

WEBCAM AND THE THEORY OF ATTAINMENT

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This paper consists largely of extracts from what will be a first draft of a book we are currently writing for Polity Press to be published under the title *Webcam*. The reason for writing such a book at this point should be obvious. Each year seems to bring some genuinely important new development in communications, whether Facebook, the smartphone or Twitter. But our sense is that over the last year the most influential development has been the widespread adoption of webcam, mainly through Skype as a mode of regular communication, often by groups such as the elderly who otherwise have been resistant to new media technologies but welcome the potential of webcam to speak to relatives abroad or admire their grandchildren. Our ethnography suggests that the core usage is of particular concern to anthropology since it is focused around close relationships, kinship, couples and best friends.

Our data comes from two main sources. A more dedicated period spent in Trinidad which included 70 more formal interviews, but in the context of a more general ethnography carried out by Jolynna Sinanan over several months in a small out of the way town. She was joined in this fieldwork by Danny though he was present for a shorter visit. The research was funded by RMIT Melbourne and from UCL. In addition Danny had carried out a pilot project interviewing mainly students living abroad. So there are around 100 main informants for this study. As the analysis and writing developed, we found that the book has also become a case study that can be used to exemplify and develop points made in the introduction to the book *Digital Anthropology* (Horst and Miller 2012) which has been published this month. In the new book on Webcam these ideas take on a new form which we will call a 'Theory of Attainment.' In this paper we briefly discuss the theoretical trajectories leading to this theory of attainment and provide short examples from two chapters and a longer study from a third chapter that give more of a sense of the content we envisage for this volume and why this particular theory seems appropriate as a means to appreciate the academic significance of the adoption of webcam.

The introduction to *Digital Anthropology* (Miller and Horst 2012) presents six basic principles that should be considered in the development of these nascent digital

anthropology studies. One of these principles states that 'Digital Anthropology will be insightful to the degree it reveals the mediated and framed nature of the non-digital world. Digital anthropology fails to the degree it makes the non-digital world appear in retrospect as unmediated and unframed. We are not more mediated simply because we are not more cultural than we were before.' (p13) The problem is that there is a natural tendency to take the world we live in at any particular moment as the bedrock of our authenticity, a world that has come to appear natural or at least natural in comparison to the changes that are currently occurring around us. So any new media is experienced as an additional 'mediation' to our lives. In popular journalism, conversation, but also frequently in academia (as in the recent book by Turkle 2011). It's as though we imagine conversation between two people standing in a field as the original, unmediated and natural form of communication, while a technology is something artificial that imposes itself between the conversationalists and 'mediates' that conversation.

To quote again from that introduction 'This is entirely antithetical to what anthropological theory actually stands for. In the discipline of anthropology all people are equally cultural, that is the products of objectification. Australian Aboriginal tribes may not have much material culture, but instead they use their own landscape to create extraordinary and complex cosmologies that then become the order of society and the structures guiding social engagement (e.g. Munn 1973, Myers 1986). In anthropology there is no such thing as pure human immediacy; interacting face-to-face is just as culturally inflected as digitally mediated communication but, as Goffman (1959, 1975) pointed out again and again, we fail to see the framed nature of face-to-face interaction because these frames work so effectively.' A conversation through webcam is not more mediated than a conversation conducted through the appropriate etiquette dictated by kinship.

This is the principle, but how in practice does one write a book about a new media that manages to reject the idea that this is a new mediation compared to how we used to be? Fortunately there is some help from the informants, particularly younger informants. They are the ones who are most likely to reverse the concept of 'natural.' For them texting is obviously more sensible and authentic with more chance to consider and reply at convenience. While the previous technology, for example the landline phone call, is positively barbaric in its clunky, intrusive and constraining nature. For them, the prior period of technology is not closer to nature but further from nature, a series of awkward and deficient technologies that they are only too glad to get away from. But above all, these older technologies stood in the way of their ability to be what they are now. And what they are now is understood to be the natural and given capacity of a human being.

The second trajectory in the development of this theory comes from an earlier period when Miller, working with Slater (2000) had early argued for four phases in the social

usage of new communications based on a study of the internet. They had unfortunately rather clunky labels, including the one of main concern here, which was the *expansive realisation*. This label was used to argue that people who have access to a new media are at first usually concerned to use this technology to facilitate things they already had been trying to do but were thwarted by the lack of means, before they turn to more unprecedented uses. So the emphasis is on a humanity in some ways always in a situation of incompleteness with respect to what we want to be or do.

