Here is the late version:

Statement by Akane Ishibashi

For this course, we focused a lot on Jay Ruby’s (2000) book, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, in which Ruby examines the importance of film as a form of communication and education in ethnographic anthropology. Ruby focuses a great deal particularly on reflexivity in film and the filmmaker’s responsibility towards their subjects and audience. Ruby defines reflexivity in film in the following statement: “To be reflexive…is to insist that anthropologists systematically and rigorously reveal their methods and themselves as the instrument of data generation…” (Ruby 2000:152). For our project, each of us has reflected on our video-making and interview process in our Process Statements. By looking at the project reflexively, viewers will have a better understanding of the purpose behind it as an ethnographic work.

Ruby makes reference to filmmaker, Robert J. Flaherty, whose film, *Nanook of the North*, is considered one of the first ethnographic films (Ruby 2000:67). Flaherty was a founder of reflexive and participatory film, and he utilized this by involving his subjects in his filmmaking process. He wanted to tell the stories of his subjects by collaborating with them as he filmed (Ruby 2000:91-2). In our video, we involved our interviewees by having on-camera interviews, which allowed them to answer the questions honestly and however they liked. We had them sign the consent forms, and the purpose of the filming was explained to them beforehand, as well as the fact that it would be on Youtube. Consent forms are crucial in protecting the privacy and rights of participants (Ruby 2000:205). Ruby explains the use of on-camera interviews as a way to empower subjects and to avoid the voice-of-God narration, which could take away the voice of the subjects (Ruby 2000: 203-4). He argues that distortion of footage can occur in the use of filming styles or editing footage that will only express what the filmmaker wants (Ruby 2000:178). In editing the interviews, the goal was to keep as much dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee, as possible. The interviews were edited chronologically, and so the final footage is not manipulated in any way that would intentionally change their answers. I wanted to make sure that the answers of the participants weren’t generalized, to represent all Japanese students on campus, since that would not be fair representation.

Ruby argues that there should be a distinct separation of a film’s intent to be art versus a realistic depiction of the subjects involved (Ruby 2000:144). In the editing process, there were transitions and music added for opening and closing scenes, for aesthetic and entertainment purposes. Editing was done to make the scenes flow seamlessly, and this is as far as aesthetics went in the film. We wanted our subjects to speak for themselves so that they had a fair representation in our video project. For this reason, we chose to have them speak Japanese and add subtitles, so that their thoughts would be expressed in a way they felt most comfortable. For some scenes, we chose to do a voiceover, and the main reason for doing so was to cut down time for the final edit. For long scenes, where the interviewee was speaking and there were periods of silence, to shorten the time we translated the footage and summarized it. I wanted to keep as much of their thoughts in as possible, in order to represent them fairly, but I recognize that in summarizing, some sentiment may have been lost.

Looking back on the entirety of the project, there are some changes that I may have made in the process. In hindsight, I would have kept as much original interview footage in the final video as possible. Although doing voiceovers cut down the time of the video, the final video was a few minutes short of the maximum fifteen, and so I could have kept some of the longer footage in. Even though the process of translating all of the footage and putting in subtitles was meticulous, I would go through it again. It was a way of interacting with the interviewees and let them open up in a way that I think would be different, had the interviews been in English. I found it interesting that they didn’t necessarily choose Japanese dishes to make. We let them choose to cook whatever they wanted, and it turned out that they chose relatively easier dishes to make, because it was more convenient.

Going into the project, I had predicted that we would find the participants doing something special to maintain their cultural identity. What I found though was that they didn’t pay much attention to it, and cooked food based on convenience and preference, as everyone typically does. The project revolved around the main question of how the students would maintain their culture, however, I learned that such a subject is a difficult thing to capture in a video project. Since a person’s identity is not something he or she consciously thinks of, it’s not an easy question to answer. By asking questions and observing the participants, we were able to have their thoughts on the topic as well as see how their cultural identity was being shown. Ruby talks about interpreting the filmed behavior of participants and how culture is communicated through visual means. Ruby references Clifford Geertz, who argued that, “behavior must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behavior…that cultural forms find articulation” (Geertz 1973) (Ruby 2000:243). While our participants may not have realized how they show their cultural identity in food, it could be seen in the video that they showed it by keeping certain ingredients and staying connected with recipes through Mixi. This video project was certainly an interesting learning experience and by sharing the methods behind the video, viewers can have a better understanding of the project’s process and how the student’s cultural identity was observed.

