Journal des anthropologues

Association française des anthropologues

130-131 | 2012

Création et transmission en anthropologie visuelle

Creating images, creating identity

Participatory filmmaking as an anthropological praxis

Créer des images, créer l'identité : la video participative comme praxis anthropologique

Peter Anton Zoettl

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jda/5093>

DOI: 10.4000/jda.5093

ISSN: 2114-2203

Publisher

Association française des anthropologues

Printed version

Date of publication: 15 December 2012

Number of pages: 53-78

ISBN: 979-10-90923-04-1

ISSN: 1156-0428

Electronic reference

Peter Anton Zoettl, « Creating images, creating identity », *Journal des anthropologues* [Online], 130-131 | 2012, Online since 15 December 2014, connection on 02 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jda/5093> ; DOI : 10.4000/jda.5093

CREATING IMAGES, CREATING IDENTITY PARTICIPATORY FILMMAKING AS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRAXIS

Peter Anton ZOETTL*

Anthropology is a creative occupation. Anthropologists meet people in remote or unfamiliar places and, just like writers, poets or journalists, note down their observations and conclusions on paper, in a form that they take to be suitable and meaningful within the genre in which they are engaged. The « belletristic » nature of anthropological writings has since long been acknowledged (Geertz, 1988), as has the importance of creativity and ingenuity for a successful career within the social and natural sciences.

While creativity is naturally and widely recognized as a part of anthropological work, it is still barely visible in the pages of the main anthropological end products – monographs and scientific, peer-reviewed articles – in what Grimshaw (2001: 2) calls the « stubborn persistence of a particular literary form ». When anthropologists make films or take pictures as part of their fieldwork or as a medium to present their findings to others (which, if one takes Margaret Mead as the pioneer, they have done for around 80 years), they still feel the need to neatly separate out the

* CRIA-IUL. University Institute of Lisbon
Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (*Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*, FCT).
Av. D. Carlos I, 126 – 1249-074 Lisboa, Portugal
Courriel : pzoetl@yahoo.com

« artistic » part of their undertakings from the « scientific » analysis. While the history of film and anthropology are closely intertwined (Piault, 2002), the invention of continually new ways of depicting reality « out there » and introducing it into the canonical oeuvre of the seventh art has not been accompanied by comparable developments in what many consider to be the primary science concerned with humanity's social and cultural realities. The consolidation of anthropology as an academic discipline certainly allowed for a reassessment of anthropological theory, but hindered the creative development of its *praxis*. The daily routine of anthropologists employed within the university system resulted, as Grimshaw observes, in « very different trajectories » compared to those of their film-making colleagues: « If a great deal of the creativity of the latter was stimulated by the repudiation of earlier work, the former sought to reify the ideas and methods of their predecessors in an attempt to legitimate their claims to a particular kind of scientific expertise [...] » (*op. cit.*: 85).

Participatory filmmaking and academic anthropology

The above introduction serves to outline the context of the following discussion about « participatory filmmaking » as an anthropological praxis. Here, participatory filmmaking is proposed as an anthropological « tool » with a twofold meaning: firstly, as a method of research; secondly, as a means of representation. In both cases, it employs creativity not as an « encore », but as part of its anthropological « essence », in ways which I will attempt to clarify throughout this paper. Furthermore, in both cases, it aims to encourage a collaborative approach to the processes of knowledge construction and representation, promoting the kind of « reflexive » or « shared » anthropology once proposed by Jean Rouch (2003: 44-46, 221).

Rouch's prophecy that « tomorrow will be the time of completely portable color video, video editing, and instant replay [...] and of a camera that can so totally participate that it will automatically pass into the hands of those who, until now, have

always been in front of the lens » (*ibid.*: 46) was not at first put into practice by anthropologists, but rather by development and community workers. Shirley White's 2003 reader « Participatory video: images that transform and empower » brings together accounts from around the globe about the use of video from a development/human rights perspective; Dowmunt (2007) does the same thing from an UK/European minority rights perspective. Most of these accounts are naturally less concerned with « theory » than with « praxis », that is, with demonstrating the usefulness of participatory video for, amongst other things, « consciousness-raising », the « creation of a sense of community », « empowerment » (White, 2003: 38, 131, 105) or « giving voice » to the voiceless and developing a community member's « social potential » (Dowmunt *et al.*, 2007: 56, 47). However, as White concludes, notwithstanding the important achievements of participatory video in a large number of projects, there remains « a remarkable absence of any well-formulated theories to undergird the participatory video practices » (*ibid.*: 24). While, as White observes, projects are routinely evaluated, « the lessons learned and understandings that have resulted have not led to significant theoretic work on the part of academics or other development professionals » (*ibid.*).

Anthropology's tardiness in seriously engaging with practices such as participatory video is clearly related to its vision that still and moving images are mere illustrations of written analyses or instruments for collecting scientific data within a realist paradigm – partly established by some of the forerunners (such as Margaret Mead) of visual anthropology themselves (Zoettl, 2009). What is, for instance, known, remembered and easily accessible from Worth and Adair's pioneering participatory study *Through Navajo eyes* (1972) is not the Navajo films, but Worth and Adair's text. Anthropology did, of course, have something to say about indigenous media (Ginsburg, *op. cit.*; Turner, 1992), but its engagement with the potentialities of participatory or community video was mainly of a theoretical, rather than practical, nature.

