

From: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

Subject: Ethnographic video

Date: April 18, 2008 5:35:16 PM MDT

To: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)

Dr. Robin Emerald,
Greetings.

I apologize for this rather blunt, unorthodox email.

I am a 2nd year PhD misfit in visual communication and culture.

[Here](#) is my bio.

[Here](#) is a link to one portion of my ethnographic video research... it may interest you, it may not.

I am appropriating TV content (my exotic tribe) and attempting to ethnographically remediate it into civic (often surreal) discourse.

My aim is to test existing theory as much as to 'write' with moving images.

My projects arc from Malinowski through yours to Bertolt Brecht - cable news through Paulo Friere to Eisenstein.

It is ambitious, provocative, and utterly unpublishable.

My work is informed by much of yours.

However, since most of today's visual media is sold off the bodies of women, my work is also taking a radical feminist turn.

Regardless, wouldn't it be nice to chat with a brother sometime?

About what?... About the resistance I am receiving using video as dissertation.

I know you must be so very busy, but it would mean an awful lot to me.

Either way, a reply would be most courteous.

Thanks so much for all.

peace,

- Holland Wilde



(Wilde Note: Robin Emerald pictured with Frank Zappa (1970) which I included here - taken from Emerald's own personal website - as visual recognition of his surreal, avant-garde, provocative history.)

From: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)
Subject: Re: Ethnographic video
Date: April 19, 2008 6:14:57 AM MDT
To: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

Holland,

As one misfit to another, hello. Your bio and culturalfarming sites are most interesting. Are you subscribed to my listserv, EYESPEECH? You should be and the list members should be aware of your work. I will subscribe you to the list if you wish. Why not join AVS if you are not a member and submitting some work to their journal RAV for publication and also why not submit something for the next year's US Anthro meetings via AVS. I think you need more contact with these folks.

As to the problem of getting your committee to accept video as part of your dissertation, I suggest you look at the Club for Anthropologists website, they have passed a resolution about this matter.

As to chatting, find with me. Chat on,
Robin Emerald

From: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)
Subject: Ethnographic video - REPLY
Date: April 19, 2008 12:41:31 PM MDT
To: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)

On Apr 19, 2008, at 6:14 AM, Robin Emerald wrote:

Holland,

As one misfit to another, hello.

To begin, I am stunned to I have received a reply - a laser-fast reply. Thank you. You have now been moved into the 'mensch" column. Ha.

I am not bashful and regularly reach out to those I admire - with marginal degrees of success: David MacDougall, Gregory Ulmer, Roderick Coover, Henry Giroux, Robert McChesney, James Elkins, etc. I do it for two reasons, obviously to announce my work, but more importantly to challenge, test, provoke what I read with what I do. Particularly, I want to materialize the numerous calls for a 'new' (auto?) ethnographic video - for I believe my work is a response to that call. However, few humans ever welcome provocation.

Your bio and culturalfarming sites are most interesting. Are you subscribed to my listserv, EYESPEECH? You should be and the list members should be aware of your work. I will subscribe you to the list if you wish.
Please feel free to do so.

Why not join AVS if you are not a member and submitting some work to their journal RAV for publication and also why not submit something for the next years' US Anthro meetings via AVS. I think you need more contact with these folks.

This is helpful, thank you. I will investigate. FYI: In the next two months I will here:

[London](#)

[Moscow](#)

As to the problem of getting your committee to accept video as part of your dissertation, I suggest you look at the Club for Anthropologists web site, they have passed a resolution about this matter.

Excellent, again, I will investigate. FYI: I want to write my candidacies with moving images as well.

As to chatting, find with me. Chat on,

Super, but email does prohibit depth... so, may I be presumptuous and offer my [oral presentation](#) from last week at [RIT, Rochester](#):

The text sketches all I want to discuss with you. Bottom line: The bravest decision may be to withdraw from my PhD studies. I went back to school for theory and methodology. I got a lot. The rest of my graduate time is now structured to push my necessary round work through the academy's square hole. Do I have time for that? I think not. Why stop my work now; freeze one small segment of it; turn that into *written* text; only to wait for 'sanctification' from a body that questions my motives? Why not just DO THE WORK?

