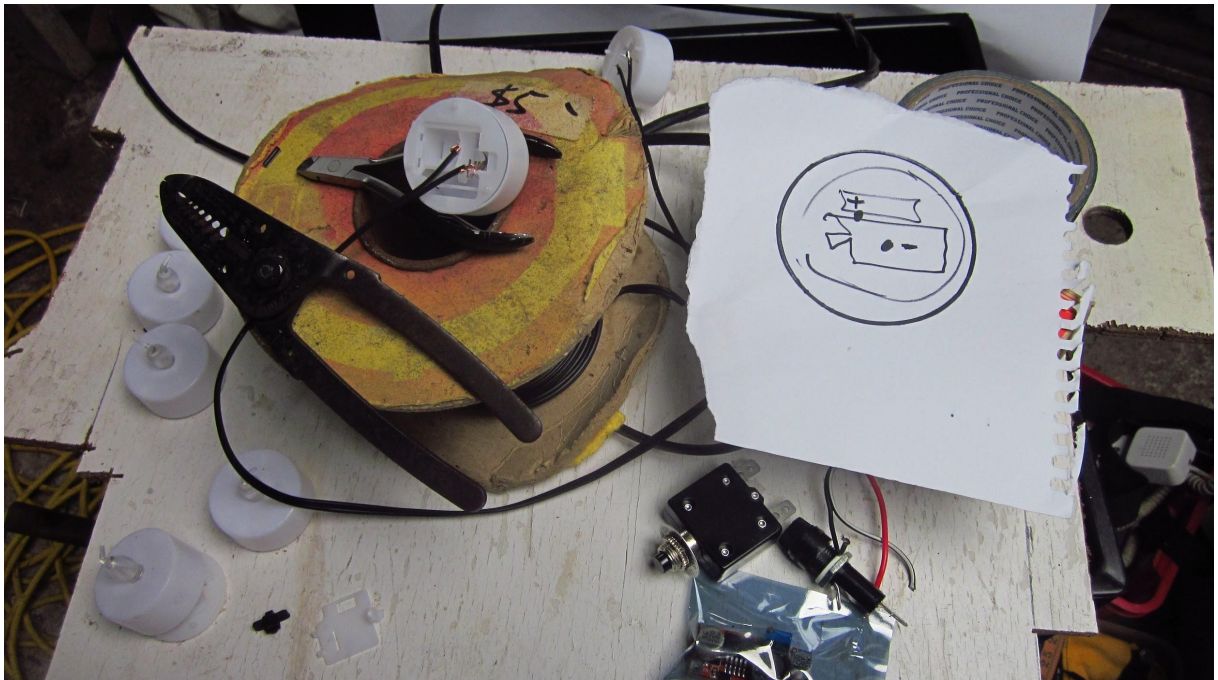


FIGURE 6: Wiring diagram and tools in the workshop.

The workshop is a space where the placement of objects occurs as a result of complex interactions and engagements between the human and materials. Tools are left at places which are convenient for use and sketches are made on whatever scraps of paper happen to be around. Within the workshop the physical placement of tools, sketches, objects, components and materials is ephemeral and constantly changing: just as thoughts come and go. The diagram, seen on the right of the image above, functions to illustrate the correct wires to connect from an electric candle used in a shrine I was making at the same time as the Bingo-Splicer. It has its own significance amongst the other objects but I also find that, if viewed out of its functional context, there is an abstract and indeterminate appeal to the shapes and lines created by as a by product of a practical support for ideas. For me I find that the 'accidental indeterminacy' which occurs once the diagram is removed from its functional context crosses boundaries between art and science. The function of the sketch is situated within the technical process of making, but once this process has finished and the wires have been soldered, the sketch shifts from being a functional object to being just another scrap of paper lying around the workshop: an abstract indeterminate object made without any apparent function in mind.



FIGURE 7: An assemblage of workshop actants, tools and components (Photo: Author)

Since my practice is situated in the intersections of technology and art, complexity and messiness seem an inevitable part of the process – as evident from the variety of complex processes occurring in the workshop in the image above. Often there are several projects in process and this increases the complexity of the influences which the objects exert. One great aid in assisting the process is the ability to leave objects where they are at the end of a making session: providing a continuity which would be less defined if the space had to be cleared and stored away at the end of each visit. Inevitably there is a dynamic between messiness and continuity, with the force of objects assisting in both clarity and clutter of the mind. In this way, the workshop can be seen as part of the extended agency involved in the processes of making: as such its space suggests a messy, haphazard and indeterminate process; filled with chance accidents, errors and multiple actants in the form of materials, tools and resources. My personal experience of making, and perhaps a common experience, is that of failure: broken and dysfunctional technologies and complex on-going extended processes; whereby I am engaged in an unscripted, improvisational ‘dance’ between intention (the vague impression of what it is I want to make) and

material agency (what it is that the materials seem to ‘want’ to make). The workshop provides the space between mental ideas and material manifestation where it often appears that technology and materials are either fragmented, broken, in a state of repair, abandoned or slowly assembling themselves through a complex and indeterminate process which can only be articulated through the performance of making. This suggests further studies which are beyond the scope of this article: visual ethnographies which use timelapse photography to capture these interactions between human and materials; observations made which do not interfere with the intuitive processes of making; and comparisons of workshop situations where either continuity or cleanliness are emphasised, such as necessary in temporary or mobile workspaces, small or extremely large spaces where objects can remain for weeks before having to be moved. Another function of the workspace is as a storeroom for the accumulation of future materials and the constant process of shifting affiliations between objects as they are shuffled and arranged through complex interactions with humans. I am reminded of the practices of the Surrealists and Dadaist, who adored the accidental and seemingly random connections between objects, as Comte de Lautréamont famously inspirational quote reads: “as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table”, suggesting a life of materials which goes beyond our usual expectations.

Case study three: Material artefacts

Within my own practices the phrase ‘without conscious effort’ has a long history, as a process in which it seems artefacts emerge as if ‘found’. This process includes the acknowledgement of chance discovery of discarded objects, such as recycled and redundant technologies and the ‘error’ of broken technologies, revealing other more interesting and ambiguous functions. Artefacts also seem to emerge from complex material processes which are ‘messy’ and difficult to keep track of, suggesting that objects exhibit qualities of non-human consciousness.



FIGURE 8: Micro-cassettes used in collecting 'found sounds' and street recordings

My ongoing practice of collecting street recordings, on the magnetic micro-cassettes seen above, has played an important role in providing materials for electronic sculptures. The tapes have been recorded over a number of years travelling in europe, middle-east, Mexico and australasia and can be listened to on the online archive (Snake-Beings, 2018C). The method of recording these tapes has been quite simple, if I hear a sound which I like I will, if possible, record it: usually in a way that will not interfere with the production of sound, whether it is made by human, object or machine. In this way, the sound recordings have been collected as a result of haphazard, accidental and chance operations. Whilst these recordings do not follow any structured ethnographical methodology, they do represent a personal documentation of the aural sensory experience of movements through various territories and are used as in the Bingo-Splicer as the raw sounds which are fragmented and re-arranged.



FIGURE 9: detail of bingo-splicer showing audio inputs and outputs (Photo: Author)

The above image is a detail from the finished artefact of the bingo-splicer. On the right of the image is the headphone out and the seven sound outputs from the device, used to send the sound to seven different speaker systems located around the room of the gallery. These are located around the central volume control. There are also seven sound input connectors which allow a variety of devices to add sound to the mix. The processed sound consists of sliced fragments of spoken word and environmental sounds from the micro-cassettes recorded in a variety of locations and cities. In this way, the sounds from diverse locations, timeframes and environments are fragmented and scattered across the space of the Hull gallery: repurposed into new configurations and sonic artefacts. This practice of reusing materials, in the form of 'found' sounds, represents an on-going process in which accidental chance is an important aspect

of the collection and ordering of materials: allowed to occur without direct interaction by a central human artist. At first this may sound odd, since the artefact is quite obviously made by human hand, rather than as a naturally occurring object, but the point here is that the device allows certain elements to circulate of their own accord: using arbitrary selections which occur in determining which fragments of sound are interlaced with each other. This improvisational dance of interactions between human and technology, forms the basis of a dialogue between the human maker and the material environment. The process permits and encourages the unconscious incorporation of material agency through loosening the human intention to direct every aspect of a particular artefact. Through this type of chance making we engage in a ‘messy’ and indeterminate process. In my own practice I describe this process as an engagement with ‘objects found without conscious effort’, since my experiences have shown me that human intention is limited in its agential power over the material environment: meaning, more simply, that I often start with the intention to build something which, through the process of making, becomes something else: through errors and accidental outcomes the materials have their own intention or agency.