In the last decade, however, *Visual Methods* (the title of an international conference held biannually in the UK since 2009) are clearly on the rise within social sciences. Latin American scholars have been especially active in the field, perhaps owing to the reasonably long tradition of participatory and community film in the Americas, especially in Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and Mexico (Bajas, 2008). While the Brazilian *Video in the villages project*, set up by indigenous rights activists, has also become an object of anthropological enquiry (Bessire, 2009; Gallois & Carelli, 1995), many recent works are concerned with the audiovisual medium not only as a matter of theoretical reflection, but also as an anthropological *praxis* in itself (Barbosa *et al.*, 2009; Flores, 2005; Mayer, 2000).

My own explorations in participatory video started in the Brazilian northeast, with a community of black rural farmers, which was in the process of becoming « certified » as a *quilombo*¹ (Zoettl, 2011a & 2011b), and a group of Pataxó Indians in the state of Bahia, which at the time of my arrival was about to set up a Cultural Centre (Zoettl, 2011c & 2012b). Returning from a thriving former colony to a metropolis in crisis, I organized a workshop with first and second generation Capeverdean immigrants in the outskirts of Lisbon and, in the following year, returned to the tropics to edit a short video with a group of Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe Indians, living in continuous conflict with neighbouring farmers (who claimed that the land occupied by the Indians was in fact theirs). Returning to Portugal – by now in an even deeper crisis, with a new government that was trying to prove its dutifulness to the *troika* of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF and which demanded – mainly from the low-income population – a substantial contribution towards the fulfilment of the state's austerity measures, I continued making videos in the neighbourhoods of Lisbon's

¹ The term *quilombo* originally refers to a hideout of slave fugitives who set up small settlements in the inaccessible interior all over Brazil. Today's *quilombolas* consider themselves to be descendants of these settlements, thus reaffirming their Afro-Brazilian origins.

periferia (peripheral areas), with marginalized Afro-Portuguese and « White » Portuguese citizens alike.

The practical and anthropological concerns that arose during these workshops in settings so apparently different from each other were nonetheless quite similar, or at least comparable. Partly, this is due to the fact that all the communities involved considered themselves « minorities » within their respective societies. The feeling of being part of society at large in some respects, while not in others, of considering oneself, for instance, « Brazilian » or « Portuguese » but belonging, at the same time, to other social communities (such as « Indian », « quilombola » or Capeverdean) stimulated many of the workshop participants to utilize the filmic medium to reflect on issues of « identity ». I will try to illustrate in what sense the creative processes initiated by the joint production of video documentaries can be considered to be « anthropology ».

A life experience

Films have to be made. Dziga Vertov has pointed out the « infinite possibilities » of the *kino-eye* in looking at the world and of the filmic medium in « dragging », at the director's convenience, spectator's eyes (1981: 41, 42). The fact that films have to be made implies that one has to think about *how* to make them. This seems trivial, but it is the reason why filmmaking necessarily engenders a thorough process of reflection on the part of the makers. This process of reflection is as of much interest to the directors as it is to the accompanying anthropologist: making films about what is of interest to a certain group or community enables the filmmakers to learn more about themselves and their fellows; at the same time, it helps the anthropologist to better understand how the other *sees* him/herself and his/her lifeworld. Filmmaking is a truly anthropological enterprise, since it is about trying to understand what is « out there » and representing one's insights to a third party. Anthropological writings, no less than films, are, as Geertz has pointed out, « themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot »; they are fictions « in the sense that they are

"something made" », the outcome of an « imaginative act » (1973: 15).

Both films and anthropological writings are not only *made* but are usually *made for* « somebody », that is, they are interpretations (and representations) produced not only for the sake of the filmmaker or the anthropologist, but for a wider audience. Observing and interpreting his world, the community filmmaker thus becomes an anthropologist of himself and of his own people, in a quest for an understanding, and a representation of this understanding, of himself as « other ».

Even when there is no spectator from outside the community, films have the power to enable to « regard at a distance » something that is actually very close to one's own world of experience, as I will attempt to illustrate with the following example. In the workshop I conducted in the lower middle class neighbourhood of Tapada das Mercês on the outskirts of Lisbon, we produced a small video which was later called *A life experience* (*Uma experiência de vida*). It was scripted, filmed and edited by a group of five women from the neighbourhood, with my (mainly technical) assistance. It consists of not more than one single (although not uninterrupted) shot, which runs for a little over 9 minutes, featuring an interview with Alexandra, a woman in her forties, mother of two, long-time resident of Tapada, and herself part of the group that produced the video.

Figure 1: Alexandra in « A life experience » (Portugal 2011).
[Publication subject to prior authorization]

The video was initially intended to address the question of «community spirit»; most of the workshop participants were engaged in one of the various community groups organised by the local non-governmental organisation K'Cidade², such as the «Women's group», the «African women's group» and the «Parent's group». The video was intended to demonstrate to the residents of Tapada the benefits of participating more actively in community activities, not only for the good of the neighbourhood (which was apparently suffering from an increase in crime and a lack of mutual understanding and consideration between residents, in an area that is home to people from around twenty different countries, but also for their own good, in their roles, for example, as women or parents.

As the filmmakers' project suggests, the population's participation in the activities of K'Cidade (which had only begun its work a couple of years earlier) was still not at the desired level, a fact proven to be true on the day we screened Alexandra's interview (it had been decided that this should be the only raw material of the edited film, to be quickly «tested» as a tool for the Parent's and Women's group). Although we had invited everybody to attend, apart from myself, the filmmakers, the local coordinator of K'Cidade and the women's group kickboxing instructor, none of the group members showed up at the screening. Notwithstanding my personal frustration, the workshop participants were very eager to see their film screened on the wall of the project meeting room and were apparently little concerned about the evident lack of an audience. The screening was met with much more success than I had hoped for; the discussion that followed was quite animated and provoked long and thorough reflections about the main topic that Alexandra had reflected on in her interview: domestic violence.

