VISUAL REVIEW | Vol. 13, No. 1, 2023 | ISSN 2695-9631
International Visual Culture Review / Revista Internacional de Cultura Visual
https://doi.org/10.37467/revvisual.v13.3382

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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KEYWORDS

Visual Anthropology
Representation
Observational Realism
Anthropology vs Ethnography
Sensory Turn
Experimental Cinema

ABSTRACT

This article aims to develop a critical overview of visual anthropology by exploring the main obstacles and pivotal challenges throughout its evolution. It explores the ongoing representational and logocentric orientations of mainstream anthropology that have caused the rejection of acknowledging audio-visual anthropology as valid academic work. Furthermore, by singling out the ocular-centric and visual realist tendencies that exist in visual anthropology, it is argued that, to some extent, it validates those criticisms and even has its roots in those representational and logocentric orientations. Within this article, a position is taken besides those who consider the 'sub-discipline' of visual anthropology as a critical approach to mainstream (social or cultural) anthropological studies. The arguments lead to the conclusion, suggesting that by distinguishing between ethnography and anthropology (Ingold: 2014 & 2017) a more diverse, creative, and comprehensive idea of audio-visual (multimodal) anthropology is probable.

Received: 03/ 12 / 2022
Accepted: 07/ 02 / 2023

1. Introduction

Visual anthropology and ethnographic film, as a consequence, gained increasing attention. They have been studied and debated further —for or against— which influenced their development in various ways. However, there has not been any consensus on what the term visual anthropology actually means and where and how it has been applied so far. According to Chris Wright (1998), "although the term is used on a regular basis, what is currently meant by combining the two words 'visual' and 'anthropology' remains unclear" (p.16). A still valid ambiguity that is coined by Mac Dougall (1998) is a resemblance to a "suit of clothes bought a little too large in the hope that someone will grow into it" (p. 61). There are indeed various scopes of interest within visual anthropology. From a field of study, research technique, teaching tool, or method of publication, to a more radical view that considers visual anthropology as a critical approach to the traditional anthropological epistemology and methodology. This diversity of opinions and points of view can be considered as productive elements that enhance the level of development and progress in the discipline —and indeed has been so to some extent. However, in the case of visual anthropology, its 'inter' or 'multi' disciplinary characteristics and its conflicting approaches have sometimes different or even contradictory epistemological backgrounds.

I do not intend to draw borders and set limits for this field of study and practice, as I appreciate and support the sense of openness and flexibility in the field and its encounter with other practices. On the contrary, the argument is that some of the above-mentioned scopes of interest have blocked the dynamic interactions that the field may inquire into, narrowing its scope down to limited and subordinate practice. With this intention in what follows I tend to discuss the major constraints that have been holding back this practice.

However, it is important to emphasize that this article distinguishes between visual anthropology and the anthropological study of cultural visuality and other media production and application by different cultures and communities. Therefore, the visual anthropology that is advocated here is consolidated by the increasing acknowledgement of the embodied essence of our perception of being-in-the-world, and thereupon, the faith in the corporeality of the research field, seek to break the linguistic confinement and pave the way for using hybrid and multi-sensory media —with a focus on film as one of the main mediums. Striving to establish more-than-text modes of narrative and re-presentation, this approach seeks to grant new perspectives to experience and mediate anthropological works —including those practices with implications attributed to visual anthropology, especially in the wake of digital and visual culture.

2. Major impediments

2.1. Visual dominance

The very first constraint of visual anthropology that can be pointed out lies in its adjective: "visual". Through the brief history of this field, we can see how vision and visuals have been dominantly applied by most scholars and practitioners, and how other sensory modalities have been either totally ignored, or at best, hierarchically regarded as secondary. Speaking of visual anthropology and its relationship to anthropology, Michael Herzfeld (2011) briefly expresses his hesitation about this combination of words composing the term "visual anthropology". However, his main reason, which I consider to be paradoxical, is the account that considers anthropology as verbal and visual. Therefore, despite his wish to refer to anthropology as multisensory that includes all sensory modalities, he argues:

> ...although we might achieve these avatars at specific moments, the fact remains that for the moment our main channels of communication and perception are verbal and visual, and our recording equipment cannot encompass much more than that...Good sociocultural anthropology has 'always-already' been both self-consciously verbal and visual. (Banks & Ruby, 2011, p. 314).

This quote raises the question if one should understand these lines as suggesting that the sounds we hear —except when one speaks of course, as there is an emphasis on the 'verbal'— the smells that we smell, the flavors we taste, and the textures that we touch, play no role in our perception and communication? Does this argument suggest that all these modes, which align our engagement with

our natural and socio-cultural lifeworld, are channeled and transferred, self-consciously, through the language we speak and write and through what we see?

Probably one could refer to another seminal work of W.J.T Mitchell (2005), *There Are No Visual Media*. He suggests "the very notion of a medium and of mediation already entails some mixture of sensory, perceptual and semiotic elements" (p. 129), hence "all media are mixed media". In this manner, furthermore, one can allocate deficiencies and incommensurability residing in the term *Visual Anthropology*. Neither the medium of representation nor the images used as the objects of study in this fashion are "purely" visual. Peter Crawford (2010) refers to Mitchell's argument and calls for attention to how the Visual is playing a dominant role in, for example, teaching visual anthropology and ethnographic films. Crawford (2010) remarks, how "[v]isual apperception has almost per definition played a key role in an academic discipline based on a fieldwork method defined as participant observation" (p. 1). He suggests that "the aural perhaps play an even more significant role than the visual when it comes to so-called 'inferred' knowledge and 'intertextuality'". (Crawford, 2010, p.1) By this he highlights the importance of the audio materials of the field as well as in the ethnographic films "as a prerequisite for understanding and knowledge". (Crawford, 2010, p. 9) Hence, throughout these lines, and to move away from this "visual-centric" constraint existing within the very term of visual anthropology, I will rather employ terms like multimodal, or simply audio-visual anthropology, in describing what I am engaged within this field.

