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# Reflection and New Vision for Visual Anthropology

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Two concerns arise from watching recent developments in ethnographic film in the world. One is the increasing number of topics that are directly political, a trend that leads away from the principles and purposes of ethnographic film. Secondly, the recent revolutions in new camera technology and information technology allow ethnographic film to be made independently, with a personal shooting and editing style, more easily than by working with a production company.



*Shinto prayer at the Buddhist altar*

In the 21st century, the invisible elements of human life are becoming ever more visible: human rights, national identity, and ethnic self-determination. As these phenomena become more visible, so do the related social and political problems. These phenomena are obviously related to the work of ethnography and anthropology, but for ethnographical film, the important thing is how to approach the subject during filming and later editing.

Ethnographic film is perhaps typically focused on human behavior within a group of same identification or different groups in one area, and deals with traditional or local culture, world view, and transitions over time. Before undertaking political and social themes, ethnographic film makers should observe more carefully human daily life, language and expressive behavior, in order to understand the social situation and life style of the people they are dealing with.

The ethnographic film offers continuous images produced by uncalculated behavior and also the routine of daily life, even in the

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Professor Omori finished his doctorate in ethnology at the University of Paris, France in 1977 while studying under Jean Rouch. He has become a leading visual anthropologist, and has produced about fifty pieces, including *My Life-Gypsy Manouches* (First Prize, 1985 Palermo, Italy), *The Sons of Eboshi* (Special Prize, 1986 Bilan du Film Ethnographic, Paris), and *A Shamanic Medium of Tsugaru* (First Prize, 1995 Bilan du Film Ethnographic, Paris). He has also written and edited a number of books including *Visual Culture* (2000) and *Utilizing Ethnographic Films in Cultural Anthropology* (2005). His recent work has been focused on the theme of pilgrimage.

midst of impact by external problems such as political or economical shock, or internal problems such as the determination of self-identity. To approach national and international political problems, the research film maker starts by recording images of human daily life. Without this, there can not be any real study or visual anthropology to understand human beings in the world.

One of the most acceptable styles of ethnographic film for general audiences is showing real problems that are in common, through images that represent people's daily life. In such films, the film maker does not need to spell out the problems emerging around the people who are filmed. Most viewers will recognize the problems and relate them to their own lives.

With regard to the second subject, mentioned above, the idea of taking a private or personal shooting and editing approach to ethnographic film was popular among 1970s ethnographic film makers, but it is only now really possible for individuals to produce high quality ethnographic film, thanks to advances in IT technology. The tools for recording images and sound (cameras and sound recorders) have become smaller, and high-quality video cameras have become less expensive. It is now possible to film people in diverse situations without learning complex procedures. With low-priced cameras and digital memory devices, long recordings can be made using images that are comparable with film itself.

Editing systems have also become much easier to use because of the progress in computers and the software for managing images. As a result, one

film can be produced by one person, who can simultaneously record his or her human relationships during the fieldwork. This is a level of personal control that could not be realized by the large shooting group.

Such personal camera work can easily be used to record images from inside one group, with a view to events outside the group. The video camera is now becoming an important tool for recording images of other group members, for communication within the group. A good example is the self-produced *American Indian Film Festival* in the USA.

However, one defect of using video camera is the huge amount of original material that can be recorded because tapes are so long and so affordable. This allows film makers to embark on field work without any precise theme or idea of subject. A lot of video tapes are filled with unusable images which increase the difficulty for cutting and editing. Furthermore, if the film maker simply waits for accidental or unexpected events to be recorded in a long-running video tape, he or she may make trouble between the recording crew and the people being filmed, since such events may not be the ordinary events in daily life.

On the positive side, having abundant images of ways of life and human behavior allows us to explain even the less obvious or minor political and social matters. The small video camera is therefore one of the most valuable kinds of recording equipment for individual production of ethnographic film.

To comprehend a filming site more fully, the film maker needs to use several cameras, or at least two cameras with crew. Today it is possible to make a film using not less than two or three cameras at the same time. In 2004, when I made a small piece of film about the Jizo-Bon summer festival, in which people console the spirits of deceased children, I had to record Buddhist and Shinto ceremonies being held together at the same time. To obtain important information for ethnological research, it was not enough to record just one side-scene in video. Three cameras were employed to record the festival procession and the simultaneous Buddhist and Shinto ceremonies. Three different camera operators each produced a different personal film, but together they made one ethnographic film by forming a partnership and unifying their different pieces of film. This was a good example of real and meticulous ethnographic film-making based on collaboration.



*Buddhist and Shinto priests meet each other at the Jizo-Bon Festival*

# Audio-visual Anthropology: Participation and Reconstruction

**Marc Henri Piault**

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We know that people's behaviours change in the presence of the camera. This rule of the game is not by itself a reason to question a narration's authenticity. On the contrary, authenticity appears much more tied to a lived presence of the gaze rather than to an objectifying distance that fails to take into account its own position, and potential reactions to the observing or objectification. This view has already been advanced by Luc de Heusch (1955) in his attempt to film a thesis on Rwanda's pre-colonial history produced by Jacques Maquet (1954).

One aim of the film was to record pre-colonial social relations, apprehended within a day-to-day life beyond any radical conflict. The film provides the image of a society that is undoubtedly unequal yet capable of confronting and regulating the problems which later became insurmountable under the effects of Belgian colonization and the manipulations of the all-powerful Catholic Church. The testimonial value of this film is clear since it attempts to obtain an internal understanding of the articulation of social groups and the value-system legitimating the social order. Consequently, the film also poses the crucial question of what modifications have been brought about by colonial occupations and post-independence politics. These modifications have accentuated and diverted the social contradictions in order to maintain external domination, the irresponsibilities of which led to genocidal massacres in 1963 and ultimately 1994–95.

