

Schneider, Arnd and Caterina Pasqualino (eds.). 2014. *Experimental Film and Anthropology*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic. 205 pp. Pb.: \$29.95. ISBN: 9780857854438

This book is as challenging as it is ambitious. For those who are used to thinking of experimental film and documentary film as two different spheres, both in terms of form, content, and the use of technical equipment, it might even come as a shock. According to the stereotype, the former has the explicit right to experiment, transform, rearrange realities, while the latter is bound to observation and a direct cinema approach. This book attempts to go beyond this established dichotomy in the understanding of experimental and anthropological practice as one and the same practice – it succeeds in doing so in a highly compelling manner. What makes this book so convincing is that it does not remain on the level of an abstract theoretical reflection but provides concrete examples of how experimental approaches could gain direct practical relevance. Hand-selected highly ranked anthropologists and filmmakers share in the eleven contributions of this edited volume their practical knowledge with us, their doubts, experiences and the limits they encounter in searching for new ways of filming realities. It becomes clear in many of the authors' arguments that a prospective change of anthropological practice/knowledge-generation is tied to changes in how we technologically approach our field and our subjects.

Moreover, who could be more qualified to write about such future visions than those who can rightly be considered to be “forerunners” and “prophets” through their artistic work? Major figures such as Robert Ascher, Barbara Glowczewski, Timothy Asch and Kevin T. Allen are either writing in the book, or their work is presented in an exemplary manner; this gives the book an authoritative voice. The book provides, in fact, a backstage view of experimental filmmaking: it consciously avoids essays about established figures such as Stan Brakhage or Maya Deren and instead introduces us (as in the contribution of Arnd Schneider) to even more fascinating “lone wolfs” such as the couple Leonore Mau and Hubert Fichte experimenting in the 1960s/1970s at the boundaries between photography and film.

The most lasting merit of this book is that it changes our thinking, even if the claim called for by the editors in the introduction to ‘overcome the realist-narrative paradigm’ (p. 1) in anthropological filmmaking is still far from fulfilled. This becomes evident when the editors state that while the *Writing culture* debate had indeed led to experimentation with text, the images of our field, and visual anthropology practice as a whole has remained largely narrative. In that sense, ‘film (especially analogue) is literally a medium that comes between us and the perceived world (i.e. our senses, perception and representation)’ (p. 4). Caterina Pasqualino, an anthropologist-filmmaker, and Arnd Schneider, an important specialist for the interrelation of art and anthropology, consequently propose blurring the boundaries between what films “are” and what they “do”. The established dichotomy between form/material versus content should be overcome. In doing so, we might be able to undergo a visual and auditory experience we might describe as a performance. In this sense, the act of seeing becomes a performance.

Several authors call for a revaluation of the montage. Among them is the dialogic article of the Danish anthropologists/filmmakers Daniel Suhr and Rane Willerslev who argue that this technique contributes not only to the fictionalisation of realities, the recomposition of participants realities, and the creation of new temporalities (“out of time”/“out of space”) but also has the potential to possibly reveal invisible (spiritual/metaphysical) dimensions of realities. The contributions of Jennifer L. Heuson and Kevin T. Allen point in a similar direction although focusing on another aspect: asynchronicity between sound and image, between ear and eye. This would give space for randomness, and implicit commentaries; it would eventually allow for a ‘critical phenomenological’ account of the relationship between knowledge, sensation, and representation (p. 114). Here, as in the other contributions, the argument is backed by practice: in this case, a project about the Brooklyn Bridge as a resonant structure and an “anthropological body”; Kevin T. Allen reverses here the common strategies of film shooting; instead of constructing sounds to the images, his eyes follow his ears: after listening to the bridge’s sonic vibrations, he starts shooting.

The contributions (two of them by the editors of the volume) touch upon three dimensions and their relation to film: time, memory and materiality. All these dimensions are potentially considered as having an experimental potential. Time can be fractionised, rearranged or suspended in film (as the article on montage by Suhr/Willerslev shows); through film, memory can also become a proof of passed time, or give an account of amnesia. The materiality of film can be used for creative purposes as well: it may comment on processes of decay, or be used as a raw material for “cameraless film-making” as Kathryn Ramey’s contribution about the anthropologist Robert Ascher shows. Using traditional film techniques and material can even be considered to be an act of resistance against hegemonic digital culture, in the argument of the editors.

A particularly impressive article is that of senior experimentalist Barbara Glowczewski, who experimented with collaborative filmmaking among the Aborigines back in the 1970s. She recalls in her article the various successful and unsuccessful attempts to render justice to the dreamworlds of the Australian natives. Her very intimate and personal reflection about issues of responsibility, morality and guilt in front of the images she had produced makes us understand that the ideal encounter with the field should also transform us and, with it, our gaze. Her contribution makes us aware that one of the key issues of the visual anthropologist remains the dilemma of choosing between representation and anti-representation, and that the visual translation of cultural worlds other than ours is one of the most difficult tasks to be faced.

This book is much more than a mere contribution to the “sensual turn” in anthropology: it makes us think beyond the established canon of anthropological filmmaking; it makes us think in terms of creativity about our field, our methodology, and a medium we thought we knew exhaustively. It might not be an exaggeration to consider this volume one of the greatest achievements in writing on visual anthropology in the last decade.

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