2.2. Text Centrism

As I have already mentioned, the shift to the senses and phenomenology has opened up new strands of interest in the use of audio-visual media in ethnographic and anthropological works. To turn to the senses and the body means, according to Grimshaw and Ravetz (2005), to go beyond the "narrow concerns of ocularity" and "visualism" (Fabian, 1983) in search of a form of knowledge that is embedded in the body and the senses. However, they also point out that the constraint still exists because of the text-centric approach of practitioners in the field —of visual anthropology— who are more concerned with the "anthropological part of the equate than visual" (Fabian, 1983, p. 3), which hinders the alternative ethnographic approaches and experiences of using (audio) visual methods in favor of the discursive concerns of the discipline. Ironically, Lucien Taylor's (1996) notion of 'iconophobia' —the existing reluctance and discouragement to engage in (audio)-visual anthropology— has been inverted into the sub-discipline itself.

Chris Wright (1998) also refers to this existing "iconophobia" and urges, through engagement with material and sensual practices in contemporary art, to put an end to, and overcome this constraint in anthropology and the self-imposed restriction of visuals on text-based models. He also problematizes the antagonistic perception between "aesthetic composition" and "anthropological relevance" that exists within the field of anthropology. He suggests that this issue "perhaps belies, or actually works to perpetuate, some perceived threat that the visual poses to anthropology" (Wright, 1998, p. 20) Therefore, this may be the reason that still, within anthropology, the visual is often used solely as a technique and index technology to provide reliable and countable data, and perhaps as an attempt to "work against the properties of the medium it uses, trying to make films act like texts" (Wright, 1998, p. 20). The kind of 'verbal-visual anthropology' that Herzfeld (2011) is advocating for seems to play in accord with the descriptions mentioned above and given by Wright.

Herzfeld advocates for the use of cameras and the ability of extensive recording of meetings, interviews, etc., based on which further re-examination of movements and gestures, as well as "commentary on the nature of relationships" and the possibility of "hearing through seeing" as an aural enhancement of capacity could be carried out (Herzfeld, 2011). This, indeed, is a clear example of what Wright, Grimshaw, and others have said about the relationship between "visual" and "textual" anthropology. More evidently, when he explains how a "friendly family camcorder" helps him to develop his "visual questionnaire" and, based on all his field experience, he concludes that "we would do better to insist that visual and other sensory recordings be considered an integral part of ethnographic data collection" (Herzfeld, 2011, p. 330). Furthermore, he indicates how concerns related to aesthetics, which he believes is linked to sophisticated technical equipment applied for filmmaking, destroy the intimacy of the relationships and the field settings. Consequently, he concludes that the visual medium is not yet a fully domesticated medium in the discipline in comparison to writing with its well-known style of poetics and sensibility.

Herzfeld's model is clearly in line with the classic idea that regards the medium as a tool for research with no potential role in representing knowledge. He sounds as if the medium's ultimate adequacy is to be applied as a pen, registering field notes, and serving as *aides-mémoire*, as supplementary documentation attached to the more "comprehensive" intellectual contextualization made through text for scholarly and academic purposes and/or teaching in seminars. From this perspective, the question I raise is why one, with this point of view, should bother to edit the footage taken to turn them into a film and create an audio-visual narrative.

David Howes (2003), as an advocate of anthropology of the senses, also surprisingly discounts film in comparison to text. His statements are particularly expressed in his book *Sensual Relations-Engaging Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, which is a continuation of his participation in the project of studying hierarchical sensory orders in different societies. Howes, in his argument, raises questions about the possible outcome of this journey to the senses and asks:

> What now of the end product of all this sensuous ethnographic investigation: the ethnographic text? Is this not an anticlimax, a pitiful reduction of multisensory experience to a disembodied script, a final surrender to the vilified model of the text? Without a doubt, it is, to a large extent. Are there any alternatives?. (Howes, 2003, p. 57)

To answer these questions, Howes refers ambivalently to Paul Stoller (1997) and Laura Marks (2000) who privilege film as an alternative medium that is more evocative than text and therefore conveys "sensory impressions" in a better way than text. However, it comes as a surprise that Howes eventually turns this advantage down, and on the contrary, suggests this feature as a disadvantage. He believes that, although films may occasionally be able to convey certain sensorial aspects, such as "dance dynamics", it still suffers from a lack of immediacy and direct channels of communication in other circumstances such as olfactory rituals. Thus, in Howes' view, visual images would have a strong tendency to "overshadow" the aromatic evocations. This implication led Howes to make a U-turn to text as his preferred medium because it does not contain nor present any direct sensory data —except, as he argues, the visual nature of the printed word. This quality, according to Howes, creates a form of equality among the senses. In this way, Howes assumes or, as he says, "feels" more efficient in the text, in some cases, in conveying sensory images and experiences. According to him, text prevents the possible falsity of access to first-hand knowledge that might arise from watching a film due to its audio-visual immediacy.

I find it remarkable how Howes degrades a medium that offers more sensory access to its audience to experience different sensory qualities, which he claims he wants to convey. More so, he does this in favor of another medium —text— that lacks those qualities and according to him is disembodied, and yet is claimed to be the superior medium. Unless one speculates that Howes' objectives in a sensory investigation are not to investigate how different people experience their life-world through their sensory perception. Instead, the attempt here, in a way, is to categorize the senses as a subject of study. It is also not clear to me how and why Howes profoundly ignores and disregards the ability of the audio-visual medium to mediate and communicate his concerns, to describe and categorize his objects and/or subjects. Ironically, this is what most traditional ethnographic films have been dealing with by far —especially through visual and verbal contextualization and significantly through voice-over techniques or traditional methods used in the observational style. For years, they have been criticized for not implementing more innovative, experimental, performative, and sensory approaches to exploit the profound potentialities that the medium can offer to get closer to the incarnated and sensory meaning of living experience.

