

RAJKAMAL AICH

Infographist

Photographer

Art Direction

Visualizer

ABC NEWS (AUSTRALIA) — BBC RADIO, UK
BUZZFEED, HUFFINGTON POST, MTV-INDIA
NDTV-GOODTIMES, SCOOPWHOOP, SCROLL

visual ethnography

LANGUAGES

ENGLISH
BENGALI
HINDI

CONTACT



+91 9871277449



rajkamal.aich@gmail.com

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Graphic designer

diffusion - DY&R
2004-2005
Senior Visualizer

Times of India
2005-2006
Infographist

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per expertise

Photoshop

Indesign

{ TV18
2016-PRESENT
Art Director }

Economic Times
2010-2016
Art Consultant

Money Today
2006-2010
Infographist

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COVER IMAGE: Aich has a professional training in art and worked in visual art for several years (photograph by Katja Müller and Rajkamal Aich)

OUTSIDE THE FRAME OF VIOLENCE: UNSETTLING VISUAL PROJECTS IN AND AFTER WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Lara Rosenoff Gauvin, *University of Manitoba*

ABSTRACT

During my 14 years of work in Northern Uganda, I learned to progressively look outside the frame of violence to understand and re-present how individuals and communities live during and after forced displacement and forced intra-community violence. Through the examination of three visual projects I created in those years, this article explores how the visual has both mirrored and compelled my theoretical understandings. Providing a valuable feedback loop to my progressive unsettling, the visual has hitherto been an integral, yet under-examined and under-theorized, part of my research practice.

KEYWORDS

Photography, Northern Uganda, Responsive Methodologies, Visual Anthropology, Indigenous Knowledge, Violence, Refusal, Collaboration, Afrocentrism.

BIO

Lara Rosenoff Gauvin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba. She is grateful that her research has been supported by a Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship, a Wenner-Gren Post PhD Research Grant, a Trudeau Scholarship, a SSHRC CGSD, and Liu Scholar funds. She is a scholar, artist, activist, and curator whose work centers the knowledge and practices of survivors of conflict and forced displacement. Her current project explores land rights protection initiatives in post-war Northern Uganda.

Lara.rosenoffgauvin@umanitoba.ca
www.lararosenoffgauvin.com

Can you believe that we are reduced to begging for food? We, the Acoli...we were once the top students in the country...but now, look at us. These children who grew up in the camps, they don't even know their own culture-how to farm, how to keep animals, to respect...but that was our way of life! Look at our land here, green, so fertile- if you even drop a seed here right here now it would grow! But now...ahhh...this war. It has really defeated us.

(Isaac, 54 years old. Puranga IDP Camp, Northern Uganda. 2004)

The hard rain started soon after I arrived in Puranga Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp, Northern Uganda. Volunteering with a Canadian film crew, I had gotten a ride out of Gulu town to the camp with the World Food Program convoy. It was October 2004, when it was still dangerous to travel out to the IDP camps because of the war between the Lord's Resistance Army and Uganda's military, the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF).

I was using analog SLR cameras with slide film to photograph the visual effects of the war, so I was not bothered by the wet conditions as I documented the long lines of shivering IDPs huddled under ripped tarps and torn jackets. Moving down the long lines of people waiting for their monthly food rations in the chilly rain, I frequently stopped to ask barefoot men and women permission to take their

photos. Most just nodded, and continued chatting with others in line. But some, like Isaac in the quote above, wanted to talk.

We were forced to stay in the camp that night due to the mud from the hard rain. The trucks could not move to return to town, and I was given a walkie-talkie by the military commander and ordered not to leave our mini-van that was parked alongside the tanks.

After speaking with Isaac and others that night, I never saw things the same.

This article is about seeing, both literally and conceptually, and traces my photographic practice through three visual projects in the past fourteen years in conflict, and then post-conflict Northern Uganda. The first was a documentary photo essay of the war taken traveling throughout Acoliland, Northern Uganda in 2004 and 2005. The second comprised a photo essay, video art, public installations, and booklet created after the cease-fire in one internally displaced persons' camp from 2006-2008. The third project featured the creation of a workbook and community portraits from 2012. I explore here how my theoretical progression in understanding rural Acoli's everyday perceptions of war, displacement, and recovery, mirrors my visual projects through the years, which had me gradually learn to look outside the powerful 'frame' of violence. Learning to see outside the frame of violence was essential in understanding survivors' everyday priorities after the forced intra-community war, and challenges much contemporary work that still primarily centers violence as a touchstone for "moving on" after war. Seeing outside this frame enabled me to understand the ongoing painful and powerful struggle of creating an everyday still not categorized, and still not defined by the years of forced intra-community violence. This is not to say that what is inside the frame of violence is unimportant, but that being able to see outside the very painful and powerful frames of violence has allowed me to acknowledge other grounds that assist in moving on and rebuilding community in rural Acoliland—such as land tenure, indigenous governance, and indigenous law. I therefore explore here how visual methodologies and public outputs both allow for and form a powerful feedback loop within, and are integral to, the creation of theory in my research practice.

I come to be a professional anthropologist via a background in the visual arts—first as a 16mm filmmaker trained in communications studies, and then as a photographer engaged in the study of documentary media. My contemplation of the relationships between seeing, frames, and theory thus rely on, and make use of my personal history of visual engagements both in academia and in Northern Uganda. This can only be done now, with the advantage of hindsight. As Michael Herzfeld writes in his postscript in *Made to be Seen* (2011), hindsight itself recasts one's own personal history in a visual frame (pp. 315). The exercise of writing this article to think about my visual methodologies and the production of theory is therefore, in itself, an exercise in thinking with and through hindsight.

I am particularly inspired here by Judith Butler's writings about the frames of war, and her call to "understand the operation of a norm circumscribing a reality that works through the action of the frame itself" (2010: 83). In thinking with Butler about frames as norms and realities, as paradigms, I have been better able to understand the shifting frames employed in each of my visual projects in Northern Uganda. By examining these frames, I have come to better understand the materialization of theory within my visual practice, and the influence of visual representation in the collaborative creation of theory. As Sam Pack eloquently demonstrates in his critique of the Navajo Film Project, the "results (of a study) are largely determined by the critical questions and concerns with which researchers initially frame and define the scope of their investigations as well as the assumptions implicit in those questions" (2012: 6). I am interested here in how these assumptions manifest, and are made visible, in my photo-based projects through the years.

I am also assisted in this exploration by Anna Grimshaw's writings about anthropology's "ways of seeing." She suggests that anthropology, in general, is marked by an ocularcentric bias, and in her book, *The Ethnographer's Eye* (2001), explores how vision works in two interconnected ways: as a methodological technique, and as a metaphor for knowledge and particular ways of knowing the world. In this article, I therefore think with Butler, Pack, and Grimshaw as I revisit my own research practice to understand the ways in which my "ways of seeing" manifest through visual projects, through the material frame, and how in turn, the material frame impacted my ways of seeing, my conceptual and theoretical understandings.

In a sense, my own hindsight regarding the three visual projects is also informed by how I understand one aspect of the historical progression of the use of representational media in the 'work' of anthropology. And I attend to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's contention that any engagement with theory must take seriously

the way that theory has been used against indigenous communities (1999). In consideration of the linkages between these two ideas—the use of representational media in anthropology and the way that theory has been used against indigenous communities—I attempt here to examine my visual projects cognizant of these entangled and often violent histories.

Briefly, in anthropology's earliest days, it was believed that the study of representational media yielded evidence of theories of cultural evolution (Haddon 1895). Within these practices, photography provided a vital form of reproducible 'evidence' within the discourses of that time (Edwards 2001). Visual evidence thus played a large role in the theories used to publicly justify the subjectification of millions of people to colonial policies, including violence, genocide, and domination. The first of the three projects I examine here, a photo documentary about the war, though attempting to respectfully represent the war, unwittingly upheld these rationalist ideals of presenting evidence of the brutal war—evidence that ultimately demanded foreign intervention, therefore positing outsiders as saviors (2004-2005). It is beyond the scope of the paper to debate what kind of interventions were necessary to end the war (see Armstrong 2014, for one such debate regarding the International Criminal Court's involvement in the war), but my emphasis here is that I was working with photography to present visual evidence of the war, visual evidence that I naively hoped would create awareness that would help end the suffering.

After the crisis of representation, and increasing recognition and debate of the discipline's complicity with Colonialism (eg. Asad 1973) there was a more general turn to self-reflexive and participatory visual work with, rather than about, research participants. Though potentially still paternalistic with an ethos that cultivates a positivist view of image authenticity (Shankar 2016), photovoice projects and participatory media creation do employ a considerably more collaborative approach to visual media creation. My second project which comprised a photo essay, video loop, public installations and booklet that documented the life of one young woman over two years in an IDP Camp—although more reflexive, critical, and collaborative than the first—embodied this more self-conscious approach (2006-2009).

The third visual project which included the creation of a workbook and community portraits emerged from what I term my progressive, continuous unsettling (2012-2015).¹ As I advanced in my studies, I encountered a vast field of Indigenous and Afrocentric Scholarship that resonated, and hastened grappling with my responsibilities and engagements as a researcher. In the context of Indigenous-Settler relations in Canadian society today, Paulette Reagan speaks about the importance of 'unsettling' the settler within (2011). This unsettling, according to her, begins to recognize and reconcile one's complicity in histories of violence and oppression. In her sense then, I became increasingly unsettled by my own all-encompassing frame of the war, the purpose of the photographs, and my own intents and purposes as a photographer and researcher.

Many indigenous scholars in critique of Western academic practices attempt to outline the possibilities of a fairer, more transparent, and more accountable Indigenous research paradigm (eg. Smith 1999, Wilson 2008, Kovach 2009). Emphasizing that "research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (Smith 1999:5), contemporary critical indigenous scholarship, and Afrocentric scholarship, calls for self-reflexivity and self-evaluation when engaging in the practice of research. For many, including Bagele Chilisa (who writes specifically about African Indigenous Research Methodologies), it is about active de-colonization of the research process. Chilisa (2012) says that this can primarily be done by acknowledging and valorizing other forms of knowledge and knowing that can challenge western academic hegemony, and thus western power.

An Afrocentric approach, or paradigm, generally centers Africans' own concerns, initiatives, and knowledge to secure and advance their social, cultural, economic, and political rights. As George Sefa Dei explains:

The notion of Afrocentricity...asserts both that African indigenous cultural values, traditions, mythology, and history may be understood as a body of knowledge dealing with the social world, and that Afrocentricity is an alternative, non-exclusionary, and nonhegemonic system of knowledge informed by African peoples' histories and experiences. Afrocentricity is about the investigation and understanding of phenomena from a perspective grounded in African-centered values. It is about the validation of African experiences and

¹ I am not alone in this of course—many visual anthropologists have worked through and dealt with their own 'discomfort' and 'unsettling' of producing visual media—recently explored through the creation of a graphic novel and the organization of indigenous video workshops (Van Wolputte 2017, Bessire 2017).

histories, as well as a critique of the continued exclusion and marginalization of African knowledge systems from educational texts, mainstream academic knowledge, and scholarship. (1994: 4-5)

In Mazama's discussion of an Afrocentric paradigm (2001), she further argues that Afrocentric research should highlight victory and growth, rather than oppression and trauma. This has resonance with Eve Tuck's work that questions theories of change that are based on documenting "damage", and she instead calls for desire-based, rather than damaged-based research (2009). In *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, she questions for example why decades and decades of research documenting "damage" has not improved the lives of researched community members.

Heeding this, and other, Indigenous and Afrocentric scholarship (eg. Asante 2003, Chilisa 2012, Mkabela 2005, Watts 2013), I did not plan any visual projects for my dissertation research—the period in which the third projects eventually emerged. Attending to community questions regarding inter-generational relationships and indigenous knowledge (*tekwaro*) itself in the post-war context, I was committed to privileging individuals' and communities' priorities and knowledge, and could not imagine where visual projects might fit into these concerns and focus.

Within my research practice, the ongoing questioning, or unsettling, along with the respectful privileging of communities' knowledge and initiatives, had changed my use—or perhaps disuse—of representational media. As materialized in my eventual third round of visual projects in conjunction with my dissertation, these responsive methodological creations emerged from requests from individual and community members in my hosts' village.

For many years, I have not considered the relationship of my history of visual projects to the general insights and creation of theory connected to my anthropological work. I do not know if I am a visual anthropologist per se, but as an ethnographer that has consistently created visual projects for the public domain, I feel compelled to reflect on the role and impacts of visual material projects on the "answers" to my research questions, and to the formation of theory. To that end, I am particularly interested in the relational, theoretical, and epistemological frames engaged in and through visual, representational media work. My objective here is simple—to understand the role of visual representational media within my own research practice.

I will first describe the three visual projects that I undertook during and after the war in Northern Uganda. I will link the visual work with both the history of the war, and how each project contributed to a personal progressive and unfinished unsettling. Then, I will contemplate the frame as both physical and theoretical delimitation, exploring how various acts of 'seeing' are constrained by the possibilities of the frame. Finally, I examine the particular relationship between these projects—these visual methodologies—and the creation of theory in my work.

Projects

I have spent a cumulative of 15 months over the past 14 years in conflict and then post-conflict Northern Uganda working with people who self identify as Acoli. In that time, I went from moving throughout the whole of Acoliland in attempt to understand the effects of war and intra-community violence, to focusing on everyday life in one IDP camp during the ceasefire, to finally forging relationship and responsibilities with one particular rural village and clan after the war had ended. In that time, I also learned the local language Acoli Luo, and in Canada received an MFA, a PhD, a Postdoctoral Fellowship, and now an assistant Professorship for my work.

Who's Counting?

I was first invited to Northern Uganda in 2004 to be a part of a Canadian crew making a documentary film about the war. Before that time, I was ignorant about the long war and its devastating effects. I volunteered, and served as field production manager and still photographer. The film crew and I had assembled a community advisory board of local non-government organizations and civil society organizations to get direction and advice about which aspects of the war to document. The 1.8 million people who had been forcibly displaced off their land into under-served IDP camps by Government was one such issue. The massive abduction of Acoli youth by the Lord's Resistance Army rebel group to serve in their ranks was another. The tens of thousands of youth who commuted nightly to the city centers to escape abduction by the LRA was another. The torture of civilians by Government's military was yet another. After two months of travel throughout Acoliland, Northern Uganda, documenting the

war and its effects through visual storytelling, I returned to Montreal. The film crew edited the film in Vancouver, and I worked on preparing both a digital photo essay and gallery photo exhibition in Montreal called “Who’s Counting?: 19 years of Horror in Northern Uganda.”

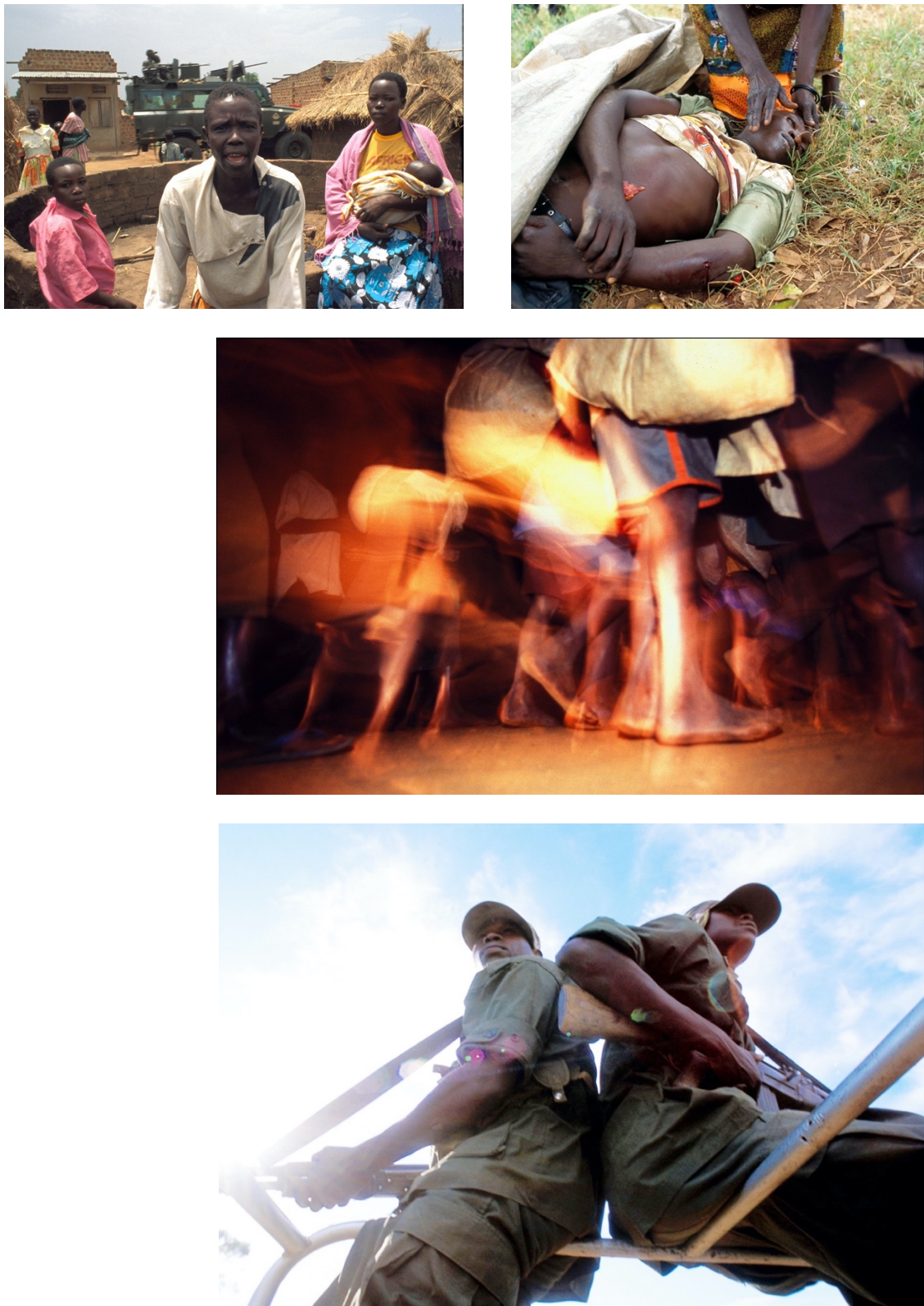


FIGURE 1-4

Similar to photography's first role in Anthropology's history, I saw the photographs I took in 2004 (and again in 2005) as simply evidence of the horrors of a supposedly 'forgotten' or 'invisible' war. I believed my role as documentary photographer was to show this evidence to as many people as possible—to tell as many people as I could about the war so that political action could be taken to end the suffering. Although these photographs were informed by local civil society—their knowledge and their goals—and all images were taken with the subjects' permissions, with hindsight I see that my theoretical understanding of collecting visual evidence of the war itself created 'the frame' of engagement with these photographs and accompanying projects. I understand that although my photographic practice was itself informed by the crisis of representation (for example to consult with a community advisory board, and then offer the photographs for their local organizations' use), I had not critically questioned what I wanted the end results of my documentation and communication to be. Political action through outside intervention to end the war was the only solution that I could conceive of.



FIGURE 5-6



FIGURE 7

Anchored in the same rationalist approach to documentary photographic evidence, I also imagined audiences for iterations of this project as rational witnesses—that is neutral world citizens who take political action when confronted with evidence of injustice (Rosenoff 2010). But as I created a public exhibition, gave digital images and rights to media outlets, NGOs and local civil society, and showed the photo essay online,² and at academic and political conferences, I began to think critically about the work beyond respectful representation. I became troubled by both my simplistic understanding of solutions to the complex war, and my conception of the role of photography (or visual evidence) within those frames. Similar to Adam Branch's exploration of the human rights discourses about the war in Northern Uganda, certain frames can only lead to, and therefore justify, intervention (2011.)

In those months after I returned, the conversations I had with survivors like Isaac (from the introduction) stayed with me—conversations that spoke *outside* the particular frames of violence I was both directed to, and drawn, to document. Speaking about Acoli culture and intergenerational knowledge interruptions like Isaac had, began to challenge and unsettle my own evidentiary, and supposedly self-evident, frames of both personal and political engagement.

