



The Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Online <http://fm.ea-tel.eu/fm/4dac23-16134> 6 March 2009. 13.00-16.00

Minutes

Present: John, Simone Nayanika, Rohan, Kate, Raminder, Ian, James, Georgie

1. Apologies

Georgie Born apologised for joining late as she was chairing a seminar in Cambridge.

2. Minutes of 8.12.08

accepted – with the proviso that people read the minutes of the meeting before (Nov 2008) to recognise the work that Georgie had put in on the Media front first.

3. Matters arising

covered in reports.

4. Reports (Written reports to be circulated in advance, please, minimal and urgent verbal reports only at the meeting)

a. Chair

John Asked Hilary Callan what had happened to the RAI studentship money that was not disbursed for the ASA Auckland conference but has not yet received a reply. Ro noted that Hilary was currently away.

Hastings Donnan wishes to talk to HoDs meeting at Bristol on the forthcoming RAF programme, and wanted to invite Biological Anthropologists. However, he has not confirmed whether he will definitely be at Bristol. John suggests that we give notice to follow up the invitation to HoDs meeting, that we hope to have Hastings address the meeting about RAE08 and follow-up, and that it is important that biological anthropologists also attend the meeting. In particular, this is relevant to Cambridge, Liverpool John Moores, Roehampton which are not integrated into anthropology depts. **Simone to send email and invite other hods.**

b. Administrator

Ro reports that much of the work has focused on finance, which should now be more legible. We are also getting a WorldPay as well as PayPal facility.

Ro thought that 8 entries to the ASA film competition was still a small number, perhaps because film makers don't make 5 min films already, but from our perspective 5m is technically efficient for delivery through the website.

Simone suggested that information on public access courses and events should be included in future Annals. Ian suggested a link with Csap. **Ian and Simone will coordinate with Ro when it comes to requesting Annals info.**

Ro has had 3 approaches from people considering bidding for ASA2011. Proposals are due by the AGM. (includes Nayanika's suggestion of India; Lampeter and Edinburgh also

considering proposals).

The 2010 budget currently looking pink, but can be tweaked.

ASA 2008: Ro is currently finalising the accounts and will prompt a discussion about how to deal with surplus. John pointed out that with interest rates currently almost 0, surplus is crucial. Ro estimated the surplus to be about £8000 overall, but Veronica intends to split the surplus between the 3 associations. However, we do need to ensure that money is properly allocated before surplus is distributed. Eg, we should recoup the £3000 that we put into subsidising students. At a minimum the ASA should get 3000, but we might get up to 5000. Ro has not found any transaction for the £1000 that we promised to give in advance, so it's not clear whether it was paid. This will have to be confirmed when he finalises the accounts. At that point he will email them to the committee and to Veronica and Mark, and request our comments. Eg When Raminder examines the accounts, she may note that the NZ students were covered within the budget, so to be equivalent, we should retrieve our student subsidies from the budget. However, the discussion will be a little sensitive, in terms of who 'owned' the conference (nice pun Ro).

ASA 2009 panel timetable to be finalised by Monday and put on the web. Timetabling more or less resolved – AGM will be at lunchtime as requested. Quite a lot of panels lasting 2-3 sessions, so either 7 sessions 13 rooms or 6 sessions wide. Will be resolved by Monday.

Members directory – not forgotten but Ro doesn't have time for this until after the conference. Hopes to have it up and running in the summer.

c. Treasurer

We have not received the revised draft accounts yet – some figures need to be checked – but should be ready next week in good time for the AGM. Income is steadily increasing from subscriptions, and there are some outstanding subs, so the figure should increase. Hopefully the figure will go towards 20,000. In 2005, the subs were 15,000 and in 2006 went down to 13,000. 2007, 16,000. So a steady increase since then. We are obviously earning less interest from our deposit account. Raminder wondered what the bank of England's 'quantitative easing' will do for the market and whether our interest rates might go up. John noted that we cannot be sanguine about getting interest on deposits in the near future, so any surplus we generate must go to support the Firth Lectures and the Radcliffe-Brown fund. So it is important that conferences do generate a surplus.

d. Ethics

Nayanika noted that the ethics of apology session at ASA08 is under consideration with Gustaaf (Anthropology Today) and Nayanika will let the committee know what this brings. Nayanika has had various exchanges with the film ethics people. It would have been interesting to know more about the Leeds Vis Anth event. **Simone will contact Jon Prosser to find out who is attending that event** [NB. *This is the first International Visual Methods conference, not a film event*].