These statements and approaches to audio-visual recordings and their role in ethnographic investigations, can be related to Jay Ruby's statement back in 1975 who argued:

> [w]hile it is reasonable to expect anthropologists and other educated members of our culture to be highly sophisticated, competent, and self-conscious about speaking and writing, an analogous assumption cannot be made about their understanding and use of visual communicative forms. Training in visual communication is not a common experience in our education. It is rare to find an anthropologist who knows very much about these forms, and even rarer to find one who has any competence in their production... However, to become a competent visual anthropologist, it is necessary to be trained in two fields-anthropology and visual communication...[therefore] it is

> necessary to more fully integrate the study and use of visual forms into the central issues of anthropology. Unless this integration is realized, the production of photographic images by anthropologists will remain an activity that is peripheral to the needs and goals of the majority of anthropologists. (Ruby, 1975, p. 104)

One should be able to master the medium —in our case, the audio-visual medium— as Ruby indicates, in addition to the ethnographic fieldwork and research process. It seems, therefore, that the significant constraints preventing audio-visual mediums from being in accordance with Herzfeld's expectations, that is, "fully domesticated" as a style in the discipline —in the way he believes that writing is— are more often due to lack of motivation or interest. It also relates to the degree of ability of anthropologists or researchers to theorize and apply these mediums, and not the deficiency of the medium.

I have been visiting various ethnographic film festivals in recent years, as well as teaching theoretical and practical courses in audiovisual anthropology. What I have observed is the lack of both theoretical knowledge, and exhausting the potentialities of the medium in many of the films. This issue is overemphasized by the assumptions and expectations that different people in the audience have shown toward the medium and its role in the field. I remember that I was once asked to offer a course at an ethnology institute to enhance students' ability to "read" and "translate" films. I rejected the proposal because I neither have such competence nor do I think that films, especially anthropological or ethnographic ones, are supposed to be made to be read or translated in a deterministic manner. One could link these kinds of assumptions of film to the semiotic structures heavily applied in styles such as structuralist films. This probably resonates with those views that Mitchell (1995) critically refers to. The assumptions that "the visual arts are 'sign systems' informed by 'conventions' that paintings, photographs, sculptural objects, and architectural monuments are fraught with 'textuality' and 'discourse.'"(p.14).

To shed more light on this issue —what I consider as the problematic assumptions about the role that the audio-visual medium can play in the process of producing and mediating anthropological knowledge— it is worth reviewing the seminal concept of 'iconophobia' that is referred to by various critics in the field. To better understand the issue, I will use a relatively classical example in which the use of camera and photograph have been misconceived by the researcher.

2.3 Visual Realism

Kirsten Hastrup's (1992) article "Out of Anthropology: The Anthropologist as an Object of Dramatic Representation", as a result of her unsuccessful attempt to use photography to convey her fieldwork perception of what she perceives as the existing aura of "male sexuality domination" during her research of the Icelandic Ram Festival. As a result of this failure, Hastrup (1992) blames the medium's uselessness for developing a "thick description" or gaining insight into invisible aspects of "social reality". She argues that she was only able to record the surface: a "thin description". She lamented that "[t]he reality of the total social event had been transformed into a two-dimensional image, a souvenir'" (Hastrup, 1992, p. 9). The apparatus was only competent to record specific forms and the visible patterns of social organization. Consequently, she concludes that only through the medium of text, the "thick description" and the invisible processes of conceptual and temporal contextualization and meaning-making can be revealed. Chris Wright and Ruppert Cox are among the ones who have critically reflected on Hastrup's view and categorized the problematic elements in two major rubrics. The first key issue that they point at refers to Hastrup's replication of a statement from the late Timothy Asch, who had acknowledged the role of the camera for an anthropologist to be the same as a telescope for an astronomer and microscope for a biologist. Wright and Cox (2012) believe that this statement and the related arguments manifest the forensic and deterministic approach towards the visual as a technical method of expression and craft within anthropology. They elaborate further on how this perspective is reflected in the contemporary debates in visual anthropology —which has been routinely employed as a synonym for ethnographic filmmaking. Furthermore, they refer to the practice of teaching technical and theoretical methods of observational filmmaking to trained anthropologists with the objective of developing skills to look at the world in particular ways. Hence, according to Wright and Cox, these critical stances highlight:

> … the anxiety that continues to surround visual anthropology's perceived non-textual or anti-textual stance and suggests that it is the ability of text to evoke a sense of texture that makes it superior to visual media. This demonstrates the double bind to which visual anthropology is often subjected – it is either too evocative and expressive, exceeding its role as an illustration, or it is the opposite: too limited to surface and unable to reveal any depth. The visual is either productive of a surfeit which is plenitude of meaning that needs to be constrained by text, or devoid of meaning and incapable of the kinds of 'thick description' and texture that text can provide. (Wright & Cox, 2012, p. 124)

The second key issue in Hastrup's argument, according to Wright and Cox, is the role that she plays as the photographer in this project. They question the existence of premeditated strategies she needed to design and plan throughout the process according to the characteristics of the work and the subject matter. They suggest that it was probably needed to apply some alternative strategies to capture and incorporate those missing aspects into the work.

> [I]t might be necessary and insightful to plan theoretically or think experimentally about how to take images of the ram festival...[and the fact that]...such preparation might have required an explicit engagement with genres of photography that have dealt with such events and themes...It is as if she relies on a conception of her camera as a particular kind of technical recording device and on a certain narrow notion of witnessing and visual realism or literalism (Wright & Cox, 2012, p. 124).

Thus, the notion of iconophobia, in the way described by these authors, is not a resistance to the image itself or to its application, but to "the seeming unwillingness to engage with the visual" (Wright & Cox, 2012, p. 125). In other words, these arguments lead me to conclude that *iconophobia* is perhaps the result of a lack of knowledge and/or recognition —like the examples mentioned earlier— of the spectrum of potentialities that exist in the audio-visual medium. It appears that the existing standards for data collection and knowledge production, clearly and traditionally structured based on text-centric and semiotic epistemology, are the main and almost the only framework from which other-alternative-mediums are measured in order to be considered, recognized, and applied in the process of knowledge production. This view has largely disavowed the potential of other alternative mediums to be explored.

