Conectividades: The Social Life of Chile's Southern Highway

The SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship allowed me to take a pre-dissertation trip to the Aysén Region of Chilean Patagonia in the summer of 2017. This trip was focused on thinking and working through the visual methods that I plan to use in my eventual dissertation research. I study what the Chilean government calls conectividad (or "connectivity") as a discourse, practice, and phenomenon that entangles both state actors and Patagonian residents. This concept, and my exploration of it, is centered on the construction of the Carretera Austral, a national highway project 40 years in the making. The fellowship helped me explore how I might approach these concerns through audiovisual methods in my fieldwork and eventual ethnographic production. On a very practical note, the generous funding allowed me to pay for my international and domestic flights, and all other in-country travel. I traveled over 2000 kilometers by land (and occasionally ferry), both as a hitchhiker and with paid tickets. The fellowship also covered my room and board throughout my time in Chile. Finally, it also funded my travel and registration for the 2017 American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. In addition to giving me the opportunity to travel, the fellowship paid for the audiovisual equipment I used in the field. This was an amazing opportunity, as the small internal grants offered by the University of Colorado, Boulder
will not pay for equipment. I am not in a visually focused anthropology program, so we do not have equipment that I can borrow, either. This opportunity allowed me to choose and purchase equipment specifically for this project, which involved riding in all sorts of vehicles as a passenger. In addition to a video/photography DSLR camera, I purchased a DJI Osmo stabilizing camera to film inside cars, trucks, and buses. The Carretera Austral is mostly unpaved, with many potholes. This particular camera allowed me to minimize some of the shakiness of filming, while maintaining some of the sense of movement along the road. I also purchased a sound recorder to record ambient motor noise and conversations I had with drivers and other passengers. Thanks to the funding, I was also able to spend enough time in the field to develop my ideas a cohesive dissertation project. I was able to focus in on a field site, make necessary research contacts, and develop institutional affiliations. Thanks to all this groundwork, I spent the fall semester applying for dissertation research grants. While I am still waiting to hear back from others, I have passed the first round for two grants so far. Of particular relevance to this fellowship, I was able to incorporate my experience last summer to write about visual anthropology in both my theory and methods sections of the grant. In summary, thanks to the SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship I was able to gather materials for my first video installation, think and work through the visual methodologies I hope to incorporate into my dissertation fieldwork, and return home with a project that allowed me to apply for competitive external grants.

Testimonial about Benefits of Fellowship

Thanks to the SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship, I was able to accomplish two things at this point in my anthropology career. In the previous section I mentioned the great help it gave me in formulating research questions that allowed me to draw on theories and methodologies within visual anthropology. Secondly, and perhaps most relevant to the fellowship, I was able to gather and record audiovisual materials for my first video installation. I am working through the materials now in a production methods class in the Critical Media Practices department. As the only anthropology student in this class, it is both thrilling and challenging to be surrounded by students more versed in the arts than I. However, the fact that I came into the class with the material I recorded last summer has allowed me to subject my footage and concepts to greater critique and will therefore allow me to further my growth as a visual anthropologist. I plan on exhibiting the installation in April at the Black Box on the University of Colorado campus. This will be my first non-anthropological venue for my ethnographic work. My goal with this project has always been to share it with multiple audiences. This opportunity allows me to engage with two new sorts of audiences outside of anthropology. First, I am excited to share the project with members of the university and wider Boulder community who do not come to the space with anthropological theory in mind. Secondly, it will also serve as a pilot exhibition to tweak and retool the installation before bringing it back to Chile, hopefully during future dissertation research.