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"Video" means "I See": Media and Anthropological Instruction

Margaret Williamson Huber

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Traditional anthropological fieldwork depends in the first instance on seeing. The accompanying text, so to speak, will not be available until one has learned the language, and that can never replace observation anyway. In this regard as in many others anthropology has much in common with art. Like the beginning anthropologist, a drawing student has to be taught *how to see*: in this case, how to translate the three-dimensional world into two, the tactile into the purely visual. The student learns to squint at the scene with one eye to produce a semblance of two-dimensionality and to measure distances with a thumb held against a pencil. But mostly she looks for shapes and patterns because what she wants to record is not what her brain has identified for her—a flight of steps, perhaps, breaking a stone retaining wall with ivy flowing over it and a lamp post where the wall joins the balustrade of the stair—but geometric forms that she represents as lines on the page in her sketchbook. But the scene she tries to render is not simply shapes: it is an arrangement of shapes that is more than the sum of its constituent parts. The appeal of the scene lies in the relationships. It may be the contrast between the fractal order of the ivy and the smooth wall; or the fact that the angle of incidence of the wall to the balustrade is the inverse of that between the balustrade and the lamp post. Whatever it may be, the artist has to be trained to look at her environment in this way, to identify inherent harmonies, patterns, resemblances and contrasts of shape and luminosity and texture, and to relate every part of the scene to every other part of it.

Teaching our anthropology students to be anthropologists—not just to know about anthropology but to be able to do it—means teaching them to look at things in an analogous way. The papers in this series discuss the use of digital media as a particular means to that end. Like an artist, the anthropologist finds herself confronted by myriad visual impressions, perhaps so many that the situation seems chaotic. But she has been trained to understand that one person's chaos is other people's order, an article of faith that prompts her to search for precisely what

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makes the situation make sense to the people who have created it. What patterns are there? What resonances? What contrasts and discordances? In these relationships she will find the intelligibility she looks for.

Doing ethnographic fieldwork is probably the toughest job on the planet. No doubt many would argue with this—summer construction workers in the Southwest, for example—but the fact is that the task is supremely intellectually and physically challenging even when the fieldwork site is part of one's own culture. In a comparatively brief time the anthropologist must learn enough about "her" culture that she can describe not only obvious things like the kinship system and how gardens are made—the lines and shading of a drawing—but also the underlying principles according to which all these things make a coherent comprehensible whole—the relations among the components in the image. She must also, in that time, recognize and attempt to suppress her own cultural assumptions—perhaps including her own anthropological training—which, however carefully she has been trained, still want to obtrude themselves in her understanding of what she sees. But the focus of research is always, as even Margaret Mead insisted, to understand another people's way of life. This is a challenge even at home (for example, the mystification at why anybody would vote for the other candidate), so how much greater is the challenge when there are, we must assume, completely different ways of thinking about everything—from what to put in the cooking-pot to the right way to treat the spirits, and, not least, seeing one as an analogue of the other.

Ethnography aims, first, to describe accurately and fully what we have seen; and then to explain it. This means one must be able to see; then, of course, to ask about what one sees. We know that what people tell us, while essential, is never the whole story. Like all primates, humans rely on vision more than any other sense; reciprocally, we construct our environments mainly in terms of how they should look, and our communications to appeal to the eye more than to any other organ. After all, "see" is a synonym for "understand." When we say the anthropologist has to be able to see, we mean understanding as well as an informed gaze. We want our students to develop that capability.

Training students to do productive ethnography has been a problem in anthropology for a long time. When I was an undergraduate, in the sixties, there were no methods classes. The most we got was the caution that you can't know before you get there what you will find or how you ought to act. Things have changed by now, and for the better. For

instance the program at my university is small enough that we can require a minor ethnographic project—say, the study of a small locally-owned retail establishment—in a number of courses; and one of the major requirements is the successful completion of a "fieldwork-intensive" course in addition to a course on the art of ethnography itself. Such arrangements are hardly unique but, obviously, impractical for larger institutions. And, as Cooper points out in her contribution in this issue, even when class size is not an issue there may be concerns about safety, legality, and ethics. One wonders, too, how long it will be before local institutions and businesses politely request that we desist because they cannot get their proper work done with all these students hanging about. The essays in this collection demonstrate that visual media are a more than acceptable substitute for introducing students to ethnographic practice, either on their own or as a complement to face-to-face enquiry.

The papers explicate how each of the writers uses a variety of visual media in the anthropology classroom and how well they work in getting the students to see anthropologically. A lot of their message is instruction for other teachers—mainly anthropologists, but not limited to them. The writers are all clear that the use of images greatly enhances the delivery of the material, and for a number of reasons. Nobody will find it surprising to learn that students who spend much of their time looking at media screens will be more at home with a video than with pages in a book; nor that, given a supposed diminution in attention span (but see Crary 1999:35-37) in the past few decades, short clips work better than feature-length films or even 45-minute television segments. What is more disturbing to any committed anthropologist is that many students evince a complete lack of curiosity about, or empathy with, other people's ways of life, so that the old standard ethnographic films fail to arouse much besides derision in the audience, if they pay attention at all. These papers suggest ways to counter this apathy and, at the same time, achieve an essentially traditional training of anthropology students.

That is one level on which these papers address the use of media in the classroom. They also consider how best to make students aware of the pervasiveness of media objectively, as a cultural phenomenon—that is, something contingent and not automatically part of life—and in the process teach them how to regard media productions analytically. These points are more explicit in the papers by Regonini and Thornburg but they are at work in Cooper's as well. Altogether these papers make persuasive cases for the use of such media as YouTube, popular television shows, and

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the students' own media productions in the college classroom. These are not just how-to papers, reports of success or failure. This is not just about experiments in a laboratory that happens to be an anthro classroom. Implicitly or explicitly these papers also justify the introduction of popular media into the august halls of academe.

It may seem odd that the use of media in this way requires defense. Perhaps it doesn't. But I am struck by a recurring note in the literature (as cited in, e.g., Goldfarb 2002: 1ff, 59; Cooper, this collection) to the effect that while a good ethnographic film such as Gardner's *Dead Birds* is suitable, even desirable, as a supplement to the written ethnography of the Dani or of New Guinea peoples generally, using *Star Trek* or *Lost* is not. Seeley (2008), in particular, describes the strong resistance of the academy to the inclusion of popular materials in the syllabus. A usual objection is that the latter are popular culture and as such have no place in an anthropology classroom, where only intellectual entertainment is appropriate. There is a persistent idea that visuals have a lower status than the written word (Goldfarb 2002:3). This is an expression of the old distinction between high and low culture, obviously. It may be fruitless to insist that the distinction is invalid, since it is part of our culture and has been for centuries; but I will try. It is worth noting, to begin with, that the codification into "high" and "low" culture found its strongest expression during that grand orgy of scientific classification, the nineteenth century (e.g., Burke 1978:9ff), when it became imperative to impose an hierarchical order on the seeming chaos of rapid industrialization and its collateral effects. Thinking that popular culture is somehow less than Culture is a Victorian mindset, which is to say, a cultural construction, and thus no more axiomatic than any other cultural notion.

Denigration of popular culture arises in the first instance from its negative definition: it is what is left over after you take the elite part out (Burke 1978:24). Unlike the common notion of high culture, popular culture is supposedly spontaneous and informal, highly variable, transitory. Of course as anthropologists we know that seeming spontaneity and informality have their rules just as surely as does High Mass in the Vatican. During a crazy time, nobody gets to act sane (cf. Bateson 1958: 12-15; Leach 1961:135; Dumézil 1988:36-7). But to anyone raised with dancing lessons and cookbooks—codified rules for performance—the variations might well appear to be entirely *ex tempore*, thus not to be taken seriously. How can something volatile and ephemeral have any moral or intellectual value, especially when—as is often the

case—it involves violence?

The idea of popular culture is an example of what Needham calls polythetic classification, which results when several criteria, all of which need not apply in any given case, define a category (Needham 1983:39, 43). Because it has multiple criteria differentially applied from instance to instance, the term has no genuine analytic value. Correspondingly it displays tremendous variation in the items that make up the category. It retains earlier meanings of local and spontaneous (for example, garage bands, rap artists, folklore, block parties). But it has also come to include anything whose main purpose seems to be entertainment, that is, amusement, especially for huge numbers of people at once—YouTube, rock concerts, social networking. And it is characterized by novelty, so that anything new will, presumably, knock out anything else as a focus of attention. The idea that those productions deemed to be popular are not intended to last, but to satisfy attention for the moment, influences our ideas about the media as well. High culture is not only for the elite but for the ages. Or so we like to think. It has something serious to say about the human condition, or the cosmos, or some equally weighty matter that will not disappear tomorrow. Popular culture appeals to the emotions, we say, and supposedly requires only the minimum of human intelligence for its appreciation; high culture appeals primarily to the intellect. And aren't these just the qualities we want in the things we assign to our students? Implicitly it's thought, too, that whereas appreciating high culture requires a degree of connoisseurship—native good taste allied to high-level instruction (Price 1989:7ff)—popular culture, because it is so un-intellectual, neither has nor requires any such thing. Nor does it have a body of scholarship attached to it, as do the works of elite artists.

Reflection shows that these arguments are nonsensical. High culture certainly extols the connoisseur and favors scholarly commentary, but then so does the popular kind. Its followers are just as aware of the history of their media, as alert to the influences that circulate from one mode to another, as judicious in their criticisms, as appreciative of the aesthetics, as any Berenson or Janson. This, by the way, counters the objection that popular media fail to stimulate the intelligence. That isn't true, of course; but more important is the fact that our students are anything but passive recipients of the media. They think about it, and with it, a lot (cf. Bird and Godwin 2006:286-7; Goldfarb 2002:60-61). Our aim, of course, is to urge their critical reception into a productive anthropological mode. Nor can we characterize popular culture as

spontaneous and informal and high culture as deliberate and academic. Thornburg's description, in this collection, of how much instruction and labor go into his students' digital stories makes the point clearly. Even the lowest-budget film production requires an enormous amount of planning and organization; the effort that goes into graphic novels equals anything done in the realm of so-called fine art. Other examples are legion. At the same time, "freshness"—the semblance of spontaneity—is highly valued in "fine" art. And all these forms borrow from each other, as they always did (Burke 1987:58-63). Novelty certainly exists in popular culture; but we expect it among the producers of fine art too, complaining when they seem not to "go anywhere" with their work or borrow too heavily from some previous artist.

In short the distinction is so arbitrary as to be meaningless. So Staniszewski asks, "Isn't it time to leave behind criteria that equate 'high' with Art and 'low' with popular culture and commerce, considering the dominance of the market regarding the value of Art and the impact and eloquence of certain aspects of popular culture such as rap, World Beat, and the flood of pop and ethnic rock music that speak a language for both the masses and the margins?" (1995:285; cf. Crary 1999:9). A very good question. It is not just that, as she says, modern sensibility is concerned more with the means of "presenting, preserving, and publicizing modern Art"—and with the art market—than it is with the virtue inherent in the objects themselves (1995:260). What we vaguely think of as sites of high art—the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Tate, the Vatican, the Louvre—are mobbed with visitors on almost any day you care to choose. Maybe these crowds belong to an elite, but the criteria for calling them that are elastic. Crowds of that size speak to the popularity of what these venues have on display.

Many of the things we call high culture started out as experiments in the medium, and in fact they were the popular culture of their day. We know this is true of most modern art, which was deliberately challenging the high/low distinction (Staniszewski 1995:199ff); but it is equally true of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.¹ The same argument can be made about any number of venerated artists in all the media. People attended to these productions in the first place because they were relevant to the

¹ See for example Don Marquis's poems "pete the parrot and shakespeare" and "archy confesses" (Marquis 1935). Marquis's work, incidentally, shows just how arbitrary the high/popular distinction is.

present moment. Only later did some of them assume the status of "classics," with a quite different meaning than their original one.

From this point of view modern movies and TV shows are no different than *The Marriage of Figaro* or *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. I propose this despite the certain objection that there can't be any comparison between *Gilligan's Island*—the quintessential mindless TV show—and Richard Strauss's *Iphigenia in Aulis*—where someone else winds up on an island. Nobody claims that all popular culture is wonderful. But it is also the case that simply being old does not make a thing venerable. (The collection at the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum in Boston bears me out on this.) The good/bad dichotomy is in no way assimilable to the (dubious) high/low one. But whether the product is good or bad, its creators are trying to say something about the present and, with luck, make some money at the same time. Actually, from a Darwinian point of view we must agree that if it makes money, it says something about the present. Directly and indirectly films, like operas, novels, and paintings, communicate a great deal about the milieu in which they are created. They can't help it: art, which includes the media, is a cultural product and a producer of culture.

But persuading our students to understand this is as difficult as getting them to see the way in which abstract theory is relevant to the seemingly random actions they observe. With training, we come to see—understand—the cultural-ness of even everyday things like eating a Big Mac, putting a sofa in the living room, or wearing a t-shirt and jeans. As Thornburg says in his paper, one's clothing is as much "media" as is a digital story. We become alert to more subtle things, too, such as the unconscious rules according to which people in our society treat each other, which become obvious only when some transgression occurs, or when—as used to be the case before the invention of the smartphone—one beguiled the wait in a restaurant by trying to figure out the relationships amongst the people at neighboring tables. Doing fieldwork in a different culture throws all these taken-for-granted kinds of demeanor into relief and thus shows how contingent they are. But, as we have remarked already, making that kind of opportunity available to the many undergraduates we must train is difficult if not impossible. So the use of films, whether feature films or television, gives us a chance to highlight these otherwise invisible social facts as well as to demonstrate the relevance of theoretical constructions for their understanding.

This is the way that I have used visual media in my anthropology

classes, most notably one that relied entirely on the original *Star Trek* (Huber 2010): to provide visual exemplars of kinds of action or ways of thinking about culture that were intended to foster anthropological understanding, not least the ability to see what was going on. Like the writers of these present papers, I found that having a visual component to complement readings and lectures or discussions arouses interest and makes it memorable. Combining images and letters like this is nothing new, of course. Texts such as the *Iliad* and the *Popol Vuh* were almost certainly intended to be accompanied by ritual or dance showing the action that the words describe. Likewise we know of no ritual that does not have its necessary textual accompaniment, whether spoken (or sung) or written. What makes meaning, and thus memory, is a combination of the two. When we put them together in our classrooms we re-discover something that our own subjects of study have known for generations.

Cooper makes this a main point of her paper, as she justifies using episodes of *Lost* in her classes. The objection to the use of film in class because it will "erode literacy" has already been mentioned. Here is evidence to the contrary, that intelligent juxtaposition of visual and written resources enhances the value of both. Both Cooper and Regonini, following Bird and Godwin (2006), argue that if the instructor does her part to provide a context for the visuals—ethnographies, lectures, before-and-after discussions—the students get much more out of them and learn, in fact, how to see things with the anthropologist's eye.

It still may be a question, though, whether Hollywood productions, as distinct from explicitly ethnographic films, can really be used to train anthropologists. Obviously, these are not ethnographic films, and they do not pretend to be. Their intention is to tell stories. To that end they include anything that will make that happen, and they exclude everything else. As such they belong to the genre of mythology, which is to say, a narrative representation of a cultural idea of how the world is constituted; and, as such, they are enormously useful for training anthropologists, if not in the way that seems most obvious. Here we are not looking for easily identified things like how a police hierarchy works or how a mother and daughter interact. Recall that the art student has to learn not just to recognize shapes but also how they are related to each other. The relationships make a drawing something much more than marks on a surface. Stories about policemen on disciplinary leave who nevertheless save the day or rebellious daughters who manage to teach their mothers a few good lessons in life are banal, but the idea that true innovation belongs

to the outsiders (among whom we include the young) is not only an important idea in American culture but well-nigh universal (Dumézil 1988). Training in the art of identifying these repeating patterns is critical to anthropological success.