One of the most typical questions raised by the critics of (audio) visual anthropology, and by some of its advocates, was whether film as a medium is a complete product on its own, capable of conveying complex anthropological concepts comprehensively, or in the words of Ruby and Banks (2011), whether this idea is merely a "complete utterance" (p. 207). Subsequently, it has been suggested that it might be valuable only in the broader context of a sociological research project but cannot be an end product on its own. It is therefore suggested that:

> Visual research, whether conducted through the creation of images or the study of images or both, is no different. It has to be seen as only one technique to be employed by social researchers, more appropriate in some contexts, less so in others. (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015, p. 164)

Jay Ruby (2008), who has been writing extensively and critically on ethnographic films and visual anthropology, suggests that the idea of ethnographic film needs to be abandoned to documentary filmmakers. He argues that "the claims made to the value of ethnographic film in the broader anthropological project are just that – claims" (Banks & Ruby, 2012, p. 10). His reluctance is due to his unsuccessful attempt:

> to find a method that would overcome the way most viewers watch a film – a position that makes it virtually impossible to comprehend a sophisticated filmic statement. One only has to contemplate the tiny audiences that avant-garde films have been able to attract to see the logic of this statement. Like the constructs of experimental film, anthropological knowledge is too complex to be packaged within the conventions of documentary realism. (Banks & Ruby, 2012, p. 5)

Ruby (2011) problematizes the overuse of "Documentary Realism" in ethnographic filmmaking by anthropologists and their ignorance in applying more experimental forms. In addition, he presents his "Oak Park Project" and explains how, after several filming opportunities in the field, he has not been able to make a coherent film out of the recorded footage, and that it is, therefore, necessary to combine it with written text and photographs. This constraint leads him to experiment with a kind of interactive non-linear narrative form, by creating a —at the time innovative— CD-ROM and a web page. Thus, alongside Peter Biella and Sarah Pink, Ruby appeals to the innovative possibilities offered by what he calls hypermedia. Through this, they seek a remedy for the limitation of traditional methods of writing, photography, and video. However, hypermedia for him, seemingly, means to combine ethnographic materials (in text, sound, and image forms) that are offered through digital media.

Pink (2006) sees *hypermedia* as one of the ways in which visual anthropology incorporates written theoretical, descriptive, pedagogical, and applied anthropology narratives with reflexive audiovisual and photographic depictions of knowledge and experience that can only be conveyed (audio)visually. These forms and methods, she suggests, bring us to the visual anthropology of the present century "that both influences and is influenced by the development of written anthropology and at the same time departs from and references existing textual forms" (Pink, 2006, p. 105). In a critical review of the approach proposed by Pink and others, Wright and Cox believe that, despite the attempt to create a conjunction between the constructive aspect of text and the evocative characteristics of image as a response to the need for more contextualization in ethnographic filmmaking, these proposed forms of hypermedia act more

> as 'technical and methodological' means to overcome the disciplinary definition provided by the AAA [American Anthropological Association] statement and others like it, rather than as constructive applications of a media 'co-aesthetic' able to provide ethnographic insight in terms particular to the subject under study. (Wright & Cox, 2012, p. 11)

Yet, I do not wish to oppose the core proposals put forward by Pink and Ruby on what they call "hypermedia", producing works consisting of multiple and non-linear narratives. As in general, the impacts of multimodal and digital technologies in shifting the concept of sociality and culture to new dimensions which have opened new strands in fieldwork and presentation (Pink, 2015; Boellstorff 2008, 2021) are evident. However, the argument is that films and other contemporary art forms of presentation and exhibition are capable of producing works that respond to these demands. The critical issue which remains of concern here is the extent of unsuccessful attempts to use audio-visual materials to create a coherent film or any other creative ways which compel us to introduce text to give direction and meaning to other recorded material as "context" or "thick description". This is a question that every advocate must ask himself or herself and must surely respond to it with self-reflexiveness.

Another question is, when and under what circumstances can we consider studies that use audio and visual material as an audio-visual anthropologic work? If the use of audio-visual material is reduced to the documentation of a project or, as evidence from fieldwork to the body of text-based research, can it still be considered audio-visual anthropology? If so, how can we distinguish it from the mainstream and the traditional, so to say, "hybrid" forms of data collection, such as note-taking and perhaps representation? As Ruby himself points out by quoting Edwards on the use of photographs — and I extend it to audio-visual materials in general— that it "is becoming more diffuse and dispersed throughout the anthropological field, no longer confined to visual anthropology" (Banks & Ruby, 2012, p. 2).

3. Advocating for an alternative approach

In what follows, I try to define the approach to audio-visual anthropology that I subscribe to. I have criticized the textual and visual centrism —since I believe that both are deeply intertwined— that exists in the vast number of works/films produced in the context of audio-visual anthropology, as well as the boundaries that have been drawn to define it as if it were only concerned "with questions of information, representation, interpretation, accuracy". (MacDougall, 2006, p. 269). I agree with Ruby when he problematizes the prevailing consensus among anthropologists in applying the style of

documentary realism in their attempt to make films. I concur with this suggestion that by setting ourselves free from this style, the possibility of "a true anthropological cinema is emerging" (Ruby, 2008, p. 4). I also accept the comparison of the complexity of anthropological knowledge with the construction of avant-garde experimental films as in many cases it is the medium and form that are at the core attention of experimentation. However, in his own hypermedia project, I have never found traces of any such endeavor that projects any attempt to build alternative narrative forms interacting with the viewer in a different approach than the prevailing text-vision-centric manner. It is, however, worth mentioning that Ruby's reason for this reluctance is his concern that experimental films attract very few audiences and could not find their way in communicating with a broader range of people as if this were not the case with many ethnographic and anthropological monographs with their complex academic forms and style of writing. Have they been able to communicate the knowledge they have created with a wider audience?

I will point at two issues in this argument. Firstly, as already described, there is a strong tendency to use the realistic and observational style and its close ethnographic bond. This dominant approach, in many ways, masks the "constructed" characteristics of ethnographic knowledge. In this tradition, fewer people are encouraged to follow and apply the paths of avant-garde figures, such as Jean Rouch, with his experimental "science-fiction" approaches to the creation of ethnographic and anthropological knowledge, despite the regular praise that he and his works, as well as his background philosophy, receive. If one simply compares the number of works produced in each genre simply in the festivals and libraries, one would notice how scarce the latter are. The second point that consequently becomes clear, and that I find problematic, is the actual situation that places audio-visual anthropology as a synonym, or as Ruby and Durrington (2012) put it, a "fancy term" for an ethnographic film. They suggest that ethnographic film is just a part of a whole that entails all broader aspects of a "visible and pictorial culture" (p. 190).