Anyway, I ramble. If you are true to your acceptance to 'chat'... I suggest you read the 'chatty' .pdf file above... and spend some time [here](#).

In return, maybe you can send me something. We can cross-pollinate! That's really what brilliant work is about. Moreover, I would happily travel to you... to hang out for a while... whatever.

Robin Emerald

Thank you so much for all! Seriously... thank you.

peace,

- hw

From: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

Subject: Thanks

Date: April 20, 2008 10:48:21 AM MDT

To: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)

On Apr 20, 2008, at 10:36 AM, LISTSERV.CHURCH.EDU LISTSERV Server (5.14) wrote:

You have been added to the EYESPEECH mailing list (Club for Anthropologists Discussion) by Robin Emerald < emerald@church.edu >.

RE,
Sweet. Thanks for this listing.
Anywhooo... I believe my videos are what really 'speak'.
peace,
- hw

From: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)
Subject: Re: Ethnographic video REPLY
Date: April 21, 2008 5:56:40 AM MDT
To: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

Holland,
I read your talk. I am uncertain what exactly what are your plans. The talk was alienating but then it appears to me that that was your purpose. The problem with reflexivity is that sometimes people tell you more than you need to know that is certainly the case with your talk. If your intention is to establish yourself as an outsider tilting at windmills then this talk would be effective to some degree. The tone is one that would make listeners turn you off. Telling people that you are so hip and they are square is a perfect way to be ignored. I do not know the program that you are enrolled in but if you are really interested in becoming an academic in some field, then learn to walk the walk and talk the talk, as that is the only way one can "push the envelope." It really is the case that less is more. The trouble with blogs is that they tend to be endless, unedited and often off the top of the head of the maker. I have yet to find one that I think is worthwhile. Your web site is simply too filled up to be manageable for me but then I am an old fart who also hates what iPods and MP3 files are doing to recorded music. I think you have to decide whether you wish to continue your role as the holy hipster who is simply too far out to be appreciated or someone with a sufficient knowledge of a particular discipline that your critiques will be within a particular dialogue so that you can really push the envelope. I sense that we have a very different approach to the development of a new ethnography. Good luck but if you really want to be listened to tone it down.

Robin

"We are all generating more media that we can consume. The amount of photography, recorded material, text, the cloud of metadata that we are all leaving behind, is overwhelming." Sandy Shrugg, UYN, Interactive Telecommunications Division.

From: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)
Subject: REPLY #2
Date: April 21, 2008 5:29:30 PM MDT
To: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)

On Apr 21, 2008, at 5:56 AM, Robin Emerald wrote:
Holland,

* * * Doctor, again, thank you so very much for replying. Hang in there.

I read your talk. I am uncertain what exactly what are your plans.

* * * As am I. I went back to school for three reasons. 1. grounding in theory-methodology to assess a crazy mediated postmodern world 2. mentorship. 3. fraternity. I've only found the first, so far, and most of that on my own. Now I stand at a crossroad - do I continue forward for the PhD union card? ... or go it alone. The latter is the loneliest, bravest, yet possibly the most effect pathway for DOING THE WORK. But I remain unsure.

The talk was alienating but then it appears to me that that was your purpose.

* * * Oddly, the talk has been well received 3 times - including RIT where it may have also garnered a personal invitation to visit-lecture at Cal-Fullerton in Fall. I wouldn't call that alienating, exactly. But I wrote you for YOUR assessments, and I truly appreciate them, Robin, all of them. ...Primarily, though, I am attempting to connect *with you* what I have seen, felt, experienced.

The problem with reflexivity is that sometimes people tell you more than you need to know that is certainly the case with your talk.

