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FOR A SONIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Jonathan ZILBERG*

For a sonic anthropology/history

‘Speaking of being moved in soul’, said Mr Penny, ‘I shall never forget the first time I heard the “Dead March.” ‘Twas at poor Corp’l Nineman’s funeral at Casterbridge. It fairly made my hair creep and fidget about like a flock of sheep – ah, it did souls! And when they had done, and the last trump had sounded, and the guns was fired over the dead hero’s grave, a’ icy-cold drop o’ moist sweat hung upon my forehead, and another upon my jawbone. Ah, ‘tis a very solemn thing!’

Thomas Hardy, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, 1871/1994: 39.

The novel *Under the Greenwood Tree or The Mellstock Quire* (1871) was Thomas Hardy’s third novel and the first of his works which achieved critical success. Set in Dorset and based on real characters and lived experience and research, thus ethnographic, it recorded and related the passing of the old English tradition of the village string based instrumental church choir. By the late 19th century and the great transformation wrought by the industrial revolution, the string choirs had been replaced by the barrel organ and the harmonium and more socially and religiously conservative

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church music as industry, church and state came increasingly together to regiment the emerging working classes in the mass migrations to the cities. In these social, economic and moral transformations, Thomas Hardy's novel has a special relevance to the contemporary study of social change, music and the creation and exhibition of archives to document the sonic and visual records of the times, that is, to the conjunction of sensory anthropology, archive fever and acoustemology.

By then the more disciplined practices of modern Christian worship had evacuated the ruddy folk traditions immanent in the bawdry Elizabethan works of Shakespeare, the earlier sounds and sentiments, embodiment of collective experience, wiped out as immoral and backwards. The expressive freedom and social license of rural England performed in churches centuries since had by then become a thing of the past with the rise of the cities and the modern Church during the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of the Victorian Era and Tradition. Fortunately Hardy having grown up aware of the loss, left us with this novel as record of the music, oral traditions and sensibilities of that earlier period. His novel is of special relevance to this article as it provides an example of a record of information on cultural change reflecting upon a period of critical transition and the attendant shifts in experience and values. Though it does so through the lens of a novel which describes the demise of a musical tradition, it has particular relevance to the conjunction of anthropology, ethnomusicology and history of religion as much as to popular music, culture and social change.

The Hardy quote serves to raise the fundamental aim at hand for my problem with anthropology, as faithful to the discipline as I am. Whenever I read ethnographies of religion and ritual, I have this overwhelming desire to want to see what is going on with my own eyes, to hear the music, to see the dancing so as to extend James Fernandez's idea in «The Argument of Images» to «verbally visualize» or pictorialize aspects of Africa religion (1986). And as Faye Ginsburg posits it for alternative multi-cultural and Aboriginal media (1992), it would take us back to the Surrealist ideals of Jean Rouch and Michel Leiris as experimented with in

their fieldwork practices, writing and anthropological film. Recall Ginsburg's lead epigraph taken from Rouch's article « The Camera and Man » (1975): « And tomorrow? The dreams of Vertov and Flaherty will be combined into a mechanical "cine-eye-ear" which is such a "participant" camera that it will pass automatically into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things » (Rouch, *op. cit.*: 102, in Ginsburg, *op. cit.*: 356).

Working along those lines in an effort to move from fieldwork based texts to greater context, ultimately to sound and image, this article proposes that sonic, archive rich, subjective and literary approaches, employing performance anthropology and creative exhibition tactics in museums could potentially solve this problem, both the absence of the sonic and the visual dimension.

Needless to say these issues have always been at the heart of visual anthropology and anthropological film. However, if during fieldwork, ethnographers systematically created open-access multimedia digital archives, data rich time capsules, would it not enliven the spirit and representational potential of their texts? Surely doing so would allow anthropologists to more successfully convey the sensory aspects of lived experience. Is this not what escapes our anthropological texts despite longstanding practices in ethnomusicology of using discographies, CD-Roms and web sites as ancillary aids to reading texts and using them for teaching purposes? Such practice would bring visual and sonic anthropology, the museum and the archive, into the center of things. But it will not. Why? Because anthropology and academia is a logo-centric world and yet as George Steiner concludes in *Grammars of Creation* (2001), in « the Leibnizian dream of a *Bibliotheca universalis*, putting the sum of recorded human memory and knowledge in reach of a desk-top terminal » (p. 244) « something radical is at stake » (p. 265).