In view of the above-mentioned issues and juxtaposing them alongside the dilemmas and claims raised about the impossibility of communicating the *invisible* aspects or *thick descriptions* of the social phenomenon via film, I conclude that one of the major problems could be the domination and centrality of a kind of *ethnographic-mindedness* as the dominant characteristics in the discipline. This is the kind of view that originally gave rise to, and advocates, explicitly or implicitly, the tendency to apply a "realistic" and observational style, projecting "real people" in their "real life" context as the most obvious style in making films about peoples' life condition. This is not a claim or call for the elimination of any 'real' and' live' form of filming, but rather critically stresses how this approach enacts or becomes a label and a kind of indicator and boundary for works of audio-visual anthropology. I have witnessed how different related academic departments, festivals, and conferences have ignored many films and works, excluding them as not being "anthropological" due to their supposed lack of ethnography, while some works simply obtain an observational style picturing some —mostly exotically— Others, offering contextualization by integrating interviews with subjects and/or other subjects. As such, while most of the other alternative and experimental genres of presentation and production of anthropological knowledge are largely ignored, this dominant tendency has become the vulnerable subject of assessments and claims on the impotence of audio-visual media to be applied and to convey an independent, comprehensive body of knowledge, which has been discussed in Hastrup's case, as an independent body of knowledge.

I support the idea that urges reformulation, re-designation, or reaffirmation of the specific concepts and terms used within the discourse. I argue it helps us to be clearer about what we mean when it comes to applying different terms and concepts. What is necessary and what I would like to discuss further in this article, is to specify whether we should differentiate *audio-visual anthropology* from its apparent counterpart, *ethnographic film*, and how.

4. Anthropology vs. Ethnography

Tim Ingold (2008, 2014, 2017) is one of the most prominent figures arguing that although ethnography and anthropology could be complementary as both have a lot to contribute to each other, yet, they are two separate and distinct endeavors. He claims that the term ethnography is heavily and harmfully overused in anthropology and hinders the role it needs to play in advancing the world we live in. In protest against the portrayal of the "be-all and end-all" of anthropology, he argues that ethnography is misused not only in anthropology but also in different branches of the social sciences

as a "modish substitute for qualitative" (Ingold, 2014, p. 384) and as such has become a too loose and unclear term. Ethnography, Ingold states, "literally means writing about people" or, better, the "art of describing" (Alpers 1983, as cited in Ingold, 2014, p. 385): "It's more of an art than a science, but no less accurate or truthful" (ibid, p. 385). A written monograph or a film that "chronicles the life and times of a people" as experienced, and is "sensitive, contextually nuanced, richly detailed, and above all faithful to what it depicts" (Ingold, 2017, p. 21) can be considered as "good" ethnography'. The goal of ethnography is to develop an interpretation based on encounters "through the retrospective conversion of the learning, remembering and note-taking" (Ingold, 2014, p. 386) into "data" and eventually the research account. Therefore, it faces ethical dilemmas and a possible double-crossing of ethnographic encounters. By contrast, anthropology is an "open-ended, comparative and critical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the one world we all inhabit. … It means to study with people and not to make study of them" (Ingold, 2017, p. 22).

In an attempt to project the ambiguity of the presence and application of ethnography in the discipline, he refers to Jackson's approach, whose objective is studying the "conditions and possibilities of being human" (Ingold, 2017, p. 388). According to Ingold, this objective is an indication of the practice of anthropology ... [and], not ethnography, in spite of Jackson's own account in considering his work as ethnography. In problematizing the implication of the term 'ethnographic fieldwork', he argues it "only stands out when you have left it far behind and begin to write about it". (Ingold, 2014, p. 386). He, therefore, suggests that the 'ethnographic' and the 'field' both have to be dropped from the term and that only a 'participant observation' method, which is a different practice than ethnography, should be kept as a way of working.

To save this method from fundamental critical views, Ingold also goes on to build up a different ontological standpoint that moves away from its classic and mainstream definition. These concerns are similar to those of Jackson's, who questioned the possibility of simultaneous observation and participation (Jackson, 1989 in Ingold, 2014, p. 387). He emphasized the incongruity of the data that each method produces, as observation has an objective tendency and participation has a subjective tendency, Ingold's response is that these kinds of critics start from the point of view that "splits between being in the world and knowing about it" (Ingold, 2014, p. 387). He explains that observation is not to be misunderstood for objectification but is rather to be seen as an attentive participation and engagement with people. He claims: "there can be no observation without participation, that is, an intimate coupling, in perception and action of the observer and observed... [and] absolutely, not an undercover technique for gathering intelligence on people, under the pretext of learning from them" (Ingold, 2000, p. 108; 2014, pp. 387-388). As such, Ingold appears to free anthropology from the conviction that its work starts with the "ideographic" documentation of the particular (ethnography) to transcend it to the "nomothetic" comparative generalization (anthropology). Therefore, he suggests that anthropology in pursuit of credibility, legitimacy, and credentialism should not need to cover "people's lives in cases... [and] qualitative evidence" (Ingold, 2017, p. 22, 3).

Clearly, the more we distance ourselves from using the life of others and refrain from using them as objects sitting on the shelves of our "window of knowledge" or as "mere means of advancing our intellectual knowledge" (Jackson, 2013, p. 51), the further we can stay from the above-mentioned dilemmas. But how much should anthropology, which derives its understanding from being in the world and living with others, separate itself from the inclusion of traces of the lives of others? How far could it be kept away from the predicament of representation? This remains a matter of debate. From another perspective, one may also wonder if ethnography, too, can be applied with fewer or no troublesome elements in the same way as has been suggested for anthropology. I would answer this question positively. The more collaborative elements to be integrated into the principles of the work, and the concept of "sharing" to be emplaced at the heart of any sort of research work with other people, in the context of anthropology or ethnography, the closer we get to fair work. As after all I strongly believe that all ethnographic and anthropological knowledge have been created collaboratively. The matter is how far we acknowledge and are ready to share the authorship with those who have been involved.