Indeed Alexandra, sitting amongst the spectators, seemed to be doubly present, once as herself (as a discussant and commenting filmmaker) and once as the film's other (that is, a «typical»

² K'Cidade, *Programa de Desenvolvimento Comunitário Urbano* (Urban Community Development Programme).

representative of the film's subject). The power of her words coming from the screen recounting her own *experiências de vida* (life experiences) as somebody who had suffered domestic violence for a long time but had finally managed to escape these circumstances – defying an alarming lack of assistance from the police or social welfare institutions – impressed us all, even those who, like me, had previously seen and heard her testimony during editing a dozen times. Being both at the same time herself and the other, Alexandra could be heard during the discussion talking about Alexandra's experiences as if she were not only talking about her very own personal life, but also about the experiences of the screen Alexandra and all the other women from the neighbourhood (and elsewhere) who had been through similar experiences.

By participating in the making of a film about herself with other women who had, in some cases, also suffered abuse, Alexandra and her colleagues not only took a step towards their specific aim of making public a situation which is usually glossed over (as Mario João, one of the directors, put it, there are simply too many women who explain away the external signs of domestic violence by saying that they « slipped and fell down the stairs »). Filming and questioning « themselves » (that is, filming a female neighbourhood resident who had experienced such a situation) allowed them, cinematically and personally, to achieve *distance*. By filming and thus making public – even if only for a tiny or select audience – the account of what had happened to one of « them », Alexandra and her colleagues proved themselves to be *directors* of what had happened, rather than mere victims. The extent to which Alexandra wanted to talk – both for her own sake and for the sake of those victims who had not yet summoned the power to confront their perpetrators – about her own and the « other Alexandras' experiences, experiences which came together in the image of the real-but-also-represented Alexandra on the wall of the K'Cidade meeting room, was evident.

Anthropology of the other

In what sense, however, can Alexandra's film be considered to be « anthropology » in itself, that is, not only another *object* of anthropological armchair reasoning, occasionally « enlivened » with some film theory? Is Alexandra's and her colleagues' creative undertaking, the making of a film, an anthropological enterprise on its own? To answer this Socratic question, one could have recourse to another, posed by the Brazilian ethnologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in his essay on the « Relative Native » (*O Nativo Relativo*): « What happens if we [...] rather than complacently admitting that we are all natives, take the opposite challenge to its ultimate, or due, consequences – that we are all "anthropologists" [...] and some are not more anthropologist than others, but everyone is in their own way, that is, in very different ways? In a word, what changes if anthropology is taken as a meaningful practice in epistemological continuity with the practices it talks about and is seen as equivalent to them? (Viveiros de Castro, 2002: 115) ».

As has been argued above, filmmaking is « anthropological » in so far as it seeks to make sense of a world « outside » (that is, outside the box that encloses the mechanism which chemically or electronically imprints the lens' field of vision on celluloid or a silicon chip) by presenting it in a certain fashion that is held by its makers to be a « true » representation of that world. Filmmaking, however, shares more with anthropology than merely the fact of being *representational*, like other (fine) arts. Filmmaking is also, to the same extent as anthropology, *relational*, since it establishes a relationship between the subject who films and the object that is filmed. Inevitably, there is someone who operates the camera or acts as a director, and someone who « merely » appears on the viewfinder. How strongly filmic representation is determined by this relation can be seen in the efforts sometimes made to overcome it: for instance, when the cameraman-director shoots into a mirror, thus allowing the beam of light that emanates from the world « outside » (and normally vanishes into the operator's black box) to originate from around that very black box, thus revealing the

filming subject to its spectators and thereby transforming it into an object³.

As Viveiros de Castro argues, being « relational » is a characteristic inherent in anthropological science. Anthropological knowledge, he observes, « is at once a social relationship, for it is the consequence of the relationships that reciprocally constitute the subject that comprehends and the subject that is being comprehended » (*ibid.*: 113). The same is, of course, true for (social documentary) film. The film itself is the outcome of the relationship between the one who films and the one who is being filmed; without that relationship there would be no film, no director, nor even any filmic « subject matter » (that is, a filmic object). As a consequence of the relationship it establishes, the act of filming creates – to the same extent as the « act » of anthropological observation and reasoning – the other and the other's alterity (as something that is « being looked at » or « comprehended »).

It goes without saying that such relationships between « ego » and « alter » reflect power structures, to the same extent that they help to maintain them. Colonial anthropology in particular has demonstrated how the scientist's look at the other helps to create that same other in its inferior – as is often implicitly alleged – alterity. For the colonial enterprise the other's ethnographic reality was of much less interest than its alterity in itself, which proved useful in justifying « primitive » people's subjugation within the frameworks of Christian morality. Moreover, the other's alterity served as a mirror for the self-analyzing colonial ego. As Manuela da Cunha observed, French and British « scientific » contemplation of South American Indians during the Renaissance was « much less an attempt to understand the other than to see oneself "in perspective", to comprehend oneself, within a world order that,

³ There are plenty of examples in film history of this demonstration of a director's « film-epistemological awareness », e. g. Maysles brothers' 1975 documentary *Grey Gardens*.

with the religious wars, had started to become relative » (2009: 192).