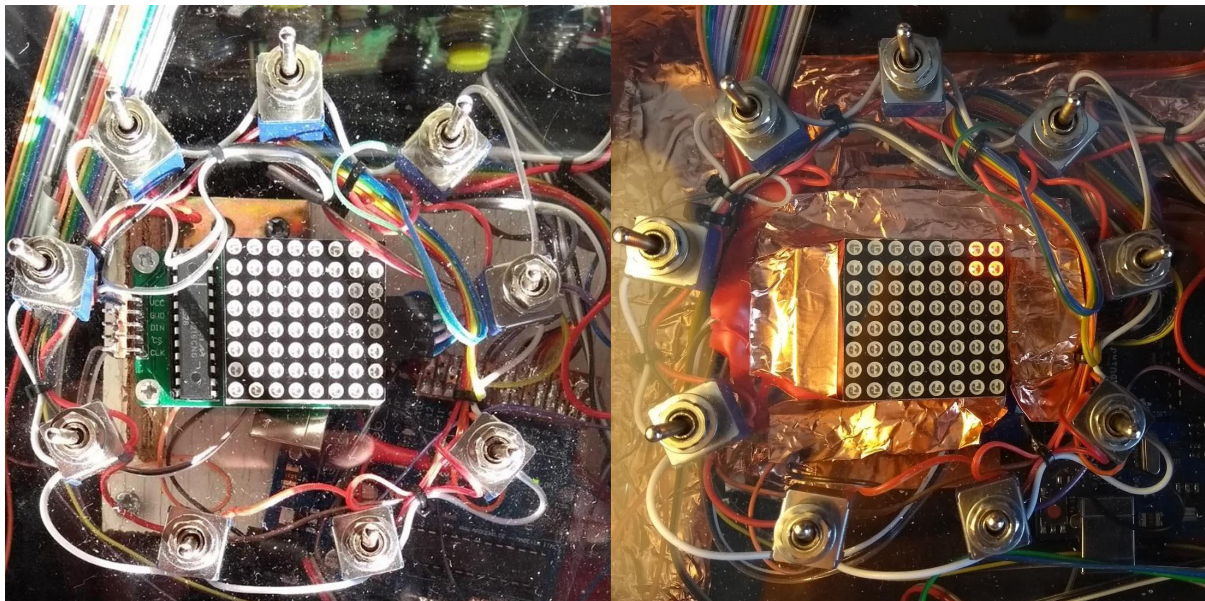


FIGURE 10: Circular pattern of switches developed in parallel to the development of ideas (Photo: Author)

In looking at the above photograph as an object of visual ethnography it displays an attitude of ‘openness’ towards the workings of technology. The visual use of the wires and connectors are both haphazard and composed – presenting a ‘messy’ method of making which incorporates transparency to allow the ‘mess’ to be seen. This attitude can be traced to a DiY ethos, whereby knowledge of processes are made visible within artefacts as signs for other makers. DiY maker-culture, in this way, focuses on producing work for other makers to appreciate: less concerned with consumption by a passive audience, it is the imagined community of makers which are best equipped to be able to hear the kinds of signals and ideas which are communicated through materials. In this way, the artefacts function as an interpellator which signal from maker to maker the possibilities of making; with a close attention given to the ability of materials and processes to ‘speak for themselves’. The idea that materials can be given a voice, or can be included as active agents in the artefacts suggests that an almost animist form of material intelligence is once again being acknowledged.

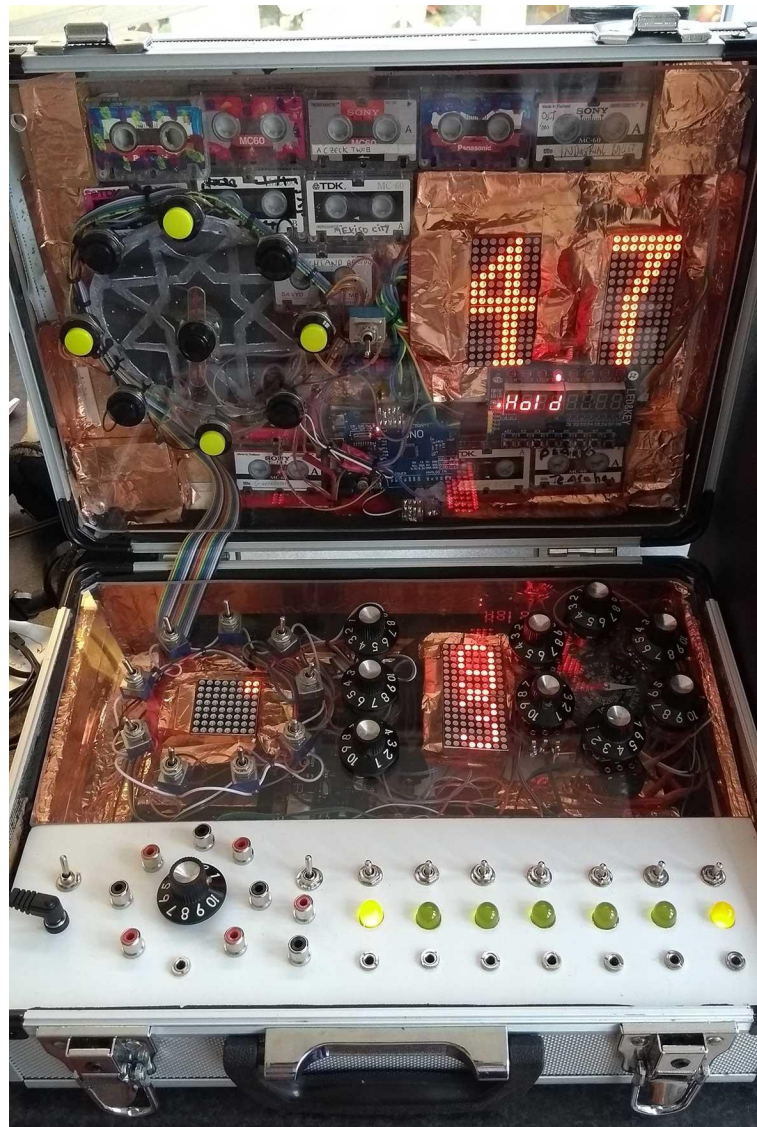


FIGURE 11: 'Finished' electronic audio artefact made by author (Photo: Author)

The construction of the Bingo-splicer artefact, shown above, has been examined throughout this article in its various stages and processes of being made by the author. It is difficult to say whether the artefact is 'finished' or whether the process will continue. The *Bingo-Splicer* remains a complex evolving machine, seemingly emerging from a process of making in which its functions have often been indeterminately 'cobbled together' without a clear view of an end product. The form of the artefact, as well as the recordings made with the device (Snake-Beings, 2018A), reflects its process: messy, indeterminate and haphazard. Listening to the recordings resembles the multiple agents contributing to the project: fragments of voices from diverse sources which combine within a rhythmic structure, just as the multiple components of the device are contained within the case of artefact. It can be said that my experiences of 'making something' have resulted in a material mess. With several months to go before the Hull exhibition my ideas have shifted multiple times, mistakes have been made, fixed and diverted and I am unable to keep up with them within the scope and timeframe of this article. Errors and mistakes are part of the process whereby my own human intention has been diverted through the 'improvisation dance' with the material environment. I have attempted to engage in a process of capturing the tacit

knowledge of the maker, with partial results. It is as if only “parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies... [and that] if they are then this is because they have been distorted into clarity” (Law, 2004, 2). Clarity is not something we associate as a necessary aspect of art: it is often the indistinct and ambiguous which keeps us looking and wondering about the world. When art is combined with science there is space for this ambiguity to infect some of our notions of technology: making us wonder if we really can control the world with science; with an exclusively human intention. I believe that this ambiguity is an inevitable part of the process of attempting to capture, within a linguistic framework, the entangled tacit knowledge of the maker, knowledge which is part human and part material. From a science view, the device, as it stands, reflects its components as potentials which have yet to be ‘made into something’: that have yet to be utilised into some form which serves a useful or recognisable purpose. From a art view, the object is an open-ended comment on our relationship with machines and the life of technology beyond human control. So far the machine has been used as a film prop in a video documentary attempting to capture my creative processes called ‘Ritual Remnants’ (Snake-Beings, 2018E). The title ‘Ritual Remnants’ describes the artefact as a left-over object, a by-product of a performative event, which acts as a placeholder for what has passed. In the documentary it suggests that the artefact serves its purpose as a supportive role for a particular consciousness to take place. This differs from viewing knowledge in terms of information that we can more easily share through words or images: consciousness represents a complex assemblage of ways of thinking and acting which need to be experienced; just as the experience of making can put one in close contact with materials and the various forces which they exert. The particular consciousness that the *Bingo-Splicer* artefact has supported, in this case, is that of an engagement between human and materials in which a consciousness of techno-animism has been the guiding principle of the maker. Techno-animism is both expressed and contained within the artefact of the *Bingo-Splicer* as an ethos or state of mind, rather than a specific set of beliefs. This has proven much more difficult to capture, as John Law says:

if much of the world is vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn’t really have much pattern at all... how might we catch some of the realities we are currently missing? (Law, 2004, 2).