Part of what the contributors to this series are doing is getting students to dig beneath the surface and see how the implicit informs the explicit. The courses discussed in the papers by Regonini and Thornburg focus on this issue from the perspective of the consumer and of the producer of media, respectively. These courses aim to cause the students to recognize the presence and impact of media, of its design and style, in their own lives. Regonini draws on her training and experience as a graphic designer to help her students regard the barrage of media they encounter all the time with a fresh and analytical eye. Thornburg, by making his students each produce a short video about themselves, encourages them to reflect not just on the omnipresence of media in the modern world but on the nature of the self in modern America.

Like Cooper, too, they are pushing students to be deconstructively critical. This includes treating the videos as visual images and not as narratives or exposition of any sort. Students have to become aware that any video, however "spontaneous" it may seem, represents a series of choices, and then they have to figure out what motivated the choices. This is much more obvious in commercial productions, naturally, where appearances should resonate with the story being told. But that same awareness has to apply to amateur images that show up on YouTube and elsewhere. What ideas about the subject are being—however unconsciously—transmitted along with the image? Dissecting a video is just the same as sorting out the composition of a drawing, with the added fun that the video moves and is, therefore, more revealing. And having identified these inherent characteristics of videos, the student comes to understand the basic cultural feedback loop—that culture is a system of information in which we generate and receive messages all the time, modifying (and causing others to modify) what we send in response to what we receive, or hope to receive.

From these papers we get a faithful image of instructors whose priority is helping their students to understand how to be anthropologists. If it means including a good deal of visual material, then it does. But they also convey that they use these in part to persuade their students actually to read ethnography. And here I have to agree with them even as I support the idea that images should be an inherent part of instruction. Our point is

that the two complement each other. Each offers information not accessible in the other medium. More critical to this discussion as a whole, though, is the undeniable fact that video flattens the narrative. One has only to compare the film versions of—to take two egregious cases—*The Lord of the Rings* or the Harry Potter books to the written versions to see that this is so. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it is meaningless unless you know what those words are. What these papers suggest is the extent to which that is true.

That this emerges as a suitable topic of discussion is hardly surprising. The huge increase during the past couple of decades in the media presence among us is something well worth any social analyst's attention. Making students aware that this was not inevitable, but a sociological phenomenon explicable in sociological terms—as these authors are doing in these classes—is an important step in making students aware that they are cultural beings. Although these papers focus on the pedagogical uses of media for anthropology without being otherwise analytical, they also raise a fundamental and important question, which the authors and their students may think it worthwhile to pursue.

The media-saturated world that Ray Bradbury describes with dismay in *Fahrenheit 451* now seems not so impossibly fanciful. And it is very easy to think of these developments as something that was inevitable, as if once the possibility of transmitting moving images became available, all else must follow. This is, though, a dangerous way for an anthropologist to think. We must always ask (to paraphrase Leach [1969:42]), "Why has *this* happened, and not something else"? We tend to look at successful cultural forms the same way we think of successful biological ones, that is, teleologically. People think that biological success is somehow just going to happen, and they forget the many forms that failed to prosper. Likewise, we think we have explained why a cultural form is successful when we describe its attractions or its utility. It seems to arise of necessity rather than contingently. But the fact is that lots of things are attractive and useful but not all of them become pervasive; moreover, our stance has to be that attraction and utility are culturally determined, not inherent in the things themselves.² Which brings us back

² No doubt there will be howls of protest against this assertion. And to a certain extent they will be justified. Many of our choices are quite obviously based on practical considerations. But, as Sahlins (1976:37, 55, 168, *passim*) argues, those choices are necessary because we have already, collectively and without consideration for practicality or for reason, chosen how we want to live. Given that decision, certain practical considerations necessarily follow, but they do not in the first instance determine a way of life.

to the question: why are these forms everywhere? I don't intend to do more here than sketch the possibility of a line of enquiry suggested by these papers.

Thornburg refers to Benedict Anderson's well-known *Imagined Communities* as an important source for understanding the role of media in modern life. Although there are reasons to resist parts of Anderson's argument, it is, nevertheless, not inapposite for this discussion. Thornburg talks about modern media as a "social glue" analogous to the dissemination of printed materials and, eventually, newspapers that Anderson cites as the principal way that nations, and the sense of nationhood, got their start and maintained themselves. These are means by which people who will never meet face-to-face, who will never be able to know, and know immediately, that they share sentiments and knowledge, can find justification in a sense of commonality: they belong to an imagined community which is nonetheless real for being imagined. So far this is appealing. He also makes the point that, before printing and the wide dissemination of printed materials, "the figuring of imagined reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural" (2006:23). Have we then simply come full circle? Or at least gone through 360° in the temporal helix? It may be so. Modern media stress globalism perhaps more than nationalism; or, rather, they mention nations now as indices of geographical distance rather than as politically significant entities in order to enhance the sense that anywhere on the globe is immediately accessible from anywhere else. The resulting society is no longer merely to be imagined. The Internet is busy with images of people in every kind of activity and crammed with signed reviews of every kind of thing. You know what people look like and what their opinions are. Still, this does not mean that you know them in the same way that you know your family or your neighbors, with whose whole unstudied presence you are familiar even if you are not always conscious of it. It is actually a community different from that and also derived from Anderson's imagined community. Its population is self-selected, and it selects also the images—including spurious names and identities—that it wants the rest of the world to see. What we have to imagine now is not that there are other people out there, but what it is they don't want us to know about them. This is a virtual community of imagined persons.

Saying so does not however answer the basic question of why anybody would want this. Are we to assume that the human race always has, but until now we couldn't do it? Is this a new iteration of the

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Renaissance idea that humanity should control nature? Is it a practical realization, insofar as we are able, of magical devices children learn about in bed-time stories? Or perhaps it's an attempt to overcome by its own means the alienation created by capitalism.

Whatever the answer turns out to be, a necessary first step, described by Cooper, Regonini, and Thornburg in these papers, is understanding the thing you want to explain. To say that they are training anthropologists does not need saying, except to set it up in opposition to other explanatory possibilities, most obviously history and psychology. How easy to answer this question "why?" by referring to Gates and Jobs, and to earlier developers of media devices and content—even relating all this ultimately to the development of machinery in the ancient world so as to make it appear that a divinity was opening her own sanctuary doors. But can history really explain anything? A well-crafted history can trace the course of a development, but unless the writer is equally well-versed in anthropological theories of culture change the history will not explain why things developed the way they did instead of some other way. Or it will explain the developments in terms of economics or psychology, forgetting that these are cultural forms like anything else.

And that is the reason, too, that psychology will not give us a satisfactory answer either. The temptation to use psychology to explain all this is not just strong: to many, it seems to be the only rational choice. In the well-known aphorism, anthropology deals with collectivities, psychology with individuals. The phenomenon we are looking at seems to be manifestly an individually-oriented one. We have only to point to the plethora of individually-owned, individually-used devices intended to record and transmit images either of individuals or of scenes that individuals have decided ought to be shared with others. But we also take for granted the idea that mass media should provide personal, individual enjoyment. All of this argues that we are talking about a psychological phenomenon, or "human nature." Most people have no trouble in assuming the "naturalness" of wanting and of using these devices and of responding to what they produce. But this, of course, is the pitfall of doing anthropology in one's own culture. In seeming to be necessary rather than contingent, and in being at some level intelligible even if it is regrettable, it seems to proceed from one's own psyche instead of from the fact that we live in a society and that we collectively generate these ideas and these things.

This brings me back to my starting point, the development of the

anthropologist's eye. As the eye is an extension of the brain, what we are doing as we focus on seeing is trying to shape our students' way of thinking so that they recognize, even in their own choices and judgments, instantiations of cultural ideas. This, in turn, means that they will always seek a sociological explanation for such phenomena, which after all is the only valid way to understand them.

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Pop Culture Pedagogy: Television and Film as Simulated Ethnographic Data

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Anthropological theory often appears as the capstone course for undergraduate anthropology majors – the final barrier to the degree or perhaps even ‘becoming an anthropologist’. Despite its importance, however, this class is often underappreciated and its full potential left unrealized due to a lack of student engagement. The abstract language of original texts can be intimidating and difficult to apply to the complex realities of daily life. In addition, simply learning about theory does not prepare students to function as critical thinkers, much less future practitioners. This paper profiles a successful compromise: the use of popular television and film as accessible proxies for ethnographic data. Commercial media appeals to student preferences for high production values and contemporary visuals, while providing instructors with a uniform set of simplified phenomena for the application of theory. Here, this usage is (1) outlined with an example from the television series, *LOST*, which originally aired on the ABC network from 2004 to 2010, and (2) grounded by both a larger consideration of the criteria for successful media selection and a critical examination of the role of popular culture and technology within the classroom.

The Trope of the Modern Student

I basically believe that media is the pedagogy of our times.
-bell hooks (in Hooks and Sealey 2008:148)

In the fall of 2007, *A Vision of Students Today* went viral. This brief YouTube video, depicting student perceptions of education (see Wesch 2008), garnered over one million hits in its first month and captured the attention of the blogosphere. At first glance, the video seems an unlikely candidate for mass appeal. As the product of a class project

initiated by Michael Wesch in his Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course at Kansas State, the video covers relatively benign ground: class size, time management, and average material and tuition costs. The imagery is simple, providing a text-based narrative written first as graffiti on an empty lecture hall's walls and seatbacks and then in the displayed notebooks and laptop screens of the students now seated in the classroom. These students silently present frequencies taken from an internal class survey, their actions accompanied by a subdued, electronica track. Yet despite these unassuming elements, a profound portrayal of student disengagement emerges – one that is unambiguous in attributing blame.

Wesch's video relies on a series of striking comparisons – most notably the implicit comparison of static, outdated modes of learning that revolve around desks, chalkboards, and classroom walls, which “cannot talk,” and the voice given to students through their use of the constantly evolving, collaborative medium of a Google document. Themes of old and new, tradition and modernity, are literally inscribed onto the built environment of the classroom, as the viewer is invited to compare fixed graffiti on a chair to rapid, on-screen edits. The overall effect is a damning juxtaposition of the “nineteenth century environment that still characterizes the educational establishment,” with Wesch's own web-based approach (Wesch 2007:0:06-0:20). For those who fail to respond to subtlety, there is also a text overlay, “Some have suggested that technology can save us” (Wesch 2007: 3:33).

This appeal to the need for modern technology has been a constant refrain among proponents of media-based teaching. As Bird and Godwin (2006:285) note, there is a common assumption within the literature that current students are the unique product of a “media-saturated society” and are distinct in their ingrained predisposition and need for media-based instruction. This sentiment has been regularly expressed for nearly forty years, ranging from Smith's (1973:51) depiction of a “highly sophisticated audio-visual generation” to Maller and Rossy's (2003:609) assertion that, “Students today have become accustomed to learning through multimedia and are easily bored or distracted by more traditional pedagogies.” The overarching message is a mandate to ramp up the technology for a new generation of multitasking, hyper-thinkers. This is not, however, the message here. Instead, I argue that media is only as good as its application, and that its strengths and weaknesses as a medium of instruction must be evaluated in context. But before turning to the classroom environment and recommendations for the selection of video

media, the trope of the modern student must be addressed.

As highlighted by Appadurai (1996:3), Western social science likes to theorize around the modern moment, “a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present.” It is unsurprising that this framework – a decisive component of the work of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Toennies, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim – should carry over into our thoughts about education in the “modern” era. Appadurai (1996) himself posits electronic media as a transformative force, corresponding well with Wesch’s (2008) depiction of the classroom as fundamentally changed by an enveloping “cloud of ubiquitous digital information.” Certainly, there are differences in scale – differences with important implications for economic, political, and cultural interactions, which we as anthropologists would do well to notice (e.g., Ginsburg et al. 2002). Yet, we are deceiving ourselves with this notion of an imagined past in which students were passive receptacles reliant upon their teachers to convey scarce, otherwise inaccessible information. Divergent narratives and alternative stimuli have always been a feature of the human experience, and higher education is essentially training in how to navigate these competing sources. Skinner (1964:483) famously noted that “education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten,” emphasizing that facts and details are disproved or lost to time, while ways of knowing endure. Ultimately, education is about how to think critically, how to evaluate and process data, and how to judge the reliability of sources. The introduction of multimedia fails to change its underlying nature, making media best understood as simply another device in the pedagogical toolkit.

It is with this framework in mind that I approach the use of media, rejecting Champoux’s (1999) notion that films “speak for themselves” and employing them instead as a source of simulated ethnographic data for the application of theory. This technique builds on a research tradition in which noted American anthropologists Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson drew heavily on propaganda films and popular cinema to assess the cultural traits of enemy nations during and after World War II (see Ginsburg 1994). It also mimics the skills developed through fieldwork as students are trained to be attentive to both significant and seemingly insignificant details, which are then analyzed, categorized, and presented through the process of theory building (Leblanc 1998). The substitution of media – specifically film and television – for the interpersonal interactions of firsthand data collection overcomes many of

the time and resource constraints of traditional course structures as well as issues of safety, legal liability, and ethics, which emerge when individuals' lives and experiences are used as a training ground. Moreover, when teaching theory, media clips serve as a comfortable bridge between the students' academic and personal worlds, addressing a critique voiced by Grimshaw and Hart (1993) and later echoed by Coleman and Simpson (1999). For these authors, anthropology routinely fails to connect its students as individuals with the larger world in which they live – an oversight that reinforces the discipline as esoteric and firmly situated in Trouillot's (1991) "savage slot." Video media, however, makes these connections and does so in a familiar, approachable way by offering simplified depictions of common, yet difficult to observe, phenomena like conflict and deception that would be otherwise inaccessible for undergraduate analysis (Huber 2009, Shields and Kidd 1973, Vande Berg 1991). Though neither a panacea nor somehow uniquely modern, the use of media does provide an efficient, low-risk source of data that can be used to model the application of anthropological concepts and theory.

Concerns in Media Selection

I do remember a literature professor walking by my classroom while we were watching a television show and transgressively shouting through the open door, "Pretty low brow, Professor!"

-S.M. Ross (2009:151-152)

Despite the push for technical innovation, popular culture in the classroom remains controversial, and calls for its use must anticipate and address the issue of academic standards. As encapsulated by Ross' (2009) experience, a clear conflict exists for institutional education when it comes to weighing the "cultural present" against the "canonized past" (Luke 1997:21). Broughton (2008), for example, documents in American and British schools a long-standing aversion to popular culture, which is routinely expressed through food metaphors that draw on the mass appeal and youthful associations of popular culture to characterize it as form of intellectual junk food. Appropriate educational content, in contrast, is seen as a more mature, cultured product that cannot be fully appreciated without specialized training. The implied contrast of popular culture and high culture is unavoidable. It invokes the unpleasant specter of

anthropology's ethnocentric past, specifically theories of unilineal evolution and Tylor's (1873) conception of "Culture" as a single body of information of which different human groups had variable amounts, reflecting their relative advancement. Contemporary anthropology clearly rejects these cultural ranking systems. Yet even as we teach the value of cultural diversity, we remain hesitant at the prospect of substituting Hollywood productions for classic ethnographic film. Certain forms of cultural expression thus continue to be privileged over others.

Part of this hesitancy can be traced to the Marxist anti-populist movement of the Frankfurt school, which viewed popular culture as an impediment to "the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves" (Adorno & Rabinbach 1975:18). This healthy skepticism of the media machine is similarly expressed by Postman (1985) in his classic critique of television as an incoherent, anti-participatory medium defined by its mandate to entertain. These are legitimate concerns, particularly given media's overwhelming commercialization and the near monopoly on messaging held by the industry's 'big six': General Electric, Walt Disney, News Corp, Time Warner, Viacom, and CBS. Yet, Dolby (2003:263) argues that it is this potential for power and control – media's role in constructing "taken-for-granted understandings about life, its possibilities, and its limits" – that makes popular culture a vital, pedagogical site. In a near reversal of Postman (1985), she advances the necessity of classroom instruction on the cultural impact of media.

