What is Ethnofiction?

Johannes Sjöberg
The research on ethnofiction is intended ...

- ... as a method for ethnographic research and representation

- ... as a complement to other methods in the social sciences

- ... to establish collaborative, reflexive and creative art practice as research

- ... to expand the ‘pallet’ of available methods within the humanities
Ethnofiction

- Experimental ethnographic film genre where the fieldwork informants act out life-experiences in improvisations

Jaguar 1957-67

Moi, un noir 1958
Transfiction

- Identity and discrimination among transgendered Brazilians
- Fabia plays a transsexual hairdresser and Bibi a transgendered sex worker
- Confronting intolerance and re-living memories of abuse through improvisations
Transfiction (Remix 2010)
Ethnofiction: five guidelines

- Ethnographic Film Approach
- Shared Anthropology
- Reflexive Filmmaking
- Improvised Filmmaking
- Improvised Acting
Ethnographic Film Approach

- Ethnographic research methods
  - Intimacy with protagonists prioritised over technical quality

- Extended period of fieldwork and filmmaking

- Small-scale productions
Shared Anthropology

- Collaborative process
- Screen-back and informant feedback
- Non-intentional advocacy
Researcher’s Responsibilities and Collaborative Limitations

- Ethical responsibility
- Ethnographic responsibility
- Narrative responsibility
Reflexive Filmmaking

Director and participants in reflexive dialogues:

- self-reflexivity
- screen back
- informant feedback

Provides a discursive context for the creative art practice

- to make the production process transparent
- to allow for the protagonists to discuss ‘their reality’ in relation to ‘the image of their reality’
- to form the basis for ethnographic research
Improvised Filmmaking

Surrealistic and poetic approach inspired by Songhay religion

- ’Ciné-trance’
- ’Pourquoi-pas?’
- ’Ciné-provocation’
Improvised Acting

- Projective improvisation – ‘The use of improvisation and fantasy as projective methods in the exploration of people’s lives’ was one of the major innovations that Rouch brought to ethnographic filmmaking ‘to convey something fundamental about real lives’.

(Loizos, 1993: 46, 50)
Functions

*Descriptive:* Illustrates events difficult to show in written ethnography and documentaries, such as historical and criminal events.

*Expressive:* to make the implicit explicit. Emotions, dreams, and aspirations are expressed, as in psychodrama, drama therapy, and forum theatre.

*Representative:* The Ethnographic Allegory (Clifford 1986) - to bridge the different through the similar by identifying the protagonists.
Different means and ends

Applied Theatre
- Personal / Social Change through Participatory Theatre
- Interactive

Visual Anthropology
- Ethnographic Research and Representation through Audio-Visual means
- Observational

Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology
Centre for Applied Theatre Research
Boal’s Metaxis

’The participant shares and belongs to these two autonomous worlds; their reality and the image of their reality, which she herself has created’ (Boal 1995)
Bibi’s sketches informed by Moreno’s psychodrama

“Bibi’s picture of ‘How I see myself.’”

“How I would like other people to see me.”

“How I think that other people see me.”

Photos: Sjöberg 2006
**Similar Methods**

- In ‘Creative Explorations’ (2007), David Gauntlett asks the participants to project their own identities by building Lego models, drawing on the therapeutic possibilities of art as a research process within the social sciences.
AMP – Practice-based PhD in Anthropology, Media & Performance

- Exploring methods combining extended ethnographic fieldwork research with collaborative and creative art practice