* * * I certainly agree with that. This talk, however, was structured as auto-ethnography-mystery, with performativity a key missing ingredient (picture me performing it). I am telling 3 tales in one. Establishing authority (ethos), explicating my media project (logos), and then, why it is necessary yet marginalized (pathos). Since I am new, an outsider, and unorthodox, I feel compelled to fully contextualize. Remember, no one knows me from Adam, and that 2 years ago I knew NOTHING of this stuff: the theory, methodology, terms, YOU...nothing. I have only discovered all this over the last two+ years. I am still a virgin... a student... struggling to connect dots in your field. I'll make plenty of mistakes.

If your intention is to establish yourself as an outsider tilting at windmills then this talk would be effective to some degree. The tone is one that would make listeners turn you off.

* * * This same talk (rejigged) was first presented at IVSA at NYU, last year. It was highly successful as contextualization to a long-form video I also screened. So successful, it caused a row, with many attendees fiercely coming to my 'defense'. It was a sight to see. Douglas Harper led the charge for support. (It was there I asked him to offer an introduction to you... that didn't materialize.) But that presentation directly garnered my invitation to retell my-story at City University in London next month as well.

Telling people that you are so hip and they are square is a perfect way to be ignored.

* * * Of course, you are exactly right... which is why I openly establish my work as NOTHING precious, simply something we all can do, and probably should be encouraging.

I do not know the program that you are enrolled in but if you are really interested in becoming an academic in some field, then learn to walk the walk and talk the talk, as that is the only way one can "push the envelope." It really is the case that less is more.

* * * I can't really assess my own program; I know so few for comparison. I can say that I am clearly unhappy (but that's not the end of the world either). But, I also wasn't born yesterday. I have 35 years of dealing with multinational clients-management-assistants-vendors-contractors of all stripes. I can work a room, and, I deeply know how to listen between the lines, gauge comments, when to shut up, how to enlist those who can't speak for themselves, how to reign in-support, encourage egos and disparate personalities. Design IS communication. I'm good at both with a history of success. But then, I also always knew exactly what I wanted from them: their money. Today, it is entirely different. I am a 'free' man. I primarily want to learn and work - from here forward - period. The question is will I be granted permission to proceed within the PhD structure or not? And if so, what will I gain, what will I lose?

To your larger point, I have received little departmental support. I'm unsure I can even gather a dissertation committee here. I struggle mightily to find interest in my department, while support oddly appears to be building outside of it. And so my willingness in fulfilling the precise (logocentric) PhD requirements is waning. I am human after all; I gravitate to where I am valued. That said, yes your advice above is exactly the party line. I hear it regularly and I deeply understand the premise. But again, I am not a usual case. I will never become the traditional "academic". It is too late for me. I am too old, too opinionated. Nor is it particularly my dream, either. I did not go back to school simply to land another faculty position that largely keeps me from the work I feel I must do. Yes, I am a very good teacher and I love it. But my primary goal is to DO THE WORK. I don't *need* the job or the money. Barring an act of god I am financially solvent. I could go on here... but it is most interesting how so few academics are willing to argue an equal-but-opposing viewpoint. For instance, that the academy IS today simply another corporate structure; that new faculty are slave-labor who do the departmental heavy-lifting; that any kind of anomaly (like writing a blog) can and will be held against promotion; that tenure as 'the prize' is often abused, etc. On the other hand, a PhD is seen as a benchmark with granted affiliations.

Let me rage on a bit here. Too many scholars I've witnessed are posers, having garnered their PhDs and now tenaciously hold court over their tiny domains, counting their precious articles and books, crushing students, baldly and badly

engaging in grotesque self-promotion, cynically complaining about the very realities they help to build, employing vicious insider politics because the stakes are so small. So many have no logical grounding whatsoever in the on-going world of 'interdisciplinary visuality'. Indeed many are frightened(?) by my 35 year visual career in theatre, art, film production, graphic design, architecture, performance, broadcast media, journalism. My MFA terminal degree is utterly marginalized in PhD-land even though my original graduate studies were significantly more rigorous than my current PhD studies. Maybe that's why I've taken double the required number of UofC courses with an overall grade point of 4.12 (blahblah). The academy needs me - but unfortunately many seem almost 'bound' not to admit it. And now I am beginning to interpret these reoccurring scenarios as a personal insult.