While acknowledging the value of Dolby's approach, I want to promote a simpler application for film and television, one that moves outside the realm of media scholarship and is capable of productively incorporating (almost) any content. This is accomplished by revising our goal and approach and reconceptualizing television and film not as factual content or a means of transporting students to distant fieldsites (see Bird and Godwin 2006) but rather as a purposeful simulation and heuristic device. On-screen stimuli become the basis for constructing thought experiments to assess a given concept or school of thought. Conceived of as such, it is no longer a question of substituting *LOST* or even *Off the Verandah* (Singer and Dakowski 1986) for Malinowski's original works, but rather a question of identifying the most useful clip to facilitate the application of his theories. Oriented by this narrowly defined objective, I draw on existing literature to establish the following three guidelines as a set of basic, best practices for media selection in undergraduate theory

courses.

Avoid Ethnographic Films and Filmed Lectures

Though it may initially seem counter-intuitive, classic ethnographic films have been shown to reinforce existing cultural stereotypes; are perceived as outdated, irrelevant, and generally unpleasant; and are often employed by students as evidence that the instructor or anthropology itself is “out of touch with modern sensibilities” (Bird and Godwin 2006:290). The potential for film to reify existing notions of the “primitive” is particularly well documented for the Yanomamo, the indigenous Amazonian group famously portrayed by Tim Asch in such titles as *A Man Called Bee*, *The Ax Fight*, and *The Feast*. As early as 1973, Thomas Hearne and Paul DeVore reported that their substitution of a series of twelve films for the standard lecture format of two introductory anthropology courses had simply provided students with a wider factual base with which to support their previous ethnocentric characterizations (Martinez 1995). Hearne and DeVore failed to effect appreciable attitudinal changes among their students despite their significant time investment (seven class periods) and careful blending of ‘fierce’ (e.g., *The Feast*) and ‘peaceful’ (e.g., *Dedeheiwa Weeds the Garden*) depictions of the Yanomamo. Martinez (1995) documents a similar effect among undergraduate students at the University of Southern California in the 1980s. Many of these students reported a profound sense of distance and alienation with respect to the “gross” and “barbaric” actions they witnessed on the screen, despite the guidance and extensive contextualization provided by teacher-filmmaker, Asch. Moreover, even Asch (in Martinez 1995:56) admits to his inability to reliably connect with students using ethnographic film, stating, “I’m just not reaching them, I don’t know what they’re getting out of it, if anything, or if their worst prejudices and biases and ignorances are just being reinforced.”

Martinez (1995:62) uses these reactions to argue against the widespread use of ethnographic film as a “mere anthropological illustration of the other,” which avoids “critical analysis of the textual politics of the representation.” The takeaway here – echoing Heider (1976), Rollwagen (1988), and Banks (1992) – is that media cannot stand alone without inviting misreading. Given the complexities of representation and the well documented tendency for film and television to serve as a “celluloid Rorschach” uncovering viewers’ underlying biases

and sensitivities, it is best to avoid introducing potentially problematic depictions of non-Western and subaltern populations unless course goals allow for a careful ethnographic framing of these groups (Demerath 1981, Hall 1980). This is rarely the case for dedicated theory courses, where time and attention are diverted to students struggling with the abstract language of original texts. As instructors, we have considerably more latitude with our treatment of fictional characters. We can question, poke fun, and play devil's advocate with abandon in our attempts to provoke class participation and enhance comprehension.

Moreover, students are more receptive to the high production value of commercial media (Shields and Kidd 1973, Vande Berg 1991). In their survey of undergraduate students at the University of South Florida, Bird and Godwin (2006:289-290) note a distaste for traditional ethnographic films – particularly those with a heavy reliance on narration – and a corresponding preference for “entertaining, fast-moving, contemporary visuals.” In a similar vein, the students resolutely rejected as “arrogant, pompous, and, above all, boring,” Stephen Jay Gould’s phenomenal filmed lecture, *Evolution and Human Equality* (Bird and Godwin 2006:289). These results are both surprising and instructive, pointing to the fact that students are more positive about contemporary film and television, which they view as a comfortable, familiar medium more deserving of their attention. Ultimately, not all media is created equal, and if Gould and Asch are hard pressed to successfully challenge student preconceptions through ethnographic film and filmed lectures, it is a good indication that we should pursue alternatives.

Keep it Brief

Writing in an earlier era, Smith (1973:56) happily promotes a selection of films ranging from Jean-Luc Godard’s *Week End* to the *Twilight Zone* series as a means of “freeing” instructors of 65 percent of their in-class responsibilities while preserving positive student evaluations. When applied solely as a “baby-sitting device,” longer media segments clearly result in more instructor free time, but this use of media leaves its pedagogic potential largely untapped (Heider 1976:130). Contrary to Smith’s (1973) conception, instructors must be present and actively engaged if film and television are to be meaningfully employed in the classroom. Bird and Godwin (2006:296) suggest that selected media be introduced, contextualized, and explicitly linked to course content prior to

viewing in order to justify students' attention; paused intermittently to refocus the class and draw attention to specific points; and then dissected post-viewing to make students "process what they have seen." This level of interaction is time-intensive and requires shorter clips to promote the appropriate ratio of viewing to discussion. This is particularly vital when the intent of the exercise is to introduce media as proxy data for training in explicit awareness and the application of anthropological concepts. Here the depicted actions and content are less important than the students' observations and corresponding theory-building – a fact that classroom time management should reflect.

By 'keeping it brief' with respect to media selection, we both allow time for collaborative learning and bypass the documented, short attention spans of undergraduates. My personal experience echoes these findings for upper-level majors and further indicates that 20-minute segments are ideal for focused, theory-based analysis. This timeframe promotes greater attention to detail and more productive, evidence-based class discussions. Providing a relatively brief set of stimuli mitigates the student tendency to substitute synopsis for analysis and produces a more manageable task. Shorter selections also avoid the temptation to assign media for out-of-class viewing. Though initially attractive due to the easy accessibility of feature films and popular television series, independent viewing fails to inspire the same complex, nuanced interpretations that result from "situated interactions" like group viewing, as evidenced by Englehart (2003).

Add Variety

The third and final guideline is a practical consideration based largely on my classroom experiences and background as the facilitator of a reflective practice teaching circle. It is targeted at instructors who are new to teaching theory with popular film and television and is intended to minimize the initial time investment and risk involved. The development of a themed course, focused on a single film or series (e.g., Huber 2009, Winegarden et al. 1993), requires extensive background knowledge on the part of the instructor and relies on the name recognition and continued popularity of the featured media to maintain interest and enrollment. Diverse media selections have the potential to appeal to a wider range of students and are more easily replaced if a given example becomes dated or otherwise fails to connect. In my own courses, I employ multiple film

and television segments: (1) to emphasize that anthropological theory can be usefully applied to nearly any medium and (2) to discourage students from becoming preoccupied with a given storyline. No class is the same, and a variety of media sources allows for piecemeal substitutions tailored to fit student interests (as well as selective updates) without threatening the core structure of the course. Although somewhat anecdotal, my course evaluations consistently support this strategy and often include enthusiastic student suggestions for additional media sources.

Applications: Teaching Theory with LOST

Having characters I know well to attach to these ideas makes me feel like I'm learning something, which is extremely important and fulfilling.

-Student Evaluation (Spring 2011)

Having profiled these basic recommendations in support of a variety of brief clips drawn from commercial film and television, I would like to conclude by outlining my technique for the use of popular media as a proxy for ethnographic data. This case study is drawn from my work in an upper-level, undergraduate seminar at the University of Alabama, which focuses on past and contemporary theories in sociocultural anthropology. The course is taught once-weekly in a 150-minute block; the first hour consists of an interactive lecture on the history and development of a selected school of thought with the remainder of the class devoted to the application of theory. It consistently enrolls around 25 students and is a required course for the major. While multiple media offerings could be highlighted, I have chosen to focus on a single example from the series LOST. I employ this clip early in the semester, and it is consistently successful as a means of introducing students to the concept of applying theory, demonstrating alternative theoretical approaches to the same set of phenomena, and underscoring differential emphasis on (1) the role of the individual versus the collective, (2) structure versus agency, and (3) materialist versus idealist approaches.

The television series, LOST, originally aired on the ABC network from 2004 to 2010, garnering both popular success and critical acclaim. With an average of 15.7 million American viewers during its first season and a continued Internet presence and cult appeal, LOST has wide-ranging, contemporary relevance (ABC Medianet 2005). It is visually and emotionally stimulating with an award-winning ensemble cast and one of the highest production values on television (Ryan 2005). In addition to

piquing student interest with its strong images, compelling storylines, and established popularity, *LOST* simulates the bounded cultures of classic anthropological theory. The show's plot centers on a set of plane crash survivors stranded on a remote, and largely deserted, island in the South Pacific as they attempt to survive in their new environment. We observe the development of new social structures, alliances, and hierarchies and witness a series of interactions and conflicts between the nascent survivor society and "the Others," a vaguely identified group, which is routinely exoticized for the audience. This restricted setting provides a simplified context for theory-building and application not unlike the (supposedly) isolated, small-scale communities that inspired Malinowski, Boas, and Mead, among others. *LOST* thus becomes an entertaining proxy for ethnographic data, capturing student attention and providing a familiar, low-risk forum in which to experiment with the application of theory. Though the use of multiple media sources throughout the semester is recommended, *LOST*'s fictional characters and events can be comfortably employed to model a full range of theories – from unilineal evolutionism to cultural materialism and symbolic and interpretive anthropology – without the threat of reifying cultural stereotypes for existing populations.

Moreover, *LOST* can be easily edited to create brief segments for in-class viewing without sacrificing comprehension. Like most television series, *LOST* is designed to function as a set of independent episodes, such that students are able to understand the action in a single episode without reference to the larger series. Excluding commercials, the episodes run for approximately 45 minutes and combine a primary storyline with one or more character-driven subplots. Each episode thus yields multiple, 20-minute, stand-alone segments, which are compatible even with 50-minute-block course scheduling. The complete six-series collection is readily available for purchase from multiple retailers, video rental centers, and via online, instant streaming. It is also freely accessible on the ABC website. For this example, I focus on a 25-minute segment from "Confidence Man" – the eighth episode of the initial season – to explore competing theories of social formation proposed by Emile Durkheim and Max Weber.

Theories of Social Formation in "Confidence Man" (05:45-29:45)

Prior to introducing the clip, it is important to establish sufficient background. In my courses, students prepare by independently reading

annotated essays by Durkheim and Weber (see McGee and Warms 2008:82-127), and I outline the history and defining arguments for this school of thought at the start of class. Students are then divided into small, four-to-five-person groups to collaboratively construct mind maps – visual diagrams that employ groupings, branches, and spatial areas to emphasize connections and relationships within a body of information. Each group focuses on either Durkheim or Weber, identifies their assigned theorist’s driving questions, and then literally draws out the connections to relevant personal background, intellectual influences, and key vocabulary and concepts. Committing these ideas to paper in a large, visual format keeps students on task and allows me to quickly assess comprehension when supervising multiple groups. The students are told that they are about to see a social group in transition as the result of a cataclysmic event (i.e., the plane crash), and that they will need to analyze these changes from the perspective of their assigned theorist. This information serves to guide their mind-mapping efforts and frame the LOST viewing as a role-playing activity. It is thereby made explicit from the outset how course content (i.e., theories of social formation) is to be connected with the selected media example.

The profiled clip opens as Jack, the physician, dresses a head wound for Boone, while Boone’s step-sister, Shannon, sits in the background in clear distress. The ensuing dialogue between Jack and Boone introduces the major source of conflict in this episode as we learn in quick succession that: (1) Shannon suffers from asthma and her inhaler has recently run out, (2) Boone’s luggage held Shannon’s spare inhalers, and (3) Sawyer, a conman and the group outsider, has been spotted with some of Boone’s possessions, which he is believed to have taken, along with Shannon’s inhalers, from the plane wreckage. Boone’s initial attempt to retrieve the inhalers from Sawyer has resulted in a beating and the head wound we see in the opening shot. The selected clip follows the group’s attempts to take the inhalers from Sawyer and treat Shannon’s worsening asthma. Flashes of Sawyer’s pre-crash back-story punctuate the segment, which ultimately ends with a torture sequence in which Jack and former Iraqi Republican guardsman, Sayid, prevail on Sawyer to disclose the location of the inhalers. Sawyer withstands these brutalities and leverages his position to win a kiss from Kate – a love interest he shares with Jack. After receiving the kiss, Sawyer reveals that he never had the inhalers.

At the conclusion of the clip, students are led in a review of the segment’s main characters and their relationships to one another as a final

preparation for group work in which they develop an analysis from the perspective of their assigned theorist: Durkheim or Weber. I often float between the two groups during this time, posing questions and prompting further reflection. Each group assigns a leader to present their interpretation to the class as a whole, and the floor is opened up for debate after both sides have been heard. During the ensuing dialogue, the instructor functions largely to identify out-of-character remarks and consistently reinforce distinctions between the students' Weberian, Durkheimian, and personal readings. I aim to advance the following basic interpretations, which are achievable for students early in the semester and provide a solid grounding in the concept and application of theoretical frameworks.

The Durkheimian Analysis

Following the plane crash, the LOST survivors must forge new interpersonal connections, ultimately creating a shared society with some degree of social cohesion. We can assume that in the days immediately following the crash, there was limited differentiation as the survivors defined themselves in relation to a single shared experience and were united through affective bonds rather than those of interdependence. Island life thus originally demonstrates mechanical solidarity. When we join the cast in this clip, however, we can see that occupational specialization is beginning to (re)emerge. It is Jack, the physician, who treats Boone's head wound. Sayid has begun to function as a technician and an enforcer, taking on the responsibility of torturing Sawyer for the good of the group. Locke, one of the more enigmatic characters, takes on the role of hunter, and there are attempts by several group members to define Sawyer as a thief. Durkheim would characterize the island society as transitioning into organic solidarity in keeping with his belief that societies evolve from simple, homogenous groups to more advanced, differentiated ones. Sawyer's refusal to turn over Shannon's inhalers (or even offer accurate information as to their whereabouts) can be seen as a violation of the assumed social facts of the group – the rules that an individual must learn and observe as a member of the society. Conflict, specifically Sawyer's torture at the hands of Jack and Sayid, can be seen as transient strife resulting from the "incomplete elaboration of organic solidarity" (McGee and Warms 2008:70).

The Weberian Analysis

In contrast to Durkheim's optimistic view of social evolution, Weber saw a movement toward increasing bureaucratization, personal restrictions, and the destruction of individual liberties. Sawyer is Weber's archetypal hero. By remaining on the beach, opting out of Jack's "Commie share fest down in Cavetown," and successfully resisting the emerging power structure, Sawyer establishes himself as a charismatic individual whose actions are a form of social protest with the potential to radically redirect society. Even when bound and physically disadvantaged, he controls the situation to further his romantic aims with Kate, prompting debate over which characters have power as well as an apt segue into Weber's classic conception of power as "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in that action" (McGee and Warms 2008:102). Shannon's inhalers can be read as the basis for a new class-consciousness when they emerge as "decisive for the fate of the individual" and thus sensitize others to Sawyer's hoarding and his control of property on the island (McGee and Warms 2008:104). While admittedly a simplification, it is an instructive one allowing the students insight into the development of basic class distinctions. Conflict is explained, per Weber, as the natural result of increasing class mobilization and the clash between two strongly charismatic individuals (Sawyer and Jack).

The Student Response

In the most recent iteration of this activity, students (n=28) provided feedback in an anonymous survey with overwhelmingly positive results. The majority of participants reported improved comprehension in comparison to both previous reading and self-study (89.3%) and general group discussion (92.9%). Qualitative comments indicate that while students enjoy the opportunity to confer with their peers, these discussions quickly become unfocused without a shared set of accessible examples like those provided by the LOST storyline. Moreover, in keeping with previous findings (Bird and Godwin 2006, Shields and Kidd 1973, Vande Berg 1991), students prefer the use of relevant, contemporary media – often conceptualized as 'characters they know.' Yet while 89.3 percent would like to see the activity repeated with a different set of theories,

several urged that we move beyond LOST to incorporate other forms of media, thus echoing the third media selection guideline. Though most students were not quite willing to describe the experience as “pleasant,” they appreciated the active element as a means of “stimulating [the] brain in a way that sitting and listening could not.”