Much work has been written on the subject of the aestheticization of suffering, and the complicity of the viewer (and image maker) that began to resonate. Susan Sontag asserts that an aesthetics of empathy obscures the causes of pain represented in the image (2003). Solomon-Godeau (1991) wonders how images that circulate within greater systems of oppression can bring about change. Similarly, David Levi Strauss speaks of the ideology of the overall system for the dissemination of photographic images of violence, noting its impact on the images themselves. "Photojournalistic news images leave our complicity intact. They do not make us question things because they operate within a perfectly organized rhetoric of consumption that reinforces a language of spectatorship" (Strauss 1998: np).

Troubled, unsettled, I returned to Northern Uganda on my own volition and expense four months after I had initially returned, and a month after the photo exhibit in Montreal. With hindsight, I can say that I was unsettled and therefore unsatisfied with my role as documentarian. I decided that I could not

² <http://www.lararosenoff.com/whos-counting-project>

continue as I had been. But I also felt that I could not simply cut the relationships I had begun to make with people in Northern Uganda either. I somehow decided instead to try to understand and foster this unsettling.

Her Name is Beatrice...

I returned to Northern Uganda again in December 2006, three months after a cessation of hostilities agreement was signed between the Ugandan Government and the LRA. I wanted to stay in one IDP camp for a longer period of time, to better understand the daily challenges faced by war-affected, internally displaced people in rural areas. Increasingly unsettled by my previous engagement, I wondered about the short time frame and limited relationships I had had with survivors previously, and wanted to learn more from survivors in rural areas directly, rather than from NGOs based in city centers. With the ceasefire, I was able to get permission to stay in one IDP Camp.

I decided to 'follow' and learn from one young woman, as female and youth's experiences of war were underrepresented in the media. Machel's groundbreaking report on children in armed conflict (1996) showed that the ways in which war affects women and children determines war's effect on home and society in general, and I was interested in these deeper experiences of living through war. I also thought it important to specifically understand young females' perspectives on displacement and conflict, and as a woman myself, had easier access to female life-worlds.

I first met Beatrice through a local NGO that operated in Padibe IDP Camp. As I explained to her, I was interested in learning about her everyday life. And as I showed her my analog camera and explained my goals, she consented to having me around. She somewhat hurriedly asked if we could start right away, because she had to get back to her chores at her place in the camp. As I weaved through the camp behind her, and squeezed through the huts that were built so close together the grass roofs touched, I was quickly introduced to the domesticity, and mundaneness, of war-affected forced internal displacement. As I spent that first afternoon with her, documenting her cooking for her brothers (their father had been killed, their mother had died of HIV/AIDs), washing clothes, fetching water, and playing with her neighbor's baby, I began to better understand the texture of life in the IDP camps. There was still little food, firewood was hard to come by, and privacy was non-existent, but Beatrice worked hard so that life could go on.

After that first visit, I decided that I needed to return to Beatrice for several reasons. I felt that after hanging around for two weeks, our relationship had established itself, and I felt responsibility to her. I also was interested in making the visual photo essay more long-term. Not only was I interested in the quotidian to better understand lived experiences of the war and forced displacement, but I also thought that long-term and sustained engagement and relationship was important in this endeavor. I returned to visit Beatrice two more times (for a total of three visits over two years). As our relationship progressed, I would bring her photos from the past trip to look over together and discuss. Although I now know that this is part of what many practice as 'photo elicitation'—at the time it was simply an update between us to show her what images we had created, and her voicing what she remembered about those particular documented moments.



FIGURE 8-9

**FIGURE 10-11**

I also became more aware of the materiality of photographs, and how their creation and circulation created relationship and knowledge between Beatrice and I. At the time, I was very interested in how this relationship shifted the way I conceived of witnessing in social documentary practice (Rosenoff 2010). In hindsight, a large part of becoming a critically engaged witness, rather than a supposedly rational one, came from me questioning the frame of photography itself. Questions about how knowledge, what knowledge, and whose knowledge is framed became prominent. In order to physically manifest my unsettling about witnessing and photography within the materiality of the photo project, I began to highlight the physical frame in outputs of the photo essay.

**FIGURE 12**

In photo reproductions on gallery walls, on the web,³ and in a zine, I kept the black frame of my scanned slide. I also created a video with Beatrice of her knocking on the lens to further provoke viewer's attention to the frames through which outsiders' can possibly see and understand violence.

³ <http://www.hernameisbeatrice.com>



FIGURE 13

When it came time for me to exhibit the work in Toronto, Canada, I created installations from the photos and video that called even further attention to their frames. I added hundreds of crumpled up pages from policy documents that were supposed to protect girls like Beatrice from the ravages of war, such as: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. I used the three-dimensional capacities of these installations to question by whose voices and knowledge—by whose frames—we come to understand contemporary experiences of conflict and displacement. I also wanted to draw critical attention to my own role in the creation of these specific frames, so I placed my own captions next to Beatrice’s narration of the displayed photo essay.



FIGURE 14

On my last visit (July 2008) before I created the installations and website, I also asked Beatrice if she wanted to have an exhibit in Padibe camp, or in a nearby town of Kitgum, or even in the capital of Uganda, Kampala. Contrary to her enthusiasm about shows in Canada, she shook her head. As I have written elsewhere (Rosenoff Gauvin 2016), Beatrice explained that her people, the Acoli, they know her story, or stories like hers. In Acoliland, many people have stories like hers, and she has nothing to teach

them. They have all been through Kony's terrible war.⁴ In fact, she rather emphasized that she would like to learn from, rather than teach, her people. She was born into the war, and she felt that she was missing a lot of important information. She wanted to know how to be a good Acoli woman. How people could live together in peace. What good surroundings look like.

Beatrice's questions again opened a new dimension of understanding the effects of the two-decade intra-community war, displacement, and violence. By the time of this conversation in the summer of 2008, many people had finally left the IDP camps to return home to their ancestral lands. Although a formal peace agreement was not signed, the LRA remained outside the borders of Uganda, though were still sporadically active in DRC, CAR, and South Sudan.

As I spoke with others in and around Padibe IDP camp that July, I found Beatrice's concerns mirrored in a general angst (among youth, adults, and elders alike) around intergenerational relationships and the transmission of *tekwaro*, what I translate as indigenous knowledge. In talking with still displaced, and formerly displaced rural residents, this angst around *tekwaro* was of primary importance as they were moving back to ancestral lands and beginning to rebuild home and community. This angst contrasted sharply with debates prevalent in the international community at the time—namely concerns about transitional justice versus traditional justice in how society can 'move on' after the war (eg. Apuuli 2011, Armstrong 2014, Baines 2007, Komakech 2012). I did find convergence in Sverker Finnström's seminal book published that year titled "Living with Bad Surroundings" (2008). In it he explores the cosmological crisis that the war wrought for Acoli in Northern Uganda, and therein explores various deep concerns of the prolonged violence and displacement on culture and intergenerational relationships. He particularly notes that "young men and women complained that there is no guidance from more senior people, while older men and women saw few possibilities to guard and guide the youth. Thus traditional values, cultural knowledge, and social institutions of everyday life are threatened" (Finnström 2008:146).

I decided then that I still wanted to continue my work in Northern Uganda. I wanted to continue learning from the people I've met over the years in rural Padibe. I saw that the established frames of 'justice' about the war were missing the knowledge and lived experience of *dano me Padibe* (people of Padibe), and was interested in learning why intergenerational relationships seemed to be more of a concern than so-called 'justice' in holding perpetrators accountable regarding the crimes of war. I applied to a PhD program in Anthropology, and began my studies that September.

During that time, Chris Dolan's book investigating the IDP camps as a form of "social torture" (2009) was released, and it clearly resonated with many peoples' experiences and concerns about *tekwaro* and intergenerational relations in forced displacement contexts. In it, Dolan outlines how the camps were not just places where physical diseases flourished due to insufficient sanitation and nutrition, but that the camps also greatly engendered social and cultural breakdown.

The Land Grows People

In 2010, I returned to Padibe to speak with people I'd known over the years to plan the research project. At that time, I could estimate that only about 5% of people (mostly seniors) remained in the trading center, what was formerly the IDP camp. Everyone else had either moved back to their *ngom kwaro* (ancestral lands),⁵ or migrated to urban centers for work.

I visited my former assistant's⁶ family back in their home village of Pabwoc, about 8 km southwest of the former camp, Padibe Trading Center. I had lived next door to them in July 2008 in a hut in the camp, and was thrilled to see them *pa gang*—in their 'real home.' Over lunch with extended family, I updated them on my studies, and on my love life. Although concerned that I still did not have children, they were thrilled that I was studying at "the highest level", had a good man, and pleased that I was interested in their own concerns with *tekwaro* and inter-generational relationships. They invited me to stay in their village (Pabwoc) for my work, and as is customary, every person over the age of 18 who was

⁴ Lweny pa Kony (Kony's war) is the local way to refer to the war between President Museveni's military (UPDF) and the Kony's rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army.

⁵ Somebody's *ngom kwaro* (ancestral lands) may refer to the village of their father, their mother, or their life partner, depending on circumstance.

⁶ Nyero was my 'fixer' during the project with Beatrice.

present, commented and gave their opinion. Many of the elders ‘blamed’ youth for failing to have respect, while the youth ‘blamed’ adults or elders for failing to teach them. Generally, every generation present had something to say about the topic, and the conclusion amongst the group was that I would be welcome to stay and look into these issues, because although people were very concerned with intergenerational relationships and *tekwaro*, they were still busy trying to rebuild huts and getting their gardens to produce enough to sustain their families after over a decade of absence.

I returned to my University, and began to look at kinship/relatedness, oral tradition/indigenous knowledge, and forced displacement and post-conflict literature as my three streams of focus. I also became increasingly aware of important Indigenous and Afrocentric scholarship that calls for decolonizing research practices, pursuing projects that are important to communities, and generally positioning oneself as a researcher that could somehow be useful to the individuals and communities we engage with (as discussed above). Not only did this approach make good ethical sense and prescribe an ethos of engagement towards which I could strive—it also resonated with my increasing troubling and unsettling, and offered a centering frame within which I could see the expert knowledge of my interlocutors in Pabwoc, in Acoliland, Northern Uganda.

Although not planned beforehand, two visual projects emerged alongside my doctoral research. During my prolonged fieldwork in Pabwoc village in 2012, I was asked by the village elders and indigenous clan government to create a book about the history of their clan and village, Pabwoc. To that end, I collaborated with various community members, and used my audio-visual equipment (sound recorder, video, still camera) to create the workbook “Tekwaro Pabwoc.” The workbook has sections on history, important songs, folk sayings, and dances that we collected and transcribed. I printed 200 of these⁷ and had them delivered to every household in Pabwoc in July 2015.

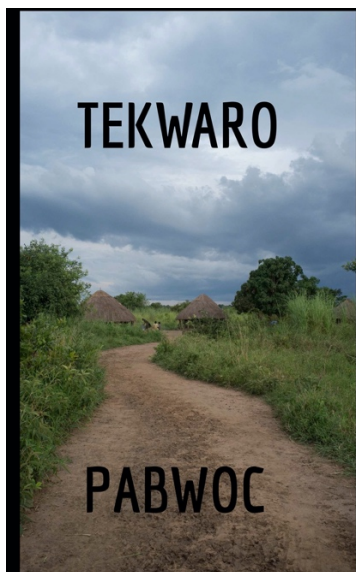


FIGURE 15

A second visual project that emerged during my fieldwork in 2012 is a series of portraits of some Pabwoc residents. Many members of my host community were aware that I was a photographer, and that I had access to photography equipment, as well as the funds for printing the photos. Over the months of my fieldwork, approximately 30 people requested that I take formal portraits of themselves for their own photo albums. Contrary to my previous documentary style of photography, I was directed to take whole body portraits of individuals and groups after specific clothes for the portraits were chosen. Photography is still quite expensive in the area, and serving as a portrait photographer and delivering prints was one way in which I could be immediately useful to members of my host community. Many of these portraits were taken as I visited each extended homestead for a village-wide survey about the effects of displacement and the war, as well as on people’s ideas and thoughts about *tekwaro*.

⁷ Thanks to generous support from The Trudeau Foundation.

**FIGURE 16-18**

In addition to delivering prints of the portraits, I obtained permission to reproduce some of the photos in exhibitions in Canada and online.⁸ For the exhibitions, I decided to print three images—of three generations of couples—almost life size and to display them as self-contained light box portraits. Framed in hardwood, the large images throw light into the exhibit space. I wanted the images to confront the viewer, and to produce and emanate light, rather than being lit from outside. I was attempting to materially express ideas about the source and relationships of knowledge and power, and sought the materiality of the exhibit itself as an expression thereof.

**FIGURE 19**

⁸ I obtained a BC Arts Council grant to exhibit three of the portraits. These have been shown at the Lobby Gallery (Vancouver, Canada), through a public widow on the Clarke St (Vancouver, Canada), and at Peterson Hall (Montreal, CA). The website address is: <http://www.thelandgrowspeople.com>

The shift in who initiated the visual projects (from myself to my host community) also had profound effects on the frame of my research—how I came to understand the questions that propelled my own inquiries—namely, how people were ‘moving on’ in post-conflict and post-displacement rural contexts. Both the workbook and the portrait project centered indigenous knowledge, ancestral lands, and the respectful representation of individuals and a community who also happened to be survivors of a 20-year forced intra-community war.

Concluding Frames

The war between the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Ugandan Government lasted approximately 20 years (1986–2006). The LRA’s abduction and consequent forced soldiering of their own Acoli youth, the LRA’s targeting of civilians, Government’s forced displacement of the entire rural population into squalid under-serviced IDP camps, and Government’s conscription of other Acoli youth to fight abducted Acoli child soldiers, led to what Opiyo Oloya calls a period of forced, “unprecedented Acoli-on-Acoli” violence” (2002).

The visual projects I describe here provide a tangible object of analysis for the trajectory of my research practice and the creation of theory within these contexts of “unprecedented” intra-community violence. I argue here that the scope of my frames of understanding—and the development of theory derived within the possibilities of those frames of understanding—were influenced by a progressive and indeterminate unsettling within these contexts. This unsettling results from a combination of my histories, experiences, and relationships, as well as from the Indigenous and Afrocentric scholarship that critically engages with the contemporary academy.

My doctoral thesis finally explored how communal, customary land tenure, and indigenous knowledge and governance connected with the land, provides the basis for social repair and ‘moving on’ in post-war rural Northern Uganda (Rosenoff Gauvin 2016). Without belittling the violence that was experienced and perpetrated, I understood that this constitutes a refusal of the power of the forced violence to completely re-organize and define social relations. Although there is much critical research work about ‘moving on’ after war that still centers the devastating effects of violence (Theidon 2012, Shaw 2007), I was provoked to see alongside how my host community strives to see—outside the powerful frame of unprecedented forced intra-community violence. To focus instead on desire—on success, on growth, on capacity, and on self-determination.

Cultivated by my own long-term relationships with, and care for, members of my host community, and by Afrocentric and Indigenous scholarship, this focus has been met with surprising resistance by many scholars who repeat “but, where is the violence?”. Yet I stubbornly insist that the goal is not to dismiss, or disregard the violence, but to train the lens elsewhere and open up the frame.

Thinking about the frame as both a material and epistemological device that embodies relations of power helps reconcile my visual practice to my overall research work. These three visual projects have provided both a material gage and forum for the working through of difficult questions and problems, unsettling my own role of researcher and as witness. Beginning with documentary photographs that pictured war-affected Acoli as needing outside intervention to end their suffering, to the portraits of community members that acknowledge their own knowledge and their own theory, I have struggled not only with my own positionality, but with the role of the visual, and of violence, within it.

This article examines the relationship of that visual practice to violence and to theory, and finally attends to the visual projects as a public and material methodology that has provided an important and critical feedback loop in my research work. The public and material aspects of the visual projects prompt ongoing reckoning with my positionality in ways that might not have occurred in solely academic written outputs. As Grimshaw states, working with a camera makes you particularly visible and publicly accountable in ways that differ from researchers working in text (2001).

Importantly, my move to a community-driven, collaborative project such as the workbook, both mirrors and informs theory that highlights community knowledge, and therefore in this case, Acoli indigenous governance and rights to land. Similar to Arjun Shankar’s work on acknowledging the art in photovoice, the portraits co-created with Pabwoc residents posit community members as “creative producers capable of making arguments about life through their aesthetic choices” (159: 2016). These portraits, these re-presentations of self, argue for the refusal to be completely defined by the forced violence of the war and displacement years. Recently, Tina M. Campt has explored that in examining

certain colonial portraits, we must listen to how the sitter pictured claims personhood and subjectivity, and that we must hear their refusal to be dispossessed (2017: 65). Although decades later, in different places, and in different circumstance, these portraits also demand serious acknowledgement—of survival, at once reclaiming personhood and refusing victimhood after the intense and forced intra-community violence created by the LRA-Ugandan Government war.

Examining the relationship of visual representational media and theory in my own work has been useful in thinking about how frames are theoretical, relational, and material delimitations. It has also been useful in thinking through how visual methodologies are actually a comprehensive part of my research practice. I discover here how visual representational media, created with research participants and presented in public spaces, functions as a valuable feedback loop. Through its creation and circulation, visual projects have both mirrored *and* advanced my theoretical frameworks for understanding the lived experiences of forcibly displaced and war affected communities in Northern Uganda.

In thinking about local conceptions of justice and social repair in Acoliland, Northern Uganda, I have come to learn that although the violence experienced and perpetrated will forever mark survivors, and will therefore always be important and difficult, a large part of living justice and social repair in the everyday encompasses a fundamental refusal to be completely defined by those years, by those forced violences. What the creation of a workbook about a clan's history, culture, and indigenous knowledge says, coupled with the co-created portraits, both mirrors and reflects this understanding that a fundamental aspect of recreating community and home after the war involves a refusal to be wholly re-categorized and reconceptualized—a refusal to be wholly redefined—by the forced wartime violence.

I am grateful to have been given all these opportunities to learn from individuals and communities in Northern Uganda, and as their student, am thankful for their patience. Apwoyo.

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STAGED AUTHENTICITY. HOW THE 'REAL' IS CREATED IN MODEL PHOTOGRAPHY

Maja Tabea Jerrentrup, *Media and Film, Ajeenkya DY Patil University, Pune, India*

ABSTRACT

While obviously lavish styling was favored in the past, the so-called "authentic" or "natural" style has recently gained popularity in the model photography scene. After looking at the cultural situation that paved the way for this style the article explores the on first sight conflicting needs for "the real" and for perfection. In the following, (visual) strategies for conveying the "authentic", including the choice of ordinary locations, the emphasis on the moment, built-in film errors reminiscent of analogue times, but also the emphasis on the friendly-intimate relationship between model and photographer. The resulting images pretend to be natural but are not. Through the apparent abandonment of signifiers, which stand for elaborate, high-quality recordings, these images emphasize emotion and intuition and could be perceived as more auratic.

KEYWORDS

people photography, staging, authenticity, reality, emotions, aura

BIO

Dr. phil. Maja Tabea Jerrentrup works as an associate professor at Ajeenkya DY Patil University/Pune, as a faculty member at the Indian Institute of Photography/Delhi, and as photographer (Nikon ambassador, editor of Pictures Magazine). Thus, she deals both with theoretical and practical aspects of visual culture. Among her current research interests are motifs in staged photography, corporeality, and photography as a tool for psychological well-being. Her latest book looks at the therapeutic potential of staged photography

maja.jerrentrup@adypu.edu.in

Introduction: A change in staged photography

Some years ago, photo shootings in living rooms were known to be the territory of filthy beginner photographers and with the prospect of a kitchen unit as the backdrop, it would have been very hard to enthrall a young woman from the model photography scene. In the best case, such motives would have been regarded as lifestyle or advertisement pictures with the expectation of financial compensation. As desirable per se, they considered shootings involving great efforts with respect to an extraordinary or luxury location, special props, opulent costumes, peculiar make-up, and extensive retouching—in this field it was easy to find "tfp"-models (time for print/pictures, no other payment). At the moment a change is happening, a style has come up in the model photography scene that is referred to as "natural" or "authentic"¹ by its members. This article should explain its appeal and at the same time show its controversy.