Whew, I said it.... (PLEASE know that I know there are MANY brilliant others who do not represent any of the above.) For me, however, the bottom line is simply this: After all the mountains of traditional media scholarship to date, our mediated world only continues to 'worsen'. Maybe it is time to embrace a kind of scholarship with more vitality, my kind. All things evolve or die. The academy is no different. Before we two are dead, 'writing' scholarship with moving images will be commonplace. It is inevitable. Why not me now? Someone has to be first.

The trouble with blogs is that they tend to be endless, unedited and often off the top of the head of the maker. I have yet to find one that I think is worthwhile. Your web site is simply too filled up to be manageable for me but then I am an old fart who also hates what iPods and MP3 files are doing to recorded music.

* * * Never hate, Robin! haha. Seriously... I understand your point. (And I can teach you to accept too...it's easy) But importantly, it is living-working-writing in THIS world that I see as lacking. If Moore's Law has any legs, most everything is expanding exponentially every 18 months... which again is why I argue for methodologies that spring from today's worlds. Yes, novelty was THE currency of my old career. Now, however, I simply want to harness some of that for good research for wider audiences. Many new viewers come to my research blog [Media Nipple](#) because they are searching key-words like 'nipple'. To me that is terrific. It was one very small part of the premise why I incorporated breast images in the first place: A pedagogical bait-and-switch. I would much rather 'preach' to the congregation than the choir. Someone surfing for porn and stumbling across my visual communication site - and LEARNING something - is for me significantly more rewarding than burying a paper about the subject in a journal for academic-eyes-only.

I think you have to decide whether you wish to continue your role as the holy hipster who is simply too far out to be appreciated or someone with a sufficient knowledge of a particular discipline that your critiques will be within a particular dialogue so that you can really push the envelope.

* * * Let me re-paint this comment. I have a life-time of being ahead-of-the-curve. Hunters and gatherers always know the lay of the land best. I do not seek "holy-hipster". Indeed, look for my name around [Cultural Farming](#)? It can be found, but

my work is essentially anonymous. There is no narcissistic cult-of-celebrity there... but I hear your point. Moreover, my work is deeply embedded and embodied in a wide, existing literature. But, being so new, so green, I do indeed wonder aloud (as I am to you now) whether or not my work is sheer folly. And this comes from the very fact (and our emails are further examples) that most scholars want only to discuss their academic machinations, or my *written* words, or my *tone*. What of my VIDEOS? I have had so few actual discussions about my VIDEOS.

Robin, I will be forever indebted to you for taking this much time with me already. And I dearly hope we can extend this chat for another round or two. If so, what of my methodology? What of my appropriation of anthropological, ethnographic 'film' *sensibility* for telling (parodic-ally surreal) visual stories about our mediated world? Are you able to make out any of this sense in my videos? Do they smell anything like scholarship? Is my work any more experimental, controversial, confusing, or misunderstood than [Jean Rouch's](#) during his time? Certainly I don't fetishize my equipment - as with most filmmakers. Can it be seen that I'm doing what [Bruce Conner](#) did 40 years ago - only maybe better, more grounded in critical methodological purpose?

I sense that we have a very different approach to the development of a new ethnography.

* * * I wonder. But I sincerely think not. I write to you exactly because your words so richly inform my moving images. Maybe you can expand upon 'new ethnography'?

Good luck but if you really want to be listened to tone it down.

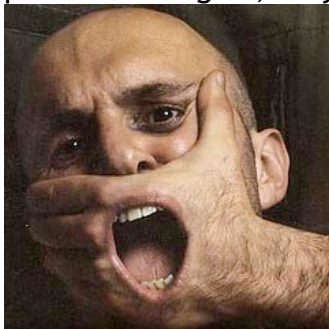
* * * I fear I may have already shot myself in the foot with you. If not, please know that I am almost never angry - I am earnest. I am not 'pissy' - I am provocative. I am very likely ignorant - but not stupid. And also that I am profoundly dedicating the rest of my life to DOING THE WORK... work that will necessarily evolve over time... as yours has over 45 years. I'm on your side and trying to pull on the same end of the same rope. I am simply a student... alive and well in this world. And still rather stunned I'm actually having a 'conversation' with someone I so respect.