Nayanika wanted to talk about a conference in India or South Asia in 2011. James thought that JNU would be a good option, and Hyderabad would be a good standby. One option is to call and meet people when any of us are in India to open the discussion.

As requested at the last meeting, Nayanika enquired of the authorities about visas, and they said they deal with things on a case by case basis. It would be useful to know how Tapati's (Firth lecturer 2009) application is going. Ro reported that he has paid for her flights, and is waiting to confirm hotel dates – she has booked to fulfil her visa application. So far she has not reported any problems.

Simone asked how often we generally should have conferences outside the UK. Ro thought our rule of thumb was roughly once every 5 years an overseas conference, every

10 years a decennial with more intimate events between. However, UK conferences have grown and become more international. We cannot tell how far holding conferences abroad prevents UK members from attending. There is a strong argument that we should hold events abroad, but only on the basis that it is organised with strong and committed local partners, because the ASA is not in the position to be a major international conference organiser. It also relies on the potential for raising international funding.

John noted that a Cuban academic, well known, with permanent residency in Spain, was refused an entry visa (by the British Embassy in Spain) to participate in John's Latin American lectures series in the UK under the new rules. Nayanika noted that any partnership needs a personal and face-to-face conversation with partners. James will be in India in July-August, and would be happy to organise such a meeting. Nayanika may be in Bangladesh and India in July-August, but is not sure about this yet – she will know in April. Ro may also travel through India on his way home, and it would be useful to him to check out how feasible this could be.

John noted that it doesn't need to be strictly every 5 years. 2013 is the decennial year. However, with a conference in India, we would have to find some UK event at which to hold our AGM. 2012 might be the right time. **Nayanika asked if the committee supported her exploring the options. Kate seconded this, and offered her support.**

e. **Networks**

Kate sent a brief report. She raised the issue that Ro alluded to of scheduling issues for network meetings at ASA Bristol. It appears that only AOB will hold a meeting there, but it is important that we protect the network meeting slot in conferences if possible. Ro and Kate have discussed the options here and are working together. Apply chose to meet at another time because Rachel Gooberman-Hill couldn't make later in the week. James reported that AM seems to be a little free-floating at the moment. Becky Marsden is managing the email list. Ingie is still editing the journal, but it's not clear they've had any meetings. John previously suggested approaching Lionel Kaplan (retired from SOAS) to be a mentor to potential new members, or to find another host organisation.

Ian reported that he could have more contact with AM to try to enliven it.

Ian hoped to have a meeting of the Teaching Religion special interest group at the ASA conference and asked if he could use the networks slot for that. Kate welcomed this and also Ian's offer to enliven AM. Simone noted that we previously suggested offering some seed-money to support a call for a new committee. **Ian said he would put this into action.**

Kate noted that network meetings were previously scheduled during lunch hour, so as not to demand too much special time out of the rest of the programme. Ro noted that they moved them out of lunchtime for attendance reasons.

Simone noted that regular annual conferences are getting very big, and asked if the committee thought that annual conferences should be made a little smaller. John agrees that it is a problem if ASA conferences get so big that ASA activities get squeezed out – as these are the very reason that the association event is held in the first place.

Ro noted that timetabling is difficult not solely because of Bristol but simply because of the number of panels and papers. However, Ro noted that few members of ASA are delegates/paper givers at the conference. Both because many attenders are students, and many of our colleagues are not members of the ASA.