I use the word "scene" (see Gelder 2005: 11) as I refer to a mostly free-time activity, with which many of its protagonists identify far more than with another hobby or job. On a daily base, most of them invest some time for networking on social media, for shootings, and retouching, and define themselves strongly by it, as my interviews and surveys have shown (see Jerrentrup 2018). There are affiliations with other scenes, e.g. a model can consider herself as a member of the cosplay culture as well as of the model scene. More or less professional photographers and models register on internet platforms such as Modelkartei, Fotocommunity or Facebook² (see Barth 2015: 250), but there are real-life-events and workshops as well

¹ A clear name has not yet evolved, whoever wants to mention it refers to example pictures.

² Modelkartei comprises over 300 000 members, mainly from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The scene is much bigger on Facebook, but more difficult to isolate, as most protagonists do not exclusively devote their accounts to photography. Popular

where people meet to improve their portfolios, to act out their creativity, and to criticise and discuss their works. The roles of recipient and producer are intermingled. For a specific shooting, a team gathers, usually comprising a model, a photographer, and often also a make-up-artist/designer and an assistant. After the selection of a team³, the topics will be discussed. Many topics require an intense staging, but there is a growing number of pictures that can be ascribed to the “authentic style”. Still, everyone active in the scene should know that a truly authentic reflection of reality cannot be expected: It should be clear, that every picture is staged.

Methods

I look back upon several years of participant observation within the scene, exerting various roles, being a photographer, a model, and an editor of a photography magazine. The participant observation took place in the two settings relevant to the scene: In real-life situations in which shootings, workshops, and meetings take place, and on social media where pictures are presented, discussed, and broader topics about modeling are debated. As I have a strong emic perspective that could be criticized for lacking the necessary distance (see Caruso 1967: 12) I decided to use a triangulation of methods (see Jerrentrup 2018: 24ff.).

During shootings and meetings, I conducted informal interviews that gave me the chance to learn more about the people’s values and opinions (see Mikos 2017: 367) and to verify the impressions I got from the participant observation. Within the course of the interviews, I addressed the question of liability with the conclusion, that there is a high interest regarding the analysis of their scene.

Further, I conducted short surveys on social media with the option of answering privately via message or e-mail to minimize the effects of social desirability that definitely have to be considered on social media. These data should broaden my scope by getting opinions of people that I would not reach in person. Moreover, the format of the survey allowed people to take a while to think before they answer and resulted in well manageable data.

Playing ‘authentic’

The photographed scenarios show e.g. models lolling on living room sofas, models leaning against kitchen doors holding a coffee cup or models in public space, usually showing a pensive expression. The following aspects are typical for the pictures’ look: Different than in street photography that declares natural moments as its terrain and thus has to deal with relatively closed apertures leading to a bigger depth of focus, in the authentic style very open apertures are chosen. Often there are specific light situations such as backlight with the foreground being lit up by a reflector or during retouching. The obvious use of a flash system is very seldom. As settings, public spaces such as streets or cafeterias are popular just as apparently private rooms, e.g. bedrooms or kitchens, rather nice indeed, but not flamboyant. One often finds dynamic pictures as well, e.g. a model walking down a street, turning her head so that her hair flies. These motifs remind on slice-of-life-advertisements. However, the cheerful mood which is dominant in slice-of-life-ads is not that typical for pictures in the authentic style. Here, the mood, as well as the model’s expression is often neutral, thoughtful or yearning.

When it comes to retouching, black-and-white is popular as well as sepia coloring, desaturations, and the imitation of analog development processes such as cross-processing. The model usually will receive a beauty retouching comprising the enhancement of skin and figure and a neat dodge-and-burn. The scenarios shown in the resulting images *could* be realistic, *could* be happening in real life—but they are not. Their origin is characterized by numerous conscious and unconscious decisions before, while, and after pressing the shutter. The entire situation, the meeting between the team members, the visit of the location, etc. would not have happened, be it not for the purpose of the shooting. Everything happens just to be photographed: “Ultimately, having an experience becomes identical with taking a photograph of it” (Sontag 2005: 18). Thus, these images can be described as staged, just as pictures using extreme costumes and make-up.

facebook groups count over 30 000 members, but usually feature only one specific look or are closely connected to one photographer or model.

³ For the typical features of casting and creation see Alward (2012: 13).

What provided the ground for this new style? Photography has always been the art of the person and its identity (see Barthes 1989: 89). Staged images usually tried to make the persons, their fashion, etc. look good or let them incorporate certain concepts. From the turn of the century onwards there is something new entering the world of model photography, as Dagmar Venohr analyses:

“At first sight, the new seems to be the beguiling realism of the photographs, their snapshot aesthetic and the authenticity in their mode of depiction. Looking closely, it becomes obvious, that in this kind of authenticity in fashion photography it can only be about an impression of authenticity because just the contextualization of the photograph in a fashion magazine should be enough to create this knowledge and a mindset of reflection connected to it. On the one hand, it is a staged authenticity, on the other hand it shows itself as an authentic staging, as the kind of fashion photography reveals, *that* it is staged. And at the same time it makes it clear, that on the side of the recipient there is an emotional longing for truth, even if he knows, that it will be impossible to fulfill” (Venohr 2010: 47).

Here, Venohr introduces the concept of staged authenticity referring to certain artists, among them Jürgen Teller and Terry Richardson. In the case of the model photography scene, this idea suites as well, even though the aesthetics are rather different: While Teller’s and Richardson’s work can be described as using a “trash” aesthetic, this feature is not present in the scene I consider here, probably as the line between the awkward beginner and the ambitioned hobbyist would fade too much.

Longing for the “Real” and “Perfect”

An approach to explain why this specific style emerged in the model photography scene lies in the search for the “true” look. In a time in which even pictures taken by mobile phones can easily be manipulated with simple apps, e.g. Beauty Plus, such a look might be gone astray:

“For hobbyists and pros alike, we’ve reached a point at which the photos we see are both indecipherable from reality and not representative of it. Trust suffers. Viewers and creators alike crave authenticity” (Gottschalk).

In this way, Gottschalk also explains the current boom in analog photography. The best-selling camera in 2016 was the Fuji Instax—an analog instant camera. But what exactly makes an instant picture more authentic? Cameras like the Polaroid Z2300 enable the photographer to process the “instant” picture before the camera prints it. Consequently, the photographer holds an instant picture in hands that actually fails the criteria for instant pictures. The photographic result is not more relatable to reality. The same is true for the authentic style in model photography. The viewer has to keep the formation process in mind in order to understand the picture—such a thing as “recognizable authenticity” does not exist.

Other visual trends can also be regarded as in accordance with the longing for authenticity:

Beauty activities (such as make-up and hairstyling) should often “not be perceived as such, as beauty appears to be too artificial and one concludes, that the character must be rather fake. The outer appearance should mirror the inner being and look natural and authentic. This is why one is ‘naturally made up’, but not blunt, as the latter would be showing (although it actually contradicts naturalness)” (Seywald 2013: 8).

An example between art and commerce whose style is matching the authentic style in model photography is the Pirelli Calendar 2017. The yearly Pirelli calendar became famous by showing naked skin and sexy models. The 2017 calendar, photographed by Peter Lindbergh, was astonishing the audience as it pictured fully dressed celebrities. “The photographer explains his idea, which is the main topic of the Pirelli Calendar 2017: ‘In a time, in which women in the media and in general are said to be a portrayal of perfection and beauty, it mattered to me to remind us that there is another, more real and more authentic kind of beauty that is not manipulated by advertisement, etc. A beauty that expresses individuality and the courage to be yourself, as well as a certain sensibility’. The title ‘Emotional’, chosen by Lindbergh himself is stressing his intention, not to create ‘a calendar of perfect bodies, but rather a

calendar, which uncovers the sensibility and the feeling, the souls of the portrayed persons, and thus portrays them more nude than nude photography” (Pirelli Press Office 2016).

Yet, there is an area of conflict: Lindbergh already mentions the two terms of *authenticity* and *perfection*. In model photography, two needs collide—the need for authenticity, and the need for sophistication, the craving for recognition. The need for authenticity is socially relevant: It probably has its roots in a psychological safety motive, as it is necessary for people to properly assess situations and their fellow human beings. Therefore, they need information—the more authentic, the more adequate this information is, the better their evaluation works out. Authenticity thus is a quality that is valued as a positive trait in many ways. For photography, it carries a specific aspect, which reaches up to photography’s right to exist. Because of multiple options for retouching, even the option of creating realistically looking virtual worlds, photography finds itself more and more in competition with computer graphics. To save its terrain, it needs to bethink itself of the one trait, which really distinguishes it from computer graphics: The immediate relation to reality, its indexicality, its “deictic power” (Blunk 2010:34) is offering this peculiarity. Everything experienced with one’s own senses is commonly understood as real. As photography appears to be very familiar to the usual sensual perception it is inclined to be seen as presenting the truth (see Wortmann 2003: 126). Of course, this is not self-evident any more—if it has ever been (see e.g. Lackner 2014:100 or Stiegler 2006: 135)—and in the resulting images the indexicality can neither be easily spotted nor denied. Still, just by declaring a picture as a photograph its reference to something “real” often tends to be assumed by the audience. The boundaries are quite ambiguous, and one easily confuses indexicality with authenticity⁴, as well as overlooking plenty of opportunities to influence a picture while it is being taken or processed. There are various standpoints concerning the question whether authenticity and truth are fundamentally different in analog or digital photography (see Hägele 2009: 24 f.), William Mitchell even talks about “a kind of vulgar technical determinism, which thinks the ontology of a medium is properly determined by looking at its materiality and its technical-semiotic character” (p. 241). Without going too deep into the topic an approach to the problem could be the description of the difference as less fundamental than gradual. Features in photography and retouching of digital photography make a directed intervention much easier and more accessible to the inexperienced—it is easier to implement one’s ideas of a perfect picture. However, too much of it nowadays seems to be unwanted; a new “ethic of photography” is coming up. “Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one—and can help build a nascent one”, Susan Sontag famously stated (2005: 13). A general craving for authenticity might find its counterpart in the authentic style.

The wish for authenticity is opposed by the wish for perfection: The photographer wants to present the best possible picture—which is prone to be more successful by strongly controlling it, especially, as the result does not disclose its development process and the audience cannot tell with certainty, in how far it was staged, how much was done in photoshop, etc. If perfection is seen as a linear dimension the professional computer graphic that does not have to deal with the deficiencies of reality is on the one end opposed by the amateur’s snapshot. The room in between is filled by average-ambitioned pictures—but of course, model photographers would not like to be found close to the amateur. For Peter Lindbergh it is easier to be daring not just because of his undisputed talent and mastery: The authority of his name and the context of the famous calendar already distinguish him, and looking at the women shown in the calendar it is obvious that they are extraordinarily attractive and further, that they know how to move in front of the camera. These advantages are not there for the usual photographer.

Strategies for developing the ‘Real’

Let’s take a closer look at how authenticity is conveyed both within the picture and by considering its context and presentation. The following strategies have been produced by the model photography scene to join the wish for authenticity and the need for perfection which comes accompanied by the need for control and thus, for staging (see Jerrentrup 2018: 76-80).

As already mentioned most scenarios are rather ordinary. Often, tiny interferences are integrated such as hair being blown over the model’s face.

⁴ A very staged picture, showing an artificial situation with the people pictured as actors, might be indexical in so far, as it refers to this very staging.

When it comes to the composition a slight violation of common portrait rules such as “the nose should not cross the cheek line” or a composition, which does not follow the typical two-third-rule or the golden cut should provide more authenticity.

One more approach is the deliberate insertion of disruptive elements, such as overexposed areas reminding of analog times (see Coleman 2015: 75), surface scratches reminding of old prints, etc. The in this way suggested “passing of time adds to the aesthetic value of photographs, and the scars of time make objects more rather than less enticing” (Sontag 2005: 136). Adding such elements happens either by using specific photographic techniques or later during the retouch. Popular filter collections for the postproduction such as the Nik Color Efex contain digital imitations of cross processing, nostalgia or vintage filters, and conversions to grainy black-and-white. Other filter collections fully devote themselves to the analog optic.

Adding a voyeurist look is one more strategy achieved either by elements in the foreground that create bokeh or by photographing the model through a window, a door, or a curtain. It puts the recipient into the position of seeing something that was not supposed to be photographed, something private, and thus “real”. Further, he is somehow participating in the situation (see Sontag 2005: 7).

Another strategy to make a picture authentic is crossing the boundary of the single image. It concerns a new interpretation of the role of the model. Apart from several superstars, photo models have been rather exchangeable for a long time. Now the mere hobby model gains individuality. She is often not just a certain model type, but a certain person, stressing her individual traits.

“Individual’ is in the first place the undividable... In the 17th and 18th century the term was related to people and it meant then: an individual carries the same features over *various* situations and thus shows certain social predictability. If it changes the scene or the context, it will not become something completely different. It stays the same under different social circumstances” (Becker 2007: 66).

But does every model have an easily recognizable individuality? Among the traits which are considered to communicate visual individuality freckles, tattoos, and scars can be mentioned. Freckles are highly desirable not just because of their connection to individuality, but also because they signify naturalness and genuineness. Being perceived as a blemish in older times and therefore rather covered, nowadays freckles are accentuated by make-up and retouching or even painted on the skin or digitally inserted. Even freckle tattoos are trendy. A more extreme example is the American model Winnie Harlow whose skin shows the depigmentation Vitiligo and thus strongly individualizes her. Yet the possibilities to achieve a strong visual individuality are rather restricted, as Magdalena Wolak is criticizing:

“The beauty ideal of our time embodies a bony, androgynous woman [...] paradoxically individuality seems to be in demand as well. The beauty ideal still has to fulfill certain criteria [...] but the models are allowed to or eventually even have to show their individuality [...] Uniformism and individuality seem to be two contradictory criteria. The uniform thin, tall and young models try to convince by their individuality by telling their preferences, dislikes, and little idiosyncrasies. Idiosyncrasies provide character and make them more human, they are something special, the exception among the need for uniformity. But the actual rules still are very clear: They have to measure at least 174 cm and must have a slim body. Only on this basis, the model industry can allow itself excesses such as individuality and genuineness” (Wolak 2005: 12).

Looking at the scene characterized by semi-professionals and amateurs, this is true in a slightly different way: A beautiful face and an attractive body can be seen as a good precondition, but extremes are popular as well and provide memorability due to their appearance. Being extreme can be partly controlled by the model herself, be it by body modifications or by investments in extraordinary costumes. Still, it is questionable, in how far individuality really can be shown:

“What was ‘the undividable’ before now is the singular and people are expected to act originally or authentically, sometimes even deviant. The modern individual, confronted with this imposition, cannot do any different than copy socially fabricated patterns of individuality” (Becker 2007: 66–67).

Indeed there are models, which can clearly be allocated in one certain section associated with individuality, be it the retro or gothic segment, and do not try out any other style (anymore). This happens for example, if the person concerned is really enthusiastic about one of these topics or if she has realized that due to her visual features she will be more successful in one particular field. A retro model can be a bit curvier than a typical fashion model and appear more cheeky. Yet, most models vary their visual traits often by changing hair color and cut, changing their stylings, etc. at such a speed that it is difficult to talk about individuality as “stability in various situations”. Many identities a model “plays” for certain shootings will not be considered as parts of herself, but rather as testing of opportunities, for which her body and her theatrical talent offer some raw material. On the one hand individuality is stressed, on the other its frame should be as loose as possible (see Bieger 2008: 55). It is less about the individual authentic “being”, but about the “being possible”, less about “being yourself” but being a postmodern, flexible human being, whose manifold appearances are tied together by the term “model”.

Being individual as a model does not exhaust itself in visual features but is accompanied by a certain way of acting on social media that underlines the model’s personality. Some of the social media posts show a strong connection to shooting results, often accompanied by some information about the shooting, a quotation, a poem, or some emotional content, but there are also backstage and “real-life” pictures, jokes, sentimental stories, personal statements up to political opinions. The recognizable individuality of the model also caters for a change in power relations: The photographer is no longer necessarily in a dominant position as supposed in most literature (see for example Stiegler 2006: 163).

I have just mentioned backstage photographs, i.e. pictures, which all people involved in a model shooting tend to show on social media as an illustration of the real shooting process, often in real-time. Paradoxically these pictures find themselves—as long as they are not intended to be “before/after pictures” shown to give an impression of the stylist’s or retoucher’s performance and therefore aim for the greatest possible difference—in a similar dichotomy as the finally resulting images in the authentic style: They would like to convey the atmosphere of a shooting but look aesthetic and interesting at the same time. They should neither anticipate nor repeat the shooting results nor disenchant them by communicating an atmosphere that contradicts the one shown in the final images. When mentioning backstage pictures, they should not be confused with the backstage area described by Erving Goffman: These backstage impressions are thoroughly staged, chosen, and often retouched, or at least filtered, especially as some steps in retouching are already offered by smartphone apps.

One more aspect is the stylisation of the relationship between model and photographer, a relationship that can provide a feeling of authenticity:

“The intimacy between photographer and model is stressed and the recipient starts to see this kind of model photography as an autobiographic document. So does Tracey Emin, an artist friend of Jürgen Teller who speculates in an attitude of directness: ‘[...] how does he achieve such a natural intimacy? If I would not know it any better, I would say, he has fucked them all, this is how far he goes with the camera.’ This intimacy, so it suggests to the viewer, is a result of ‘real’ closeness and ‘real’ feelings, the staging of the relationship between photographer and model is forced to seem authentic” (Ruelfs 2006: 214).

The photographs do not only appear as artistically motivated works but also as evidence for the time spent together, for common experiences, often accompanied by proving backstage pictures⁵. The photographer can adorn himself to have spent time with attractive models—just the term “model” makes them somehow attractive—and even more, to be part of the models’ lives. The model can show that she is popular and that it is not just her appearance, which is appealing, but her character as well. On social media, the people concerned often use positive attributes to describe the shooting and to mutually stress the teams’ abilities, among them attributes that lie beyond photography such as “incredibly congenial” or “just wonderful”. Superlatives are very popular.

⁵ “Youngsters appear to take less interest in sharing photographs as *objects* than in sharing them as *experiences*”, José van Dijck notices in an article about selfies (van Dijck 2008: 61), this is partly true for the model photography scene as well.

Looking at the ‘Real’

The relationship between the photography team and the recipient should be regarded as well. What does a picture in the authentic style tell besides the already mentioned aspects? Compared with the obviously staged pictures there seems to be a certain *laissez-faire*-attitude expressed in many of these pictures as if one would neither crave attention, nor hope for the benevolent look of the recipient, nor long for “likes”. One does not try to impress with great effort and abundant *mise-en-scènes*. Thus, one appears to be very self-confident, maybe even arrogant—and pictures a typical high fashion attitude. Runway models featuring big labels seldom smile, in high-gloss magazines such as *Vogue* the recipient sees rather serious expressions or sometimes eccentric laughter, but rather seldom the friendly face shown by an average woman when she intends to please. Pointedly formulated, model and photographer communicate independence and arrogance (see Dangendorf 2012: 105). Even though clear status markers are missing, this style underlines the high-quality of the shooting, a quality that does not exist due to the attributes depicted but that lies in the team members themselves.

And what about art?

All these strategies try to make the pictures and the teams behind them appear more authentic and at the same time desirable and sophisticated, accompanied by the semblance that the recipient would witness something true in the sense of unstaged.

As already shown, it is the specific ability of photography to have a definite relationship to the visible reality that is stressed in this style. By apparently giving up parts of the extensive staging, the well-thought-out, own composition, this kind of photography seems to move away from the traditional notion of art. This can deconstruct the image of the photographer: He is no more someone who deliberately draws with light but just a snapshooter (even if an intuitively ingenious one).