Robin

* * * Peace, my friend.

hw

ps: ...then again, maybe I should just try to say everything visually:



From: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)
Subject: My Reply
Date: April 24, 2008 7:25:29 AM MDT
To: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

Holland,

My interests and yours are a bit different. I am a committed anthropologist who has been trying to develop an anthropology of visual communication within the confines of mainstream anthropology. Sounds to me that you are not committed to becoming an academic and probably should not bother if I understand your complaints. What you are experiencing is normative for a grad student. You either accept the narrow confines of a discipline or quit. Your critique of academics and academia is accurate but my question is what do you expect? That world and the real world are about the same. What isn't?

Your fantasy that media studies will somehow have an impact on the media empires is amazingly naive. I use to tell my students if you want to change the world do not pick up a camera, pick up a gun. Academic research, even the so-called activist-radical media, critiques only preach to the choir and seldom have any impact on the real world. Scholars talk to other scholars.

As asked about what I meant by "new ethnography." [See the attached.](#)

Your choice is rather simple. Become a good scholars within a discipline; or continue to be a maverick but within the acceptable limits of your profession; or drop out stay a professional outsider. I seriously do not believe that ranting against the machine will never yield the results intended. An example: Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly produced a classic "Harvest of Shame" about the plight of the farm worker. Since that production literally dozens of other docs have been produced dealing with the same issue. As far as I can see the farm workers are still dirt poor, uneducated, etc. Now if the hundreds of thousands of dollars had not been spent on those productions but rather on educational and health programs then we would see some actual results. As an old 60s radical, I feel like Dylan hoping to not go through all these things twice.

Enjoy your windmills.

Jay Ruby

"We are all generating more media that we can consume. The amount of photography, recorded material, text, the cloud of metadata that we are all leaving behind, is overwhelming." Sandy Shrugg, UYN, Interactive Telecommunications Division.

From: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

Subject: Reply #3

Date: April 24, 2008 11:08:12 AM MDT

To: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)

On Apr 24, 2008, at 7:25 AM, Robin Emerald wrote:

Holland,

* * * Greetings.

My interests and yours are a bit different. I am a committed anthropologist who has been trying to develop an anthropology of visual communication within the confines of mainstream anthropology.

* * * And this is why I write to you. I respect this.

Sounds to me that you are not committed to becoming an academic and probably should not bother if I understand your complaints.

* * * You prefer to critique my emails and not my work. My 'complaint' is that I am meeting great resistance writing my media research with the media content I study. And that this is complicated further by (visual) scholars unwilling to support alternative approaches to ethnographic storytelling.

What you are experiencing is normative for a grad student. You either accept the narrow confines of a discipline or quit. Your critique of academics and academia is accurate but my question is what do you expect? That world and the real world are about the same. What isn't?

* * * This is just about the saddest thing I've ever read. As to what I expect: I expect the academy to hold itself to a higher standard - and at the very least accept, applaud, and promote those willing to challenge and extend that higher standard.

Your fantasy that media studies will somehow have an impact on the media empires is amazingly naive.

* * * "Media" is not some inevitable blob in the universe, Robin. It is made daily by smart people just like you and me. Indeed, I know many of these people. They, like us, fundamentally want to do the right thing; and all are persuadable when presented with logical, ethical, profitable recourse. Isn't one worthy goal of scholarship to uncover 'recourse'?

I use to tell my students if you want to change the world do not pick up a camera, pick up a gun.

* * * Again, if you spent time in my work you would find that my message is, exactly, [that cameras ARE guns.](#)

Academic research even the so-called activist, radical media critiques only preach to the choir and seldom have any impact on the real world. Scholars talk to other

scholars.

* * * And this is a good thing?

As asked about what I meant by "new ethnography." [See the attached.](#)

* * * Thank you.