The Zimbabwean field research materials considered here provide us insight perhaps into Zimbabwean history that would otherwise never enter the academic record. For so many years I struggled with communicating why Dolly Parton is both important

and political for Zimbabwe, why the trivia of the everyday that typically escapes anthropology is serious. And while I can imagine using archives to bring alive Dolly Parton's uplifting presence in Zimbabwe as with other anthropological projects I work on such as the oppression of young punks in Aceh, the issue of pornography and rising conservative Islamic agendas in Indonesia, I would never use the performative archival power of sound and image to bring attention to the physical nature of the use of mass rape as a weapon of war in the eastern DRC though plays and writing are successfully bringing attention to the problem (see Zilberg, 2009). There are then self-imposed limits on expression whether it regards the study, collection and exhibition of pornography and violence but those are different issues for consideration elsewhere.

The essence of my theoretical interest in the creation and transmission of field-work based archival materials is to demonstrate how important sonic and visual archives should be to providing context and sensory depth for anthropological analysis. This is not to argue that ethnographic writing to date is in any way compromised or somehow lessened by that lack but that there is an absence that has always bothered me with our professional emphasis on text. Perhaps to some degree or another we all struggle with this and wish to convey the multi-sensory richness that has necessarily escaped our texts. To discuss this problem and suggest solutions, I begin by briefly referring to a few studies of African religion and culture that have a fetishistic status. In my experience, they are inspirational texts, revered symbolic forms.

As a symbolic anthropologist with a core interest in religion and ritual, I am always left, despite my passion for the ethnographic text, with a sense of dissatisfaction, a feeling of incompleteness. It was not something that bothered me prior to conducting fieldwork for the first time but struck me while in the field. It has bothered me more and more over the years. Intellectually, as an Africanist reading Victor Turner's *The Drums of Affliction* (1968), Audrey Richard's *Chisungu* (1956), Jean Sybil La Fontaine's *Initiation: Ritual Drama and Secret Knowledge Across the World* (1985), Jean Comaroff's *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (1985), Michael

Lambek's *Human Spirits* (1981), René Devische's *Weaving the Threads of Life* (1993) and other works further afield such as Jennifer Degger's *Shimmering Screens: Making Media in an Anthropological Community* (2006), Tommie Hahn's *Sensational Knowledge* (2007) or Dale Olsen's *Popular Music of Vietnam* (2008). I want to hear the music and see the rituals and the dance they are writing about, in fact as Hahn very effectively manages to achieve with the CD-Rom and how it is built into the text. But unfortunately I lost the CD. I feel an intense need to be able to hear the music rather than just read the texts of the songs in the rituals or read descriptions and analysis of the dance, the clothing, the sacred sites and such. Once again, it did not start that way and that desire on my part does not lessen the pleasure I take in these texts and their intellectual value they hold for me. But I want more. Do we not all?

The performance context, the lived experience, is so far removed from the textual analysis that I always feel that I am missing out on something so fundamental that surely something can be done about it. That is the argument made in this paper. New technological developments, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary even anti-disciplinary projects, informatics and archive projects combined with performance based works in art museums, on-line archive rich hypermedia texts, might well make it possible if not to go beyond the necessary problem of the reduction of experience in textual exegesis then at least to transmit the curated data collected during fieldwork. That would allow for its relatively unmediated experience in which the reader/viewer/listener as active participant can engage the data.