The German term ‘*Inszenierung*’ (= staging) has always been seen in context with the notion of traditional art: The artistic work requires many decisions, especially, when art should be distinguished from the mere depiction of nature. “The expression ‘*Inszenierung*’ is a relatively new one; its usage was growing during the first half of the 19th century [...] In German it can be traced back to an article by August Lewald in the *Allgemeine Theater Revue* in 1838 [...] In Lewald’s time staging comprised primarily the stage arrangement” (Walter 2002:53). In many model photographs, the staging makes itself obvious, e.g. if a model is wearing an unusual headdress or an antique costume that would not be worn if not for a shooting. In the authentic style, this is different—the final images should appear just like moments of everyday life. Through the seeming surrender of a conscious composition, photography sets itself apart from what is generally considered as traditional art, a visible, willingly reflected composition. Presented as “lucky shots”, as “everyday moments” these pictures seem to move away from this idea of art and rather represent the ability of the right intuition. Further, these pictures lack clear signifiers for high-class status such as well prepared, elaborate dresses, special backdrops, and luxurious locations. Thus, emotion and intuition become more important than the concept or the on first sight noticeable status markers. Here, Walter Benjamin’s idea about the aura of art in the age of mechanical reproduction comes to mind. The aura of the authentic style lies in its assumed and suggested indexicality. Maybe this is what Benjamin meant with regard to Eugène Atget’s photographs when he said they would have aura even though they are reproducible, as they show the “inimitable gaze on apparently irrelevant, trivial motifs” (Haegele 2009: 30).

Two aspects can be further worked out: First, it is the art of finding the right moment, which distinguishes documentary and street photographers as well, even if they usually have to cope with different challenges than model photographers. The rather analytically seeming art of the *mise-en-scène* is replaced by the intuitive, emotional talent not to construct but to notice and capture the right moment. This moment is not as in classical painting the moment, in which e.g. the story is condensed, reaches its culmination (see Pochat 2011: 354), but a comparatively mundane moment, which often appears very transitory: The moment, in which the wind is blowing a strand of hair in the model’s face, in which she is turning around, in which warm evening sun is hitting her head, in which she is straightening herself up. This emphasis on the moment, its fluidity and transience, strengthens photography’s relationship to reality.

The second aspect refers to the design of the situation and thus is acknowledging the photographer’s interference in reality. By designing a moment that could be possible in real life, the photographer creates

a second, thoroughly thinkable reality. He is no longer a storyteller just as someone who is taking fantasy pictures with sublime styling, bizarre locations, and elaborate photomontages (see Hägele 2009: 29) that always carry the flavor of the unreal, but he creates illusions that seem real. Art here is neither the visualization of the fantastic nor the hiding of messages in specifically calculated works, but it is creating a scenario that allows the recipient to dream himself away into this situation. Instead of focusing on complicated settings full of metaphors, allusions to the history of art, etc. the genuine emotions count, emotions that are conveyed to a recipient, who just needs to show diffuse attention⁶. This kind of photography strikes us as oddly similar to some slice-of-life-advertisements. In both cases, the recipient could be aware of the photograph's staged character. Both the advertisement and the model photograph works as most people do not pay much attention to it, or rather do not analyze it any further. Be it due to the very short moment pictures are looked at in times of Facebook and Instagram or be it due to a new romanticism (see Beyer 2011: 13) that focuses on feelings rather than on rationality: Emotions are prioritized, building on the impression: "It could be just like this".

⁶ Here this type of model photography comes close to the Indian theory of art which develops around the notion of "rasa", loosely translated as essence. One of its central concepts is the transfer of emotions.

Pictures



FIGURE 1: Ilka: Obviously staged, shot underwater, referring to mermaids or Shakespeare's Ophelia



FIGURE 2: Lilly: No requisites, yet clearly a staged motif



FIGURE 3. Giu: Many signifiers of the authentic style: Black-and-white conversion, weird cut, overexposed areas.



FIGURE 4: Alina: Foreground bokeh underlining the voyeuristic atmosphere, making it look more authentic.

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DEFINING BIODIVERSITY: A LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF THE TAHUAYO RIVER, PERU USING SELF-DIRECTED PHOTOGRAPHY

Rozsika Steele, *Independent Scholar*

Jhonatan Erik Rodriguez Macuyama, *Independent Scholar*

ABSTRACT

Self-directed photography allows participants the opportunity to direct data collection and empowers them to visually communicate their perceptions. This method was employed in the rural Amazonian communities of Buena Vista and El Chino on the Tahuayo River in Loreto, Peru, in an effort to interpret local connections to the environment. Thirty-three participants (representing a 47% sample of households) were given cameras and two weeks, and were asked to photograph the people, places, or things most important to them. The Tahuayo River was chosen for this project because it borders the Área de Conservación Regional Comunal Tamshiyacu Tahuayo (ACRCTT), a reserve recognized for the advocacy and conservation work of resident communities. Participants sorted their photographs in order of relative importance and provided a narrative description of each image. The images identified as being the ten most important, a total of 320 photographs, were considered for analysis. Plants and trees represented 63% of these images, with 74 distinct species identified. This article demonstrates how self-directed photography can be used to access Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and facilitate the development of holistic resource management plans that advocate local stewardship.

KEYWORDS

Self-directed Photography, Ethnography, Community Conservation, Biodiversity, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Holistic Resource Management

Bio

Rozsika Steele is an ethnographer and documentary photographer. She lives in Washington State with her husband and four children, where she is currently working as an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). She graduated with a Bachelor of Art in Anthropology, Bachelor of Science in Primate Behavior & Ecology with a minor in Environmental Studies, and a Master of Science in Resource Management from Central Washington University. She is experienced in both animal caregiving and sanctuary management through her work at the Chimpanzee & Human Communication Institute. Her areas of interest include community conservation, non-profit management and photojournalism.

Jhonatan Erik Rodriguez Macuyama was born in Iquitos-Peru. He studied Social Anthropology at the National University of the Peruvian Amazon and Official Tourism Guide at the Higher Technological Institute El Milagro Fe y Alegría 43. He has extensive experience and knowledge about Amazonian history, nature and cultures. He is an independent artistic-cultural promoter, Amazonian poet and fervent activist for the environment and Amazonian indigenous rights. He is currently the President of the Civil Association School of Amazon Art and Cultures and General Director of the Amazon Sentidos Magazine, a magazine of Art, poetry and literature. He is an advocate for the International Poetry Festival of the Amazon. His current research focuses on the Shawi Indigenous Migration and Economy of km 73 on the Iquitos-Nauta-Peru Highway.

jhonerickrm@gmail.com
 rozsika.danielle@gmail.com

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Introduction

Biodiversity is claimed as a global resource and responsibility (Sarkar & Montoya 2010) but because it is bound by geography it is managed at the local level, though not always by the local people (Vermeulen & Koziell 2002). Reasons for conserving biodiversity range from economic considerations for ecosystem services and species diversity, to the intrinsic and spiritual value of landscapes (Sarkar 1999). There is disagreement between conservationists not only about best management practices but also what the essential purpose of biodiversity conservation should be (Naughton-Treves, Holland, & Brandon 2005). This disagreement reflects differences in cultural norms and values (Sarkar 2008; Guha 1989).

It is crucial to recognize the different value systems and interests that motivate stakeholders. Social conservationists view the human species as being inextricably integrated within the natural environment and believe community stewardship and sustainable use are the most practical solutions to the problem of biodiversity conservation (Miller, Minter, & Malan 2010). In contrast, strict biological preservationists believe natural landscapes like the Amazon Rainforest are pristine wilderness that must be protected from human exploitation (Terborgh 1999). This mandate has led to the physical and economic displacement of local resource users, who commonly are of indigenous origins (Agrawal & Redford 2009; Brockingham & Igoe 2006), and has created a contentious atmosphere that is contributing to the failure of conservation efforts (Chapin 2006).

The conservation of biodiversity is further complicated by the comprehensive nature of its definition. The International Convention of Biological Diversity (2003) defined biodiversity as “the variability among living organisms from all sources including *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems.” The scale of this definition is equal parts staggering and intangible. An umbrella term that encompasses all life on Earth creates a problem of complexity for the development of conservation policy (Hamilton 2005). Attempting to develop a pragmatic resource management plan without an operational definition of biodiversity is unfeasible (Sarkar 2008).

Faith (2005) considered the term biodiversity to symbolize a gap in our knowledge about the natural world. He argued that the conservation of biodiversity is ultimately about preserving global option values so that we may continue to receive the benefit of species and ecosystem services that we have not yet discovered or do not fully comprehend. However, the ambiguous definition of biodiversity substantially limits any practical application of the concept (Hamilton 2005).

Sarkar and Montoya (2010) discussed the need to narrow the scope of this definition by identifying which constituents of biodiversity will be targeted for conservation. These targets can vary widely depending on the focus of the conservation and their designation often hinges on educated intuition (Sarkar 1999). For this reason, biodiversity conservation is progressively focused on the interactions of stakeholder groups, particularly local resource users. A universal definition of biodiversity that encompasses the values of Western conservationists must also consider the diversity of cultures represented by local resource users (Sarkar 2008).

The perception that indigenous people are spoiling utopia is unfairly casting them as the villains of their own story (Gupta & Ferguson 1992), and making them scapegoats for environmental degradation that is the result of global overconsumption of natural resources (Guha 1979). Hayes and Ostrom (2005) discussed the efficacy of collaborative partnerships with resident communities. When local resource users are involved in the development of policy, rulemaking, and enforcement, there is a significant and positive correlation to high vegetation density in conservation zones (Hayes & Ostrom 2005). Bureaucrats may be capable of developing broad institutional frameworks for protected areas but it is the people on the ground who determine whether conservation will succeed or fail (Berkes 2007; Hayes & Ostrom 2005).

Resident communities should not be seen as obstacles to success but rather as authorities on their environment who can provide meaningful insight into areas targeted for conservation (Berkes 2007; Hayes & Ostrom 2005). Indigenous perspectives on biodiversity conservation reflect a cumulative knowledge that is acquired incrementally through generations of resource use. An understanding of antecedent conditions contextualizes fluctuations in resource availability. Self-regulatory mechanisms often develop when subsistence communities must adapt to periods of resource scarcity (Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke 1993). This intrinsic awareness of ecosystem dynamics is the result of local resource users' shared cultural experience (Gomez-Baggethun, Corbera, & Reyes-Garcia 2013).

Local level assessments of environmental conditions involve a similar process as modern science; however, this kind of knowledge is not readily available in scientific literature because it is learned in situ by way of cultural transmission (Vermeulen & Koziell 2002). Research has shown that Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) can parallel scientifically collected botanical data more than 80% of the time (Jinxiu et al. 2004; Halme & Bodmer 2007). The development of holistic resource management plans that capture the interconnectedness of local resource users and their landscape would benefit from the inclusion of TEK and community stewardship (Barthel, Crumley, & Svedin 2013; Berkes, Colding, & Folke 2000; Boillat & Berkes 2013; Boissiere et al. 2013; Oteros-Rozas et al. 2013; Ruiz-Mallen & Corbera 2013). This article demonstrates how the application of self-directed photography in conservation planning can serve as means to rapidly access TEK.

Self-directed photography (Markwell 2000; Moore et al. 2008), also known as resident-employed photography (Beckley et al. 2007), or Photovoice (Beh, Bruyere, & Lolosoli 2013), has been used to understand place attachment across disciplines. This method requires participants to photograph a set of images that will become the basis for an interview about their choices. Markwell (2000) described this as an advantage of self-directed photography because control of the data collection is turned over to the participant through their decisions about what is photographed. The camera is a way to empower participants by enabling them to visually document their perceptions (Moore et al. 2008). This process requires participants to be introspective so they can effectively communicate their stories to the researcher. The absence of the researcher during the photography process allows the participant more time to form responses that fully articulate their intentions behind each image (Beckley et al. 2007). Self-directed photography can give researchers access to a participant's life in a way that would not normally be possible in an abbreviated timeframe (Moore et al. 2008). Beh, Bruyere, and Lolosoli (2013) described this method as a legitimate way of incorporating resident communities into the resource management planning process, particularly in areas with high biodiversity where local resource users may be semiliterate.

1. Methods

1.1 Study Area

The Área de Conservación Regional Comunal Tamshiyacu Tahuayo (ACRCTT) is located in northeastern Peru within the state of Loreto. Covering an area of 420,000 hectares, the ACRCTT benefits approximately 4,000 inhabitants in 18 different communities located within the catchment area of the reserve (Gobierno regional de Loreto, 2010-2015). The ACRCTT consists of primarily continuous *terra firma* rainforest with areas that experience seasonal flooding (Gobierno regional de Loreto, 2010-2015). The complex forest mosaic has contributed to high biological diversity, including 14 identified primate species (Puertas & Bodmer 1993).

The Tahuayo River is a tributary of the Amazon River located in the upper Amazonian floodplain. The Tahuayo River borders the ACRCTT and the communities residing along its banks were integral to conservation efforts that led to the formal recognition of the reserve by the Peruvian government. Running approximately 80 km, the black waters of the Tahuayo River are characterized as being acidic, nutrient poor, and lacking the sediment that is typical of the white waters of the Amazon River. The cyclical hydrologic patterns of the Tahuayo River are influenced by the rise and fall of the Amazon River rather than by annual precipitation. The ecosystem of the Tahuayo River is predominately a *varzea*, or floodplain. The communities on either side of the river channel experience seasonal flooding where an influx of approximately 6-8 meters of water temporarily submerge the forest and the villages (Pinedo et al. 2000), with only a limited area of elevated ground, locally referred to as *restingas*, above water. These cycles of flooding allow water resources to reach inland, restocking the region's lakes with a variety of fish species. This greatly enhances the productivity of the fishing industry and in turn impacts both economic and subsistence activities in these communities (Pinedo et al. 2000).

The neighboring villages of El Chino and Buena Vista, located along the Tahuayo River, were the focal communities for this project. The inhabitants of these communities are referred to as *riberaños*. Their ethnic heritage is diverse, with many being descendants of indigenous people who worked on the numerous rubber estates that existed along the Tahuayo River in the 1900s. During seasonal flooding events approximately 90% of the land in these villages may be inundated with water (Pinedo et al. 2000). The continuous transformation of the *varzea* ecosystem results in a dynamic economic system that is

highly malleable. *Ribereños* must seasonally adapt their strategies for sustaining their livelihoods as the environment dictates resource availability (Pinedo et al. 2000).

1.2 History of the ACRCTT

During the 1980s, community leaders of villages along the Tahuayo and Blanco Rivers became concerned that the increasingly intensive exploitation of the area's natural resources was not sustainable. They began to organize their communities through local meetings and strategically constructed guard posts along the river to expel outsiders, in particular commercial fishing operations from Iquitos (Newing & Bodmer 2003), the largest urban city in the Peruvian Amazon located approximately 40 km away (Pinedo et al. 2000). The local people took action to safeguard their natural resources from overexploitation, beginning a conservation movement that led to the creation of one of Peru's first communal reserves (Newing & Bodmer 2003).

In 1991, the Reserva Comunal Tamshiyacu Tahuahyo (RCTT) was established by Regional Executive Resolution No. 080-91-CR-GRA-P (Gobierno regional de Loreto 2010-2015), only the second of its kind in Peru (Newing & Bodmer 2003). The category of communal reserve was meant to benefit resident communities by conserving wildlife that served as traditional sources of food. Each community agreed on and signed a communal agreement describing how they would achieve sustainable use of their natural resources. Permanent settlements were purposefully excluded from within the perimeter of the reserve to avoid land use disputes. Each community was designated an area of influence from which they were permitted to extract resources within the guidelines of their communal agreement (Newing & Bodmer 2003; Pinedo et al. 2000).

The communal agreement outlines rules for who is granted access to the reserve, what resources can be extracted, penalties for violation of the rules, and details describing how penalties will be enforced. The communities distinguish between exploiting resources for commercial profit and extracting resources for subsistence use. The rules set quantitative limits on extraction of game species and establish open and closed hunting seasons. The rules also specify the type of technology that can be used to harvest resources from the reserve; for example, the use of the poisonous barbasco root (*Lonchocarpus spp.*) is forbidden during fishing activities. Enforcement of these rules is flexible and can vary depending on periods of abundance or scarcity, as well as the social and political situation in the community (Newing & Bodmer 2003; Pinedo et al. 2000).

After years of advocacy by resident communities and conservationists, the regional government formally recognized the RCTT by Supreme Decree No. 010-2009-MINAM, on May 17, 2009. The reserve was expanded in both size and strength of protection, and renamed the Área de Conservación Regional Comunal Tamshiyacu Tahuayo (ACRCTT). In October 2010, the ACRCTT received final approval and recognition from the federal government (Gobierno regional de Loreto 2010-2015).

The ACRCTT is the only regional reserve that includes the word *communal* in its name. Community leadership insisted that the new name of the reserve include the title of the RCTT. To them, the word *communal* represented decades of hard work that the resident communities had invested in conservation for the benefit of their children. Leadership was concerned that if the reserve lost its name, community members may also lose their sense of ownership over the reserve, and consequently their commitment to conservation may waver.

The management responsibility of the ACRCTT lies in the hands of resident communities. Advised by collaborative biological research, management decisions integrate TEK and scientific data to determine a management strategy that ensures ecological sustainability. Resident communities have full control over how research findings are used to prescribe management regulations. All moratoriums on resource extraction and extractive quotas are self-imposed. There is typically some compromise between the best interest of the local economy and maximum sustainability of natural resources. The degree to which local people retain control over the ACRCTT's management decisions is unusual, particularly in a government-protected reserve (Newing & Bodmer 2003; Pinedo et al. 2000).

1.3 Data Collection

Data collection took place January 2-March 24, 2012. An ecotourism company called Amazonia Expeditions provided logistical support during fieldwork, including an English translator and local

guides. Amazonia Expeditions has an interest in conservation and community sustainability. They were drawn to the Tahuayo River by the conservation efforts of the local people and have developed long-standing relationships with resident communities. In addition to employing villagers through their ecotourism venture they have created a non-profit organization called Angels of the Amazon devoted to providing humanitarian assistance to the communities of the Tahuayo, while promoting environmental and economic programs in the region.

This project was part of a larger investigation into the resident communities' participation in the creation and management of the ACRCTT. The focal communities of Buena Vista, El Chino, San Pedro, and Diamante were chosen due to the high level of community engagement in the creation of the ACRCTT, and the ongoing participation in its management and protection. The majority of my time in the field was spent engaged in participant observation in these four communities.

I began by mapping the focal communities to assess the number of households. Using convenience sampling, each household was approached once and their participation was requested. Every household in these four communities was given the opportunity to participate. I sampled 74% of households for the first phase of this investigation (El Chino 70%, Buena Vista 78%, San Pedro 100%, Diamante 62%). In total, I conducted 67 semi-structured interviews with participants regarding their household economy, utilization of forest resources, the history of the community's conservation efforts, and their community's participation in the reserve's management.

The focus of this article is the result of the second phase of this investigation. In the communities of Buena Vista and El Chino, following the initial interview with participating households, I requested participation in a project using self-directed photography. This phase was designed to interpret local connections to the environment. Forty-seven percent of households in Buena Vista and El Chino were sampled for this phase of the investigation. A total of 24 men and eight women were invited to participate. Their ages ranged from 23 to 70, with a mean age of 45. Participation was limited by the number of cameras available in the field.

1.4 Self-Directed Photography

Thirty-three single-use disposable cameras (27 exposures, 35 mm film, 800 speed) were distributed to participants in the communities of Buena Vista and El Chino. This method was chosen because it allowed for participation of individuals with varying degrees of literacy. All participants were trained how to use the cameras and were instructed to take pictures of the people, places, or things most important to them. If prompted for further explanation participants were told that there was no right answer and that they were free photograph whatever they wanted. They were also made aware that they would receive printed copies of their photographs. Participants were given two weeks to complete the photography portion of the project before cameras were collected.

In total, 631 photographs were developed. During a post-photography interview, participants provided a narrative description of each image. Participants were only prompted with the questions "what is this photograph of?" and "why is this important to you?" After describing each of their images participants were asked to sort their photographs in order of relative importance (Figure 1).

