

## Editorial

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In this issue we present eight films that demonstrate the great diversity of filmmaking within the field of visual anthropology. Films from Africa, South America, Asia and Europe represent a range of forms and approaches from the traditional to the experimental. From Bata Diallo's closely observed study of a Mali woman's daily life in a subsistence world absent of husbands, to Martha-Cecilia Dietrich's film-in-a-film about Quechua filmmakers making a horror movie about the pre-colonial pasts, to Pavel Borecký's sensory exploration of displacement and confinement set within a camel market in Algeria, these films give us a sense of the direction filmmakers are taking the discipline and how their efforts to create anthropological and visual narratives both define and challenge it.

### **“Djeneba” a Minyanka Woman of Southern Mali, a film by Bata Diallo**

Djeneba is a Malian woman who finds herself in a position common to many women in Sahelian societies – being forced to take on subsistence responsibilities that in former times were borne exclusively by men. With the migration of large numbers of men who have left their home villages in search of wage labor, the entire complex of customary, long-held gender roles has been seriously disrupted. The film closely observes Djeneba and her nine children as they negotiate cultural and economic changes far beyond their control. It documents in great detail a system organized by woman to give mutual support and enable the group to make micro-loans as they navigate a new economic landscape. On one hand, this is a classic observational film which offers a substantial and well-integrated chronicle of a year in the life of Djeneba and her family. It is also a focused self-reflexive account of that period as Diallo's camera takes the clear point-of-view of the filmmaker, signaling her importance to the story. It is the filmmaker's presence and growing relationship of trust with Djeneba that blossoms into an expansive openness which is the essence of this narrative. The result is a deeply intimate portrait of women and men of various generations that transcends barriers of culture and language. Other characters in the film, like wise Nano, invite the camera into a range of everyday situations, interactions and conversations. Nano is a local chief and philosopher who tells us, “...the world has gone mad and everything is now about money”. The connection between the filmmaker and the community is palpable and the situations portrayed have the look and feel of a trusted insider's view. It is an excellent example of the power of reflexive observational cinema.

**Unless the Water is Safer Than the Land**, a film by Arjang Omrani and Mehrdad Razi

There have been numerous films about migration made over the last decade. Many of these are journey narratives that document desperate flights to safety from war and political upheaval. In his film, *Passager* (JAF vol. 4, no. 1), Omrani personalized the experience of Asef Rezaei, a young Afghan refugee attempting to escape from a Greek migrant camp, using Asef's cell phone videos to construct his story. *Unless the Water is Safer Than the Land* is more interior, more subjective, presenting several stories of migration, vulnerability, exploitation, and longing. It visually and emotionally takes us closer to the inner experience of migration by telling these stories through text with subtitles – but leaving out the voices of the speakers. *Unless the Water is Safer Than the Land* demands much from its viewers. We must invent the voices for ourselves. The film's subjects – the tellers of the stories – are not shown in the film. We only see the places where they have been – rooms, parks, landscapes through an airplane window, an anonymous migrant cemetery. Many of the sequences are shot from places of hiding. Our attention and imagination are required to give physical form and voice to the text, thereby completing the narrative. Omrani writes that his films are concerned with the transcultural condition, expressed in sensorial and performative modes. *Unless the Water is Safer Than the Land* uses the language of sensory ethnography to construct a narrative space that intensely personalizes the fear, desperation and cultural loss that is the sad hallmark of migration. The film takes its title from a poignant poem written by Warsan Shire, a young Somali-British writer and poet. Like the poem, the film moves us into the emotional world of its characters through the creative and inspired use of the visual medium. It makes a unique contribution to the body of documentary and ethnographic films on migration.

