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BOTH SIDES OF THE CAMERA :

ANTHROPOLOGY AND VIDEO IN THE STUDY OF A GCALEKA WOMEN'S RITE CALLED *INTONJANE*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the potential of video as a research tool for anthropologists in the recording of a single ritual. The study examines interactions between ethnographers, informants and viewers. The thesis reveals the capacity of video to make possible close, detailed readings of performance in terms not originally anticipated by the researcher. Archival storage of the video recording allows for critique and assessment of the research.

The case study chosen in which to test the potential of video as a research tool was a woman's 'initiation' ritual (called *intonjane*) in Shixini in the Eastern Cape (in what was, until recently, the independent homeland of Transkei). Historically, the ritual was supposedly held at the time of a girl's first menstruation, this being the physical symbol of her transformation into adulthood. Ritual seclusion served to effect an accompanying social transformation in preparation for marriage. Paradoxically, in the late 1980's, it was older women and mothers, already married and well past the age of first menstruation, who were undergoing the ritual seclusion and symbolic marriage. The study explores this paradox with the goal of understanding the purpose of the ritual in contemporary times. By recording large segments of the ritual on video, and subjecting the footage to a close analysis of verbal and non-verbal aspects of performance, both the ritual and the merits of video as a research tool could be examined.

Video was utilised, in an interactive research process, as an information elicitation tool. The analysis of the recorded text of the ritual brings to the fore elements which make what is apparently a paradox understandable. The elements which explicate the paradox were not anticipated when the research commenced, and in all likelihood would have eluded a researcher who did not have the benefit of the incidental capture on video. The thesis reveals the enormous contribution video can make to research and suggests that video has an important contribution to make to the discipline of anthropology.

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

L. Cloete

LAURA CLOETE

20 day of August, 1996.

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PREFACE

> The visual image is possibly the dominant mode of communication in the late twentieth century and its location, establishment and integration among traditional texts rightly exercises the minds of interested scholars and practitioners
>
> (Edwards 1992 : 3).

In South Africa, the use of video technology in anthropological research is extremely rare. In gathering fieldwork data, the conventional tools of observation and note-taking have generally sufficed. This is understandable as South Africans are largely untrained in the critical use and analyses of visual images, and visual anthropology - the branch of anthropology which uses and analyses visual images in the exploration of culture - is relatively unexplored in this country. The reasons for this are several.

The utilisation of images in this country has, until the recent transition to democracy, been heavily controlled. Certain photographs in newspapers and books have been highly censored, as have some films and television programmes produced for mass distribution or broadcast. Since South Africa's late entry into television in the 1970's when the national broadcaster, the South African Broadcast Corporation, was handmaiden to the apartheid government, South Africans have, on a daily basis, encountered the persuasive power of 'the image' in its most frightening capacity. The majority of South Africans therefore recognise the power inherent in the manipulation and exploitation of images, but have had little access to that realm of power.

The suspicion and lack of credibility of visual media, combined with the high cost, the fear of technology and the lack of critical expertise and literature in the field of visual anthropology meant (and still means) an excessively large investment would be needed by any department wishing to offer visual anthropology as a serious theoretical and practical option. However, such investment into new fields of study has been discouraged

due to limited funding and exacerbated by a political environment which, until recently, was not conducive to attracting international expertise or encouraging attendance at international conferences. What funding has been available is consequently channelled primarily into existing courses. Also, social and political studies dominate the social anthropology syllabi in South Africa, while video is generally ignored as a valid anthropological tool.

That visual anthropology has remained completely marginalised in South African anthropology departments is even more understandable if we consider the questions of representation and authority that anthropologists have struggled to deal with over the last few decades. Anthropologists are exploring more sensitive ways of conducting fieldwork and of constructing ethnographies. And it in this context that my examination of the use of video technology as research tool for social anthropology takes place.

It is clear that, without funding, expertise, literature or technology, the unknown arena of visual anthropology will retain only a novelty interest amongst most mainstream anthropologists. Anthropologists are ignoring a potentially valuable research ally in the medium of video technology. Hopefully, this research, through the application and demonstration of video as a research tool, will contribute a persuasive argument to the debate and show that conventional attitudes should change, and that the necessary investments for visual anthropology be given serious consideration.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork and ethnography - video as an alternative form of recording data

> Truth is not a Holy Grail to be won:
> it is a shuttle which moves ceaselessly
> between the observer and the observed,
> between science and reality
> (Morin, in Tomaselli et al, 198(26).

> The observer should be conscious of the contingent nature of research, and the final text, the ethnography itself, should not mimic scientific presentations but should be experimental, multi-vocal, ironical
> (Kuper, 1989: 455).

In the late 1980s, questions regarding the nature of the representational process and problems of ethnographic authority in anthropology began to come to a head (Clifford, 1988; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; John Comaroff, 1975; Crawford, 1992; Kratz, 1994; Nichols, 1991; Scholte, 1986). Two areas of research were beset by questions of validity: the collection of data (fieldwork), and the manner of translating that data into ethnography (writing). On what grounds did the author claim authority for the data, and through what techniques were representativeness and authority conferred in the published works?

Malinowski's tradition of participant-observation formed the basis of fieldwork. Its objectivist claim to reveal the native point of view was problematic as fieldnotes - the process of data collection as well as the data itself

- were usually separated out from the final ethnography (Morphy, 1994: 118).

