

Anthropology of Music Masterclass *** 26th - 29th of June *** Prof. Steven Feld

Echo and Narcissus: Searching for Voice in Academic Speech

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Overview

In this presentation I cobble together the works of Steven Feld, the philosopher Adriana Cavarero, historian Mary Carruthers, anthropologist and education theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, anthropologists Tim Ingold and Bruno Latour. In stumbling tones I suggest that considering academic ways of thinking and making arguments in terms of a community of practice, even if a long established one, makes it possible to historicise academic ways of knowing that otherwise appear as necessary, correct, natural, and all other ways of knowing secondary.

As Feld (2015) argues listening is always a relational history of listening, therefore I attempt to listen to the traces of how previous anthropologists listened and learned to attend to the world. I draw on the experience of being taught academic ways of thinking, in particular how to create a coherent line of argument. In this pedagogy and subsequent ways of knowing, the musicality of language is explicitly considered secondary. I contrast this to the concerns of research theatre, whose practitioners strive to devise ways of knowing that are responsive to emergent ecologies of experience. Here musicality is considered in terms of responsiveness, and the aesthetic of sound is secondary.

These two ways of knowing converge in my personal experience, having trained in both. Through a performance/presentation I explore how this onto/epistemological convergence might revive voice in academic speech.

Formative qualities

In my recent research, called “Crafting Anthropology Otherwise”, I have explored the question: How can the ways of knowing of anthropology and research theatre mutually inform each other

in valuable ways? This question led me to studying the formative qualities of the craft of anthropology in relation to those of research theatre. In this presentation I will explore one formative quality from each of these distinguishable ways of knowing and I'll suggest one way in which they might work together.

One formative quality of anthropology, as in academia more widely, is the *logos*. This is a shorthand for a multitude of tasks that include analysis, rationality, and argument of various forms, but is also a label that carries with it a history of epistemological hierarchy with very real and serious effects in the world. In research theatre one formative quality that I will focus on in this presentation is the interest in exploring emergent ecologies of experience. Research theatre is a complex and multi-stranded ecology of practice and I will introduce the field through how I came to be engaged in it, relating my collaborative work with Ang Gey Pin, influences by Jerzy Grotowski.

The Logos

Firstly in relation to the *logos* in anthropology I present an autoethnographic example of learning how to organise sentences and paragraphs. What this pedagogical example draws attention to is how learning the discipline of anthropology shapes thoughts and narratives especially for the purposes of writing in a particular form – analysis and argument. In anthropology the late Dwight Conquergood was critical about this emphasis on writing, not because of writing itself but because of the way anthropological work participates in a system of logocentrism – in which the knowledge is assumed to be ‘true’ if it is in the register of the *logos*, reason, it also participates in the political systems by which people are controlled by how states read people, and this bleeds into anthropology in subtle ways, such as in Geertz influential understanding of culture as text to be interpreted.

In this logocentrism the musicality of language is explicitly considered secondary. If writing can be poetic great, but first and foremost the argument has to be clear. I ask why this has come to be so.

Adriana Cavarero writes that in the history of metaphysics any serious attention to the acoustic qualities of language, of *logos* was silenced as a result of being contrasted to vision.

One major stumbling block here is that the ancient philosophers Cavarero refers to developed their ideas by means of speech, through oratory. In retrospect Cavarero argues that the problem was dealt with by co-opting one aspect of *logos* into this rubric of truth to the exclusion of any

others. By varied processes *logos* loses its voice, and logocentrism becomes a system of knowledge that values rationality and reason above all else. However, Carruthers in her study of reading and memory in the medieval monasteries in Europe provides examples of the changeable historical continuity of this visualism.

To bring this back to anthropology, in the way anthropologists refer to the practice of thinking visual metaphors are still prevalent. This is also apparent in the description of thinking as reflection and self-awareness as reflexivity. And this even though for decades there has been an overwhelming interest in the senses. Both reflection and reflexivity are of course visual metaphors that depend on how mirroring works. Haraway has criticised the use of this optical metaphor of reflection because it extends the assumption that what scholarship is for is to understand and faithfully represent the world as it really is. That knowledge should hold a mirror up to the world. Her proposal is to shift to 'diffraction' instead of reflection, because diffraction generates multiple possibilities.

So on the one hand we have Haraway suggesting other visual metaphors, and Cavarero suggesting attention to the possibilities of acoustic grounding. Here I argue instead for attention to ecologies of experience based on my work in research theatre which I argue allows anthropologists to take other ways of knowing seriously precisely by extending the importance given to building relationships in fieldwork to the entire orthopraxy of anthropology.

Research theatre demonstration