If we combine these two perspectives, we can see how they point away from humanity as a position of prior authenticity, or a given condition, by focusing instead of humanity as a project that is never complete but always in various ways frustrated by lack of means. It is this that leads to our new theory of attainment. A Theory of Attainment is one in which we view a new technology in terms of its facilitating our ability to attain something, rather than disrupting some prior holistic being. The word attain implies that although it was not previously achievable it was already latent in the condition of being human, rather than being simply a possession of the technology itself. The details of the theory will be presented in our book, but the overall point is that most of what we observe in the usage of webcam is best understood as the resolution of a prior contradiction or in the achievement of something that was previously frustrated. We hope that this theory of attainment will be clearer and more developed than the prior notion of expansive potential, though it incorporates those earlier ideas. It is also employed to carry through the principle established in digital anthropology that we are not increasingly mediated. In essence, this requires a change in our view of humanity as a project that is never complete because the meaning of the term humanity now includes latent potentials, some of which are realised with the advent of new technologies.

The book is still first drafty so this is subject to change, which may include responding to criticism and comments in this seminar – so don't pull your punches. But as things stand, we predict the following chapters. After the introduction come two chapters which will be briefly referred to here - on the topics of self-consciousness and intimacy. We give more space here to the next chapter on place. What will not be covered in this discussion is the chapter that deals with relationships, nor the chapter on Polymedia which is concerned to situate webcam in the context of all other media. Then, prior to the conclusion, there is a final chapter on visibility and the wider implications of having a visual component to communications. While most of the chapters are based on data from interviews and observations on personal communication we have deliberately emphasised commercial usage when discussing the issue of visibility in general, partly because of the light it sheds on this topic, and also in reference to an important earlier

paper on visuality 'The Rhetoric of the Image' by Roland Barthes (1977) which also rested on the example of commercial imagery.

The first substantive chapter of our book concerns the topic of self-consciousness. It starts from the observation that when people use webcam though Skype and other similar platforms, they become intensely aware of the small box in which they see themselves. The reason for this, it is suggested, is that although in the past we have had mirrors and we have had photographs or videos, in all such cases we strike poses or in some ways perform to create the image that we then see of ourselves. Mostly these images have also been relatively static. By contrast, when we are on Skype for an hours conversation and on increasingly frequent occasions, we become less inclined and able to maintain these self-consciously performative versions of ourselves, and lapse instead to an appearance which is still performative but had developed without the same degree of self-consciousness because it had not been visible. As a result, and for the very first time in human history, we routinely observe ourselves as we have always appeared to others in the course of ordinary conversation.

How does this illustrate a theory of attainment? As soon as we consider in abstraction the potential capacity of a human being to see themselves as others see them, we can quickly appreciate how absurd is the notion that an inability to do this is somehow the natural condition of humanity. It is only the past condition of humanity. Such a natural condition exists mainly in myth. The Greek myth of Narcissus implies that a human being existed at some phase of humanity who had never been able to view themselves as a physiognomy, until perchance they spied themselves in the surface of a lake, with in that case rather dire consequences, but also as the birth of self-consciousness. The psychoanalyst Lacan could be considered an equivalent myth maker.

Of course, still lakes exist as do burnished surfaces that reflect. Any animal has the capacity to see themselves. But human beings unlike, we imagine, most animals differ in that they have huge investments in the imaginative construction of selves including selves as they feel others must judge them. Piaget is better guide than Lacan. Even as children, we are the ones that construct this capacity. We dwell within a huge city of structures of embarrassment and shame, make-overs, self-consciousness and embellishment or our appearance. Recent archaeological discoveries of pigments in sites inhabited by Neanderthals suggest these structures have foundations earlier than our modern species. So we have always possessed the cultural ability to imagine ourselves as others see us and strive to work on that appearance. What has been lacking is the technical facility that matched this cultural facility, other than the static mirror. So webcam is not some artificial transformation of what it is to be culturally

human it is more a case of bringing machines as technology up to scratch with culture as technology.