The anthropologist came to be seen as somewhat akin to the director who organises the gaze of the audience in a theatre (Drewal, 1991: 24). The ethnographer would organise the understanding of the reader, choosing which questions to ask, which answers to recognise and which data to prioritise - and then extrapolate deeper meaning by drawing on the data selectively as evidence to authorise the ethnographic account.

Acknowledging that the ability to 'capture' experience in any scientific sense was impossible, anthropologists moved towards a description, rather, of ethnography as narrative, implying the imaginative representation of he researcher's experience of the object of research (Geertz, 1988). No longer was it possible confidently to claim to represent social reality objectively or from the native's point of view.

> What once seemed only technically difficult, getting 'their' lives into 'our' works, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically, delicate
> (Geertz, 1988: 130).

Geertz argues that all writing is an 'imaginative act'; all ethnographies are fictions - 'something made, something fashioned' (ibid: 15) - an argument vigorously pursued in contemporary theory. This explicit

recognition of the role of the anthropologist as author offers a revision of the nature of the representational process and ethnographic authority, of the very relationship between 'reality' and 'interpretation'.

Geertz's approach is to view culture as context, within which human activity can be thickly described, while human behaviour, he argues, should be seen as symbolic action - action which signifies (1973: 14). The role of the ethnographer, then, is to 'search out and analyze the symbolic forms - words, images, institutions, behaviours' (ibid: 58) through which people represent themselves to self and other, to discover the concept of person, to find meaning in the cultural 'webs of significance' (ibid: 5).

His contribution, then, is to view anthropological writings as interpretations of social activity. These interpretations, he argues, are best served by thick description - the rendering, in all of its complexity, of the interwoven, inexplicit conceptual structures of the subject which the anthropologist must somehow contrive to grasp (ibid: 10). Through this means, he claims to render a local reading of local experience, to uncover his subject's identity through their enactments about themselves. Unlike Malinowski, he claims not to reveal the native point of view as from a local, so much as the anthropologist's reading of local perceptions - from 'over the shoulder' of the subject (ibid: 452).

Hence, for Geertz to describe his writing as fiction does not mean that he does not engage in fieldwork. On the contrary, his view of culture as 'an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulder of those to whom they properly belong' (ibid: 452), clearly implies the gathering of data in the field. The Balinese cockfight is a good example of one such text (or form) he has researched in a variety of settings. However, Geertz's method of gathering data and translating them into ethnography is not without problems.

To begin with, he relegates the data-gathering process to a one-way channel of communication in which the skilled anthropologist observes and analyses behaviour from over the native's shoulder. From this one-way observational mirror deriving first data and then analysis of another culture, he then extrapolates an even wider interpretation of society at large.

For example, in studying the cockfight, Geertz describes (in detail) his observations. Then, by unpicking the myriad of symbols, images, words and behaviour he has described, he interprets what he understands the event's essence to mean to the participants. From this understanding, he then extrapolates still further, analysing and interpreting the cockfight as a symbol of Balinese individual and national identity. Hence, from the one heavily described text, he offers an analysis of Balinese society as a whole.

> The cockfight renders ordinary, everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced (or, if you prefer, raised) to the level of sheer appearances, where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived
>
> (Geertz, 1973: 443).

The exercise is not without its problems. At one level, Geertz's account of the Balinese cockfight is a seduction of the senses. His thick description is full of humorous personal experience, colourful metaphors and analogies, and vivid interpretation. His content is thick with sexual allusion, but it is his style which most enthrals. The flourish of words, spinning out the meanings of the actors doings and sayings, draws the reader into Geertz's glistening web. But herein lies the problem: amidst the dense description on which his analysis relies, there is little empirical evidence for his attributions.

Whilst methodologically he claims to explore local understandings from without, from over the native's shoulder, his ethnography purports to provide `a Balinese reading of a Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves' (ibid: 446, my emphasis). In other words, he makes a Malinowskian claim to understand local experience from within the mindset of the native. In fact, in setting out the meaning of 'the Balinese experience', Geertz finishes, ultimately, with an imaginative account in which only he, the author, is present. In the seamless flow of words, we never hear a Balinese voice. As Crapanzano states, Geertz's

> constructions of constructions appear to be little more than projections, or at least blurrings, of his point of view, his subjectivity, with that of the native, or more accurately, of the constructed native (1986: 74).

Thick description is, to quote Tedlock, 'a gag rule on native discourse' (in Scholte, 1986: 11). The only voice we hear belongs to Geertz, assuming invisible authority after his initial presence in the introduction.

Much like the theatre director, Geertz (and, indeed, any ethnographer) organizes the gaze and hence the understanding of the reader. In Geertz's case, Drewal's point that the gaze is not returned by the performers (1991: 24) is unfortunately appropriate. His one-way mirror method of fieldwork has the effect of ordering the world as an endless exhibition. This objectifying of the subject has historical roots. Mitchell, describes, for example, of how, in 1889, European photographers and writers attending an Orientalists' Congress in Egypt complained of the city of Cairo that the 'chaos in the streets that would not compose itself into a picture' (in Drewal 1991: 13). In an attempt to make an accurate representation, they would try to create order by distancing themselves from the picture, to try to see it objectively.

> Unaware that the Orient has not been arranged as an exhibition, the visitor nevertheless attempts to carry out the characteristic cognitive manoeuvre of

> the modern subject, separating himself from an object-world and observing it from a position that is invisible and set apart
>
> (ibid).