Fieldwork at home

During fieldwork in Zimbabwe, I rode a bicycle to get around, one of those big black Chinese monsters. And as Harare is a very spread out urban space and as I lived in different far flung parts of the city and outside it, I would spend hours each day traversing the landscape, sometimes riding the very same paths across the still

empty fields of my youth. The important point is this. If you have ever left a place forever and then by chance come back to it later in life, you experience the place, its sights and sounds and associated feelings and memories in the most intense and meaningful fashion, more acutely and consciously than if you had never left, especially ostensibly forever at the climax of a revolutionary war. And as the structure of feeling if you will, the general style of a place in terms of its culture and its form in the media stays surprisingly stable despite revolutionary changes, you recall things that are never captured in anthropology and history, advertising jingles, ways of speaking and dressing and thinking, important and trivial but consequential things nonetheless. So perhaps it was this sense of loss and re-discovery that compelled me to think of ways for recording and conveying such things as the sound of the frogs in the vleis at night, the sounds and sensibilities of how different classes and ethnic groups speak and move, the particular conservative way in which stylish black Zimbabwean dress and carefully choose their accoutrements and do their hair, a million sensate things I wanted to record and convey but recognized were outside of the bounds of my fieldwork mandate.

Being at home again and not knowing when if ever I would return I decided to record everything possible and within that to focus on issues that struck me as significant as the data piled up on any topic that appeared to be an important issue in society worth following as it played out in the media and daily life. One experience in particular struck me one late afternoon later turning night as I rode past the national archives, the vast empty space opposite the race track and out into the peri-urban countryside north of the city. I had become interested in the sonic worlds of the independent church groups one finds in empty spaces around the city, perhaps a lone women or two and child praying under a tree or on a rock, groups seemingly competing with each other, smaller and larger groups, sometimes breaking apart, members leaving to join more charismatic expanding groups.

That evening, I was moving fast across a large space with scattered church groups singing and dancing at prayer here and

there. There was something ethereal about it, a feeling of being some kind of spirit moving in space across the landscape. The uplifted voices rose and faded as I passed by and I asked myself how it was that in all that I had read on Christianity in Zimbabwe there was no record of this most elemental aspect of the experience. Why does our focus on text and social relations, identity and group dynamics, eschatology, ideology and history etc. remove from the record of this basic physical and social activity of African prayer. I have for years yearned to come across a text or study which somehow managed to get at this insufficiency and as of yet, there has been none.

And then as if to highlight the conundrum I came to review Claudio Steinert's otherwise excellent study *Music in Mission* (2007) for the African Publishers Book Review. Again, though the study was about music, there was no music: only analysis of the music. I perfectly understand the limitations, that a text is a text and that we have established ways of writing about music in academic settings for academic purposes. I respect and appreciate this. But I do not like it. It bothers me more and more. I want to hear the music and I want to see the congregants at prayer, singing and dancing in context so that I, as a reader, can share what I have experienced as an ethnographer. For instance, I want to share with you the magic of uplifted children's voices and the sound of kettle drums filling the church at Serima mission near Great Zimbabwe, a place of special significance for Zimbabwean art history and the focus of my primary interest in an expanded and plural Zimbabwean cultural history. But I cannot and in any event, I did not record the experience except in memory. Instead, let me offer you something of the observations that I made systematically about the kind of data we need for a richer more sensate historical anthropology.

Zimbabwean data of the sort never included in ethnography and history

At the start of my fieldwork on Shona stone sculpture, something happened which set the tone and task for all that

followed. I was in Mutare, a city in the east of Zimbabwe, close to Mozambique. I was listening to the radio, to the Beatles singing *We All Live in a Yellow Submarine*. Then the announcer, a young woman with a decidedly Zimbabwean British accent came on the air and said: « When I was a child we used to play this song on the record player and dance around and around the room singing "We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine, a yellow submarine" ». And I said to myself: « Where is this kind of detail in all the anthropology and history of Zimbabwe? Is it so trivial as to deserve no comment, so inconsequential as to not be worthy of any note or analysis. Where is the everyday life of media in our ethnographies of Zimbabwe? »

At that time and by and large still today, such data is if not considered irrelevant, simply politely evaded as outside of the scholarly domain despite the rise of studies of popular culture in Africa (see Barber, 1987). More and more this paradigmatic absence in Zimbabwean ethnography and ethnomusicology is being addressed at the same time that ever increasingly sophisticated analysis of sound and religion are appearing (see Perman, 2008; Turino, 2000; Falola & Flemming, 2012). What follows might not convince more orthodox anthropologists or ethnomusicologists never mind historians to go this far, but at least here it is for the record.