Simone suggested that poster sessions be used more effectively to keep core conference activity more focused. John suggested the committee make a decision on whether we allow conferences to grow, or whether we focus them. Kate noted that James indicated that

their institution supported people to give posters, and that she also has reservations about current changes in conferences and supports Simone's view. Ro noted that time was allocated for poster presentations. We got feedback on the use of e-papers that was mixed – in terms of whether people bothered to read them in advance. Ian also noted that he supported the more focused conference approach. John notes that the Brazilian anthropological meeting which has about 4000 delegates. They have about 300 posters, mostly by students, and a judging committee of noted anthropologists. Kate noted that if well-known anthropologists are invited to discuss and give feedback on posters, they might become more attractive than giving a paper in a busy session with not enough time to discuss. Kate suggested that posters are new for our discipline, so there is some work to do to explain to our colleagues on how it could work. Simone referred to 2 other conferences that have been announced with limited places (AHRC Landscapes Aberystwyth, and the Manchester ANT meeting).

Simone suggested putting it on the agenda for the AGM as a proposal from the committee, and circulate it in advance to members for comments before the AGM. Committee agreed to take this discussion to the membership:

Simone will prepare a summary from our discussion today to present to members and to AGM. Ro will prepare an online survey also in advance of the AGM – in cooperation with Simone (and John).

(Ro notes that AGM website will have an online survey module option soon, and we could use it carefully to recruit further opinions). John notes that is useful to find out whether ASA members are happy or unhappy with the conferences, and also useful to compare with non-ASA members, for whom the conference is also important.

f. Publications

The bad news is that Tom Selwyn and Julie Scott's volume has taken longer than they envisaged. Final manuscript as not arrived. It should now come by the end of July. So there won't be a new publication during 2009, but early in 2010. Things are developing much better for monograph 47, Veronica's volume, which already has a detailed schedule in place. That should come out in 2010 and we hope that members will be forgiving of that.

g. Media

Georgie joined the meeting at 3pm. She was not surprised by the Ofcom response to our letter of complaint about Cicada Film's incursions in Peru. She noted that their denials of her meeting the Ofcom man is wrong. They claim he said what they would have liked him to say, not what he actually said (which Georgie noted in a detailed way at the time). At the end of their letter, they do seem to conceded that it could be appropriate for them to do something about Cicada, despite earlier denying it. Georgie is not sure whether we should pursue this. She also asked whether anyone hear about the event in London where Cicada spoke? No-one had. John had not held out great hopes from Ofcom. However, it was a very robust rejection of our complaint (using the word 'rebuttal' about Cicada's version, and taking their view as correct without any further investigation). John is worried by medical experts who claim that people get respiratory diseases because they don't wear clothes. Cicada clearly responded to initial complaints from Fenamed by dumping the project then trying to revive it through other organisations. John felt that the ASA does not have the capacity to look deeper into this unless someone does it as a research project. There are differences in fact raised that would have to be taken further with evidence from witnesses in Peru. John's feeling is that the most we should do is give the response to the people who raised the issue with us and ask for further comments and see if we want to relate that

back to Ofcom. As Ofcom is rebutting our enquiry so strongly, we are not really advancing the discussion of the ethics of these kinds of films anyway. Georgie agreed but did not think the exercise has been meaningless – we have sent a warning shot across the bows of both Cicada and Ofcom, and it will filter through the industry. Our long shot was that had Ofcom collaboratively got involved in creating a debate around good practice. However, we should send replies to those who did the primary work. Georgie noted a contradiction in the letter – 2 lines before the end, they say ‘if such issues occur in the future... to ensure programme makers we regulate do not...’ (yet they deny they regulate programme makers).

Nayanika also noted Ofcom’s letter only refers to Rodriguez’s paper is to support Cicada’s case – so they have been very selective with the report. Nayanika agrees that continuing a discussion with Ofcom is not productive, but the process so far has not been productive. We should forward the letter to Daniela Peluso, Daniel Rodriguez and Magnus Course, and others who have been quoted in AT. Nayanika would like to take forward a discussion on ethics of film making. Georgie asked about the RAI festival debate possibilities. She has heard nothing since Andre said he would look into it last Autumn. Simone noted that no ethics event has been proposed for the RAI festival but there is still space available for a workshop to be proposed. Simone also noted that our proposal to hold an ethics event at the Rai festival was based on a process building up during the year which has not happened.

