

- Arjun: [00:11](#) Welcome to Episode Six of Anthropological Airways. My name is Arjun Shankar, postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. So far in this podcast, we've been laying the groundwork for our listeners to see the range of possibilities for anthropologists as public and political intellectuals, as researchers invested in the four field approach and as ethnography is interested in thinking differently about our work, given the tools available to us in the 21st century. And it's in this context that we present this episode which deals with multimodal anthropologies, a moniker that we deploy in the sense that our colleagues in American anthropologists multimodal anthropology section have encouraged as a way to both pay homage to the history of visual anthropology. Then informs much of this type of research, while expanding what we imagined as the outputs of anthropological work in image, sound, and text in the digital age. In this episode, you'll be hearing from Carolyn Rouse of Princeton University and Brent Luvaas of Drexel University, both of whom provide very different ways to begin answering this question. Really, if there's one thing that might feel both exciting and daunting about the multimodal, it's just how many possibilities these methods provide for really transformative work. I think with that, I'll pass it over to Tali Ziv and Kyle Olson, graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania. Please enjoy.
- Interlude: [01:45](#) H-how, how are you? I'm going, I'm going to go ahead and mix some music. I'm going to do so in a way that tells a story something never. Nobody's ever heard before.
- Tali: [01:55](#) My name is Tali. I'm a fourth year graduate student at Penn and I'm here with Carolyn Rouse and we're going to be talking about her multimedia work and your interest in media more generally. I guess we can start really broadly and maybe just if you could chat a little bit about your work and sort of what you think makes it multimodal or what sort of makes it multimedia more generally.
- Carolyn: [02:19](#) So I started out in visual anthropology studying with Tim Nash at USC and Michael Renoff who was in critical studies and in the film school and so at the time I had gone to graduate school because I just wanted to be a filmmaker. I'd worked with Fred Wiseman and then I'd worked on a major motion picture and I really just wanted to make documentary films, but I realized that it was difficult life, so I went on and got my PhD and while I was doing that I continue to make films, so I've always loved film. It was my, in a sense, Plan A, and being a professor was Plan B. And as many people know, anthropology still doesn't quite know how to treat film as the same as written work. I

know that at the University of Pennsylvania where you're from, John Jackson has been spearheading this effort to treat them as equivalent, but it's been very difficult. And so when I decided to join this profession, I put aside my visual anthropology in order to write, but I've always wanted to come back to it. And I made a film in South Africa. We finished it in 2015 and it's on venue and it's a cold listening is a radical act that deals with the question of world anthropology's with, uh, a group of international scholars who use ethnography. And I love it. It's very didactic. It's not what I learned in film school. So that's one way in which I've tried to continue my visual anthropology.

Carolyn:

[04:07](#)

I think now what I want to do with my department at Princeton is really try to find fun ways, not just fun, but really important ways to take these new digital technologies and try to educate people about anthropological theories and concepts and her data knowing that people have become so much more visual visual learners and that our work is actually more visual than we understand it. And that being able to translate those concepts visually will be really helpful. So were we created an ethnographic data visualization lab last year. We're still working on it and building it and one of the first things we're doing is we're taking data from 7,500 subjects around Philadelphia area, captured by this anthropologist and physician at CHOP where he was studying the development of these kids and we're now taking that data and we are using maps, ethnography, archival data and we're trying to understand and to see if there are actually environmental impacts on development.

Carolyn:

[05:15](#)

And it's a robust study. It's a difficult study and this was before consent forms were signed, but we want to be able to create a multimodal representation of what it is we capture. Because I liked the digital humanities, but there's a certain flatness to it, it's very archival, or you have these maps where you have these little dots on a map. We want those dots to become, you know, four dimensional, have elements of time and space and then people in those spaces, because what does it mean to move around the city that's polluted, and how does that impact the body? [These are] complex things. And we're just at the cutting edge of trying to figure that in fact our IRB at Princeton is scratching its head on even how to write, how to give us consent, but we feel like this is the future of this integration of digital technologies, humanities into anthropology. And I think that we could, we could do this better.

