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# Complicity Through Montage : A Call for an Intercultural Approach to Ethnographic Filmmaking

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### Résumé de l'article

La récente production d'ethnographies participatives et de textes expérimentaux montre la préoccupation des anthropologues à vouloir réduire l'écart qui existe entre le Soi et l'Autre. Cet article propose une exploration critique d'un tel objectif en examinant jusqu'à quel point le Soi et l'Autre peuvent être articulés dans un texte audio-visuel unique. Dans cet article, je propose que l'adoption consciencieuse de techniques de montage interculturelles en production filmique a le potentiel de créer des standards visuels alternatifs qui défient les modes de représentations occidentales en vogue, en plus de ré-imaginer, plutôt que d'éliminer, la distance qui existe entre le Soi et l'Autre.

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# COMPLICITY THROUGH MONTAGE

## *A Call for an Intercultural Approach to Ethnographic Filmmaking*

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### Introduction

During the first year of my PhD studies at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester, I was asked to explain how I planned to integrate the visual medium with my doctoral research<sup>1</sup>. Various practical and theoretical explorations made me realize that the heart of my visual approach is in issues of representation and intersubjectivity. Since then, my visual approach has taken up the following questions: How can I represent the Other in a visual text? Can we reject the ideology of “observer-observed” as encouraged by a postmodernist approach (Clifford 1986)? Is it possible to symmetrically integrate the Other’s “visual system”<sup>2</sup> into a text of which I am the main author? How can we merge different stylistic conventions into a unique visual product? All of these questions are related to the ostensibly

1. This article has been made possible thanks to the generous financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Overseas Research Scholarship offered by the University of Manchester, the Radcliffe-Brown Trust Fund granted by the Royal Anthropological Institute and the Fonds de Recherche sur la Société et la culture granted by the Government of Quebec.
2. Marcus and Banks define visual systems as “the processes that result in humans producing visible objects, reflexively constructing their visual environment and communicating by visual means” (1997: 21). Indian Hindu photographs, for example, show a different visual system of representation than the Western one as “temporally and spatially situated images all co-exist within the same frame” (Pinney 1992: 85). This illustrates a different visual convention than the Western one, which emphasizes continuity, unity of time and space, and individualism.

unavoidable distance between Self and Other, which is at the core of the ethnographic film enterprise (Nichols 1994: 67; Russell 1999).

The idea of a “shared anthropology” and “participatory ethnography” was, to a certain extent, explored in the films and writings of Jean Rouch, and many other attempts since have been made to diminish, integrate, dissipate, deconstruct, and/or eliminate the distance and the asymmetrical relation existing between Us and Them. The emergence of polyphonic, dialogical, collaborative, participatory, reflexive, autobiographical, and indigenous types of experimental ethnographic texts, among others, shows a clear response to such concerns as they address the legacy of colonialism.

This article lays the foundation for a critical exploration of such attempts by questioning the extent to which Self and the Other can be articulated within a unique visual text.<sup>3</sup> In maintaining that such a distinction always involves relations of power, I emphasize the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of creating visual products of shared authority. Rather than focusing solely on the potential of diminishing the distance between Self and Other, experimental projects should consider the possibility of destabilizing Western conventions that emphasize notions of continuity and unity (Pinney 1992: 101). I propose that the adoption of interculturally conscious forms of montage techniques in filmmaking has the potential to create new meanings that challenge Western modes of representation and re-imagine the gap between Self and Other.

Montage, I argue, can generate alternative and purposeful means of understanding theoretical issues. The exploration of how topics are inscribed within the structure of a film itself (rather than being limited to a sole “content” position) is central to my visual approach. I am thus interested in the visual representation of a particular topic and how it can generate new filmic structures, and promote the acquisition of anthropological knowledge at different levels (i.e. thick description). A section of this article is dedicated to the work of MacDougall (1992; 1997; 1998; 2006) and his invitation to produce intertextual films in which both structure and substance are transformed by the incorporation of various visual conventions.