Filming one's own alterity

How does participatory video relate to the questions of « relationship », « alterity » and « power »? As was mentioned at the outset, participatory video is usually cited as a tool to « give voice » to the (supposedly marginalized) other. By transferring technology and knowledge to those who have always been looked at, long-established « subject-object » relations are thought to be possibly overcome, empowering those who have always been the objects of enquiry to present « their own » point of view, as acting subjects (or « agents », in anthropological jargon). Bentes, for instance, highlights the achievement of the *Video in the Villages* project as having trained « a generation of indigenous filmmakers who make a kind of "auto-ethnography" or "auto-documentary", in which the Indians themselves register and edit their images, transforming themselves from objects into subjects of discourse » (Bentes, 2004: 1).

However, as Viveiros de Castro points out, from an anthropological perspective, the challenge of anthropology's relational character is not « to see the native as an object and the solution is not to institute him as a subject » (*op. cit.*: 118). De Castro argues that precisely by rashly taking the other as another *subject*, the anthropologist fails to understand him as a « subject-other », that is, an alterity which, rather than being subject or object, is « the expression of a possible world » (*ibid.*: 117). Otherness, de Castro (drawing on Deleuze) continues, is a *presupposition* of perception: the world which falls outside the current range of vision « has its existence granted by the virtual presence of an other by whom it is perceived » (*ibid.*: 118). The other, therefore, is « not *anybody*, neither subject nor object, but a structure or relation », it is not an element of the field of vision but « its constituting principle »; it is not « a particular point of view » (the other's point of view in relation to my own point of view, or

vice versa) but « the possibility that there is something like a point of view, that is, the *concept* of viewpoint » (*ibid.*: 118).

Alexandra commenting on Alexandra in a film by Alexandra (and her colleagues) already provides a clue about how the lines between Alter and Ego are constantly stretched, challenged or transgressed in participatory video projects. The workshop I conducted in the Pataxó Indian village of Coroa Vermelha in north-eastern Brazil serves as another example of how « betwixt and between » (Turner, 1988) the filmic subject-object's relationship can become, toing and froing between looking and being looked at, representing the other or being represented by the other. As mentioned, the workshop was set up in collaboration with the Pataxó's own Cultural Centre; the 24-minute film that came out of it was scripted and shot jointly with a group of 5 young Pataxó, and was entitled *Indians in Disguise (Capa de Índio)*. It is basically a filmic reflection about the other's idea of the Pataxó, that is, a reflection on the concept of indianness that the tourists have in mind when they arrive at the beach town of Coroa Vermelha, which is also an Indian Reservation. Figure 2 is a still frame from the video, representing a tourist from the bordering state of Minas Gerais preparing to have her picture taken at Aelson's (one of the film's directors) souvenir shop.

Figure 2: Still frame from « *Capa de Índio* » (Brazil, 2010).

The scene captured by the Pataxó reminds me of Darwin's account of « first contact » with the people of Tierra del Fuego in 1832, as cited by Taussig in *Mimesis and Alterity*: « They were excellent mimics: as often as we coughed or yawned or made any odd motion, they immediately imitated us. Some of the officers began to squint and make monkey like faces; but one of the young Fuegians [...] succeeded in making far more hideous grimaces. They could repeat with perfect correctness each word in any sentence we addressed them, and they remembered such words for some time. [...] All savages seem to possess, to an uncommon degree, this power of mimicry (Taussig, 1993: 74f) ».

In fact, with the help of Aelson and his wife – who together make their living running the souvenir shop (« mimetizing » photography is merely an extra service they offer) – the White Brazilian tourist proved to be an excellent mimic. Quite a few of the observers of this still frame (which was later used for the cover of the DVD version of the film and was shown at an exhibition in Lisbon about « Tourism, Pilgrimage and Transformations ») have commented on her « natural Indian beauty », which seemed doubly curious to me, as I had frequently been warned by well-meaning Whites about « false Indians » in north-eastern Brazil.

Taussig's question « Who is mimicking whom? » (*ibid.*: 76f) is far from rhetorical. It refers to what he calls the space « permeated by the colonial tension of mimesis and alterity, in which it is far from easy to say who is the imitator and who is the imitated, which is the copy and which is the original » (*ibid.*: 78). Alterity is an indispensable requisite for the colonial enterprise and mimesis is one of its modes of action. The « power of mimicry » projected onto the Fuegians, who were mimicking Darwin's men mimicking the Fuegians, bears witness to the mutual fascination of the other's alterity. Mimesis establishes colonial alterity as post-colonial, emphasizes it, exposes it and makes it visible, as in the big screen adaptations of Karl May's Winnetou. Mimetized by taking his/her picture, the distant other is subjected to our « urge [...] to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction » (Walter Benjamin, cited in Taussig, 1993: 20).

Today's Pataxó Indians, like other indigenous groups from the Brazilian north-east, are often suspected by their fellow White Brazilian citizens of being « Indians in Disguise », of merely staging their Indianness to gain land rights and social benefits. Allowing a White customer to dress up as an Indian in a souvenir shop could therefore be seen as indirectly subscribing to the allegation that « anybody » can become Indian by means of a superficial exchange of identity attributes. However, by masquerading as a Pataxó, the tourist from Minas Gerais is actually playfully *asserting* their hosts' alterity. The White tourists' « acting » as an Indian reasserts, by mutual consent, Brazilian Indianness as a *concept* in itself. The Indian picture-taking of the-White-as-Indian is a quaint example of what Taussig called a « mimetic contract », a « set of largely unconscious complicities » (*ibid.*: 162) between the White and the Indian, where alterity is the principal commodity exchanged.