The film reconstructs not only behaviours but also ways of thinking about relations between people and between genders, and shows the strength of hierarchies and their dependence upon wealth or knowledge. But it was impossible for the film maker to remain distant from society and be content with illustrating and using one text as the source of all explanations and as the film's main narrative line. de Heusch realized that a cinematographic project involved establishing an explicit relationship with the people and

environment filmed. This is achieved from the film's outset, including its preparation and organization, as a means of reconstructing the relations between the two groups constituting Rwandan society, the Tutsi and the Hutu.

The first steps of this participation gradually emerge as the centre of the film-maker's concerns. It becomes clear that the initial approach remains limited to the ethnological initiative and that more time is required to realize the necessary to-and-fro of participation. At the beginning of this gradual process, de Heusch (1962) could write: "The effective and conscious participation of people in making a film is desirable and perfectly in line with traditional techniques of ethnographic observation." He later explains the reasons behind the making of his film in Rwanda. It involved: "... restoring as faithfully as possible a society different from our own, another way of considering women, of locating prestige, wealth, etc ... It seemed to me impossible to provide an account of the most elementary facts of social life [...] without obtaining the effective participation of the people being filmed."

This position, clearly stated from 1962 onwards, is not so easily admitted however by most makers of ethnological films aiming to preserve a neutral, if not objective, view of what is being filmed. Undoubtedly the readily affirmed *mise en scène* and the actual role-playing by actors can raise fears of manipulations or interpretations in which control is not clearly evident. However, it seems to me that reconstructions involve two important elements that enable a closer examination of the real. They necessitate a collective reflection on a situation or an event, a reflection which simultaneously involves memory, critique and an adjustment of viewpoints. They also necessitate an extremely close-ranged enquiry into the material and social conditions of how objects are made.

I myself conducted an experiment of this kind during preparations for a film

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looking to reconstruct the formation of the State of Kabi, to the north of modern Nigeria, during the 16th century. It was necessary to plan in the tiniest details of not only the functions and events, but also the weapons, clothes, the feeding of the armies involved, house architecture, the state of communications, methods of travelling by land and river, the location of cultures, the precise layout of defences and their materials, the modes of recruiting and training different military corps, the practical forms of trade and exchange of goods, and a thousand other things. All of this demanded the redeployment of a historical anthropological inquiry that I had believed was already well advanced. Furthermore, the project helped stir up fresh debate on the plausibility and origin of certain technical forms at a given moment of history as well as their subsequent evolution. In this way, I launched a work of memory radically different from that usually undertaken in relation to social forms, historical facts, political organizations or strategies of alliance. The divergence in viewpoint revealed rifts hidden until then social specificities left in the shadow.

The film's concrete materialization of history proved to be an unparalleled way of opening up social debate. The reflection by the society on its own makeup was of an unmatched intensity, revealing concerns over precision and authenticity that I had not been able until then to observe, despite this being a society widely concerned with its own history and functioning. As the debate unfolded, it revealed forms of reciprocal control and adjustment of knowledge whose effectiveness I had only previously seen in the particular domain of political history, and in certain sectors of the religious field. The production of a book is often extremely remote from local preoccupations and its effective realization requires little actual involvement from people. The shared production of a film-as-object concerns a society as much if not more than the film-maker. The whole of society is concerned and engaged in fashioning an image of itself, giving it a new visibility to the outside world.

Thus the audiovisual expression of an investigation initiated by the anthropologist may be appropriated by the local group and presented as a joint project. Reconstruction is an approach that allows better delineation of a theme and control of the images used to treat it.

More than fifty years have passed since Jean Epstein discovered that cinema, like any scientific venture, was an experimental device which did no more than invent a plausible image of the universe. He showed that cinema allows the combination of space and time to be rendered real, but, according to him, this realization was a 'trick' in which the production approached the "procedure according to which the human spirit itself generally fabricates an ideal reality." What I propose is quite similar: the image-sound recording procedure is itself a process of knowing, a cognitive process and not simply a collection of data. The knowledge produced is a plausible interpretation of the experimental data, an interpretation that provisionally characterizes the data's forms and meanings. 'Documenting' the real is an enterprise that cannot ignore the fictionalizations of each and everyone's attempts to represent reality. The poetic act of discovery — this new relating of elements which we have previously deemed unrelated — is the fictional venture which we claim to use and recognize. This venture will always seek to unmask the tricks and falsifications of representation which, posing as truth, do not recognize themselves.

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# Questions of Method in Ethn cinematography

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Felix-Louis Regnault is considered the first to film human behavior and by so doing he accomplished what is recognized as the first ethnographic film. He was also the first to advocate the systematic use of motion pictures in anthropology and to propose the creation of anthropological film archives (de Brigard 1995). Although his ideas were made known at the end of the 19th century, they were not effectively recognized until the mid-20th century. One of the most important developments linked to Regnault's ideas was establishment of the German *Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film* (IWF) and its *Encyclopaedia Cinematographica*.

The roots of the IWF were established in the 1930s under the Nazi regime. It is well known that movies meant a lot to national socialists, to such a degree that, immediately after the Goebbels studios takeover, German production reached up to 100 feature films a year, and a total of more than 1,100 films were made during the twelve years of the regime. In addition, there was an important commitment to documentary, partly because of governmental concerns with didactic-educational policies. Documentary played a special role in those policies. In 1935, 141 national and 160 regional productions were completed (Manvel and Fraenkel 1971).

This concern about the role of documentary film in spreading knowledge led to the creation of the *Reichsanstalt für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* at the beginning of 1930s. This institution was to become in 1956 the *Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film* directed by Gotthard Wolf.

Contrary to what happened with the German cinema as a whole, scientific film quickly recovered after the end of the war. It did not take long for many anthropologists and ethnologists to use cameras in the field, thanks to the support of IWF. Their activities were of two different kinds: recording subjects under observation, and the organization of archives to store films and show them to the public.