This relates to my own feeling, that the process of making is an attempt to capture an “elusive” reality which has yet to be defined in material form. Making is a performative act, a process rather than an end result. Out of the “vague” and “indistinct” forms of materials the maker is hoping to be able to “catch” hold of something. This has been the aim of this article, to capture some of the “slippery [...] ephemeral, elusive or indistinct [...] realities” (Law, 2004, 2) of making. This reality has presented itself as a series of snapshots and sketches held together by a consciousness of material agency, supported by the materials of the notebook, workshop and artefact. The aim has been to turn the artefact into a useful ethnographic object through the human intention of the researcher. Of course, the artefact might not have had that specific intention: it might have had other ideas which remain elusive to its human partners.

Links to visual and audio material

Snake-Beings, E (2018A) Bingodisiac device raw. [Sound files]. www.circuit47.com
 Snake-Beings, E (2018B) Cledon device recordings. [Sound files]. www.circuit47.com
 Snake-Beings, E (2018C) Various street recordings 1990-2018. [Sound files]. www.circuit47.com
 Snake-Beings, E (2018D) A game of Bingo using prime numbers generated by the Bingo-Splicer machine. [video files]. <https://youtu.be/rAC0ZoUZRes>
 Snake-Beings, E. (2018E) Ritual Remnants: A portrait of Emit Snake-Beings [video files]. <https://vimeo.com/287933092>

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PEOPLE IN TRANSIT: EXPANDING THE SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL FRAMES OF THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETINGS

Justin Raycraft, *McGill University*

ABSTRACT

This photo essay comprises a series of black and white photographs taken in transit. The photographs were taken in airports, planes, busses, railway platforms and underground metro stations during the photographer's journey to the 2017 American Anthropological Association (AAA) Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Taken in high contrast, the images presented here reflect the photographer's acute awareness of the sharp conceptual boundaries that separate the scholarly arena located inside of the venue's walls from the social, political, economic and spatial worlds that exist outside of them. The essay provides a visual narrative of the photographer's observations of people and places while on route to the event. In doing so, it highlights everyday lived experiences that occurred "just before" the official onset of the event, while "on the way" to the venue. Through careful attention to shadows and viewpoint, the photographer subtly anonymizes subjects, maintaining the fabric of their relationships as passing strangers. While at once a reflexive commentary on the temporal and spatial frames of conferences, the essay also documents the diverse ways that people temporarily dwell in ephemeral travel spaces.

KEYWORDS

Street Photography; Visual anthropology; Photography; Space; Place; Politics; Conference Travel; Reflexivity; Aesthetics; Experience

Bio

Justin Raycraft is Ph.D. student in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University, with interests in environmental anthropology and photography. He holds a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and a Richard Salisbury Award from the Canadian Anthropology Society.

People in Transit

Victor Turner (1967) famously mobilized the phrase 'betwixt and between' with reference to the liminal phase that people must enter into in the context of culturally-sanctioned rites of passage. Since then, the concept of 'liminality' has continually resurfaced throughout anthropological scholarship. Anthropologists themselves often embody the concept in their professional lives. Life for anthropologists often oscillates between field sites and academic institutions. Scholarship on the concept of "the field" suggests that field sites are not necessarily bounded locations, but are porous places of mind, continually constructed and reconstructed in abstract manners that are congruent with current ways of thinking (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The dichotomy between "being there" and "not being there" does not effectively encapsulate the ways in which anthropologists may find themselves carrying out their everyday lives at home, while their minds drift back to their field sites and the people with whom they have lived and shared experiences. There is liminal space, both physical and mental, between the home and the field, and these spaces are ripe for anthropological inquiry.

How are anthropological conferences situated in relation to this complex dialectic between "being there" and "not being there?" When I travel to conferences, I am often struck by the similarities between them regardless of place of implementation. Certainly, there are contingents of scholars who present on issues relevant to the local ethnographic context. For the most part, however, the overall structure of conferences from one locality to the next is the same.

When I step inside of a conference venue, usually a luxury hotel, I often feel like I have entered into a conceptual space that is no longer contextualized in relation to the phenomenology of everyday life outside of its walls. This distinction is particularly pronounced for graduate students like myself who are reliant on public transit for economic efficiency.

One of my interests when I travel to conferences is getting a glimpse of the observable aspects of everyday life happening in public spaces outside of the venue. While a few days in a new city is certainly not enough time to engage in ethnographic fieldwork, it is enough time to acquire an initial sense of place, and the urban lifeways that animate it. Places provide backdrops to experiences that are subjectively linked to people's ways of seeing. To fully engage with the layers of meaning and significance that are woven into the social fabrics of places, one would need to conduct long-term ethnography. However, Luvaas (2018) has argued that "ethnographers do not hold a monopoly on seeing richly" (191). Street photographers, he argues, also share an anthropologically-sophisticated way of seeing people and places, and "demonstrate the potential of photography for enhancing a particular kind of experience of place." (Luvaas 2018, 190). Luvaas (2018) goes on to explain that street photography can "convey a mood" and "enrich a theme" (Luvaas 2018, 190). I follow Luvaas's (2018) sentiments here, suggesting that street photography can offer a particular lens for expressing an experience of place. Perhaps street photography and ethnography are not mutually exclusive, and can articulate with each other in artful ways.

As Rose (2007) shows, academics are coming to realize the important role that visual media can play in capturing and conveying the 'texture' of places (see also Merchant 2012, 220). I am particularly inclined towards photography as ethnographic method. Photography provides both a mechanism of documentation and of reflexive commentary on one's own subjective experiences.

Building from these themes, my intentions behind this photo essay are threefold. The essay comprises a series of high contrast, black and white photographs taken during my trip from Montreal, Quebec to the American Anthropological Association (AAA) annual meeting in Washington, DC in November 2017. The essay is first an expression of my experience of place through the lens of street photography. By carefully considering shadows and viewpoint, I subtly anonymize photo subjects to maintain the nature of our relationships as passing strangers. Second, in highlighting lived experiences that occurred "on the way" to the venue, I provide a commentary on the politics of conferences. I attempt to broaden the spatial and temporal frames of the AAA annual meeting by drawing attention to everyday experiences that occurred "just before" the start of the meeting, outside of the venue's walls. Third, I use the theme of 'people in transit' as a metaphor for the liminal lives of anthropologists, who must regularly negotiate spaces that are both 'betwixt and between.' In doing so, I demonstrate, following Luvaas (2018), a potential application of street photography within the anthropological project.



PHOTO 1: View of Montreal Trudeau International Airport from the runway



PHOTO 2: En route from Montreal to Toronto



PHOTO 3: Sunrise over Toronto Pearson International Airport



PHOTO 4: Departure gate at Toronto Pearson International Airport



PHOTO 5: Glimpse of a passing traveler.



PHOTO 6: Waiting in the shadows.



PHOTO 7: Boarding at daybreak.



PHOTO 8: Passengers silhouetted on the flight from Toronto to Baltimore.