None of this has been a barrier to the way in which humanity at any given moment understands itself as the `natural' condition of being. We do not these days consider that the ability to look in a mirror or to see ourselves in a photograph is some profound disruption to an otherwise natural state (though see Melchoir-Bonnet 2002). But with the appearance of each new technology that facilitates a movement in this ability to see ourselves, it will first have been experienced as a threat to the given condition of humanity. Yet it seems reasonable to suppose that people might, for all sorts of reasons, have wanted to know how they looked to others in routinized everyday conversational mode, and even without webcam we took considerable measures to construct what we hoped was the best or an acceptable version of this imagined self. Though as our chapter demonstrates this has now been supplemented by the desire of most users to also `put on a face' for the express purpose of appearing on webcam. So the ability to see oneself as one appears in ordinary sustained conversation is an attainment. Not necessarily comfortable, or always desired, indeed sometimes feared. But nevertheless, an attainment that allows us to accomplish something that - if we had previously been able to achieve - would have seemed to us as entirely natural, a given presumed condition of being human, it's just that previously we couldn't do it.

Chapter three addresses the topic of intimacy. The argument made in this chapter again resonates strongly with the point made in the introduction to *Digital Anthropology*. The reason is that the very term `intimacy' carries with it the connotations of the most unmediated and most natural aspect of our relationships. Whether this pertains to the essential and natural physical co-presence of two people engaged in sexual intercourse or the immediacy of encounter between two people who are involved in intense emotional and affective relationships. We therefore assume we know what intimacy ought to be, or what can properly be considered as intimate. Webcam seems at first to be precisely an artificial mediation that creates an improper, denuded and quite possible fake version of intimacy. But as this chapter unfolds we also see a very different story unfold.

In this chapter, we explore the degree to which prior to webcam, all forms of intimacy were thoroughly dependent upon the construction of particular conditions of ambience that allowed people to experience this feeling of togetherness as natural. Thanks to webcam we come to appreciate just how much work it has taken to culturally create the conditions of feeling natural and close. This is perhaps clearest in the discussion of what we call `always-on' webcam which attempts to re-construct the intimacy of `natural' co-presence of two people living together in the same house and sharing the

same rooms. Exactly as befits the principle stated in the introduction to *Digital Anthropology* it is only with the advent of webcam that we come to appreciate the quite bizarre nature of living together under the same roof with all its subtle rules of speech and silence, attendance and aversion. Similarly it is webcam that helps confirm the centrality, indeed dependency, of co-present sex upon fantasy, and why in some cases people need webcam to repair the damage of co-present sexual relations and come back to a relationship to sex itself that is sustainable and feels comfortable. As a result this chapter provides several original insights as to what intimacy, and also sex, has previously been. Intimacy is not more mediated by webcam, webcam merely reveals the prior frames and mediations of intimacy.

There is just about room here to give a more extended example, and this is derived from the next chapter in our book which deals with our sense of place or location and particularly, the idea of home. The early part of that chapter focuses on issues of attention and whether a person is regarded as really present to the other. But the latter part of the paper turns to the question of home itself and whether and how webcam destabilises and problematizes the notion of home. Followed by the various ways it reconstructs a concept and experience of home in its own right.

During the study of Facebook in Trinidad that preceded the fieldwork on webcam Miller (2011) realised that in one respect we might need to radically re-think the way new media have been conceptualised with regard to place. Much of Miller's previous work, as that of many other academics (e.g. Fortunati, Pertierra and Vincent 2011), had concentrated upon usage by diasporic migrants. An obvious focus of anthropological analysis, which also accorded with what users saw as common sense. As a result we had come to understand the main impact of new media as a means to re-connect people now living in distant homes. In another project, Madianou and Miller had focused upon the extreme example of new communication media being used to re-connect Filipina mothers in the UK with their left-behind children in the Philippines (e.g. Madianou and Miller 2012). All of this would cast webcam in the position of helping to repair the breach between people sundered by their separation. In effect, these studies situate webcam as conservative with respect to place, simply because communication is used principally to bring these already established places back into relation with each other.

But the study of Facebook suggested an alternative way of conceptualising these media. Instead of seeing the media as connecting separate locations, we may now have reached the point where we should start to think of new media as places within which people in some sense live. A third place distinct from the two offline locations. Three factors contributed to this radical re-thinking of the relationship between media and

place. The first was that with mobile smart phones, it was no longer the case that specific location was of particular consequence. It really didn't matter where a person and their phone was any more. The situation is now one of connecting people through the medium of the phone itself, in which they were temporarily within the same place as the phone, rather than being connected as otherwise located persons.

