

# ETHNOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

# TEJASWINI GANTI: THE VALUE OF ETHNOGRAPHY. MEDIA INDUSTRY JOURNAL 2014

- Ethnography of media industry: to take into account **contestations over cultural and symbolic capital** that characterize the “field” of media production
- long-term ethnographic fieldwork (1996-2006)
- A focus on the processes and practices of production allows us to look beyond the instances of “success” (many films or television shows do not progress beyond a conceptualization or pilot stage)
- Spending time observing the daily life at the sites of media production – a way how to understand media producers’ **self-representations and discourses about their practice**
- Paying attention to what people do in addition to what they say illuminates both norms and expectations of what constitutes **appropriate or acceptable practice**

# MEDIA ETHNOGRAPHY

- Clifford Geertz - **hermeneutics**: “The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to *read over the shoulders* of those to whom they properly belong.”
- First-order interpretation are not available; system of culture is available only as a system of symbols; we need to interpret the symbols and make conclusions on the way agents perceived a situation through categories available to him/her

# JOHN T. CALDWELL ON PRODUCTION CULTURE(S)

- **production community** as a cultural entity that involves the same symbolic processes and collective practices as other cultures: the question of identity, consensus, order, interests
  - interpretive frameworks and self-analysis of the group itself
  - Regulated "disclosure" of embedded production knowledge: private disclosure (circle of professionals); public disclosure
  
  - **Industrial reflexivity:** as a form of local cultural negotiation and expression for the production communities
  - A/ corporate macrostrategies establishing power
  - B/ human microstrategies critically resisting top-down control and expressing locally lived realities
  
  - Self-mythologizing narratives in the U.S.
- X
- European producers: narratives about the impossibility of overcoming the different kinds of financial, administrative and cultural barriers that prevent them from becoming 'real entrepreneurs' and from winning international recognition (P. Szczepanik on European producers)
  
  - Film and tv **as local cultures and social communities**
  - Culture understood as an interpretative system (searching for the social group's interpretative frameworks and self-analysis)
  - **Reading „over the shoulders“** of film and television workers – analyzing deep texts, artifacts, demos circulating among crew members
  - Studying worker beliefs and industry reflexivity

- **Deep texts** – industrial artefacts, working methods, professional rituals, narratives circulated in trade cultures
- **Trade talk** – explicit explanations
- Industry self-theorizing and sense making:
- explanation in notions such as „playful magic of artists“; making of: usually mimics established genre structure (educational and scientific discourse + „wonders“ explained as the result of hard-working techs and geeks – talented artists)

# ARTIFACTS AND RITUALS

- (1) „Fully embedded deep texts and rituals“
- (2) „Semi embedded deep texts and rituals“
- (3) „Publicly disclosed deep texts and rituals“

#### FULLY EMBEDDED DEEP TEXTS AND RITUALS

*(Intra-group Relations: bounded professional exchanges)*

- Demo tapes
- Pitch sessions
- Machine interface design
- Equipment iconography
- How-to manuals for production technologies
- Trade and craft narratives and anecdotes
- On-the-set crew pedagogy and work behavior
- Union and guild workshops
- Association/member newsletters
- Corporate retreats

#### SEMIEMBEDDED DEEP TEXTS AND RITUALS

*(Inter-group Relations: professional exchanges with ancillary public viewing)*

- Electronic press kits (EPKs)
- Advertiser up-fronts
- Trade shows
- Trade publications
- Internship programs
- Technical bake-offs and reveals
- Panels on how to make it in the industry

#### PUBLICLY DISCLOSED DEEP TEXTS AND RITUALS

*(Extra-group Relations: professional exchanges for explicit public consumption)*

- Making-of documentaries
- DVD director tracks, and “extras”
- Docu-stunts during “sweeps” weeks
- Online Web sites (TV/dot-com interactions)
- Studio- and network-supported fan conventions
- Screening “Q&As”
- Televised show business reports
- Viral videos on YouTube.com and MySpace.com

# FULLY EMBEDDED DEEP TEXTS AND RITUALS

- – demo tapes, pitch sessions, machine interface design, equipment iconography, how-to manuals for production technologies, trade and craft narratives and anecdotes, on-the-set crew pedagogy and work behavior, union and guild workshops, association/member newsletters, and corporate retreats.
- These fully embedded deep texts are largely cut off from the public and are commercially enacted or circulated by production personnel within the relatively bounded worlds of work. The primary function of these artifacts and rituals is intraguild, intra-association, or interpersonal interaction and dialogue among crew members, all of which are dynamics involved in the formation and maintenance of groups.