Tali:

[06:15](#)

It seems like in your work, you know, it is part of it, but you've also just focused on sort of media more broadly and the power of media, different types of media. And so we were curious to

sort of maybe hear you contrast a bit the potential of virtual reality versus even something like radio podcasts... in Televised Redemption, you sort of talk about the importance of these, of these media. And so I would just be curious to contrast them a little.

Carolyn:

[06:41](#)

So the media is capacious and we have to really clarify what we mean when we talk about media. And that was the struggle with the book because there's so much media, you know, what are you focused, what are your analytics? And so, I mean, I think this is one of the reasons why even making films is a difficult thing to equate with a book, let's say, because the action is in front of you, but how does it connect to theories and these theoretical conversations? So with respect to media, when I teach it, I teach it with respect to language theory because it's all about signifiers, juxtapositions, bricolage, you know, look, Lacan, de Saussure, Perice, right? It's a language and it's full of these pregnant signifiers. And I want my students to understand that they already have learned how to read media and the same with how they learned how to speak, right? They already know how to read it and I show them old films or on documentaries and they're like, ugh -- they can't even read it because it's too slow and there's an aesthetic issue and there's the cutting issue in there. All of these, it's so different. So that's one way in which I teach media studies is for them to understand. Um, and then also this question about ideology in and sell them and the power of, of, of the signifiers to create a kind of common consensus about reality that then blind you to its power, to lull you into thinking that it's all right, all factual.

Carolyn:

[08:31](#)

In the past I was starting this course called religion and media. And this year I've added religion ideology and media because as we know, just as religion as a cultural system, ideology is a cultural system. And I'm sort of shocked at how sort of Trumpism has replaced evangelical media, which brought the bushes to power. And really promoted Reagan totally illogical, almost devoid of any religious signifiers except occasionally they'll throw a bone around abortion or something like that. But basically there's nothing there that's particularly religious so. So it's an opportunity for the students to recognize the relationship between religion and ideology and just culture

Tali:

[09:15](#)

and what you've been talking about this far. There's this really interesting duality inherent with media, right? So there is this sort of power to do indoctrinated sort of cast an ideological spell over folks, but there's also the differential power that affords a particular type of recognition, a type of accessibility to represent yourself. And I know in the past you've sort of talked

about engaging media and especially sort of African American communities, engaging media to counteract some of those same forces. And so can you talk a little bit.

Carolyn:

[09:51](#)

Well, yeah, I mean I think that's what we talk about in the televised redemption is that work that was required to humanize the black race in this country. And you know, you have these three different faiths. Thinking about the particulars of that project differently, sort of all having to respond, they responded differently to Marcus Garvey's kind of, okay, it's time for us to, to flee and create our own state. Right? And of course the Christian said, no, we're digging in our heels, we're going to stay here. The Muslims are like, well, we want to stay here but we don't really want to work with white folks. And then the black communities are like we'll leave, you know, I think we'll leave but uh, you know? And, and also the language that all three of them are very different as well. You have the black Hebrew Israelites creating all sorts of new terms just to decolonize the self, your language and then you have the televangelists trying to empower people by getting them to embody the dispositions and practices of neoliberalism.

Tali:

[10:58](#)

And then you had the Nation of Islam that says we're okay with capitalism, but we want a moral economy built around us, supporting each other around a particular moral project. And so they use media in different ways. And so we don't want to be functionalist about our analysis, but you have radio, which makes sense for the Black Hebrews was because language is such a big part of what they're trying to do to empower people. And of course you have the televangelists which uses not just small media documentaries and radio, but big media. And then you have the Nation of Islam doing a lot with respect to publishing and publishing newspapers, writing themselves into their own history in a particular type of way. And the cartoons that I include in Televised Redemption, when they were first printed, people thought they were and insane. And I think what I hope people get when they read them is they didn't have a language for explaining how they felt at the other end of the police.