I use the term “intercultural” to refer to the form of montage I am particularly interested in the present article. This term is closely related

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3. This article reports a work in progress and provides some avenues of investigation, which need to be further explored.

to MacDougall's (1992) use of the term "intertextual." However, the term "intercultural" shifts the focus from the *texts* to the actual *relations* and *borrowings* that exist between the anthropologist and other actors and groups.<sup>4</sup>

To complement this argument, I present three audio-video clips produced alongside members of the hip-hop community in Santiago de Cuba. There I collaborated with the hip-hop community-action group G1-2K<sup>5</sup> on more than a dozen audio-visual texts that were used by the group as promotional devices. The actual process of production and montage, which took place between 2005 and 2007, allowed me to explore how these hip-hoppers wished to represent themselves audio-visually and, subsequently, how such representation contrasted with the more traditional aesthetics and conventions of film editing in anthropology.

### Dealing with Otherness in Ethnographic Film

The crisis of representation in anthropology shook many foundations within the discipline. In addition to questioning the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, hard science and soft science, objectivity and subjectivity, it encouraged the development of a postmodern ethnography that "foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer" (Tyler 1986: 126). Just as cultural identity needs to be constantly redefined, the Self is conceived as an inconstant and dispersed subject (139), which directly influences the representation of the Other.

Observational cinema is sometimes labeled the "fly-on-the-wall" approach to filmmaking, erroneously implying that someone can film someone else without affecting his or her behaviour (Barbash and Taylor 1997). In fact, observational cinema is aware of the "Self effect," and with the exploration of alternative ways of representing the Other, the

4. I recognize the danger of falling into essentialism here in considering cultural products as clearly associated with one "culture" or the other.

5. G1-2K refers to *Grupo de Apoyo Kultural a la Comunidad* [Kultural Support Group to the Kommunity]. The members of the G1-2K explained to me that the use of K's instead of C's for the words "culture" and "community" is a common phonetic change for the sound [k] in hip-hop linguistic deformation in the United States. Although they do not know how to explain it in great detail, they believe the [k] sound was written with a K instead of a C in the languages of the African slaves who were brought to Cuba.

camera is converted into a tool that directly intervenes in the filmic process (i.e. the “fly-in-the-soup” — Crawford 1992: 78).<sup>6</sup> It is now widely accepted that the divide between observational and participatory cinema is blurred, because an observational style requires intensive fieldwork based on participant observation (MacDougall 1998:137; Henley 2004). The idea that observational cinema is participatory because of its methodological approach implies that Self and Other are constantly influencing each other. In addition to acknowledging the mutual influence of Self and Other while producing a film, some visual anthropologists, such as Jean Rouch and David MacDougall, have attempted to develop filmic approaches that explicitly incorporate the presence of the Other within the content of a film.

Even though Jean Rouch is said to be a premature postmodernist (Stoller 1992), because he encouraged the development of a shared anthropology in his films, his multivocality and reflexivity were totally ignored by debates surrounding the crisis of representation (Ruby 2000). During a forty-year period, according to Ruby, “Rouch’s intention was to produce a ‘shared anthropology’ in which those in front of the camera shared the power with the director” (2000: 13). In *Chronique d’un été*, for instance, Jean Rouch encourages Marceline (one of the subjects) to conduct interviews in front of the camera. It is clear that we can question the extent to which Rouch’s work succeeded in creating a shared anthropology because he never made the term explicit (White 2004); but so too can we admit that his work enriched contemporary theoretical debates about the limitations of representing the Other within a rigid temporal and spatial Western model (ethics of representation), as his work encouraged the production of alternative visual ethnographic documents.

The adoption of experimental approaches to anthropological filmmaking has challenged the static and supposedly objective construction of the Other in ethnographic texts. For instance, the explicit incorporation of the Self in a text, or reflexivity, has generated stimulating debates regarding issues of subjectivity, representation, and the “constructedness” of ethnographic knowledge (Ruby 2000: 152). In addition to highlighting the subjective nature of a filmmaker’s background and acquisition of knowledge, integrating the Self explicitly in a filmic production is a way to “express the subjectivity and

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6. The film *A Wife Among Wives* by David and Judith MacDougall (1982, 72 min.) illustrates such an approach.

immediacy of ... intercultural encounters" (MacDougall 1998: 261-262).