The second point was that people in Facebook spent a considerable amount of time working on the look and style of their appearance online, as had perhaps been even more the case with MySpace. Horst (2009) had shown how these aesthetic concerns with the look of their online location could be co-terminus with the aesthetics of the rooms of the teenagers she had studied in California. The question is often raised as to why people spend so much time cultivating the appearance of their online sites, with photos and other paraphernalia. But if instead of seeing Facebook as merely a mode of communication it was designated as the place in which you lived then this transforms our perception of such activity. What we can now understand is that designing our appearance on Facebook is actually a new form of home decoration, which makes it much less strange and more amenable to conventional analysis.

The third factor comes not from Facebook but from webcam itself, where the phenomenon we describe as 'always-on' has the clear accoutrements of people living together in the same space. In this situation, the conjuncture of space is created by webcam itself. A couple lives in the join created by webcam as much as in the places that are joined. All three factors may be reinforced by the more general observation with regard to Facebook that it was people whose location was constrained who in effect lived all day on Facebook. The example of Dr Karamath, who couldn't leave his house for reasons of illness, but created a sociable and cosmopolitan life online is one of the stories in *Tales from Facebook* (Miller 2011)

It would be simplest to proclaim this as a Copernican shift in our perception; rather than webcam being that which connects two places, we come out from those places to dwell in this new space which is webcam itself. But what this would do is merely confirm a prior period as the stable moment of taken for granted domestic co-present location, which is now disrupted by this extraordinary new possibility of being located as-it-were outside of location. So calling this a Copernican shift seems radical – a new way of seeing online space, but is actually again conservative because of the way it then naturalises the sense of space we are presumed to have possessed prior to webcam. It would break the principle established in *Digital Anthropology* and could thereby easily contribute to an ideology of domesticity that was always conservative. As traditional studies of the household noted (Netting, R. Wilk, R. and Arnould 1986) there were always diverse configurations of the triangle between house, family and household,

ranging from tribal men's houses to homes which did not assume kin relations between occupants. Even in countries such as Canada, Norway and the UK amongst ordinary suburban populations the relationship to the home is much more dynamic than is usually acknowledged (Clarke 2001, Garvey 2001, Marcoux 2001). While in these countries the home acts to give residence to a household, Gudeman and Rivera (1990) show how in many peasant families, it is the people who are subservient to the interests represented by the continuity of the home itself. It is also well established that media have an important bearing on the way people understand both their concept of home (see Morley 2000 for an extensive discussion), and a substantial impact also on their sense of homeland (see Basu 2007). So instead of affirming a natural prior condition we might welcome the way new media returns anthropology to this much broader and earlier anthropological understanding, rescuing us from the parochial assumption of the domestic home or the nuclear family.

At the recent EASA in Paris Tom Macdonald and Razvan Nicolescu hosted a session which was devoted to breaking away from these ideologies of the home as stability. A good example would be a recent paper by the geographer Katherine Brickell (2012) based on her studies of divorce and separation in Cambodia. Her paper includes a useful bibliography which contains many studies showing how the ideology of the home papered over several problematic issues including domestic conflicts and contradictions between household members, requiring she argues, a more critical geography. In these studies the concerns are as much about unacknowledged tensions in kinship as much as location.

All of this gives us scope to consider the ways in which new media both de-stabilise the concept of home or help us appreciate the degree to which it was rarely as stable as implied by its own ideology. Perhaps the most familiar example of new media as disruption occurs when teenagers gain access to computers in their own room. Parents may almost palpably feel this sense that their children have stopped living in their home, but rather, as in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, the personal computer has become a portal that allows their children to escape the confines of their own bedrooms and live in some other world entirely. A particularly extreme version of these contradictions was evident in an excellent MSc thesis by Penni Fu, a student in the UCL Digital Anthropology program, looking at the impact of computers upon urban children in China. As a result of the one child per family policy, parents feel huge pressures to see the computer as facilitating the education of their children. For urban Chinese education is of immense importance. As a result they tend to repress the evidence that actually this is the machine that gives their children the means to escape from these educational

pressures within the privacy of their own rooms. In practice, the children use the computer for pretty much the exact opposite to the intended purpose.

