

ALTAR

**Anthropological Laboratory
for Tropical Audiovisual Research
The Cairns Institute, James Cook University**

We are a laboratory for communicating the heard and seen across the tropics.

We value the camera as a technology of sensuous encounter and social engagement.

We encourage dialogic approaches and collaborative productions between researchers and communities.

Concerned with socio-cultural specific forms of perception and expression, we welcome innovative approaches to audiovisual methods in ethnographic research, including experimental approaches working between image and text.

ALTAR supports research outcomes in different audiovisual forms, including:

- Ethnographic films and videos
- Community-based video and art projects
- Photographic essays
- Exhibitions and installations
- Soundscapes and other audio works
- Audio and/or visual content for websites

Ultimately, our aim is to foster new ways of knowing and relating to others, using audiovisual technologies as a means of apprehending—and responding to—the lifeworlds and values of the people with whom we work.

IDEAS & GOALS:

ALTAR is an audiovisual laboratory for anthropological research located in The Cairns Institute and College for Art, Society and Education at James Cook University (JCU). We specialise in places and people of the tropics. Our members are committed to developing practice-lead approaches to research that engage with and contribute to the communities with whom we work with. We are therefore concerned with not only returning research and other audiovisual materials to communities, but finding the ways to make audiovisual research relevant within local concerns and agendas.

ALTAR members understand the camera as a catalyst for creativity, insight and social change. We use practice-led approaches to generate new kinds of critical ethnography and social theory at a time when the increasing ubiquity of digital technologies and social media recast urgent questions in anthropology and other disciplines, not least those regarding representational and post-representational politics and ethics.

ALTAR members have produced a diverse range of award winning documentaries; experimental art works; photographic and multimedia museum installations. We research and publish widely in areas such as aesthetics, digital technologies and culture change, new media, film theory, visual culture, cultural sensoria, ethnographic media and ethnographic art practice.

PUBLIC FILM SCREENINGS:

Our public screening program at the Cairns Institute features a range of ethnographic and documentary films, programmed around particular themes. Email to subscribe to program alerts: daniela.vavrova@my.jcu.edu.au and visit our website: <https://espaces.edu.au/altar>

WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS:

ALTAR runs occasional workshops in photographing, filming, editing, and directing with an emphasis on the role of digital technologies in ethnographic research. We

hold weekly meetings and discuss issues related to the ongoing projects (see below). We have also established an occasional seminar series dedicated to the discussion of new methods and theories in visual culture.

ALTAR:

ALTAR Research Director:

Dr. Jennifer Deger

ALTAR Laboratory Director:

Dr. Daniela Vávrová

ALTAR Postgraduate Leader:

Bård Aaberge, PhD candidate

Anthropological and Academic Mentors:

Prof. Rosita Henry

Prof. Ton Otto

Dr. Michael Wood

Dr. Anita Lundberg

Dr. Robin Rodd

Dr. Maureen Fuary

Postgraduates and Associate Members:

Chiara Bresciani

Katarzyna Wojtylak

Kristian Lupinski

Jennifer Gabriel

Christiane Falck

Honorary Member:

Filmmaker Gary Kildea

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LOCATION:

The Lab is located in room D3-018 in The Cairns Institute building, JCU Cairns.

ONGOING PROJECTS:

Bård Aaberge:

Bård's current project is filming Dreaming narratives as told and dreamed by Kuku Yalanji elder Roy Gibson at Dreaming story locations within the Greater Daintree region in Far North Queensland. A DVD will be produced and given to Roy for community use. The audiovisual material also forms a complementary audiovisual part of his PhD thesis as well as a part of larger filming process about the Yalanji traditional knowledge in the past and present.

Chiara Bresciani:

Chiara will be documenting relevant elements of cultural heritage of Huave people in Southern Mexico. This audiovisual material will be part of her PhD project about agency, cultural change, and tradition.

Jennifer Deger:

Jennifer Deger is working on a number of film and museum installation projects as part of the new media collective, Miyarrka Media, including *Christmas Birrimbirr* (*Christmas Spirit*) and *Gapuwiyak Calling*. In her collaborative and experimental media work with Yolngu has co-directed and produced of a number of documentary films including *Gularri: That Brings Unity* (1997/2011), *Manapanmirr in Christmas*

Spirit (2012), *Ringtone* (2014) as well as the video artworks *Christmas with Wawa* and *My Red Yolngu Heart*.

Christiane Falck:

Christiane is currently working on an exhibition about people's relations with spirits in a Sepik community in Papua New Guinea. Part of the exhibition will be audio-visual material as well as artefacts collected during her PhD fieldwork. Since spirits inhabit an unseen sphere, Christiane is currently experimenting with ways in which audio-visual material can be used to capture the immaterial and can be presented in a way that will help the visitor of the exhibition understand people's lifeworld. The exhibition will further address topics such as 'rituals of life and death', 'people's relations with the dead', and explore how she herself came to be seen as a spirit of the dead.