For recording activities, strict rules were created and enforcement of these rules led to a particular aesthetics for anthropological film. In the procedures, we can see the constitution of what is considered to be the first real attempt to turn into reality what Regnault had already hoped for at the end of the 19th century: the constitution of 'film archives'.

According to Wolf, the first IWF director, scientific film is distinguished from other genres of film by its aim. In opposition to documentaries and other films popularizing science, the scientific film is a 'film for science' and it can be divided in three categories: the 'research film', the 'scientific documentation film' and the 'university instructional film'. Whereas the latter (like other instructional films) profits from the vivid character of motion pictures and from a didactic structure for teaching scientific knowledge to students, the first two types have the role of bringing new understandings through the analysis of movement.

While the 'research film', in the strictest sense of the term, is designed to solve one particular problem through the scientific study of movement, the 'scientific documentation film' is designed to record information on the particular type of movement of a particular object or species. The Institute created, at the beginning of 1950s, an intense program for production of scientific film organized in a so-called *Encyclopaedia Cinematographica*. The main purpose of that program was to set up a collection of films embracing several disciplines and contemplating 'the systematic filmic documentation of movement'. Those disciplines included technological ones such as medicine, biology and ethnology.

In the *Encyclopaedia*, the kinds of movement recorded were related to one or more of the following:

- (i) processes that cannot be captured by the human eye and that become only visible with the help of the film technique (for example, the flight of the insects, the growth of the plants)
- (ii) processes in which comparison

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plays an essential role (for example, the behavior of the animals)  
 (iii) peculiar processes that are prone to disappear and cannot be recorded in the near future (for example, movements of ethnological significance) (Wolf n.d.).



*The opening shots*



*A knife is pointed in the direction indicated by a head movement*



*Close-up of the lip disk currently used*



*Comparing the dimensions of the wood piece that has just been made with the lip disk*

In order to illustrate the Institute's strategy for moving picture description in ethnography, let's examine a ten-minute film shot in the Upper Xingú River entitled *Schnitzen einer lippenscheibe*. This shows the handcrafting of a lip disk used by a native Brazilian tribe named *Suyá*.

The lip disk is a very important ornament in *Suyá* culture. Its use marks several rites of passage and emphasizes the value assigned to speech by the community. The first placing of a disk happens when the boy is considered old enough and has demonstrated having had sexual relations. When a man is getting old, his passage to the group of elders — called *wikenyi* — is celebrated. There are also changes in his habits (intake of forbidden food with the other men, no more singing in unison and making obscene or funny remarks during ceremonies or everyday life. The old man stops using his lip disk decorated with the Pleiades and starts using another one without any decoration.

The Pleiades constellation is a constant reference point in *Suyá* life. Its position in the sky indicates the times to get ready for the dry season, for harvesting and for planting.

#### **Mise en scène as a film strategy**

The film mentioned above begins with a medium-long shot in a light, high angle that shows a man, sitting on a small log at the margin of what seems to be a river. The frame circumscribes a man on the left, a canoe on the right at the river edge and a small floating log in the middle of the image between the man and the canoe. The man is standing still, then looks over his right shoulder at something that is supposedly out of the frame and to the left, as if he is waiting for a sign. When this supposed sign is given, he moves to his left to reach the log, without taking his eyes off the sign. As soon as one edge of the log hits his foot, he takes his eyes away from the element out of picture, to stare at the object that is not held in a preliminary manner. Using his right hand, he reaches out for something outside the movie frame. The camera then makes a slight pan towards left but not far enough to reveal the object of his searching. Before the movement is finished, the agent brings the object inside the frame and we can now perfectly see that it is a large knife, an instrument that will obviously be used to make the disk. However, just before beginning to do so, the agent seems to be looking for something. The agent then points the knife to where he

gesticulates with his head communicating with a boy who is now in the scene.

The boy enters in the river and leaves the frame, because the camera stays still. Meanwhile, the agent gently rests the large knife on the log to measure exactly where he will begin to cut. However, before the first blow is done the boy reappears and gives the agent a small piece of wood. The agent places it besides the other one and only now the camera's angle changes. We see now the profile of the agent who begins to hit the larger log. This shot is quite short and we go immediately to a medium close-up framing of the object (the log), the instrument (the large knife) the agent's hands and part of his legs, and it is between them that everything happens. Medium long shots are combined with medium close-ups but the angle basically stays the same, and is always on the agent's right, and in light high-angle shots.

A real highlighting of the operation is made when the agent is involved in carving one face of the disk, using something like an animal tooth as a chisel. At that moment, the camera adopts an angle that corresponds to the agent's vision. The viewer is now looking at the instrument's (the chisel) action on the object (the disk) in the same way as the agent. According to Claudine de France, that angle — or base angle — **emphasizes the** dominance of a material technique.

The film ends with the agent replacing his labial disk with the one he just finished. According to shots described above, let's try to analyze the IWF method of description.

The first thing to be observed is that the whole filmed process was a *mise en scène*. In other words, there is a 'representation' of the act of making a lip disk by one of the tribe's members. There is no attempt to hide or dissimulate the fact and make us believe that the recording was made spontaneously, inside a real social and cultural context. On the contrary. An efficient milieu was clearly set up by the filmmaker. This phrase is used by de France to identify a space where all necessary elements directly or indirectly related to accomplishing an activity are present. The agent of the process was placed on the edge of the river, and the instruments and the object for his work were arranged in an absolutely artificial

way. Nevertheless, some elements essential for the task were omitted: a second wooden piece is picked up from the river and a bowl for preparing the ink is needed to decorate the disk.