Geertz's over the shoulder method of conducting fieldwork implies an apprehension of culture in much the same way. As Drewal states, 'subjects are turned into objects through distancing devices that allow the ethnographer to gain perspective' (1991: 13). This objectivist paradigm sets up unequal, unilinear power relationships. She concludes that the 'privilege of "knowing reality" is by default restricted to the "organizer of the view"' (ibid: 14), which results in unequal, unidirectional power relations.

Geertz, to his credit, acknowledges that

> if anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens... is to divorce it from its applications and render it vacant
>
> (ibid: 17).

Yet the didactic tone of his ethnographic writing implies a belief on his part that thick description overcomes the problem by providing sufficient evidence to justify his assumption of authority. Bob Scholte objects, criticising Geertz for reifying the product and 'separating what the natives are up to from the "tricks" used by the anthropologist to get at it' (1986: 10).

Michel De Certeau says that the anthropologist and subject, in order to avoid circling each other in mutual

incomprehension, should rather engage in a dialogue, trying to reach tentative agreements about actions and their meanings (in Brady 1983: 908). The absence of dialogue in Geertz's fieldwork is revealed in his ethnography as a lack of empirical data and the silenced native voice. The author substantiates his authority in his writing, instead, through the use of certain rhetorical devices.

For example, his invisible presence in the text (both at the cockfight and in the ethnography) provides an I-was-there authority on which the reader is forced to rely. This device is more subtle than the author-saturated ethnographies, which are explicit in I-witnessing (Geertz, 1988: 97), yet is as effective in appropriating authority. Supplemented with thick description invoking such literary devices as analogy, symbolism and metaphor, the reader is invited to view Balinese culture through the unavoidably westernised spectacles of Geertz - although he implicitly denies this in his claim of a 'Balinese reading of Balinese experience' (1973: 446).

Then, too, by invoking the writing-as-fiction or writing-as-imaginative-act argument, he subtly implies that, as fieldwork itself is a creative, interpretive act and the data derived from it selective and, in a sense, fictional, it cannot be offered as scientific evidence. Hence the absence of fieldnotes as evidence conveys no loss to his ethnography.

This is, as Kuper (1989) states, a misconception of the role of the anthropologist. While Kuper recognises that research is a social process and ethnography a social construct, that we can no longer reinstate the fiction of 'an objective observer who can bear witness to another culture "as it really is"' (ibid: 455), he argues nonetheless that a disciplined research process involving comparison, evaluation and debate with the subjects can produce valid empirical evidence. This would ensure that authority does not lie solely with the anthropologist or in one single account, and that cultural analysis is more than what Geertz describes as 'guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses' (1973: 20).

For Geertz, then, divorcing his fiction of the cockfight from the thin description of his methods, theory and raw data has meant that the thick description of his ethnography is considerably diluted, its validity easily called into question. Egon Renner takes an even stronger stand against Geertz, arguing that his ethnography 'cannot be predictable, verifiable or falsifiable because there would seem to be no one who can grasp what it empirically refers to' (1984: 540).

Geertz's ethnography clearly raises questions of validity and authority - about how he (and indeed all anthropologists) get 'to know what they know and write in the first place; how they authorize themselves' to 'speak in the name of the "real"' (de Certeau, in Brady 1983:

908).

The problem of Geertz's assumption of authority lies fundamentally in the inability to verify his conclusions due to a lack of empirical evidence in his work. As Kuper explains (1989: 454), the only way thus to challenge research is to go back later to repeat it, but, as history and the research context will most likely have changed, it is inevitable that the findings will change. This crisis of verifying research by reproducing it is perhaps best illuminated by the Mead-Freeman controversy.

Travelling to Samoa over a decade after Margaret Mead in order to assess the validity of the findings in her classic study, Coming of Age in Samoa, Derek Freeman not only settled on a different island to Mead, he also found, amongst other changes, a different colonial government and a different economic base (ibid: 455). A world war had intervened between the time in which the two pieces of research took place. And yet he claims of the research context that 'there is... no reason to suppose that Samoan society and behaviour changed in any fundamental way' (Brady 1983: 932). He then offers an aggressively different portrayal of Samoan adolescence, decrying Mead's ethnography as completely false. Kuper (1989: 455) argues that possibly both Mead and Freeman were correct; that differing contexts led to the different interpretations of Samoan adolescence.

The Freeman-Mead controversy has raised questions of

authenticity and validity in ethnographic research and has fed the reflexive and dialogic postmodernist tendency in writing. The written text (as compared with speech) is independent of its context (Thornton, 1983), hence the nature of relationships, and data emerging from these relations, can be disguised or distorted. Furthermore, the absence of individual voices allows authorship and authority to be more readily claimed or discredited.

It is imperative, then, in the light of these debates on representativeness, authority and validity, that empirical data be included - to provide evidence within the ethnography itself - for substantiating or refuting claims.

Ultimately, then, for Mead, Freeman, Geertz and indeed all anthropologists, the goal is an attempt - whether conveyed in the language of science or art - to portray another's 'reality' in all its complexity. The positivist endeavour to understand the natives' experience from their point of view is challenged by the post-modernists who contest the ability to translate another's reality in any but fictional terms. The debate lies around the extent to which it is the subject's or the anthropologist's 'reality' which is portrayed. The argument weighs heavily for empirical evidence and a dialogic methodology in which the subject is part of an interactive process in building up the portrait and extending the anthropologist's knowledge and understanding.