In exaggerating reflexivity, some films may eliminate the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. For instance, Minh-ha's evocative alternative to filmic representation (i.e. the-fly-in-the-I), "*deconstructs* Western conventions of representing other cultures. It is pure critique of the 'I' of the western eye" (Crawford 1992: 79). Both her written and cinematic work is marked by fragmentation, dislocation, and juxtaposition (Moore 1994a). As I will discuss in more detail in the next section, anthropological filmmaking is generally inscribed within Western stylistic conventions. Non-Western understandings of time, space, and styles of representation are not usually integrated within ethnographic texts. As MacDougall explains, a stylistic narrowness in filmmaking "has led to unevenness in how films represent the social reality of other societies" (1992: 91). If we consider the existence of different visual conventions between cultures (Hinduist photography, for instance; Pinney 1992), anthropological filmmaking has by and large failed to represent them.

Collaborative and participatory visual projects in turn attempted to demonstrate the active role played by the Other in influencing the substance and the structure of a film. Collaborative projects were put forward by anthropologists who wished to involve the Other within the process of image-making. Such endeavours advocate the adoption of multivocal, polyphonic, dialogical, and engaged approaches to filmmaking. Visual production undertaken by the Other has generated new ways of understanding intercultural visual systems. Indigenous media, for instance, challenges "a long outdated paradigm of ethnographic film built on notions of culture as a stable and bounded object, documentary representation as restricted to realist illusion, and media technologies as inescapable agents of western imperialism" (Ginsburg 1994: 14). On the other hand, even though some maintain that indigenous media "permits a more equal re-encounter in which differences are no longer inscribed in a hierarchical power structure" (Feitosa in Moore 1994b: 128), others question the extent to which notions of authenticity and anthropological imperialism still influence these forms of representation (Moore 1994b).

The experimental approaches to anthropological filmmaking briefly discussed in this section show that the history of ethnographic film is not simply "a history of the production of Otherness" (Russel 1999:



10); but, most importantly, it is a history of how visual anthropologists have developed alternative strategies to deal with the notion of otherness and intercultural experiences in considering the ethics of representation. The next section considers the relevance of an intertextual approach to filmmaking, as developed by David MacDougall. I wish to explore further how the production of an intertextual document can challenge issues of representation in adopting visual styles and conventions that are not necessarily based on Western principles, in addition to redefining the relation between Self and Other. In this sense, intertextuality should be understood as one attempt among others to experiment with intersubjectivity and visual representation.

### **Intertextual Approaches to Anthropological Filmmaking**

The subject is part of the filmmaker, the filmmaker part of the subject (David MacDougall 1998).

MacDougall writes that the starting point of an ethnographic film is “the encounter of two cultures, or if you will, two texts of life; and what it produces is a further, rather special cultural document” (1992: 96). Observational cinema involves the encounter of the filmmaker-anthropologist and the subject. Therefore, the process of filmmaking is basically transcultural, as it engages in crossing cultural boundaries. More importantly, though, it also *defines* such boundaries because we always realize who we are in relation to the other. MacDougall affirms, however, that image-making has the potential to weaken such cultural differences, and in this sense, visual anthropology is therefore counter-cultural in its forms of representation. As he further states, “the content of a photograph is overwhelmingly physical and psychological before it is cultural” (1998: 252). Therefore visual representation in anthropology transcends the cultural as it highlights our shared human identity.

MacDougall agrees that both the filmmaker’s perspective and the physical presence of the Other are inscribed in the visual text. He writes that films “almost always contain some trace of this crossing of minds and bodies, whether they mean to or not” (1998: 261-262). In the article “Complicities of Style,” MacDougall encourages visual anthropologists to further develop this intersubjective method by adopting an intertextual approach to filmmaking. In other words, filmmakers should explore the possibility of incorporating the visual

conventions of the Other into the structure of the film in addition to their physical image.