Several participants identified photographs that were missing because of problems with the exposure, typically that the film was underexposed making the image too dark to recognize. To remedy this situation, participants were provided with a note card to substitute for the photograph during the sorting process. The name of the missing image was written on the note card following the participant's description. I kept digital copies of the photographs and the participants were given the printed copies.

2. Analysis

For the purpose of this article a "photograph" describes the physical print and "image" describes what is depicted on the photograph. Images identified as being the ten most important in each photoset were considered for analysis. If an image was represented multiple times within the top ten photographs, only the photograph with the highest rank was considered, resulting in ten distinct images in each photoset. After one participant was excluded for having fewer than ten images, 320 images were considered. Points were assigned to each image that corresponded to how the image was ranked in order of importance; the most important image in each photoset was assigned ten points and the least important image was assigned one point. Each participant could assign a total of 55 points to their photoset, for a cumulative total of 1,760 points. The photographs were then sorted into seven discernible

categories of images: animals, conceptual images (e.g., images representing good health), material possessions, people, places, plants and trees, and skills. Refer to Appendix A for details on the number of images in each category and the corresponding number of points assigned by participants.

3. Results

Fourteen percent of the images taken by participants depicted animals. Typically these images were of a source of food (78%) although a few of the images were of wildlife (15%) or family pets (7%). Chickens were depicted in 42% of the photographs of animals. A participant described the value his of chicken farm:

Glory to God! This hen was bitten by a bat. One of the babies was close to death but we cared for them. They are present like a human being. The way we treat them is a reflection of who we are. We earn income from them and they help to sustain our family so it is important that we care for them. This rooster is the father of our chickens. He has accomplished his mission and so one of these days he will die for our meal. From this rooster we have another rooster, his son, so we can keep our farm going.

Another participant described the monetary value of chickens:

If you have a chicken farm you can earn a lot of money and completely support your family. Your life will be better because you can buy all that you need. With two chickens they can easily reproduce and your wealth will grow. They create security in your life. You can give education to your children, buy them shoes and clothes. I gave an education to my children with this bird. Before there was a secondary school in the village I had to send them to Iquitos. With these birds it is like having a bank in your home. It is safety money.

Eighteen percent of the images of animals depicted fish. Fish fulfill a very important subsistence need in these communities. Figure 2 illustrates how one participant represented fish. This participant described the value of the reserve as it relates to the Oscar fish:

This fish was close to extermination in this river but we have seen an increase in the population because of the reserve, because we have rules and management.

Ninety-one percent of the images depicting material possessions were related to transportation (e.g., rubber boots, canoes, paddles, ferry boat). The canoe is vital to being able to navigate the *varzea* ecosystem during the winter season. Rubber boots are a safety measure for protecting yourself against snakebites while walking in the rainforest, or on your farm.

The images of people (6% of the total photographs) portrayed children in the community (40%), as well as family (30%), friends (10%), and neighbors (20%). One participant described an image that depicted a process called *minga*:

You call on people, your neighbors, to help you work in your farm. You give them food and drink but not pay. This photo was taken when we were taking a break together. We were sweaty and tired and drinking *masato*.

The skills category included four percent of the total photographs. These images included techniques for farming, hunting and weaving, as well as daily life skills. Farming techniques represented 46% of the images in the skills category.

Three photographs were categorized as conceptual images, representing only one percent of images. Two of the images represented good health:

I am sitting with my wife on our front porch watching the landscape and passing time. We have good health. This is a beautiful photo.

Another participant described the photo he ranked as the most important:

Here I am beside my wife and you can see the houses of the community. This picture is important because it shows the houses facing the river. This picture shows the position of my village in the reserve.

Images of places represented eight percent of total photographs. The most photographed images of place were of houses (23%), farms (19%), and the river (15%). A participant described the value of the river:

From the river we use the water to drink with, to cook with, to bathe. It is home to the dolphins and anacondas. It is very important. This photograph is a good reminder that I live in a beautiful place.

The rest of this article will be devoted to discussing the category that included the overwhelming majority of photographs, plants and trees. This category represented 63% of total photographs, with 74 distinct species identified. A total of 1061 points were assigned to the plants and trees category, or 60% of total points. Based on the narrative description of each image, each species was further broken down into five subcategories of use: Building Material, Food, Income, Medicinal, and Wildlife Habitat. Species that were discussed as having multiple uses were included in each of the corresponding subcategories (Table 1).

If a species was valued as food, for generating income, or as building material, it typically overlapped with another subcategory (Table 2). For example, plants or trees that produce edible fruit often doubled as a source of income because the fruit could both be sold in the market and consumed by the family. The majority of species valued for their medicinal properties were only included in one subcategory (53%).

One assumption I had when starting this phase of the project was that the simple instructions to take pictures of the people, places, or things that are most important would result in images of material possessions such as their canoes, or places like their home. I assumed that in a flooded rainforest, shelter and a boat to navigate the river would be highly valued. However, these images did not feature prominently in the photographs. To me, entire photosets appeared to be comprised solely of images of the rainforest. After participants provided narrative descriptions of the images it was clear that all of the participants did take pictures of their homes, just from a different perspective. Rather than photographing the structures themselves, they provided images of the raw materials needed to build and maintain their homes as they degrade in the humid environment of the Amazon Rainforest.

Forty-three percent of the plant species depicted in the images were valued as building material. Three separate palm species were identified for weaving the thatch roofs of their homes. A participant discussed the value of the irapay palm (*Lepidocaryum tenue*):

When you weave the leaves it is called *crisneja*. It is used to make a roof for your house. It protects our home from the rain and the sun.

The husai palm (*Euterpe precatoria*) was the third most valued plant species and the only species that held value in all five subcategories. Among its various uses, the bark of the husai palm is used to construct the walls of a house. These species are significant to conservation and represent solid common ground between resource managers and local resource users.

The rest of this section discusses the two trees species that were assigned the highest value by participants (Table 3): the aguaje palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*) and chambira palm (*Astrocaryum chambira*).

The most photographed image in this category was the aguaje palm (Figure 3). This species was photographed by 72% of participants and represents 7% of total photographs. Participants assigned a total of 142 points, averaging 6.2 points for the 23 participants who included the image.

The aguaje palm is an important fruiting tree and grows in high densities in the Amazon *varzea* in areas called *aguajals*. It is considered a keystone species because the vast stands provide critical habitat and a source of food for many species of primates, large ungulates, and birds, especially macaws (Manzi & Coomes 2009). The aguaje palm also plays an important socio-economic role in rural Amazonian communities. The fruit produced by the aguaje fulfills a subsistence need and is a cash crop that contributes significantly to the household economy.

Each aguaje palm can reach heights greater than 30 meters as it competes for light in the forest canopy. The single trunk is smooth and slick, making it difficult to scale the tree to access the fruit produced at the crown. This has led to the destructive harvesting method of felling wild trees (Manzi & Coomes 2009).

The aguaje palm has been the focus of a NGO sponsored agroforestry program in the focal communities of this project. Aguaje palms are not often cultivated due to the availability of wild trees (Manzi & Coomes 2009). However, localized extinctions due to tree felling had conservationist and local resource users seeking better options. When aguaje palms grow in open fields where they do not need to compete for light, the trees will only reach 2-5 meters in height (Bodmer 1994). This allows for safer and easier harvesting and takes only the fruit from the tree. With this technique the trees will continue to produce year after year and can be harvested multiple times each season. Until the aguaje palms planted in farms reach the age where they will produce fruit, the Rainforest Conservation Fund has provided farmers with climbing harnesses so they can safely scale wild trees. These harnesses are made of simple materials and the farmers were taught how to construct them.

A participant described the image of his four hectare aguaje farm:

This tree is 16 years old. It has been giving me fruit for six years now. In a natural system you have to wait around 40 years for a tree to fruit. The wild tree must compete for light and wait for other trees to fail before it can grow tall and produce fruit. In total I have 2,000 aguaje palms on my farm. At one point I planned on planting 5,000 trees on my farm but I am too old. Not all of them produce fruit yet. You have to wait about seven years after you plant the tree to know if it is a female that will produce fruit. I can harvest from more than 50 palms. Every year five or six new trees make fruit. One of my palms gives me 14-16 sacks of fruit that I can sell in the market. Sometimes I can get five *soles* for a sack, sometimes 10-15 *soles*, and at one time of the year I can get 40 *soles* for each sack of fruit. It depends on how many people are selling aguaje fruit. Nearby we have an *aguajal*, a place where the aguaje palms grow wild. People come from the Amazon to collect the fruit there. This place is outside of the reserve but it is on the Tahuayo River. They cut the trunks of the trees because they do not know the systems for protecting them.

The chambira palm received the second highest ranking of all images. Thirty-eight percent of participants photographed the chambira palm, assigning it a total of 107 points. While almost twice as many participants photographed the aguaje palm, those who photographed the chambira palm (12 participants) assigned higher value to it, with an average of 8.9 points assigned.

The chambira palm fibers are strong and used to create a variety of items, both functional and decorative. The villages of Buena Vista and El Chino are nearby Amazonia Expedition's eco-tourism lodge. Amazonia Expeditions urged the women in El Chino to form a cooperative and work on creating high quality, decorative baskets and other crafts that could be sold to tourists at their lodge. The cooperative calls themselves the Asociación de Artesanos Manos Amazónicas. They create palm-fiber baskets using only local, sustainably harvested forest products (Figure 4). Partnering with Amazonia Expeditions, Manos Amazónicas has developed a strong and consistent consumer demand, with approximately 2,000 tourists passing through their market annually. They have outlined rules meant to conserve traditional cultural knowledge by promoting artistic expression and sustainable, renewable resource extraction.

The market for chambira fiber crafts has lifted families out of poverty and given women an economic voice in their communities for the first time. An artisan tearfully described how weaving has impacted her household economy:

We have prosperity and we are changing our lives. We are simple women who work very hard and we are becoming successful. I feel very happy that now I have an income to support my kids with what my hard work brings. From selling my artwork. I have five children. I can buy all the things I need at home. *Now I have. Now I have.* My household income has improved. Before I worked as an artisan, before I weaved, I didn't have even a piece of soap. Now I can support myself. I can support my family.

Another artisan described the challenges she faced when learning to weave:

I came to live with my sister-in-law and I watched her weaving. I asked her "where did you learn this?" and she told me about a woman from Jerusalem who taught her. I thought this woman was like an angel who passed through our lives giving us her knowledge of weaving. I started learning from my sister-in-law and one day I went to sell at the lodge to tourists. I put out my baskets and they sold like hot bread. Immediately before you had a chance even to barely finish and people were buying it. I got so excited. I was so excited. I was so encouraged. I wanted to continue making baskets and weaving more... I made my own design... Other artisans added to what I created and we started working together to improve. We started

having meetings and our husbands started to question what we were doing? Why are we getting together? We are wasting time. We are not working. We are just gathering and doing nothing. We would talk openly about these problems that we were having at home. A lot of the women decided that they were going to stick with it. We were not going to back down. It is what we wanted to do, even if we got hit, or if we got beat up. We decided that we were going to stick with it because it was something that we wanted to do. We wanted to learn and we needed to encourage each other. We would talk openly about our husbands being mad, or if I had a problem. But I was not going to give up. I was going to continue. I wanted to learn. I knew this was going to benefit me and my family. Eventually these things improved, when they saw the money that we were making and realized that our household economy was improving. Many of the pioneers, the women who started weaving, are no longer in the community.

The chambira palm faces similar extractive pressures as the aguaje palm due to the spiny trunk that makes it impossible to climb. Inspired by the agroforestry program for the aguaje palm the artisans are starting to create their own chambira palm farms to provide them with easier access to their materials. A participant described her chambira palm farm:

My husband works on the farm and I stay home and process the fibers. I take one frond from the palm at a time. I won't harvest this same palm again for six months. Each year I harvest about 30 palm fronds. When you plant a tree it will take seven years before you can harvest from it. We plan to reforest this area but in the lowlands the young trees will die when it floods. In this photo my daughter is working on the farm. She is clearing the area so the tree can have more light to grow tall. I am already teaching her to weave. I have been weaving since I was 18 years old. When my father died, my mother and I were struggling. I saw a lot of tourists buying crafts from girls. I watched the other girls weaving and so I found a book so I could learn to weave and learn the designs. Now I create my own designs. Usually I sell about 40 baskets each year but last year I sold 60 of my large baskets. This is an important tree for supporting the children.

The artisans also identified a variety of natural dyes and decorative seeds as holding value. For example, the seeds of the achira (*Canna indica*) and carrizo (*Gynerium sagittatum*) plants are used as beads and the achiote (*Bixa orellana*), huito (*Genipa americana*), and mishqui panga (*Renealmia spp.*) are used to create colored dyes. A participant described the value of mishqui panga:

This plant gives color to the chambira fibers. If you mix this plant with a citrus fruit it will give it one color, if it is mixed with ginger it will give another color. It is very versatile. If it is mixed by itself it will turn the fibers purple. My wife is an expert at color mixing.

4. Discussion and Future Work

Landscapes such as the Amazon Rainforest are anthropogenic environments where indigenous people have culturally managed resources for more than 5,000 years (Coomes & Barham 1997). Economic cycles have shaped the composition of landscapes through extractive industries (e.g., reforesting aguaje and chambira palms). Consequently, natural and cultural effects cannot easily be separated from one another (Coomes & Barham 1997). This complicates the assessment of biodiversity, particularly in highly diverse ecosystems like the Amazon Rainforest (Halme & Bodmer 2007).

Self-directed photography allows participants the opportunity to share aspects of their lives without the risk of an unknown presence imposing on them. This gives the researcher a glimpse into the lives of multiple participants without necessitating their presence, enabling them to make a rapid assessment of conditions. Furthermore, the use of self-directed photography partially frees participants from the barrier of language by empowering them to visually communicate their perceptions. The results of this project demonstrate that when provided with the means to direct data collection, participants are capable of providing researchers with a picture of biodiversity as it is seen through the lens of local resource users. Self-directed photography could be paired with techniques like participatory mapping to enhance the richness of the data and reveal a more complete picture of the local experience.

This method is a technique that can easily be replicated to elucidate connections between people and their landscape. Repeating the project at various times of the year may reveal the social-ecological adaptations and resource use patterns that participants are embedded within. This project took place during the beginning of the winter season. I would expect different images in the photosets if it were to

be repeated with the same participants during the summer months. A participant illustrated this point with their description of the cycles of food in the rainforest:

The fruit of the pijuayo can be used to eat or to prepare masato. This is very important to me and my family. We grow this in our farm. Before the flooded season we pick up all of the produce, yucca for example. But in this season the pijuayo fruit begins to mature. All year there are cycles of fruiting plants so we have a continuous source of food. We can harvest different fruits during the different seasons. Then, in the dry season we can plant again. We always have something to eat. Rice, beans, we harvest these, save some for the winter season and then sell the rest.

Repeating this project with more focused instructions could help funnel the information to target a more specific research question. For example, rephrasing the instructions to say “take pictures of the aspects of the environment that are most important to you” could result in photosets that depict how resident communities define biodiversity. However, this should be done only to uncover additional layers of information. Projects should begin with broad, open-ended instructions to capture anything the community may be willing to reveal to the researcher.

It is necessary to contextualize the photographic data in relation to the local cultural experience. An understanding of the socio-economic and political situation in a focal community is vital to interpreting the data productively. Furthermore, this type of data will be limited to the area where it was collected as TEK cannot be generalized across regions and cultures (Halme & Bodmer 2007).

Self-directed photography has widespread application potential both in academia and real world settings. This method can be used to enhance civic engagement by allowing stakeholders the opportunity to visually express their interests and concerns. A photograph can be a powerful representation of emotions that translates across cultures and generations. An image can give an audience a deep, visceral understanding of an issue in a way that the most eloquently composed statement may fail to do. Utilizing self-directed photography can create an inclusive atmosphere where ideas are shared in a meaningful, authentic manner.

Conclusion

The success of community conservation is not a linear process (Pinedo et al. 2000), as with any good story there are a lot of twist and turns. Conservationists must cultivate relationships with stakeholders that will promote a balance between biodiversity conservation and respecting the rights of local resource users (Chapin 2004; Chicchon 2009). Stakeholders must engage in open discussion to develop inclusive conservation programs that will preserve both biological and cultural diversity. This is not simply a matter of environmental justice, but also one of pragmatism (Chapin 2004). The challenge to stakeholders on both sides is to engage in a dialogue that permits compromise and clearly discusses trade-offs, while simultaneously gaining understanding of and making clear the fundamental ideals that should not be compromised (Berkes 2007; McShane et al. 2010). Self-directed photography can help initiate this dialogue to help create and sustain participatory conditions. In this way, the camera proves to be a powerful tool in conservation.

FIGURES



FIGURE 1: Participant sorts images in order of importance



FIGURE 2: Participant image representing fish



FIGURE 3: Aguaje palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*)



FIGURE 4: Decorative baskets woven from chambira palm fiber

TABLES

Table 1

Plants and Trees: Subcategories of Use

<u>Category of Use</u>	<u>Number of Species</u>
Building Material	19
Food	34
Income	33
Medicinal	32
Wildlife Habitat	14

Table 2

Plants and Trees: Number of Uses

<u>Number of Uses</u>	<u>Number of Species</u>
One	34
Two	25
Three	13
Four	1
Five	1

Table 3

Highest Ranked Images in Plants and Trees Category

<u>Name of Plant</u>	<u>Total number of photographs of each image</u>	<u>Total number of points assigned by participants</u>	<u>Average points if included by participant</u>	<u>Percent (%) of total photographs</u>
Aguaje Palm	23	142	6.2	7
Chambira Palm	12	107	8.9	4
Husai Palm	14	77	5.5	4
Banana	8	43	5.4	3
Camu Camu	9	42	4.6	3
Yucca	11	35	3.2	3

Note. Results are from 29 of 32 participants. Points correspond to the rank of the image (10 being most important, one being least important).

APPENDIX A

Categories of Participant Images

<u>Category</u>	<u>Participants who included images</u>	<u>Different types of images in each category</u>	<u>Total photographs</u>	<u>Total photographs, percent (%)</u>	<u>Total points assigned by participants</u>	<u>Average points if image was included by participant</u>
Animal	23	8	45	14	248	10.8
Conceptual Images	2	2	3	1	29	14.5
Material Possessions	10	5	11	3	40	4
People	14	5	20	6	137	9.8
Places	14	11	26	8	158	11.3
Plants & Trees	32	74	202	63	1061	33
Skills	10	6	13	4	87	8.7

Note. Points correspond to the rank of the image (10 being most important, one being least important).

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“BECAUSE I NEED TO CREATE MY OWN UNIVERSE” BLOGGERS ON INSTAGRAM AND THE CREATION OF A DIGITAL PHOTOMIMETIC SELF

Maria Eitzinger, *University of Copenhagen*

ABSTRACT

To grasp visually what a person represents is an increasingly important element for the social media generation¹ (Senft and Baym 2015, Hall 2015, Hjorth and Hendry 2015). This is especially true for fashion bloggers and ‘Influencers’, who live – or try to live – off their blogs and/or Instagram accounts. Creating a specific visual universe on these platforms appears to be a common and crucial practice among these content producers. Based on a long-term anthropological fieldwork project among female fashion and lifestyle bloggers in Copenhagen, I look at bloggers online and offline in an attempt to make anthropological sense of what the ‘posting of images’ on Instagram is culturally and microsocially about. In this paper, I argue that this generation of bloggers constructs what I have termed a photomimetic self. They do this to create a recognizable digital online self, crafting it to attract an audience, which, in turn – if large and rich enough – may attract lucrative collaborations with companies that want their brands marketed. Thus, the popularity of this visual and digital identity is key for bloggers who wish to live off their postings. My central argument is that the photomimetic self, although portraying a ‘now’, projects a mimicked future; it is an ideal, phantasmic, a coat stand of dreams and wishes created to attract audiences in order to bring this future self into the life of the offline present self.