In general terms, the filmmaker's strategy followed Wolf's recommendation that modifications or falsifications in behavior have to be recorded in detail when those being filmed are influenced by their awareness of the camera. In the present example, not only was the agent's behavior modified, it was also totally executed for the camera.

The filmmaker attempted to limit his recording to the purely material aspect of the activity, and built his *mise en scène* around it. As a result, the film shows how to transform a piece of wood into a lip ornament, but we cannot see what kind of wood was used, its origin, where the process usually takes place, or most importantly, what the lip disk means to the *Suyá*. There is a complete amputation of the most important area of description required for an in-depth understanding of the observed phenomenon.

The manipulation of filmic language elements — the shots, angles and frames — is extremely limited, so there are countless unexplored or little-explored aspects in the space-time continuity of the activity.

Some could argue that each *Encyclopaedia's* film is accompanied by a written text that makes up for the aspects missing in the images. However, there is no doubt that moving images have enough cognitive potential for an effective description of any human activity. Depending on a written text reflects poor exploitation of that potential, and relegates moving images to a supporting role in the acquisition and transmission of knowledge.

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# Site-seeing: Anthropology and the Arts of Observation

**Rupert Cox**

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Visual anthropology today is enjoying something of a revival in terms of student interest in graduate study, but is still somewhat ill-defined as a distinct (sub)discipline. The diversification, of its former *raison d'être*, documentary film practice, into the fields of media anthropology and indigenous filmmaking has accentuated a long existing question about vision as a subject or a means of study. The honourable and necessary attempt to address epistemological and ethical questions about the status of documentary film in anthropology would seem to have resulted in a reluctance, or at the very least a deep circumspection, about engaging in the activity of making images as a means of doing fieldwork. Part of this reticence is rooted in the increased awareness of the ubiquity of images and image making technologies in the newly emergent 'global village' and the capability of others, formerly the subject of the anthropological gaze to more 'authentically' represent themselves. No longer is it possible, so the argument goes, for anthropologists

to filmically create the 'shock of the new' which informed earlier assessments of ethnographic film, or to affect that sense of cultural insights being revealed through the descriptive encounter between observer and observed, that is the hall-mark of good ethnography.

It may be possible to look at the current state of visual anthropology less in terms of a disabling divergence than a productive convergence of practices and theories, and to do so by looking back historically to a cultural encounter that produced, through visual means, an epistemic break in cultural consciousness.

The encounter in question is that of Europe and Japan, initiated in 1543 by the opportune shipwreck of a Portuguese merchant vessel on the island of Tanegashima. The Iberian incursion that followed was based on religious and mercantile motives, but resulted in and became known through new visual technologies and styles of representation, subsequently and collectively termed *Namban* 'art' (*gijutsu*). These iconographies for representing variously real and



*Kanō school: Southern Barbarians, six-panel folding screen, colours on paper, 16th–17th centuries (Paris, Musée des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet); Photocredit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux /Art Resource, NY*

imagined others, both domestic and foreign, constituted what the art historian Ronald Toby (1998) has called a new 'anthropos' in Japanese discourse. The two parallel but related forms of pictorial representation: *bankokuzu*, schematic 'pictures of barbarians' and *byōbu* painted 'golden screens' of processing 'foreigners' (*Nambanjin*), remained remarkably consistent, visually-based media for thinking through the nature and significance of cultural difference in Japan. Indeed their resonances are felt today, not only in the expected displays of these paintings and associated objects in museum spaces, but also their reproduction in a multitude of commodity forms and their re-creation through performance in annual parades in the cities of Sakai and Tanegashima, where the first encounters took place. These parades are based on the imagery of the processions featured in the *byōbu* and are often videoed - the recordings may be watched later by residents, or in some instances copied and passed on as documentary evidence to passing anthropologists (author's fieldwork, 2002).

It is interesting to consider how, in theoretical terms, we should interpret the making and viewing of these videos. Are they, as media anthropologists might argue, evidence of technology's role in the vanishing of the historical consciousness of the original pictures from which the 'look' of these parades derives? Or are they a demonstration of the local appropriation of history and the construction of local identities? Or finally, to take a postmodern turn, are these videos parodic displacements of the past into yet another simulated form within an 'Empire of Signs'? None of these explanations is entirely convincing or satisfactory, although they may account for important elements of the production and reception of the videos.

Considering another approach, what may be understood by these videos, if we draw upon anthropological debates about the production of indigenous media? Attempts to answer the question of whether indigenous films really are based in their own cultures remain unresolved. In an interesting exchange, James Weiner, Faye Ginsburg and Terence Turner (2002) have argued over the capacity of visual media to be defined by use rather than by origins. Is it possible to move beyond debates that seek the sources of meaning in degrees of technological and/or contextual determination, and attempts to find links with the issues raised above in the related field of

media anthropology?

One approach, may be to think not only about the kinds of seeing that go on in the production of these videos and their subsequent viewing, but also how these modes of seeing relate to the kinds of seeing going on *within* the original painted screens and *of* these same screens when we consider their materiality.

Within the *Namban byōbu* there is a fixed visual scheme, showing a single ship or *nao*, beside which — **assembled** on a beach — **are foreign merchants** and seamen, and from which a procession begins moving along a single pathway through a vividly and exotically portrayed urban conglomeration. The stage-like scene, embellished in the *Kano Momoyama* style with decorative waves and clouds, creates what we might call, following Tomas, an 'intercultural space'. In this space, the ship exemplifies a logic of movement and of placelessness, its passage between different locations having the capacity to link and even create new spaces and times. As a fixed viewing platform within the *byōbu*, the ship operates like a camera, making the distinct pathway through pictorial space a voyage of intercultural discovery. The same visual logic underpins the stylistic choices in the shooting of the videos of the parades that re-enact these processions, filmed from a fixed point with long, tracking shots of the passing figures.