But if you mean this as a definition:

"The ethnographies, designed to be seen on a computer, combine text, photographs and video in an interactive way. These innovative works bring together the traditional publishing outlets of a book, a photo essay and film in a way that enhances the usefulness of all three. "

...or this:

"Robin Emerald has long espoused the use of visual data as a powerful tool for academic research. In his Oak Park Stories he has provided a clear example of how his theories can work and bridged the gap between visual and mainstream written anthropologies. "

...Where, exactly, is the difference between your work and mine? Isn't mine equally 'good to think with'?

Your choice is rather simple. Becoming a good scholar within a discipline; continue to be a maverick but within the acceptable limits of your profession; or drop out stay a professional outsider. I seriously do not believe that ranting against the machine will never yield the results intended.

* * * "... a *good* scholar..." Humm. Again, if you spent time in my work you would see that ranting is not my MO. I rant to you in email - rarely with my work. You seem intent on confusing and extending this point for the purpose of deflating creative alternatives... as if every worthy possibility has already been exhausted, scholarly or otherwise.

An example: Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly produced a classic "Harvest of Shame" about the plight of the farm worker. Since that production literally dozens of other docs have been produced dealing with the same issue. As far as I can see the farm workers are still dirt poor, uneducated, etc. Now if the hundreds of thousands of dollars had not been spent on those productions but rather on educational and health programs then we would see some actual results.

* * * I would argue that many more dollars have been spent on education and health programs than on all docs combined. Regardless, could it be that maybe the wrong people are making most docs... and/or making them the wrong way... for the wrong audiences? Maybe it is time to encourage the 'seldom heard' to tell their own 'media mystories'.

As an old 60s radical, I feel like Dylan hoping to not go through all these things twice.

* * * As a 55yo radical I continue to read *all* of Dylan:

"All the tired horses in the sun.
How am I supposed get any riding done."

Enjoy your windmills.

* * * With Cervantes, as with Berholt Brecht, Shakespeare, James Joyce, the Dadaists, the Surrealists - Jean Rouch - and so many others, a *worthy* political and educational goal is to shock the audience, to shock our students into the awareness that social life, and art, and scholarship are all human creations, all socially constructed works capable of reconstruction and recuperation.

Robin Emerald

--

"We are all generating more media that we can consume. The amount of photography, recorded material, text, the cloud of metadata that we are all leaving behind, is overwhelming." Sandy Shrugg, UYN, Interactive Telecommunications Division.

* * * Think about this end quote, you keep including at the end of every email, for a minute. Does it mean we give up? What kind of challenges *are you willing* to accept, Robin??

hw

<http://www.culturalfarming.com>

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=2bjqYPH7rAo&feature=related>

From: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)

Subject: Re: From: Holland Wilde - Reply #3

Date: April 24, 2008 11:27:58 AM MDT

To: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

Holland,

Good luck and good bye.

Robin

--

"We are all generating more media that we can consume. The amount of photography, recorded material, text, the cloud of metadata that we are all leaving behind, is overwhelming." Sandy Shrugg, UYN, Interactive Telecommunications Division.

From: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)

Subject: Programs in Ethnographic Film Production

Date: July 8, 2008 7:13:24 AM MDT

To: EYESPEECH@LISTSERV.CHURCH.EDU

Has anyone compiled a list of places where ethnographic film production is taught? I am aware of the programs in the U.S., U.K and Nordic Country? Where else?

Robin Emerald

From: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)
Subject: Re: Programs in Ethnographic Film Production
Date: July 14, 2008 8:32:24 AM MDT

http://www.culturalfarming.com/Extras/Wilde_ZAPOOK.mov



From: emerald@church.edu (Robin Emerald)
Subject: Re: Programs in Ethnographic Film Production
Date: July 14, 2008 2:35:43 PM MDT
To: farmer@culturalfarming.com (Holland Wilde)

I have no idea who you are but the video is a piece of shit. Eskimos prefer to be called Inuit but you are too ignorant to know that. There are no polar bears in Nanook. Nanook is copyrighted. Please go away. Will not respond to any more emails. Will delete. I have removed you from EYESPEECH. People like you do not belong on the list.

Robin Emerald