KEYWORDS

Blogger, Instagram, photography, photomimetic self, visual representation, imagination

BIO

Maria Eitzinger holds a Ph.d. within Social Anthropology from the University of Copenhagen and is currently working as a Senior UX Researcher within the field of technology. Her research interests are situated in the field of media and design anthropology, working at the intersections of cultural studies, anthropology and visual methods. These interests are critical when studying contemporary changes of media presumption. Her research is invested in exploring the dialectic relation between a changing media landscape and bodily experiences generating forms of selves.

maria.eitzinger@anthro.ku.dk

Introduction

Bloggging on the internet had its breakthrough in Denmark around 2010, over a decade after the birth of the phenomenon in the US. The first blogs were text-based, and the use of visual images was scarce, partly due to technical limitations (Rettberg 2008). With the advent of the picture-based social media platform Instagram in 2008, the use of images increased in importance to become one of the most important vehicles of digital communication, not least in the fashion industry: fashion-oriented blogging. In 2016 and 2017, I conducted ethnographic field studies among highly active fashion bloggers,² who call themselves ‘social media Influencers’ on Instagram. By following them online and offline, I documented the communicational formats, self-descriptions and marketing strategies of an increasingly influential group of people, whom I – along with other media- and cultural scholars – have come to regard as a community (Boyd 2006). In this paper, I explore selected aspects of the communicative practices and social strategies of fashion bloggers, and sketch out an anthropological portrait of their entrepreneurial and aspirational self-crafting as independent media actors. My particular focus is on the role and significance of the photographic images the bloggers use to create meaningful digital selves.

¹ Broadly speaking this generation includes people born between 1981 and 1999 and is known as generation X and Y.

² I write about my community of fashion bloggers in the feminine, as 100% of the interlocutors are women.

Thompson calls the digital self a 'symbolic project', which is actively constructed by an individual in order to actively work out a coherent 'narrative of self-identity' (1995: 210). This implies the recounting of the narrative to oneself or others.³ The digital self is a constructed one, while the photomimetic self describes the effect that the digital self has on the offline self, which stands in a dialectical relation to the digital self and is continuously constructed. In my research I have followed the ways in which visual images are imagined, produced, talked about and recycled in a Denmark-based, fashion-focused blogging community on Instagram. In the following analysis I present and analyze particular social and communicative practices involving the use of rather rigid technical formats and platforms (Instagram, digital photography and photo-editing) to craft digital selves, which are then communicated within and beyond the Instagram fashion community, where they are recreated, traded, multiplied and reimaged in various visual forms to brand and monetize the blogging self.

To sketch a quick map of how we will proceed, first I give a brief survey of the literature on bloggers I am writing myself into, and outline the methods I use for this study. This is followed by an analysis of the notion of photomimesis. Thereafter, I take you to my field, with a detailed analysis of three case studies.

Studying Bloggers on Instagram: Methods and frame

According to Rettberg, blogging is a cumulative process; in other words most posts presuppose some knowledge of the history of the blog and where they fit into a larger story (2008: 4). Since the first blog was developed in 1997⁴ (Rettberg 2008: 17), fashion and lifestyle bloggers have become a permanent force within the fashion and lifestyle industry (Rocamora 2011). Not only are powerful bloggers represented by PR agencies (Mohr 2013) but they have also become regulars in the front row of fashion shows (Wilson 2009) and even walk the catwalk (Lindig 2017). Research on blogs and bloggers during the past 20 years ranges from the historical development of blogs (Rettberg 2008), forms of digital diaries (Nardi, et. al. 2004) and the democratization of representation through technology (Tan & Ibrahim 2008) to gender aspects in relation to (self) representation and performance (Duffy and Pruchniewska 2017). Moreover, the commercial aspect of blogging has become a topic of research, including topics such as bloggers' influence on consumers (Halvorsen et. al. 2013), bloggers' influence on the fashion ecosystem (McQuarrie et. al. 2012), and bloggers' authenticity in relation to the economic distribution of products (Hunter 2016).

More recently media scholars have directed their attention to a digital culture peculiar to Instagram, which has since its beginnings in 2010 proved one of the fastest-growing platforms in the digital sphere. Senft (2008), who has described internet personas on webcams, coined the term *microcelebrity*, which Marwick (2015) applies to Instagram by looking into *Instafame* as a form of microcelebrity in which people attempt to attract economic attention through selfies exhibiting luxury goods. While Marwick does not distinguish between sponsored and unsponsored selfies on Instagram, Abidin (2016) explores 'Influencers' as a kind of microcelebrity and analyzes selfies on Instagram as saleable objects. She considers selfie-taking as 'tacit labor' that achieves a 'subversive frivolity' – a playfulness that she defines as the 'under-visibilized and under-estimated generative power of an object or practice' that derives from being framed as 'marginal, inconsequential, and unproductive'.

Setting aside these previous works, which focus on established bloggers, this paper focuses on a re-creation process of the self in relation to the image, as well as ways in which these images are used to create a branded and remunerative digital self – the online presence of the self in the online arena. I analyze this through the concept of the photomimetic self, which does not reflect only the present self, but also the dreams and aspirations of the future. This focus has emerged from my ethnography, where I encountered multiple practices and strategies to create a satisfying digital self. Thus, while the 'picture' as such does figure prominently in my research, this study cannot be viewed as a picture analysis, which would focus on a socio-historical analysis of an image and its content (Schober 2001), or as a semiotic analysis, which would focus on the rhetoric of images and thus the production of signs (Barthes 1964).

³ This process implies a continuous modification in the process of retelling while we are at the same time responsible biographers of ourselves. Thompson is inspired by Anthony Giddens and by describing the digital self, Thompson makes an early attempt to analyze how the self is influenced by mediatization.

⁴ Only seven years after Tim Berners-Lee invented the internet, blogs were born. A blog is a contraction of the two words 'web' and 'log', coined by blogger Peter Merholz in 1999 (Rettberg 2008: 26).

The pictures in my research form the photomimetic self, and thus should be seen as a visual, digital extension of other practices of self-representation.

This study has focused on bloggers on Instagram. The fashion bloggers of this study guide their followers⁵ into their own, specific ‘blogosphere’ through a hyperlink in the description field of Instagram. The term blogosphere describes the collective activities of blogs and bloggers and developed with the rise of blogs in the late 1990s (Rettberg 2008). Some of the bloggers in my ethnographic field referred to themselves as being primarily ‘bloggers’, or ‘digital content creators’, but all the bloggers I interviewed (2016-2017) mentioned Instagram as an essential platform that they actively used. I followed approximately 30 bloggers on Instagram and monitored their digital activities. In addition to Instagram I studied their blogs as supplementary ethnographic material in order to better understand bloggers’ ways of communicating with their followers. Besides the online material, I interviewed 10 bloggers⁶ in person, in interviews lasting from 90 minutes to three hours. Some of these bloggers I met several times, which allowed me to have informal talks with them as well as giving me the chance to follow their development online and offline. In this paper, I focus on three bloggers who are at different stages of their blogging ‘careers’ – one who recently started blogging and two who have been blogging for at least four years. Additionally, I participated in ‘blogger events’ – events particularly organised and designed for bloggers to take pictures and promote products or services. In doing so, I hoped to better grasp what pictures mean in the frame of Instagram and beyond. In the next section I start out by elaborating on the notion of photomimesis and my application of it.

Photomimesis

The notion of photomimesis combines photo and mimesis. The concept has had scanty applicability across sociology, art⁷ and media studies. In a dictionary of visual discourses, sociologist Barry Sandywell describes photomimesis as the craft of photo-technology, where the light inscription causes a (physical) material inscription (2011). Media scholar Scott McQuire discusses photomimesis in his book *Visions of Modernity*, reflecting on the ruins of representation through the case of cinema and photography.⁸ Even though he barely touches on the notion of photomimesis itself, he does describe how the desire to represent and mimic reality animates the technological development of photography. Thus, McQuire focuses on the notion of mimicking through photos (photomimesis) by describing the craftsmanship of photo-technology, with a focus on the physical reaction that causes a material inscription of reality (1998: 13-17). McQuire talks therefore about representation – or rather the separation of the realm of images from that of reality (ruins of representation) – when he writes about photomimesis. But here my focus is on how digital photography is used to *become* the represented; my use of the term is from a sociocultural perspective on bloggers’ digitally shared photography. In doing so I lean on Walter Benjamin’s understanding of photography (1931), and Taussig’s use of mimesis (1993), which is also inspired by Benjamin. Applying their insights to my field study of Danish fashion bloggers, I describe how the posting of pictures is a process of becoming a self-sufficient blogger – someone who can make a living from their branded self.⁹

Photography has gone through vast changes, which also means that to capture and share life moments through pictures has never been easier. The first daguerreotype camera was introduced to the public in 1839 (Benjamin 1931), and in only 20 years its delicate, laborious process had already been vastly speeded up. Society has also gone through a complex process alongside the digitalization of pictures, which has influenced our sociocultural understanding of how to engage with and relate to

⁵ ‘Follow’ is a cyber term that means agreeing to receive updates from her Instagram profile and blog. It requires an agentive act by the follower: either go to the blog or click ‘follow’ on the Instagram page.

⁶ One of the interlocutors was the assistant to a blogger.

⁷ While not using the notion photomimesis directly, one could interpret art historian Wolfgang Born’s use of the term ‘photo’ as a mimetic one: “The discovery of reality is the mission of photography. It is not incidental that the very process of taking a photograph involves the use of technology. The nature of this medium is intrinsically adapted to the structure of the contemporary worldview; its objective way of registering facts corresponds to the thinking of a generation of engineers. Today the camera can unfold its finest virtue – truthfulness – without hindrance” (Born 1929).

⁸ Referring to Sonntag and Bazin, he states that photography is only an interpretation of the real and thus there is a “crisis in the relation between image and reality” (McQuire 1998: 94).

⁹ Besides Senft (2008), Marwick (2011) has also written about self-branding of celebrities, saying that “self-presentation becomes a strategic way to display and garner status, and tangibly translates into material rewards (10)”.

pictures. Culture and technology are related, and are deeply, mutually influential on and of one other (Williams 1974).

In his article *A Small History of Photography*, Walter Benjamin writes “photography makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious” (1931: 7). By ‘optical unconscious’ Benjamin means that the optical reproduction of reality does not necessarily correspond to that which the unaided eye sees (ibid). Photography reveals “the physiognomic aspects of visual worlds which dwell in the smallest things, meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams” (Benjamin 1931: 7). In other words, the camera has a technological ability to throw up on a screen details processed by the eye but dismissed by the conscious mind. Through the three case studies in this article I show that the practice of producing, posting and accumulating digital images on Instagram is to a large extent explicitly used to create a digital self. While the focus of this paper is not Benjamin’s use of terms like consciousness and unconsciousness, what I apply from his analysis of photography is the ability of photography to reveal the ‘waking dreams’ that these images portray of the bloggers of this study.

Having pointed at the ability of photography, I now bring the focus to mimesis. Mimesis has never been a clearly defined concept. Deriving from the Greek word *mimos*, meaning to mime or mimic, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin describe miming as a phenomenon arising across all forms of social exchange. In *The Mimetic Factory* and *Doctrines of the Similar*, Benjamin addresses the term ‘mimesis’ as the paradigm of social existence. He states this not only in the sense of an aesthetic representation, but as a key to social behavior, which he draws from children’s games and the example of the deeper layers of language, where they connect meanings with words and written language with speech (1933: 212). For Benjamin, it is humanity’s capacity to create similarities by seeing resemblance that describes the power of the mimetic faculty (Benjamin 1933).

Inspired by Benjamin, anthropologist Michael Taussig explores how the mimetic faculty is “the capacity to Other” (19), which “take[s] us bodily into alterity” (1993: 40). Mimesis, then, is “the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power” (1993: xiii). Thus mimesis allows for identification with the external world, which is why the concept forms a link between the self and the Other. Continuing in this spirit, Taussig elaborates that “mimesis sutures the real to the really made up” (1993: 86). It is this suturing – this creation of a ‘second nature’ with a camera and a social media platform – that is under the magnifying glass in this article. To be more specific, I argue that the ‘sutures’ of mimesis that link the self and the Other – the real and the made up – are made more flexible by a medium like Instagram; time, space and time-space are things to play with in a digital world. The Other, in the case of the bloggers, is what I call their own *potential future self*, performed on digital platforms that, if they attract big enough audiences, will in turn attract company sponsorship.

Thus, I understand the posting of pictures on Instagram as processes of becoming a self-sufficient blogger, one who can live off her self (-brand). I explore how the bloggers of this study are continuously creating a digital self through images that include their wishes and desires. It is thus the mimetic quality of pictures – the relationship and culture created between the picture and the portrayed – and with it, the social aspect of picture taking – that is the focus of this article.

Based on my ethnographic material, in the following sections I demonstrate how these processes of becoming play out empirically. I focus mainly on three bloggers: Magde, whose blogger persona is called *Colorfeeling*; Maya, or *Hyperbabe*; and My, whose blog is called *Mj*, and the processes through which they create their photomimetic selves.

The digital self: a mediated self, a constructed self

“What kind of blogger are you? - You have to decide what kind of blogger you want to be!” I’ve been asked and told that several times since I started my blog a month ago and every time I have been like: “What do you mean by ‘what kind of blogger’ do I want to be? I just want to be ME... Having fun with dressing up and blogging about it. (Colorfeeling, 3rd July 2016)

This statement was one of the first posts by Colorfeeling,¹⁰ led by five pictures of herself in a blue polka dot jumpsuit outfit she is wearing from the brand Monki. Through time though, she has slightly modified this statement in a conversation I have had with her. Magda, which is her (anonymised) real name, is 28 and has only recently started blogging besides her job as an “Area Visual” in a fashion chain. She still wants to just be herself and not think of herself as fitting into any (emic) blogger categories. Compared to before she started blogging, Magda’s everyday use of creating and posting pictures on Instagram constitutes a significant change in relation to the formation of the self, online and offline. While Magda’s blog started out as a hobby, with the motivation to encourage other women to dress in a more colorful way, she gradually gained more experience in the creation of her online persona as a blogger and, with that, other opportunities arose. A bit over a year after she started blogging, she now has an emerging little fashion label,¹¹ a little web shop where she sells other emerging labels, and a podcast. She has quit her fulltime job and, most of all, she is trying to make a living out of her passion: blogging about fashion. However, the Danish blogger Colorfeeling marches behind the vanguard. Italian style icon Chiara Ferragni, one of the first internationally known fashion bloggers, has turned her blog *The Blond Salad* into a multimillion-dollar business venture, and created her own fashion line as a successful businesswoman.¹² In a Scandinavian context, Pernille Teisbæk started a blog called *Lookdepernille*¹³ in 2012. She now has over 536,000 followers on Instagram, is co-designing clothes and shoes with other companies and is co-founder and creative director at an Influencer agency.

The majority of Colorfeeling’s pictures on Instagram are of herself and if they are not of her, then they relate to her passion for colors (see images below). Antunovic and Hardin describe in their article on women’s sports bloggers how blogging revolves around the blogger’s ‘self’ and serves as a form of self-expression. In their quantitative content analysis study, they found an increase in first-person pronouns over time, which they relate to the realization of the personalization potential of blogging (2013: 387). From my observations on bloggers, while I was not counting instances in order to track a trajectory over time, there certainly was a major similarity on the picture-driven platform of Instagram: it is all about the circulation of the self. Whether a blogger emerges directly in the picture or is only indirectly related to the blogger-self, the self is the object that is shared.

Besides a psychological approach to the self – which is not in the scope of this paper – the literature of the self in anthropology focuses on the creation and presentation of the self¹⁴ (Goffman 1957, Butler 1990, Giddens 1991). For Giddens the multilayeredness of identities is determined by daily practice, and consequently he sees identity as a constant ‘work in process’ (1991). To phrase this differently, the self is an ongoing construction and, as such, he argues, self-identity is a reflexive phenomenon, which moves the focus from the persona to the process. Inspired by Giddens, Thompson (1995) describes how the self is influenced by the digital, which he does by focusing on mediatization through materials, which individuals weave into a coherent account in order to narrate a self-identity. “We are all the unofficial biographers of ourselves, for it is only by constructing a story, however loosely strung together, that we are able to form a sense of who we are and of what our future may be” (1995: 210). While the self is in large part always mediated, with or without mass communication media, as Cathcart and Gumpert argue with the help of George Herbert Mead (1986), the scholars reason that a medium has the capacity to objectify and intensify the experience, which they show with the medium of (analog) photography.

While online diarists and text-focused bloggers use their own writing, on the one hand, as a mirror that allows them to see themselves more clearly and, on the other hand, to construct themselves as subjects in a digital society (Serfaty 2004), the medium of Instagram could allow for similar processes through images. Serfaty’s argument already hints at a mimetic process that words could have on a blogger’s self. More recently Elisa Serafinelli gave an analysis on online identities and digital life showing how the self-expression on LinkedIn differs from the one on Instagram, which is mainly defined through

¹⁰ The bloggers have been anonymised for the purposes of this paper. While some gave me permission to use their names for this article after they read it, I have chosen to keep synonyms, as I am writing up a dissertation, which they may not get to see, and where I will be using their synonyms as well.

¹¹ In collaboration with an illustrator she first met online.

¹² She started her blog in 2009. By now she has about 20 employees and 11.6 million followers on Instagram.

¹³ Teisbæk decided to stop the blog in 2016.

¹⁴ I could also have focused on the self as a form of commodity, like Giddens (1991), who has discussed it in relation to modernity and Borgman (2004) who has discussed self-commodification in relation to digitalization. However, I would rather stress the process of self creation in the digital space through pictures.

images (2018: 161). Below I take a closer look at how the landscape of the image contributes to highlighting a self in the making.

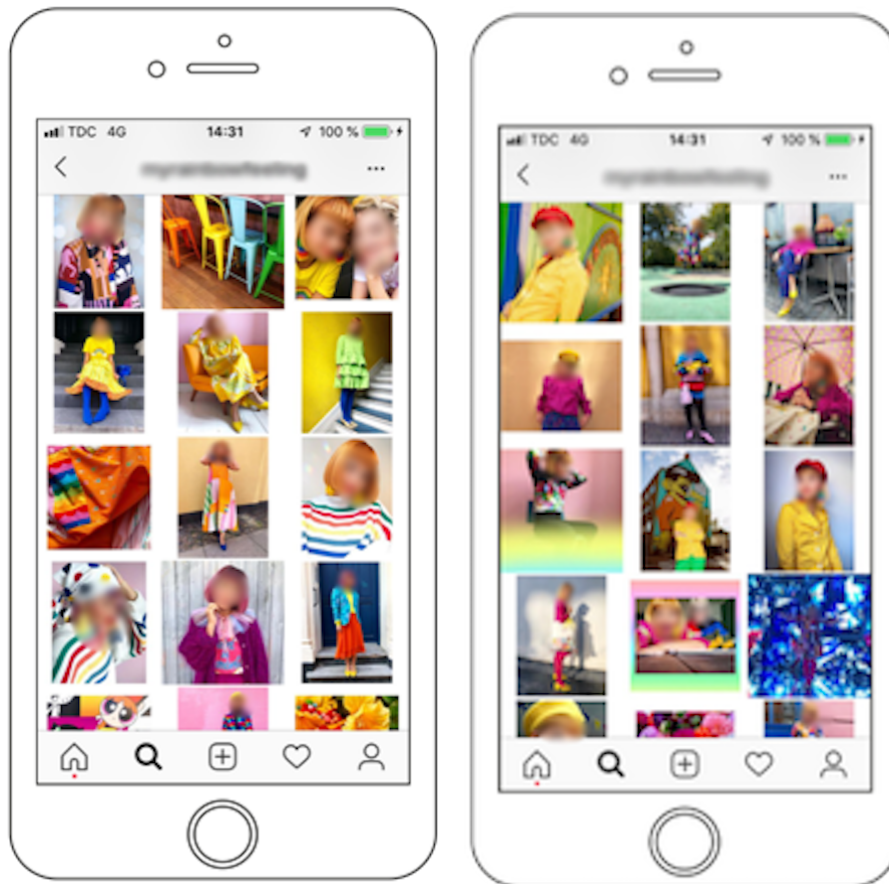


FIGURE 1: From Colorfeeling's Instagram account

Instagram Mode

Maya, 23, is a Copenhagen-based, award-winning fashion Influencer who has 16 600¹⁵ followers and has been blogging for the past six years. I have been 'following' Hyperbabe, Maya's blogger persona, for four months on Instagram¹⁶ and InstaStories.¹⁷ Within that time, I have received daily snapshots in the form of pictures and short video clips, very much what Herring et al. (2004) in relation to the blogosphere call 'diarying' and 'journaling'. Additionally, I regularly get small story updates about her everyday life. Besides the self-chosen updates by the blogger, I get to see the production of pictures when meeting up with her in person. Benjamin (in Heywood and Sandywell 2012: 19) regards such picture production as a 'particular mode[s] of production' using 'practices of looking' and 'spaces of seeing' to shape 'forms of selfhood'.