Back from the east, following my usual pattern of stopping in at my Harare water hole, The George Hotel in Avondale near the University of Zimbabwe, I run into Tapfuma Gutsa, essentially the only avant-garde Zimbabwean stone sculptor then or since. He is with his now former gorgeous Bavarian wife. We are sitting in the afternoon sun on the patio drinking Lion Lagers and talking about Shona sculpture and his early training at Serima mission where I had just been. Tapfuma was suspicious about something. Eventually he said to me: « So what is it that you are really doing here? » To this I replied: « I'm trying to study historical consciousness » to which he responded « and what does that mean? » I replied « Well, like why do Zimbabweans love American

country music so much? » We all started laughing and Tapfuma exclaimed: « Yes, it's a funny thing, they certainly do ».

Later that evening the atmosphere became more and more interesting as the evening progressed. The jazz band was playing a Shona country music song and everyone was singing along « Vachiti (they say) heyoh, hey, hey, heyoh... heyoh... heyoh » The audience was grooving, laughing and talking loudly as they drank. Sometimes a person would burst into song or a two-step jig. Then the seasoned elder jazz musician addressed the audience in Shona and said: « We've heard folk songs from Mashonaland, Malawi and Matabeleland and now for one from America ». Then he broke out into *My Senora and Me*... « Aie, yehah, yeehaah oh my senora and me » Later in his rich baritone voice he sang *The House of the Rising Sun* in an upbeat jazzy way and even later on at some point a young man jumped to his feet and impersonated an American rock musician energetically strumming an imaginary guitar while a lady who looked very much like a local version of Donna Summer with an elaborate hairdo, pearl earrings, dressed in a white executive style jacket and a black crinoline shirt, stood up clapping with joy.

At the table by my side, two men dressed in the official Zimbabwean bureaucrat uniform, grey suits, white shirts and red ties, drunkenly crooned along, « My mother was a... my father was a... » and then laughed and talked away slipping in and out of Ndebele and Shona. Ordering another beer I said to myself as I always did in these situations which I recorded in detail but unfortunately only in notes: « How does one turn this into anthropology? » « What kind of anthropology is this and why is this kind of ethnographic data so rare? » On other evenings, more sedate ones than this, before the main band came on stage, there was a musician always dressed in a white polyester jacket and sporting a white cowboy hat who would impersonate Willie Nelson, if poorly at best. While he sang I would sit and drink and write up my field notes and ask myself how the hell I was going to incorporate this kind of data into my dissertation or career – if at all. And so it was that on Heroes Day 1991 that I went to back my watering hole as usual to continue my voyeuristic and introspective

study of historical consciousness. And keep in mind that in the 'eighties I had lived in Texas, Willie Nelson's homeland and Austin, his cult center, whereas in the late 'seventies I had often sat here with my fellow high school Rhodesian reprobates, minus the country music, and of-course any « people of color » except for the waiters who still remembered me fondly. Everything had changed and yet nothing had changed. Now here I was again, over a decade later, pondering why the foreigners including academics and diplomats were so interested in the myth and magic of Shona sculpture while the locals had no interest in it whatsoever.

The bubbles rising in my beer cheered me up as the Willie Nelson impersonator finally came to the end of his set. The people began whistling and clapping wildly and an elder woman wearing a tight fitting abstract tiger design dress and a tea cozy on her head jumped up. She launched into what looked to me like an ecstatic Shona cowboy chicken dance, bent knees, hands-out like you might see in Hicksville, Texas. The leader of the band adjusted his saxophone and stepped up onto the stage while the old lady in the tiger dress raucously exclaimed: « Hello Sonny! » The music rose, deep, warm and jazzy and the powerful female vocalist (a said spook from Chicago) began to croon in a husky way – « Ooh, when I fall in love with you... ». That night the band was so together. The waiters in their starched white colonial uniforms were bringing in the beers as fast as they could on their loaded silver trays. Watching all of this and feeling the beer, the joint, the music and the joy of it all moving through my veins I suddenly felt that Joseph was there by my side. His eyes were twinkling and we were happy.