Joo Shin

Final Reflection Paper

The purpose of the fifteen-minute food project was to inform the significance of food in relation to culture. The subconscious and conscious food choices that people choose everyday are related to his or her culture, family, and the way of living. Our group, the Japanese food project, interviewed three Japanese students who invited our group mate, Eri, to dinner. Our project was based on food, but it was much more complicated and demanding. We were required to correlate our video to *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* by Jay Ruby; using his foundation of ethnography and suggestions that Dr. Aimers have presented assisted us to create our first, and hopefully adequate food ethnography.

Dr. Aimers stressed the importance between food and human since the beginning of the class. I also personally believe that food is the most powerful symbol of culture; it is one of the most intense human communication and social connection. When a baby is born, the milk from the mother’s breast is the first contact between the mother and the infant; it is the first bond and the first love for the infant. It is a subconscious connection between the kin. This can be viewed easily in all of our interviews, especially from Taketo Igarashi. He indicates that his choice on food is based in convenience. But he subconsciously cares about the food he eats; it can be viewed in his Japanese spices and snacks that he had brought back from Japan. Food represents his or her culture and ethnicity but also subconsciously reminds the social connections with others while simply eating a meal. This proves one of the Ruby’s ideas where ethnographers should be able to decipher the action and the speech to gain knowledge behind the conscious.
In the process of editing, I realized that an editor is able to change the perspective of the whole film. Ruby signifies the manipulative ability of editing therefore it should be cooperated with anthropologist, director, and possibly a native to prevent it. Another difficulty that I encountered was the language barrier. Ruby emphasizes on the importance studying the culture and possibly the language to create ethnography. It was impossible for me to edit the video until Eri or Akane arrived to assist me with the language and the food seasoning that were in the clip and explain why it was important. In a broader picture, an ethnographer who is filming a culture without any knowledge will encounter complications. One of the major ideas that Ruby emphasize was to prevent the usage of "voice of God" narration; he believes that it reduces the reality of the ethnography. Our video consisted with interviews that went back and forth with the interviewer. Ruby strongly recommends to use the on-camera interviews to empower subjects and to avoid "voice of God". Our group tried avoiding the narration but with limited time it was necessary for us to use it to summarize the whole situation; therefore saving video time.

Statement by Eri Kurose submitted after class had started

Focusing on the Japanese international students’ living outside of the school, we tried to film how they maintain their identity in the food. When I watched the video again and reflected the process of film making, I could realize what we needed more to influence the audiences.

First, we could successfully convey some knowledge of the international students’ life. In the Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology, Ruby (2000:167) mentions, “anthropology is viewed…film as a medium for communication that can be used to convey the knowledge created with that system” (167). Considering about the statement, the film we made could achieve to inform the reality of the Japanese International students’ food lives in off-campus. For example, we could know the food they usually eat, the idea they mainly have toward the American food, the networking they commonly communicate and the recognition toward their identity. One of the reasons that they mentioned their honest opinions could come from the familiarity between the recorder and the students. There were no Americans during the film making. Therefore, we could communicate feeling at home and speaking Japanese. I imagine that their way of expressing their opinion might be different if there were the students who originally from the U.S. The conversation could be taken place in English and the menu they chose could be different concerning the others’ preference.

However, I realized that we did not reveal who we are. Ruby (2000:154) mentions, “There is a growing interest in knowing something about backstage” (154). The movie’s message would be conveyed more persuasively if we revealed who we are. It is because some of us had a little similar situation to them and the others had a same background as them. When people know who made the film, it will definitely give different opinions toward the film. Ruby (2000) insists the significance of the knowledge of the producer (156). When we share the same or similar identity with the targeted participants, the knowledge we have would be same or similar too. However, it is true that we could create the message stronger if we increased our knowledge before the filming.

Considering the film’s reflexivity, I think we could present the reality of the Japanese international students’ food habit with their identity well. However, we did not really motivate the audience’s curiosity to seek the knowledge deeply. Ruby (2000) argues, “being reflexive means that the producer deliberately, intentionally reveals to his or her audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused him or her to formulate set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his or her finding s in a particular way” (156). It is an idealized form, but if we starts with the movie raising the question of the relationship between the food and identity, the audience would more focus on and seek the answer during the movie.

References Cited

Ruby, Jay