Saving Media

Contemporary popular media cannot ‘save us’ or somehow transform our teaching into a uniquely modern endeavor. Neither should we fear or dismiss it as a ‘low brow’ cultural product. As evidenced earlier, perceptions of media-based instruction tend toward either utopian visions of the collaborative potential of evolving technologies or dystopic fears of eroding academic standards. The intent here is to prompt a movement away from this false dichotomy with a practical consideration of media as simply another device in the pedagogical toolkit.

For theory courses, film and television offer an efficient, low-cost, low-risk source of simulated, ethnographic data. Instructors compile brief clips from commercial film and television, which allow students to work together in-class to assess a variety of characters and events without the time investment of original fieldwork or the danger of reifying stereotypes for existing populations. I have profiled the television series, LOST, due to its compelling images; convenient replication of anthropology’s classic small-scale, bounded cultures; and my consistent success with this example early in the semester as an introduction to the technique. Yet LOST is only one of many possible examples. When used as a heuristic device rather than a means of conveying factual information, media selection is constrained only by three basic guidelines: (1) avoid ethnographic films and filmed lectures, (2) keep it brief, and (3) add variety. Conceived of as such, this technique bridges the gap between the abstract language of theory and students’ everyday worlds, providing a simplified, non-threatening forum for role-play and experimentation with multiple theoretical paradigms. Ultimately, it becomes a space for students to build the skills and confidence needed to address the nuance and complexities of real-life events.

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Stories and/of Self: Using Digital Storytelling in the Anthropology Classroom

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Digital storytelling is a computer-based media production process that holds significant pedagogical promise for college- and university-level courses in general and cultural anthropology courses in particular. Although digital storytelling is increasingly being used in third-level educational institutions, the advantages and potential problems of giving such assignments have yet to be fully considered in the scholarly literature. This article uses a case study approach to address the potential problems with and benefits of utilizing digital storytelling projects based on my experiences in teaching a “Media, Self, and Society” course at two universities in the 2010-11 academic year. Particular attention will be paid to two related pedagogical benefits suggested in the literature, increased student engagement and the facilitation of student agency. Both have particular bearing on the objectives of my course and the teaching of cultural anthropology in general.

In the fall semester of 2010 I taught a course called “Media, Self, and Society” at Duke University, where I was a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Cultural Anthropology. As a final project for the course each of the 35 enrolled students produced a short video project in which they explored the ways in which their “self” had been or was being shaped by media. The following semester, I taught a slightly modified version of the same course at Elon University. Again, the class was well-enrolled with 29 students, and students produced a short video project addressing the effects media had on them as a final assignment.

The video projects created by students for the course were produced in line with the approaches and techniques of digital storytelling. Digital storytelling is a process by which people use digital media production software in order to make video projects. These projects are often comprised of a wide range of digital assets, including images that are

either created specifically for the project or downloaded off the internet, narrative voiceovers that are recorded using audio recording and editing computer programs, background music that is sometimes altered or modified using audio editing software, video clips recorded by the project producer, and/or text written by the project producer. Digital stories are often short, averaging two to ten minutes in length, and can address a wide variety of topics. A website on the use of digital storytelling for education purposes suggests that “the topics that are used in Digital Storytelling range from personal tales to the recounting of historical events, from exploring life in one’s own community to the search for life in other corners of the universe, and literally, everything in between” (University of Houston 2012). Despite the potential range of subject matter, digital stories most often have an extremely personal element, either in addressing a personal topic or looking at a subject from a personal point of view.

As a part of the larger trend of employing information communication technology in classrooms, digital storytelling is increasingly being utilized in teaching practice at all levels. In a recent review of scholarly literature on the use of digital storytelling as a teaching tool, Patrick Lowenthal has identified at least thirteen proposed educational benefits of digital storytelling, including its ability to amplify students’ voices, leverage multiple literacies, engender student creativity, appeal to diverse learning styles, increase student engagement, and facilitate agency in students who undertake digital storytelling projects (2009:253–255). It is the last two of these proposed benefits that are most pertinent to the discussion presented here.

The increased student engagement that digital storytelling assignments facilitate is substantively covered by Mark Hofer and Kathleen Owing Swan, who characterize increased student engagement as “the clearest and most tangible benefit of undertaking a digital storytelling project” (2006:680). They claim that a major reason for digital storytelling’s ability to increase students’ engagement is that the production of digital stories allows, even requires, students to utilize skills and competencies that are associated with their lives outside the classroom context; it allows them to work in the “language of their generation” (679). “As a result,” Lowenthal suggests, “digital storytelling offers educators a new and exciting way to captivate students’ interests like never before” (2009:253).

A less clearly understood pedagogical benefit of digital storytelling

discussed in the literature is its ability to facilitate agency in students who undertake digital storytelling projects. Lowenthal suggests that “perhaps the most complicated and least understood benefit is digital storytelling’s ability to create agentive senses of self” (2009:255). Much of the literature suggesting digital storytelling’s potential to facilitate agency focuses on the recontextualizing of aspects of one’s life experience in the narrative process of producing the digital story (Davis 2004; Hull and Katz 2006). This process provides an opportunity to reconsider the significance of personal life events and reframe them in agentive ways.

I became aware of these potential benefits of digital storytelling while taking part in digital story facilitator training at the same time that I was developing the “Media, Self, and Society” course. In recent years, multiple academic and administrative units at Duke University have made a concerted effort to facilitate better teaching among faculty and graduate students. One of the major players in this push for pedagogical improvement is Duke’s Center for Instructional Technology (CIT). It was a timely CIT workshop on digital storytelling that led to the classroom practices discussed in this article. The workshop I attended was led by Duke’s Instructional Technology Specialist, Dr. Hugh Crumley, and involved workshop participants in putting together their own minute-long digital stories utilizing the audio recording and editing software GarageBand, the video production program iMovie, and other readily available digital media applications. Crumley had traveled to Berkeley and learned the techniques of digital storytelling at the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS), which was founded in 1998 when the San Francisco Center for Digital Media relocated.

As I learned more about digital storytelling as a result of the workshop and related activities, I came to see how it could be effectively utilized as a pedagogical technique in the course I was developing. It was important for students to be able to apply the social scientific approaches to media covered in the class to their own life experience as a way of exercising a critical perspective in response to the media present in their lives. From the standpoint of cultural anthropology, this is in line with the mission of “making the familiar strange” that has long been a goal of the discipline. One of the major things I wanted to effect through the course was a bringing to consciousness of potential influences of media which are so often left unconsidered. Such self-awareness gives people agency by allowing them to act differently, and the personal orientation of digital storytelling is well-suited to this agenda.

In this article I will present the use of digital storytelling in my course as a case study in the use of media in anthropology courses. First, I will provide a short history of digital storytelling and its increasing presence in educational institutions. Second, I will describe how I integrated the technique into my own course with attention to both the pedagogical aspects and the infrastructural considerations behind “pulling off” a course that includes digital storytelling assignments. Finally, I will discuss what I see as the potential problems with and benefits of using digital storytelling in teaching anthropology. Despite the potential benefits, the use of digital storytelling in anthropology classes is not without its difficulties and potential drawbacks. Such problems have yet to be fully addressed in the literature.

History of Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling developed out of the work of a group of San Francisco-based artists in the mid-1990s. Both the CDS website (2012) and Executive Director Joe Lambert’s book on digital storytelling (2002) discuss the impact of performance artist Dana Atchley and his multimedia performance piece titled *Next Exit*.¹ Atchley’s work in multimedia storytelling-like performances led him and others associated with the future center to develop workshops given at the American Film Institute (Lambert 2002:9–10). These workshops became a model for the three-day workshops that became, and remain, the hallmark of the CDS.

By the late 1990s, the founders had established the CDS in Berkeley, California, where they developed a curriculum for a Standard Digital Storytelling Workshop and began to work with numerous organizations and institutions to spread the practice of digital storytelling. Among the early groups with which the CDS worked were primary and secondary school teachers. They designed an Educator Workshop that is specifically aimed at K–12 classroom teachers. Largely due to these efforts on the part of the CDS, and perhaps aided by an increasing belief that digital multi-media projects are better suited than traditional paper assignments for developing learning styles appropriate to “the information age,” digital storytelling projects have been and continue to be assigned at K–12 institutions throughout the U.S. Some third-level educational

¹ For a different, and perhaps more detailed, history of the development of digital storytelling that includes discussion of the Center for Digital Storytelling, see Alexander (2011).

institutions have also embraced these methods. However, my perception is that professors and instructors at colleges and universities throughout the country have been slower to take on digital storytelling as part of their pedagogical practice.² Despite this reticence, such assignments are increasingly finding their way into courses at a number of institutions.

Digital Storytelling and My Course

At the time I took the digital storytelling workshop, I had already been asked by my department to teach a “Self and Society” course that had been on the books but not taught for several years. The professor who formerly taught the course had moved to a different university, and there was really no one expressing a desire to teach the course. I had long envisioned a “Media, Self, and Society” course I thought would be perfect to teach under that course designation and had made this known to the department. In the spring of 2010, I was given the go-ahead to offer the course in the following fall semester. It was the development of this course that was most on my mind when I finally got the opportunity to take Crumley’s workshop, which is given once each semester.

The personal orientation of the digital storytelling product was perfect for the goals of a course highlighting the potential effects of media, as widely as possibly construed, on the “self” or “selves” of the students taking the course. I wanted to make certain that throughout the course, students were attempting to apply the theories and concepts of media analysis we considered to their own personal life experience. When I designed the final “digital storytelling” project that concludes the course, I described it as a critically autobiographical video that “addresses how your (i.e., the students’) ‘self’ has been/is shaped by your media environment.” Students were asked to produce a two-and-a-half to three-minute digital story that applied the types of media analysis and theorization covered during the semester (or other academic media approaches from outside the class) to an exploration of the ways in which a form of media could affect, perhaps even effect, particular kinds of selves. I also produced a grading

² While slower to adopt the digital storytelling approaches, a number of colleges and universities have recently established programs, often spearheaded by offices for information technology or teaching and learning centers, to facilitate the use of digital storytelling on their campuses. Bryan Alexander offers a rundown of institutions of higher education that have begun efforts to facilitate digital storytelling on their campuses and/or offer degrees on the subject (2011:26–27).

rubric for the assignment in which the application of “Course Content/Concepts” was one of the major criteria. The projects were screened in class at the end of the semester.

By the time I completed the digital storytelling workshop, I had determined that a digital storytelling assignment would be a singularly effective means of demonstrating students’ abilities to apply the material covered in the course to their own lived experience. That was in some ways the easy part. What wasn’t so clear, and was in many ways much harder, was making certain that the students in the course would have the skills and resources needed to complete the final assignment I had envisioned.

Facilitating Digital Storytelling

My first step was to investigate the resources available on campus to enable students to produce their final projects. I was fortunate to find out about two Multimedia Production Studios that have been set up on the Duke University campus. These facilities include multiple workstations containing high-end, integrated hardware and software for the creation and editing of graphics, web pages, and audio and video projects. Students have 24-hour access to one of these two studios, and both of them are regularly staffed by student assistants that can help students resolve problems they encounter when working on projects.

While it turned out that the resources to complete projects were readily available, I still had to make certain that each student in the class had the basic skills and, as important, the confidence necessary to undertake the final assignment. Many students, probably even the majority, already had the skills needed to complete the project I had in mind, although a few did approach me at the end of the first class session to express their concern about having never attempted a video project. As the instructor, my task was to provide an adequate foundation so students could then utilize university resources to expand their abilities as needed to accomplish whatever it was they wanted to do in their particular final projects over the course of the semester.

To complete this task, I set aside three early class periods to hold a digital storytelling workshop during which each student would produce a 30-second class-introduction project in which they would detail one or more forms of media that they liked or that had affected them in some way. I launched this on the very first day of class by asking students to do

some “homework” and bring in three lists of three examples of media (three books, three songs, three movies, etc.) that they liked. This was to be their ticket into the second class and would be turned in to me at the end of that period.

When they arrived to the next class, their three lists in hand, I broke them up into groups to discuss the lists and determine which form of media on their list they felt best represented them in some way. Perhaps they would only come up with one form of media or even a single instance of media that they felt really defined them. Perhaps they could take one item from each of the lists that represented the different aspects of their personality. I left it broadly open to them to decide what instance or instances of media would populate their class-introduction project.

Of course, this group work on a topic of personal relevance had several purposes. Primarily, it provided material that would be expanded on in their class-introduction digital storytelling projects. As important, however, was the opportunity it provided very early in the semester for students in the class to get to know one another, to break the ice and begin talking to each other. Many friendships fostered in those early days when all the students were discussing topics that were mildly and acceptably personal were maintained throughout the semester.

At the end of this group work session I showed my own example of a class-introduction project. In it, I highlighted three of my favorite books: Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, and Míic Mac Gabhann’s *Rotha Mór an tSaoil*. While images of the authors and their books mixed with pictures of me passed by, my narration suggested that these three novels have had a profound effect on me. I noted that all three of these stories were about travel, which has been a life-long passion of mine. But, a key reason for their appeal was that each of them addresses the interpretations their lead characters form about themselves, those they meet during their travels, and the overall contexts in which they find themselves.

After presenting this example I declared that in a little over a week we would screen a similar project for each of the students in the class. Over the weekend following the first week of the course, the students were given the assignment of producing a 100-word script for the narration to be included in their class-introduction project, which we would record in the next class period using Audacity audio recording and editing software. They were also instructed to begin collecting relevant iMovie-compatible images (my having explained to them which image formats would work in

iMovie) to populate the video project we would produce at the end of the second week. I arranged for a mobile cart of Mac laptops (with iMovie and Audacity loaded) to be brought into the class for the remaining two in-class workshop periods. I further made certain that students would be able to access the same computers on which they started their project over the weekend after my workshop, in case (as was very likely) they were unable to complete their entire project during the final workshop class period.

At each of the workshop sessions, I first walked through the process. I showed the students how to produce a digital recording of the narration scripts they had written using Audacity in the second session, and in the third session, we used these narration recordings with the images they had collected as assets to populate 30-second iMovie projects. Again, I walked through the process, recreating the video example I had shown them at the end of the second class period, showing them how to create a story board of title pages and images with different transitions between them and insert the voiceover files they had already produced. I demonstrated how to adjust the position and timing of their images. Then, I set them to work on their projects while I circulated through the class to resolve the problems that inevitably arose. These sessions went well, with all students seeming to understand what was expected of them. The following Monday was the proof when the iMovie projects began to fill the Blackboard "Assignments" folder I had created for them. By the beginning of the third week of class, I had a 30-second video from each student in the class that demonstrated his or her ability to undertake a project of this kind.

The fifth class session was dedicated to screening the class-introduction projects. Although I cannot describe all of the 35 videos that were turned into me, here I provide a couple of examples of how the students engaged in the assignment. One video began with the creator of the project proclaiming, "I wish I could impress you with a list of three profound novels, but that's just not me." The narration goes on to suggest that television is what this student turns to in order to relax and explains what it is she likes about her three favorite television series: *The Office*, *Burn Notice*, and *Entourage*. The first thing I liked about this example is what I took to be minor dig at my own example video in its reference to "three profound novels," and I did call the student out on this. But, that aside, I highlighted the student's suggestion that she liked "*The Office* because it's funny and something my friends and I make references to." I took time during the class in which I screened this video to note media's

ability to act as a social glue for real or imagined communities, which we would later be addressing in the work of Benedict Anderson (1991) and other theorists.