Given that Aelson's wife was the photographer who took the picture of the White tourist dressed up as an Indian, it is hard to say who is the « subject » and who the « object » in this image-producing relationship. With the same visual exchange of otherness being videotaped by another Pataxó, the situation becomes even more confusing: a movie scene that represents (that is, *mimics* by audiovisual means) a White who is mimicking an Indian. Moreover, the Indians who are being mimicked by the White tourists are, to some degree, themselves mimicking a « generic » concept of indianness – perpetuated in the Brazilian north-east by Whites and Indians alike. In what seems to be a vicious circle in which the mimicking of a visually expressed alterity affirms precisely that same alterity in its own terms (Zoettl, 2011a), the Indians dress up for the tourists in precisely the way that is expected of them by their othering other.

Participatory video and awareness

So what is the point of introducing Pataxó Indians to the techniques of filmmaking within this context of mutual mimicking

and the reaffirmation of the other's alterity? Does the mimicking of the tourist-other in the search for otherness lead to more than a self-referential visual « language » game? In response to this question, I will highlight two aspects of what I consider to be the main achievements of the Pataxó's (and Alexandra's) participatory video experiences: « reflection » and « control ».

As outlined above, the situation of the Brazilian Indians in the north-east of the country is difficult not only in economic terms; one of their main worries is their lack of ethnic *recognition*. Many of the indigenous groups in the north-east have only begun to reaffirm their identity in recent decades (Oliveira, 2004) and are still fighting a tedious battle for the transformation of their territories into Indian Reservations by the state – and for this to be respected by adjacent farmers, miners or, for instance, multinational cellulose producers. In general, their demands receive little support from the White Brazilian population, mainly as a consequence of the above-mentioned and widespread belief that north-eastern Indians are « not the real thing ». While it is true that in some areas non-Indians have tried (and sometimes managed) to become legally « converted » into Indian citizens to benefit from the special legal status attached to them, the unwillingness to recognize indigenous groups like the Pataxó, Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe or Tupinambá (all based in the state of Bahia) is generally justified on account of an alleged lack of « traditional » Indian culture and, particularly, of its visual manifestations (such as Indian dress, plumage, thatched huts, etc.).

What the workshop participants achieved by verbally and visually questioning the tourists' view of Indians was a reflection about the *notions* of indianness present in Brazilian society and the way these are reproduced and reiterated in representational images. Moreover, the Pataxó directors came to reflect on their own part within this process of identity « prescription ». As indicated above, the mimicking of stereotyped concepts of Indian alterity not only takes place next to Aelson's souvenir shop, but is part of a routine objectification and commodification of indianness nurtured by the Pataxó themselves. During interviews conducted with tourists from all over Brazil and the discussions that followed, it became clear

that while many of the visitors vindicated precisely the kind of (stereotyped) view the Pataxó expected of them, others expressed their genuine interest in learning more about the Indians' culture and complained about the stereotyped manner in which the Indians presented themselves to tourists.

During the production of *Capa de Índio*, there was ample space to reflect on questions of identity. The film's topic (« tourism ») was chosen by the workshop participants after a period of brainstorming about « what was most relevant » to their everyday lives. At the scripting stage, the Pataxó expressed their indignation about what they understood to be Brazilian society's requirement that they remain « unchanged » (that is, not develop) and behave and look exactly like the Indians from Cabral's time⁴. Shooting, which lasted a couple of days, was usually followed by a screening of the material on the TV set of one of the directors' relatives, thus enabling other members of the community who were not directly involved in the making of the film to see and comment on our « rushes ». It was, however, principally the personal on - and off-camera interaction with their guests which made both parties (the filmmakers and the filmed visitors) aware of the pitfalls of the visual construction of indianness.

One could, of course, ask to what point « reflection », « self-reflection », and the likes, are concerns of anthropology. Although anthropologists should obviously be, and generally are, concerned about the social implications of their research, anthropology, as an academic discipline, is not an applied science like, for instance, psychology. To consider, or not, « participatory video » (and other variants of « shared anthropology ») as a valuable method for anthropology itself, capable of producing anthropological *knowledge* in a stricter sense, certainly depends on the anthropologist's personal stance on what anthropology actually *is*. The notion of images-as-anthropology has frequently been challenged (in fact, since the very beginnings of « visual »

⁴ Pedro Álvares Cabral « discovered » Brazil for the Portuguese in 1500, landing in Coroa Vermelha.

anthropology); Janet Wolff, for example, has recently criticised the « lure of immediacy » and the « evaporation of the social in visual and cultural theory » provoked by scholars who invoke « the power of images » (2012: 3). Wolff, in her article, thoroughly rejects « the conviction that aspects of experience escape language and signification » or that « that the viscosity of the image must be acknowledged, and that images should not simply be "turned into language" » – defended, amongst others, by Norman Bryson or W. J. T. Mitchell (*ibid.*: 7, 13).