Carolyn:

[12:07](#)

Right? They didn't have a language that we have now when we talk about mass incarceration and terror, policing terror. So they were using visual images to represent their, their experience in really profound ways that now they don't look radical at all. And so they all had to find different ways to try to get people to be seen by others as, as human, but also for them to see themselves as human because a lot of the converts to Islam and they said they felt like they were in the mud. They felt like dirt

white supremacy can, does a number on black psyche, right? So that kind of rejection, the white savior of the kind of the idea that white people will save you, you just need them to accept you was empowering.

- Carolyn: [12:56](#) And so this is in part why I just taught a class at The School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell on "The Case Against Reparations: a Radical Rethinking of Social Justice in the 21st Century." Because what I've learned through my field work is that we don't need to be tied to somebody else repairing. We can do this ourselves because it's been done. And we just have to learn from it, embrace it.
- Tali: [13:24](#) Going back a bit then to the ethnographic, would you say that the combination of different types of media and modes creates some more accurate or precise representational form that has, doesn't have sort of the same danger inherent with it, just sort of run amok and enter these other types of discursive forms, these other types of ideological traditions?
- Carolyn: [13:50](#) I think, yeah, I mean, what I think of, I'm sitting here with you guys and you know, I see you, I hear you, um, were engaging linguistically with not only words but with concepts that we know. So you know, you see when you, you have both the book, the visual, the audio, it becomes more of how we learn as people. When you add, I think what you call multimodal media because each of these things has something to offer. And this, I mean this is what I have to apology does gives us context for understanding things and the multimodal just gives us more context because that context matters. Whether we're talking about exchange, where they're talking about medical anthropology, whether we're talking about legal anthropology, understanding how laws are created in context, how people understand health in context, how are built around these complicated interactions between money and exchange relationships in people and giving and taking and rights and duties.
- Carolyn: [15:01](#) So yeah, I celebrate all of this because even our books can be only one part of it's only one mode and they're wonderful. If you can get people to get through them, they're wonderful, right? And they explained so much, but multimodal forces you to explain the same thing in another form, which actually I think improves your translation of it. Again, if you're making a film, what kind of film would you narrate the film? Would it be a cinema verite? What kind of film would you do to represent that? So every time you choose another mode, you create a new kind of lens by which people can see the same thing, which

I think gives it more dimensions. I think that's where we need to go. So yeah, I think that that we should embrace it all as anthropologists.

Tali: [15:53](#) So I think you really made a case for why anthropology matters, which seems to be a question and we continue to ask ourselves over the many years, um, and that largely centers around sort of providing meaning and different forms of context. And so in terms of advice for fledgling anthropologists who are sort of setting out to create projects and to think about searching for new ways to provide both sort of context and also investigate meaning any sort of advice you can give on that process of thinking through the different utility of modes and have different modes or different media.

Carolyn: [16:31](#) So let's go to the oldest form, which is theory. Having spent six weeks with these graduate students and early professors, it's really important to take time to read. That's a separate thing to be part of a long ongoing conversation. A lot of the stuff we see now is not new. That's I think a really important piece. And I think social media such that, you know, people spend a lot of time online, and they need to break a little bit from that and go back to these powerful works. And then that's always in the back of your head, as you are in your field site. And another thing I want people to do is trust the experience and trust it and try as hard as you can to get away from your own identity politics. And that is even anthropology has a particular set of politics around theorists and theories and you have to free yourself from that too, again, trust the experience.