This is not to suggest a sophisticated historical-aesthetic awareness on the part of the video makers, but rather that we should analyse the relationship between the video image and the painted image of the *Namban* presence, as being a relationship between different kinds of screens. By 'screen', I mean to indicate the physical form of the image and therefore to consider the video screen, the original painted screen now in a museum, and the walls in public spaces where images from *byōbu* are reproduced, as constituent elements of architecture. In this way, screens, both virtual and material, may be viewed as sites of transit from one space and time to another, producing a network of architectural forms and a new kind of mobile observation that Giuliana Bruno calls 'siteseeing'. In doing so Bruno presents the spectator as a kind of *voyageur*. Through the processional movement of the *Nambanjin* in these scenes of urban *flanerie*, in contemporary forms of spectatorship that can be observed anthropologically, and through the material presence of wall screens and of videos that are made and then watched

in domestic spaces, the spectator exists as both a virtual and a real presence.

Implicit here, in the concept of site-seeing is an important theoretical tension, between the material reality of the built space of the screen and its environments and the dematerialized imaginary that the screen, filmic or painted, has always provided. It is a tension which indicates a possible conjunction of the pictorial and material 'turns' in visual and material culture studies, and the marking out of an intellectual space for visual anthropology that can account for the intrinsic qualities and contextual determinants of the image as well as its 'entanglement' in processes of exchange — what N. Thomas calls 'Double Vision'. The same tension may also lead

to the practice of visual anthropology defined not only by filmmaking, but also by (and alongside) the creation of museum displays, painting, photography and the like.

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## Exhibitions

### 'Touch and Grow Rich': You Can Touch Our Museum!

*Thematic Exhibition*  
March 9 – September 26,  
2006

In our contemporary life, we always make light of the sense of touch. In many museums, you can find a notice saying 'do not touch' or 'hands off'. Through this exhibition, I wanted visitors to experience the world of 'touching and

feeling', an exploration that can lead to greater recognition of human potentials.

What is the meaning of 'Touch and Grow Rich'? I would like to prove a new formula: 5–1=6. The blind cannot use the sense of sight. People who can use only four senses out of the five are generally regarded as disabled. We tend to think that five is greater than four and that a normal person is superior to a physically handicapped person. Blind people, however, use the sense of touch more often than the sighted. In this exhibition, visitors could learn about the importance and potential of our sense of touch from many

examples of writing systems and other materials used by the blind. I hoped that all visitors could learn something new by touching the exhibits and becoming familiar with blind culture, regardless of their eyesight.

The exhibits included:  
(i) Writing systems: raised wooden letters, lacquered wooden letters, needle letters, a textbook with raised letters, origami paper letters, a model of Mt. Fuji, raised map of the ancient capital Kyoto, and globe with raised surface. These were used in schools for the blind in the Meiji Era, before braille was invented. Braille was contrived in France in 1825 and the idea was adapted in Japan in 1890.

(ii) The diary of Kuzuhara Koto (1812–82) and his stamp alphabet collection. This diary was written using Japanese alphabet stamps designed by himself. Each stamp was marked with a line, so he could recognize it by the sense of touch. Kuzuhara was totally blind and was a well known player of Japanese zither (*koto*). He kept a diary for about forty years. Kuzuhara showed the uniqueness of blind culture in his diary.

(iii) Objects for touching: a miniature Japanese shrine created by a carpenter named Masakazu Shimizu. Such models are very enjoyable for blind people, but are usually displayed out of reach. The



Wooden raised letters used to memorize letters (borrowed from the Kyoto Prefectural School for the Blind)

'Fureai (Touch and Love)' Buddhist statue, created by the late Kocho Nishimura, the Chief Priest of Otagi Temple in Kyoto and a master of sculpting Buddhist statues and their restoration in Japan. He was extremely benevolent and merciful, and was frustrated by environments that are not friendly to the visually handicapped, so he was motivated to create this Buddhist statue. A bird carving by Haruo Uchiyama, the leading bird sculptor in Japan. He carves realistic birds from wood. Seven birds and their singing could be enjoyed in the exhibition.

Kojiro Hirose  
Chief Organizer  
National Museum of Ethnology



Visitors look into the display box through the peephole or slit

## Kids-World: Objects as Ties between Children and Their Society

*Special Exhibition*  
March 16 – May 30, 2006

At Minpaku, we usually focus on a particular region or phenomenon in our special exhibitions, and ideally reflect the research carried out by our staff. This is the first time for Minpaku to create an exhibition on the topic of children.

Minpaku has no specialists for education or child science. However, we always face the living reality of children and their environments in the local communities where we do our field research. Anthropologists may learn almost as much about children as researchers in other fields. I was able to do my 'field research' in the museum by listening to interesting stories told by my colleagues. I learned about many kinds of relationship between children and their society. Over time, Minpaku has experimented with display methods, educational programmes, and outreach materials to encourage children to learn from and enjoy the museum. While designing this exhibition, we wanted to think what the museum, and

especially Minpaku, can do to understand children, and speak to them.

The exhibition was divided into two parts. On the first floor, the theme 'Gifts for Children' addressed the relationship between children and adults, through objects used by children in various regions of the world. On the second floor, an interactive exhibit allowed visitors to observe museum materials from the viewpoint of a researcher. Old-fashioned games of Japan were also displayed for playing — to link adult visitors to their own childhood, and to give child visitors a glimpse of the past life of their parents as children.

Gift is an important idea in anthropology. For this exhibition, we thought about the gifts from communities to their children: 'Ulu nife' of the Inuit people told of the exchange between a child and the ritual midwife; a blow gun given to a boy by his father or uncle among Nu people in mainland China introduced the child to practice for hunting, while woven cloths in Senegal and the Bedouin panpipe are the inheritance of a daughter from a mother. In Japan, some rites of passage, such as those for a new-born baby (*hatsumiyamairi*) or for celebrating the coming of

age of a 20-year old (*seijinshiki*), have been passed down for many generations. The relationships between children and adults can be perceived through these caring customs. Through the display of games, we showed how Japanese children's learning and play have changed over time.