As discussing the value of images as such within anthropology (and thereby the value of images produced within a « participatory » or « shared » anthropological perspective) would go beyond the scope of this article, I will resort to Geertz again to suggest in which way an image-based process of reflection may eventually be understood as having the capacity to produce anthropological « findings ». Geertz, in his renowned introduction to the *Interpretation of cultures* (Geertz, 1973: 6f), has stressed the importance of understanding « more exactly what doing ethnography is », for the understanding of what anthropology itself is « as a form of knowledge » – a question which is, according to Geertz, « not a matter of methods » (*ibid.*). One of the main objectives of anthropology, from an interpretative perspective, consists in « the enlargement of the universe of human discourse » (p. 14). The ethnographer « inscribes » social discourse (and Geertz emphasizes that such « inscription » is *not* confined to « writing » in the literal sense), trying to make sense of it. This sense-making or interpreting (of the subjects' own interpretations of their doings) is incommensurable with the kind of analysis performed by the experimental sciences; it attempts foremost to render other people's behaviour « accessible » (p. 14). The anthropologists work is not a « veni, vidi, vici » exercise of recording, observing and analyzing, but the quest for an interpretation that « takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation » (pp. 20, 18).

Participatory video, as a method of a shared anthropology, seeks to achieve a similar kind of inscription and interpretation of social discourse. The Pataxó's enactment of their identity, in its

relation to society's as a whole notion of indianness, is such a societal discourse which can be « written down » cinematically and interpreted through the very process of its filmic elaboration. « Reflexivity » and « self-reflection », within this contexts, are therefore not appreciated as social skills (as they would be from an applied scientist's perspective), but as part of a human discourse in relation to which they represent « winks » (to draw on Geertz again) to the interpretation (the sense-making) of that very discourse. The idea to carry out the reflection on this discourse in a « shared » manner (co-constructing it by the anthropologist and the local filmmakers) is in no way an attempt to deny, talk down or revert the fact that « participatory » filmmaking establishes subject-object relations as much as any other method of anthropological reasoning. It is an effort to open up the limits of the discourse inscribed. As Geertz has put it, we are not « seeking either to become natives (a compromised word in any case) or to mimic them. [...] We are seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to *converse* with them » (*ibid.*: 13, my emphasis).

Participatory video and « image control »

Terence Turner has pointed to the importance for the world's indigenous peoples to « in some measure » control the « institutional forms, symbols and techniques by which the dominant society defines its relations with them » (1992: 12). Turner also emphasizes the importance of the « ability of a group to objectify its own culture as an "ethnic identity" » in order to confront « the dominant national society and Western world system » (*ibid.*).

As the commodification of indigenous culture seems to be not only a matter of fact but also a question of survival, the « management » of one's ethnic identity comes down to an endeavour not to lose control of the *terms* under which such commodification happens. Coroa Vermelha and its surrounding areas are vivid examples of how indigenous « identity » is actively

commercialized and marketed – mainly by the non-Indian population, a fact clearly perceived by the Pataxó. Tourism all around the vicinity of the city of Porto Seguro (around 20 km from Coroa Vermelha), which receives an estimated half a million tourists every summer, builds heavily on the city's image as the capital of the « Coast of Discovery » (*Costa do Descobrimento*) and the Indians of Coroa Vermelha are the « living » representatives of this alleged history. In order to denounce what the Pataxó experience as the commercialization of their image for the benefit of others, non-Indian businesses advertising themselves using Indian names or pictorial representations featured on our film shot list, as did a monument of larger than life-sized Indian statues at the entrance to the village – a « homage by the mayor of Santa Cruz Cabralia to the primordial inhabitants of this Terra Brasilis », as the plaque next to the monument proclaims.

What had triggered the Pataxó's interest in the moving images some time before the visual anthropologist's arrival in their village, however, was the prospect of using video as a means of promoting their culture and boosting their own businesses. For a couple of years they had been running a company that organized visits to the nearby Nature Reserve of Jaqueira, which was also set up by the Pataxó from Coroa Vermelha. Video was seen by the leaders of the Cultural Centre (who were also acting as community leaders) as a tool and medium to promote their involvement with the tourist industry on their own terms.

However, it would be a mistake to understand the Pataxós' interest in « promotional » film as a solely commercial concern. In fact, their wish to promote their culture by audio-visual means is an eminently *political* activity: firstly, the reaffirmation of what is understood – by themselves or in the mind of society at large – to be their « culture » is directly connected to the Pataxó's acceptance within society as « proper » Indians. Secondly, their political survival as an ethnic group is, last not least, subject to their economic survival, which is mainly based on income generated by tourism. Hence, promoting their culture by means of images *they*

produce was seen to be a complementary measure in their fight for moral and legal recognition by Brazilian society.

The same became apparent during my ongoing fieldwork with a group of Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe Indians, who recently expressed in an email their wish to « make a documentary which supports the battle of the Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe by showing how we live today and what has improved in economical terms within the municipality since our recent occupation of [indigenous] land »⁵. Both cases illustrate the kind of appropriation (although much less visible) of media technology referred to by Terence Turner in his comment on the Kaiapo (or Caiapó) Indians from the Amazon region. Turner highlights the Kaiapo insight into the importance of entering the stage as media *actors*, by ensuring « that their camerapersons would be one of the main attractions filmed by the other crews », thus employing video as an « important mediator of their relations with the dominant Western culture » (1992: 7).

