

“Visualizing Culture”

**Guest Professor Dr KAWASE Itsushi,
Grenada Centre for Visual Anthropology,
Manchester University**

The Department of History and Cultural Studies, Mekelle University, has invited the visual anthropologist, Dr Kawase Itsushi from Manchester University to give a course for graduate students and interested staff on visual anthropology and filming, as a Abba Gorgoryos Guest Professor (as the second of a planned longer series of the *Abba Gorgoryos Guest Professorship*). The Centre of Social Anthropology, Institute of Palaeoenvironment and Heritage Conservation, was invited to collaborate and send interested staff and graduate students.



Dr Kawase during the course “Visualizing Culture”, 22 July 2011

After longer preparations, Dr Kawase was able to secure funds for a journey to Ethiopia in July 2011, and the date for the planned course was set on mid-July, to be offered to the summer MA students in the Department of History and Cultural Studies, and open for graduate students from other backgrounds.

The Guest Professor showed himself most interested in the developments of the Department and other institutions in the university, and very openly offered a wider future collaboration. He conceived his course very flexibly in most constructive collaboration with the Department. After his arrival, a change of concept was carried out in collaboration with him and other interested departments: The registration deadline for the summer MA students was prolonged on short notice by the University management, beyond the already fixed dates of the stay of Dr Kawase; as a consequence the course of Dr Kawase started one day later, in order to clarify the question of participation. In a fruitful cooperation with Alula Ayele from the Centre of Social Anthropology, the course was opened to interested MA students of Social Anthropology of the first and second studies year, MA students of History and Cultural Studies of the first year, and selected staff members of the latter two Departments and the Department of Heritage Conservation.



Dr Kawase during the course "Visualizing Culture", 22 July 2011

Dr Kawase had prepared an intensive block course for a small, concentrated group of participants, in order to be able to work with every participant intensely, which was accomplished (eight participants). The course entitled "Visualizing Culture" was held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (22 – 24 July 2011) in the Management Hall (Main Campus), ending with a public film screening of ethnographic and historical films on Ethiopia, in collaboration with Dr Wolbert Smidt, Associate Professor in

Ethnohistory at the Department of History and Cultural Studies. Participation certificates are given to the participants.

On the first day, different categories of modes of documentary film were presented, each illustrated with extracts from films using the respective mode; every mode was represented by examples from at least two films. The modes included the classical observational (predominant in the case of ethnographic films) and expository modes, but also other more experimental modes of film-making. The film material presented included mainly films shot in Ethiopia, but also in Paris and in Kyoto. Every presentation of every mode was followed by an intense analysis and discussion. Later in the seminar Dr Kawase explained basic practical and conceptual rules of filming and then moved to practical exercise, forming two groups. One group produced a short film on the management building with focus on cleaning women (observational mode), the other group produced film material on “village life” in the campus, focusing on persons of different social status (expository /reflexive mode). Both raw films were discussed and analyzed by the course conductor Dr Kawase and the participants.

In addition, he also presented three films focusing on sound, which helped the participants to understand how modern visual anthropology now focuses not only on the image, as it was classically the case, but now tends to develop into a conceptually wider “sensual” anthropology, taking into account that culture is not constructed and formed through “words” alone, but through images and a wide range of use of other senses. At the end of the course there was a public film screening, with analysis and discussion: Three films shot by Ethiopian and foreign visual anthropologists and film-makers were fully screened, all three with focus on Ethiopia. Topics were “Esset” (a film on the ensete of the Gurage); “Awura Amba” (a film on a community in southern Gondar, by an Ethiopian visual anthropologist); the “Return of the Aksum obelisk” (a film co-directed by the known Ethiopian film-maker Samson Giorgis).

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