**Horror in the Andes: Ayacucuan Cinema in-the-Making**, a film by Martha-Cecilia Dietrich

In 2017 the Andean Horror Film Festival (in Vancouver), introduced North American audiences to demons and spirits unique to Peruvian myth. The program included films about a half man/half llama demon called the *Jarjacha*, an evil shaman known as *Kharisiri*, and Martha-Cecilia Dietrich's engaging film-within-a-film, *Horror in the Andes: Ayacucuan Cinema in-the-Making*, about a group of Quechua filmmakers who set out to make a horror movie about pre-colonial spirits in Ayacucho, Peru. Dietrich's film focuses on three close friends and their small film company, Ccora Productions, as they move through the final grueling days of a five-year long production. We observe the Quechua filmmakers on location in the Andes, honoring the mountain spirit and seeking his help in making the project a success, working with actors and staging scenes. We accompany them to their collective creative space where costumes are designed, essential props are constructed and the necessary course corrections in writing and direction are made. This is their "equipment museum" where we glimpse the group's previous productions and examine their collection of old and new production gear. Horror, as a genre, holds a popular position in South American cinema. It draws on the tried-and-true conventions of Hollywood, long-lived mythic stories, and a receptive local cinema culture. Dietrich writes that her film is based on research she conducted that explores how Peruvian filmmakers have resorted to horror fiction as a means of rendering and discussing contemporary social issues with local audiences. Rather than a discourse on contemporary social issues, the film celebrates the filmmaker's passion for cinema, their connection to Peruvian cultures of the past, and their hopes for success in the wider world of commercial film.

**Going for Mackerel**, a film by Rolf Erik Scott, Hans Frode Storaas and Diane Perlov

Out on the open sea Norwegian fishermen say, “We are not superstitious, but there’s no point taking chances”. Commercial fishing for mackerel takes specialized equipment, long-honed skills, experience and of course, a measure of luck. Mackerel is a demanding fishery, the stock moves rapidly, changes direction often and the harvesting season is short. The competition is fierce – there are many boats out hunting. Mackerel generate a good price at the regional fish auctions, so all fishermen concerned hope they have a good catch, remain safe and that the other boats will not have the same good luck. *Going for Mackerel* is a traditional observational film that documents the intense and demanding process of commercial fishing – the hours of waiting and searching, throwing out the nets and gathering them up – hopefully full of fish. The film follows the crew of a purse seiner on the western coast of Norway on three separate trips to fish for Mackerel. The documentary footage is structured using interviews with crew that are directed to the topic of “taboos and superstitions”. Fish stories inevitably come up that reflect a commonly held set of beliefs: Never leave for the fishing grounds on a Friday, never walk through a special door on the boat except at the precise time for throwing out the net, never bring a rucksack or an umbrella onboard, and don’t have pictures on the wall or talk about horses. The fishermen credit former generations of seamen as the source of these superstitions, but firmly believe that – silly or not – they could bring bad luck if not taken seriously. Norwegian fishermen are not alone in these beliefs, they are widely shared by other fishing and seagoing cultures world-wide. One character stands out in the film, the “net boss” who decides when and where to put out the net. His decisions are crucial for the whole venture. He needs luck.

**Make a Silence: Musical Dialogues in Asia**, a film by Barley Norton

In recent years there has been an increasing amount of scholarship on a range of experimental music in different parts of the world, its relationship to issues of national and regional identity and how it draws on experimentalism in other parts of the world, particularly the historically ‘dominant’ narratives of western music. Much of this scholarship has been text and/or audio based. *Make a Silence: Musical Dialogues in Asia*, makes a visual contribution to this existing body of work on “new music” and experimentalism. Using a sensory approach, the film is structured around several key moments of high energy performance at the 2018 Hanoi New Music Festival. Following the collective audience experience, performers and composers elaborate on its meaning as they discuss the ideas and philosophies of the festival and the expanding world of “new music” with participants. The experience of the music and the particularity of the festival itself remains the central focus of the film. It brings us into intense dialogue with composers and performers and places us with listeners as they attempt to navigate an entirely new range of sonic systems and musical patterns.