It is clear that the presence of the Self, the author — or, in this case, the filmmaker — will always appear in the construct of a visual text. Even a filmmaker who is aware of representational and ethical issues will transmit his or her anthropological commentary “in visual terms which reflect European expectations of causality, chronology and interpersonal behaviour” (MacDougall 1992: 93; Rollwagen 1988: 295). Yet, rather than producing films that follow centered and linear models of the West (from a temporal and spatial perspective), MacDougall emphasizes the importance of constructing films that employ repetition, associative editing, and non-narrative structures. In other words, techniques of montage that incorporate the visual systems of Others have the potential to destabilize the Western conventions of filmmaking.

As a case in point, MacDougall explains that Australian aboriginals’ “self-expression is more typically one of inscription than explanation” as *showing* is in itself a sufficient act for the transmission of rights (1992: 96). Therefore, the incorporation of such an aboriginal visual system within the structure of a film (intertextual approach) would imply enumeration rather than the adoption of a comparative form of montage. Concretely, in these terms, a film does not need to explain “anything or develop any argument or analysis; rather, by simply existing it has the potential to be a powerful political or cultural assertion” (MacDougall 1992). Adopting an intertextual approach implies the incorporation of specific audiovisual conventions within the structure of the film itself, which is also influenced by the anthropologist’s visual conventions.

In order to integrate visual experiences of the subject(s) into the structure of a film (contrary to its sole content), a filmmaker needs to consider the *borrowing* of visual conventions outside of his or her own stylistic model. I would like to emphasize here that the idea of “transcultural borrowing” may also be relevant to situations in which filmmakers share similar visual stylistic conventions with the film’s subject(s) (i.e. when the filmmaker and the subject come from similar cultural backgrounds). I suggest that notions of race, class, gender, and age also need to be considered, as they can provide areas in which trans-subjective (in addition to transcultural) borrowings can be explored.



In order to construct a transcultural (and/or trans-subjective) visual product, the anthropologist needs to *perceive* and *understand* the visual experiences of the Other; but most importantly, he or she needs to share fields of consciousness with the Other (MacDougall 1998). A shared consciousness “involves a transcultural process ... and a willingness to enter into a sympathetic contract with others” (272-3). Similarly, Leslie Deveraux maintains that “the encounter with the other is also the encounter with the self” and that “only the self-knowing self can withdraw its projections and leave the other free” (1995: 60).<sup>7</sup> In order to achieve an intertextual, intercultural, and/or transcultural product, one needs to adopt an attitude of openness within the conditions of the encounter.

Ruby suggests that “the future of an anthropological cinema may lie with an eclectic borrowing from fiction and art films rather than a slavish adherence to the norms of the documentary” (2000: 167-8). This implies that borrowing from other cinematic conventions may also encourage anthropologists to redefine the way they imagine and construct their relations with the Other, in addition to generating new debates about representation and film production. If the integration of various visual systems within an intertextual product does not “turn to ethnographic film as a primary source of inspiration, this should be occasion to pause,” argues Nichols (1994: 91), and to question ourselves about “our” forms of representing the Other within the discipline at large. In other words, if an intertextual approach does not produce an ethnographic film in its traditional form (i.e. observational style), we should question the extent to which the standard ethnographic style is valuable as a form of representation for the Other.

The process of integrating several visual systems (including that of the anthropologist) and cinematic conventions within an intertextual document has the potential to productively recast the problem of Self and Other (as suggested by MacDougall 1992 and Nichols 1994). However, I argue that an intertextual approach to filmmaking does not necessarily reduce the distance between Self and the Other, nor does it produce a visual text that *symmetrically* and *equally* incorporates various cultural conventions. Hierarchical relations between Self and the Other remain in ethnographic projects that are initiated by an anthropologist. Furthermore, visual systems integrated within a visual product, authored by an anthropologist, may not necessarily succeed in representing the

7. See also Michel Foucault’s interview “The Ethics of The Concern of The Self as a Practice of Freedom” (1994).

Other on multiple levels (i.e. thick description), as viewers may interpret visual mixing differently. The notion of “fusion of horizon” between two subjects, as discussed by the hermeneutic circle, needs then to be explored further from such a perspective.