## **SEMI-EMBEDDED DEEP TEXTS AND RITUALS**

- forms of symbolic communication between media professionals. Yet these texts and rituals are simultaneously designed to spur and stimulate ancillary discussion and eventual awareness in the public sphere of the consumer as well.
- Semi-embedded deep texts include electronic press kits (epks), trade shows, trade publications, internship programs, and panels on “how to make it in the industry.”
- If the fully embedded practices are “intra-group” in nature, semi-embedded practices are “inter-group” and function as institutional dialoguing between media corporations and trade associations.

# PUBLICLY DISCLOSED DEEP TEXTS AND RITUALS

- self-consciously directed at the viewing public
- Include making-of documentaries, dvd director tracks and “extras,” online Web sites, studio- and networks supported fan conventions, and televised show
- While increased viewership is an obvious goal of each of these genres, audience engagement works primarily by providing “access” to the ways that practitioners work, think, and talk about how they work and think
- This kind of industrial theorizing is publicly performed for the ostensible benefit of the viewer (the person watching the dvd “bonus track” or the cable tv “making-of”) who is positioned as lucky enough to have been given access to those “inside” the production process
- the public contact made available here is focused on the embedded theorizing process itself
- a kind of “extra-group” engagement, a far more open form of industrial theorizing than are the previous categories

# TRADE STORYTELLING CONVENTIONS

- Trade storytelling conventions among workers as a symptom of labor conditions
- Trade stories that practitioners tell among themselves
- Source of knowledge; form of pedagogy; communicating economic and technological changes

TRADE GENRES	CONTEXT/ WORK SECTORS	CULTURAL FUNCTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• War stories</li> <li>• Against-all-odds allegories</li> </ul>	<p>Below-the-line technical crafts (operators, editors, grips, etc.)</p>	<p>Establishing craft mastery; labor mystique; mentoring system (via moral character and triumph of will) <i>Skill set: certitude, physique, and belief</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genesis myths</li> <li>• Paths-not-taken parables</li> </ul>	<p>Above-the-line creative sector (DPs, directors, writers, producers)</p>	<p>Professional legitimacy and accumulation of career capital (via pedigree and industrial ancestry) <i>Skill set: intuition, vision, name dropping</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making-it sagas</li> <li>• Cautionary tales</li> </ul>	<p>Unregulated and nonsignatory sectors (assistants, agents, reps, clerical)</p>	<p>Career salvage operations; boundary and turf marking (via networking, hooking up and giving back) <i>Skill set: quid pro quo human relationships</i></p>

## WAR STORIES AND “AGAINST-ALL-ODDS” ALLEGORY (BELOW-THE-LINE TECHNICAL CRAFTS)

- Production as a war:
  - film/video creation compared to military struggle or a war
  - producers and directors will sometimes slip into this mode; the tendency is most pronounced in the trade storytelling practices of below-the-line workers in the technical crafts (camera operators, sound recordists, editors, grips, and gaffers)
- Against all odds allegory:
  - Establishes set of ideal character traits: humble, unexceptional origins; persistence of the worker in finally achieving his or her now well-earned success;
  - ability to make art or creatively innovate with few financial resources and support
- War stories and against-all-odds allegories give to storytellers a mystique of technical mastery
- celebrations of work, suffering, and survival
- This set of story types tends to emphasize the teller’s relation to his or her **physical conditions or material task**

## „AGAINST ALL ODDS“ – AN EXAMPLE

- The manufacturer Eastman Kodak exploits the trope „against all odds“ in a series of biographical stories that make up its “On Film” marketing campaign:
- the cinematographer Sam Bayer states: “One of the things I learned in art school is that you don’t need twenty five years of training to create a great painting. You have to dig inside of yourself and create something that **comes from your heart and soul**. mtv was like an experimental film school for me. . . . It’s a combination of intuition and experience. Stanley Kubrick was one of my heroes. **I had a zoom lens he had developed for Barry Lyndon pulled out of mothballs for a commercial where I wanted a particular effect**. I can’t explain the technology, but I knew what I wanted it to do. I also know that if I use a certain film and push it two stops on a dark city street, I’m going to create an emotional experience.”
- the complaints coded into below-the-line trade narratives about harsh working conditions, worker character, and creative triumphs of the will may also reinforce opportunistic business practices that will ultimately make labor conditions worse, rather than better