This research tests video's capacity, when put to work as a tool for anthropological research, to facilitate an interactive investigation, providing evidence to accompany the final ethnography. As such, it addresses critical questions central to anthropology today. Through microanalysis of a video recording of ceremonial performance, the study aims to try to understand the paradox of *intonjane*: of why an initiation rite aimed at preparing young girls for adulthood, marriage and childbirth was performed on women who were already married and had usually borne several children; of how and to what end the ritual effected transformation; and of whence its efficacy lay. Finally the thesis explores the extent to which the capture of data on video provides an archival reference against which an ethnographer's reading can be evaluated.

The female ritual of *intonjane* was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, its heavy emphasis on performance, its affective dimension and its visual aspects made it an interesting subject on which to test a medium with the capacity to simultaneously record dense visual and audial material. Secondly, its focus on women made it accessible to a female anthropologist. Thirdly, its irregular and intermittent occurrence made the ritual difficult to research using standard anthropological methods, but a useful vehicle on which to test the medium's capacity to record material for thick description and to facilitate repeated observation. And, finally, the rite provided an opportunity to test the

technology in terms of its capacity to handle limited light, space and mobility. The central goal of the project, as originally conceived, was thus to explore the methodological contributions and shortcomings of utilising video as a research tool for social anthropology.

The thesis therefore follows two clear lines of investigation. In the first place, it puts forward a methodology for, and tests its application on, the recording and performance analysis of an *intonjane* ritual. This case study approach is conducted to open up the second avenue, an exploration of the usefulness of video as a research tool for social anthropology.

What is *intonjane*?

The word *intonjane* means literally 'girl being initiated' and is generally used to describe a woman's initiation ritual. The rite is described as ideally meant for a young girl at the time of her first menstruation (Hunter, 1936: 165), although it nowadays usually occurs well after the initiate has been married and has borne children.

The popular description of *intonjane* as an initiation ritual (MacLean 1906; Soga 1932; Hunter 1936; Carstens 1982; Shaw & Van Warmelo 1988) makes it seem analogous to male circumcision. Certainly historically this may have been the case. Soga (1932: 216) tells us that *intonjane*

derives from the verb *uku-tomba* which means to menstruate for the first time. MacLean (1906: 104), the Chief Commissioner in British Kaffraria, writes, at the turn of the century, that *intonjane* was held 'when a girl arrives [my emphasis] at the state of puberty' - his euphemism for first menstruation. MacLean says explicitly that 'this female custom is analogous to circumcision among the men, in as far as it is the initiatory rite by which girls are introduced to womanhood' (ibid: 104). His criteria for making this assumption seem to be that the two rites take place 'at the same time of life, viz.: that of puberty', before an initiate is married (ibid: 104). By the end of the rite, the girl who has been secluded 'has entered into the state of womanhood, and is considered marriageable'. This is readily comparable to circumcision initiates who, on finishing the rite, are regarded as men and are also eligible for marriage.

Kohler (1933: 10, 11) also says women's initiation rites among the Xhosa in Southern Natal took place immediately after the onset of first menstruation although the initiate was called the *umamgongo* after the seclusion room (called the *umgongo*). The ceremony was called *ukutombisa*, meaning 'to attend on a girl during her first menstrual period'. Hunter translates *ukuthomba* as meaning 'to put forth, to bud, to sprout, to menstruate for the first time' (1936: 165). *Ukuthombisa* is the causative form, meaning the 'performance of the initiation rites'.

If a girl was not initiated before marriage, it was believed that she might 'fall ill after marriage, or that she may fail to conceive, or that her children will be born sick y' (Hunter 1936: 166).

The earliest ethnographers were therefore quite clearly let to believe that first menstruation was the earliest and, it seems, the most common time at which performance of the rite was activated. First menstruation signalled the girl's sexual maturity, her ability to conceive, and the *intonjane* ritual was the vehicle for socially recognising this maturity and teaching her the correct behaviour attendant thereupon. As Carstens says, the initiation process matched or prepared a girl for her prospective socio-economic position. The ritual context of the *intonjane* reflected the 'restricted status of an adult (married) woman' (1982: 515) and guided the initiate in the expected behaviour of a new bride. But there may also have been another motive for performing the rite.

The sudden bleeding of a young girl who has begun menstruating is a source of universal fear and taboo. Blood, says Audrey Richards, stands for 'death, murder, life-giving force or kinship' (1956: 19). Certainly this is true for the pygmies of the Ituri forest in north-east Congo who, Turnbull argues, recognise menstrual blood 'not only as a being the symbol of death, but also of life' (1961: 208). Unlike conventional bleeding, however, menstrual blood, with its 'mysterious

periodicity' (ibid: 208) is considered especially terrifying and disturbing, according to Richards.

> It evokes magic rites for the protection of the girl who thus becomes a potential source of danger to the community for the first time; for those nearest to her it involves purification ceremonies. It makes the girl depend on the older members of the community who can give her this protection
> (ibid: 19).

The rites serve to purify the girl, protecting her and the community from danger. As Cook points out, it was believed that 'an uninitiated girl would give birth only to monstrosities' (1929: 943).

Ritual protection was not only effective while menstruating, it was regarded as having a long term beneficial effect on the girl's health and good fortune. By extension, it also benefitted her family and her future husband's family. Considering the exchange of cattle which the bride's family would expect from the groom for her hand in marriage (Wilson in La Fontaine 1972), it is not surprising that the protection described above was an important consideration. It meant that the groom received a wife in ancestral favour, with assured health and who had received many gifts to bring with her into her marriage. Hence, the rites surrounding a girl's arrival at puberty concerned more than just the girl herself, they were of considerable interest to her immediate family, to the agnatic cluster, to future affines and to the community at large.