On the other hand, I maintain that intertextuality *may potentially* produce a visual text that is more meaningful for those who are represented. Similarly, Pinney argues “against mixing cultural visual and textual forms with the hope of coming ‘closer’ to the object of study” (1992: 79). He explains that mixing cultural forms within a unique visual product (i.e. intertextuality and interculturality) will always bring formalist misreadings (what he calls the problem of “opticality”) among viewers. Pinney concludes that “We *should* incorporate local narrative traditions not in the interest of a closer approximation to truth, but because it offers the possibility of destabilizing cherished Western notions of the unity of time and place, of realist narrative, and ultimately, of the self” (101; his emphasis). Therefore, the advantage of adopting an intertextual approach to visual anthropology lies in its potential to develop alternative ways of representing the Other outside of a Western model.

In many ways, the attempt to destabilize rigid forms of representation through the production of a “transcultural” visual text is not entirely original, as many anthropologists already address the ethics of representation in advocating for participatory, collaborative, dialogical, and indigenous forms of representing the Other. Also, such calls for the production of “transcultural texts” are not limited to visual anthropology. Dennis Tedlock, for instance, encourages the borrowing of poetic conventions and practices of the Other in the creation of ethnographic discourses, emphasizing that writing is part of a dialogical process (1999). However, an intercultural approach to filmmaking remains unique because of one main aspect: it involves the integration of visual conventions through an extreme Self-Other conscious form of montage. Therefore, the process of montage must reflect a clear intention from the filmmaker to incorporate his or her visual system *with* that of the Other into a single visual product, a process that is highly dependant on what technology can offer. As a consequence, this incorporation has the potential to destabilize the Western stylistic conventions of filmmaking; but it would be a consequence, not an intention a priori.

Trinh Minh-ha’s *Reassemblages* deconstructs Western notions of time and space unity, but it does so in order to explore notions of discontinuity

and fragmentation visually. Minh-ha's techniques of montage did not aim to integrate the visual systems of Senegalese women, but to "challenge and undermine the ethnocentrism of Western anthropological studies of 'other cultures' and to criticize the way those cultures are habitually perceived and represented in Western discourse" (Moore 1994a: 116). Her main goal is to explore different ways of challenging Western and anthropological modes of representation, not to construct an intertextual film.

The process of producing an intercultural film requires a form of "self-knowing self" (Devereaux 1995) and the conscious effort to incorporate the Other's modes of representation, understood and analysed through long-term fieldwork. I argue that the mixing of visual conventions into a film is made possible by the development of an experimental intercultural conscious form of montage.

### **A Brief Note on Interculturally Conscious Form of Montage**

The technical juxtaposition of visual clips in the production of a film and the editing it requires are referred to as montage (Marcus 1995: 45). Montage is at the heart of constructing a film narrative because it establishes meanings from seemingly unrelated clips. For instance, parallel editing is used to achieve an effect of temporal simultaneity and connection. The exploration of how montage can convey specific meanings and metaphors is central to the development of an experimental approach to filmmaking, as it shows a desire to create alternative narratives that will break with academic rhetorical conventions in addition to highlighting the arbitrariness of how visual products are constructed (37).

The processes of editing and montage offer a space where the anthropologist can experiment with the incorporation of visual systems within a text. This implies a deep understanding of both his or her own visual convention and the one(s) of the Other(s), and, subsequently, the elaboration of technical visual effects that will represent these systems. All of these experiments take place within the process of montage during which forms of representing the Self and Other are selected and constructed. These visual experiments may result in a final product that borrows from other visual systems and cinematic traditions, which may consequently deconstruct Western norms of perception (temporal and spatial continuity, for instance). An intertextual film, as proposed

by MacDougall, involves a form of montage that is reflexive, participatory, experimental, transcultural,<sup>8</sup> and intersubjective.

Furthermore, in adopting an interculturally conscious form of montage, we can potentially address the viewer on multiple levels. At a shallow level, the viewer can learn and identify him/herself with the substance and content of the film. At a deeper level, the film may also transmit metaphors and meanings that are embedded within its structure (i.e. constructed through montage).