Capa de Índio and the only recently released participatory video *Tudo OK* (see the above footnote) have both found recognition by the respective communities as films depicting « their » point of view. This is far from being self-evident as – even though both films were produced not only together with indigenous filmmakers but also with a considerable participation of a number of community members which were accompanying, criticising and encouraging our work – there is of course a very wide range of differing opinions on the subject matters covered by both videos *within* the communities at large. In both cases, the community's leaders took a very close look on our doings, to be sure that the outcome would not eventually contradict their own « official » point of view and their own understanding of the political « message » of the film. The production of *Tudo OK*, for instance, was actively supported by various Hã-Hã-Hãe leaders who judged the film to be potentially helpful in their legal battle against the

⁵ In the meantime, the Hã-Hã-Hãe's proposal resulted in the production of a 26 minute documentary video, *Tudo OK. Os Índios Pataxó Hã-Hã-Hãe e o desenvolvimento rural*.

illegal occupation of their lands by local farmers – an expectation which made them send a personal copy to all of the eleven members of the Supreme Court (Zoettl, 2012a).

To what point participatory media is considered, by the involved communities, to be a true co-representation of their own (political) views, often depends less on the degree of hands-on involvement in the *technical* aspects of filmmaking (like camera handling and editing), than on the conviction that a filmic representation of certain community concerns does, or does not, actually preserve the *spirit* of such concerns. While *Capa de Índio* was thoroughly discussed, scripted and filmed by community members, the montage of the video, for organizational reasons, ended up to be entrusted mainly to the anthropologist (Zoettl, 2012b). Still, it was considered by its makers and the Pataxó of Coroa Vermelha (as far as I can speak for them) as being entirely *their* film. While montage is doubtlessly a central part of documentary filmmaking, my experience during most of the participatory video workshops I conducted has been that the initial stages of brainstorming, discussion, scripting, shooting and the constant reassessment of the jointly produced material was of much more importance to the final outcome than the actual editing process. As Downmount (2007: 189) has pointed out, a «professional» editor may sometimes render a community's political intent more faithful than it would be – initially – possible to the community's own novice filmmakers.

The community leaders that observed our doings all along most of the workshops were generally much more interested in the «political» implications of the filmic medium than, for instance, its aesthetical or entertaining qualities. During the filming of *Capa de Índio*, for instance, the question arose if the interviews conducted with visiting tourists would not, eventually, leave the impression that those were not treated sufficiently well by the locals. Such concerns corroborated our plans to shoot not only on the Reserve's beach, but also within the nature reserve of Jaqueira, where tourists are guided through the Pataxó Indian lifeworld in a way considered «exemplary». In a similar way, the Tupinambá directors of

another participatory video project insisted that their film would leave it very clear that they would never ever grind raw manioc without rigorously washing it before – an impression which might have harmed their reputation as producers of the « best » manioc flour around⁶.

While Alexandra decided that her video should not be distributed (for fear that her children would become the object of mockery), *Indians in Disguise* has been shown at a number of festivals in Brazil and elsewhere and has been hosted on the Internet. Thus, the workshop not only helped to introduce a couple of Pataxó to video film techniques, but also to disseminate an image of Pataxó Indianness that goes beyond what is usually propagated by the Brazilian media. Filming themselves can be seen as a step towards the Pataxó's re-appropriation of the imagery of otherness projected onto them by Brazilian society and towards the representation of their culture on their own terms, exploiting the mimetic faculties of film. As John and Jean Comaroff noted, ethnical self-marketing, although ultimately involving « a Faustian bargain of sorts » (2009: 26) may well foster ethnical self-awareness, precisely as a consequence of the producer-consumer relationship it entails: « [I]f we believe the likes of Kruiper [the leader of the †Khomani Bushmen] or the Xavante dancers or the Hainan islanders, [ethnical self-marketing] also appears to (re)fashion identity, to (re)animate cultural subjectivity, to (re)charge collective self-awareness, to forge new patterns of sociality, all within the marketplace. And it often does so [...] by *ambiguating* the distinction between producer and consumer, performer and audience. How so? Because the producers of culture are also its consumers, seeing and sensing and listening to themselves enact their identity – and, in the process, objectifying

⁶ Olivença de Bay-y-By, filmed by the Tupinambá community of Santan (Ilhéus-BA). On the day of shooting, we found the water tanks of the manioc mill empty, which forced the Indians to fetch water from a distant well.

their own subjectivity, thus to (re)cognize its existence, to grasp it, to domesticate it, to act on and with it [...] » (*ibid.*).

Participatory and indigenous media have the same potentiality to encourage ethnic minorities to « see, sense and listen » to themselves enacting their identity in a creative way. As it turned out, the women from Tapada das Mercês in the outskirts of Lisbon were, just as the Pataxó Indians in the developing Brazilian north-east, markedly conscious and critical consumers of their own image – their image within society at large and the images on the screen of their project room or Cultural Centre. Filmic ethnographies have, like cultures, to be made, that is (to use the Comaroff's expression), « produced ». When they are made by people who happen to be the focus of the anthropologist's concerns, their making may encourage a deeper (and hopefully useful) reflection about the makers' situation-within-society and the identities either embraced by or ascribed to them. Taking the other's creative endeavours « seriously » (Viveiros de Castro), as an anthropology-by-the-other, should also help anthropology itself to discover new forms of engagement with the cultures of those who creatively seek to gain control over both their personal and their people's destiny.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BAJAS M.-P.**, 2008. « La Cámara en manos del otro. El estereotipo en el video indígena mapuche », *Revista Chilena de Antropología Visual*, 12: 70-102.
- BARBOSA A., CUNHA E. & HIKIJI R.-S.** (eds), 2009. *Imagem-Conhecimento: Antropologia, Cinema e Outros Diálogos*. Campinas, Papirus.
- BENTES I.**, 2004. *Câmera Muy Very Good Pra Mim Trabalhar*. Rio de Janeiro, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil.
- BESSIRE L.**, 2009. « From the ground, looking up: Report on the Video nas Aldeias tour », *American Anthropologist*, 111(1): 101-103.