MacLean (1906) makes no reference to *intonjane* ever being held at any time other than puberty. Initiation was, in his time, the first crucial step separating the girl from her childhood in what was a slow transition into womanhood. Hunter (1936) and Van der Vliet (in Hammond-Tooke, 1974: 240), writing on the Xhosa and Lobedu respectively, also describe *intonjane* as the first step in a transition process from girlhood tc womanhood. After *intonjane*, a girl was called a woman, yet her transition into womanhood was incomplete without marriage and childbirth. Initiation was the first stage of a process, then, and one upon which marriage was encumbent. In this respect, it was as crucial to girls as circumcision was to boys. According to these ethnographers, then, it would seem that to marry in Xhosa (and Lobedu) society, a girl would first have to 'become a woman', to pass through the rite which recognised her social and sexual maturation into adulthood.

However, Van der Vliet (in Hammond-Tooke, 1974: 226) writes that a Lobedu girl's initiation ceremony could be delayed beyond first menstruation, but that it had to be held before marriage. Soga (1932: 218-219), on the other hand, says the *intonjane* rite was sometimes delayed for such reasons as poverty, in which case a girl could marry without being initiated. Her delayed initiation would be much shorter than a rite held at first menstruation. There is, therefore, no conclusive evidence that the rite was always limited to newly-menstruating young girls.

In the late 1980s when the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted, the *intonjane* ritual was usually held well after marriage and sometimes into a woman's middle and even old age when she was certainly already sexually and socially mature. This was unlike circumcision which was still then the defining factor by which boys become adults. Until circumcised, a boy could not marry and thus had no legal claim to his offspring. Once circumcised, he began to accumulate seniority and respect through marriage and the birth of children. Circumcision was thus central to male identity and to men's assumption of rights and obligations within clan and community. Performance of the *intonjane* ritual effected nothing like the radical transformation in status that circumcision granted to men.

What is interesting is that in the late 1980s, as before, the rite was articulated in ideal terms. It was always described as being meant for a young girl, even if, in reality, it was applied to a more mature woman. Similar symbols and actions were used. The name given to the climax of the *intonjane* ritual, *umtshato* (the Wedding Day), as well as the behaviour expected of the initiate took much the same form as before, but it would seem the task - of initiating a girl in a rite which rehearses her for marriage - was redundant. Can we still say, then, that the girl's initiation rite was analogous to the boy's? Can we even call this rite an initiation rite and, if so, initiation into what? If it was not an initiation rite, what kind of rite was it? Why was it

articulated in terms which reduce a woman to mere girlhood? Whose needs did it serve? And, finally, what kind of transformation was effected and where did the rite come by its efficacy?

Informants with whom I consulted identified six events which comprised the ritual highlights of *intonjane*. These were *umngeno*, (meaning 'going in'), the day the initiate went into seclusion; *umngenandlini* (meaning 'entering the hut'), the ritual goat slaughter; *umtshato* (meaning 'wedding day'), the ritual climax and ox slaughter, which lasted 3 days; *ukutsiba intaba* (meaning 'to jump over the mountain') at which the initiate's polluted implements were disposed of; *umphindelo* (named for the goat which is sometimes ritually slaughtered) at which the initiate left seclusion temporarily; and *umphumo*, (meaning 'going out'), where the initiate finally left seclusion.

The ritual days not singled out with special names or activities followed a regular pattern. The *intonjane* received visitors, rested, ate and occupied herself with a small activity such as weaving. Her father, or his representative, hosted the rite. Her mother participated only in providing the initiate with food throughout her seclusion and in enjoying some of the meat on the days of feasting. Another elder woman was appointed to oversee the women's activities. If the initiate had a baby, she was allowed to keep it with her, breast-feeding in the hut throughout her seclusion. If she had a male twin, he

accompanied her through the most important parts of the ritual, namely those days singled out above.

In the early morning and evening, neighbourhood women of *intonjane*'s father's agnatic cluster (the 'set or cluster of agnatically related homestead heads who live in a particular area' (Hammond-Tooke, 1985: 49)), typically visited to sing special songs, walking in a circle in front of the cattlebyre. Young neighbourhood boys and girls spent the night in the hut with the *intonjane* and her assistants, keeping them company and enjoying themselves in a variety of ways.

In terms of Van Gennep's (1960) framework for analysing rites of passage, *umngeno* represented the rite of separation, ending with *umngenandlini* at which stage a goat was ritually slaughtered and shared smongst kin. The initiate's first menstruation was symbolically finished but she had yet to learn and practice the social skills required of a young woman.

Umtshato, with its ox slaughter and three-day celebration, was the primary transition rite, when the community publicly gave witness to her new role as an adult woman. The transition ended with *ukutsiba intaba* and *umphindelo*, symbolised by the polluted tools of the ritual being burned and the initiate being allowed out briefly to join her family.

The ritual closed with *umphumo*, the rite of incorporation

back into the family when the initiate left seclusion to return to the main hut. On her return to her husband's homestead, the initiate drank *amasi* (sour milk) from her husband's cattle. This latter act was not described by participants as a part of the rite, but was regarded as a necessary annexure to it.

The broad structure of *intonjane* gives little clue to understanding the ritual paradox. We turn to Kratz (1994), who argues that the essence of any event, particularly a ritual event, is performance, for a way forward.