### Experimenting with the Other's "Visual System": A Case Study

I conducted more than fifteen months of fieldwork with members of the G1-2K. This collective of young activists worked together with the goal of promoting hip hop as an artistic form of expression and a tool of action and education. In the written description of their project, they claim that hip hop should be conceived of as a "source of socio-cultural elevation" [*fuentes de elevación sociocultural*]. The G1-2K not only focused its actions on the promotion of rap music but also aimed at presenting hip hop as a *kulture*, which refers to a complex system of symbols and artistic forms of expression. Isnay, the leader of the collective, often claimed that "he is hip hop," signifying that he embodies hip hop and that this culture is part of his identity.

Despite the fact that most of the G1-2K members defined themselves as Afro-Cubans,<sup>9</sup> the collective did not adopt an especially strong

8. Loizos would disagree with the use of the term "transcultural" as adopted by MacDougall (1998). Loizos writes that one "can be bicultural, and if particularly versatile, tricultural but never transcultural!" (1992: 61). Note that there has been recent uses of the term "transcultural montage" by visual anthropologists in Europe as illustrated by a panel titled "Transcultural montage: the uses of filmic montage in conveying diversity and mutuality" organized by Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr Nielsen at the 2008 European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA). To my knowledge, nothing has been published on "transcultural montage" to this date. Note that the term "transcultural montage" basically refers to the expression "interculturally conscious montage" as discussed in this article.
9. The notion "Afro-Cuban" might be understood differently depending on the context in which it is used. I am conscious of its arbitrary nature and its various political and racial implications in the Cuban context (see for instances Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000; De la Fuente 2001). Note that the members of the G1-2K defined themselves as Afro-Cubans [*afrocubanos*] and this is why I use this specific term here.

discourse of racial contestation, as is observable in the discursive patterns of rappers and hip-hop activists from the Cuban capital, Havana.<sup>10</sup> During workshops offered to young teenagers, however, members of the G1-2K often referred to revolutionary Afro-Cuban figures from the eastern region of Cuba (Santiago being located in the southeast of the island), such as Pedro Ivonet and Antonio Maceo, and to political groups that historically defended the rights of Afro-Cubans, such as the *Partido Independiente de Color*. Also, all of the G1-2K members identified with Afro-Cuban religions, which according to them are strong markers of black identity.

Contrary to the image of hip hop and rap commonly conveyed in the North American media — violent, ultra-mercantile, individualist, and misogynist, gathered loosely under the term “gangsta rap” — the G1-2K promoted a “conscious” and socially implicated type of hip hop. The G1-2K members believed that by adopting this culture’s philosophical basis, one could generate positive changes in his or her life. Their organized workshops, activities, and events were meant to transmit “hip-hop philosophical tools,” mainly based on the potential of self-empowerment through performance and artistic expression. Most rappers and reggaetoneros in Santiago perceived the G1-2K collective as being associated with what in Cuba is commonly called the “underground” rap clan, as opposed to the reggaetón, or commercial, clan.

When I joined the group with my video camera in October 2005, we began to produce video clips, projections for concerts, advertisements, and short documentaries. The G1-2K had already produced audiovisual texts before my arrival, but my video camera and my computer provided the technical means to further their desire of creating audiovisual texts based on the video technology (rather than photography). Most of the texts we produced were motivated by the G1-2K’s desire to advertise events and promote Sentimiento Rapero, a rap group and member of the G1-2K. Two members of the G1-2K, Isnay Rodríguez Agramonte and Abigail Montsellier, were particularly active in the production of video products. Both of them were technologically savvy and had many ideas about how to enhance a video production with special effects and original storylines. The three of us were involved at different degrees in the production process of a

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10. For more details on the peculiarities of the Santiago hip-hop scene, see Boudreault-Fournier 2008.



series of clips, including the creation of storyboards and video shootings. Yet it is at the time of montage that I really grasped the essence of this group's "visual system," to echo Banks and Morphy's concept, which refers to a set of visual and aesthetic references adopted by a group or individuals (1997: 21).