Joseph Ndandarika was a friend of mine. He had been one of the first and youngest Shona sculptors at the Workshop School at the National Gallery in the 1960's and more than anything else in the world, besides women, he loved beer and to hang out in bars and drink with his friends. He had died earlier that year but he was no longer dead for me in that awful atheist white man sense of gone forever, but rather he was present as spirit partaking in the pleasure of the living. The *ambuya* (granny) who had been sitting on the edge of her chair lit up a cigarette, jumped up again, twirled around

and launched into a boogie dance as the tambourine shook and the saxophonist went into a long solo while the young man playfully gyrated behind her. My beer frothed over and the vocalist went over and over the final phrase in a deep throated passionate way – « Oh sonny once so true, I love you ». Later she sang Stormy Weather and I spiraled into myself as she crooned and moaned. I was there and not there suddenly made melancholic. I was unsure of how or if I would ever turn this into anthropology.

Most people that Sunday night in Harare and elsewhere across the nation if they had a television, which a large majority of the urban families do, would have been watching taciturn Carson's Law if they were old and boring before or after their time. But if they were young or young in spirit they would have been enjoying listening to the vibrant Peter Johns Show on the radio (Zilberg, 2012). But where was this in all the anthropology of Zimbabwe? Nowhere! So to address this ethnographic gap, I believe that the best solution to dealing with this historical absence and conveying its reality is to present the archived data in an art museum as an engaged performance happening. Perhaps publishing an article proposing this might lead to that eventually. In the meantime, it's just another conversation in anthropology, but hopefully not a boring day in reading paradise.

Return to classics

Let us consider then a few classic anthropological studies and what we have missed out on by not having a more sonic and visually rich anthropology in the past. In the first case of the study of Bemba female initiation by Audrey Richard in *Chisungu* (1956), we do have a few illustrative photographs of the clay sculptures made during the ritual and descriptions of the song texts and their meanings and the purpose of the ritual. But having art historical interests what I would like to have access to are the audio-recordings of the songs, the films of the ritual dancing and singing, the bawdiness and sexual provocation of it all. I especially want to be able to viscerally experience the destruction of the clay

crocodile sculptures, the women trampling them and throwing the clay into the river. If nothing else, having access to such data would certainly bring the text to life in the way that it is experienced by the participants and it would surely add considerable value and interest to the text.

Consider Victor Turner's study of boy's circumcision and initiation rituals amongst the Bemba peoples also in Zambia (1967). Again, I would like to be able to hear the songs rather than simply read the transcriptions. It would give me a feel for the place and the culture that I could not appreciate without the sonic and visual component. I want to watch their elders doing the body painting, covering them with those white clay spots, the ritual process behind that iconic image on the book's cover. Far to the west in Zaire, I would want to hear and see the fertility healing rituals Renee Devisch describes in such detail, to study the therapeutic effect of ritual said to have unlocked infertility through song and rite unblocking the social conflicts rendering the women allegedly impotent. I need that sense of being there.

Why? Does it matter theoretically? Will it have any consequence that would not have come about without this? I imagine it virtually axiomatic that no ethnographer would disagree that having such data available as a uniform practice in the ethnographic enterprise would be a good thing, especially for ethnographic and art museums. Usually the only time we get to see such data is during an exhibition on a masquerade tradition such as in the recent show on masquerades of the Niger Delta in the Fowler Museum at UCLA in which films are provided to put the different regional traditions of mask complexes in performance context. Fair enough, but I want to emphasize that this not my point as that is merely illustrative.