While Jackson is not clearly in line with Ingold on the division of these two worlds, he still sets an agenda for the project of ethnography relatively similar to that of Ingold's project for anthropology. It is not clear how Jackson connects or distinguishes ethnography and anthropology, as Ingold has also pointed out. My interpretation is that for Jackson, they are not known to be the same domains, but are

definitely closely linked. Like Ingold, Jackson indicates that the project of ethnography is also an open-ended one. Through his view of the field and participant observation, coming at the very same point of view as Ingold does, he offers a more radical view of the inherent features of anthropological and/or ethnographic knowledge. Jackson argues:

> ethnographic judgment abolishes the subject-object split of natural science and replaces it with an intersubjective model of understanding... [that its outcome] is never a synthesis of all the various points of view taken together, but an arbitrary closure that leaves both self and other with a provisional and open-ended view that demands further dialogue and engagement. (Jackson, 2013, p. 260)

What should be emphasized here first and foremost, regardless of how we interpret these two activities as either explicitly distinct or the way Jackson ties them together, is that both should *act* responsibly and *take* responsibility for what is (re)presented in the public sphere in accordance with the existing general contexts. What I believe is a *step beyond* the general responsibility which has already been acknowledged and is mostly limited to the framework of the field specifically and directly to the participants and those limited numbers of people who have been engaged in the fieldwork.

I believe, especially in the context of today's global situation, there should be far greater requirements urging us to consider more responsibly the speculative processes of interpretation of the works that are to be released. In order to be cautious regarding the possible effects and affects that our works can create, particularly in relation to how they are contextualized and interpreted based on the pervasively generated information through the media and/or through institutionalized assumptions. Finding and enforcing strategies that prevent (re)production of malicious interpretations is essential, at least, if not fighting back against those that already exist. This very important and sensitive issue is even more apparent in the application of media such as film, photographs, and in general those with broader and more mobile dissemination characteristics — audio-visual anthropology.

Ingold's call for a distinction between anthropology and ethnography helps to portray the obstacles and constraints existing in the discipline that is valid up until now, and essential to be addressed. It not only helps to bridge the roots of the problems faced in audio-visual anthropology, but also to strengthen the arguments that call for the inclusion and consideration of works aimed at anthropological —and/or ethnographic— research, but do not necessarily project or mirror the 'ethnographic' —fieldwork— material in their presentation.

5. The predicament of the observational style

In what follows, I will discuss some of the ideas that promote observational cinema. To this end, I tend to construct a critical analogy between these views and the criticism of Ingold presented above, specifically by highlighting the medium of film as a clearly constructed product of its author(s) —the filmmaker and/or the anthropologist. Therefore, it serves to mediate and convey what its author(s) aim(s) for, or in Benjamin's words: it "bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand" (Benjamin, in Marks, 1999, p. 129). Therefore, I argue that it is a fallacy to create such an illusion that suggests a work to be a non-judgmental (re)presentation of some other's worldview to its audience. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider it as an attempt to enable an audience to form their own judgments on the basis of the work they are encountered with. This is the view of Paul Henley, one of the figures championing the observational style in the field of audio-visual anthropology. Henley (2005) considers the observational film to be a medium for research in the production of anthropological knowledge and a practical ethnography based on the methods of participant observation. He believes that this style, through the use of an "unprivileged" single camera and synchronous sound, communicate the lived experience of a "normal human participant" (Henley, 2005, p. 114). It tends to "preserve the integrity of events" with a spontaneity that occurs without any "pre-arrangement" through long recordings. While recognizing other forms of filmmaking, Henley puts forward observational cinema as the preferred genre, that is, as he claims, in "harmonious correspondence" with the present concerns of anthropology. (Henley, 2005, p. 110).

Silvio Carta (2015) in the pursuit of visual and experimental information in observational cinema refers to Henley and stresses the importance of the prevailing realistic form that provides "a realist

impression of the personalities of flesh-and-blood human beings" at the heart of the genre (Carta, 2015, p. 2). Relatively in line with the view of Henley, the camera is introduced as a device to replicate the [realistic] qualities of the environment by capturing in sync and offering "an illusion of normality". By staying away from film technologies and camera styles that are distinct from most fiction films, the genre tends to bring the viewers "to the social experience of film subjects... [recreating] the subjective experience of the eye and mind behind the camera" (Carta, 2015, p. 5).

The third example added to my analogy is the perspective of Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009). They suggest that their approach to observational cinema is predicated on the works of scholars such as Ingold's *sentient ecology*, Jackson's *radical empiricism*, and MacDougall's *corporeal images*, "in seeking to move anthropological attention from the conventional objects of social scientific inquiry – structures, systems, theory – in favor of a renewed engagement with lived experience" (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, p. 551). They also refer to Taussig's mimesis adapted from Benjamin and the Frankfurt School "as a particular way of knowing" based on "two key elements of 'copy' and 'contact', understood as a sensuous or visceral connection between perceiver and perceived, subject and object" (Taussig, 1993 in Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, p. 551). This implies that the "tactility of the vision" displaces the concept of "knowing something" with "relating to something". It is a mechanism created by proximity, hence, in contrast with the enlightenment model that invokes the senses of detachment, distance, and mastering. This proximity, however, according to Walter Benjamin, is inseparable from its antithesis, which is "alterity" and functions dialectically. The "sameness and difference, self and others" (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, p. 551).

Based on the above-mentioned methods, the authors advocate observational cinema —with its style of long recording, deep field scope, accuracy, and dedication to the use of extended editing— as a challenge to forms of communication in anthropology. In the meantime, they emphasize the connection in observational cinema, especially the moments that are expressed in an almost intangible and empathic way as a crucial aspect of the genre and therefore a challenge for the filmmaker to "make this moment concrete" (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009).

6. Moving Beyond Styles

The above-mentioned standpoints resonate with the common shortages existing in audio-visual anthropology and ethnographic film genres and can be explored and identified through Ingold's polemics. This is where the main criticism of mine also lies, that is, how documentary realism and the notion that promotes the method of the camera as a research tool are foregrounded under the cloak of observational style on various occasions; ideas akin to Pink's who suggests that "the visual brings the fieldwork experience directly to the context of representation" (Pink, 2006, p. 16). Ingold's critical stance therefore can be expanded to these kinds of views, by stating that the:

> idea of ethnographic fieldwork [one can say ethnographic films], perpetuates the notion that, what you are doing in the field is gathering material [film footages] on people and their lives ... to burnish [the] social scientific credential [as] 'qualitative data' [documentary evidence] that which, subsequently to be analyzed and written up" [montaged by using long sequence shots]. (Ingold, 2017, p. 23)

Furthermore, he emphasizes that observation should not be confused with objectification, rather "it is to notice what people are saying and doing, to watch and listen, and to respond in your own practice ... a way of participating attentively... [and,] not a technique of data gathering but an ontological commitment" (Ingold, 2017, p. 22).

