Consumption, Belonging, and Place (72:00)

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This film is designed to probe the potential of auto-ethnography in ethnographic research. The film focuses on a single community in South East London where the director of the film used to live. This film incorporates the director’s voice, also a character in the film, and the voices of other inhabitants who are the consumers of The High Street. The film represents an everyday life of The High Street and its people. The street has its own spatio-material topography as the market. The High Street also serves as a symbolic representation of the socio-cultural practices of the local community. Reflecting Nigel Thrift’s theory of space (2002), the street is “porous” - with no boundary to incoming memories, messages, or encounters, and with no stable landscape for communication.

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**“Consumption, Belonging and Place”**

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A documentary, *Consumption, Belonging, and Place* is part of a bigger project on the relationships between consumption, ethnicity and material reality in which video ethnography was applied as a main method, accompanied by interactive methods of communicating with the receiving community, such as local screenings, exhibitions, and internet blogging. The role of the marketplace and the distributions of social and cultural meanings in creating the community has been investigated in this film within the time span of one year: 2006-2007. The film was designed and executed to probe a methodological basis of research involving a voice of the researcher and her own experience in the community. In its current form the film represents the researcher’s interpretation of the results from semi-structured interviews which were conducted among two groups of inhabitants of the community: the owners of businesses and the shoppers in the High Street. The street–the marketplace delineates spatio-material topography of the study but also serves as a symbolic representation of the socio-cultural practices of the local community. As in Nigel Thrift’s theory of space in this research the street is “porous”– with no boundary to incoming memories, messages, or encounters, and with no stable landscape for communication (2002), though, as my ethnographic film shows, there will be plenty of attempts to make that space static and stable.

The film is an interpretative tool which shows that the street is made up of many kinds of stories and practices brought in to relation with one another through a continuous and largely involuntary process of encounters. The space of one street, however, emphasizes the ‘materiality of thinking’ (Carter 2004) which in this research is accepted as an epistemological foundation for consumption practices. Such practices are observed in relation to space and ethnicity which are themselves the products of interpretation of the consumption of the street and its facilities by different informants.

The film shows the researcher’s own story of the place and other stories provided by the inhabitants of which none can become a dominant narrative. The interpretivist approach is articulated through a subjective process of editing combined with self-referential images which reveal the process of film-making and the researcher’s personal engagement (Cohen 1994). Both a textual and meta-textual level in the film is to accentuate the awareness of a tension between representation and everyday life practices, including the practice of research too.

To acknowledge the mutual exchange between those levels, the self-reflective visual ‘footnotes’ were utilized in the film which come from the reality of the researcher and the production-team. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of objects, texts, images and technologies in people’s lives which are the object of an ethnographic research. This is to state that, unlike in Collier’s traditional approach, in this film ethnography is regarded as an aspect of research and an aspect of representation as well, while the whole project represents the narrative-based communication story constructed by the researcher (Clifford 1986).

The recorded interviews indicate that most of the stories told by the informants find their opposite versions in other informants. This differs mostly across different ethnic groups using the same street but also across generations and lifestyles. Nonetheless, in the process of editing, those stories acquire another form which depends only on a researcher who interprets them from her own point of view.

**References**