Most of the audiovisual texts we produced were strongly influenced by video clips and mass media from North America and Western Europe, suggesting the strong impact of global hip-hop culture. It is clear that the appropriation of this "visual system" contributed to the Santiago hip-hop movement's recognition of the G1-2K's membership in a culture that had connections and influences outside Cuba. As a matter of fact, most of G1-2K's audiovisual productions aimed at reaching alternative networks, mainly the local hip-hop movement, by transmitting messages that were at the heart of the collective's project but not necessarily on the agendas of state institutions. Audiovisual texts were thus primarily produced to promote hip hop outside of a state-institutional setting, a significant peculiarity within the Cuban context in which popular culture is highly regulated by state officials.

In order to fully grasp the peculiarities of the G1-2K's forms of representation through audio-visual texts, three collaboratively produced clips are presented below. The first clip, produced in December 2005, was projected on the screen of a local theatre in Santiago during a *Sentimiento Rapero* concert. It aimed at creating a visual effect during the performance. For this occasion, we produced five other audio-visual texts, also to be projected on-screen during the group's performance. The second clip, produced in February 2006, aimed at promoting the G1-2K collective at a hip-hop conference organized in the city of Bayamo, located in a neighbouring province. On the same occasion, this clip was also projected at the beginning of a *Sentimiento Rapero* concert, held in a Bayamo theatre. In June 2006, we produced an advertisement to promote the first hip-hop symposium in Santiago, called *Eslabón* ([link] translated literally) and organized by the G1-2K collective. This advertisement, which lasts less than thirty seconds, was produced by Isnay Rodríguez Agramonte and me. To be more specific, we both wrote the storyboard, I shot the video and produced the first montage, and we both reworked the rough cut to a final version<sup>11</sup>.

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11. The reader should now watch the three clips that available on line at: <http://www.erudit.org/>



Two main points need to be highlighted from these clips: the striking exposure of a hip-hop aesthetic and the use of sound and music (instead of the visual) as primary sources of inspiration in the editing suite. In order to illustrate these, let us take the extreme complicity between music and image into the process of video montage itself as a case in point. As hip-hoppers, it is not surprising that music takes a leading role in their production of videos. Yet, their approach to the editing software differed from mine. Technically speaking, their first inputs into the timeline were always on the sound track rather than on the image track or a combination of both. In simple terms, their video montage was grounded in music. Comparatively, I was inclined to begin with the image component or a combination of image and sound (i.e. sync sound).

During the editing, we developed a way to apply music techniques adopted by the hip-hop culture directly to the visual component, in addition to structuring the clips according to the sound dimension. For instance, we used the same musical techniques developed by turntable artists (such as scratching, mixing, blending, cutting, and punch phrasing); however, we employed them visually rather than orally. The second clip, for instance, is full of juxtaposed scratching techniques and time-compressed images.

The members of the G1-2K were extremely aware of sound — though not exclusively music — in the editing suite, illustrating a specific cultural sensitivity to montage that I did not necessarily share at the outset. Notice in the third clip how a rhythmic sound is synchronically juxtaposed to the moves of the players when they knock the domino pieces on the table. My first cut did not superpose this sound pattern perfectly well with the image, and this was one of the first complaints I received from Isnay, my co-editor, when I showed him the “rough cut.” I was then urged to resolve this problem by adjusting the rhythmic pattern to the image, a sound pattern I had not even noticed while listening to the audio track. This is a concrete example of how a dimension of montage was foregrounded by my collaborator because it was an important element to him. As a result, I became more sensitive to this dimension in trying to develop and explore the sound component while editing.

With time, I learned how to play with specific special effects and montage techniques that I knew would coincide with their visual systems of representation, which were properly audiovisual systems of

representation. I was able to produce a “rough cut” that I knew could satisfy their aesthetic expectations. For instance, I learned to borrow conceptual ideas from hip-hop video-clips and began to play with the time dimension. In contrast, time is almost always linear and non-circular in ethnographic filmmaking.