A second class-introduction video I screened on that day took graphic T-shirts as a form of media that the project producer took to be important for her. While image after image provides examples of politically oriented shirts, the student claims that “by promoting various social issues a common, everyday article of clothing can pass on a message to everyone who sees it.” After screening this example, I highlighted the student’s selected topic of clothes. “Are the clothes we wear media,” I asked the class. I had already asked the students to consider, perhaps reconsider, their definition of media during the very first class session. I had given the example of dance, and most in the class had agreed that the formal and staged dance performances that comprise the American Dance Festival that had just ended in Duke’s hometown of Durham were instances of media. But, what about when the students were down at the local club shaking their booties on Friday night? Is that media? In this student’s class-introduction project, I suggested, we had another possible expansion, or perhaps problematization, of the definition of media. I noted that this project foreshadowed the discussion of clothing we would have in discussing Dick Hebdige’s (1979) work on youth subcultures when we addressed a range of Birmingham School theorists about half-way through the semester.

In addition to providing a novel way for students to introduce themselves to their classmates, these class-introduction projects allowed me an opportunity to get students thinking about the substantive theories of media we would be addressing throughout the term. After the screening session class we turned to Marshall McLuhan (1962) on the phonetic alphabet and the printing press. We went on to explore a range of media-oriented theorists, including the work of Frankfurt School theorists Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, and Althusser, as well as that of Hall, Hebdige, Willis, and others from the Birmingham School. This theoretical background provided the conceptual tools needed for the students to address their own media environments in their final projects.

Throughout the semester, I would occasionally have a student come after class to discuss some technical aspect of recording and/or looping a song using audio-editing software in order to have an instrumental version of a particular song playing in the background of the final project. Or, I might get an e-mail inquiring about whether flip camera

videos would be high-definition enough for interviews the student wanted to include in her project. But these were actually few and far between, and when the time came for final projects to be turned in, like clockwork, they began appearing in the Blackboard “Assignments” folder.

The Final Projects

The last three class periods were dedicated to screening the final projects each student produced during the semester. A single example on museums as a form of media will serve to illustrate the nature of the projects. The topic was one we had addressed throughout the course, and the video narration begins thusly: “When we think about things that shape the way we identify ourselves, we don’t usually think of museums, but institutions alter the ways we behave and the ways we look at others and ourselves.” The project goes on to highlight the organizational and display principles of museums and the ways in which these reinforce received categories and cultural understandings. The project also details work the student had done on a showcase exhibit of Chinese objects (jade, porcelain, lacquer, and metal items) as part of an internship with a curator at Duke’s Nasher Museum of Art. Part of her job was to write the general information labels that accompany the items to be displayed. The student found that in order to do this work she had to make assumptions about the audience members who would read the descriptions she was writing, assuming, for instance, that they did not speak Chinese languages but were acquainted with the geographic locations she mentioned in the descriptions.

In her video, this student utilized concepts from Walter Benjamin (1969) and Margaret Mead (White 1976), as well as from Mark O’Neill (2004) and Paul Valéry (1960), on museums in order to analyze the exhibit she helped to create. While Benjamin, Mead, and O’Neill had been covered in the course, Valéry’s essay was novel outside material. In line with general trends of digital storytelling and the way the assignment was written, this final project had a personal element to it as the student elaborated on the exhibit she had personally participated in constructing. The majority of the videos were similar in terms of their introduction of course and novel academic sources in the analysis presented, as well as in their inclusion of a personal element—an aspect facilitated by the digital storytelling medium in a way it would not have been in a standard term paper assignment.

It is the personal element that is at the heart of the advantages digital storytelling assignments of the type described here have for academic work in general and anthropology courses in particular. First, digital storytelling assignments increase student engagement as students bring course content to bear in analyzing their lives outside the classroom in a mode of representation typically associated with non-classroom online leisure activity. Additionally, the application of scholarly approaches and theory to life outside of the classroom facilitates critical reflection on experience that is often left unconsidered. Such agency-provoking evaluation of students' lived experience is a common objective of cultural anthropology courses.

Discussion: Challenges and Potential Benefits

So, what are the challenges of and potential benefits resulting from the use of digital storytelling-format final assignments? Challenges no doubt arise on the technical side of things. I would be reluctant to give students this type of assignment unless I was certain the resources were available on campus for them to appropriately complete it. Duke University may be particularly well-resourced in this regard. However, I also taught a version of the same course at Elon University, which had fewer relevant resources, and I was ultimately able to find appropriate facilities there as well. In the end, instructors will have to be pragmatic, looking at the resources available to them and being very careful to design the course within the constraints presented by their particular institution's facilities.

Students' technical abilities are also a potential source of problems. I am unwilling to assume that students are coming to my course with the skills in place to complete assignments of this type. I am convinced a handful of students would have dropped my course had I not made allowances for them through the class-introduction project workshop described above. This process was time well spent.

Of course, there are concerns regarding the knowledge and technical abilities of the instructor as well. Multi-day workshops to develop the skills needed to undertake digital storytelling projects, and to teach others to undertake them, are available through the Center for Digital Storytelling and like institutions. A teaching and learning center or office of information technology at one's institution might be convinced to facilitate such a workshop. If not, it would be necessary to seek out

appropriate training.

As for the potential benefits of using digital storytelling in anthropology classes, increased student engagement is a key benefit. When given at Duke University, my media class was entirely filled with a waiting list and additional students e-mailing me to see if the course would be taught in future semesters. In part, this may be a result of the course's emphasis on media, which is always sure to draw a large number of students. However, my conversations with students suggest that the fact that digital storytelling is a practice more associated with non-school leisure activity than class assignments was also a significant factor.

The integration of digital storytelling may have other benefits for anthropology classes above and beyond attracting students. Ola Erstad and Kenneth Silseth (2008) have pointed out that use of digital storytelling and similar methods of electronic media production has the effect of drawing activities students commonly engage in outside of classes into the classroom experience, thereby complicating the idea of the classroom as a space of formal learning.³ "Digital storytelling might represent a new way of integrating these (classroom and non-classroom) contexts and might bypass a categorical division between the formal and informal paths of learning" (215). The result of this complication of contexts can be to make for a more student-centered learning situation. Erstad and Silseth suggest that "when young people are given the opportunity to blend the informal 'cultural codes' with more formal ones in their own learning processes, agency may be fostered in a new way" (214). They refer specifically to a concept of "epistemic agency" that has been associated with the increasing implementation of information communication technology in classrooms and an increased focus on more active students roles in learning.

Along these same lines, in the context of European social anthropology Simon Coleman and Bob Simpson make a distinction between substantivist and imaginativist pedagogical strategies. Substantivist approaches include providing students with mastery of a body of knowledge about a given discipline or topic. Imaginativist strategies, on the other hand, are more focused on developing an

³ I have noted that a significant number of students in my classes were not prior producers of YouTube aesthetic or digital storytelling-like videos. Nevertheless, most students will be avid viewers of such projects (often with the desire to become producers of this type of material themselves). As such, the idea that integrating digital storytelling practice into the classroom draws from the domain of their non-classroom experiences is still valid.

“anthropological apperception” whereby a student is able to apply insights arising out of a body of disciplinary knowledge in their own lives. Coleman and Simpson claim that the imaginativist approach is preferable not only because of its potential to increase student motivation and retention but also because it is at the heart of anthropology as a discipline. Anthropology is about the contextualisation of knowledge, action, belief, meaning and language, and any strategy that fails to understand and incorporate student understandings into this process misses a crucial pedagogical opportunity. Thus, to integrate education into other parts of student life is not just sound pedagogically, it is also sound anthropologically. (Coleman and Simpson 2004:20)

The personal nature of many, if not most, digital storytelling assignments in my class fostered a situation in which students were compelled to think about themselves as affected or constituted, at least in part, by aspects of their society that are often taken to be mere entertainment. This critical reflection on personal life experience is an agency-provoking process that is a desirable objective of many cultural anthropology courses.

Conclusion

No doubt, there are difficulties associated with assigning digital storytelling and like audio-visual media assignments in anthropology courses. Facilities, knowledge, and competencies needed to ‘pull off’ the use of digital storytelling demand a large amount of foresight and preparation on the part of instructors and their institutions. The technical aspects of utilizing digital storytelling assignments must be pragmatically considered by each instructor in the context of his or her own particular course and institution to assure student success in completing the assigned projects.

In digital storytelling assignments, however, there is a useful vehicle for maintaining students’ motivation while they demonstrate understanding of course content. The fact that digital storytelling is an example of a computer-based media practice that is, at least at present, more associated with leisure activity outside the classroom than school work has the effect of attracting and motivating students.

For cultural anthropology courses, the emphasis on the personal in digital storytelling practice may be particularly beneficial. Digital storytelling assignments that are carefully planned and implemented to

help students apply social scientific approaches and theory to their own lives have singular potential to facilitate critical reflection on aspects of their lived experience. Digital storytelling assignments have the potential to facilitate an “anthropological apperception” that is commonly at the heart of the mission of cultural anthropology instruction. As a result, digital storytelling is a media practice that holds great potential for college- and university-level courses in general and cultural anthropology courses in particular.

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“What will this do for my career?” Teaching Cultural Diversity to Design Students in a For-Profit Institution

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For-profit educational institutions are a growing force on the higher education landscape today. In order to improve the rigor of their four-year degrees, general education and other non-career-specific courses are being added to their curricula. The pedagogy at these schools generally privileges four-hour class blocks, the use of visual materials rather than standard texts, and hands-on practical application of skills, all of which can make teaching a traditional lecture-based class in the career school environment quite challenging. This article analyzes efforts by the author to combine personal experience teaching with web videos and visual blogging in courses at both traditional and for-profit institutions with visual and experiential pedagogy. The goal is to craft a visually-oriented, skill-based curriculum for a proposed cultural diversity course to be offered at a for-profit design college.

For-profit educational institutions (known historically as “career colleges”) are a growing force on today’s higher education landscape. These institutions and their enrollments have multiplied rapidly, with the University of Phoenix now ranking as the largest for-profit institution in the country. By 2001, it was listed as the largest private university of all degree-granting institutions in the United States (Armstrong 2001:488). Other for-profit chains have proliferated in a similar manner, so the individual schools themselves can be part of larger corporations such as The Art Institutes, Career Education Corporation, or DeVry Education Group or homegrown career schools training certified nursing assistants, information technology workers, or hair stylists. Whether one believes they are valuable resources that increase opportunities for low-income and other non-traditional students, or that they mislead students about their

career opportunities and abuse student loan programs, these schools are here and not going away any time soon.

In an attempt to give their four-year degrees more breadth, some for-profit institutions are adding liberal arts and general education classes to their degree requirements (Floyd 2005; Kartus 2000; Armstrong 2001). These additions of more traditional undergraduate courses are increasingly required by accrediting bodies, both national and regional (Floyd 2005). As for-profit schools make these curriculum changes, more instructors from traditional public and private colleges will likely be hired to teach these classes in general education, liberal arts, and social sciences.

For example, I recently became aware of an opening for a cultural diversity instructor at the for-profit design school where I earned an associate degree in computer graphics and taught graphic design and interactive media design classes for eight years after receiving my degree. This position is a new listing that was likely triggered by regional requirements to increase general education offerings for their four-year bachelor degree students as mentioned previously. Based on my personal experience and scholarly study of cultural and visual anthropology, I was intrigued by this new class and could easily see the need for a diversity course that took into account the specific needs and interests of design students. This prompted me to consider how I might be able to create a diversity course that would be attractive and meaningful to design students, one which would allow them to use their talents in their chosen fields of study. I knew I would need to draw on many of the lessons learned from previously teaching there, as well as those learned from using video pedagogy and visually-based technologies in teaching traditional undergraduate classes in communication and anthropology at other public and private institutions.

In this essay, I look first at some of the demographics and other relevant information regarding the for-profit education industry and the increase in demand for general education classes in this sector. Then I briefly examine the literature on visual, design, and experiential pedagogy, with the primary focus on the use and creation of videos and other visual materials in the classroom, both pro and con. Finally, I will present a condensed account of my personal experiences in teaching with video and other forms of visual materials. Using those experiences and suggestions from the pedagogical literature, I propose a career-focused, skills-based cultural diversity course intended to allow design students to have a more personally meaningful experience than they would in a standard general

education lecture class. Bringing in components from the pedagogy of documentary filmmaking, visual anthropology, and visual literacy, I outline the basics of a class designed to engage students primarily through visually-based texts, while also training them in how to critique and unpack the cultural meanings of these texts. Students will complete projects that meet stated course goals through creative explorations using media of their choice.

Because this essay only addresses concepts for a proposed class, rather than data gathered for a formal study of class effectiveness, quotes from student evaluations and other qualitative data should be considered in that context. The general assumption in proposing this class, in part growing out of my own personal experiences, is that design students will have similar responses based on growing similarities between for-profit and non-profit student populations, in addition to the growing acceptance of video and other visual materials in the classroom.

An Overview of the Non-Profit Education Industry

It is not hard to find advertisements for career training programs and schools. In fact, these institutions have grown dramatically since 1970, when there were 18,333 students enrolled in for-profit degree-granting institutions in the United States. Less than four decades later, 1.85 million students (out of 20.43 million enrolled in all degree-granting institutions) were enrolled in for-profit degree-granting programs—an increase in for-profit enrollment from 0.2 percent of all students in degree-granting schools to 9.1% in 2009 (Deming et al. 2011:1). A slightly earlier study (Floyd 2005:539) stated that the actual number of for-profit degree-granting institutions represents 19 percent of all degree-granting institutions in the United States, and that these institutions award 5 percent of all degrees.

While there are various reasons for this growth, a major reason is that these institutions seem to respond quickly to the demands of the career market, as well as to demands from students for more flexible class schedules compatible with the demands of work and family (Floyd 2005:543; Armstrong 2001; Bailey et al. 2001). Many of the marketing statements for career schools tap into such demands, emphasizing the availability of condensed and highly skill-based training taught by instructors who are professionals working in their fields, instead of by lecturers who may not be up-to-date on the latest trends or technologies

(Bailey et al. 2001; Armstrong 2001; Kartus 2000; Floyd 2005). The typical for-profit student body includes a range of ages from recent high school graduates to middle-aged and older adults returning for career retraining. Ethnically, the student body is also diverse, and at my particular institution, immigrant populations from around the world are well represented. Additionally, there is a higher percentage of lower-income students and families in for-profit institutions than in public and private non-profit educational institutions, with the vast majority attending school full-time and working at least part-time (Baum et al. 2011). These observations are corroborated by other studies of diversity in for-profit institutions:

African Americans account for 13 percent of all students in higher education, but they are 22 percent of those in the for-profit sector. Hispanics are 15 percent of those in the for-profit sector, yet 11.5 percent of all students. Women are 65 percent of those in the for-profit sector. For profit students are older, about 65 percent are 25 years and older, whereas just 31 percent of those at four-year public colleges are and 40 percent of those at two-year colleges are. (Deming et al. 2011:6)

This same study notes that for-profit students are much more likely to be single parents with significantly lower incomes than students in traditional two-year community colleges. They are also twice as likely to have a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) than the community college students. Enrollment in certificate programs is the norm at for-profit institutions at 55 percent. Although only 11 percent of all students in for-profit institutions are enrolled in four-year BA programs, that segment is growing the fastest (*ibid.*).

In reviewing curriculum and pedagogy in for-profit schools, regional and national accrediting bodies for colleges and universities have begun to require greater attention to general education coursework, in addition to an increase in the number of total contact hours and improvements in library holdings. Many of these requirements have been triggered by increased governmental requirements to show institutional effectiveness in order to keep receiving federal financial aid (Floyd 2005). Students, however, often choose for-profits because they perceive that the education is more career-focused, cutting out what they feel are “non-

essential” liberal studies and general education classes. These students place more value in a shorter, skills-focused education than the other benefits they might get at a traditional institution, such as socialization, sports, and research (Armstrong 2001; Bailey et al. 2001; Floyd 2005).

Institutions seek to balance these conflicting demands by attempting to implement hands-on, practical skill-based projects into every course offered, including the general education requirements. While students may be better prepared for the job market through a skills-oriented curriculum, a study by Caroline Persell and Harold Wenglinsky (2004) suggests that for-profit students show low levels of civic engagement and participation, a finding that seems to be directly related to the more market-driven education model found in for-profit schools. Other studies also bemoan the lack of social science or other humanities offered by design programs, saying that these programs “concentrate largely on educating students about traditional design skills, knowledge and processes” (Rothstein 2002:2; Lackovic 2010).

