Adam Fish

Nonfiction Production Cultures:
Class Identity, Performance Practice, and Screen Culture in American and Indian Television and New Media

Research Problem

Transformations in television and internet technologies are changing the practices of non-fiction media in two global centers of media production: the United States and India. This is a study of elite producers of documentary television, screen journalism, online non-fiction, and ethnographic cinema in Los Angeles, USA, and, for comparative purposes, Mumbai, India. I intend to discern the structural and ideological tensions between institutions (television/internet networks) and creative agents (non-fiction producers). I envision three methods of research: ethnographic fieldwork with television production cultures, comparative textual analysis of screen cultures, and my personal experience as a television and internet producer. It is the goal of this study to effectively link class identities, production practices, and screen cultures.

Literature Review

History and Pedagogy of Visual Anthropology

For most of the 20th century, anthropologists were wary of studying television, film, and new media. They saw it as too “mass culture”, too connected to the Western world. While anthropology of media began in the 1950s (Bateson and Mead 1952; Powdermaker 1950) and canonical ethnographic film ran from the 1950s to the 1970s (Jean Rouch, John Marshall, Robert Gardner, John Bishop, and Tim Asch), it was not until the late-1970s that an “anthropology of visual communication” emerged (Worth 1980). From the 1970s to today, anthropologies of media developed under the theoretical writing and film productions of Jay Ruby (1975, 2000), Karl Heider (1976), David McDougall (1998, 2006), Faye Ginsberg (1991), and Lucien Taylor (1994) aided by graduate programs in media anthropology at New York University and Temple University dedicated to the production/theory of media anthropology. At UCLA a group of scholars and graduate students are dedicated to the anthropology of media and television (Caldwell 2004, Mann 2007, Mankekar 1993, Ortner forthcoming). UCLA graduate students are observing/participating in media industries, either as loggers (Fish 2007, Hill forthcoming), actors (David forthcoming; Banks 2006), or producers (Fish forthcoming).

I am extending anthropological investigations of non-fiction media production (Worth, Adair, Chalfen 1972; Born 1998; Dornfeld 1998; Ortner forthcoming), critical media industrial studies (Caldwell 2004, 2007; Mann 2007), and media-focused practice theory (Caldwell 2004, 2007; Ortner 2007). Today’s anthropologies of media vary in their method and subject. Some anthropologists look at how a media product migrates from producers to consumers in a transnational circuit (Larkin 1997), how media was complementary to or instigative of cultural transformations (Mankekar 1993). Others study the anthropological qualities of a particular media (Fischer 1995), how marginalized peoples use of media challenges power and inspires activism (Ginsberg 1997, Srinivasan and Fish 2008), and how producers of media form a discursive and diffuse culture (Powdermaker 1950). Of these, my approach is the latter—the study of cultures of media production.

Indigenous Cultures of Media Production
The study of cultures of media production takes as its subject the people who produce media and looks at how the media they produce are reflections of their historical and social contexts. The investigation of cultures who make media have a temporally long but spotty history that has two branches distinct because of ethnicity, class, and geography: Western elites and indigenous people. Before Powdermaker’s study of Hollywood producers (1950, more below), most visual anthropological studies of media consisted of studies of indigenous people and media: how Navajo produce film (Worth, Adair, and Chalfen 1972), Australian aboriginals make television (Michaels 1986), and ethnographic filmmakers make anthropological films (Fish and Bishop 2006). Applied visual anthropologists investigate how Aboriginals, Native Americans, and the Kayapo from Brazil use video and television for political goals (Ginsberg 1997, Prins 2002, Turner 1992). This study is grounded in the history of anthropologists and media studies scholars analyzing Western elites in their work places—a form of “studying up” (Nadar 1970).

Western Elite Cultures of Media Production

The anthropological study of cultures of media production did not start with an analysis of how indigenous people made media but how Western urbane elites did. Hortense Powdermaker conducted a curiously Medieval study of film production in Hollywood in the 1950s (Powdermaker 1950). She was lambasted and battered in popular presses by the media industrial “scribes” as she called them. The anthropological study of Western cultures of media production languished until the emergence of an anthropology of the present (Fox 1991), elites (Marcus 1983), studying-up (Nadar 1972), and studying-laterally (Ortner 2006). In the 1980s British cultural studies used ethnographic methods to study media production (Fiske 1987, Gitlin 1983, Hall 1980). Born (1998) studied the British Broadcasting Corporation using ethnographic techniques and in the same year Dornfeld (1998) did the same for the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service. After the 1980s, a period of profound self-analysis, anthropologists were studying themselves and how ethnographic filmmakers represented the indigenous other as well as themselves (Ruby 1991, 1995; see also Fish and Bishop 2006). Scholars in television and media studies at UCLA—inspired by British cultural studies and more recently by American anthropology—also research the performative aspects of television producers’ rituals (Caldwell 2004) and the actions of “below-the-line” (technical laborers) in television production (Caldwell 2007; Hill forthcoming). Ethnographies of new media and social networking are fewer still with one scholar Danah Boyd researching user-created social networks (2007).