Carolyn: [17:38](#) And I say that in part because of, you know, race is such a powerful truth. I work in race. It's such a powerful trope. But sometimes you can want to please by saying things that you don't necessarily find in the field, but you feel, you know, you're supposed to because of the politics of citation, say things. But I think in the long run you have to really trust the experience. And if you do, that honesty, that brutal honesty, is what is needed. And so you have to trust that. And that's when you have to keep going back to try to figure out theoretically where you are. And then, and then there are so many different ways in which you can represent that and you're doing this now with podcasts and you can do that in photography to take the things that we can't necessarily say because of IRB or because it's too difficult to lay out the case. No one's going to listen to find other artistic forms to say what we want to say. And I think we should embrace that

- Stuart Hall: [18:54](#) Culture is saturated by the image in a variety of different forms. The image itself with the moving still and whether transmitted by a variety of different media seems to be able to have become the privileged sign of late modern culture and modern culture is not only that culture which one finds in the advanced industrial, postindustrial, society of the Western world, but because of the global explosion in communication systems, it is also these saturating media, the saturating idiom of communication worldwide.
- Kyle: [19:43](#) My name is Kyle Olson, I'm a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania and the Department of anthropology. So today we're here with Brent Luvaas, of the Department of Anthropology at Drexel University. The reason we wanted to interview you was because of your recent book, Street Style, an Ethnography of Fashion Glogging. Could you tell us a little bit about it?
- Brent: [20:01](#) Sure. Well, this is a book that grew out of a project I started about five or so years ago now, just gotten back from Indonesia and was looking into a way to do a continuation of my research over there and came across a number of people that had been involved with the indie music and fashion scene that I had been studying in Indonesia who were now doing fashion blogs, and through that became interested in this larger project of blogging. And one day I was looking through a set of Indonesian fashion blogs that I look through. They were talking about a certain street style blogger named Ivan Rodic I didn't know of at the time who was in Indonesia photographing cool looking people, putting them up on his blog called Facehunter. And we're super excited about this guy there. So I looked him up and discovered a whole network of other blogs that he was connected to who were doing this thing called street style blogging, basically wandering around their home cities, taking pictures of people that they thought were interesting looking, putting up them up on their blog.
- Brent: [21:02](#) And I saw sort of a lot of commonality between what I do as an anthropologist who's focused on youth culture, or at least at that time was very focused on youth culture and style and what these guys were doing, going around to different countries, document what it looks like to be young, hip and urban at any given moment. So I started to be to follow a number of street style bloggers from around the world. Thought there was an interesting project to do about street style is that kind of mode of amateur visual anthropology. And I'm the only way that I could think to do the kind of participant observation research that I do about this group of people who are scattered all over

the world was to start my own blog, urban field notes and connect with a number of other street style bloggers around the world through that medium. So it became this kind of hybrid project of the digital, uh, in terms of, you know, putting posts, posting stuff on my blog, engaging in conversations with bloggers all over the world through that, but then also going out in the streets of Philadelphia and New York primarily, uh, taking pictures of people that I came across myself and really understanding in an embodied way what it takes to be a blogger and to do this kind of. Yeah.

Kyle: [22:14](#) Yeah. So I think there's an important lesson to be learned there about following the lead of your ethnographic subjects, right? But then the question that I think becomes more general is for just any ethnographer, this question of auto ethnography that you use in your book.

Brent: [22:29](#) Well, you know, I think it's really critical if you're doing this kind of auto ethnographic work, that it's really is a kind of anthropology of becoming right? It's about becoming that which you study, right? You're breaking down sort of collapsing that, that artificial boundary between you and your research subject in a way that is perhaps more pronounced than another kinds of ethnographic research. And the only right way, I think, to effectively do that is to treat your interlocutors as those people who are there to instruct you on how to do it right. Tim Ingold talks about learning from our research subjects rather than about them. And I think this is a really classic example of where you would have to engage in that sort of ethnographic work. So it was about me being in the sustained dialogue with street style bloggers and photographers who are doing this kind of work, asking them about their methodology, observing them doing it, and then trying to apply it myself on the streets of Philadelphia. Just wandering around with a camera, trying out those techniques, trying to emulate the kind of images that they were producing, trying to figure out what it takes in real practical, immediate terms to produce that kind of work.