New exhibition methods were attempted: in one area, objects were placed inside wooden boxes, and every box had an eye-hole and two narrow slits for visitors to peek through. The vertical slit was for adults and the horizontal slit was for visitors in wheelchairs. Different explanations for the objects were visible through the different openings. Other approaches were used to encourage interaction with visitors: in a display called the 'Tree of Our Names' the visitors wrote their name and its meaning on a strip of paper and attached it to the tree. As the exhibition proceeded, the tree became lush with the leaves of peoples' names.

A volunteer group, 'Minpaku Museum Partners' played an important role by teaching visitors how to play with the old games and toys. *Materiatheque 2006* and *Hakonabi* (Box Navigator) were developed in collaboration with Advanced Telecommunications

Research Institute International (ATR). *Materiatheque 2006* is a hands-on facility to learn about objects, and *Hakonabi* is a device supplying information about objects. The display 'Minpaku Museum Eye' gave people a new impression of the museum — a glimpse behind the scenes at the routine activities of checking and cataloguing artifacts, and at the more idiosyncratic activities of individual researchers.

Treasuring children is a feeling shared all over the world, in all communities. In an era of rapid social change, it is important to understand children and their environments and to help children learn about the adult world. This exhibition gave children and adults a much needed opportunity to talk to each other about what we see, think, and feel.

Atsushi Nobayashi  
Chief Organizer  
*National Museum of Ethnology*

## Conferences

### Written Cultures in Mainland Southeast Asia

*International Symposium  
February 3 – 4, 2006*

In this symposium we took an empirical approach towards understanding the regional character of mainland Southeast Asia, by analyzing how written documents are used in the everyday lives of people inhabiting the region.

Within mainland Southeast Asia, several language groups are distributed among numerous ethnic groups. The region is divided by many national boundaries that were created during the formation of nation states in the 20th century. One result is that Chinese characters are coming into wide use regardless of ethnic group in southwestern China, just as are the Thai, Lao, Burmese, Quoc Ngu (the alphabetical writing system of the Vietnamese) and Khmer

scripts in Thailand, Laos, Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia respectively. These official scripts have spread mainly as a result of the establishment of modern bureaucratic institutions. However, diverse writing systems — besides the official writing systems found in each individual country — have circulated throughout mainland Southeast Asia for hundreds of years. The process of bringing national writing systems to the fore in the 20th century should not be regarded as a simple transition from illiteracy to literacy, or from oral tradition to literary culture. Even now, we can find many kinds of signs and symbols carved, written or printed on materials such as stone, paper or palm-leaves, in many parts of the region. These writings span all genres and include religious documents, genealogies, annals, customary laws, letters and various kinds of literature (historical, artistic, etc.). Specific writing systems have been transmitted for specific purposes by specific social groups. A complex regional mosaic has been created by the different but overlapping distributions of language groups and writing systems.

The symposium highlighted how written cultures are embedded in folk societies. Our presenters were researchers dealing with literary sources that use Tham, Tai Dam, Lao, Shan, Cham, Karen scripts and Chinese characters. The topics covered were:

- (i) materials used for writing and printing technology
- (ii) entertainment, such as folk songs and oral traditions
- (iii) religious history
- (iv) political history.

The presentations and resulting interdisciplinary discussions will be published



*Priest reading a manuscript of the annal Quam To Muang in front of the coffin during a Tai Dam funeral (Tuan Giao village, Vietnam, 1997)*

in English. Abstracts can be seen at <http://www.minpaku.ac.jp/english/research/pr/060203-04written.html>.

Masao Kashinaga  
Organizer  
*National Museum of Ethnology*

### Social Reconstruction in Post-genocide Guatemala

*International Forum  
March 11, 2006*

In Guatemala, Central America, a civil war continued from the 1960s until a peace agreement between the government and a counter government guerrilla force was concluded in 1996. During this turbulent period, approximately 200,000 people became victims. It is known that 85% of the victims belonged to native Mayan

communities. But the most tragic thing is the occurrence of genocide, a crime caused by the military government.

The forum on March 11 was co-sponsored with the Comparative Genocide Studies Program of The University of Tokyo (Director: Yuji Ishida). Our main speaker was Fernando Moscoso, a Guatemalan forensic anthropologist who has been engaged in activities such as the exhumation of clandestine cemeteries where victims were abandoned, and the return of remains to bereaved families. According to Mayan cosmology, the victims' souls could not rest in peace until the traditional funeral ceremony was completed. Evidence recovered by exhumation was not only useful in trials to prosecute the murderers but also for claiming economic compensation from the government.

Moscoso, a founder and representative of the Guatemalan NGO *Historial para la Paz*, has recently put his energy into constructing a Genocide Museum in the

remote village of Panzós where the massacre actually occurred, in the Department of Alta Verapaz in the western lowlands of Guatemala. The mission of the museum is to preserve memories of the massacre and to inform the public about the tragic event. The indigenous people have generally not understood the death of their family members in the context of the genocide because the Guatemalan government has denied that a genocide occurred.

The museum is located in a small building lent by a village office near the heart of the village. The main theme of the exhibition is the genocide, but there are also many panels showing medicinal plants, animals, and agricultural products from the surrounding areas in order to educate villagers on life and the natural environment. Introductory panels give an outline of the massacre directed by the military government, and explain the genocide-related local history of a conflict about land ownership, between the

communities and a foreign-affiliated land developer. The most impressive corner of the museum, to catch the visitor's eye, is a display of photos of the victims, and the testimonies by bereaved families and by survivors.