As such, the way that the camera is promoted by Henely (2005) and Carta (2015), or as Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) see it alongside the microphone as extensions of their bodies, is epistemologically at odds with the anthropology that Ingold advocates. Watching and listening attentively and participating in this sense are clearly not the actions that occur through the apparatus. Rather they prevail through the embodied presence and engagement of the very same people who take part and engage in the social and inter-subjective circumstances. Therefore, I find it ontologically problematic to consider the medium of presentation and communication as a research method, and I believe that there is a false assertion in it. It sounds similar to claiming that writing a book is a process of research and a method for gaining knowledge on a subject.

I argue that the process of selecting the medium of representation —the camera and the act of recording in this case— and the idea for how to conceptualize and develop them, should be posterior to the bodily engagement that has been developed. It can be imagined only after a proper amount of understanding and knowledge of the field has begun to flourish. Therefore, I believe that entering a research field with the idea of making a film in advance has its own problematic aspects that can hinder any research project from the task it is expected to accomplish. This is as restricting, framing, and limiting as entering the field with theories and hypotheses about others beforehand, the strategy that Ingold and Jackson, among others, critically discuss.

Filming and recording require their own attention and focus, which makes it almost impossible to be fully present and responsive to the circumstances that exist in the field. MacDougall, who is considered an observational filmmaker, nevertheless has been expressing his concern about its shortages by pointing out:

> the act of filming tends to interpose its own barriers between the observer and the observed... [and] the filmmaker exhaust most of his energy making his camera respond to what is before it [as] the observational filmmaker often thinks in terms of the image on the screen rather than his presence in the setting where events are occurring... [the] filmmaker limits himself to that which occurs naturally and spontaneously in front of his camera… and [therefore] finds himself cut off from many of the channels that normally characterize human inquiry. (MacDougall, 1995, p. 121)

Although MacDougall, a few years later, redraws his contestation on the basis of what he sees as the epistemological changes in the discipline, nonetheless, I believe these limitations and barriers still exist. Particularly in the way that "knowledge of human life" is perceived and has been dealt with, we do not see much fundamental alteration at the core of the style and methods proposed by the advocates of observational cinema. This limits the possibility of approaching and encountering social phenomena as if all of them had similar characteristics, and we, as researchers, are not different people, with different personalities, and diverse cultural and even academic views. Factors that have strong impacts on our quest for diverse and versatile elements comprise our lives, each of which calls for different strategies to be presented and communicated.

Although all advocates in varying degrees emphasized the subjective nature of film based on the point of view of filmmakers, they offered minimal propositions suggesting how to engage with this important issue. No major proposal has been made, in form and style —with the exception of rejecting the talking head and voice-over— that separates the current approach from its older positivist one. In fact, it is more like imposing meaning on relatively similar actions and expecting conceptual transformation, rather than exploring the limitations, potentials, and consequences and implementing formal alterations accordingly. Carta (2015) points out: "that observational films recreate the subjective experience of the eye and mind behind the camera through long scenes that reproduce the single point of view of an actual observer" (p. 14). I see no reason or indication to accept this claim as valid at all times. On the contrary, and on many occasions, it is the persistence in recording events with long shots and the follow-up camera that impairs the subjective point of view and foreshadows a sense of reality that resembles, even if implicitly, what is shown as reality out there.

The style somewhat ties the filmmaker's hands during filming or editing to apply certain cinematic techniques to extend the multiple layers of meaning across different forms and qualities. It is more like playing a table soccer game and trying to apply innovative tactics used in a real soccer game. Clearly, there are not many options, as you are left with minimal possibilities, as all the figures —players or tools— are mounted on the rotating bars. I also found it notable that Grimshaw and Ravetz tend to present observational cinema as an example of phenomenological anthropology —not as the sole and definitive method though— suggesting that:

> the distinctive techniques and aesthetic of observational filmmaking no longer appear as evidence of a simple-minded scientism or old-fashioned ethnographic realism. Instead, they can be appraised as constitutive of a reflexive praxis - that is, a way of doing anthropology that has the potential to fuse creatively the object and medium. (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, p. 552)

What is said here sounds like suggesting that since the general point of view of 'reality' has shifted, we can now adjust our interpretation or reception of observational films accordingly, from an older tradition —with no or minor improvements in its style— to a progressive one. I believe this has to be conceived the other way around. It was, in fact, approaches like observational style that have had hand in creating a sense of objectivity and realism, and they need to be re-conceptualized and modified. This means changing their approach and technique, as well as their way of constructing meaning and reality, according to the broader perspectives of epistemological reform that Grimshaw and Ravetz have indicated. It is, precisely because of these revised points of view that we need different alternative forms and strategies to meet the demands of phenomenological, existential, and embodied anthropology or other recent and progressive knowledge of human life.

Another major constraint is the montage, which has been severely undermined by —realist— observational methods. It is recommended and proposed —such as the examples mentioned above— that the editing should follow the structure of long-sequence shots taken by the camera with regard to the principle of "refusal of fictional editing in observational films [that] relates to the use of long scenes" (Carta, 2015, p.4) and therefore, to stay away from any creative interruption —understood as manipulation. This is another kind of limitation that is enforced, and hinders or even disproves, any artistic effort to create meaning —sometimes in abstract and imaginative forms— that might seek to communicate arbitrary realities to its viewer, with the conviction that it is fictional, distorted, and therefore a kind of pseudo-reality that, at its best, would be classified as an artwork by mainstream observational advocates.