While Maya and I are wrapping up an interview in a café in Copenhagen, I become part of this mode of production when she asks, to my surprise, if I will take a picture of her. I have observed others taking pictures of bloggers, but she is the first blogger to ask me to do so. Usually bloggers have a so-

¹⁵ This number of followers is from 2016. Not even a year later she had 17 600 followers.

¹⁶ Instagram is a social media platform, which allows users of the app to post pictures and tag other users and locations, as long as they are also subscribers.

¹⁷ InstaStories are picture and video snapshots that disappear after 24 hours. It is an integrated feature in Instagram. The 'tag' function makes it easy for the person looking at an InstaStory to follow the hyperlink from a tagged subject and object to the websites of the people and places in those stories.

called ‘blogger friend’¹⁸ who takes their picture and vice versa, or sometimes their ‘blogger husband’¹⁹ will step in, but in Maya’s situation, I seem to be the only option in this place and time. She tells me that she will be busy the rest of the day, which is why she has to update her blog later on the train ride to Malmö (Sweden), where she is studying visual communication.

The new blog post is called “Three Ways to Wear Print All Over”, but she is lacking one out of three (outfit) photographs. Entering the coffee shop, Hyperbabe had already noticed a colorful blue wall, which she thought would be great as a background for her outfit. She naturally and automatically scans her environment in relation to her own blog universe, where one, as the blogs states, can “expect bright colors and bold prints, interesting outfits, styling tips, trend dissections and cool collages – basically, a fun and inspirational universe of fashion” (Hyperbabe, seen June 2016). Besides her blog, consisting of both pictures and text – which is what Rettberg (2008) considers the general outline for a blog – Hyperbabe’s blog has a particularly colorful aesthetic, which also manifests on her Instagram account.

After Maya sees how the pictures I took of her turn out, she says, nodding: “The light irruption is too dark, so you can’t really see it [the colorful clothes and blue wall] in a good way.” Her blog is not one that entertains a gloomy vibe or photographs that contain a blurry aesthetic. It is bright and uplifting, with an arty and colorful touch, so she is dissatisfied with the pictures and thus turns away from the camera and in a split second scans her environment again. “Let’s try it over here by the green door,” she suggests. I take the single lens reflex camera out once again and this time I give loose instructions as to which direction she should look in. I try to get as many angles as possible, just to make sure there is at least one satisfying shot. While my role of pressing the button of the camera and the skills that are required to take a *good* picture in terms of coloring or lighting help realize the photo, it is Maya’s continual recalculation of the perfect ‘snapshot’ that ultimately reflects and reproduces her own image dialectically, as a blogger in relation to the camera. ‘Dialectic’ refers here to the relation between the selected landscape and the self in (re)creation, a landscape that is creating a consistent mood and with it an aura connected to the particular blogger in focus. While this article could have been about how these bloggers create a distinct aesthetic with each photomontage on Instagram (for instance with their usage of filters on photos) – which I see can contribute to the construction of an authentic aura, even in a mechanically reproduced reality²⁰ – I have decided to examine how the mimetic process between landscape and blogger plays a role in the creation of a ‘second nature’ – their digital self.

Benjamin refers to the ‘snapshot’ throughout his work as a lightning flash of nature (in Leach 2000). Inspired by Benjamin’s mimetic understanding, Leach argues that humans are increasingly dominated by photography and consequently are ‘taking on’ the attributes of the camera (2000: 27). Skimming the (urban) landscape in relation to potential photo opportunities that reflect the self, and that can thus be used in pictures relating to one’s image in creation, seems to have become an ingrained habit I have encountered with many people besides Maya. It is the product of a carefully tuned and experienced eye, which selects and deselects elements of its environment – or whole environments – the better to reflect, underline and mimic the digital image of the blogger self.

¹⁸ In Danish it is called *blogger veninde*. It is outside the scope of this article, but the choice is interesting in terms of gender. What would a male blogger call his go-to person?

¹⁹ ‘Blogger husband’ often just relates to the blogger’s boyfriend. I have also come across the emic term ‘blogger daddy’, which most likely refers to sugar daddy.

²⁰ For Benjamin the landscape represents an important factor in creating ‘aura’, which he discusses both in *The Work of Art* essay, as well as in the *Photography* essay (1931). By aura he means: “A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer’s noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance – this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch. Now, to bring things closer to us or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction. Every day the need to possess the object in close-up in the form of a picture, or rather a copy, becomes more imperative. The difference between the copy, which illustrated papers and newsreels keep in readiness, and the original picture is unmistakable. Uniqueness and duration are intimately intertwined in the latter as are transience and reproducibility in the former” (Benjamin, *Photography*, 518).

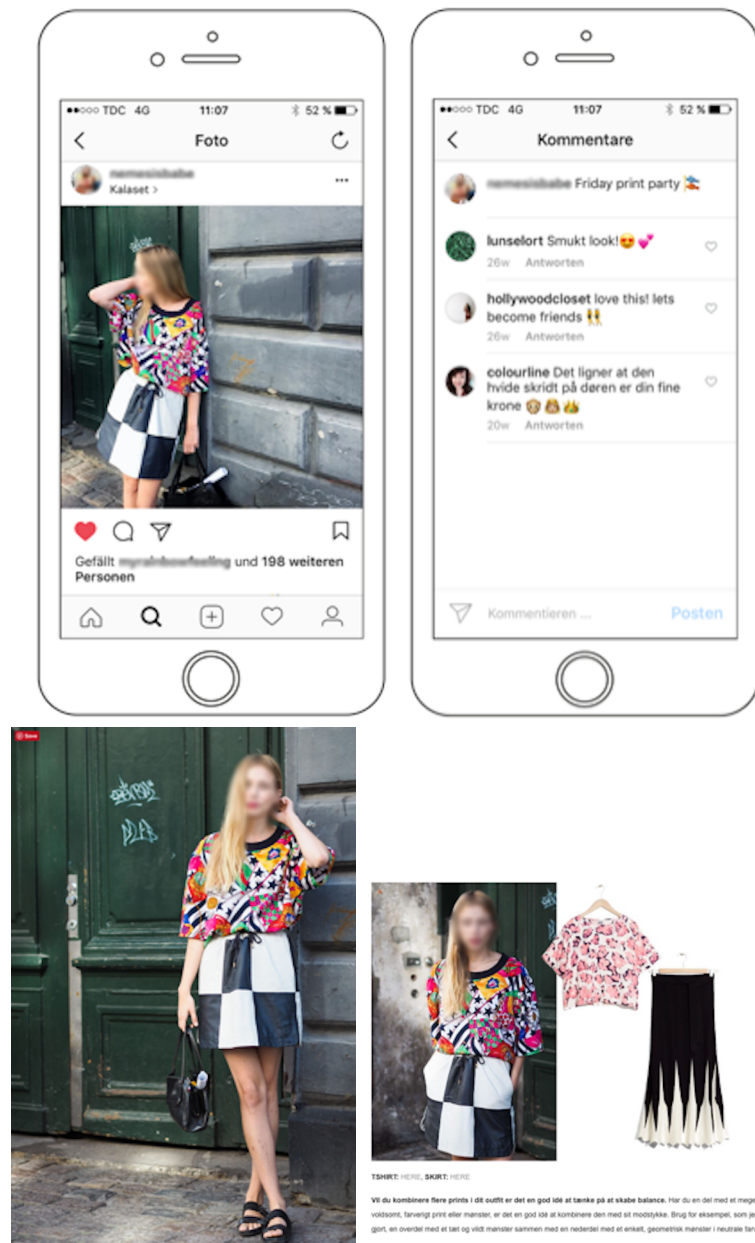


FIGURE 2: These are three of the many pictures I have taken. The first image (+ image of comment) was spotted on her Instagram account a few hours later and the second and third picture were published on her blog.

Thus, if the landscape does not exist, it can just be created, or at least tweaked. “It’s just pretty if you place a green leaf in the picture, when I take a picture of a cup of coffee,” as one of the other bloggers, Cecilie, put it. Another blogger, Samwhat, tells me: “The good thing about taking pictures in my flat is that I can choose to leave the corner with the pile of clothes out of it and show the pretty corner.” Or as MJ puts it, “it [a picture she wants to share] is just as much about creating the right colour composition that reflects who I represent [digitally]”. With their trained eye, a blogger would push a bowl further away to change the composition, or pose with particular objects for a picture in the making.²¹ From that perspective, even though bloggers might go through life observing it through the camera’s lens, the way of seeing and reflecting the landscape of the pictures is in continuous relation with the self in mind.

²¹ Bloggers have focused particularly on the aesthetics within pictures, which I will not elaborate on further in this article. However, I do see the aesthetic created around the image of the blogger as an important aspect of creating recognition as well as ‘otherness’.

Thus, the photography mirrors not only the person posting the picture, but also a mimetic process of how the blogger sees him/herself and how they want to be seen within that landscape.

What I have shown in this section is that the landscape of the image contributes to the mimetic process of the self in an image, or in other words, the backdrop to the pictured self is as much a part of the photomimesis as the main subject. I will now explore how some of these bloggers’ pictures on Instagram are created in collaboration with companies, potentially leading to more followers.

The shared selfie

The mimetic self comes into being through the digitally shared picture. The concept of sharing has been dealt with extensively in anthropology (Mauss 1924, Geertz 1964), going as far back as Malinowski and his work on the Kula trade (1922), where he describes how the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands exchange bracelets and necklaces in return for social status as part of their ecosystem. In other words, the institution of the Kula relates individuals to one another and simultaneously establishes solidarity throughout the group. While my focus is not on sharing as a communal act that links the participants to one another and thereby establishes a community, in the following example I show how, by virtue of digital ‘shares’ with and by their followers, bloggers can become their Other – that *potential future self* they have dreamed of becoming.²²

Like any other prize-winning blogger, Hyperbabe collaborates with various established brands, a practice which has a number of ways of playing out. Among other things, she agreed to cover²³ Roskilde Festival, a Danish music festival, for the clothing brand Monki, a brand owned by H&M. Both the brand and the festival are somewhat mainstream and have their own digital platforms, including a homepage and Facebook and Instagram profiles. Besides Maya getting paid in money,²⁴ she can also keep the clothes,²⁵ which she can choose herself beforehand in a PR agency space.²⁶

Then I went around with my friend in Monki clothes. We took turns shooting in all kinds of places and it was so much fun to do what I like to do. The only thing I had to comply with were the agreed rules, which were that I should cover the festival, send them the pictures and upload some pictures on my platform. It was so much fun, but it is also because of myself, [...] because it makes sense, because mine and Monki’s aesthetics are so close to each other and like myself they [Monki] also think things need to be fun.

While she recognizes that she cannot live off clothes alone, this collaboration is less about the immediate commercial aspect than about producing an image that she exchanges (through uploading on Instagram) to attract new followers for Monki and herself. An understanding of Maya’s image as “a colorful and fun fashion girl”, as stated on her blog, has likewise been expressed by Instagram followers, other bloggers and various PR agents I have interviewed, and is actively (re)produced by herself through pictures. Choosing collaborations with companies that align with the blogger’s own image has a reinforcing effect on the blogger self (Carah and Shaul 2016) and consequently these collaborations generate a greater scope in terms of followers, as well as allowing for potential additional exposure within already existing communities on Instagram by using hashtags.²⁷

²² While I will not discuss the self as such from a philosophical or psychological dimension but rather from an anthropological point of view, it is intriguing that the notion of the blogger’s identity shows a paradox that lies within blogging; namely that the blogger’s self comes into being through the presentations of herself on the online platform as well as the audience’s confirmation of its existence. This we may say is also what happens in other parts of social life: we become persons through other people’s recognition of our existence [Goffman (1959) Giddens (1992)].

²³ To cover means that a person is capturing events on digital platforms. Usually a blogger would announce this in advance, thus promoting this so-called Instagram takeover.

²⁴ As a PR agent explained, when bloggers get ‘bigger’ they can afford to ask for money. Big, in this context, however, is a variable that differs with different brands.

²⁵ She can also give them back again, which I have experienced with some bloggers and certain brands.

²⁶ Fashion companies like Monki often collaborate with a PR agency, which takes care of the strategic decisions that lie behind communication. While the process of finding the right blogger (bloggers also often approach PR agencies) the bloggers’ autonomy in choosing certain products and projects is a dialectical process, a topic on its own outside the scope of this article.

²⁷ When collaborating with companies, the company usually strategically arranges certain hashtags, while with non-collaborations bloggers would usually have a freer hand with which hashtags to use. In the end, the purpose of the hashtag is to widen the scope and reach of an audience conducting a specific search.

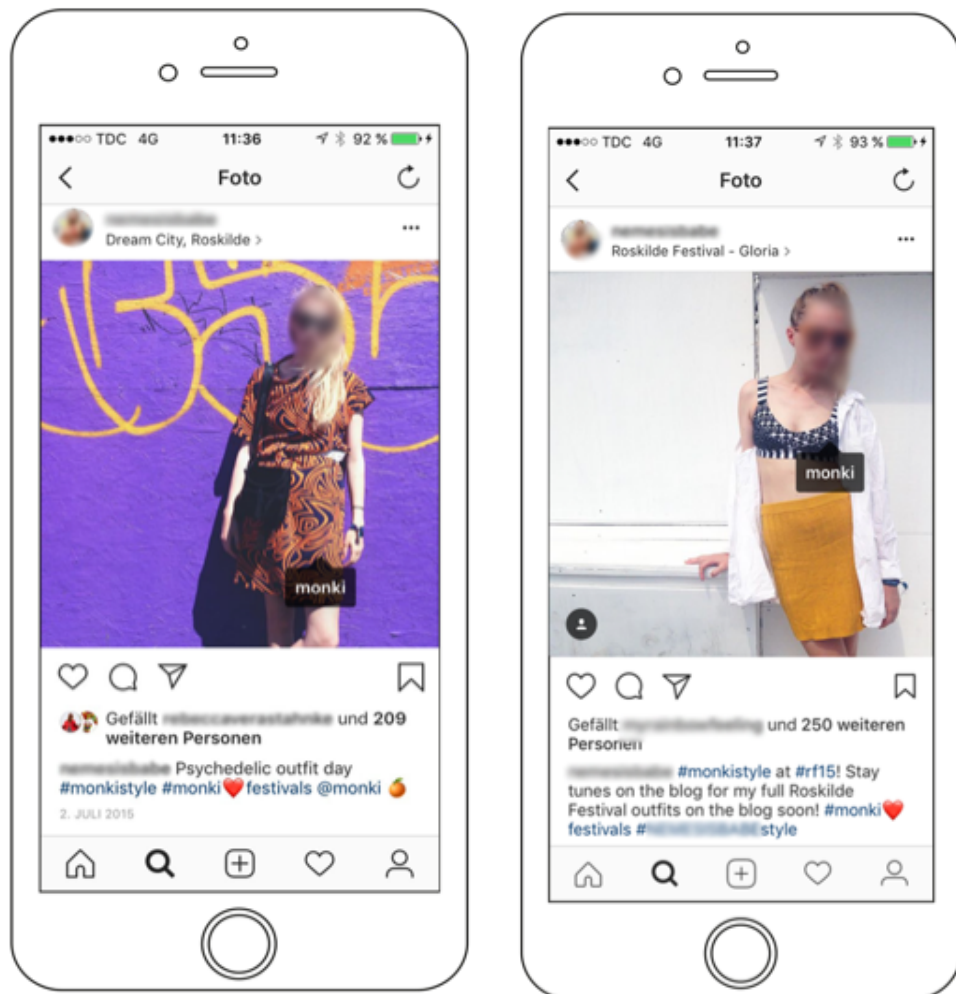


FIGURE 3: These are two examples of the eight pictures she posted from Roskilde Festival.

Digitally shared pictures of the bloggers I followed generally contained hashtag(s), which were made visible by tapping on the picture of the clothing item the blogger was wearing.²⁸ Legally, bloggers are required to mention (and report for taxation) when they are wearing clothing given to them by companies to model online. While these rules are clear²⁹ and bloggers are aware of them, the practice can be less clear in terms of sponsored content, in contrast with bloggers' independent purchase of clothes, which can also be a way for companies and bloggers to tap into an audience that is looking for other inspirations from hashtags, for example #festivals, #rf15,³⁰ or #monki. While the blogger's self is embedded in creating content in the digital reality that can be exchanged (Schwarz 2010), it is hashtagging herself with the brand Monki, a globally established brand that has 443 000 followers on Instagram, that allows users from the Monki universe to tap into her universe. In other words, hashtagging allows bloggers to gain exposure and get attention from 'outside' (non-follower) users if these users are searching for those hashtags. It is unsurprising, then, that another blogger has described the use of hashtags such as #monki and #monkistyle, which gave her "an incredible boost in the number of followers", as strategic. While this practice as such does not need any kind of sponsorship, it is the posting of bloggers' pictures on company Instagram accounts instead of their own that allows for more excessive

²⁸ Different bloggers had different practices with it. Some would only post pictures with hashtags of the brand, others would also post pictures once in a while without a hashtag. The general norm I have seen, however, would include a hashtag of the brand in action or a tag on the brand in the picture, whether the picture was sponsored or not.

²⁹ Bloggers are bound by law to announce whether the staging with certain brands is paid, but not all bloggers do it in a very obvious way. There are various understandings of marking sponsored content. The most frequent practice I have encountered is that if clothes are given to bloggers they are not marked as sponsored – only if they get money for it.

³⁰ Short for Roskilde Festival 2015

exposure. Another blogger mentions she got “10.000 followers within 3 days due the exposure on [the Instagram page of] a well-known brand”.

Through such exposure, bloggers interact with their followers; they exchange their photo for a reaction in the form of a like or a comment from followers, and maybe even get new followers. This exchange may be referred to as the process through which the photomimetic self comes into being – a self that may then later be involved in exchanges that result in financial gains. While bloggers have been rather quiet about the financial aspect, a staffer at one of the strategic marketing agencies, who works with Influencers, framed it this way: “Big bloggers can charge like 40.000 Danish crowns for a post. Like the big ones. Like only the really big ones can do that.” Even though she works with smaller bloggers herself, who will be paid up to 5000 Danish crowns for an Instagram post, it is the number of followers that defines and determines a blogger’s self(brand); with the help of followers, the photomimetic self is released. Hunter (2016) writes in her article, *Mommybloggers*, how the audience is commoditized in order to create further business relations with potential collaborations. The number of followers and ‘hits’ on – visits to – my interlocutor’s site was used as leverage in relation with PR agencies and potential collaborations with companies, financing part of one’s own livelihood.

Picturing the Future Self

While the images that Hyperbabe and the other bloggers project are posted and shared in the present, they are also part of a continuous dialectical process with an imagined future.³¹ I argue that these pictures portray a self that these bloggers want to become. The potential self of the future is mimicked and placed in the present in the form of pictures; the self is staged as it aspires to become. In other words, the bloggers I have looked at tried to mimic themselves into the ‘Other’ (cf. Benjamin) - their own potential future self.