Moscoso reported that the museum activities are promoted and supported voluntarily by young villagers. This helps to integrate the newly rebuilt community and to train new leaders replacing those who disappeared during the rule of the military government. The museum has played an important role in the recovery from trauma for bereaved families and for survivors by giving them opportunities to face their personal history as victims of the genocide.

Debate following the presentation addressed the question of whether or not holding the genocide in memory really can help repair a collapsed community. In Guatemala, massacres were often carried out by self-defense organizations directed by a military whose members could be from the same community as the victims. We realized that although the example of Panzós is very valuable, divisions within communities may be encouraged by such museums if there is not sufficient care about the background of each case of genocide.

Yuji Seki  
Organizer  
*National Museum of Ethnology*

**Eurasia and Japan:  
Mutual Interaction and  
Representation**

*International Symposium  
March 18 – 19, 2006*

A collaborative research project of the National Institute for the Humanities has been established by the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka and National Museum of Japanese History in Chiba. The five-year project, 'Relationship between Eurasia and Japan: Mutual Interaction and



The Genocide Museum at Panzós, Department of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. Photos of the victims, and testimonies by the bereaved family and survivors, are shown

Representation', is aimed at building a new image of region and history by taking cues from power systems, representation, and mutual interactions.

At our first symposium, we discussed the nation state, research conditions in Korea, immigration policies in England and France, and cultural representation through musical instruments, melodies, the diffusion of *Etoki* (picture primer) which originated in India, and the production of recorded music by Japan Columbia in regions ruled by Japan in the 1930s. As examples of mutual interaction, we discussed the evidence for international population movement provided by a 6th century tomb excavated in the Korean Peninsula, exchanges of commodities and information in the sea area around Japan from pre-modern times to modern times, realities of *Xiafang* (forced migration under the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China), and immigration history in Japan's former colonies and regions of authority.

Shigeyuki Tsukada  
Convenor  
*National Museum of Ethnology*

## Information

### Awards

Four Minpaku researchers have recently been given prestigious awards for their exceptional academic and social contributions:

**Hirochika Nakamaki** (Department of Cultural Research) received the *Ordem do Mérito da Imigração Japonesa na Amazônia* from the *Associação Pan-Amazônia Nipo-Brasileira* (Japanese-Brazilian Pan-Amazon Association). This award is given to those who have made outstanding contributions to Japanese and Japanese communities in Brazil (December 30, 2005).

**Makito Minami** (Department of

Social Research) was given the *Samman-patra* by Nepal Magar Association, Central Committee for his research on Magar society and culture (March 29, 2006).

**Hiroshi Shoji** (Department of Social Research) was awarded the *Maarjamaa Risti IV klassi teenetemärk* (Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana, the 4th class), the highest award given to foreigners by the Government of Estonia. This award is in recognition of his special contribution to the Republic of Estonia (March 31, 2006).

**Keiji Iwata** (Professor Emeritus) was awarded the *Kumagusu Minakata Award* by the city of Tanabe where the scholar of folklore and natural history, Kumagusu Minakata (1867–1941), lived for close to forty years. The Kumagusu Minakata Award is given to scholars who have made a major contribution in the two fields in which Minakata specialized (May 13, 2006).

### Comments on the Kashmir Earthquake

The October, 2005, earthquake in Kashmir and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan was a huge natural disaster that will have consequences for a long and indefinite period. For the communities that were most badly hit, there may be no recovery, or only slow recovery over generations. In immediate and longer term responses to the disaster, universities and related organisations in Pakistan may have a major role to play.

Large public universities will usually have the best resources, in terms of funding and staff expertise, but smaller institutions close to the most affected region are also important because of their proximity, and because they have many staff and students from that region.

Soon after the Kashmir earthquake on October 8, the present author, an ethnobotanist at the National Museum of Ethnology, made contact with Zabta Shinwari, an ethnobotanical colleague who is also Vice Chancellor at the Kohat University of Science



Kohat University, Pakistan, October 2005. The Vice-Chancellor (centre) and other staff members prepare a relief fund collection desk

and Technology (KUST), in Kohat City, NWFP (66km south of the provincial capital, Peshawar, and not far west of Islamabad). I first met and worked with Shinwari when he was a PhD student at Kyoto University, in the early 1990s.

Fortunately, his present university and Kohat City did not suffer any severe damage, so Shinwari and other staff were able to turn their attention to the immediate task of providing relief where it is most needed, in other parts of the province. An initial Disaster Management Group was established, and the team began collecting and delivering relief materials during the first few days after the disaster. Information about this effort can be found on the University website (<http://www.kust.edu.pk>). The university has about 1,500 students, many of them from within NWFP, and needing financial support for their studies. It is likely that many of these students will be involved with disaster recovery for years to come.

Because earthquakes are frequent in Japan, many research organisations, NGOs and NPOs are monitoring the present disaster in Pakistan and are planning to provide help for recovery, or have already sent small teams to

observe and help in the affected areas. Although many of the organisations involved have bilingual websites (with Japanese and English), it is not easy for the organisations to provide up-to-date information in English. Bilingual staff who might be able to translate materials for a website are also likely to be busy with planning and visits to affected areas. When natural disasters occur, the possible benefits of employing volunteer or paid translators should not be underestimated, and the Internet provides ample scope for finding the necessary help (see <http://www.researchcoop.co.nz>, for example).

Isao Hayashi, at the National Museum of Ethnology, is currently heading a publically funded project entitled 'Ethnographic Studies of Disaster Responses and Management in the Asia-Pacific Region'. For this work he is collaborating with the Disaster Prevention Research Institute (DPRI) at Kyoto University (see <http://www.dpri.kyoto-u.ac.jp>). For readers wishing to learn more about current relief activities by NGOs based in Japan, a good example is the bilingual website of Japan Platform (see <http://japanplatform.org>), an NGO consortium that aims to

provide rapid emergency relief in natural disasters and refugee situations.