In my argument, I link these visions of ethnographic films to the ones that Marcus (1990) ironically points out, that:

> ... despite its keen sensitivity to issues of representation and reflexivity in text making, I have found ethnographic film rather tame in its will to rethink the project of ethnography itself. Yet, those who have done the work of critiquing ethnographic rhetoric, mainly with written texts in mind, either have operated from a cinematic imagination or are dealing with experiments in a form that could as easily if not more conveniently be handled in a film medium. (Marcus, 1990, p. 2)

Back in 1997, Peter Loizos, although hopeful about the future changes in observational cinema, also referred to the discrepancy as "attempt[s] to capture events-in-process, [and] the flux of social relations". He then asked: "[w]hat was the character of the huge amounts of material which had been discarded in the cutting room? [How do] those many thousand feet of raw, unedited actuality … lost their right to appear in a 60 min film" (Loizos, 1997, p. 83). He concluded that this approach to ethnographic film limits the narrative scope and grounds the imagination in empirical, immediately visible actualities. The advocates of observational style, although not completely rejecting, behave ambivalently in expressing their stance on the constructed nature of the film production process. On some occasions, as has already been mentioned, they have accepted the subjective nature of the film and have dismissed attempts to create a mechanism or concept of objectification. However, at the same time, and through the implementation of their proposed methods, they have undermined the possibility of moving away from and beyond the rejected and outcasted issues.

These arguments bring us back to the question dealt with earlier. None of these proponents may clarify or find ways to indicate how observational filmmaking has interacted with the unseen aspects of life in their own films. How —with these given instructions— are they about to evoke and communicate those realities that have no immediate trace in the visual realm? The famous "Invisible", and I'd add the "Unspeakable" or "Non-Utterable". MacDougall reminds us that, unlike the anthropologists who have been constantly trying to portray a precise notion of reality,

> filmmakers have shown a growing interest in precisely those things that cannot be seen. It was never the physical body that was felt to be missing in ethnographic films. What was missing was not the body but the experience of existing in it. (MacDougall, 1995, p. 249)

Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev have emphasized the importance of editing in order to break the "mimetic dogma of the humanized camera". They point out that although ethnographic filmmakers are aware of the differences between human eyes and cameras, "their take on filmmaking has..., largely

consisted in minimizing them, so as let the camera imitate the human eye" (Suhr & Willerslev, 2012, p. 283). They highlight the lack of epistemological basis for observational cinema given by Paul Henley, and point out that:

> [f]or observational cinema, the invisible can be said to be that which is seen but not usually noticed … [but what if] the invisible cannot be captured visually, but lies beyond visibility? Then it seems to follow that the long camera takes of observational cinema, indulging in an abundance of visual detail, cannot be sufficient for evoking the invisible (Suhr & Willerslev, 2012, p. 284).

By this token, they propose "that montage, along with other forms of cinematic manipulation, is a precondition for evoking the invisible in its own right" (Suhr & Willerslev, 2012, p. 284). George Marcus (1994) was one of the voices that called for the reconstruction of the idea of anthropological knowledge and the urge to apply alternative narrative techniques in order to create and construct a "sense of the real". As part of his proposal for "modernizing ethnography's apparatus of representation", Marcus (1990) states that in the cinematic montage the "self-conscious experimental moves away from [the] realist representation [and the] existing rhetorical conventions and narrative modes". Although he points out that the alternative coherence of the montage itself is subject to experimentation (pp. 3-4).

7. Concluding

Following Marcus, I stress and conclude that montage or "other disruptive techniques in films" (Suhr & Willerslev, 2012, p. 283) are the means to construct narratives, based on the knowledge acquired and the "meaning made" throughout the fieldwork process. That is to suggest that what we are faced with are two different stages of a body of work, given how entangled they may be on certain occasions. The unseen and unspeakable, are ultimately to be configured and exposed through an innovative and intricate method of narrative creation through recording —sound and image— and montage, which is a highly controlled and selective procedure. My argument re-indicates the tendency that distinguishes ontologically the process we observe, experience, and interpret, in the quest for knowledge in its various forms and qualities, with that of transforming the knowledge through a rigorous and innovative process based on the characteristics of the applied medium or combination of mediums, to mediate and be presented to its audience.

Therefore, I reject acknowledging the existence of arbitrary or random elements in a product such as a film or any other form of presentation of knowledge —as is claimed by realist style advocates. No matter what happens during the filming —registering— we are always carefully selective on the editing set —as Loisoz ironically questioned. Consequently, any case of random appearance —out of our selection and choice— in the film must be considered and interpreted, more than anything else, as an error; the error made by the maker. I argue that those problematic factors identified by Ingold are at the root of these issues and have created shortcomings in the way film and observational cinema have been conceptualized, theorized, and further molded as methodology, in order to obtain a kind of "scientific" outfit to be held accountable in the academic context. This was shaped in a frame, that is "ethnographic-centrism" and its vision can be identified in the words mentioned above, which govern not only mainstream anthropology but also the major body of audio-visual anthropology within the academy.

I want to emphasize that what I argued here is not the refusal to apply any kind of live and documentary images in general, nor that I exclude any form of camera-carrying under any circumstances in the field. My criticism focuses on the implications of "methodologizing" the idea of the "camera as a research tool" and the theories built around it. Those ideas could lead us to suggest that in most cases as an implicit consequence are able to undermine the human presence of the researcher in the field; with its particularity and limitation of the ability to encounter, experience, perceive, and interpret the lives of others. In addition, this would lead to the advocacy of a type of agency that pursues the impression that the study of people, and subsequently, the knowledge gained can be acquired by and through the lens of our camera.

Consequently, and by this token, the materials we report on would be reasons for considering the study as ethnographic and therefore valid to disregard anthropological accounts. Intrigued by the arguments put forward by Ingold, the idea of how anthropology and ethnography are different kinds

of practices, and within the framework of audio-visual anthropology, I argue, we should distinguish between ethnographic and anthropological films. Although one film may include the features of both, as discussed in the previous lines, I find it highly relevant to refute the "Ethnographic" as the measuring scale for the evaluation of audio-visual works of anthropology. Moreover, while the focus in this article remains on film, it is necessary to recognize how the prospects of this discourse have been expanded and transformed by the ever-increasing omnipresence of digital culture and multimodal, social-digital networks in our lifeworld. Although there are further critical inquiries necessary to investigate the diverse perspectives and impacts these prevailing circumstances bring about on the ontological and epistemological aspects of the practice of (audio-visual) anthropology, I believe, the general conceptual framework proposed here remains applicable in that context.

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