The study of performance

Following on from Austin's work (1962) on speech-acts, Finnegan (1969), Searle (1972), Tambiah (1973, 1986), Gardner (1983), McAllister (1987) and Drewal (1991) all look variously at the ethnography of speaking highlighting the importance of studying performance. But it is left to Kratz (1994) to develop a systematic methodology for performative analysis which, applied to ritual, highlights the transformative power created in the performative context.

All of these scholars characterise performance, broadly, as the ability of simultaneous word, action and emotion in specific contexts to effect some sort of transition on the participants. Drewal argues that performance is a contested concept. She broadly defines it as 'the

practical application of embodied skills and knowledge to the task of taking action in everyday social life' (1991: 3) and describes it as having tactical, repetitive, improvisational, rhetorical and temporal characteristics (ibid: 1). She argues that the study of performance is 'especially political because it involves research on performers as they make choices and take action in particular historical and social situations' (ibid: 27).

> In Africa performance is a primary site for the production of knowledge, where philosophy is enacted, and where multiple and often simultaneous discourses are employed (ibid: 2).

But, Drewel argues, until recently, oral performance in Africa has largely been dealt with as literature - 'translated and transcribed, frozen on the printed page, and treated as a fixed text' (1991: 2). The politics of this decontextualization and static rendering of the 'verbal arts' is an attempt to place performance on an equal footing with literature(ibid: 23).

Geertz's ethnography (although focusing on Indonesia and not Africa) renders the cockfight similarly, failing to deal with the performative aspects sufficiently. His ethnography is clearly concerned with Balinese identity, but Kratz (1994) argues that no notion of identity is possible without detailed consideration of ritual structure, sequence and performance and with particular attention to the actors' beliefs, intentions and agency. This should include the study of such non-verbal

characteristics as costume, location, use of symbols, defining of time and space, as well as extensive linguistic material to examine cultural philosophies and to explore verbal patterning. Language and movement should be explored in combination to understand the subject's sense of emotion, sentiment and personhood.

Drewal (1991: 35) lists three priorities for researching performance. She argues for the undertaking of historical studies; for empirical studies of performers and audiences; and for intertextual studies of the relationship between performance and other cultural texts, and between performances themselves.

Clearly, all three areas require investigation if an holistic understanding of the subject is to be attempted. However, as the priority of this study is to test video as a research tool within the inevitably curtailed parameters of a Masters thesis and not to undertake a comprehensive study of performance analysis, only one rite is focused on.

The study of *intonjane* would clearly benefit from an historical perspective, and obviously the recording of only one event cannot facilitate historical studies or any study between performances (other than when they occur within the one event). But even a video record of a single event should accommodate empirical studies of performers and audiences. That is not to say, however, that, were a cockfight filmed, it would necessarily

prove, one way or another, whether Geertz or his critic Crapanzano was telling the 'whole truth'. Truth is, at best, a relative concept, and much of our notion of personhood is caught up in our dreams and desires, in our ideals and our goals, in our social and historical context. As MacDougall says, 'the values of a society lie as much in its dreams as in the reality it has built' (1975: 121). To expect visual footage to reveal such depth is like expecting field notebooks containing raw data to do the same. These notes-in-progress are baseline data, used by the fieldworker as a starting point from which to proceed.

The means through which change is incorporated into, and the idea of 'tradition' re-created in ritual contexts is hardly understood, Kratz claims (1994). What is clear, however, is that within ritual, the processes of transformation are embedded in performance traditions through repetition and conscious choice-making, through 'acts of re-presentation with critical difference' (Williams, in Drewal 1991: 38).

While the idea of repetition is fundamental to the notion of tradition, Antonin Artaud identifies the paradox that

> all words, once spoken, are dead and function only at the moment when they are uttered, [...] a form, once it has served, cannot be used again and asks only to be replaced by another, and [...] a gesture, once made, can never be made the same way twice
>
> (1958: 75).

Hence no repetition is exact. As Drewal points out (1991: 39), performers and audience experience ritual differently every time. Each repetition is in some measure original, yet never totally novel. Performances reflect the performers assessments of the moment. Hence, the enactment can never be regarded as preformulated or as mechanically reproducing a society's norms and conventions (ibid: 44).

And yet, each performance is recovered through memory of previous performances. Ritual is constructed out of organised sequences that are 're-behaved'. Thus each performance is a combination of repetition - based on an earlier performance - and improvisation dependent on the politics of the moment. This intertextuality of performance is likely to be well served by video recordings which can facilitate research into the construction of relationships through the 'multiple and simultaneous discourses always surging between harmony/disharmony, order/disorder, integration/ opposition, and so on' (Drewal, 1991: 45).

In a similar vein to Drewal's notions of repetition and improvisation, Richard Schechner (1981) explains continuity and change in 'tradition' through the concept of performance as 'restored behaviour'. Behaviour is restored, that is, 'pre-existing behavioural items [are] brought out for ritual performance and reproduced as exactly as possible' (Morphy, 1994: 132, 133) by the individuals who participate in the event. Every

individual makes a creative contribution to the ritual, creating meaning through a cumulative and additive transformation process yet one which also involves the 'loss of certain meanings and connotations that were once part of the currency of the ritual' (ibid: 123).

> Each person approaches the performance with different motivations and different emotions. Restored behaviour does not pre-exist the performance in any concrete sense; it is learned behaviour differentially held in the memories of the participants. A ritual captures people at different stages of the learning process. This is particularly significant in a situation of rapid social change, where there is less shared experience between young and old, when we are dealing less with a process of replication and more with one of transformation, and when the life cycle of one generation is radically different from the one that follows
>
> (ibid: 132).