Practice Theory and Cultures of Media Production

Ortner is widely known for her assistance in developing practice theory as a theory/method that foregrounds how agents work/play within discursive contexts of power, culture, and history. I will use the practice theories of Bourdieu (1990, 1993) and Giddens (1979) as improved by Ortner (1984, 1996, 2005) and Sewell (2005) to investigate the tensions between the auteur agents and structuring media corporations. This present study should be seen as an methodological and theoretical extension of Ortner’s recent work yet not into independent cinema but into new media and television. Bourdieu (1993) insists that creative production consists of a struggle by the producers to create prestige for themselves while placating the institutions that make that cultural production possible. With the emphasis placed on human practices that reproduce or transform the structures in which actions are performed, practice theory is an ideal method for understanding the relationship between a creative media producer and the networks that finance and moderate their art practice.

Research Questions/Hypotheses
Three of five theses explore the three subjects of this dissertation: production practices, screen cultures, and media production. The remaining two theses test the methods in this dissertation: identifying links between the three subjects mentioned above and explaining the synergy of the three methods: ethnography, media production, and visual analysis.

1) Ethnographic observations of production practices results in data on the emergence of a participatory non-fiction television/internet convergence. Interviews with production cultures will reveal information on producer’s class, education, and cultural capital. Producer’s creative agency is constrained or enabled by technological innovations and media institutions. Ritual spaces of media production and exhibition are locations for performances of media industrial competency.

2) Visual analysis of non-fiction television/internet screen cultures exposes stylistics of television/internet convergence. A screen culture consisting of low-budget, first-person, non-fiction content is emerging from an unstable industrial environment as well as from technological transformations. Visual analysis is distinct from textual analysis and is focused on defining the non-textual modes of communication used in visual media. Ethnographic film, travel television, adventure journalism, and amateur internet media all display similar styles of reflexivity that express changes in media industries.

3) Non-fiction television/internet production paired with anthropological research results in increased access to production cultures and a complication of tradition ethnographic methods. The trend towards media co-production in contemporary anthropological research will collapse the following reductive binaries: emic/etic, subjective/objective, viewer/producer.

4) The three subjects of production practices, screen cultures, and media production are complimentary in an anthropology of media. Evidence from one subject is observed originating in another subject. For example, producer’s class is observable in screen cultures and production practices. Media production adds depth to ethnography of production practices. Analysis of screen cultures is facilitated by media production and production practices.

5) The three methods of ethnography, media production, and visual analysis are complementary methods necessary to prove the links between production practices, screen cultures, and media production.
Cristina Moya

5 hypotheses related to my dissertation project arranged in order of priority

1. People are more prone to make a one-to-many generalization about others in linguistically defined categories than occupationally or politically defined ones. This is particularly the case for traits which are culturally inherited and exhibit inter-cultural variation.

2. Visual markers that show signs of intentional production for non functional purposes will be more likely to promote one-to-many generalizations and quick stereotype formation. In this case, metal dental rims compared to more obviously ornamental ones with designs.

3. Linguistically exogamous couples will be less likely to agree (and if together take longer to come to a consensus) on ambiguous decision making scenarios, particularly if morally ambiguous, than are linguistically endogamous couples.

4. When forced to guess the identity of a known individual by asking questions with yes/no answers, at each stage subjects will use the social category identifier that excludes the most potential targets (e.g. should start with sex). However, ethnic identifiers will be used relatively early even controlling for their information acquiring efficiency.

5. People living in the same town are more likely to recognize and be able to name others from towns where their language is spoken (as a proxy for language structuring social networks) even controlling for family relations.
1. I hypothesize that since the 1970s there has been a paradigmatic shift in urban planning towards de-centralized decision making due to civil activism in American cities from the 1960s. This entails a process whereby elected or appointed public officials are educated to, and are often mandated to, open decision making to the public. This may occur through open meetings, notifications, requests for input, and other communications.

2. I hypothesize that de-centralized decision making in the field of planning was both inspired by the activism of civil actors and further encourages their organization and activism. Current land use decision making processes consistently involve the presence of civil actors who have organized to articulate a certain position. These organizations frequently outlive any individual decision because they have a vision for their community derived from their interest and long-term goals associated with this vision. Their having a well articulated interest, and associated vision and goals, is the source of their influence, attraction and longevity.