Design Training and Visual Pedagogy

A design-focused curriculum attempts to train students to take inspiration from visual and aural materials and objects around them, including those from other cultures. The objective is to introduce the skills and processes necessary to solve whatever design problems they are faced with in their careers. The emphasis is placed on creative thinking and problem-solving, and research shows that design students respond better to graphic information in training for these tasks than they do to written texts (Hsu and Chang 2009). Whitney Rapp (2009) and Robert Berk (2009) also found that visual-spatial learners perform much better in educational environments when audiovisual materials are used in the classroom. Several studies highlight the enhanced affective benefits of video technology in triggering emotional responses, creating anticipation, and increasing recall of content in all types of learners (Berk 2009; Jones and Cuthrell 2011; Mitra et al. 2010; Cherrett 2009; Craik and Lockhart 1972). Other studies focus on the potential that visuals have to “bring culture to life” (Bird and Godwin 2006: 285).

While instructors have been using films and other visual materials for many decades now, the easy availability of video material through YouTube (YouTube.com) since its founding in 2005 has turned that site into a major educational tool (Bloom 2009; Jones and Cuthrell 2011;

Mitra et al. 2010). Instructors can not only easily find clips from documentaries and other historical documents but also access news reports about current topics and even “citizen journalism” reports breaking from locations worldwide. YouTube makes it easy for students to search for information that interests them, as well as to make and post their own videos or comment on those of their classmates.

I have used YouTube extensively in anthropology classes at the University of South Florida (USF) and in the visual literacy and intercultural communication classes I have taught at the University of Tampa (UT). I find a great deal of content overlap in all of these classes and frequently use some of the same visuals and video sources while structuring the class discussions and projects to reflect differing class goals. Each semester I draw from the vast bank of National Geographic clips found on YouTube that deal with cultural practices worldwide, including family structure, sexuality, religion, health, and dietary norms. I also use various videos dealing with the changing economic climate worldwide, particularly those focused on class differences and resource inequality facing marginalized groups. The effects of globalization and technology are examined with videos created from external, scholarly viewpoints as well as more emic, insider views, and sometimes from hard-to-find anthropological documentaries, which are often sampled on YouTube in a form adequate for class viewings.³ In all cases, I attempt to show not a single, comprehensive video but to feature several different voices on the same general topic. This reflects a diversity of opinion and allows me to choose the best place during the class lecture and discussions to interject these viewpoints. The following paragraphs discuss examples of some of the media choices I have made when discussing common diversity and visual literacy topics in my classes.

In introducing the concepts of “diversity” and “culture” to classes, one of my favorite sources is the video *Mai’s America* (Poras 2002), formerly shown on the PBS website.⁴ This film is a documentary about a

³ Of course, the legality of this distribution is highly suspect, but in some cases, such as with *Future Remembrance* (from DER), the video is not available for purchase anymore, and likely will not be in the future, so having these smaller clips (and sometimes even the full documentary) available on *YouTube* is highly valuable to instructors and departments on a budget or with limited multimedia resources.

⁴ Unfortunately, just as this article was going to press, this film has suddenly become unavailable. It is no longer available for viewing on the PBS website, all links to purchase it appear to be down or missing, and Poras’s own website is down. This is

young Vietnamese woman who becomes an exchange student in a Mississippi high school. The video takes the viewer into the unexpected diversity of a small town in Mississippi, including living with both “rednecks” and a young black family, having a transvestite friend and going to gay bars, and engaging the Vietnamese immigrant experience in the American South. Asian stereotypes are also explored, particularly those of duty to family and “saving face” when Mai runs into unexpected problems after enrolling at Tulane University, and those cultural expectations eventually affect the choice she makes so she can stay in America. While the video does have Mai as the primary narrator and focus, it does not appear that she chose what was recorded or ultimately shown in the film, and this raises questions of framing and agency that add to the depth of the class discussion about the movie.

My students have responded very positively to this film, finding it interesting and enlightening, but also funny and “weird,” and, ultimately, sad. Based on the discussion board comments from my Cross-cultural diversity class, it put them in a positive mood for learning more about diversity in the rest of the course:

You would never know that there are transvestites in Mississippi high schools!! I couldn't believe that Mai would become friends with that guy . . . so weird, but it was kinda nice to see that she could be so open-minded. You wouldn't think that a Vietnamese girl would act like that, not being scared of him or of moving around from family to family so much. I really liked this movie, and hope we're going to see others that show us how other groups we don't hear about live. (“Alexa” – student comment board posting)

Wow, this was a surprise! I didn't think we were going to see a video about America, in this class . . . diversity was supposed to be people from tribes in Africa and South America . . . cool to know we can talk about what's different about all of us here in the States. Now I'm excited for the rest of the class! (“Tony” – student board posting)

When working with the topic of race and racism, a popular web site with my classes has been the comedy site *Reckless Tortuga* (www.recklesstortuga.com), which features a series of tongue-in-cheek public service announcements (PSAs) dealing with racism. While spiced with some language and situations that could be considered mildly vulgar or profane, I have not hesitated to show them. All students were told in advance if a video had language or visuals that I thought might be offensive to some.

In using these videos in class, I often ask students from different ethnic backgrounds to comment on their own difficult or humorous experiences in dealing with stereotypes. I also use DVDs and materials from the American Anthropological Association's *RACE: Are We So Different?* website (www.understandingrace.org) in this section, allowing students to explore the artificiality of "race" given the biological evidence to the contrary. These videos have been very successful in generating a great deal of class discussion with my students. While some of the more religiously conservative students have questioned the scientific research, most students seem to be more willing to examine their beliefs and prejudices by the end of the semester, which I count as a success for this methodology.

For the topics of sexuality and gender, I have used news clips from India covering government action to grant legal rights to *hijira*, men who dress and live as women (whether or not they undergo sexual reassignment) and perform women's roles in their society, especially the performance of special dances and blessings at celebrations for "donations." I also showed short video clips from the United States featuring brief interviews with "two-spirit" persons (a Native American concept similar to the *hijira*), and news shorts on sexual topics, including demonstrations for and against equal rights for LGBT persons around the world. *Killing Us Softly 3* (Kilbourne 2000) is another popular film used for this topic section.⁵

When teaching on concepts of identity and representation of self in the Visual Literacy classes, I have shown the Christopher Nolan film *Memento* (2000), as well as the anthropological film *Future Remembrance* (Wendl and du Plessis 1998), a documentary about Ghanaian photography and sculpture practices. I have also used YouTube clips about "Print

⁵ This is the version of *Killing Us Softly* referenced in Elizabeth Bird's essay, and the one I have used previously in class. There is, however, a newer version available, *Killing Us Softly 4* (2010).

Club” or *purikura* photography practices of Japanese teens and young women. When we discuss the concept of “the Other” and orientalism, I have shown *Cannibal Tours* (O’Rourke 1986), as well as vintage video and print advertisements (and not so vintage ones) that feature stereotypical depictions of various ethnicities, as well as propaganda posters from World War I and II. Topics of media influence and the military-industrial complex have been addressed through campaign advertising, recruitment posters, and the films *Full Battle Rattle* (Gerber and Moss 2008) and *Wag the Dog* (Levinson 1998).

While none of these classes have been taught exclusively through video, videos serve as a springboard to use when talking about the readings, and help students feel more comfortable with the concepts and how they apply to their own lives. In addition, the videos increase the spontaneity and energy of class discussions both in class and online as students debate the various cultural topics presented. Most recently, I have attempted to bring in more self-created videos from YouTube so that students have a contemporary and inviting platform from which to begin discussing ideas they have likely questioned but may have been hesitant to talk about. Students seem to be more willing to talk freely when they see and hear a “peer” discuss the topic and provide examples on which they can build their own insights and responses.

However, there are still some drawbacks to using video, particularly in the anthropology classroom. Concepts such as ethnocentrism, racism, and gender can go unchallenged by students unless well guided by the instructor. Merely showing a film or a video clip without prior briefing or discussion afterwards can lead to students becoming more titillated than educated, missing the intended message through the distraction of the “exotic,” “outdated” or “out of touch.” These concerns are supported by an audience reaction study conducted by Elizabeth Bird and Jonathan Godwin (2006) regarding the use of film in an introductory anthropology course. Their results found that large numbers of students simply tuned out during film screenings and that obvious displays of the “exotic” were “often greeted with laughter and derision” (Bird and Godwin 2006: 289). They also found that students did like the use of visuals in the classroom, but when the relationship between the visuals and the class material was not obvious, they became “irritated” and would be more likely to ignore the material (291).

Newer, non-ethnographic videos, such as Jean Killbourne’s *Killing Me Softly 3*, were seen by students to be more relevant to them personally.

But these were still subject to negative comments, such as, “I liked the feminist marketing video because it was so damn ridiculous to watch this woman interpret ads however she wanted to. Why are girls in ads and naked? Because naked girls are sexy and everyone likes to see them, that’s it” (Bird and Godwin 2006:290). Bird and Godwin also recommend that films be previewed before showing, and that instructors try to anticipate what questions students might ask before framing the films in the context of the class. They also encourage showing shorter clips, rather than whole films, and integrating these clips into discussions so that students are not as tempted to see the films as “entertainment” and tune them out (296). These recommendations pre-date the rise of YouTube, but they anticipate the current educational uses of video, advising teachers to seek out “new, up-to-date media designed to appeal to young audiences” and “look in unexpected places for media” (297). YouTube and newer sources such as the TED Talks video series (ted.com) and the separate TED-Ed series (ed.ted.com), which are short videos and presentations designed specifically for use in the classroom, would certainly qualify as good sources for a wide variety of videos, both professional and amateur. The increasing number of independently produced videos available through such sources can only enhance the diversity of voices and issues that might be accessed.

Design Training Meets “Culture”

While design students are often encouraged by their instructors to go more in-depth to learn about the original cultures and the origin of the design concepts they are drawing from, students often do not take the time to learn this material. Therefore, I believe that the cultural diversity course was added to the institution's curriculum not only as a general education requirement to bolster the four-year degree programs but also as an attempt to try to counteract that uninformed, and potentially stereotypical and exploitative, “borrowing” from other cultures.

The concept of “cultural design” challenges designers to examine both “generative” works in the graphic and aural arts (including graphic design, music making, and other creative human outputs) as well as the critical meanings of these items in relation to the types of ideologies and exchange systems where these products circulate. Derek Pardue defines the semiotic practices of cultural design as follows:

Cultural design as a theory of meaning-making and identification allows one to better understand and explain facets of signification often outside of focal awareness as persons navigate market spaces of ideology, identity formation and entertainment. (Pardue 2005:67)

Pardue’s ethnographic study of Brazilian hip-hop CD cover art as cultural literacy supports the case for increasing awareness of the examination of “culture” and “design” together in order to “foster a dialogue which I believe speaks to contemporary life” (ibid.). By focusing on the factors within cultures that shape and are shaped by various creative activities, a design-centric diversity class will allow students to learn how to critique design, apply their particular design skills and training to develop creative solutions to class projects, and learn how to apply this knowledge in the different contexts they will encounter throughout their careers.

Video Action Research and Pedagogy (VARP) is another approach to the study of culture through a hands-on, ethnographic lens that would also encourage critical analysis of design and its relation to larger power structures. VARP is the creation of Maria Lovett, a documentary filmmaker and ethnographic researcher and instructor. In her dissertation, *Creative Intervention Through Video Action Research and Pedagogy* (2008), Lovett explains the underlying reasoning behind this methodology:

The Video Action Research and Pedagogy methodology simultaneously challenges representation, and exposes or re-exposes fragmented experiences: our own, those of others, and the world in which we struggle. The methodology racks the focus—that is, shifts the attention of the frame (and framed) from one detail to the next, to illuminate what is hidden (or ignored) and potentially intervene in colonial racist, sexist, ageist, classist, and homophobic injustice. . . . A set of processes blending pedagogy, research, art and media production . . . re-frames what we see and think we know, and what we do not, into a methodology designed to operate with paradigms of social justice. (Lovett 2008:20)

While this may seem a lofty goal for a general education class, Lovett has

based this pedagogy on personal experiences with undergraduates as well as with middle and high school students. Her own project detailed in her dissertation is, of course, much more complex and time-consuming than anything we would expect our students to produce, even in a design school. However, the basic focus and structure of the lessons taught through the hands-on use of creative skills mesh well with how I would propose to structure a cultural diversity class and reflect my own personal teaching experience at the institution.⁶

Utilizing the structure of VARP could bring the possibility of connecting design to real-world needs into a cultural diversity class, increasing its value as a “career-related course” for students. Lovett specifically designed the VARP pedagogy with the intent of combining critical pedagogy with technical training in media production.

From the on-set, the methodology embodies research as practice. Training procedures and technical goals are blended with critical pedagogy and media production to problematize issues of representation and challenge knowledge. . . . Rather than privilege text based representations of information, VARP is a methodology that relies on audiovisual interpretations to make meaning and promote learning. (Lovett 2008:78)

Lovett breaks VARP down into three distinct themes: “representation,” “positionality,” and “empirical documentation.” Each theme shows how the topic can be studied from a slightly different angle, but they are interconnected. For example, “representation” focuses on “how the marginalized Other is visualized, discussed, spoken about, represented and signified across multiple texts and modalities” (48). “Positionality,” while closely related to representation, is addressed more in reference to the subjects themselves—“how one claims and *defines* his/her position, and the position of the author/producer in the *act* of representing.” And lastly, “empirical documentation” examines the “accepted” ways in which the Other is marginalized or trivialized, and packaged into an “experience” for consumption (*ibid.*). This last step is where Lovett says visual pedagogy meets visual research, suggesting that through attention to representation

⁶ In this case, I am thinking of documentary video production, but Lovett does discuss other artistic forms as being valid for this process.

and positionality in artistic research, changes can be made in how artists create experiential information (50).

Lovett also explores visual pedagogy theory addressing the need for “action oriented learning and meaning-making” (2008:51). Referencing Brian Goldfarb (2002) and Stuart Hall (2005), she makes a case for empowering students as authors, producers, or researchers, turning them into civically engaged citizens who can understand the basics of visual literacy. She positions students as creative problem-solvers and “teachers,” allowing students to “de-code the world in which they live—preparing them as cultural producers, to later re-code their world” (Lovett 2008:56).

While the theoretical basis of VARP is divided into three frames, there is also a practical production-based, four-stage division of labor that relates to research and creation: pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution (Lovett 2008: 56). This division of labor relates well to the general structure of most design courses, even non-video production ones, and is a process that design students would recognize and easily adapt to. During pre-production, a topic would undergo questioning and critical reflection. In production, research and the creation of initial materials (video, artwork, audio, etc.) would take place. Post-production would involve assembly of various materials and research into a whole, while distribution would involve the process of reproducing the final product and getting it into the hands of those who could utilize it.

One technique I have experimented with that supports the goals of VARP in the classroom is that of visual/video blogging, or “vlogging.” I have had some of my classes use the social media sites Tumblr (tumblr.com) and Pinterest (pinterest.com), both of which are designed primarily to use graphics and video rather than written text, as the main form of content. By having students keep an online vlog through one of these sites, I intend for them to develop a “digital clip file” of references, images, videos, and other materials essential to completing class assignments throughout the semester. This also allows students to develop essential career skills relating to the pre-production and production components of the design project flow—tasks also reflected in the VARP process delineated above.

Using vlogs throughout the semester helps students organize their thoughts and experiment with creating and critiquing images without the pressure of a “formal” project (Trier 2007). I often start students off on this process by asking them to post five photographs that visually describe

their first week at college. This is a simple exercise, based on one from my graduate visual anthropology course taught by Elizabeth Bird. Students can quickly grasp the essentials of the project, and it only requires a cell phone or disposable camera and the ability to scan or upload photos. They are not allowed to use any descriptive text, only the images. The exercise is not simply a good ice breaker for the class, but the images allow me to start discussing concepts of identity and representation, signs and symbols, and framing. After this exercise, I often continue to post “trigger questions” or topics for each week, and usually require a certain number of posts and responses throughout the semester as part of each student’s participation grade.