Peter J. Matthews  
*National Museum of Ethnology*

## New Staff

**Toshikazu Sasaki**  
*Professor, Department of  
Advanced Studies in Anthropology*



Sasaki studied at Hosei University (MA, 1979) and Waseda University (PhD, 2000). His research interests are the history of

the Ainu and modern Japanese history. His dissertation, *Ainueshi no Kenkyu*, analyzes the Ainu folkways and culture as portrayed in paintings by the Japanese during the 11th to 19th centuries, and a book based on it was published in 2004. Before joining Minpaku, Sasaki worked as a specialist on research sources at Tokyo National Museum (1995–2003) and as a chief officer at the Department of the Cultural Properties of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (2003–06).

## Publications

The following were published by the museum during the period from January to June 2006:

◇ *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 30(3). Contents: T. Matsuyama, 'Walgett: An Aboriginal Community in a Depopulated Town, New South Wales'; B. Aoki, revised by Y. Nagano and Y. Komoto, 'Report from Tibet'; and L. Bossen, 'Land and Population Controls in Rural China'.

◇ *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 30(4). Contents: T. Udagawa,



Kohat University, Pakistan, October 2005. A donation is received and recorded

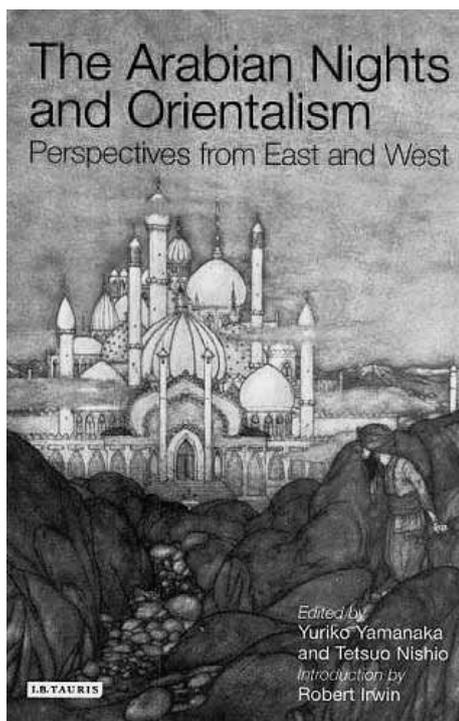
'Towards Revisioning Identity: Another Phase of Italian Identity Discourse'; H. Yang, 'Reading Political Dimensions into the "Camel Fire Ritual" in Mongolia: Ambiguous Loss and a Native Anthropologist'; and J. Ma and X. Chen, 'Floating Population and Acculturation of Urban Nonnative Ethnic Minorities in the Pearl River Delta'.

◇ Ishikawa, E. *Polynesian Cultures and Societies in the Days of James Cook*. Senri Ethnological Reports, No.59, 99pp., February 2006.

◇ Yungdrung, T., P. Kværne, M. Tachikawa and Y. Nagano (eds.) *Bonpo Thangkas from Khyungpo*. Senri Ethnological Reports, No.60, 343pp., February 2006.

◇ Nishiyama, N. (ed.) *Building a Sustainable Relationship between Cultural Heritage Management and Tourism*. Senri Ethnological Reports, No.61, 261pp., March 2006.

◇ Yamanaka, Y. and T. Nishio (eds.) *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.



Here Yuriko Yamanaka introduces a monograph that is the first example of our co-publication with a foreign publisher.

About 300 years ago the *Arabian Nights* left its homeland to be regenerated and transformed in the Orientalist climate of Europe, and subsequently, to become one of the masterpieces of world literature. Minpaku held a special exhibition on the *Arabian Nights* from September to December 2004 to commemorate the tercentenary of the first European translation of the *Nights*.

Preparatory research for the exhibition was conducted over a period of three years at the museum. During this time, we were able to build a considerable collection of editions of the *Nights* and related books, some of which are very rare even in the libraries of Europe and the United States. Ulrich Marzolph (Enzyklopädie des Märchens), Hasan El-Shamy (Indiana University), and Margaret Sironval (CNRS) were invited as guest researchers to use these resources.

The present volume includes contributions by above and other members of our joint research project. The articles were originally papers presented at the international symposium 'The Arabian Nights and Orientalism in Resonance' held at Minpaku on December 12–13, 2002. Studies on narrative motifs and style of the *Nights* appear in the first part on 'Motifs and Formulas'. In part two, 'Sources and Influences', we present comparative studies and investigations of influences from and to other cultural spheres. In part three, 'Text and Image' we explore relationships between the written text and its pictorial representation.

No doubt, the *Arabian Nights* is a product of the West's interaction with the Orient, and much has been said on the subject. However, this volume is a unique contribution to the field, in that it presents a new perspective from the Far East. The Japanese contributions in

this volume demonstrate a significant scholarly engagement with the *Nights* and Arabic literature. The reception of the *Nights* into Japan, the Japanese view of the Middle East generated through the *Nights*' image, and pictorial representations of stories from the *Nights* by Japanese artists may be of particular interest to Western readers.

This book shows that the *Arabian Nights* is indeed a literary phenomenon that encompasses the Far West to the Far East. There is perhaps no other literary work through which we can see such a rich cross-fertilization of cultures.

#### MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter

The Newsletter is published bi-annually, in June and December. 'Minpaku' is a Japanese abbreviation for the National Museum of Ethnology. The Newsletter promotes a continuing exchange of information with former visiting scholars and others who have been associated with the museum. The Newsletter also provides a forum for communication with a wider academic audience.

MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter is available online at:  
[www.minpaku.ac.jp/publication/newsletter/](http://www.minpaku.ac.jp/publication/newsletter/)

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