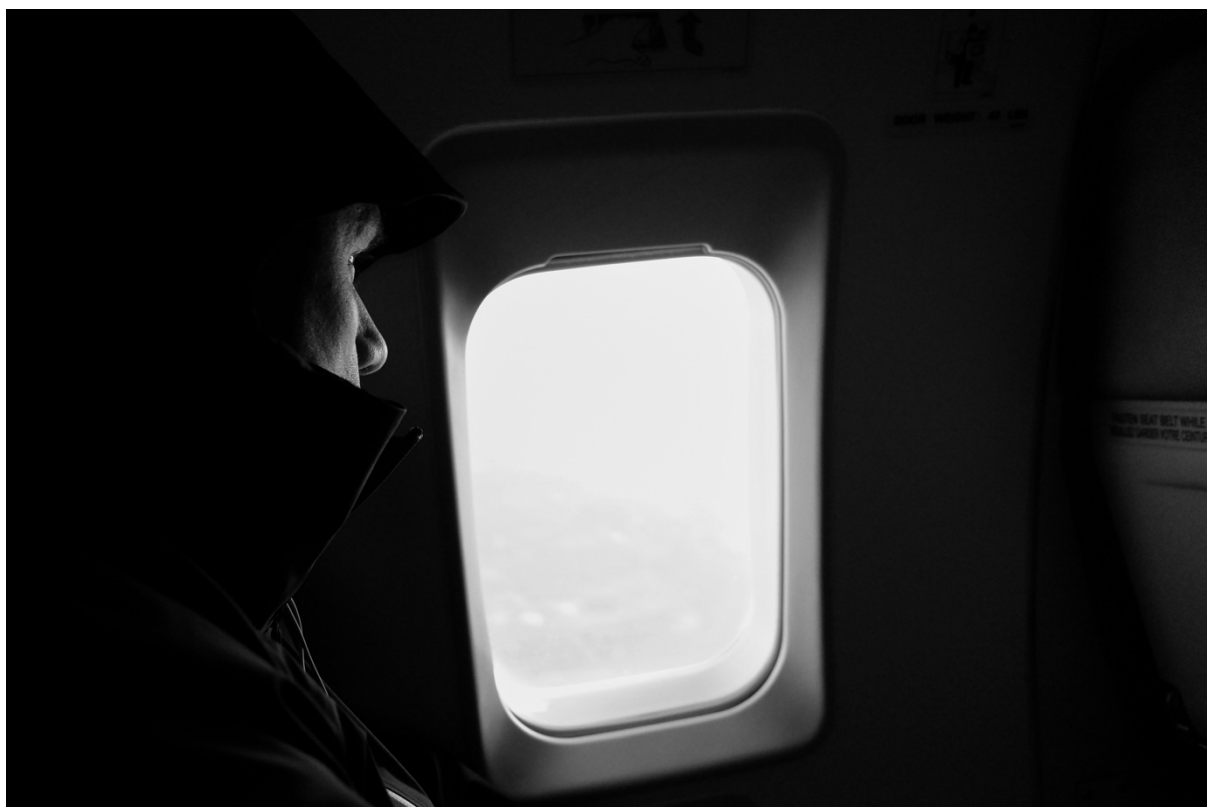


PHOTO 9: Thoughtful gaze.



PHOTO 10: Dozing on the bus from Baltimore. Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport to Greenbelt Metro Station.



PHOTO 11: Reflexive shadow on the Greenbelt Metro railway platform.

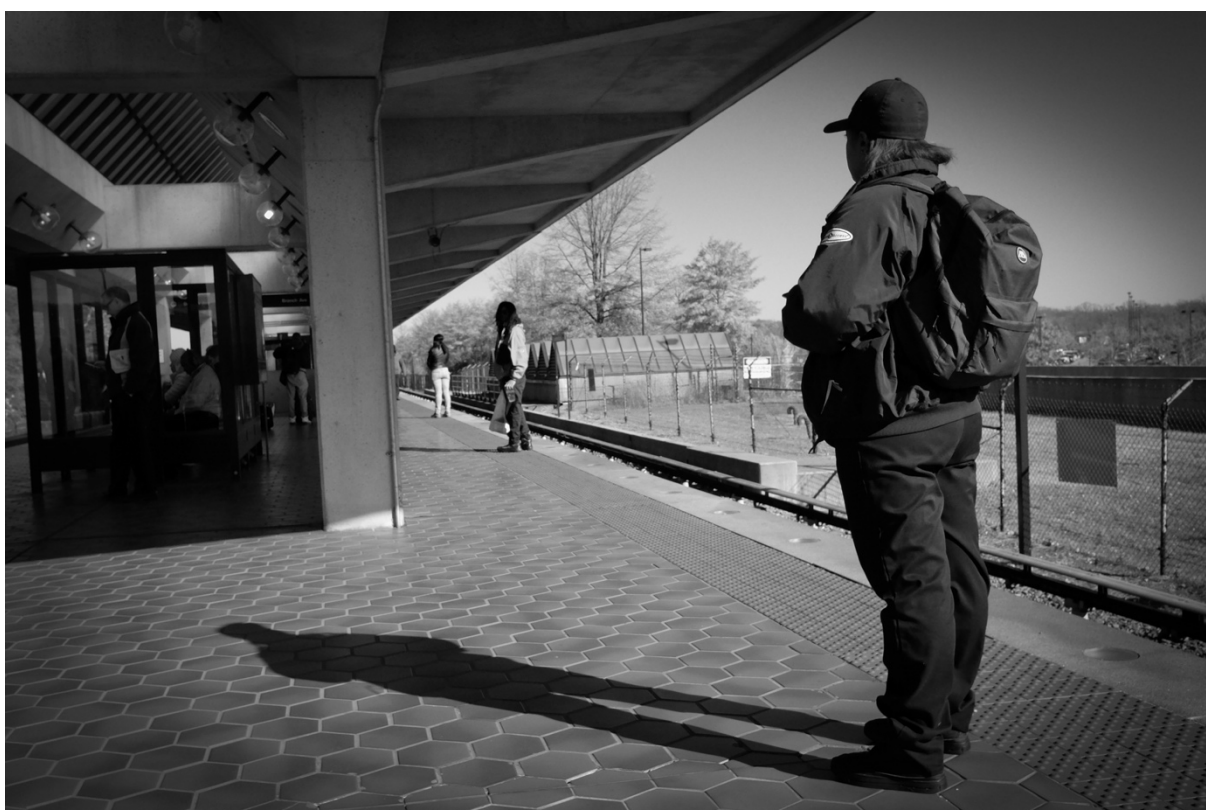


PHOTO12: Shadow self.



PHOTO 13: Catching the Metro at Gallery PI-Chinatown.



PHOTO 14: The escalator at Woodley Park-Zoo Metro Station.



PHOTO 15: The final leg of the journey. Looking upwards towards the exit of the metro.

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LONG WA: THE LAST OF THE HEADHUNTERS

Thomas Martin Ronald Groves, *Webster University Thailand*

ABSTRACT

Long Wa, North East India, bordering with Myanmar, home to the last living Konyak Headhunters of Nagaland; older tattooed men, surrounded by green prosperous forests, living a traditional way of life which is quickly disappearing.

The photography works, titled “Long Wa: The Last of the Headhunters”, is a series of images documenting the last living Headhunters of Nagaland. The medium used was intended to capture a moment in time to help preserve a disappearing culture. Conflicts caused by globalization, rapid development and government pressure within Nagaland are causing the Headhunters’ way of life to disappear.

This work experiments with High Speed Sync (HSS) studio strobe photography. This technique permits the introduced light to expose the subject while allowing the background details to be naturally lit by the sun. HSS photography adds a strong sense of presence and importance to the photographic subject. Using professional portable studio allows the photographer to bring studio quality lighting to the amazing outdoor settings.

Exploring the jungles and mountains of North East India in search of the feared tattooed men of the Konyak tribe I soon found respected warriors concerned with their disappearing culture and lost stories. With the use of HSS photography I was able to showcase the environment of their living conditions, while simultaneously allowing my subjects to stand proudly in my composition. This work is not to be seen as photojournalism but rather as an experimental form of visual ethnography.

KEYWORDS

Konyak, photography, visual ethnography, India, headhunters

Bio

(<http://www.webster.ac.th/academics/faculty/faculty20.html>)

Thomas Martin Ronald Groves is a Webster University Media Communications lecturer, holding his BA and MA in Media Communications and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education. He joined Webster University Thailand as a fulltime instructor in 2009 and was recently awarded Sverdrup Global Teaching Fellowship to teach communication studies in Accra, Ghana. He teaches photography, digital production, advertising and communications theory. He is an avid photographer who enjoys traveling around the world documenting the beautiful and unique.

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Hunters

While the elder Headhunters are the highest regarded in the village the next tier are the village hunters. The images below showcase a small percentage of the village hunters. The hunters in my images are starting the day on their way to hunt or during the actual hunt.



PHOTO1: A master hunter prepares his morning tea. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 4, 2017



PHOTO 2: Two hunters share their muzzle loaded rifles to the author. Long Wa, Nagaland March 2, 2017



PHOTO 3: An elder hunter shares his traditional hunting outfit mid hunt. This outfit can only be seen on elder hunters. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 3, 2017



PHOTO 4: Son to the elder hunter in Figure 9 wears a more modern outfit seen on most younger hunters. The image was taken moments before a deer was shot. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 3, 2017



PHOTO 5: Many of the elder hunters do not spend as much time hunting in the jungles but rather collect honey from bee hives natural occurring in the forest. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017

Children

Children in Long Wa were naturally very curious of a foreigner walking around and taking pictures. To be respectful I communicated with the children's' parents prior to all photographs. Children are actively involved in household chores, watching over their siblings and learning their parents' trades.



PHOTO 6: A young boy poses for his first picture after working in the fields with his mother. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 2, 2017



PHOTO 7: Young boys playing with their toy guns and sling shots practicing to become hunters. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 8: Children gather in the village Morung¹ to watch the author use a camera. Long Wa, Nagaland..March 2, 2017

¹ Morung is a special building used for religious events, ceremonies and now often used for educating children on traditional ways of life.