This illuminates the need for an historical perspective if any real understanding is to be acquired. When recordings are made over a period of time, the subtle changes in ritual and the process of their incorporation would be a valuable archival addition, rendering ethnography more potent (or otherwise!) by providing evidence for anthropologists who might wish to research similar fields or reproduce the research. But when only one ritual is observed, the temporary, changing nature of ritual and the manner of invoking 'tradition' to incorporate (or disguise) change is obscured.

> Questions about past and present practice can be deflected by invoking 'tradition'
> (Kratz 1994: 28).

Kratz argues that this needs to be taken into account and redressed somehow in the research if one is to explore, as she does, how, through 'images of continuity, community and the past', the concept of 'tradition' comes to hold 'explanatory and legitimating force' (ibid: 28). Clearly, she is correct. However, as stated earlier, this research, confined as it is to the limitations of a Masters thesis, makes its priority the study of video as a research tool by its application to only one ritual.

Instead of analysing ritual change across time, as did Kratz over a 20-year period, this research undertakes a microanalysis of performance within one ritual. In the attempt to establish where performance derives its efficacy to facilitate powerful transformations on an individual's and society's sense of identity, this research undertakes the dual investigation of video's capacity for thick description, for opening up the research process and for faciltating an interactive methodology.

The utilisation of video recordings as a medium of research must surely have occurred to Kratz, particularly as performance cannot be captured easily in writing.

> Research reifies performance as a spatialized representation for mental cognition alone, as if detached from the human bodies that

practice it

(Drewal, 1991: 15).

Conventional research and writing processes render performance static rather than dynamic. Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs (in Drewal 1994: 24) argue for a dynamic process of negotiation in which ritual participants 'reflexively examine the discourse as it is emerging, embedding assessments of its structure and significance in the speech itself' (ibid: 24). However, trying to carry out this exercise in the middle of performance interrupts its spontaneity and renders the exercise invalid. A video recording of the performance, on the other hand, has the potential to facilitate reflexive analysis at the first subsequent opportunity and to substantiate the ethnography, inherently static in its written form, with a document which captures the discourse in much of its intertextual complexity, in the moment of its performance.

It is surprising that Kratz, despite continued emphasis on the study of performance, makes no use of video herself. Instead she engages in detailed but repetitive description and analysis which, while convincing as an argument, offers little sense of the intertextual dynamism of performance which video can potentially reveal. She also fails to provide an archival text reflecting the simultaneity of performance against which her readings can be assessed.

Research history and context

While the first female in recent years to undertake research in Shixini, I was by no means the first anthropologist. Research had been conducted in the area in past (Hammond-Tooke 1956-57; Mayer, 1970) and in recent years (McAllister 1981, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1992; Simon 1989; Heron 1990; Deliwe 1992; McAllister and Deliwe 1994).

Another female anthropologist, Alida Liebenberg, undertook research about an hour's drive away from where I did mine. As the footage reveals, Liebenberg travelled to Folokhwe to view the opening day and climax of *intonjane*.

Having recorded footage as part of my Honours dissertation (published subsequently as part of an HSRC report (Heron and Cloete, 1991)), I was already known, amongst Gcaleka Xhosa people of Folokhwe and its neighbouring wards, for carrying a video camera.

Although I was severely constrained in the duration of footage I could record due to a limited amount of battery power, where possible I took the opportunity to practice filming in local lighting conditions, both inside and outside; to demonstrate the use of the camera to allow people to become accustomed to it; to familiarise the interpreter with the handling of audio equipment; and to show the footage to the community for their entertainment as a means of returning their hospitality and building a relationship of trust. By the time this research began, approximately 18 months later, the sight of my interpreter and me wielding or simply carrying our video equipment was commonplace and invitations to record local events were frequent.

I witnessed aspects of four different *intonjane* rituals being performed on Gcaleka Xhosa women between 1989 and 1991 in Shixini in the Eastern Cape (what was then Transkei). Of the four, I managed to watch two comprehensively. Each lasted a total duration of 18 days to three weeks. Of these two, I recorded one (in Folokhwe) on video. At this rite, the female initiate was accompanied through parts of the rite by her twin brother.

A year later, I made an audio tape-recording of the speeches at a second *intonjane* ritual (in Jotelo). This rite was witnessed as a comparison to the first. However, as this research aims to test the usefulness of video for anthropology, it focuses on the first rite,

drawing on the second only where differences in structure arise or where aspects of the first rite were missed.

This research therefore utilises footage of an *intonjane* ritual recorded in mid-1989 in the Folokhwe region of Shixini. The ritual was captured in as full a sense as possible (in terms of agreements outlined in the methodology section which follows in the next chapter). However, two of the named events, *ukutsiba intaba* and *umphindelo*, condensed in this rite into one day, were missed. The female leader, impatient to bring the rite to an end, moved the date forward. In chronology, these events fell after the ritual climax and were dismissed as unimportant by community members. However, the day's activities nevertheless had important symbolic value and were a necessary part of the research.

Although the study was based on the analysis of one ritual, dissatisfaction with missing these events, as well as the desire to witness a second ceremony in order to facilitate even the most superficial comparison led me

to seek out another ritual. In this instance, only an audio recording of the speeches would be made. It took another year before a ceremony coincided with my fieldwork. The rite took place in the next ward, called Jotelo. This viewing of a second rite was necessary to establish, firstly, whether ritual was significantly changed by the absence of a camera; secondly, it offered a comparison of the order and content of the speeches, and of the initiation of a single person rather than a twin; thirdly, the missed events were witnessed. However, as the focus of the research was the contribution of video, data from the Jotelo rite is only included in this study on the missed events or where the Jotelo rite showed any significant variation from the recorded Folokhwe ritual.

