



SESSION ABSTRACT

Digital Visuality

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Visual communication and visual culture have been a research focus in social and cultural anthropology for quite some time (e.g. Banks & Ruby, 2011). With the advent of digital media and technologies, internet-based devices and services, mobile computing as well as software applications and digital platforms new opportunities and challenges have come to the forefront in anthropological research, education and communication of visuality (e.g. Pink, 2011). Digital media technologies have become ubiquitous means of visual communication, interaction and representation. For anthropology and its subdisciplines, such as digital, media and visual anthropology, it is of particular interest how people engage with digital media and technologies, how “the digital” is embedded in everyday life and how it relates to different social practices and cultural processes in human societies. By considering changing sociocultural, political and economic contexts and through ethnographic fieldwork, a continuously growing number of anthropological projects is aiming for a better understanding of contemporary digital phenomena (e.g. Horst & Miller 2012).

This session contributes to these endeavours by inviting papers (in English or German) that focus on the visuality and visual aspects of digital life and culture. Papers could present ethnographic studies and discuss some of the following questions:

- What does “the digital” mean for visual anthropology and/or the (interdisciplinary) relationship between anthropological subdisciplines and other visual research fields?
- How does visual anthropology provide new perspectives on digital visuality?
- How do specific conceptual approaches contribute to the analysis and understanding of digital visuality (e.g. ritualization, performativity, representation, material culture, practice theory)?
- What theoretical concepts and analytical categories of sociality can be used to study (differences of) visual culture?
- How does digital visuality co-constitute and mediate cultural performances and rituals?
- How do digital platforms and social media services, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat, and related practices constitute and change (visual) communication?
- How does digital visuality impact and redefine ethnographic research (e.g. research techniques, tools, ethics)?
- What are possible futures for digital visual anthropology and ethnography? How does digital visuality impact and redefine ethnographic research (e.g. research techniques, tools, ethics)?
- What are possible futures for digital visual anthropology and ethnography?

SESSION SCHEDULE

Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 2 | Room 4

Philipp Budka: *The Anthropology of Digital Visuality: Notes on Comparison, Context and Relationality*

Harjant Gill: *Introduction to Multimodal Anthropologies*

Petr Nuska: *“Changing the equipment or changing the perspective?” - Exploring Film and Video Approach in Visual*

Ethnography

Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 3 | Room 4

Katja Müller: *Contemporary Photography in India - Post-media Aesthetics, Traditional Art and Economic Professionalism*

Uschi Klein: *What Does a Photograph Really Tell Us? The Photography of Young Male Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

Fatma Sagir: *‘We Can See Your Hair, Dina!’ Muslim Female Embodiments of Digital Visibilities*

Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 4 | Room 4

Nadia Molek: *Argentinian Slovenians Online: Facebook Groups of Slovenian Descendants in Argentina as Mediators of Identity Performances and Rituals*

Daria Radchenko: *Digital Anthropology and/or Digital Traces: Seeing the City Through the Eyes of Locals*

Elke Mader: *Mediating the Krampus. Digital Visuality, Ritual and Cultural Performance*

SESSION PAPERS

The Anthropology of Digital Visuality: Notes on Comparison, Context and Relationality

Budka, Philipp (Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vienna, AUT)

Sociocultural anthropology provides theoretical approaches and concepts to comparatively study local life-worlds, to contextualize cultural meaning, and to (re)consider human/non-human and socio-technical relations that have been emerging with digital media technologies (e.g., Horst & Miller, 2012; Moore, 2012; Whitehead & Wesch, 2012). Ethnography, as methodological tool, allows for investigating digital practices and processes by considering the above aspects (Pink et al., 2016). For anthropology it is of particular interest how people engage on a day-to-day basis with digital media and technologies, internet-based devices and services, mobile computing as well as software applications and digital platforms.

This paper discusses from an anthropological perspective and through ethnographic examples digital visuality as a contemporary phenomenon and as a constituting feature of new patterns of visual communication and culture. Digital media technologies and mobile networked devices, such as smart phones, have become ubiquitous means of visual production, communication, and representation (e.g., Gómez Cruz et al., 2017). Moreover, digital platforms and social media services, such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, are utilized to share and consume visual artifacts. Constituting and changing thus communicative practices and visual culture alike. Consequently, these transformation processes provide new challenges and possibilities for the anthropological and ethnographic study of the visual (e.g., Pink, 2011).