- COMAROFF J., COMAROFF J., 2009. *Ethnicity, Inc.* Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press.
- CUNHA M-C., da., 2009. *Cultura Com Aspas e Outros Ensaios*. São Paulo, Cosac Naify.
- DOWMUNT T., DUNFORD M. & HEMERT N. van (eds), 2007. *Inclusion Through Media*. London, Goldsmith, University of London.
- FLORES C., 2005. « Video indígena y antropología compartida: Una experiencia colaborativa con videastas Maya-Q'Eqchi' de Guatemala », *Liminar. Estudios Sociales y Humanísticos*. III(2): 7-20.
- GALLOIS D., CARELLI V., 1995. « Vídeo e diálogo cultural – Experiência do projeto Vídeo nas Aldeias », *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 2: 61-72.
- GEERTZ C., 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York, Basic Books.
- GEERTZ C., 1988. *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- GINSBURG F., 2002. « Mediating culture: indigenous media, ethnographic film, and the production of identity » in ASKEW K. & WILK R. R. (eds), *The Anthropology of Media: a Reader*. Malden, Blackwell: 187-209.
- GRIMSHAW A., 2001. *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- MAYER V., 2000. « Capturing cultural identity/creating community: A grassroots video project in San Antonio, Texas ». *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 3(1): 57-78.
- OLIVEIRA J. P. de, 2004. *A Viagem da Volta. Etnicidade, Política e Reelaboração Cultural no Nordeste Indígena*. Rio de Janeiro, Contra Capa.
- PIAULT M.-H., 2002. *Antropología y Cine*. Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra.
- ROUCH J., 2003. *Ciné-Ethnography. Jean Rouch*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- TAUSSIG M., 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity*. New York/London, Routledge.

- TURNER V., 1988. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York, PAJ Publications.
- TURNER T., 1992. « Defiant images: the Kayapo appropriation of video », *Anthropology Today*, 8(6): 5-16.
- VERTOV D., 1981. « Kinoks-Revolução », in VERTOV D. Lisboa, Livros Horizonte: 40-47.
- VIVEIROS DE CASTRO E., 2002. « O nativo relativo », *Mana*, 8(1): 113-148.
- WHITE S. (ed), 2003. *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. New Delhi, Sage Publications.
- WOLFF J., 2012. « After cultural theory: The power of images, the lure of immediacy », *Journal of Visual Culture*, 11:3-19.
- WORTH S, ADAIR J., 1972. *Through Navajo Eyes. An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- ZOETTL P. A., 2009. « Braços cortados: o realismo fílmico e a antropologia visual », *Iluminuras*, 10(23): 1-28.
- ZOETTL P. A., 2011a. « Imagens do nordeste, nordeste das imagens. Notas de campo sobre o poder de nomeação, o "vídeo participativo" e a imagem quilombola », *Cadernos do Leme*, 3(1): 71-85.
- ZOETTL P. A., 2011b. « Las imágenes del nordeste, el nordeste de las imágenes. Notas de campo sobre el poder de designación, el "vídeo participativo" y la imagen quilombola », *Revista Chilena de Antropología Visual*, 18: 33-48.
- ZOETTL P. A., 2011c. « O "video participativo" como meio de reflexão e auto-reflexão sobre imagem e identidade de grupos indígenas reemergentes no nordeste brasileiro », *Espaço Ameríndio*, 5(3): 143-159.
- ZOETTL P. A., 2012a. « Creating images, creating identity. Image, drama and identity in the Hã-Hã-Hãe struggle for recognition », *Proceedings of the 2012 Avanca International Conference Cinema – Art, Technology, Communication* [forthcoming].
- ZOETTL P. A., 2012b. « "Participatory Video" as a means of reflection and self-reflection about the image and identity of

reemerging indigenous groups in northeastern Brazil », *Anthropology in Action* [forthcoming].

Summary

Participatory video, which has a long tradition within development projects, is only recently being discovered by academic visual anthropology as a tool for scientific enquiry and representation. This article discusses its potentialities in addressing questions such as « identity », « agency », « alterity » or « subject-object relationships », based on fieldwork undertaken in Brazil and Portugal. Participatory video is proposed as a practice for both the anthropologist and the « native » in order to gain deeper insights into social relations and their construction, through a reflective process of image-construction.

Key-words: visual anthropology, participatory video, Brazilian Indians, Portugal, identity, agency.

Résumé

Créer des images, créer l'identité : la vidéo participative comme praxis anthropologique

La vidéo participative, qui a une longue tradition dans les projets de développement, a été seulement récemment découverte comme outil d'enquête et de représentation par l'anthropologie visuelle académique. Cet article étudie ses potentialités en se posant des questions sur l'identité, les dispositifs de mise en action (agency), l'altérité, ou la relation sujet-objet, en se basant sur un travail de terrain au Brésil et au Portugal. La vidéo participative par un processus réflexif de construction de l'image, proposée comme pratique, tant à l'anthropologue qu'aux « indigènes », pour en retirer un approfondissement de l'analyse des relations sociales et de leur construction.

Mots-clefs : anthropologie visuelle, vidéo participative, Indiens Brésiliens, Portugal, identité, agency.

* * *