## GENESIS MYTHS (ABOVE-THE-LINE CREATIVE SECTOR)

- celebrations of an originating moment and artistic pedigree
- genesis myths function as the glue intended **to create social cohesion** in a work group
- Trust, bonding, in tale about the “passage” of legacy and artistic sensibility from master to disciple („ Once he understood that you understood what he wanted, he was easier to work with. His death was particularly devastating for me, because it did take a long time to establish a close relationship with him.“ cameraman)
- “paths-not-taken parable”; dramatize contrasts between the work world as represented by the individual and an alternate world in which the practitioner might have worked but chose not to pursue
- **This story type tends to focus on the teller’s psychological disposition and internal relations, in which career stands as an ideal of self-actualization**

## GENESIS MYTHS – AN EXAMPLE

- comment from an industry worker on the terminology used in production design:
- “The old Hollywood designation ‘art director’ was no longer sufficient to describe the accomplishments of Menzies. So David O. Selznick anointed him his ‘Production Designer.’ The title we use today.”
- Description of the historical shift from the designation “art director” to that of “production designer”:  
practitioners muse on moments of seeming inevitability in which the industry is finally forced to recognize the of their given specialization.
- Another designer says: “Menzies so completely designed the movie from a visual point of view.”
- what the Art Director’s Guild is less likely to suggest in public:
- Selznick may actually have used the shift in terminology to creative control away from the four directors who were fired during the production of *Gone With the Wind*. Selznick made the production designer Menzies his personal partner and then exploited his newly enhanced status in a way that rendered the film directors largely dispensable



## MAKING-IT SAGAS (UNREGULATED AND NONSIGNATORY SECTORS)

- labor roles that are not regulated by the “signatory agreements” between the major studios and the major guilds and unions
- diverse group of occupations, most of which involve little or no time on soundstages, back lots, locations, or television studios
- agents, managers, sales personnel, and assistants
- “skill sets” — personal networking, hooking up, and “giving back”
- presuppose that success in the industry is based on exploitation and management of all human and trade relationships
- One trade story—in the genre of “I drank and bullied my way to the top”—serves as a variant of the suffering, surviving, and seduction genre
- With little permanence or job security - workers tell stories that affirm constant interpersonal flexibility, networking, and mutual exploitation as vocational skill-set
- **This type of stories focuses on workplace networks and interpersonal relations**

# STEALTH MARKETING AND FAKE BUZZ

- corporations have learned to master the storytelling skills of the individuals
- creating informal trade stories of their own. In some ways, the modern studio and network marketing departments are masters of institutionalized—and stealthy—storytelling
- “After Blair Witch . . . Marketing tools that masquerade as one fan’s obsession became part of the studios’ promotional machines.”
- Corporate employees actively masquerade among interpretive audiences in the online world. Poorly paid industry assistants and interns are lurking online and speaking as and for fans

## MISSING



**Heather Donahue** Age: 22 Height: 5'6" Weight: 127lb Eyes: hazel Hair: brown  
**Joshua Leonard** Age: 23 Height: 5'10" Weight: 152lb Eyes: blue Hair: blonde  
**Michael Williams** Age: 24 Height: 5'9" Weight: 149lb Eyes: brown Hair: brown

Last seen camping in the Black Hills Forest area, near Barkkittsville.  
**PLEASE CALL FREDERICK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE WITH ANY INFORMATION YOU MAY HAVE!**  
(301) 866-4370