This paper argues that an anthropology of digital visuality has to consider anthropology's key constitutive features and tools such as comparison, context, and relationality. However, it also needs to critically reassess these methodological tools and theoretical conceptualizations in the light of digital transformations and entanglements.

References

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Introduction to Multimodal Anthropologies

Gill, Harjant (Towson University, Towson, USA)

Last year, American Anthropology Associations' flagship journal *American Anthropologist* rebranded its Visual Anthropology section as "Multimodal Anthropologies." This change marks an important shift in how the journal and the discipline engages with and circulates research that transcends text-based articles, and involve more visual and sensory forms of knowledge production. As we have elaborated in our introductory article "Multimodality: An Invitation," "these changes suggest a new framework, multimodal anthropology. . . that works across multiple media. . . [and] also engages in public anthropology and collaborative anthropology through a field of differentially linked media platforms" (Collins, Durington & Gill 2017).

As one of the co-editors of "Multimodal Anthropologies," in my presentation, I will offer an overview of the new and dynamic ways in which we (at *American Anthropologists*) have strived to expand the traditional definitions of visual anthropology to consider anthropological scholarship that engages with various non-traditional, non-linear, interactive visual mediums include gaming, app development, graphic novel, virtual reality 360 video. I will share what we have learned in the last two years during our tenure as section co-editors, mainly how employing a more multimodal approach to research and publication encourages us to refine the existing parameters for knowledge production and circulation. I will also draw on my own experiences of making ethnographic films in India for the last ten years, and more recent forays into VR 360 video storytelling to talk about how my research and practice has expanded to incorporate a more multimodal approach.

"Changing the equipment or changing the perspective?" - Exploring Film and Video Approach in Visual Ethnography

Nuska, Petr (Durham University, Durham, GBR)

This paper explores recent trends in the involvement of using film and video in ethnographic research. In the last decade, there has been a significant methodological shift in visual ethnography, most notable driven by technological advancement in the production of two traditional motion picture media – *film* and *video*. In the digital era, the boundaries between these two media are slowly dissolving. In 2018, for instance, there are numerous smartphones capable of capturing video in 4K resolution, a feature of a very few high-end digital cinema cameras on the market just a decade ago. It is becoming possible to achieve the powerful film effect of shallow depth of field and high dynamic range on these smartphones, devices that, at least originally, were primarily constructed for communication rather than for taking motion-picture footage. Despite the fact that distinguishing the terms film and video in the contemporary world has, therefore, very little practical meaning, visual-anthropology literature still operates with both as if they were two distinguishable concepts (for instance, scholars talk about *observational cinema* rather than observational video; on the other hand, they recognise the idea of *participatory video* rather than participatory film). The paper will argue that both film and video represent concepts that are shaped by specific technological and aesthetic aspects from the past, are bound with different film-production practice as well as different ways of doing visual-ethnography.

Keywords: visual anthropology, visual ethnography, methodology, ethnographic filmmaking, film and video, documentary

Contemporary Photography in India - Post-media Aesthetics, Traditional Art and Economic Professionalism

Müller, Katja (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Halle, GER)

Photography has turned digital. A million selfies a day underline the programmatic claim of the end of the photographic age, or at least a shift in photography's meaning from identity and memory towards communication and experience. Visualities of photographs, that used to be framed and influenced by its form of exposition and materiality of the carrier material, are now supposedly only determined by the calibration of the screen, the adaptability of the website and photo-editing software.

In contemporary Indian photography, we can observe these developments, too. Traces of a 'Camera Indica' remain, but for a new generation of urban Indian photographers trying to make a living from photography outside the art market, it forms an ambient noise rather than a dominant trope. Today, aspirational photographers – often driven by a 'wanderlust' – take classes in digital photo composition and software-based postproduction. Professional photographers make a living through catering to hybrid forms of wedding and high gloss photography, or through adopting their work to the preconditions of online platforms and social media.