Being conscious of my own visual conventions, which have been greatly influenced by an observational approach to filmmaking, allowed me to displace myself from my own background and adopt a form of editing that also incorporated the audiovisual system of the hip-hop culture in Santiago de Cuba. Being able to borrow aesthetic conventions was not a simple task; it took practice and many exchanges between my Santiago colleagues and me. During this learning process, I realized that a traditional observational form of representing this group would not fully comply with the ways in which its members wished to paint themselves. In other words, producing an observational ethnographic film, as I was encouraged to do for my doctoral studies, would not appropriately represent the group with which I had conducted fieldwork. Furthermore, such a form of representation did not have the potential to generate further debates in visual anthropology on issues of alternative forms of representation among groups considered marginalized.

It is with this dilemma in mind that I began to perceive the necessity of building up a filmmaking tradition in visual anthropology that would focus on a complicity of style between the anthropologist and her informants. This complicity should be directly inscribed in the structure of the film through a conscious adoption of montage techniques.

### **The Proposition ...**

I suggest that an intercultural approach to anthropological filmmaking *has the potential* to generate more “relevant” and “significant” forms of visual representation *for* the Other. In addition, such an approach can potentially destabilize the Western/traditional way of producing ethnographic films. In the case reported in this article, adopting an intercultural approach to video montage would imply producing hip-hop texts that juggle with particular visual systems, rather than producing a text about hip hop. I am perfectly aware that such an approach to filmmaking may not be applicable to every case study and in every context, but I maintain that a conscious form of montage in ethnographic videomaking has the potential to provoke new practical and theoretical avenues in visual anthropology. This is especially relevant

when working with informants who do not have easy access to audio-visual forms of self-representation. In giving them an opportunity to create audiovisual texts, these informants may reveal original avenues of representation, which can be further investigated from an anthropological perspective.

It is clear that from a practical point of view, visual anthropologists should learn about shooting video and montage techniques, as without these skills, the complicity cannot be fully explored. From a theoretical perspective, I propose that the adoption of an interculturally conscious form of montage can creatively add to issues of representation, ethics, and subjectivity (in the areas of temporality and spatiality, for instance), and therefore contribute to theoretical debates in the discipline at large. In adopting a perspective that constrains the visual medium to a solely illustrative position, one may argue that films do not add to theoretical debates, issues, and/or conceptual understanding in social anthropology the way written texts aim to. From this perspective, film remains a thin description (Hastrup 1992) as it only *illustrates* anthropological concepts.

Yet, like MacDougall (1998), I believe that visual anthropology needs to consolidate itself within a strong theoretical framework that would contribute to academic developments in anthropology. My intention here is not to discuss why visual anthropology has not yet acquired a strong theoretical tradition within anthropology,<sup>12</sup> but to see how such a lacuna can be explored creatively in approaching montage itself as a rich source of anthropological data.

## Conclusion

The call for a conscious form of montage developed in this article does not aim to eliminate the presence of the anthropologist, nor does it attempt to diminish the distance that exists between Self and Other. It rather encourages the researcher to investigate his or her “visual system” and to explore how this may contrast or not with the informants’ own visions of representation. It may further question the aesthetics

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12. The position of “the visual” in anthropology has deeply influenced the way it is perceived and legitimized within the discipline. As MacDougall maintains, “Anthropology has had no lack of interest in the visual; its problem has always been what to do with it.” (1997: 276). The written word has a strong tradition in anthropology (Mead 1995, for instance) and the visual is usually positioned at the margin.

and the purpose of a traditional approach to ethnographic film (and visual anthropology) today in a world in which the visual is all pervading. More revealing to the discipline at large, a conscious form of montage has the potential to recast issues of representation among groups at the margins. Finally, it is ironic to realize that, in my case, this approach to visual anthropology revealed the significance of sound as a reference of representation and identification, an at best supplementary concern in anthropology to this day. Intertextuality, to borrow MacDougall's term here, is then not expressed solely among actors but also between media; in this case, sound and image are in direct dialogue. An avenue to be further explored, indeed.

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