# LOST IN LA MANCHA

- 1: obsession; topic of a fate – personal similarity;
- 2: TG: obsession; virtually made film („pictures in my head“), correlation with life oeuvre – implies „reality“ – especially economic one – as the only barrier
- 9: producer René Cleimant – European film as a dwarf vs. Hollywood giant + 12 line producer: making Hollywood film without Hollywood
- 12: Patterson – Assistant Director: making a movie with TG – riding a horse; close eyes - ie., believe in him
- 16: TG – self-myth on director going beyond limits to be creative („author“)
- 17: filmmaking as implementation of TG’s imaginary film: myth of genius fighting with limits of reality
- 25: producer on chaos of production; „captain Chaos“ as rationalisation of the failure on organisation
- Production as a panic – panicking chickens
- Munchhausen – a metaphor for a failure and a production pattern for repetition
- Against-all-ods stories; a variant to Genesis myth: TG „always“ enfant terrible
- TG: I do not know how to solve such situation .... Later on he provides a metaphor: the film is taken by the wind
- **1:24 – Patterson: „train theory“**
- **1.25.30 - REALITY took TG away from Don Quichote**

# CULTURAL ORGANISATION OF SPACE

- **Space organized culturally** by media corporations and trade associations
- how **trade talk and trade iconography cultivate notions of space** in conceptual and cultural terms?
- The way production unit organizes its members and technologies reflects a **cultural understanding of what the group is and how the various members should relate to each other**
- **Understanding spaces via activities in the spaces:** small-scale, proprietary, private space of creative executives - analyzed through the conventionalized ritual of the film/television 'pitch meeting'

# TRADE RITUALS

- **Film/video practitioners conceptualize space in following ways:**
- **personal spaces** as cultural presentations
- **material spaces** and master plans
- **tactical spaces** as countermeasures
- **conceptual spaces** as cultural representations
- **collective spaces** as social negotiations

## PERSONAL SPACE AS CULTURAL PRESENTATION

- *control* (space, boundaries, continuity) and *agency* (action, imaginative behavior, change)
- Appearance (culturally coded trade presentations); acting; interacting

# MATERIAL SPACES AND MASTER PLANS

## **strategic use of architectural space to represent a company's production ideal**

spatial organization and physical presence of a production unit announced and interpreted the industrial and cultural significance of production

designing buildings and workspaces that adequately “express” the ostensible personality or the brand of a company

Electronic Arts broke with the Fordist factory ethos entirely in their design scheme: “Animators and engineers at EA’s two-building studio in Playa Vista can escape their darkened cubicles to shoot hoops, spike volleyballs or score soccer goals. Or they can soak up the sun and the coastal breeze at a courtyard that features a toe-dipping pool, a fountain, a boardwalk and deck chairs.’

production worlds that serve as official three-dimensional interpretations of the company. The resulting production spaces also publicly express and articulate to workers and visitors the central themes, individual strengths, and identity of each production enterprise



## CASE STUDY – HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE – BROTHERS IN T-SHIRT

- [To jsou Bratři v triku dokumentární film Česká filmová klasika\\_2.mp4 - Google Drive](#)



## TACTICAL SPACES AS COUNTERMEASURES

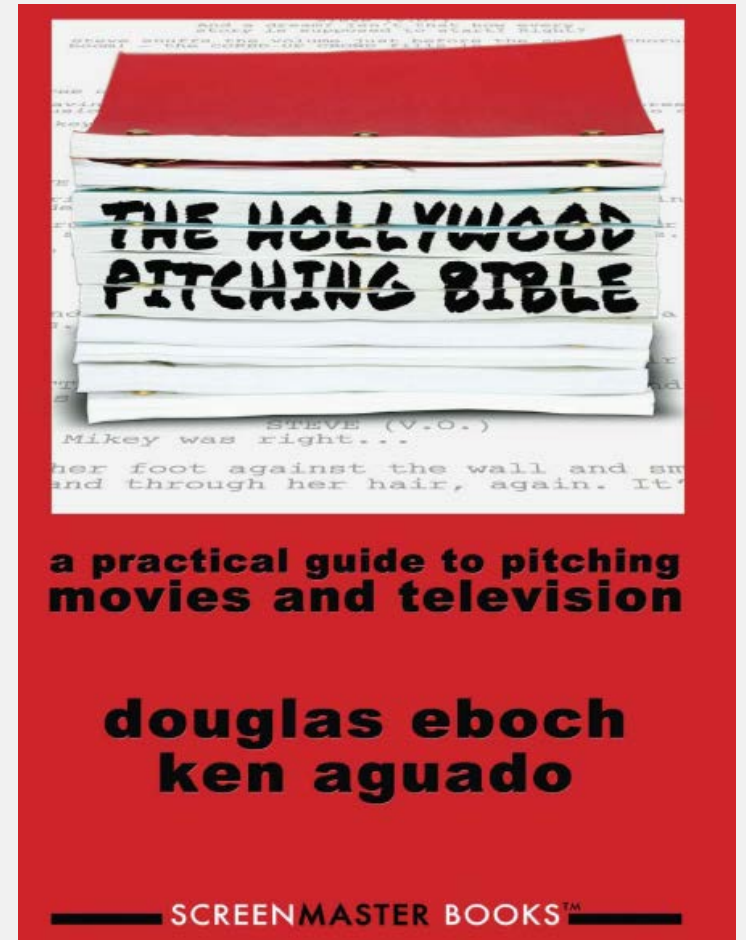
- Individual film/video practitioners redefine production areas in symbolic, tactical ways that are meaningful to them
- Counter-official artistic expressions
- Practitioners controlling spaces that usually dominate them
- Animators individualized their cubicles as countermeasures against the cramped material conditions that digital workers face within the Nickelodeon Animation Studio in Burbank