We find here strong forms of post-media aesthetics, where affective and emotional dimensions start to reemerge at the cost of cognition and interpretation. Economics and global technical developments determine the aesthetic expectation of contemporary Indian photography. Yet, the artworks of Rajkamal Aich, himself a successful infographer/photographer/art director for Times of India and TV18, guide a complexification of these seemingly linear developments. His combination of photography and drawing with the help of software require both his studies at one of India's leading art colleges as well as a proficiency in digital art and appliances. His work at TV18 and Times of India demonstrates a combination of affective with contextual dimensions. And his personal dealing with materialities while working in the digital realm demonstrate that digital visualities in Indian photography are not strictly post-media, but demonstrate that Indian photographers situate themselves creatively and successfully between conventional art, post-media aesthetics, and economic restraints.

What does a photograph really tell us? The photography of young male adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Klein, Uschi (University of Brighton, Brighton, GBR)

Two starlings on a concrete bench, the left one is slightly cropped from the frame, both positioned in relatively close proximity to the foreground; a cropped part of the façade of a high-rise building, a typical sight in an urban environment; a profile view of a badger surrounded by greenery, possibly an animal sanctuary; a colourful detail of a graffiti wall; a wet, brown leaf on the pavement, almost unrecognisable because of how it has wilted; a round stained glass window inside a church, part cropped, giving the impression it was captured in a rush; and a cloud formation on a sunny day. These are all examples of photographs

taken by four young male adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the sphere of their everyday lives. Their photographs indicate there is a wide range of activities designated as 'photo-worthy', but what is not evident by merely looking at the photographs is what they encompass beyond what is framed and depicted on the screen.

Photography involves decisions, interventions, negotiations and actions that the photographer makes in order to convey a particular message. The image-maker guides the viewer to focus on some features rather than on others to tell a story from a particular vantage point. These stories are people's personal encounters and depict ephemeral moments lifted out of ordinary time in order to emphasise an idealised sense of their special value; they illustrate the 'being there' and the 'having-been-there'. Photographs resemble a great flood of everyday visual expression, in which people seek to uncover patterns, regularities, series and dynamic sequencing. By revealing and exploring repetition through photography, people make sense of their everyday life, which in itself is filled with repetition on a frequent basis. Within the recent scholarship on everyday photography, however, little attention has been paid to the photographic practices of people with ASD, who are among many marginalised groups whose photography has not been explored. This article addresses this shortfall and begins to nuance the picture of everyday photography by investigating the photographic practices of four young male adults with ASD.

Drawing on my qualitative, image-based research into the everyday photographic practices of young male adults with ASD, this paper turns to phenomenology to examine their unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world as expressed through the medium. After all, for James it is not just a photograph of a sky formation on a sunny day; for him, "it looks like snow but it's sky from a different angle". Hence, going beyond representation, the paper discusses photographs linked to broader changes in, and inclusions of, social identities and cultural practices and how these have shifted in relation to everyday life.

'We Can See Your Hair, Dina!' Muslim Female Embodiments of Digital Visibilities

Sagir, Fatma (Freiburg University - Cultural Anthropology, Freiburg i.Br., GER)

A Muslim woman's body is part of the traditional dichotomy of the private versus the public where she ideally shields hers from the male outsider's gaze.

Digital Culture has changed this drastically. The cultural and religious practice of covering a woman's body, the lack in public display of affection between men and women, the general understanding to keep private matters private eg. in the house, in the family, between the partners, is shifting away from traditional ideas among Muslims globally. Much has changed since the arrival of the #Mipsterz and their notorious viral video from 2013, when young Muslim women of colour moved along the beats of Hip Hop-moghul Jay-Z's 'Somewhere in America' in an urban setting. While #Mipsterz was a watershed moment, Social Media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube offered a safe space for young Muslim bloggers to explore questions of identity, visibility and belonging through lifestyle blogging, which entails fashion. Modest Fashion's (Lewis 2015) rise as a billion dollar market began along the emergence of Modest Fashion bloggers.

This paper reflects on the idea of Modest Fashion and the (bodily) practice of posing, focusing on young women's strategies to make themselves visible through digital culture while negotiating the idea of modesty that entails traditionally the 'invisibility' of women. I look into the shape and colours of Modest Fashion within the context of posing, focusing mainly on my case-study of British-Muslim blogger Dina Tokio.

Furthermore, this paper shares my research frame and the key questions I focus on, such as:

What role play their dressing and overall outer appearance challenging common images of Muslim women and misconceptions about them? How do they use their bodies against a general understanding of the invisibility of a Muslim woman's body in public space (hence the 'prohibition' of figure-hugging clothes)?