Raw footage and fieldnotes

Raw video footage is most often broadly compared to fieldnotes (Morphy 1994, Rapport 1961) with local data being captured on video for later analysis as one of several sources of information available to the anthropologist. Yet, more than fieldnotes can ever be, video is - akin to the anthropologist - a listening device (recording the voice) and a viewing device (recording the actions). Unlike conventional fieldwork where only the anthropologist views, listens and takes notes, when a video camera is used, the anthropologist and the camera both view, listen and record. Where the notetaking anthropologist might ignore material only to

discover it necessary at a later stage - and have to view a second ritual and formulate a composite description - the video records even those data to which the researcher is not immediately sensitive.

However, in their listening and viewing, the camera and the person operate quite differently. Recording tools do not have the same capacity of human beings to be selective in their focus, isolating out sounds or images of particular interest. They record 'whatever light rays or sound waves are received within their range' (Asch and Asch, 1988: 167).

Within whatever range the camera operator chooses to focus the lens, all elements of the picture and sound appear equidistant. No one is prioritised over the other. Hence the camera can record many elements besides those selected as significant by the researcher. Video recording therefore offers a unique way, quite unlike notetaking with its inherent lineality, its static, sequential form, of capturing the complex, interwoven texts which, altogether, help to define community (Rapport 1961: 12, 13).

It is the camera operator who is selective, focusing the shot up close or widening it out to include more elements. In reading the image, the eye often settles on a particular point in the picture. This is usually because the camera operator has chosen to compose the picture in a manner which centers the eye on a particular

focus of interest, has chosen to place the microphone at a particular spot, has chose to frame, focus, time, angle the shot in a specific way. It is pertinent to remember, therefore, that

> pictures are a way that we structure the world around us. They are not a picture of it (Worth, 1981: 182).

The full extent to which video can assist in opening up the richness of the filmed occasion must be explored, as well as whether, in revealing different perceptions about the occasion, video has the capability of highlighting the false concreteness which can surround cultural events (ibid: 139).

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that video is as much the subject of interpretative and representational processes as any other data, unavoidably producing selective and partial coverage; that it has a false concreteness of its own arising out of the apparent scientific truthfulness of its recordings which equally needs to be understood.

This research further investigates the merit of video recordings for facilitating research by offering 'a medium of communication between the researcher and the native participant' (Caldarola 1985: 41). Also, video's capacity to accommodate indigenous responses is tested. In analysing the dense, complex action, video's effectiveness in revealing a multiplicity of

interpretations representing different ages, gender, status and interests is explored. And video's capacity to record continuous sound against which to synchronize the images is examined (Asch and Asch, 1988).

Obviously, questions of anonymity need also be addressed. To what extent does the participants' lack of anonymity on video ensure accountability by the anthropologist? Does the researcher's sharing of raw data with the participants of the event or the audience of the ethnography necessarily imply responsible ethnography? To what extent is the research opened up for scrutiny? Given the limitations imposed by the fleeting memory of an observed event, it would seem that video footage has the potential to advantage the research by allowing on-going discourse with the participants at a far greater level of detail than fieldnotes (Morphy 1994: 124). Furthermore, as an archival record, video potentially provides evidence for other anthropologists to check the ethnography. This usefulness of the archived video record is particularly important when fieldnotes are withheld from ethnographies.

The thesis also investigates the inherent nature of filming and how it affects the research. For example, while videotape has the advantage over film for its exceptional mobility, good light receptivity and the three hours of continuous recording which videotape can accommodate (Asch and Asch, 1998: 165), there are certain technical and environmental limits which can constrain

its performance. Even video struggles to record where there is excessively low light or too little space. Furthermore, limited battery power in rural conditions means a generator is needed to undertake the time-consuming chore of charging equipment in between recording sessions. In Shixini, petrol to fuel a generator could only be obtained an hour's drive away. Hence, recording duration was of necessity limited and recording choices had to be carefully made. On the other hand, the immediate feedback of video, although also reliant on generator power, had the useful potential for accommodating interactive research (ibid: 165).

The ritual itself, in the process of being recorded, the raw footage, the transcription and the final ethnography - are all texts in their own right, representative of the filmed encounter, and each makes a valuable contribution to the final ethnography. The transcription allows for detailed analysis of the verbal aspects of the ritual, but it excludes non-verbal data without which performative analysis cannot take place. Hence, I use the term 'text' interchangeably for different modes of representation and accord each text a value in its own right.

Chapter Two of the thesis elaborates on the metholodological issues only touched on in this introduction. It looks at methodology, theory and application for the recording of footage and for a performative analysis. Conventionally, only a short

section on methodology prefaces a study, however my chapter on methodology is central to the thesis findings. In a certain sense, the thesis is methodological by definition.

Chapter Three then offers a description and analysis of women's activities in the ritual. This is followed, in Chapter Four, with a performative analysis of male participation. Finally, the study concludes with a discussion of the contemporary meaning of the ritual and of the implications of video's contribution as a research tool to the field of anthropology.

An English transcription of the footage, including a translation of speech and song and technical data on shot descriptions and numbering, is to be found in an annexure at the end of the research. The Xhosa text can be had from the video tapes which accompany this thesis.

Author Cloete L
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