Women

Women play a significant role in the Konyak tribes of Long Wa. They maintain the homes, raise the children, take care of meals for their families and are heavily involved in farming. While often not included in meetings I observed that most women held significant roles in the decision making process.



PHOTO 9: Konyak women wearing their traditional dress. The entire dress is normally only worn during ceremonies but often jewelry can be seen during everyday activities. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 2, 2017



PHOTO 10: A young woman looking outside of her home window. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017

Headhunters

A majority of the headhunters in the village made the effort to meet me while I walked around. They were curious about what I was doing in their village. Once a relationship was developed many of the elders wanted to share their stories. The headhunters can be easily recognized by their tattooed faces. A face tattoo symbolizes a successful headhunter. These tattoos carry great honour as they would have received these tattoos from the queen. The tattoos will be of a skull. The headhunter can receive a next level of honour with receiving a neck tattoo. After the sixth successful head removal they would receive their neck tattoo. The Naga Konyak elder headhunters will also wear an heirloom necklace made of brass. Each head on the necklace represents a human head taking during this ritual. It is important to note that while the ceremonial head and necklaces are not worn on a daily basis the spears and ear ornaments carry functional aspects to daily life.



PHOTO11: Konyak elder headhunter proudly wears his traditional outfit over his polo shirt. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 12: An elder headhunter stands in front of his home in traditional outfit. His home proudly displays the Gayal skulls that he has hunted over the years. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 13: Deputy Angh of Long Wa proudly stands in front of his home. All homes are built by the community. The larger and more complex the architecture signifies the more respect and appreciation the village holds for the owner. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 28, 2017



PHOTO14: The youngest headhunter of Long Wa. Now in his 60s, he still wears his traditional symbols on modern materials. His spear replaced with a spear headed cane and brass necklace replaced with gold coloured embroidery. While his attire might not look as fierce this Konyak headhunting elder is still active with hunting in the wild. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 3, 2017



PHOTO15: Konyak headhunter waiting for tea to boil. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 16: Known for his hunting of Gayal and large birds this headhunter stands proudly in front of his hunting wall. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017



PHOTO17: Konyak headhunter out for a morning walk. Long Wa, Nagaland. March 1, 2017



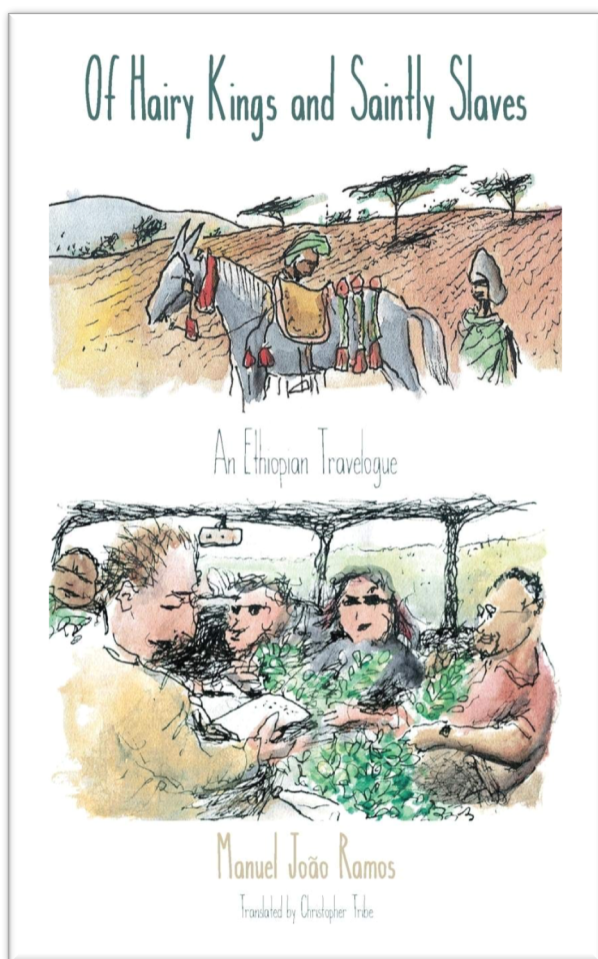
PHOTO18: A man, nearly blind and deaf, makes the necklaces of the Konyak headhunters. While these necklaces can be found for sale in other parts of Nagaland only a few are allowed to make and maintain the warriors' necklaces. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 19: A close up of a necklace being maintained. The man's hands in the picture show his years of dedication to his craft. Long Wa, Nagaland. February 27, 2017



PHOTO 20: A child plays in the mountain range of Long Wa, Nagaland. March 2, 2017



Manuel João Ramos

Of Hairy Kings and Sainly Slaves. An Ethiopian Travelogue

Canon Pyon, Herefordshire (UK), Sean Kingston Publishing, 2019

<http://www.seankingston.co.uk/publishing.html>

A lost sketch book on a Portuguese castle rampart left Manuel João Ramos bereft, and the impulse to draw deserted him - but his first trip to Ethiopia reawakened this pleasure, so long denied. Drawing obsessively and free from care, his rapidly caught impressions convey the rough edges of the intensely lived experiences that are fundamental to the desire to travel. For the travel sketch is more than a record or register of attendance ('been there, seen that'): it holds invisibly within itself the remnant of a look, the hint of a memory and a trace of an osmosis of feelings between the sketcher and the person or objects sketched. Less intrusive than using a camera, Ramos argues drawing comprises a less imperialist, more benign way of researching: his sketchbook becomes a means of communication between himself and the world in which he travels, rendering him more human to those around him.

As he journeys through the Ethiopian Central Highlands, collecting historical legends of the power struggles surrounding the arrival of the first Europeans in the mid-sixteenth century, he is drawn to the Portuguese legacy of castles, palaces and churches, near ruins now, though echoes of their lost splendour are retained in oral accounts. Excerpts from his diary, as well as journalistic pieces, share the conviviality of his encounters with the priests, elders and historians who act as custodians of the Amhara oral tradition. Their tales are interwoven with improvised, yet assured, drawings, and this informality of structure successfully retains the immediacy and pleasure of his discovery of Ethiopia. It also suggests the potential for drawing to play a more active part in anthropological production, as a means of creating new narratives and expositional forms in ethnography, bringing it closer to travel writing or the graphic novel.

Manuel João Ramos is a professor of anthropology at ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon, and an active illustrator and essayist.



Pietro Meloni

Antropologia del consumo. Doni, merci, simboli

Roma, Carocci, 2018

http://www.carocci.it/index.php?option=com_carocci&task=schedalibro&Itemid=72&isbn=9788843090969

Nelle scienze sociali gli studi sul consumo sembrano essere attraversati da una tensione costante tra due poli interpretativi: quello che vede le merci alla base di un processo di alienazione nelle pratiche quotidiane e, all'opposto, quello che privilegia l'analisi degli scambi simbolici, che definiscono il consumo come costruzione di legami sociali e attività di tipo rituale. Gli oggetti ci rendono schiavi o, al contrario, ci liberano da numerose costrizioni? Attraverso gli oggetti ci isoliamo dal mondo o, diversamente, li usiamo per costruire relazioni sociali? Lo shopping è una pratica di tipo edonistico o un modo per manifestare l'amore verso i propri cari? Nel testo si insinua il dubbio che il consumo non si esaurisca nell'acquisto ma si configuri piuttosto come una relazione – una sorta di opening gift – dove diversi soggetti si vincolano tra di loro in un rapporto che assume forme sempre più complesse di definizione del sé.

Il volume illustra gli ambiti di ricerca, le teorie e i concetti dell'antropologia del consumo in una prospettiva etnografica.

Pietro Meloni insegna Antropologia del consumo all'Università di Siena.

THE WINTER WOOD: WILD BOAR HUNTING IN “VAL DI MERSE” (TUSCANY, ITALY)

Pietro Meloni, *University of Siena (Italy)*

ABSTRACT

This photo-essay is the product of a period I spent in the winter of 2017 as a photoethnographer accompanying hunters on their outings in the woods of the Merse River Valley (Val di Merse).

Iesa is a small community in the Municipality of Monticiano, in the heart of the Val di Merse, a large wooded zone between the provinces of Siena and Grosseto in southern Tuscany. It is made up of 6 small, linked villages, considered individual nuclei by their residents, little villages-within-a-village. Some of them are groups of buildings centered around what were once farms, typical of sharecropping-era Tuscany, separated from the agglomeration of houses that more closely resembles a village.

The 2011 census reported 246 residents, with one surely noteworthy statistic: 18 different nationalities are represented. In fact, the population is made up of Italians, Thais, Ukrainians, Americans, Albanians, Bulgarians, Swiss, Brazilians, Germans, Brits, Kosovars, Moroccans, Moldavians, Macedonians, Poles, Romanians, Russians and Serbs.