Blogging or vlogging can be seen as a type of narrative, one connecting language, images, and modern technology (Lackovic 2010:129). Blogs provide users a place to reflect and revise their thoughts, but also to receive critique and feedback on them, fostering “discursive, relational and conversational” learning (130). As future design professionals, students need to learn how to critique visual materials in a meaningful way, and to receive constructive criticism. Vlogging allows them a safe place to practice these skills, create collaborative networks, and explore creative ideas and representations of self and others (Lovett 2008:83).

I have been very impressed with the way my students have adopted this technology and used it to showcase visuals and links which allow me (and their peers) greater insight into their thought processes and contextualization of class topics than I would ever get from class discussion, no matter how active. Requiring weekly reflective posts about the images and their relationship to topics and discussions has worked well for some of my classes, but may be troublesome for instructors to manage. Posting the Tumblr or Pinterest addresses of the entire class and featuring a “vlog of the day” could help encourage active sharing and commentary from other class members. Additionally, for group projects, vlogging will help prepare students to work in a more collaborative way, enabling them to easily share materials and revisions with others, even distance learners.

Basing the cultural diversity course concepts and goals on Perdue’s cultural design theory while using a slightly modified version of Lovett’s VARP pedagogical methodology (adapted to non-video projects) should work well for this course. Linking this theory and pedagogy with requirements for a virtual, shareable vlog for reflection on class topics and

collection of research materials would allow students to critically explore concepts of diversity through visual media, and address these concepts through creative works relating to their career paths.

New Cultural Diversity Course Objectives and Structure

As a general education elective, the new course needs to present an overview of the concept of diversity and how it applies to students’ everyday lives, as well as a sense of how it may affect their personal and professional relationships in the future. However, since the institution proposing the course is a design college, it is also essential for the course to engage with the various visual fields the students are training for, including graphic design, web design, photography, fashion design, interior design, game design, and audio and video production.

The course objectives are based on those of my Cross-cultural diversity course at USF, modified for the specific concerns of this design-centric class:

- Demonstrate understanding of basic concepts of diversity (relativism, globalization, etc.) and their influence on and expression through global design and other creative practices within contemporary society
- Recognize how diverse cultural practices form our modern, multicultural society
- Engage with “different cultures” within the student’s own culture, through class interactions and experiential design challenges
- Understand features of social inequality and gain basic skills in using design to challenge those features
- Demonstrate ability to use critical thinking and problem solving skills to address issues of diversity as they may apply to the student’s chosen career

These objectives align with Pardue’s theoretical concepts of cultural design (2005) in that they connect “culture” with “design” through systematic examination of the origins, influences, uses, and distribution of design within cultures. They also connect with Lovett’s Video Action and Research Pedagogy (VARP) by encouraging students to learn how design is used in the creation and representation of “the Other” and in positionality of self, as well as in exploring the market and distribution channels that affect the empirical documentation and experience of a culture or cultural object (Lovett 2008).

The weekly topic structure will be roughly structured around the Conrad Kottak and Kathryn Kozaitis (2008) textbook, *On Being Different: Diversity and Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream*, the same one I used for my Cross-cultural diversity course at USF. However, I plan on using videos, some chosen by me and others chosen by students as part of their research, as the main pedagogical texts, rather than requiring readings. I made this choice for two main reasons. First, students at the institution are not often required to read textbooks for their skill-based classes. They may be required to do more conventional readings for general education classes, but I believe, as do other authors, that this requirement only adds to the frustration and negative attitude toward general education classes that has been seen in research on lecture-based classes, especially in career schools (Armstrong 2001; Badway and Gumport 2001; Carlisle 2010; Ulbig 2009). And as Lovett reminds us, “Rather than privilege text-based representations of truth, VARP is a methodology that relies on audiovisual interpretations to make meaning and promote learning” (Lovett 2008:78).

I also know from personal teaching experience that a fair number of these students struggle with reading literacy. While I was unable to find any statistics on student literacy rates in for-profit schools, I recall having one or more students in each class who could not follow written directions or tutorials without help. I would certainly recommend the textbook for student purchase, as the combination of text plus video has been found to reinforce learning, particularly for students who are new to a topic (Mitra et al. 2010; Matusiak 2012). I would create a topic outline for each class, matching subtopics with specific pages for review of the material, but I believe that careful organization and preparation on my part can allow video to serve as the primary text for this class, as long as students are prepared in advance for viewing, allowed to have discussion afterward, and have exercises that reinforce the lesson through practical application of their media production skills.

The topics to be covered include the following:

- Globalization and Multicultural Places and Spaces
- Ethnicity and Cultural Practice and Identity
- Religious Diversity and Practice
- Social and Biological Dimensions of Race
- Gender Roles and Sexual Orientation
- Health, Fitness, and Age
- Class and Economic Diversity

- Linguistic and Aural Diversity

As previously discussed, the course focus will be on the visual aspects of these topics, particularly looking at the hegemonic uses of visuals and creative works in controlling subcultures, as well as the manner in which some subcultures use these same materials as a form of resistance for gaining a voice in the larger communities of which they are a part. A focus on cultural design, especially visual literacy concepts of meaning-making within each topic, will help the students understand how visual culture and the media can be used to advance or suppress the welfare of diverse groups, and it will ultimately help them understand the ramifications of the choices they make as designers. This understanding is particularly important when they are using visual and aural properties from other cultures as inspiration for their own creations.

In addressing exactly how video and other visuals would be used in the classroom, two main practices will be employed. First, the course will use carefully chosen weekly videos, both long-form documentaries and movies, and short-form clips from YouTube, National Geographic, PBS, and other sources. The accessibility of these videos online will make them easy for students to view if they miss class, and the length of most clips will make them easy for students to download or play, no matter their Internet connection speed. Also, having the videos online will make it easier to quickly revise a playlist based on student interests or issues that arise in class, and will allow the instructor to access materials that may otherwise be nearly impossible to obtain in a timely manner or at a low enough cost to justify their purchase.

Second, the course will employ the concept of visual blogging as a student organizer and project sharing and development tool. As long as expectations for individual student participation are clearly stated (how posts are graded, what an “appropriate” post and response look like, how much of their grade is based on this participation), my experience is that they will participate in a meaningful fashion, inspiring critical examination of course topics among their peers.

With the videos as the primary focus of each class session, I will facilitate a discussion in class to pull out the basic concepts for that week, referencing specific scenes and video clips that were “defining moments” for teaching specific concepts such as hegemony or ethnocentrism, or that examined an area of controversy. A brief lecture to define important terms would follow, and then group or individual activities in class would allow students to put the concepts from that day into practice. Keeping a

cultural design/visual literacy lens on the topics, as well as the design focus of the school and the students' planned careers, the in-class activities would consist of activities requiring them to use some critical thinking and visual literacy concepts to design a response in opposition to predominant ways of thinking about the topics presented. For example, an activity that was originally done in the general anthropology class at USF was to have groups of students design advertisements that went against the traditional marketing techniques focusing on proscribed gender roles, such as marketing engagement rings for men, 4x4s to women, or makeup for men.

Activities such as the above would be a perfect concept for a design-centric class, and the classes are generally long enough to allow for not only a fairly lengthy video or multiple videos and class discussion or lecture but also for valuable small group engagement each week. Issues of creative works as a mode of individual communication and counter-hegemonic cultural expression would be explored through activities both in and outside of class, allowing students to research examples of these works and create their own based on various issues discussed in class.

Even though these students generally prefer to work in visual formats, I do not want to totally ignore the need for them to be able to communicate in a written fashion since this is a skill they will need in their careers, no matter how creative they are in other areas. Therefore, as I have done previously with my Visual Literacy classes, I will also ask them to write a commentary post on their vlog addressing each major course topic in relation to images or videos they choose to share each week. While not formally graded for grammar and spelling, part of the standards for acceptable participation in this exercise would be the expectation of "professional communication." Therefore, the writing would need to be well-organized, with a clear topic and good supporting arguments.

Class and homework projects would allow students to interpret the deliverables in their own way, based on their own particular talents and interests. Since these classes will likely have a mix of students from different design concentrations and years, it would be difficult to require all of them to complete something that required specific technical skills, such as video production. However, these students should all be able to do basic photography, simple layouts, and basic drawing and graphic communication. Students who are primarily audio production students make up a very small portion of students at this institution, but I do not anticipate that they would have problems with the very basic visual requirements of this class. Nevertheless, I do anticipate that they could use

audio-based materials to complete most class requirements if desired.

Closing Comments

While the specific structure of this proposed course is distinctly focused on the needs of a student population attending a career college, many instructors would likely agree that a considerable number of undergraduates, particularly those taking classes outside of their major to satisfy a general education requirement, can be uninterested, unmotivated, and distracted from doing their best in class. Anthropologists have long used video in the form of documentaries to reach our various audiences, including students. However, these “classics” are not enough to keep today’s students engaged, especially when there are much more interesting things happening on that little glowing screen in their palm or on their desk. As has been shown in the literature (Bird and Godwin 2006), students often find our old “standards” boring and irrelevant, and even though I still use some of them myself, I can tell when students are missing the message because they are laughing at the exotic or out-of-date topics or at the physical appearance of the subjects.

While perhaps not a perfect solution, using multiple short contemporary videos such as those found from various online sources could help students of all majors and interests begin to connect the concepts of diversity to their lives in a more meaningful manner. Not all students will have the skills or inclination to do highly creative work such as video production or fashion design, but they all have personal passions that they *can* bring out through small group and individual activities that ask them to engage critically with concepts, turn them on their heads, and “think different,” as the old Apple ad asked us all to do. A good basic visual anthropology course for undergraduate anthropology majors could be constructed with a similar framework while including a little more emphasis on the anthropological classics in the field. An introduction to the contemporary clips discussed previously, and to the basic skills and ethics of the creation of “anthropological” media would also be essential for majors. Also, majors would be well-served by being introduced to critical analysis of the process of amateur and “prosumer” video and image creation, especially issues related to technological access and the sources of videos and images we actually get to see. Do they really represent an entire culture? Whose voices are missing or too dominant?

More than a year has passed since I first sat down to research and

design this course, and the job position as an instructor for the cultural diversity class is still listed as “open.” Even if I never get a chance to teach this specific course myself, based on my personal experience and the emerging literature on visual pedagogy, I believe the concepts and course organization to be sound, especially that relating to the use of YouTube, blogging, and other audiovisual technologies. I continue to experiment in my classes with having students do much of the video research for the class, sharing their findings and reflections on these videos through vlogs. I have also been gradually reducing the emphasis on textbook readings in most of my classes, because it seems that most students never do them, particularly if the class is project-based and they know they will not be tested on direct memorization of the material. I do, however, continue to try to work reading and writing assignments into these visually-dominant classes by assigning more readings from popular web-based news and culture sites rather than from an official text. I have also lessened the emphasis on writing structure, choosing to emphasize original thought and creative engagement with the class topics instead. Most institutions (including this particular design institution) have writing improvement centers or individual tutors, and I refer students to their services as needed. When students complain that they didn’t think they would have to write in a visually-oriented class, I emphasize that as college graduates, they are expected to be able to communicate effectively in all forms of communication; writing to effectively support the visual work they created is a skill they will have to use with employers, clients, and in their professional portfolios. The assigned activities and grading benchmarks are designed to promote critical thinking about how historical and current events relate to specific concepts explored in class, as well as to encourage and reward students’ own personal exploration of cultural diversity topics, challenging their own ingrained belief systems and learning the value to be found in increased acceptance of differences.

Whether one teaches at a traditional higher education institution or a for-profit career college, the reality is that the demographic characteristics and educational expectations of these two student populations are becoming more alike (Ashraf 2009). Pressures from students, parents, and employers for a more “relevant” curriculum—and demands from credentialing and governmental bodies for more accountability in meeting instructional outcomes—are forcing instructors to bring current research into the classroom while emphasizing practical applications of that information (Armstrong 2001; Goggin 2012). As

Gerard Goggin states, “The recognition of culturally specific practices and imaginaries of digital technology needs to be combined with similar precise, located accounts of different pedagogical and educational traditions—in order to usefully and democratically develop online pedagogy in different places, rather than assuming global technologies that can simply be rolled out everywhere” (2012:19).

Instructors can no longer afford to ignore these findings. The emerging pedagogical research being done in countries around the world regarding the use of the Internet and mobile technologies is vital to adapting higher education instruction to the demands of our globalized society.

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Audiovisual Media as a Pedagogical Tool: A Brief Annotated Bibliography

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Media-based, pedagogical innovations are understudied and largely undocumented within anthropology and the social sciences more generally. While most instructors share the experience of showing films or employing YouTube clips as quick, contemporary examples, we rarely reflect critically on these techniques—much less publish our impressions. This bibliography mirrors the still tentative state of the literature and is neither exhaustive nor authoritative but intended instead as a starting point, profiling (1) examples of media-based pedagogy from the 1970s to the present, (2) critical assessments of the efficacy and impact of classroom media, (3) practical references outlining potential source material and relevant copyright restrictions, and (4) seminal works that form essential background reading. We hope that these sources will provide readers with the resources and inspiration needed to begin their own projects—and that you will contact us as you identify relevant additions for our list and begin to disseminate your work.

Media-Based Pedagogy Examples

Champoux, Joseph E.

1999 Film as a Teaching Resource. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 8(2):206-217.

Drawing on film theory and the film studies literature, Champoux assesses popular film as a teaching tool for management theory and organizational behavior. Coming from outside of anthropology, the author largely bypasses issues of representation and uncritically accepts film as a form of cross-cultural experience. The article is, however, useful for its careful attention to filmic techniques and vocabulary, providing a quick primer for instructors. A brief but

helpful discussion of ways of incorporating film and its relative advantages and anticipated effects is also included.

Demerath, N.J.

1981 Through a Double-Crossed Eye: Sociology and the Movies. *Teaching Sociology* 9(1):69-82.

Demerath offers a useful corrective to the assumption that films provide straightforward illustrations of social science concepts and helpfully provides six concrete suggestions for minimizing competing messages, ranging from providing shorter clips that privilege the start of the film to focusing on the more representative side-kick rather than the main character. He concludes with a brief but thought-provoking segment on alternative uses for film that go beyond delivering thematic content.

Engelbrecht, Beate, and Rolf Husmann

2004 Films in the Classroom. *In* Current Policies and Practices in European Social Anthropology Education. D. Dracklé and I.R. Edgar, eds., pp. 112-126. New York: Berghahn Books.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the varied pedagogical uses of ethnographic film. Engelbrecht and Husmann outline a series of university-level anthropology courses in which content delivery is paired with the extensive use of visual media. They then discuss multiple, in-class media uses, ranging from film analysis to reception analysis. While it would be preferable to link the course structure and methods segments (and provide concrete guidelines for film selection), the authors do give a concise summary of film's pedagogical possibilities and echo the distinction between "film as illustration" and "film as a source of detailed information" made by Cooper (this issue) and Leblanc (1997).

Goldfarb, Brian

2002 *Visual Pedagogy: Media Cultures in and beyond the Classroom*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Goldfarb presents an engaging history of media pedagogy from the Second World War to the present focusing initially on projects within school settings and then extending the analysis to consider applications outside of formal educational institutions. The book incorporates film, television, video, and computer-based media and has a decidedly global perspective. While the entire text is recommended, chapter 2 will be of particular interest for instructors looking to develop their own media-based projects.

Huber, Margaret Williamson

2009 Teaching *Star Trek* as Anthropology. *Southern Anthropologist* 34(1/2):32-53.

This detailed example piece outlines Huber's use of the original *Star Trek* series as the cornerstone of her theme-based introductory anthropology course. Huber's justification of the show as a teaching tool provides a nice set of criteria for media selection, and her extensive outline of the course with multiple concrete examples is easy to follow and replicate, particularly given the accompanying list of assigned course readings.

Jackson, John L., Jr.

2004 An Ethnographic Filmflam: Giving Gifts, Doing Research, and Videotaping the Native Subject/Object. *American Anthropologist* 106(1):32-42.