Argentinian Slovenians online: Facebook groups of Slovenian descendants in Argentina as mediators of identity performances and rituals

Molek, Nadia (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, ARG)

The aim of my paper is to present an anthropological inquiry about the uses of the social media Facebook in the identity configurations among the Slovenian descendants in Argentina. Facebook groups became a useful platform to gather Slovenian migrants and descendants of migrants from different migrations flows to Argentina in a context of globalisation and local association weakening. I explore which role the social media Facebook plays as a mediator of identity performances and rituals and which representations, experiences and -memory/ideological- senses are produced and shared on the walls of the Facebook groups, finding that some offline community divisions and representations of the Slovenianess are still to be found in the online environment. I stress that Facebook groups, not only imply a communication tool, but also a virtual place that mediates the need of the actors to configure their self-identity and belonging to an imagined community linked to the land of their ancestors.

Digital anthropology and/or digital traces: seeing the city through the eyes of locals

Radchenko, Daria (STRELKA KB, Moscow, RUS)

One of the key methodological discussions of the anthropology of internet (or digital anthropology) is driven by the question of the position of researcher (observer). In this discussion both key competing approaches are equally following the ideas of classical field anthropology. Tom Boelstorff [Boelstorff et al 2012] shows that anthropology can be limited to “digital ethnography” in the sense that the researcher is situated in the same online space as the researched community. For him participant observations of online practices it is both crucial and sufficient. In his turn, Daniel Miller [Miller et al 2016] insists on prolonged parallel observations both offline and online. In both cases digital anthropology is focused on participant observation of community’s interactions online, while offline practices at best are used to explain online processes.

Yet there’s yet another approach which investigates community’s “digital traces” (from photos and texts to “likes” and geotags) not to describe its online practices but rather to analyze offline ones – for example, how people use urban space and how the practices of living in a city are reflected in user photos and videos. The paper will discuss methodological challenges and limitations of this turn to online observations of the life offline.

My empirical base for these reflections will be the applied anthropology research of user-generated photography which has been conducted for the needs of urban designers at KB “Strelka” in over 100 locations: from small Russian towns with less than 5 000 inhabitants to capitals like Moscow and Dubai. We’ll discuss how and to what extent anthropological perspective can convert big massives of images into an understanding of local practices.

Mediating the Krampus. Digital visibility, ritual and cultural performance.

Mader, Elke (Institut für Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie, Wien, AUT)

The interface between ritual, performance and media is a significant field of Ritual Studies, it is linked closely to the study of ritual dynamics in diverse contexts. Felicitas Hughes-Freeland argued in her pathbreaking volume on this topic that to place ritual in a relation with performance and media is to address the effects of the rapidly changing intellectual geographies we inhabit. Ronald Grimes demonstrates how - not long ago - the terms “ritual” and “media” would have been regarded as labels for separate cultural domains - the one sacred, the other one secular. Today, both notions, ritual and media, are understood quite differently, and connections between them are remarked upon with growing frequency in scholarly writing. The mediatization of rituals as well as of other forms of cultural performance implies several dimensions of change, including the publicising and validation of a ritual for extended audiences that go hand in hand with new ways of constructing and reading multivocal symbols and their meanings in the sense of Victor Turner.

Digital visibility plays an influential role in such processes of mediatization as Paula Uimonen has demonstrated in her study on sacred drama in Cape Town, when the world united in unprecedented ways in mourning the global icon Nelson Mandela. She uses the term digital visibility to refer to a wide range of cultural forms and practices in which digital and visual media converge, from digital public screen and visual memory objects to mediated co-presence and virtual immortality.

This contribution to the workshop will focus on the significance of digital visibility in regard to cultural performances in Salzburg/Austria related to the Krampus, a mythical monster who has gained new popularity during the past decades that go hand in hand with new styles of performance. I will discuss several aspects of this processes of reframing ritual in regard to visual culture and its mediatization, which are also linked to the interface of performance and materiality in the sense of Jon Mitchell. Thus, elaborate masks and costumes have gained great significance in the Krampus performances since the 1980ies, and have become a major object of digital visibility. Furthermore, this contribution will investigate, how the images produced and circulated in the realm of digital visibility shape the self-representation of Krampus-groups on the internet, in particular in regard to the construction and performance of an interconnection with nature and landscape.