In a similar vein, the webcam can be said to increase homesickness. Individuals may strive to become reconciled to absence, so that they can achieve a gradual adaptation to their new environment. Prior media such as phone conversations were less disturbing of this process. But the intensely personal and visual contact facilitated by webcam has made this a media that can disrupt this ideal of gradual settling in, and informants talk as though through the use of webcam they had suffered a relapse back to a less reconciled state. 'Yes. Um, sometimes I do definitely have that feeling of "OK, the Skype conversation is over, I'm suddenly not there anymore.'" It's kind of hard because you have to reconnect with reality, and the reality of the distance. So I do find it hard, sometimes I do find it lonelier, even though I am surrounded by people.' Similarly, a mother notes 'I would Skype her and she would say I'm not preparing anything to eat tonight, I just have a sandwich and you will feel really guilty as a parent because that is one of the basic things you need to do and you tell yourself. 'I can't even prepare a poor meal for this child'. Another person once made a callaloo (the Trini national dish) to show her relative abroad. But having seen the reaction decided never to do so again. The visual evidence of home cooking seems to be particularly disturbing.

By the same token, people may feel that webcam obviates the need to establish any kind of reconciliation with the new physical location. There are Filipina women in London who have almost no relationship to London itself - they never eat out, go to the cinema or to a pub. Their lives are split between socialising with other Filipina women in London but increasingly living their non work hours online and webcams with their friends and relatives within the Philippines. Although we say that this person is working and sleeping in London, it is no longer quite so clear that we can say that they are living in London. Similarly, a Trini talks of her sister in Texas living on a US military base with no close friends there at all. Her social life remains essentially her connections with her family back in Trinidad which are maintained through Skype. In the case of some cousins she has never seen them in the flesh, but feels that Skype is sufficient to constitute a more meaningful relationship with them than anyone she knows on the military base.

All of these are examples of how new media de-stabilises the ideology of domesticity and home. But it would be equally wrong to privilege the academic critique. We have to recognise that these are ideologies that an increasing number of people around the world now believe in. And our ethnographies have to contend with their perception. We hear them tell us how once they had this stable natural home which is now being disrupted by new media technologies. So while they thereby confirm the de-stabilising

impact of the new media, their response is to try and counter those effects with action which allows them to either retain or return to a clear and fixed relationship to space. When mobiles started to become popular, people felt the first thing they needed to do in their conversation was to establish where they were irrespective of any relevance of location to the conversation - 'Oh Hi, I am just on the train....I am still at home....I am spending this weekend in Manchester.' This varies with respect to webcam. Some seem to feel it's very important to know where their correspondent is located. In some cases, such as a boyfriend insisting on seeing the surrounds of his girlfriend, there are clear connotations of surveillance and jealousy, similarly when a student checks whether her boyfriend is really in the library. Another reason for showing location is to celebrate it, pointing the webcam at ornaments, or more commonly the garden. Several more examples are given in the chapter about the ways in which people attempt to re-fix their sense of precise location with respect to the exact location of their computer, or how it is located within the bedroom.

All of this evidence suggests that webcam may have the effect of de-stabilising the relationship to any particular location, but partly in response to this, people may equally use it to re-engage with precise location and affirm this relationship. It is clearly possible to make generalisations in both directions. But as anthropology has retreated into abstraction it is ever more important to illustrate these points with examples that show how actual people that we meet in our fieldwork objectify such generalities in and through their lives. So the final part of this paper will compare two brief portraits of individuals we met in Trinidad to show why given their particular trajectories and backgrounds they come to have radically different experiences of the potential of webcam in their relationship to place.

The case of Jason helps illustrate how the propensity to identify with the internet as a kind of place depends not just on this new relationship to the digital media, but just as much on one's previous sense of place. People differ in the degree to which their identity is grounded in location itself and then in any particular location. Jason was not a Trinidadian, but from St Vincent, one of the smaller Caribbean islands. Indeed Trinidadians generally disparage such migrants who they tend to generalise as 'small island' people. Not surprisingly, many of the migrants from these smaller Caribbean islands have a much more transnational sense of themselves as compared to Trinidadians, who Jason suggests are often so obsessed with Trinidad that they barely acknowledge the wider Caribbean, except as a source of immigration. Jason himself implies that having a less parochial sense of place is likely to lead to a different relationship to the potential of the web. But there are additional reasons why Jason in particular would be less fixated on location or physical space for his sense of place.