In Iesa, as in many other places in Italy, hunting is marked by a constant balancing of nostalgia for a lost past and a present in which hunting groups must rely on the participation of hunters from outside the area to continue their hunting activities, since none of the foreign-born local residents are interested in hunting or possess the requirements to practice it – a gun permit and a hunting license.

In Iesa, wild boar hunting serves to consolidate relationships between people and also to define their relationships with non-human elements: the territory and animals. This aspect emerges in familiarity with places, in place names, and in the care with which animals are “raised” in anticipation of being hunted. In the context of an inexorable process of depopulation of Tuscan villages and the significant changes brought about by the presence of migrants or immigrants, the practice of hunting – although often instrumentalized in arguments for a presumed continuity of territorial identity – needs to bring in “occasional” hunters from various parts of Italy who view hunting as a hobby; otherwise, local residents would not make up the number required to create a hunting group or team.

KEYWORDS

Wild Boar Hunting, Material Culture, Tuscany, Ethnography.

BIO

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Il bosco d’inverno

Nel testo *L’utopie de la nature: chasseur, écologistes et touristes* (1996), Sergio Dalla Bernardina dedica una lunga riflessione alla sofferenza del cacciatore contemporaneo, il quale spesso non esiste se non in relazione al passato: commemora un modello ormai scomparso che fa ponte tra l’attività venatoria di oggi, vista sempre più come qualcosa di amatoriale, e il suo antenato mitico, il vero cacciatore. Faccio mie queste osservazioni di Dalla Bernardina che ho avuto modo di riscontrare più volte a Iesa, piccolo borgo nel cuore della Val di Merse senese, luogo dove da alcuni anni conduco un’indagine etnografica sulle pratiche di vita quotidiana. A Iesa, infatti, la maggior parte della popolazione – e si tratta di un centinaio di persone in tutto – è legata alla caccia in maniera profonda:

l'hanno conosciuta attraverso i racconti di nonni e genitori, l'hanno frequentata fin da bambini come momento di coesione sociale fino a praticarla loro stessi appena arrivati in età per il porto d'armi.

All'inizio della mia ricerca non ero intenzionato a occuparmi della caccia come tema antropologico, le mie competenze sono troppo esigue sull'argomento. Dopo le prime interviste e dopo un lungo periodo di campo mi sono però accorto di come la caccia continuasse a emergere nei racconti degli abitanti del luogo, uomini e donne, che attraverso questo tema rievocavano un tempo perduto nel quale desideravano collocare la rappresentazione più "autentica" di loro stessi.

Ho avuto la sensazione che la caccia fosse non solo una tradizione venatoria ampiamente diffusa nelle zone boschive ma un complesso di pratiche immateriali che oggi, in una società completamente ricostruita – Iesa, con i suoi 246 abitanti, può contare ben 18 nazionalità diverse – può configurarsi come un patrimonio di cui avere cura, da conservare e tramandare. Certo, un'espressione del genere può apparire un ossimoro, dato che la caccia rappresenta certamente un argomento controverso, che chiama in causa politiche oppostive sulla gestione del territorio e sulla cura dell'ambiente, venendo spesso usata come elemento che evidenzia la barbarie del passato da espungere nelle società del presente. Eppure nei discorsi dei cacciatori o delle figlie o mogli dei cacciatori, l'attività venatoria è sempre in relazione alla conoscenza e alla cura del territorio, al complesso e delicato rapporto tra uomini e animali, dove non è mai dato per certo un vincitore e dove la vittoria dell'uno non è mai definitiva, perché deve preservare un equilibrio che permetta a entrambi di vivere in armonia. Al tempo stesso la caccia struttura i racconti delle persone, scandisce le fasi della vita, consente la socialità altrimenti difficile da mettere in pratica. È attraverso la caccia che i diversi interlocutori con cui ho avuto modo di parlare mi hanno raccontato le loro storie di vita; oppure a un certo punto le loro storie si sono intrecciate con la caccia, come se non fosse possibile separare il vissuto quotidiano dalla lotta per l'addomesticamento del territorio.

In questo modo Mario, partigiano della Brigata Spartaco Lavagnini, mi ha raccontato il suo incontro con un militare tedesco durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale:

Conoscete le Potatine? Lì, su in cima al cucuzzolo del podere della Rovinata, dove poi c'è l'imposto del Santo, lì dove c'è la fattoria. Dove spiana, quella era una posta fenomenale per cacciare le lepri.

Le lepri che venivano trovate nella parte che guarda Monte Pescine fin giù alla Merse, venivano trovate giù nel piano delle Potatine. Una mattina si arrivò lì, il capo caccia disse: "questa sarebbe una posta buona, perché le lepri passano di qui". Però di lì ci passavano anche i Tedeschi. Erano gli ultimi giorni, c'era ancora un po' a passare il fronte, però insomma, si disse "sarà meglio lasciarla vuota", perché era troppo rischioso. Io gli dissi: "quando si è lasciato vuota questa posta si può anche tornare a casa, perché tanto le lepri passano di qui, e i cani gli vanno dietro, e noi senza cani non si fa niente". Così dissi di andare a mettere le poste e sciogliere i cani.

Per tirar bene alla lepre bisognava stare sul ciglio della strada, ma lì sempre non ci potevo stare perché ci passavano i Tedeschi e i fascisti. E allora scelsi un posto nascosto, c'era un rientrino del bosco nel campo, che allora i campi non erano coltivati, c'era un cespuglio. Mi misi lì, dove potevo vedere bene il transito della strada e potevo vedere bene anche il campo, ma di lì però non gli potevo sparare alle lepri, era fuori tiro la posta, bisognava fare una corsa per arrivare nel posto ed aspettare che la lepre uscisse dal bosco per potergli sparare. Era questione di un minuto. E infatti la prima lepre che venne su dritta l'ammazzai, e ricorsi al boschetto a nascondermi. Parte un'altra canizza e quella non mi fece nemmeno alzare da sedere, prese su per l'argine del bosco, fra macchia e campo e quando mi arrivò a tiro gli tirai e l'ammazzai. [...] Nel frattempo, erano passate due o tre macchine tedesche, alcune di fascisti, un po' di transito locale, qualcuno in bicicletta. Poi riparte una canizza dalla parte delle Potatine e la canizza continuò, e pensai una "padellata", ed erano quasi le nove, e cominciava a fare caldo. Ero lì per alzarmi e piglia' le lepri che avevo cacciato per andare al ponte dagli altri, quando ti vedo la lepre uscire da sola nel campo... "Ora se mi muovo mi vede e va via... a correre non fo' in tempo, se passa anche a tiro lungo, al limite spreco una cartuccia". Così stetti fermo e quando capii che quella tanto non si avvicinava, feci una fucilata. La lepre ruzzolò, però si rialzò e andò verso il bosco. Mi misi a correre, ce la feci perché zoppicava e feci in tempo a tirargli.

Quando arrivai a scendere nella fossetta per prendere la lepre sentii una moto che arrivava da Petriolo e spoggettava lì all'imposto. Le moto dei Tedeschi si riconoscevano dal rumore, e quella era una moto tedesca... ed ora? a ritornare al bosco non facevo in tempo, a dirlo ci voleva poco ma a farlo? Infilo due cartucce corazzate nel fucile, a piombo grosso e in quel mentre la moto arrivò in mezzo alla strada a pochi metri da me, per fortuna c'era un tedesco solo. [...] Al che dissi: "se tu metti i piedi in terra e tu stacchi le mani dal manubrio la testa ti va nella fossetta di là", e così presi la mira. Quando mi vide prendere la mira, dette una sgassata... per arrivare alle Potatine ci mise... il tempo che misi giù il fucile era già arrivato alle Potatine e scompariva all'orizzonte... e dissi: "allora lo capisci l'italiano!".

Io ero renitente alla leva, perché ero venuto via l'8 settembre e non c'ero ritornato, sicché... allora per andare a caccia ci voleva il porto d'armi e una specie di lasciapassare scritto in italiano e tedesco nel quale era dichiarato che era assolutamente proibito cacciare ad una distanza inferiore dai cinquecento metri dalle strade transitate dai tedeschi, sicché ero in difetto su tutto.

Per Mario forse la storia avrebbe meno forza evocativa se distaccata dall'attività venatoria, perché gli permette di evidenziare una serie di competenze che sembrano direttamente connesse alla pratica del cacciare: un udito fino, capace di sentire ogni rumore e riconoscere le diverse sfumature dei suoni; la prontezza di riflessi, che gli permette di armare il fucile in fretta e, infine, il coraggio di guardare in faccia il nemico-preda.

