Visual Anthropology

Session 1: Introduction

Preamble: Interest in Visual Anthropology

→ anthropology, cultural difference, exoticism, negative reinforcements

What Is Visual Anthropology? What Has It Been?

(1) visuality of anthropology: body painting, dress, gestures, photographic records, paintings, sketches, wood cuts, even post cards.

(2) late 1960s—1970s, “visual anthropology”: Program in Ethnographic Film, Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication (SAVICOM), Society for Visual Anthropology (USA). Manchester, Granada (UK)

(3) problems of self-definition; origins and developments with people, institutions and developments outside of anthropology
   -- “seeing culture”
   -- privileging the visual
   -- visuality in Western speech practices

(4) Science & Fiction
Positivism: actually observed facts, physical and objective records.
Challenging the neutral authority of the image: 
*authored creations*, necessarily incomplete, selective and partial → fiction

**What are the “Contents” of Visual Anthropology?**
→ dominance of ethnographic photography and film
→ ethnographic photography since the 1890s, role in fieldwork
→ ethnographic films—problem: which ones are the ethnographic ones?

**Debates within Visual Anthropology**
→ **Overview**
→ **Realism, Positivism**—to what extent is a film’s depiction of another culture accurate? How has the filmmaker altered or edited the content and sequencing of the footage?
→ **Indigenous meanings**
→ **Science or Art?** – images are “data,” anthropology is (was) a word-driven discipline that sees (saw) itself as a science
→ **Still versus Moving Images**
→ **Words versus Images**
→ **Visuality and its virtues** – getting to know one’s culture, or another culture, is a multi-sensory experience
Colonialism and Exhibited Others:

Difference as Spectacle and Science

Overview
→ transition from bringing “natives” from colonies to Europe and North America, exhibited at world fairs, to...
→ imaginatively bringing Europeans and North Americans to the colonies via photography...
→ anthropologist acting as an intermediary
(a) the interrelationships between colonialism and exhibitionism
(b) how ethnographic exhibits were designed, orchestrated and narrated by ideas of exoticism, scientific racism, and social Darwinism
(c) the relationships between exhibitionism, the roots of early anthropology, and the emergence of ethnographic photography

Colonialism and Voyeurism

An 1884 exhibit of Australian Aboriginals in England

→ production of images of the exotic
→ justice of the imperial division of the world
→ those who organized, rationalized and surveyed vs. those who were the subjects of this surveillance, those who were surveyed and mapped out
→ Voyeurism
FIRST INTRODUCTION IN ENGLAND OF THE BAND OF
SEVEN AUSTRALIAN
BOOMERANG THROWERS.
CONSISTING OF MALE AND FEMALE
QUEENSLAND BLACK TRACKERS
AND
RANTING MAN EATERS!
THE
CELEBRATED BUSHMEN
From the Continent on the other side.
The only captive band of these ferocious, treacherous,
uncivilized savages, with deep scars and seams in the
red flesh, and bones and huge rings thrust through
nose and ears as ornaments.
VERITABLE BLOOD-THIRSTY BEASTS
IN DISTORTED HUMAN FORM.
WITH BUT A GLIMMERING OF REASON & GIFT OF SPEECH.
They will be introduced in their
PEACE, WAR, KANGAROO, EMU, & COCKATOO DANCES;
THEIR MIDNIGHT CORROBERIES,
CASTING OF THE SPEAR,
AND
WHIRLING OF THE BOOMERANG
It is worth journeying a hundred miles to see these specimens of the
LOWEST ORDER OF MAN.
Sara Baartman: Extreme Spectating of the Colonial Era