Nayanika suggested having this discussion at the Leeds event, and take it forward in the autumn towards a code of ethics, in conjunction with the media officer and ethics officer. Georgie agreed – when she went to RAI to discuss this, she realised the difficulty of taking this debate forward. She noted that it is anthropologist/film makers and industry who need to have this discussion to find a way forward. She also notes that people like Mike Yorke and Andre Singer are well connected in industry – but Simone noted that they have no will to raise this issue. They argue that anthropologists are also not always ethically responsible. Nayanika agreed that anthropologists should not approach this from an ethical high-ground.

John noted that there is still a possibility of drafting a code and seeing how people respond. Nayanika suggested bringing the other parties to this debate in Leeds could be a way to facilitate a conversation. Beyond that we could plan an event on developing a code. Georgie noted that this will require people to take it forward who have some knowledge of film making. Andre Singer did take seriously the issue, but is clearly too busy to take things forward. John suggested that someone within the visual anthropology community should advance the project. Georgie also raised the issue of whether such issues aren’t already being raised in the visual anthropology organisations themselves. **Nayanika will write to the Kent people, with the letter, and ask if they would like to be involved in the Leeds event. She will then contact the Leeds people, possibly via Simone.** [NB it’s not clear what event Nayanika had in mind]

Georgie supported Simone’s suggestion of turning this into a research project. **Simone will liaise with Georgie and Nayanika about how this could be turned into a research proposal.**

5. ASA conferences - review and plans

(see above under Admin Report and Ethics Report)

a. ASA 2009

John’s term ends in April and he will have to come back to the UK for the conference and return to Brazil the week after. As well as having the HoDs meeting, we need a handover

meeting in Bristol. **John has booked the Clifton Hotel from Sunday night to Friday morning.** Another AHRC consultation has come up which requires responses in early May. John is currently responding to a lot of proposals but is getting little input from HoDs. As there is a change of chair, how do we regain a dynamic to the profession as a whole on these important issues? There is a question of how far the ASA should be keeping abreast on current government and RC activities, and how much on moving the profession forward on academic fronts. This could usefully be the agenda for the handover meeting. Georgie seconded this, but onerous and impossible as it is, struggling with what the state constantly sends down is essential to keep the beast at bay a little. Although thankless, it is a very important function. Would it be better to have a standing group of prominent anthropologists to work as a lobby to respond to these sorts of issues. Simone suggested that HoDs carry more political legitimacy and avoid being labelled as 'the usual suspects', but that this is something we could very usefully discuss at the meetings.

b. **ASA 2010**

Nayanika wondered whether the conference theme limits itself by calling itself interviews. Would conversations among anthropologists work better, as interviews are only one of various approaches. John thought that the limits made it quite a focused topic, as you could discuss other things that could grow out of the topic of the interview. If you opened it up too much to other forms of orality, it would lose the focus on the interview – which has not previously been treated to a methodological or analytical analysis by anthropologists before.

c. **ASA2011 (see discussion above)**

6. **Dates of meetings 2009**

Simone will circulate a list.

7. **AOB**

Ian asked if the ASA would like to have a stall or sponsor a drinks reception at the C-Sap conference in November 25-27, Marilyn Strathern will be the keynote. A drinks reception is £125 and would be an opportunity to promote the monographs. Ian also proposed a teaching prize and asked if Raminder was still interested in being a judge. Simone suggested that the publishers should sponsor a reception and James suggested asking Berg. On the other hand, Simone suggested that AM should have a stall to promote the ASA, and that they could use this as a relaunch of a revived committee. John noted that our income is very tightly decreased, we have just put up the subs and are not producing a monograph this year, so this is probably not the appropriate time for us to sponsor anything.

Simone reported that the recent blog was somewhat slow, but that this was probably because most of those interested had just been involved in a very lively debate on the latin americans' site. Nayanika noted that we already had some suggestions on the cards that can be taken up by various committee members for future blogs. Georgie also noted that the current financial crisis would be an interesting topic among economic anthropologists.

Nayanika will take this forward.

Simone noted that it is very difficult to get submissions to ASAonline and requested help from committee members to request specific papers from people. She is also trying to get ISSN registration for the series.

The chair thanked everyone for being present (especially Rohan who stayed up all night in NZ to join us) and looked forward to seeing everyone in Bristol.