Jason's real interest in life is acting. More specifically it is acting within art theatres including performance art. This represents a kind of double abstraction. One abstraction is the self-consciousness that this created for both himself and others as distanced from their apparent presence because of the degree to which they are quite deliberately acting as themselves. But for someone as academic as Jason, who likes to quote key figures such as Judith Butler, there is also an analytical abstraction of separation from mere presence.

These kinds of involvement in the arts also tend to lead towards a positive identification with a cosmopolitanism that is in any case transnational. There may well be only one or two other people in the whole of St Vincent who could in any way be seen as on the same wave length in terms of Jason's particular and quite esoteric artistic sensibility. So even without the internet Jason would be identifying with a more translocal set of people who have gravitated towards this particular field of artistic practice. The affinity with the internet is very evident. From early on the internet was viewed as a place where people with very particular hobbies, interests or beliefs could form such transnational networks based on common interest as opposed to mere physical location. Jason was now living in Trinidad, but would be regularly in webcam contact with people all over the world. This might include family in St Vincent, but equally practitioners of his kind of performance art in Japan or Argentina. All of these people have seized upon the possibility of Skype which in comparison to any previous platform is far more able to manifest their very particular relationship to acting, which has become tantamount to their relationship with themselves. Jason will look up key figures in his art movement and make contact directly. Such individuals come into being through being seen by those who are able to appreciate them as embodied performance. A person is deliberately created as an artefact rather than relegated to some given identity. Authenticity is something they achieve through the vision of the other.

For people such as Jason, a knowledgeable and appreciative eye viewing them through webcam is more real than an ignorant eye that is located in the same room. The former sees them, the latter doesn't. It therefore seems particularly reasonable to envisage someone like Jason as not just living on webcam but coming alive in that presence. In fact, as far as he is concerned he comes into existence through webcam, while he is reduced to merely a latent presence in much of his mundane offline life, because the people he generally lives amongst do not have this capacity to see him as he really is and that vision of the other is constitutive. He has to use webcam to locate those far flung people in different parts of the world who have the eye to appreciate him and under whose gaze he can finally become himself through performing himself.

Sunil is in several ways the precise opposite of Jason. Sunil's sense of personal identity is largely a product of the idea that he is an authentic Trinidadian residing in Trinidad. Miller and Slater argued (2000: 85-115) that when the internet first came to Trinidad the result was less a blurring of boundaries and more an acute consciousness of the specificity of being Trinidadian, caused by this exposure to all other peoples and places. Trinidadians came to realise that most people had never heard of them, and therefore redoubled their efforts to create their online presence specifically as Trini. One of Sunil's most common modes of self-representation is that he loves to see himself as a personal ambassador for Trinidad. But the point is not, as it might have been for others, that he puts himself forward as an exemplary Trini. For him being an ambassador consists of being the conduit that brings others to a proper appreciation of Trinidad itself. The key advantage of webcam is simply that he can directly present Trinidad to these others. It is as much webcam as himself that occupies this role. Things are far more straightforward for Sunil than Jason, since for the former Trinidad is self-evidently a location, a place, to be both experienced and celebrated by fellow Trinis who have the privilege to actually live there, as a gracious act of remembrance for the diaspora and as a beneficent gesture to the poor souls who are not so fortunate as to be native born Trinidadians but at least can be given a taste of what they have missed by reason of poor birth.

This role is concurrent with his paid employment, since he is constantly on Skype linking his office in Trinidad with suppliers in Europe or North America and video-conference and webcams have become an ubiquitous part of his work. He finds it essential, if for example, he is talking to an Italian who is not confident in standard English let alone Trini-English. Their mutual fondness for gestures and bodily and facial expression makes for much more effective communication. His work also means that he has travelled a fair bit and so his sense of Trinidad comes through this exposure to contrast. One of the most common ways this ambassadorial role operates, not just for Sunil but for many Trinidadians, is around Carnival. Trinidad is not a great tourist destination with few impressive beaches. Much of the islands tourism is therefore centred upon Carnival itself. Commonly a visitor from abroad will first meet Trinis within the conviviality of Carnival and then maintain the contact. Carnival usually means just a fleeting visit.