3. I hypothesize that these organizations are not necessarily representative of the community at large. They are organized around special interests that may only represent the interests of a minority in the community, or at best they produce a majoritarian scenario that consistently dis-empowers smaller interest-defined groups or unorganized minorities. Their formation process, and therefore its purpose, is not the outcome of democratic practice. It is the product of voluntary action. Their vision and the long-term goals associated with this vision may furthermore not be in parallel with individuals who associate with the group on an episodic or inconsistent basis.

4. I hypothesize that these civil organizations represent people of a particular demographic character. They may be disproportionately composed of non-working women and people in retirement age. The interests of these organizations may therefore vary from a wider community interest, or only represent a special interest, because they have demographic characteristics that do not parallel the community at large.

5. Most importantly, I hypothesize that the attention of planning officials to these groups in land-use decision making in the name of participatory democracy can compromise participatory democracy. In so far as civil activism is voluntary and based on special interests, it creates a situation of inequality in participation. Those left out should not be punished, in the form of decisions that do not represent their interests, for not participating just because they may not have the time, know-how, or confidence to do so.
This project addresses several interrelated questions:

1. What are the specific forms of social support that young Chinese friends share with one another, and what values do they ascribe to these varying types of support?

2. What is the nature of exchange in Chinese friendships? It has been hypothesized by some that friendship entails a distinctive style of reciprocity or exchange (e.g. Laursen 1996; Clark 1984). Is this true of Chinese youth friendships, and if so, what are the exact features of this reciprocity and how does it compare to exchange in other relationships?

In order to understand how friendship and its practices of social support fit within the broader context of young people's lives, this study will consider three trends, namely: home-leaving or migration, education and employment, and marriage.

3. Given that many youth intermittently leave and return home, either for schooling or work, how does their reliance on peers change when they are away? In other words, do peer networks and their support substitute for family support when young people live away from home?

4. Do Chinese youth enrolled in school have different needs or expectations from their friends than those who are already employed in full-time work? That is, do the different conditions of school and work life affect how youth relate to, depend on, and support their peers?

5. How do romantic relations or marriage affect the quality and importance of friendship ties? As youth begin to marry or find longterm partners, how do they negotiate and prioritize between these two different types of close relations?
1. Individuals learn from those who are in closest proximity.
   a. Spatial distance should be the best predictor of social learning
      sources/models
      i. Though this could be measured in multiple ways…
   b. *will be hard to contrast with nepotism (#3) since spatial location and
      kinship are highly correlated

2. Individuals prefer to learn from the highest-skilled individual in a particular task.
   a. Skill ratings should be the best predictor of actual social learning
      sources/models
   b. Individuals should rate skill as an important factor in asking someone’s
      help at performing a difficult task (where strength is not an issue)

3. Individuals learn preferentially from kin (nepotism)
   a. Relatedness should be the best predictor of actual social learning
      sources/models
   b. Degree of relatedness should matter more than spatial proximity (possible
      way to tease the two apart)

4. Individuals learn preferentially from slightly older individuals (not those at the
   age of mastery)
   a. Individuals should report preferring to seek help from others who are
      slightly older, especially at life stages where there is an important
      transition in time allocation to new tasks

5. Individuals serving as models are repaid by learners through prestige.
   a. Unsure how to gauge this…?

Possible ways of operationalizing and/or identifying sources of social learning (cultural
models):
   b. Self-report of who individuals would ask for info on this task
   c. Self-report of where individuals actually learned task from (have some
      suggestion this won’t work to elicit responses in Fiji)
   d. Behavioral measures of task performance in response to questions like:
      how do you do (task)?
During a trip to San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala in 2001, I observed several mothers bottle-feeding their babies Coca-Cola. When asked why, they indicated that it was because Coca-Cola was urban, it was sophisticatedly packaged, labeled and marketed and from America; they were feeding their babies with dreams of upward mobility. In the Philippines, while implementing a nutrition program, I observed a similar phenomenon: mothers felt a strong desire to be able to feed their kids fast food because, to them, eating Western food was a step towards a better life for their children. While in Havana, I was always within earshot of talk about more beef and jokes about the growing number of local vegetarian restaurants. Anthropologist Mary Douglas shows that everyday practices, such as eating and drinking, can reflect the broader beliefs of a culture. If food consumption can be symbolic of broader cultural beliefs, do the channels through which the food is obtained impact its symbolism?