Jennifer Gabriel:

Jennifer is creating a website for her project in Papua New Guinea. It involves an interactive website for world heritage consultation and will draw upon innovative production methods which include the use of circular narrative in website design. One of the techniques that will be explored involves the viewers to temporally find themselves in between a beginning and an end, enabling audiences to have an experience that meets their own needs and perceptions. This will be achieved through setting, theme and dialogue. Circular narrative in website design involves the transition from a real world to an imagined one, and finally ending back in reality. User Experience as a field in Website creation puts the content and the interface into a familiar framework, allowing visitors dive right into the experience.

Rosita Henry:

Rosita is employing the methods of visual anthropology to document exchange transactions and other events. Visual media are now an accepted part of anthropological research and vital tools for collaboration with research participants and dissemination of research results. Rosita has already recorded a wealth of film footage on brideprice exchanges and mortuary exchanges that requires editing. She plans to use the facilities provided by the Cairns Institute to produce of an ethnographic film on contemporary cultural transformations in brideprice exchanges and several shorter ethnographic video clips for communication of results to the community and the broader public and as a means for integrating her research into her teaching.

Kristian Lupinski:

Kristian is a talented BA student of the Creative Industries (Media Design) program at the JCU. Throughout his life, he was involved in a number of video and film productions, such as these of the Little Earth Productions (Cairns). He is also a member of the Tropical Arts Council. At the end of the year, he is going to undertake a field trip to the Amazon. He is going to collect material for his audio-visual project that focuses on the culture of the Witoto Murui people. Currently, he is working with Daniela Vávrová on her film project about a Polish priest in Papua New Guinea.

Ton Otto:

Ton Otto's interests comprise the epistemology and methodology of ethnographic research, including visual and museum anthropology, and its relationship to innovation, intervention and design. His recent publications include the co-edited volume *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology* (Wiley-Blackwell 2010, with Nils Bubandt) and *Design anthropology: Theory and practice* (Berg 2013, with Wendy Gunn and Rachel Smith). He also codirected the films *Ngat is dead: Studying mortuary traditions* (DER, 2009, with Christian Suhr and Steffen Dalsgaard) and *Unity through culture* (DER, 2012, with Christian Suhr).

Daniela Vávrová:

Daniela's PhD project is an audiovisual ethnography in a Sepik community, Papua New Guinea. It focuses on the sensory experience and perceptions among the Karawari-speaking people of Ambonwari village. She implements audio-visual material into her writings and also made a feature-length film accompanying the thesis. The film explores the limits of sensory mediation through the screen while in the same time it plays with the infinite options of stimulation and interconnectedness of the senses possible only through the film experience. A separate film project in progress, beside her thesis, is a portrait of a Polish priest in Papua New Guinea. *Enet Yapai – an Ambonwari Girl* made for Daniela's MA thesis in 2008 was awarded a commendation prize and shown on many festivals of ethnographic film. For more details about Daniela's work visit her website > <http://rachel.reflectangulo.net/>

Katarzyna I. Wojtylak (Kasia):

Kasia is a PhD scholar in Anthropological Linguistics at Language and Culture Research Centre. Her project focuses mainly on the linguistic description of Witoto Murui, a South American indigenous language from the north-eastern part of the

Amazon rainforest in Colombia. During her fieldwork, Kasia collected numerous audio-visual materials with an intention to create a short documentary film about the Witoto Murui language and culture. Currently, while collaborating with the co-editor of the film, Kristian Lupinski, she is preparing her materials for editing.

Mike Wood:

Editing of a short film about a key mourning ritual among the Kamula people, Papua New Guinea. The ritual uses song and dance to allow for the intense expression of grief and compassion. The resulting video will be used for teaching purposes while other copies will be taken back to Kamula communities.

GUEST PROJECTS:

Seraeah Wyles:

Seraeah Wyles began filming with an idea of creating a series of films that showcase the importance of learning and sharing cultural knowledge within her traditional owner group 'Girramay' on her father's lineage. Her current project with the assistance of ABC Open was to create a short film 'Going home to Girramay' - showcasing the importance of making your connection to country, family and culture as well as the importance of also finding alternative ways to record cultural knowledge to share with future generations and also to inform the wider community of the roles and responsibilities that exist within each traditional owner group and how to rightfully respect one's cultural country. This short film has won the price for the best James Cook University Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Film Maker award at The Understory Film Festival which was held on 19 July 2014 >
<http://vimeo.com/user29218664>