Ivan Rodic: [23:50](#) My name is Ivan and I'm a blogger. I'm reading a book on face hunter and face onto international street style blog. I try usually to do meet and photograph people who have a unique lifestyle who going at least do the things in their own way and express themselves visually through the closing.

Kyle: [24:22](#) The other really interesting aspects of the book and also the blog, Urban Fieldnotes is this question of the blog being this sort of thing in the academy where academics say, we need to engage the public. How should we do it? Let's have a blog. But

you took it one step further and the blog was not just about communicating with an intended audience, although it was that, but also as a research tool in and of itself.

Brent: [24:45](#) Yeah. It was an interesting balancing act, so I didn't entirely know what I expected the technology to do for me when I first started. The project I knew I wanted to be really transparent about how I was doing this work and I wanted to have something like open access field notes for the project, so I thought, alright, my audience is going to experience through, you know, along with me what it is that I'm going through right now. And so I wrote a lot of my daily notes about the experience of being out on the street of learning to use my camera properly of interactions that I had with other bloggers. Then when I started attending fashion week events, who I was encountering, how I was attempting to shoot them, what it's like to shoot alongside other people and then I'd get real time feedback from other people who were at the same events that I was at about their experience, about the way I described it, how it may have differed from the way that they experienced it. And that was really useful, really valuable material for me.

Brent: [25:44](#) At the same time, I envisioned the blog as being a way to connect with and engage with a larger community of street style bloggers and it was that to a certain extent, particularly in the early days when I set about to systematically interview and then post my interview and urban field notes with all the people that I could manage to to to find who are part of that world. So I used it as a. As a way of forging these kinds of connections and this goes back to some of what I was saying before about how the field that I was studying or this this object that I was this sort of subject position I was attempting to occupy with shifting as I was attempting to occupy. Now. One part of the equation is that the blog stopped being important to the bloggers that I was working with and that I was studying.

Brent: [26:36](#) But blogs simply don't have the same status and the fashion industry that they did five years ago. That role is now fulfilled by instagram almost exclusively. And so a lot of the people that I was identifying as bloggers were letting their blogs go towards the end of my research, and so what are they now? They're not bloggers anymore. This particular medium that we're using to define themselves is not the basis of their identity anymore. So many of the people that I talked about as bloggers that are identified as bloggers at the beginning of the project, but at the end of the book where either we're identifying themselves primarily as photographers and a lot of you know, other kinds of fashion bloggers have redefined themselves now as influencers,

because influencers have influence across media platforms. They're not defined by their blogs or they're defined by the kind of content they produce. So that's the shift. That's how that happened, as I was attempting to become a blogger.

Brent: [27:55](#) I would say that there is something of an anti-fashion bias in anthropology, which I get, in fact, I share it to a certain extent because I conflate like many other anthropologists and social scientists committed to social justice issues. A natural distrust of an industry that profits off of promoting very particular models of personhood or not others, right? And also certain forms of consumption. It an industry, of course, that requires us to continually buy and discard. And as a consequence, fashion of course is the number two most polluting industry on earth. And so we have just in terms of the production process, the dyes, the carbon costs of shipping things around the world, the, um, the landfills, the chemicals that are, that are in clothing, what after they're discarded the leach into the soil and the waterways or this is a major industry that profits off of convincing people that they need to look and be a certain way, right?

Brent: [29:00](#) And that they have to purchase in order to do that. One of the reasons that anthropologists are just so distrustful of fashion is that fashion has a tendency to take things that have a real meaning and consequences in people's lives and turn them into something disposable. Commodities it to come out. And it is exactly, but commodities specifically that are meant to, um, become obsolete quickly, right? Commodities to be quickly replaced by other commodities. And so when cultural appropriation happens in fashion, which it does routinely and repeatedly, right? That's why it matters because it ends up turning something that has real value in consequences in people's everyday lives into something cheap and disposable that we're going to get rid of and go onto something else. And it is the situation where for western cities, New York, London, Paris, and Milan dominate the production and dissemination of fashion worldwide and which, innumerable other parties have attempted to break into that set of four power players in the industry for decades now.