As a component of his larger argument, Jackson discusses film production as a particularly valuable teaching tool in the realm of anthropological ethics. Given the exploitative potential of filmic representations, Jackson argues that this medium provides students a valuable forum for considering the ethics of participant observation more broadly. As digital storytelling allows students increasing access to this creative process as documented by Thornburg (this issue), ethical considerations of this sort are becoming available for classroom negotiation.

Leblanc, Lauraine

1997 Observing Reel Life: Using Feature Films to Teach Ethnographic Methods. *Teaching Sociology* 25(1):62-68.

Leblanc investigates the advantages and disadvantages of using feature films to teach ethnographic methods, particularly observation, in this profile of her undergraduate course on the sociology of youth subcultures. Like Cooper (this issue), Leblanc is distinct in her use of media to encourage the application of social science skills rather than to convey content. Appendices containing an annotated listing of Leblanc's film selections and tips for film analysis are particularly helpful.

Mallinger, Mark, and Gerard Rossy

2003 Film as a Lens for Teaching Culture: Balancing Concepts, Ambiguity, and Paradox. *Journal of Management Education* 27(5):608-624.

This article is included as a counterexample, demonstrating that media is only as effective as its accompanying pedagogy. Here, Mallinger and Rossy introduce their Integrated Cultural Framework (ICF), a simplified taxonomy used to classify cultures based on: ability to influence, comfort with ambiguity, achievement orientations, dichotomies between individualism and collectivism, and time and space orientation. Students apply this framework to their out-of-class viewing of the comedy, *Gung Ho*, in order to learn about cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan. This example and its evident stereotyping demonstrate the danger of incorporating popular films as valid, ethnographic examples of existing cultures.

Sealy, Kelvin Shawn, ed.

2008 *Film, Politics, and Education: Cinematic Pedagogy across the Disciplines*. New York: Peter Lang.

This edited volume outlines various aspects of the history, theory, and practical application of moving images—particularly popular film and television—within the classroom. The collection's most notable contributions include (1) chapters by Sealy and Bickford

addressing the politics surrounding the educational use of media, specifically arguments contrasting elitist and popular forms of culture; (2) Broughton's detailed and engaging history of the pedagogic use of film; (3) Sun's Gramscian analysis of Disney's *The Lion King*; and (4) the concluding interview with bell hooks on the topic of film and education.

Shields, Donald C., and Virginia V. Kidd

1973 Teaching through Popular Film: A Small Group Analysis of *The Poseidon Adventure*. *Speech Teacher* 22(1):201-207.

In this early exploration of popular film as a teaching medium, Shields and Kidd use the 1973 feature film, *The Poseidon Adventure*, to demonstrate film's potential within the undergraduate classroom. The authors recommend popular film as a practical teaching aid that offers sensory stimulation, intellectual involvement, and contemporary themes that are both engaging and entertaining. They provide an extended listing of relevant films for various topics in communication theory along with a detailed case study outlining their use of *The Poseidon Adventure*.

Vande Berg, Leah R.

1991 Using Television to Teach Courses in Gender and Communication. *Communication Education* 40(1):105-111.

Vande Berg presents a model for studying sex-role orientations through television, arguing that television represents scripts for social interaction that both reflect, and at times challenge, mainstream norms—especially regarding gender. After introducing television's benefits (e.g., its high production value, positive reception, and familiarity) and briefly discussing practical issues of access and availability, Vande Berg concludes with an extended description of the teaching process incorporating multiple detailed examples from *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Honeymooners*, and *Who's the Boss*, among others.

Winegarden, Alan D., Marilyn Fuss-Reineck, and Lori J. Charron

1993 Using *Star Trek: The Next Generation* to Teach Concepts in Persuasion, Family, Communication, and Communication Ethics. *Communication Education* 42:179-188.

Winegarden, Fuss-Reineck, and Charron provide rationale and examples for using television programs in the classroom for courses in gender and communication. In particular, they focus on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, outlining in detail its application to themes of persuasion, family communication (i.e., family patterns, family roles, ecosystems and family life), and communication ethics. The authors discuss advantages and disadvantages surrounding the use of television series, but the article is largely an extended example of the theme-based analysis of television content.

Critical Assessments of Media Use

Bird, S. Elizabeth, and Jonathan P. Godwin

2006 Film in the Undergraduate Anthropology Classroom: Applying Audience Response Research in Pedagogical Practice. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 37(3):285-299.

Bird and Godwin explore audience response to film in the undergraduate anthropology classroom, addressing claims that films “speak for themselves,” evoke better student response, and improve retention of class materials. Using a four-field, introductory anthropology course at the University of South Florida as a case study, they conduct in-class observations and student focus groups, administer structured questionnaires, and interview faculty with experience teaching the course. Their results offer keen insight into how instructors’ expectations of media reception are not always consistent with student experience. The article concludes with an excellent set of concrete recommendations for more effective use of classroom visuals.

Blum, Denise

- 2006 Expanding the Dialogue: A Response to Bird and Godwin's "Film in the Undergraduate Anthropology Classroom." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 37(3):300-306.

In this follow-up to Bird and Godwin (2006), Blum explores and expands upon the observation that film in the classroom actually inhibits learning by merely transferring information as opposed to nurturing a more profound understanding. Assessing her own two-year media project, Cineculture Friday, a series of first-release cultural documentaries shown in what Blum terms her "public classroom," the author uses extensive participant observation and structured questionnaires to demonstrate that film reception is dependent upon the unique interaction of the film, the instructor, the post-viewing discussion, and the viewers.

Chu, Godwin C., and Wilbur Schramm

- 2004 *Learning from Television: What the Research Says*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

This is a newly available reprint of a late 1960s classic meta-analysis of instructional television and radio. While the technology assessed is now clearly dated, the research and design principles are sound, and it should be of use for instructors looking to bring a more systematic approach to the evaluation of media's potential benefits for pedagogy.

Englehart, Lucinda

- 2003 Media Activism in the Screening Room: The Significance of Viewing Locations, Facilitation, and Audience Dynamics in the Reception of HIV/AIDS Films in South Africa. *Visual Anthropology Review* 19(1/2):73-85.

While focusing outside of the classroom on public reaction to HIV/AIDS films, Englehart remains relevant for her careful consideration of the impact of context and framing on audience response. In particular, she demonstrates the effect of "situated interactions" such as group viewing and establishes that films seen independently do not receive the same level of complex

interpretation. This work has clear implications for the use of class time.

Martinez, Wilton

1995 The Challenges of a Pioneer: Tim Asch, Otherness, and Film Reception. *Visual Anthropology Review* 11(1):53-82.

Martinez exposes the disconnect between the goals of noted ethnographic filmmaker Timothy Asch, with his deep commitment to education, ethnographic veracity, and humanistic ideals, and student reception of his films, which ironically center on the otherness he sought to dispel. Conducting original research at University of Southern California, where Asch taught during the final years of his life, Martinez examines student reactions to (1) *The Ax Fight* in isolation and (2) the full body of Asch's Yanomamö films. He concludes that despite Asch's cultural relativism and best intentions, the films often fail to achieve teaching goals and learning outcomes, contributing instead to the students' existing cultural stereotypes. He argues for a reevaluation of the true impact of ethnographic film and closer attention to its pedagogical framing and use.

Smith, Don D.

1973 Teaching Introductory Sociology by Film. *Teaching Sociology* 1(1):48-61.

This article is an early assessment of the value of film for in-class use. Smith's primary focus is increased efficiency within diverse classrooms with limited prerequisites—what he views as the standard introductory environment. Defining success as positive student evaluations, he finds no significant differences between comparable film and non-film classes, allowing him to argue for the in-class use of film as a means of freeing the instructor for other tasks.

Practical References

Crews, Kenneth

2006 *Copyright Law for Librarians and Educators*. Chicago: American Library Association.

Essentially a second edition to Crew's *Copyright Essentials for Librarians and Educators* (2000), this is a professional handbook and primer on copyright law ranging from the scope of protectable works to rights of ownerships, fair use, the TEACH Act, and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Highly approachable with checklists, sources for additional reading, and an index, this is a good reference tool for instructors negotiating legally permissible uses of media.

Gerster, Carole, and Laura W. Zlogar, eds.

2006 *Teaching Ethnic Diversity with Film: Essays and Resources for Educators in History, Social Studies, Literature, and Film Studies*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

This helpful edited volume provides comprehensive chapter overviews on the filmic representations of African-Americans, Asians and Asian-Americans, American Indians, and Latinos over time, introducing extensive source material for instructors seeking provocative examples for classroom use. It also profiles methods of film analysis for a non-specialist and offers specific instructions for the social studies discipline on the identification of stereotypes and cultural appropriation. Although the final section of the volume is geared toward the high school classroom, the information is sound, and the text as a whole offers lots of inspiration for syllabus design and media-based classroom activities.

Heider, Karl, and Carol Hermer

1995 *Films for Anthropological Teaching*. Washington: American Anthropological Association.

Now in its eighth edition (and unfortunately out of print), this filmography includes over 1,500 films arranged alphabetically by

title. Heider and Hermer provide the release date, length, production credits, distributor, order code number, purchase and rental prices, description, and review references as available for each film along with “focusing questions” and “warnings” for a select number of titles. The guide is prefaced by geographical and topical listings of the films along with a name index and a distributors’ list. This collection privileges those films reviewed in *American Anthropologist* and still in distribution, although the selection criteria are not explicit.

Howard, Jennifer

2011 What You Don't Know About Copyright, but Should. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 3: A6.

This brief primer on copyright law includes information on multiple online resources and introduces readers to the classroom use exemption to copyright, offering options beyond the standard fair use exemption.

Husmann, Rolf, Ingrid Wellinger, Johannes Rühl, and Martin Taureg

1992 *A Bibliography of Ethnographic Film*. Munster, Hamburg: LIT-Verlag.

In addition to the approximately 1,000 film reviews organized by director in the fourth and final chapter, this 335-page reference includes an extensive set of briefly annotated books and articles on the general topic of ethnographic film (chapter 1); citations for academic reviews of film conferences, symposia, and festivals (chapter 2); a wide-ranging selection of additional reference materials, including catalogues and bibliographies (chapter 3); and an appendix of selected journals. The volume is well indexed—searchable by review author or the film’s title, director, ethnic group, and country or geographic origin. It is current up to the spring of 1992 and includes over 3,000 references—many from non-abstracted sources.

Jhala, Jayasinhji

1998 *A Guide to Visual Anthropology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Jhala presents a selection of 50 classic and contemporary films recommended for use in introductory, cultural anthropology courses. The films are organized alphabetically with a listing of the production crew, U.S. distributors, format, genre and key words. Jhala's brief summaries are supplemented by notes on the films' importance and suggested classroom use.

Mitchell, Charles P.

2004 *Filmography of Social Issues: A Reference Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

In his noteworthy introduction, Mitchell presents a set of 20 social themes ranging from abortion to divorce and violence with multiple related titles and a historical overview of each theme. The remainder of the text is devoted to a set of 100 feature films from the 1930s to 2002. Principal social themes are provided for each listed title along with an overview, synopsis, and critique. With its index of titles, actors, locations, and themes, Mitchell's work offers an excellent reference for constructing syllabi and film-based classroom activities.

Seminal Background Reading

Acciaioli, Greg

2004 *The Consequence of Conation: Pedagogy and the Inductive Films of an Ethical Film-Maker*. In Timothy Asch and Ethnographic Film. E.D. Lewis, ed. Pp. 123-148. London: Routledge.

In this piece, Acciaioli claims that the Conative mode of communication (i.e., the pedagogical or teaching mode) was always, and perhaps increasingly, at the heart of Timothy Asch's filmic practice. This article is recommended as useful background reading for instructors considering incorporating ethnographic film, particularly in light of the reservations expressed by Bird and

Godwin (2006) and Cooper (this issue), as well of those in Martinez's (1995) work on student reception of Asch's films.

Ginsburg, Faye D.

1994 Culture/Media: A (Mild) Polemic. *Anthropology Today* 10(2):5-15.

Ginsburg calls for an expansion of visual anthropology's range of media, highlighting the increase in filmic media produced by indigenous, diaspora, and other (often disempowered) filmmakers. Consideration of the relationship between this genre of native ethnographic film along with more traditional visual anthropology, Ginsburg suggests, facilitates recognition of a "parallax effect": the differences of perception of an object based on a difference in the position of the observer. Thus, consideration of this broader range of filmic media necessitates an acknowledgement that ethnographic films are second-order representations, cultural representations of cultural representations. This is an essential understanding to impart to students in classrooms in which filmic media is utilized as more than a proxy for ethnographic data. It is a strong companion piece to Worth and Adair (1997) and useful background for the justification of participatory projects and instruction in accessible, inexpensive technologies such as digital storytelling.

Ginsburg, Faye D., Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, eds.

2002 *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

This landmark collection covers the anthropology of media broadly conceived from cultural activism to national and transnational imagery, technology, and social sites of production. This text is recommended as a primer for those wishing to engage with media in a broader framework, addressing its cultural impact and beginning to study the medium itself in an ethnographic sense.

Hall, Stuart

1980 Encoding/Decoding. *In Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*. Pp. 128-138. London: Hutchinson.

This is a seminal piece in the movement away from the “effect” studies of the 1970s and 1980s and their narrow focus on media’s impact on the audience in isolation. When introduced, Hall’s model was unique in its attention to viewer characteristics and the tendency for race, class, gender and other identity markers to serve as lenses, differentially decoding media messages to fit an individual’s existing worldview. This short, approachable piece is good background reading for class exercises that consider audience response and the importance of context.

Heider, Karl

2006 *Ethnographic Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Often considered the film primer for anthropologists, Heider’s classic text (originally published in 1976) focuses on what it means to be ethnographic, providing both attributes and extended examples through the work of Jean Rouch, John Marshall, Robert Gardner, and Timothy Asch. Technique, ethics, and financing are also considered before Heider concludes with a brief section on teaching with film. Though his attention to pedagogy is somewhat anemic, Heider’s work remains important background for those considering the classroom use of ethnographic film.

Loizos, Peter

1993 *Innovation in Ethnographic Film: From Innocence to Self-Consciousness, 1955-1985*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In this review of 50 influential films produced between 1955 and 1985, Loizos provides an accessible history of the nature and development of ethnographic film. He covers classic works by John Marshall, Timothy Asch, Jean Rouch, and Robert Gardner as well as the earlier projects of contemporary filmmakers like Melissa Llewelyn-Davies. Changes in production technology, content, strategies of argument, and ethnographic authentication are highlighted, and Loizos is careful to discuss issues of representation (for both filmmaker and subject) in regards to each individual film. Loizos is detailed and direct in his presentation of the films’ context, argument, and approach, making this a solid

pre-viewing text for student audiences in line with the recommendations of Bird and Godwin (2006).

Postman, Neil

1985 *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. New York: Penguin Books.

Postman's critique of television as an incoherent, anti-participatory medium defined by its mandate to entertain continues to inform debates regarding the appropriateness of television and film in educational contexts. Chapter 10, "Teaching as an Amusing Activity," is particularly relevant for instructors, and it is recommended background reading for those looking to engage with television in a meaningful way.

Strong, Mary, and Laena Wilder, eds.

2009 *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Though primarily a collection profiling current research and techniques in visual anthropology, the final chapter details digital and interactive technologies that can be used to present research findings or engage in applied collaborations. These techniques can be easily adapted for classroom use and instruction contributing to a media-based pedagogy.

Worth, Sol, and John Adair

1997 *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Originally published in 1972, this classic project chronicles Worth and Adair's experiences training a small group of Navajo youth to produce their own films. The participants—most of whom had no previous film exposure – were taught basic camera and editing skills and allowed to develop their own narrative style and sequencing, which were then compared to the techniques of inner-city teenagers in Philadelphia to explore the impact of culture on visual language. The results are intriguing, particularly given the emerging interest in digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool (see

Thornburg, this issue). This book is recommended both as background reading for instructors and as a potential course text.