## CONCEPTUAL SPACES AS CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

- industry's own imagined identity
- the use of space, the rhetoric of space, and **the trade rituals** that take place in those spaces can all be understood as **critical self-commentaries and cultural self-expressions**
- Piracy „outside“ of Hollywood

# COLLECTIVE SPACES AS SOCIAL NEGOTIATIONS

- Conventionalized production rituals: pitching, writing by committee, note giving
- social performance of show making
- Pitching as a performance art
- „screenwriter’s *acting* skills are as important as his or her writing skills“
- Pitchfest - affirming symbolic function for the trade organization (National Association of Television Program Executives) identities and hierarchies



## NETWORKING

- larger-scale staged enactments and rituals
- „cultivation“ rituals
- In production talk, trades, and events: career and personal success are linked to an ability to create supportive personal networks, institutional coalitions, and alliances
- Solicitation and cultivation rituals tend to occur **in specific kinds of intermediate industrial spaces (hotel suites, open houses, and nonprofit professional associations)** - contact zones that bring together potential partners in an ostensibly neutral industrial zone

## CULTIVATION RITUALS/PRIVATE-PUBLIC CONTACT ZONES

- to promote the idea that the industry is collaborative, personal, and human
- acting out frequently takes place “halfway spaces” that exist between the private and the public spheres of the professional: guild halls, film festivals, cinematheque retrospectives, film/tv museums, summits and panels, industry conventions, trade shows, and universities
- The *semi-public space*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G7pQtB3-68>  
Daria Kaschheeva, Golden Lion for student’s film

## CULTURAL MEANING OF SPACE AND PRODUCTION RITUALS

- **production spaces and rituals function in four ways:**
- as industrial consensus-forming gatherings;
- as group self-reflection activities;
- As cooperative negotiations responding to new technology threats or economic changes;
- as socio-professional networking rituals “bracketed off” from “regular” work to serve as collective therapeutic exercises
- Liminality: special cultural moments that are bracketed off from standard life tasks; communities and cultures reimagine their collective identities through symbolic and ritualistic means

# ANALYSIS OF SPACES AND RITUALS

- **material and corporate structures function as barriers.** Studying various barriers to trade entry and participation forces
- **two analytical perspectives :**
- - **the cultural geography of production spaces** (studios, locations, guild and union halls, equipment pavilions);
- - **the conventionalized, socio-professional rituals** (pitch-sessions, trade shows, mentoring events, and deal-making) **that take place and define those spaces**
  
- **“borderlands” that exist between the cultures of consumption and the cultures of production**
- Who scripts the industrial theater staged in these worlds?
- taxonomy of the ways that the production culture identifies itself within a culturally coded caste system of concentric zones: public/private spaces for ritualized interaction

# ETHNOGRAPHY OF FILM FESTIVAL

- Daniel Dayan, In quest of a festival. National Forum 77, no. 4, (Fall 1997): 41-47
- Toby Lee, The Public Life of Cinema. Conflict and Collectivity in Austerity Greece. University of California Press, 2020
- 22 months of fieldwork



# RESEARCH ON FILM PRODUCTION: FILM SCHOOL

- Ritesh Mehta, “Hustling” in film school as socialization for early career work in media industries. *Poetics* 63, 2017
- 18 months of fieldwork