Brent: [30:17](#) And you see, for example, Tokyo, it has positioned itself as the fifth fashion center, but it never quite solidified... Shanghai is another major contender for that right now. Seoul has been vying for that position. And it has real consequences for the economies at large and these countries for quite a number of reasons. One of these is that there's a hierarchy setup within the fashion industry which has really wide, broad sweeping

effects between those countries, mainly the United States, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom who are, by and large responsible for the design and marketing and fashion, and they dominate the fashion industry in terms of those high-status and high profit-reaping aspects of fashion. Now most of the rest of the world is confined either to being consumers of fashion or manufacturers of the outsourced designs of those major fashion capitals.

Brent: [31:22](#) So why does Japan care about putting Tokyo on the fashion map? Why does Jakarta care about putting Indonesia the fashion map? Well, it matters because being known for the design and marketing and dissemination of fashion fundamentally alters the kinds of jobs and economic possibilities that are available within that sort of space. It alters the power relationships to the fashion world. Right? And so what I was interested in when I was interested in street style was really was in fact fundamentally an issue of social justice because what street style bloggers were doing was attempting to put their own cities on the fashion map in a meaningful way and to make them matter to the international fashion industry. And back in 2005, it looked like it was working for a short period of time. But you know, when, when street style blogs started, it seemed to me like this was a moment of finally, you know, their industry is stopping to pay attention to what's going on and always places that didn't use to matter to it except as sources of manufacturer.

Brent: [32:26](#) I mean Seoul and Tokyo are maybe the most successful examples of people who have really used streetstyle to put themselves out there. But it was happening in Buenos Aires, it was happening in Rio de Janeiro, happening all these kinds of places. Sao Paolo became a fashion destination in no small part because of the street style photographers who started to document Sao Paolo fashion week. And then when it started to matter, people started sending in a, you know, professional street style photographers to shoot it. Tblisi in Georgia became, just in the last year has become, a major fashion story because of this.

Brent: [33:17](#) The government of Georgia recognized that street style actually mattered. And if the fashion industry is strong within a country, it attracts a luxury high end tourist, right? And so, I have several of my friends who shoot for major fashion publications now who have been doing some street style thing for a long time had been paid, and I don't know who exactly the entity within the government is paying for his paying, paid Vogue and W and all these magazines to cover it. Right. And so then they send out

their house photographers to do it. So that's like. So this is the political economics of street style, right? In these kinds of encounters and how you get this tap and you know, Ivan Rodic's job, full time job, is to be paid by entrepreneurs who have some kind of stake in putting their own city on the map for the fashion industry to fly out there and document how cool the kids are in that town. Right?

Kyle: [34:15](#)

Yeah. So it's the commodification of cool, in a way.

Brent: [34:18](#)

It is very much so. When I interviewed him back in, I think it was 2014, he had had been to 52 different cities, in 24 different countries. He lives, and I put in air quotes, in London, but doesn't really spend any time there, because he's being flown all over the world to to show how cool they are. They're seen as it has consequences.

Arjun: [34:53](#)

In this episode, you heard samples from Stuart Hall's On The Ubiquity of the Image King Crimson's Matte Kudasai, Claudia's TED talk about "How to translate the feeling into sound", Mark Ronson's TED talk on how sampling changed music, Ivan Rodic, speaking about his work and some clips from Tbilisi fashion week. Thank you all for listening and I hope you'll tune in to our next episode which turns our attention to biological anthropology and hominid evolution will be talking to Ralph Holloway at Columbia University and Shara Bailey of NYU. Please do tune in next.