I want something much richer, much more complex and all encompassing. I don't know yet quite what this would look like but it is certainly not something as staid as the attempts art museums make to contextualize their masks. When I was teaching African art with a museum collection at Illinois State University in the 1990's, I wanted for instance to be able to have the students study such

films and then work with dance instructors to wear the masks and physically experience the dance, to embody the experience. Naturally, there was and still is no chance of doing so with a museum collection but this illustrates the point that I am seeking something far more substantial than merely some minor boring addition to museum displays or ethnographic texts.

Simply making available more sensory rich field data in traditional formats will not achieve sufficiently substantial effect. Performance anthropology in the art museum is I think ultimately the way to go as I attempted at the Dambudzo Marechera Celebration at Oxford (Zilberg, 2009). Ethnomusicologists do this all the time and so do ethnographic film makers. The former physically understand their subjects and the latter have always used sound and image, no figure and no instance being more significant to this discussion than the film *Les Maitres fous* by Jean Rouch. Might not digital open-access archives embedded in hyper-text ethnographies satisfy these urges for data richness if nothing else? Technologically it is not problematic. Professionally it could be particularly feasible if you were in a department of art-science working on an experimental collaboration or if you were a curator. Nevertheless, to be realistic, this will probably remain a rare form of *avant garde* creativity in anthropology.

Conclusion

In the published review of a symposium on James Clifford's *Predicament of Culture* (1988) in the journal *Social Analysis* Stephen Nugent in his article « Tell me about your trope » deftly gets to the heart of the issue as I feel it to be. As he wrote there: « The problem simply put by Pratt (1986) is that anthropological writing is boring. The audience's expectations are heightened in anticipation of exotic facts about exotic peoples, yet the anthropological narrative usually fails to deliver because the author must operate from a distance deemed professionally appropriate for a de-personalized, scientific recording instrument » (1990: 131).

Nugent continues to note that while the new ethnography ushered in by James Clifford excited anthropologists with the possibility of new forms of writing that would not be so boring, something more surrealistic which would evoke rather than explain, it probably would not. He also asks whether the idea is new at all invoking William Burroughs as a « demi-monde ethnographer » waiting in the wings.

We should recall here Zora Neale Hurston's work and difficult career as a Boas student for that matter and the debate which subsequently came about as to the difference between anthropology and literature, and literature in the service of anthropology (Benson, 1990; Hurston, 1938/1990). Recall too Barbara Tedlock's highly compelling descriptions of Kachina dancers and tourists at Zuni which exceed Nugent's dissatisfaction (Tedlock, 1984). Recall how we in anthropology have forgotten or been unaware of Aby Warburg's early contribution in the late 1800's to the conjunction of archive building, art history and anthropology and how it all began at Zuni (Zilberg, 2011). We seem to be coming full circle. Consider the way in which Roland Barthes is able to write about wrestling in both an engaging and intellectual way and how Raymond Williams is able to take us into a context in such a way as to seamlessly blend descriptive writing, analysis and theory. Does anthropology have to be boring in order to deliver the theoretical and analytical goods? Can the consideration of the senses in history and the incorporation of sensory oriented data ameliorate this?

In short, anthropological writing, in my view, sometimes does exceed Nugent's and Pratt's judgment of the genre as a whole. Take Keith Basso's chapter « "Stalking with stories": names, places and moral narratives among the Western Apache » (1992) for instance. After all, we are not in the entertainment business. Yet imagine how much more compelling it could be if we were able to hear those stories Basso recorded, to see his informants relating them in the landscape. Would our anthropology not be vastly enriched by it? Surely we all ultimately want to be able to hear data such as the voices in Robin Ridington's article « A tree that stands burning »

(1990), to listen to the collected narratives about the Omaha people's sacred pole as spoken?