L'attività espressa nella memoria lunga permette inoltre di pensarsi in una continuità genealogica che oggi viene utilizzata come elemento distintivo tra i cacciatori autoctoni e quelli che provengono da altri luoghi. Uno dei temi ricorrenti è infatti legato alla memoria, a come un tempo la caccia fosse motivata principalmente dalla necessità di procacciarsi la carne, altrimenti difficile da ottenere in altro modo, e per questo motivo ritenuta più etica e sostenibile. La caccia è rievocata come momento di aggregazione di una cultura della fame dove il rapporto tra uomo e ambiente è così delicato da mettere in campo complesse competenze tecniche e culturali. A ragione Tim Ingold sostiene, portando come esempio la Lapponia, che

anche se gli animali appartengono alle persone, come ci si aspetta in una società pastorale, gli animali erano comunque praticamente selvatici e venivano radunati con tecniche simili a quelle della caccia pre-pastorale. Questo mi portò a pensare che né la caccia né il pastoralismo si possono comprendere in termini puramente tecnologici o ecologici, ma solo come congiunzioni storicamente specifiche di relazioni di produzione tecnologiche e sociali (Ingold 2001: 45).

È infatti dentro queste relazioni, dove la caccia ed il pastoralismo assumono contorni meno netti di quanto siamo abituati a pensare, che le persone costruiscono dei rapporti di dipendenza con il territorio, circoscrivendolo attraverso le pratiche di domesticazione che consentono poi la messa in pratica dell'attività venatoria. Il rapporto con gli animali selvatici è infatti spesso caratterizzato da una vicinanza che tende a familiarizzarli; li si nutre, fino a guadagnarsi la fiducia dell'animale, che tende ad aver meno paura degli umani, ma poi li si considera nuovamente selvatici, nel momento in cui apre la stagione di caccia.

In questo particolare contesto, la caccia al cinghiale assume un valore quasi mitico, sia nella memoria delle persone, sia nella riattualizzazione nel presente:

Faccio una caccia sola, quella al cinghiale. Mi ricordo che ero piccolino, mi' babbo non aveva il porto d'armi però la caccia al cinghiale era qualcosa di aggregante, perché così in certi periodi c'era anche il pezzo di carne.

Prima i cinghiali venivano spezzati con la pelle e tutto e si portava a casa, era più pelo che ciccio e mia nonna levava le setole con la spazzola scaldata e con la cotenna ci faceva i fagioli, perché non buttava via nulla. Oggi invece il cinghiale viene pulito dai cacciatori e i pezzi sono tutti pronti. Oggi è aggregante, di compagnia, però non è più come una volta. Prima ci si accontentava di ammazzare un cinghiale ogni due giorni, ora ne vogliono almeno dieci a giornata, altrimenti non sono contenti e poi non vengono. Col tempo si cambia, io me li sognavo la notte, oggi invece gli ridarei la via per poterli ricacciare, perché bisogna accontentarsi. La persona che mi ha portato ad avere la passione, la voglia, è stato Remigio. Era un personaggio, da piccolo mi ha fatto tirare la prima fucilata, mi ha insegnato a caricare le cartucce, io ci passavo tanto tempo quando ero libero dalla scuola, mi ha trasmesso questa passione che mi è rimasta. Poi l'ambiente ti dà il resto. Se da piccino hai questa cosa, allora è logico che la passione si tramanda. Io ho imparato tante cose con Remigio, con mi' babbo, con gli amici.

Mi ricordo i primi tempi, io non avevo i cani e andavo al cinghiale, allora era ancora possibile, era legittimi sparare a terzarole, che è più facile che con la palla. Alla prima cacciata arrivò un cinghialeto, a me mi sembrava enorme, ma era un porchetto di venti chili, tirai la prima fucilata e aspettavo che cascasse e invece nulla, allora la seconda fucilata a terzarole e lo presi, gli ruppi le gambe ed è stato il primo cinghiale che ho ammazzato.

I cinghiali hanno una tempra incredibile, in capo ad un anno ricostruiscono il callo e vanno avanti anche senza una parte di bocca, una zampa, perché le terzarole non erano mortali, quindi se non gli spari da vicino molte volte il cinghiale sopravvive.

Qui c'è un aneddoto per capire la differenza tra oggi e vent'anni fa: prima gli animali c'erano venti, trenta animali ad annata, negli anni '80 si ammazzò sessantasette cinghiali ed è stata una cosa eccezionale. Oggi ci sono squadre che ammazzano sessanta cinghiali in un giorno. Oggi i cinghiali non scappano più davanti all'uomo, sono più domestici, temono di meno l'uomo.

Prima la giornata era dura, oggi la caccia è molto più facile, ci sono più cani, più persone, ci sono le radio... si è un divertimento, oggi però è più semplice. Prima i forestieri erano guardati con diffidenza, oggi purtroppo del paese siamo rimasti cinque o sei, in una squadra di sessanta persone gli iessatoli saranno il 10%, la gente smette perché invecchia, ed i giovani non cacciano. Noi non siamo una squadra con tanti extra provincia perché per la caccia al cinghiale ci vuole persone che ci sta tutto l'anno, la caccia dura tutto l'anno, perché bisogna curare il territorio, come per l'alluvione di settembre, perché se non rifacevamo le strade non ci passava nessuno, né cacciatori, né fungaioli, né turisti. Io ho rifatto lo stradello che va alla Farma, altrimenti non ci passava più nessuno. Quando finiranno i cacciatori del cinghiale finiranno anche le strade e gli stradelli perché nessuno sentirà la necessità di sistamarle. Per qualcuno siamo incivili "ammazzanimali", ma se i cacciatori smettono di accudire il territorio sparisce molta sentieristica e molte strade a sterro perché dopo l'alluvione del 24 agosto le strade a sterro non erano più percorribili e se oggi lo sono molto è dovuto ai cacciatori.

Il racconto di Michele ci aiuta a comprendere il punto di vista di chi vive la caccia come forma di appaesamento, in senso demartiniano (de Martino 1977), presso i luoghi nei quali è cresciuto. Ho avuto modo di constatare come la conoscenza del territorio in ogni suo angolo sia una componente fondamentale per la messa in atto della caccia. Non solo i sentieri, le strade a sterro ma i torrenti, i letti dei fiumi, la macchia stessa sono conosciuti dai cacciatori con un tale livello di incorporazione da permettergli di muoversi in totale sicurezza. Questa sicurezza mi è spesso stata restituita come possibilità di muoversi nel bosco anche di notte, con il solo aiuto della luna, e di sentirsi molto più sicuri nel bosco che in città. Questo rapporto con la natura, come ha avuto modo di scrivere Maurice Godelier, si fonda su una profonda conoscenza del territorio, sul calcolo delle possibilità e sulle strategie di azione che si possono operare per avere la meglio sulle altre forme di vita che abitano il bosco:

Lo sfruttamento di qualsiasi risorsa presuppone dunque una certa conoscenza della proprietà degli "oggetti" e delle loro relazioni necessarie in determinate "condizioni", nonché l'impiego di know-how che "utilizzi" la necessità di tali relazioni per produrre un risultato atteso. L'attività produttiva è dunque un'attività "regolata" da "norme" tecniche che esprimono le necessità alle quali essa deve sottomettersi per dare un risultato. Le tecniche di caccia, per esempio, implicano una conoscenza minuziosa delle abitudini degli animali cacciati, dei loro rapporti con la fauna e la flora dell'ambiente, in breve una "scienza del concreto" che poco rientra in quella mentalità "prelogica" che fino ad ieri si attribuiva ancora ai cacciatori primitivi (Godelier 2009: 76).

La caccia è un momento magico, che divide l'attività del quotidiano da quella rituale. Le conoscenze tecniche che ne permettono la riuscita sono messe in atto seguendo modalità ben consolidate, ripetute nel tempo, incorporate al punto da essere ritenute naturali. Ci sono cacciatori che hanno un'esperienza di oltre cinquant'anni e per i quali la caccia è un modo di pensarsi nel mondo, una sfida che attendono e ripetono ogni anno, seguendo regole solo in parte scritte perché negoziate necessariamente con l'ambiente circostante. Ognuno di essi ha aspettato con ansia l'occasione di uccidere il primo cinghiale, quello che per lungo tempo avevano atteso, sognato, desiderato. Ancora Sergio Dalla Bernardina ci racconta il rapporto tra il cacciatore e il "suo" cinghiale:

Per essere precisi, il cacciatore non evoca l'apparizione di una bestia qualsiasi, ma della sua bestia. Questa sfumatura, nella logica del racconto, non è senza importanza, poiché permette di far passare l'uccisione per l'accettazione di un dono spontaneo. È la preda, in ultima analisi, a scegliere il "proprio" carnefice. E a ben seguire il ragionamento del cacciatore, in fondo, non possiamo che convenire: se le regole del gioco sono state rispettate, se le offerte hanno raggiunto l'ammontare richiesto, la "sorpresa" che scopre davanti al mirino è proprio per lui. Se l'è meritata. E del resto, perché parlare di sorpresa? Chiamiamola piuttosto atto di riconoscenza. E nel doppio senso della parola: consapevole del debito che ha contratto, l'animale "riconosce" il "proprio" cacciatore e gli offre spontaneamente la propria vita e la propria bellezza" (Dalla Bernardina 2003: 215).