In Cuba, since 1962, food cultivation, collection, and distribution have been controlled by the state. What impact does state control over food have on the ways in which people conceptualize food and nutrition, as well as how these are connected with their health and wellbeing? Do those who cultivate their own food have different ideas about the impact of the food that they consume on their health and wellbeing? Are their feelings different if they conceptualize the land as their own or as belonging to the state? Does neighborhood food cultivation empower community members, build community, and bring together neighbors? Do those who cultivate foods through urban gardens feel a connection with the land, in absence of the state? Through the development of a deeper understanding of local people’s use and views of community gardens, this project will use the urban gardens to illuminate a link between health/nutrition, community participation and nationalism. From a bio-cultural perspective, human health is affected by the ideas that inform consumption as well as the nutritional aspects of food. My project supports a deeper understanding of the social constructions and cultural negotiations of diet. I believe this project will also shed light on the many ways in which garden participants view their bodies, both as instruments for work and as recipients of the nutrients of the foods that they cultivate.

Historically in Cuba conuco cultivation was used by cimarrones (escaped slaves), this included hunting and gathering, as well as traditional home gardens that were small plots of land created around their palenques (small forest villages) where they practiced traditional Creole agricultural methods. Today the term conuco connotes a large garden where traditional agricultural methods are practiced (Esquival 1988). The revival of urban gardens and horticulture clubs were among the many strategies of the Cuban government towards combating economic difficulties during Cuba’s Special Period of severe economic crisis which began in the early 1990s. Before the start of the Special Period, autoconsumos – a similar garden concept – were used to supply the state farm canteens with the produce needed to feed the farmers; these gardens were extended to
other workplaces such as schools and factories. First appearing in 1991, the *huertos populares* (popular gardens) and *huertos privates* (private gardens) were a widespread type of urban garden and accessible to the general public. The gardens are cultivated by anywhere from one to seventy people, the majority of the participants are men, although women and children also work in the gardens (Chaplowe 1996: 62). The Cuban government’s encouragement and assistance with urban gardens stands out from other countries, particularly in Africa, where governments typically do not support urban horticulture because it is seen as unsightly, primitive, or it is simply not a priority for land use (Chaplowe 1996:77).

During the mid-1990s, there was some research on community gardens in Cuba, most of which focused on sustainable and organic growing and the applicability of this method to other countries. While I hope to look at all three types of community gardens (autoconsumos, huertos populares and huertos privates), horticultural techniques will not be my main focus. My project will examine how State presence is perceived through local people’s conversations about the urban gardens as well as state messages about nutrition and the building of the ideal Cuban citizen. In addition, I will investigate how government messages link the gardens to nutrition and health and whether or not local people see a connection between the gardens, food and their own health and wellbeing.

My project is multi-sited to include urban gardening outside the capitol and in different regional contexts; I will spend approximately one month each in Havana and Santiago de Cuba. I will have approximately thirty formal and informal interviews, which I will audio record and take written notes on. I will use informal, unstructured interviews with community members in Havana and Santiago de Cuba—both those who participate in the gardens and those who do not. Through these informal conversations I will gain a deeper understanding of local food folklore and symbolic interpretations, in addition to ascertaining the level of local involvement in the gardens. I will also conduct formal interviews with garden leaders, horticulture club members, food and garden related NGOs, as well as local medical professionals. Using participant observation at the garden sites and in the community, I will record the amount of time individuals spend in the gardens and the types of activities they undertake during this time. I will also observe the extent to which gardens and food are discussed outside of the physical space of the gardens, in order to gauge the intensity of people’s participation and concern about the gardens and food. I plan to use discourse analysis and “open” coding of the recorded interactions to identify emergent themes in the data.

This project will illuminate connections between the state, community, work and health. Additionally, it will contribute to research on social hierarchies, which form around the gardens, informal trade networks and other ways in which people use the gardens for personal, familial or local gain. This project fits ideally into my course of study in UCLA’s Anthropology PhD program. I hope to use this research both to formulate my Masters thesis and as pre-dissertation work towards networking and making important connections in Cuba; I plan to spend 12-18 months in Cuba for my dissertation research which will address similar questions and will likely be focused around a site of health care delivery.
Pari Wichianson-Santillano

Research questions

TOPIC: Understanding cultural influences on patterns of cigarette smoking among Thai American men

1. What are their knowledge attitudes and beliefs about smoking? Is there a difference between current, former, and never smokers?
2. How are characteristics such as age, number of years in the U.S., and English proficiency related to knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about smoking?
3. What are the cultural beliefs about smoking and how do they change upon arrival to the U.S.?
4. What are predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors of smoking and how are they related to culture?
5. What are the barriers to smoking cessation?
Five questions this research intends to investigate:

1. How and why did individuals/artists join/become part of the Asian American movement? What was the pull? What was the push?

2. What was the lived experience, shared history and mission of the Asian American movement?

3. What was the personal meaning of being part of the Asian American movement? How did it affect sense of self, purpose, worth?

4. How did the AA movement affect cultural and aesthetic practices, the content or form of artistic expression?

5. How did cultural and aesthetic practices convey, capture, reflect, give voice to the Asian American movement?