I began this piece with Thomas Hardy in that this problem of being true to the ethnographic project of describing other places and people, of being forced by disciplinary requirements into being « boring » has always been foremost in my mind as a problem for anthropology as compared to literature. Since the experimental moment, that is, at the start of the post-modern turn in anthropology (See Clifford, *op. cit.*; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Bruner, 1983) anthropology has indeed become more literary. Yet at the same time the more literary oriented the scholars are the more theoretically oriented their work sometimes tends to be such that in the end up we are returned to Pratt and Nugent – to the problem of being boring. Nugent also noted that Stephen Tyler in his essay on the post-modern anthropological text as an occult document (1986) had denied any possibility of resolving the tension between anthropology as either a science or an experiment in creative writing. He added that anthropology remains bound by convention to a high-low hierarchy and lineage, to Jane Austen and not Jacqui Collins, to Conrad and not to Burroughs. Moreover, Nugent introduced another problem in that rather than being concerned with affecting change in the real world ethnography in the 1980's was merely oscillating as Clifford put it between metanarratives of homogenization and invention.

Nugent's last words are Liebling's, a largely forgotten figure who wrote *The Sweet Science* (1956): « Watching a fight on television has always seemed to me a poor substitute for being there. For one thing, you can't tell the fighter what to do. Besides, when you go to a fight, boxers aren't the only ones you want to be heard by. You are surrounded by people whose ignorance of the ring is exceeded only by their unwillingness to face facts... » (Nugent, *op. cit.*: 134-35).

Indeed, reading ethnography might be a poor substitute for the experience itself, and one anthropologist's or historian's view might be very different of the same issue in the same time and place. But if we could feel more as if we had a ring side seat to

whatever the ethnographic data is and the argument being made based on it, and if we were able to invent and appropriate new tropes to fuse the subjective and the objective, not only would we get much more out of it but so would a vastly expanded audience.

In thus recuperating the contested agendas of the 1980s, an embodied experience through digital archives might have potentially profound consequences for how one could re-present fieldwork data. If we engage developments in acoustemology, informatics, archive-based art exhibitions and open access archive fever with Roland Barthes in mind then rather than Levi-Strauss, and considering Nugent's critique and its consequences for ethnographic practice and writing, we could hardly fail to make anthropology even more analytic and interesting in its fusion of the subjective and objective, more relevant and more widely consequential than it already is¹.

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Summary

This article proposes a conjunction of acoustic, literary and archival approaches to fieldwork and anthropological writing.

As a critique of the hegemony of the text in the anthropology of African religion it emphasizes subjective and embodied tactics.

Set in a fieldwork context in Zimbabwe in the early 1990s, it argues that the combination of sonic anthropology, archival experimentation and literary or performance practices hypothetically provide seductive opportunities for overcoming the traditional limits of the canonical text.

Situated in a critical relation to select classic studies in symbolic anthropology, the essay proposes a solution.

Artistic exhibitions of multi-media field data and the use of hypertext links in e-ethnographies which would connect the text with the audio-visual data out of which they are created could allow ethnographers to overcome the traditional logocentric limitations of textual representation.

Key-words: memory, identity, field research, archive politics, anthropological tradition.

Résumé

Pour une anthropologie sonore

Cet article propose une conjonction des approches acoustique, littéraire et archivistique du travail de terrain et de l'écriture anthropologique.

Comme critique de l'hégémonie du texte dans l'anthropologie de la religion africaine, il insiste sur les tactiques de subjectivation et d'incarnation.

Développé à partir d'un exemple de terrain situé dans le Zimbabwe du début des années 1990, cet essai défend l'idée que la combinaison de l'anthropologie sonore, l'expérimentation dans la gestion des archives et les pratiques littéraires et performatives fournit hypothétiquement des opportunités séduisantes pour dépasser les limites traditionnelles du texte canonique.

Posé dans une relation critique pour sélectionner des études classiques en anthropologie symbolique, cet article propose une solution.

L'exposition artistique de données multimédia de terrain et l'usage de liens hypertextes dans l'e-ethnographie connecterait le texte avec les données audio-visuelles à partir desquelles elles sont créées et pourrait permettre aux ethnographes de dépasser les traditionnelles limitations logocentriques des représentations textuelles.

Mots-clefs : mémoire, identité, enquête de terrain, politique des archives, traditions anthropologiques.