**Nodas. Launeddas at the Time of Crisis**, a film by Umberto Cao and Andrea Mura

“We are talking about a 3,000-year-old instrument,” says music teacher Giuseppe Orru in *Nodas. Launeddas at the Time of Crisis*, a film about the long history and cultural revival of the ancient Sardinian polyphonic wind instrument, the *launeddas*. “It’s made of three canes,” he continues, “one of which is the drone and the other two are the chanters – it’s a brilliant invention!” Nearly vanished, today launeddas are vital and widespread thanks

to the dedication of young Sardinian musicians and their teachers. The film is made in a traditional documentary style structured using interviews with teachers, students and performers juxtaposed with scenes of performance set against the expansive countryside and dense urban landscapes of Sardinia. *Nodas* centers on five young musicians from the new generation of launeddas players who articulately examine the tension between folklore, ethnicity, tradition and new musical experimentation. These young musicians confront what it means to think about one's identity as a Sardinian in an increasingly complex global environment. At the same time, *Nodas* voices the broader economic and cultural crisis, one of an entire generation, with few jobs available and no official support for those actively embracing the revival of Sardinian music. The film is also an indictment of the Italian school system which teaches the basics and leaves Sardinian culture – and its music – out on the margins. “I’ll get my diploma in July and if I don’t find a job, I’ll have to leave,” a young launeddas player tells us. “Should I wait for Sardinia to wake up, for some Institution of Launeddas to be created that could employ musicians, based on merit? This will never happen.”

### **The Depth Beneath, The Height Above**, a film by Andrea Bordoli

Humanistic geography, the perception and experience of the spaces that humans occupy, is a theme that lends itself to the language of sensory ethnography. *The Depth Beneath, The Height Above*, challenges our perceptions about spatial coexistence of the places we live and work. The film explores the visual opposition of two worlds that exist literally on top of each other, a huge hydroelectric dam with its turbines spinning underground, and a dairy farm with grazing milk cows in a peaceful, bucolic setting on the land above. The film is elegantly shot and edited to build an increasingly discordant visual contrast of these two worlds. Inside the dairy, cows are being milked while the farmers process curds. Far below, technicians examine dials and adjust controls as the mighty turbines rumble and turn. It is a stark view of physical simultaneity, a snapshot of coexistence in scale. We don't learn anything more about the farmers and the film stays distant from the workers at the dam and power plant. But this film is concerned with the external landscape rather than the interior. Through the juxtaposition of opposing images and visual contrast of scale, the film uses sensory language to great effect, inviting viewers to experience and perceive “landscape” in a deeper sense.

### **In the Devil's Garden**, a film by Pavel Borecký

The Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard University describes itself as a laboratory that promotes innovative combinations of aesthetics and ethnography. Since its establishment in 2006, it has inspired a decade of new work that questions and often challenges established conventions in ethnographic film. These films have helped fuel an energetic, ongoing debate about boundaries in visual anthropology and the nature of ethnographic film, one that harkens back to Robert Gardner's 1986 work, *Forest of Bliss*. Pavel Borecký joins this conversation with his film, *In the Devil's Garden*, which takes us into the world of displaced Sahrawi people of Southwest Algeria. The film begins in the claustrophobic setting of an animal market. These scenes are disorienting as we see pieces of desert landscape and close up images of the bodies of camels and goats. Gradually the view expands and our attention is directed towards the men of this displaced community. As it moves through the desert setting we see glimpses of animals being slaughtered. In fragments of dialogue we come to learn that the Sahrawi were forced to flee their land by

Moroccan troops and that the UN dissuaded them from fighting to win it back. In the darkness around a bonfire, we hear voices discussing the Swiss nationality of the film crew and speculating whether Switzerland might recognize the Sahrawi as refugees. This short film is not ethnographic in the sense of creating a structured inquiry that contextualizes knowledge of a displaced community. Rather, it takes us into a world of images and sound, juxtaposed to create a sensory, experiential environment that is both disorienting and compelling. “This sensory ethnography film,” Pavel Borecký writes, “will invite you to question the banality of displacement, confinement and exploitation in an out-of-sight territory”.