For Sunil an extra component is foreigners surprise when they become appraised on the more Into-Trinidadian aspects of local culture, and Sunil is keen to correct the misapprehension that Trinidad simply one more Caribbean population of African origin. On one occasion, Sunil took his webcam around with him on Divali to demonstrate to a US based tourist how Divali is an authentic Trini experience. Another such visitor was a pop singer from Burma. These tend to be women, but Sunil implies these are not

romantic encounters. He is even more concerned that his US cousins don't seem to realise how American they have become to the detriment of their Trini heritage, which surely they cannot mean to lose. As he says of one cousin 'there are other Trinidadians in the school but by and large the bulk of people are Americans, so I think he'll probably follow more towards them'. For the same reason his Facebook pages are full of photos from Trinidad, a typical photo will be 'this is what my home looked like for Divali.'

Sunil's communications with his US cousins is typical in that while migrants from most countries are somewhat awed by the US, most Trinis assume a certain cultural superiority to Americans, which may in part be a legacy of British rule. As part of this same self-confidence, Sunil is not at all afraid of exposure to wider cosmopolitan landscapes. To be Trini is seen as a kind of natural openness as against the fearful privacy of Americans. His computer at home is in a public space 'so it's not like it's my room or my mom's or dad's, so anyone could just, and the door is always open'. He loves travel and does mind too much if it is actual visiting other countries or seeing them through webcam. In the same way he likes going to beach or to lime. He loves to be the person who sets up his relatives on Skype thereby facilitating the expansion of their horizons and exposure to that wider world. The important thing is that this should be visual. In the middle of a webcam conversation he will hold up the toy or a fruit that he is discussing. 'Look what I got today' 'do you guys have this back at home? He likes to see the expressiveness of other people, or have them play guitar online which he thinks would be boring without the visual. He prefers face to face rather than always on. His hobby is photography and using these to show the world to the world.

The reason for juxtaposing Jason and Sunil is that they have equally seized upon the possibility of webcam for developing their relationship to location. As with Miller and Slater's 'expansive potential', they are seeing the potential of webcam in further developing a vision that already existed but had been technologically more difficult before. And yet they represent two opposite extremes in the way this can be done. Jason shows how webcam can be used to create authentic sociality derived from separating oneself from mere place as location, to produce a more analytically abstract and transcendent form of sociality. While Sunil uses webcam to reinforce the affective experience of visual immediacy, of being able to see and therefore feel what it means to have a clear and grounded sense of location in the place where one is born. While they present entirely opposite visions of themselves in relation to place, both find in webcam a means to realise the logic of their positions to a greater extent that would previously be possible. As such they lead us back to this theory of attainment that is the overall aim of the book we are writing. The cultural script that they seek to embody as cosmology was not written for them by webcam, there is no technological determinism

here. But prior to webcam there was a limit to the degree to which they could follow through the logic of that vision. With webcam they are a great deal closer to attaining the position that these cosmologies prescribe for them. They can now be much more fully centred, or much more fully de-centred than they were previously able to be. They both attain a sense of their own humanity that was given in the degree to which they personally objectify a logic in humanity's relationship to location. Attain does not mean ever fully attained, just relative to the frustrations that existed prior to this technology.

The examples here fit another of the principles laid out in the introduction to *Digital Anthropology* (4-11). The outcome of webcam is not unidirectional. It is rather dialectical, allowing for the expansive potential of two entirely opposed logics in the cosmology of spatial identification to both be extended beyond their prior limits. There is no sense that it is webcam itself that has been responsible for the cultural scripts embodied in the lives of Jason or Sunil. Both of these emerge from contradictions in our relationship to place that are as ancient as a humanity that grew up in hunter-gathering and pastoral nomadism. As a result the argument cannot be reduced to one of technological determinacy. This also corresponds to the dialectical nature of modernity where individuals such as Sunil often re-invest in a fixed relationship to place precisely because they are confronted by the possibility of people such as Jason who celebrates his cosmopolitanism.

The examples also fit the principle of Digital Anthropology in that these pay full acknowledgement to prior historical trajectories and conditions of being human but without making the mistake of rendering these as more authentic or less mediated. This issue of place was always a matter of contradiction. The juxtaposition of the two cases refutes any attempt to employ them to bolster ideals or ideologies of domesticity, home or community (Postill 2008) as the natural conditions of humanity. Instead they help exemplify a new theory of attainment, which builds upon these two earlier theoretical positions. By using the examples of Jason and Sunil we also appreciate that such cosmological trajectories and their realisation through technology exist not only in abstraction but become embodied in particular lives and personal trajectories as we encounter them ethnographically.

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