La cura del territorio viene ricompensata attraverso il dono della vita dell'animale, quello a noi destinato, che si manifesta quasi inaspettatamente. L'orecchio teso a cogliere ogni minimo movimento, nel silenzio più assoluto della posta – il cinghiale ha ottimo udito e olfatto.

Ogni cacciatore ricorda il primo cinghiale. Ricorda i dettagli, l'età, la situazione e, anche se con il tempo i ricordi possono affievolirsi, i cinghiali non diventano mai un numero attraverso il quale elencarli. Bisogna ricordare la storia, la situazione, il peso dell'animale, esporre quando meritevole – ossia particolarmente grande –, la testa o le zanne. È qui il trofeo non è soltanto la messa in mostra della bravura del cacciatore, è anche un atto di memoria dovuto alla vittima, che verrà ricordata attraverso i racconti familiari, quelli con gli amici e gli altri cacciatori.

È ancora attraverso le parole di Mario che l'importanza della prima cacciata prende forma:

Il primo cinghiale... allora qui ce n'erano pochissimi di cinghiali, quando si arrivava ad ammazzarne una quindicina, a venti ci si arrivava poche volte, e dico in un anno intero. Ma a quel tempo si cacciava spesso con quelli di Casale, e dalla parte della Maremma a quel tempo ce n'era un po' di più.

La caccia cominciava quando avevano tracciato. Allora, prima, se era possibile, si tracciava. Tracciare vuol dire cercare le orme del cinghiale, soprattutto quando è piovuto, perché si trovano più facilmente e si può vedere dove hanno attraversato lo stradello, in quale appezzamento di bosco sono entrati, circondare e ispezionare il perimetro di questo appezzamento, per vedere se erano o meno usciti.

Quando si arrivava all'ultimo appezzamento, dove si trovavano le tracce di entrata ma non di uscita, era segno che il cinghiale era ancora lì, o che le tracce non erano state viste dal "traccino", perché altrimenti il cinghiale doveva essere ancora all'interno del perimetro. E allora si metteva caccia, e se non si "padellava" si chiappava il cinghiale.

Noi però non si faceva normalmente, eravamo al massimo una decina, con il nostro capo caccia che era il padre di mia moglie, e spesso si cacciava con quelli di Casale. Quando andavano a tracciare il cinghiale, quelli di Casale ci facevano il fumo di segnalazione, accendendo il fuoco di frasche verdi che facevano più fumo, in cima ai colli verso Casale.

Quando vedevano il fumo, prendevamo fucili e cani e, a piedi, via per la Farma, un'oretta e mezza ed eravamo lì. Se avevano tracciato vicino ci aspettavano lì, se invece avevano tracciato molto distante, ci lasciavano uno e quando noi arrivavamo ci portava dal gruppo. Quel giorno, quando vedemmo il fumo, si andò, si arrivò lassù e si chiese dove avevano tracciato, ed era in cima al monte. Si fece la cacciata al monte, e si prese due cinghiali, ed uno lo presi io.

Poi si andò alla Botte, verso Civitella, a piedi da Iesa, e se ne prese due anche lì. Quindi quel giorno si ammazzarono quattro cinghiali. Poi però c'era da portarli a spalla fino a Casale, che da soli non andavano. Gli si legava le gambe su un legno, ed uno davanti, uno di dietro, lo si portava a spalla, dandoci il cambio. Quello fu il primo cinghiale che ho preso.

La carne poi si spartiva. Prima di tutto allora non si buttava via niente, si buttavano via soltanto gli unghioni, le unghie, nemmeno tutte le setole, perché quelle delle femmine, quelle migliori, del collo, si prendevano per darle ai calzolari che le mettevano in cima allo spago per legarci le tomaie.

Si pulivano, era un'operazione che quando si cacciava di frodo si faceva direttamente nel bosco, e poi si dividevano per quanti si era. All'epoca si faceva la parte anche per i cani migliori, pelle compresa, che poi a casa gli si levava il pelo ed era buona per farci i fagioli lessi. Si mangiava tutto, ora invece si butta via la pelle, le interiora, la testa... si butta via tutto. Chi ammazzava il cinghiale gli spettava il coscio, ma poi [questa usanza] si tolse perché era sempre una lite sul tiro e su chi lo aveva ammazzato, e capitavano troppi battibecchi. Quindi si tolse. Alcuni hanno mantenuto certe divisioni, chi prende il fegato, chi prende la testa.

Con il tempo alcune usanze sono state cambiate, in particolar modo quelle legate alla spartizione perché finivano con il creare forti disuguaglianze all'interno del gruppo. Chi era più abile, infatti, prendeva sempre il coscio, la parte più pregiata del cinghiale, mentre agli altri toccavano le parti di minor pregio. In comunità molto piccole come Iesa, poi, il rischio era che tra i cacciatori ci fossero molti parenti per cui una famiglia poteva ottenere molti pezzi di carne ed un'altra rimanere con poco o niente. In questa idea di socializzazione la caccia è divenuta col tempo governata da una logica del dono e della redistribuzione dove la spartizione non segue più gerarchie determinate da chi ha ucciso l'animale ma lo si divide in parti uguali per tutti. Al cacciatore vanno in premio le interiora, dono che sembra rimandare la caccia al suo carattere più ancestrale, quando gli organi interni degli animali avevano poteri soprannaturali.



PHOTO 1: Iesa, frazione del Comune di Monticiano nella provincia di Siena (Italy).



PHOTO 2: Cacciatori si ritrovano al mattino vicino alla piazza del paese.



PHOTO 3: Cacciatori.



PHOTO 4: È facile che a Iesa la gente dica di essere per la caccia. Molti dicono anzi che la caccia, e soprattutto la caccia al cinghiale, è qualcosa che si ha “nel sangue”. La caccia a Iesa è passione, memoria, relazione di intimità con il proprio territorio e sfida con la natura e la sorte. Ma è anche prova di forza, perché andare a caccia è faticoso: ci si alza presto la mattina, si cammina a lungo, al freddo, spesso si saltano i pasti o si mangia quando si può e, alla fine, non è detto che si riesca a catturare qualcosa.



PHOTO 5: La composizione delle squadre di caccia è affidata alla sorte.



PHOTO 6: Cacciatori nel bosco.



PHOTO 7: Cacciatore.



PHOTO 8: Cacciatori nel bosco.



PHOTO 9: I cani sono i principali alleati del cacciatore.



PHOTO 10: Anziano cacciatore di Iesa con uno dei suoi cani.



PHOTO 11: Cacciatori nel bosco.



PHOTO 12: Il capocaccia definisce le posizioni della posta.



PHOTO 13: La caccia è fatta di grandi attese in silenzio.



PHOTO 14: Alcuni anziani guardano alla caccia con la nostalgia di chi vede una tradizione che cambia. Sono cacciatori che hanno iniziato a cacciare spesso quando erano ragazzi, talvolta ancora minorenni, che per avere il loro primo porto d'armi avevano bisogno della firma del genitore.



PHOTO15: I cacciatori ricordano con soddisfazione che, quando si prendeva un cinghiale, prima di rientrare in paese scaricavano i fucili per comunicare a tutti il buon esito della battuta: a ottocento metri dal paese si faceva una sparatoria per dire che si era ammazzato il cinghiale, perché prima c'erano i fucili a bacchetta, che quando li caricavi rimanevano carichi, non era come oggi con la cartuccia.



PHOTO 16: Quando se ne ammazzava uno era una festa grande, perché la carne era alimento raro e prelibatissimo: non era mica come ora che si va a bottega e si compra tutto. Prima, quando io ero piccino e dicevo “mamma ho fame”, lei mi dava mezzo salsicciolo e c’era anche famiglie peggio, che già mezzo salsicciolo era tanto...



PHOTO 17: Oggi la caccia al cinghiale è cambiata. L'uccisione di un esemplare non è più un fatto eccezionale, perché negli anni il numero dei capi è cresciuto molto. Questo ha alimentato soprattutto il turismo venatorio, con squadre di cacciatori, provenienti perlopiù dal Nord Italia, che giungono a qui ogni stagione di caccia.



PHOTO 18: Finita la battuta di caccia, gli animali vengono portati in un capanno per essere macellati.



PHOTO 19: I cinghiali uccisi vengono macellati su un tavolo di legno.



PHOTO 20: Pesatura della carne.



PHOTO 21: La giornata si chiude con il registro di caccia, dove vengono inseriti i nomi dei cacciatori e gli animali uccisi.

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