

The NHI and visual anthropology. Response to Henning Engelke

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5142317

It is indeed true that in the early 1960s we see the expansion of visual anthropology, and several of the pioneers of this field, such as Allison Jablonko, Paul Byers, Sol Worth, Jay Ruby, among others, knew of Birdwhistell's work and were sympathetic to what he was doing with kinesics and with his ideas about the nature of human communication. There were others too, such as Martha Davis and Irmgard Bartenieff, who were much interested in the role of the body in communication, who knew Birdwhistell and his work. Alan Lomax, in developing his work in choreometrics was also part of the network that included Birdwhistell and others who, in various ways, were related to those who had been involved in NHI. However, since our paper aimed to describe the origins and development of the NHI project specifically, we felt it was a bit beyond our scope to go into these other influences very much. If one were to write about Birdwhistell and his wider influence (which was considerable), then indeed visual anthropology and choreometrics (as developed by Alan Lomax) would certainly need to be discussed, but given the aims we had set for ourselves with this paper, it did not seem appropriate for us to write about these things.

It is certainly important in giving an account of Bateson's work to discuss who he was making films with, so a mention of Weldon Kees is indeed appropriate. Kees could not have had any direct role in the NHI project, however, since he disappeared (and was presumed dead) in July 1955. He certainly had some influence on Bateson, as is suggested in Engelke's chapter, and his account of how Kees worked with Bateson and Ruesch is very useful.

As for the discussion of the issues of coding and the distinction between analog and digital modes of encoding, to my knowledge this distinction does not appear to have received much explicit discussion in the NHI seminars, at least not as far as I have been able to gather from the extant texts. Birdwhistell's chapter for NHI, as republished in *Kinesics and context* (1970), does not have any discussion

of this issue. Bateson, on the other hand, certainly discussed this from an early stage, as may be seen from Chapter 6 of *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*, which he co-authored with Jurgen Ruesch (Ruesch & Bateson 1951). The analog/digital issue does get one brief mention in Bateson's chapter in the NHI manuscript where he says, "We have seen that both the digital analysis of 'pip' or 'bit' phenomena and the analogic analysis of total pattern or system phenomena are appropriate on every level" (McQuown 1971: 5). Remember that the years of the NHI were early days in the development of discussions about the problems of coding in these terms. Discussions of this, especially in relation to language, became much more widespread later. As far as I can see, it was not an issue of focus in the NHI discussions, nor did it figure much in later discussions that followed on from the work of NHI.

References

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