

Making an Exhibition with Images and Objects from Fieldwork in Anthropological Research

Date : June 11, 2008

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For anthropologists, to quote Shakespeare, "all the world's a stage" in terms of their global and multi-sited research endeavours. This is also reflected in their photographic practices and in objects originating from their fieldwork sites. Yet, what is precisely the role of photographs, other visual representations and material objects in the various stages of the research process? This was the question that guided our work as curators with the exhibition *The World Kaleidoscope: Images and Objects from Fieldwork in Anthropological Research*, which was inaugurated on the 4 April 2008 in Galleri Sverdrup, at the University of Oslo. The exhibition ran between 4 April and 25 May, and will later this year continue in the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. With this exhibition we wanted to reflect on the power of images and objects to represent and communicate anthropological insights. What role do images taken or encountered during fieldwork play in the research process? Can objects and images create associations, new insight and moreover become important in knowledge production?

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For this exhibition we invited each member of staff of the Department of Social Anthropology (www.sai.uio.no) and the Ethnographic section at the Museum of Cultural History

(www.khm.uio.no) to present their work through one photograph and an object. The photos and objects in this exhibition were not selected because of their beauty. Rather we had asked the contributors to choose pieces that have been part of the ethnographic research process, either as a tool that represented them with new insights, or which was evocative in the process of writing up their research. The objects and photos are accompanied by captions written by the participants, but beyond that we did not wish to construct coherence across the contributions through an elaborate hypertext. Instead we wanted it to be up to the visitors themselves to create stories around these artefacts.

We started working with this idea during the summer of 2007, and started our dialogue with the participants in October: explaining what we wanted from them and discussing which photo and object they should pick. It is a unique experience to be able to collaborate with all one's colleagues! Through willingly sharing their images and objects with us, we have been able to learn more about our colleagues' work, and not least how images and objects enter into their work. At first, this can seem almost banal, but as the process went on it became increasingly interesting to see how people wanted to create a link between their photo, their object and the captions they wrote for each item. Originally, we had suggested that there did not need to be a link between photo and object, and that little text was necessary for the captions. For most, this seemed like a counterproductive way of conceptualising their contribution. After discussions with participants and our designer, Damir Cvetojevic, we decided that the link between pictures and objects had to be made evident both semantically, in terms of content, and visually, with small picture inserts. Damir therefore photographed all objects so that we could visually cross-reference objects and photographs. All captions and written material is furthermore bilingual (Norwegian and English).

Caption: Maria Øien: Ongoing fieldwork 2007-8 in Nauiyu community, Daly River, the Northern Territory, Australia. I have spent countless hours under a shady tree away from the burning sun with Molly Yawalminy and Mercia Wawul teaching me how to weave. While we sit together and weave they teach me their language and techniques, laugh at my clumsiness, and praise my diligence and interest to learn. My participation in dilly bag weaving has given me valuable cultural insight and helped me build a strong relationship to my akkalli (grandmother) Molly.

Our intention with this exhibition is also to provoke a discussion on the status of visual and material artefacts in anthropological fieldwork, which are all too often neglected in the research process and relegated to a mere support role in the hermeneutic acts of interpretation and representation. Images and objects are an integral part of the anthropologist's understanding of other cultures, in a multi-sensorial process of cultural appropriation, learning and interpretation, even if this is rarely explicitly acknowledged.

Caption: Astrid Bredholdt Stensrud: Two cosmologies merge in the pilgrimage of el Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i (Lord of the Snow Star) in the Peruvian Andes,. The belief in the spirit lords (Apu) and Mother Earth (Pachamama) live side by side with the catholic belief in Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, who according to legend made an apparition here in 1783, is depicted here on a stone, and the image has been reproduced in miniatures that pilgrims can bring home for protection. On this photo we see Apu Qolqepunku, which is part of the mountain range of the Apu Ausangate, the most powerful mountain lord in the area.

Moreover, we think that the images and objects in this exhibition are vivid testimony to the possibilities of representation beyond text. They evoke more than can be said with words, or what can be expressed in a descriptive, or for that matter analytic sentence. Yet the materiality of objects and the no less 'material' visual impressions disappear quickly after fieldwork is finished and 'writing up' takes over. Similar to precious gemstones, believed long lost, which are retrieved from private collections or reappear at auctions, this exhibition presents an astonishing array of significant items from the fieldworkers' own 'archives'. They also provide manifold sign-posts for how future anthropological researchers might give more prominence to the sensorially rich experience they encounter and engage with during fieldwork.

Caption: Harald Beyer Broch. February 2007. The crew of a small vessel fishing for spawning cod at Malangsrunden in Troms during the winter fishing season. The men are from Helligvær in Nordland.

The curators acknowledge funding from Galleri Sverdrup, the Department of Social Anthropology, the Museum of Cultural History, and the Norwegian Anthropological Association. Images from the exhibition opening were taken by Damir Cvetojevic.

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Caption: Exhibition opening
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