Below I elaborate on this discussion about the future through the case of MJ (see images below), who has been blogging since her teens. After her first blogger experience when she was only 13 and a break with blogging thereafter, she started again when she got back from a high school exchange program in the US, “where blogging was a common thing”. Her main purpose back then was to give styling and makeup tips to redhead girls, as she herself faced challenges with that particular issue. Later she started writing for a fashion magazine in Copenhagen, temporarily replacing a woman on maternity leave. While working for the magazine she put her blog on hold for a while, but returned to it after being discovered during Copenhagen Fashion Week by a ‘street style’ photographer. Her Instagram at that moment exploded from one day to the next after being tagged by Søren Jepsen, who takes street style pictures for Vogue. She gained a host of new followers after appearing on the cover of the online magazine. While her Instagram account was booming, her temporary job was coming to an end, and the question of what to do next became imminent. She wanted to stay within fashion, or at least the creative industry, which is why she used her remaining months to tell her network that she was going to be blogging after her time at the Danish fashion magazine. During her time at the magazine she had established connections with fashion brands, designers and PR agencies, which she wanted to make use of. “And then it all made sense,” she says in one of the first posts as she picks up her blog again. She now had a useful network of people from the industry, compared to when she first started her blog. She had always wondered how other bloggers got their hands on so many things, particularly things that weren’t available in stores yet.

But that’s because of the PR agencies, who have the collections in their showroom before they get out to the stores and I am now allowed to borrow those. This is the reason I can always be ahead. I already know before you what’s going to hit the stores. And that’s an advantage (MJ September 2016).

³¹ These images are also connected to the past, because they are often taken some time before they post them, but in this section my focus is on the future.

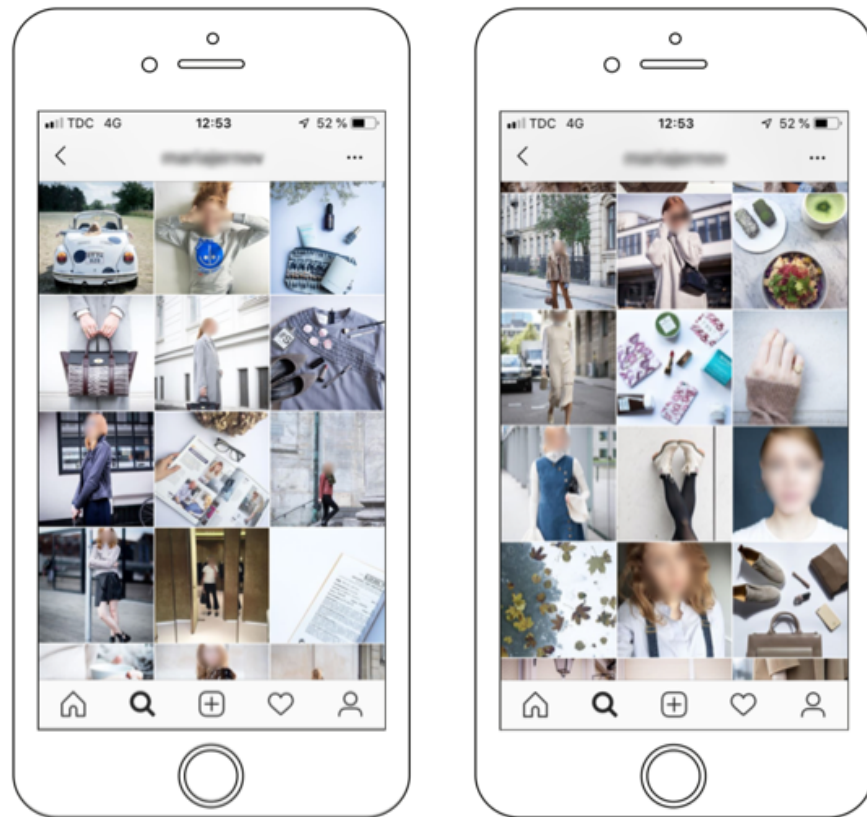


FIGURE 4: From MJ's Instagram account

Benjamin writes that the time aspect is an essential element in creating an image, which can help us understand what it is that MJ is doing with her blog. He describes the moment of creation as one: “in which the has-been [*Gewesene*] comes together in a flash [*blitzhaft*] with the now to form a constellation” (Benjamin: GS V1, 578 see N50 in Weigel 1996: 47). According to Benjamin, the manifestation of different temporalities in pictures comes into being through capturing the moment in pictures. The photograph stops and preserves a part of ongoing experience by closely replicating the human process of visual sensing, but apparently without the presence of human interpretation and evaluation. Benjamin calls this ‘dialectics at a standstill’ (1931). He perceives the past as part of creating memory in the image, giving recognition in creating the now (PW: 578). Whereas Benjamin focuses on the past and the present in this description of the image, he briefly touches upon the future as part of the *now-being* (*Jetztsein*, Benjamin 1928:115), allowing for a creative moment bridging towards the new (in the future). In doing so the author discusses the quality of the picture. Relating this back to bloggers’ images, I argue that these images, although portraying a ‘now’, project a mimicked future; both technically and socially, they use the qualities of a picture to attract followers and create a better future for themselves.

Another blogger, Samwhat, who writes about “extremely expensive shoes, a lot of bags and life’s ups and downs”, also appreciates having access to products her followers have not yet even seen. But while both bloggers stress the importance of networking when collaborating with companies, Samwhat – who has 30 300 fewer followers on Instagram than MJ – voices a greater concern about the role of her audience in her blogger life. Despite feeling a personal empowerment through her interactions with her audience about her personal stories, she stresses that “in the end, they make you who you are”.

The bigger the audience, the greater the potential for a blogger, not only for collaborating with companies but also for being given access to other projects outside the blogosphere. In the excerpt below, MJ, who has a dream to become an actress, tells me that an actress friend of hers has been asked by different casters for the number of her followers on Instagram. This is because:

They [casting companies] want to promote themselves. They [bloggers] have a brand value, which also adds to the branding for the movie. This is also the reason why I think this [blogging] is only one strength for me. I have also seen a lot of people in the fashion industry in Denmark, which can be a place where I can meet people who can do something

for me in this [movie] industry. It’s rather closely connected [...] we all know each other a bit, whether you are an actress or a fashion editor.³²

Commoditizing the audience for the good of oneself has thus become an important aspect of having a channel. Bloggers create awareness, or publicity, around particular projects but in so doing, they also legitimize companies’ collaboration with bloggers. All the bloggers I have encountered not only blog, but also co-design, create products, model, DJ, are journalists, study or desire to do so. The notion of just being a blogger is in itself an illusion and the bloggers I followed do not intend to remain bloggers for their entire life. Rather, the goal of being able to live off oneself and one’s potentialities in various industries and projects outside their blog is a goal that is expressed sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly, yet always a part of the motivation to be a blogger.

With the development of photography, the quest of representation has developed new complexity. According to Benjamin, photography involves a surrealistic aspect that plays with illumination and the notion of reality (1931). Advances in communication technology, including photographic technology, have created a new set of possibilities for framing and packaging reality as one sees it. One example of this is that sharing selected pictures digitally is a way for bloggers to generate a photomimetic self, which can then be transformed into financial gain. MJ explains this in relation to her own digital self:

I used one and a half years to build up an image so they [companies and PR agencies] know who I am. Not everybody can just come in and borrow some clothes and I can also not just borrow any clothes. I am not allowed yet to borrow Gucci for example, but I’m about to be there.

She works on her photomimetic self by borrowing fashion items (from friends) that she is not yet allowed to borrow from the producers. The pictures imply possession of the items. “I’ve borrowed Gucci bags from my friends and some other items, like certain dresses from Cutur [a blogger friend].” By mimicking her own image with particular items that she wants to be associated with, taking pictures and putting them online, bloggers like MJ create a second nature and become what they desire. Mimicking the potential future in the now and manifesting it through pictures brings it closer to being real. In the fashion blogging hierarchy, the more followers you have, the more prestigious the companies that want to collaborate with you and associate their brand with yours. As soon they do, bloggers have the advantage of getting their clothing before it hits the market. In doing so, these bloggers create themselves while simultaneously co-creating the future of these companies.

Conclusion

In this article I have applied a theoretical framework of the photomimetic self in order to grasp how the taking and posting of pictures is used to create a digital self, based on ideas of what one would like to become. To put this in another way, I have tried to show how bloggers’ images on Instagram create a second nature in the form of a digitally coherent, exposed and shared self; a self in a mimetic relation with photographs that are created with the express purpose of posting them online.

I used a vignette to open a window into the way bloggers think through and with the Instagram lens, giving an example of how a blogger purposely chose an environment as a backdrop to create and mediate a particular self in the setting of Instagram. But this was not only an illustration of photomimesis from the perspective of practices and experiences of bloggers’ everyday lives. It also indicates how ‘Instagram mode’ becomes a snapshot of a time and place in a wider sense; it describes sociocultural changes as a result of social media and self-performance. Scrolling through Instagram makes it abundantly clear that the creation of a photomimetic self in a digital space has become common practice in shaping and performing identity among young people with access to smartphones.

While a medium always has the capacity to intensify the experience of the self, digital images on Instagram gives bloggers a platform to experiment with strategic ways of portraying their own images in a dialectical process of becoming, where the mimetic process forms the dynamic between the digital self and the offline self. The focus of this article is not the commercial potential of the internet, but rather

³² In 2018 I see a note that MJ has had her first role in a short movie and has moved to LA to pursue her dream of becoming an actress.

how social practices of discovering, shaping and performing identity through images in an online world are contributing in realizing the dreams and desires of these bloggers. The digitally shared self is dependent on its followers; only followers can elevate a blogger's potential self to the reality that is not yet. In this sense, a fashion blogger's future self is dependent on creating, retaining and growing an audience, as the process of photomimesis shows. As I have shown, the bloggers create not only their own futures through the digitally shared images of their selves – they simultaneously contribute to creating the future of the companies they are in collaboration with. The audience's likes, comments and shares could perhaps be seen as currency in a Kula ring contributing to shaping the companies' future.

NOTES

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HALLUCINATION-BASED ETHNOGRAPHY. IMAGINATIVE KNOWLEDGE AND THE ECSTATIC SIDE OF FIELDWORK

Chiara Pussetti, *University of Lisbon*

ABSTRACT

This auto-ethnography details the author's encounter with a spiritual entity – an hallucination experienced by herself during her fieldwork in the Bijagó Archipelago, Guinea Bissau – in order to discuss the processes of imaginative learning that are involved in this kind of exceptional experiences. Analysing her own vision and the processes of ritual learning through nonverbal means, she explores the relationship between images, imagination, aesthetic practices and knowledge, and illustrates the epistemological efficacy of art-based research methods to capture the non-verbal and ephemeral dimensions of being, going beyond words.

KEYWORDS

Auto-ethnography, imagination, art-based ethnography, experimental research methods, extraordinary experiences.

Bio

Chiara Pussetti has a degree in Philosophy and has completed a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Turin in 2003. Over the last 16 years, she has lectured at graduate and post-graduate levels in Italy, Portugal, and Brazil, and has researched and published extensively on the subjects of migration, healthcare, gender, body and emotions, social inequality, suffering and well-being in urban contexts. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in Guinea Bissau, Portugal and Brazil on public health policy; representations of race and racism; social vulnerability, exclusion and discrimination, urban regeneration, creativity and public art. Chiara is currently Auxiliar Researcher at the Institute for Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon ICS and she is Principal Investigator of the Project “EXCEL. The Pursuit of Excellence. Biotechnologies, enhancement and body capital in Portugal” (PTDC/SOC-ANT/30572/2017), funded by the FCT – Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology.

chiara.pussetti@ics.ulisboa.pt

Hallucination-based ethnography. Imaginative knowledge and the ecstatic side of fieldwork¹.

In this essay, I relate an extraordinary encounter with a spiritual entity – a vision experienced by myself during my four year-long fieldwork in the village of Bijante (Island of Bubaque, Bijagó Archipelago, Guinea Bissau) – in order to discuss the processes of imaginative learning that are involved in this kind of exceptional experiences. The idea of addressing the oneiric and hallucinatory aspects of ethnographic work aroused from a challenge that had been launched to me by my colleagues Dara Culhane (SFU/ CIE) and Denielle Elliott (York University / CIE), who had organized a panel for the CASCA-CUBA 2018 (Canadian Anthropology Society) conference, dedicated to Ethnographic Hallucinations. Denielle and I collaborated previously on the occasion of the first #Colleex EASA International Workshop in Lisbon, discussing about experimental forms of ethnographic fieldwork and about the role of art practices in exploring imaginary landscapes experimental and emergent ethnographic methodologies (Elliott and Culhane 2017). The panel Moving Towards Ethnographic

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Hallucinations organized by the Centre For Imaginative Ethnography (CIE) brought together my main theoretical concerns: how to study the invisible, the emotional, and the sensorial? How to study something that is indefinable, elusive or dream-like? How to interpret something that may not exist or that is uncanny? How to reproduce the imaginative aspects of ethnographic communication? During the panel's sessions we discussed the main theoretical and methodological possibilities of studying imaginary landscapes and human experiences that are at the limit of our understanding, dialoguing with different authors (Irving 2011; Calzadilla and Marcus 2006; Pink 2013; Degarrod 2013, 2016; Clarke 2014; Kazubowski-Houston and Magnat 2018; Estalella and Sánchez Criado 2018). Following up on conversations around ethnography-based artistic practices and art-based research methods started the year before, in the occasion of the #Colleex EASA International Workshop in Lisbon, my contribution in the CASCACUBA conference focused on the interplay between reality and imagination afforded by visual art, analysing in particular the capacity to transform something dreamed or imagined into a concrete form, an objects in its own right. Aesthetic practices are particularly suited to elicit, communicate and embody unarticulated experiences, and concealed understandings of the world. Images, rather than only representations of reality or visual systems of meaning, are powerful social agents, acting as visual devices with and on the body, and transforming the viewer's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Like words, images actually do things: oneiric, emotional, relational sensuous and sensitive transformative things that enchant human experience.

Analysing my own vision, through an exercise of auto-ethnography and evocative narrative, I will explore the relationship between images, imagination, art and knowledge, in order to disclose the imaginative and sensuous aspects of understanding and connecting with the spirit world. I am aware that speaking about 'imagination' and not about 'perception' means establishing a difference between 'fantasy' and 'reality'. It is not my intention to discuss here if the invisible world is 'real only for my informants' - disqualifying in this way half of their world as a false belief - or if it is 'really real'. I am not interested in establishing proofs of invisible forces or in gathering empirical evidence of the existence of spirits. I am interested, rather, in reflecting on alternative research methods and on imaginative forms of understanding and representing the spiritual world in anthropology.

Reporting the personal experience of a socially significant vision in the context of my fieldwork, I intend to reflect on the process through which I have gained some kind of knowledge about the invisible world and on the specific circumstances in which such understanding became operative, blurring the borders between 'reality' and 'imagination'.

Developing a reflection on the "extraordinary" aspects of the ethnographic experience (such as dreams, apparitions, visions, miracles) means, firstly, to open up to a radical methodological openness to difference of all kinds, including what we would call epistemological or ontological. Secondly, it involves dialoguing with different authors who have ethnographically explored encounters, events or "realities that that are not necessarily socially constructed in ways that allow us to do conceptual work with them" (Kohn 2015: 315). Finally, it implicates asking a few questions. What are the most suitable ethnographic approaches to communicate spiritual and extraordinary experiences, unexpected encounters, and ecstatic understandings of the world? What methods and visual techniques would be most appropriate to unearth such realms? Which aesthetic practices are aimed at the description or mimetic replication, and which ones are at the construction or creation of a hallucinatory experience? Are drawings, chants, paintings, sculptures, or body-decorations, for example, iconic representations and indexical indications of culturally specific imaginations of the invisible aspects of the world? What is the relationship between art, imagination, immaterial knowledge in coming to understand something about unusual experiences and making sense of the ineffable world? Is it ethnography itself an essentially imaginative act²?

I talk here about imagination, because for my informants the world of spirits is real, socially significant and operative, even if real in a different qualitative way from ordinary reality. In everyday life it is impossible to see, smell, listen or touch the spirits. However, it is possible to learn how to 'feel them' or to 'see them with the mind', expanding our perceptions or entering in a deep level of imagination, that is not a 'believed-in' but a 'lived-in' imagination, which Carlo Severi has called a "chimeric imagination" (Severi 2015 [2007] pointing towards the 'intangible' aspects of reality. This definition expands the

² Casey 1976, 2003; Preston 1991; Crapanzano 2004; Huppau and Wulf 2009; Harris and Rapport 2015; Severi 2004, 2015; Bloch 2016.

practical function of imagination beyond the merely representational and beyond individual creativity, situating it in the realm of the personal as well as the collective and highlighting its social importance as a meaningful form of agency *and* effective social practice to relate with the intangible life-world.

As the words we choose have weight - and very often an ethnocentric and colonial heaviness - I prefer here to talk of 'intangible' or 'invisible' dimensions of reality and of 'extra-ordinary' or 'unusual' experiences, escaping equivocal definitions such as 'supernatural', linked to an essentialist idea of 'nature', or 'irrational' often used by anthropologists to describe events that place their sense of reality and rationality in crisis. The main - and most difficult - exercise I underwent during my fieldwork was not to dismiss the physical and metaphysical realities of my ethnographic subjects as 'beliefs' or 'metaphors' to represent 'real' facts, instead sustaining them in free possibility. Following Mignolo's call for 'decolonial thinking and...epistemic disobedience' (2009:173-4), when confronted with a conception of reality which don't fit with my own terms of what can or cannot be "real", I tried to alter my very analytical concepts in order to arrive at a new form of considering their experience (Straight 2009; Holbraad 2010; Viveiros de Castro 2015). My movement inside their cultural logic made the improbable enter into the dimension of the possible, opening up to being changed by the ethnographic experience (Young and Goulet 1994; Goulet and Granville Miller 2007; Escolar 2012; Goslinga 2013).

I will describe now one of the most personally disturbing and perplexing moments of my fieldwork (a vision, a dream or a hallucination, depending on the interpretative grid) - one I never wrote anything about. The conscious choice of not writing about this event is in itself extremely interesting. In spite of the mantra of relativism, this kind of experiences - as we know - are generally ignored, silenced or avoided by anthropologists, not only as subject of analysis, but above all as field data to be documented as ethnography.

Though a modest group of ethnographers risked descriptions and even analysis of extra-ordinary experiences, such as seeing spirits and other invisible things; acquiring shamanic powers or speaking with the dead, in most cases the documentation of such events remains bounded at the margins of our scientific enterprise³. As the hilarious moments in which the anthropologist looks foolish or idiot - the mistakes, the blunders, the 'gaffes' - also the hallucinatory, spiritual, and ecstatic experiences are relegated to personal journals, dinners with friends, anecdotes or rumours. We well know that the report of such extra-ordinary happenings brings to mind an even more dangerous ghost: that of the Carlos Castaneda's work, that makes any report of extra-ordinary experiences risky in our profession. Relating fieldwork stories in which you look completely stupid or crazy tend not to count as 'valuable professional capital' among the scientific community.

To be honest - reading the accounts of anthropologists who interacted with witches, angels, zombies, vampires, ghosts, spirits, and so on - I have always wondered how hard and solitary their fieldwork had been, how they were suggestible or what kind of substances they might have ingested. However, to the detriment of my scepticism and irony, my experience as a 'piroque of spirits' and my vision of the powerful python spirit 'Serpente' proved to be more a particular mode of knowing through imagination and of ontologically relating with doubt and uncertainty than a one-way ticket to a psychiatric asylum.

Learning to be a piroque

As in many other societies, in the Bijagó Islands the invisible is neither unreal nor supernatural. The world of spiritual entities, obscure forces, witches, ghosts, energies, is for Bijagó people as real as that of trees and stones. The Bijagó world is divided between 'those who know' and 'those who do not know', 'those who see' and 'those who do not see'. This division is marked by a series of ritual passages and has important political implications (Pussetti, Bordonaro 1999).

The *kandjá kaorebok*⁴, literally the 'temple of spirits', located at the centre of each village, is a clear metaphor of this division. If the external walls alternate geometric patterns with illustrations of the daily

³ Long 1974; Long 1977; Grindal 1983; Marton 1994; Turner 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2003, 2005; Favret-Saada 1977, 1990, 2009; Stoller and Olkes 1987; Guéron 1994; Young and Goulet 1994a, 1994b; Goulet and Grandille Miller 2007; Cohen 2002; Segato 1992; De Carvalho 1993; Morton 2004; Shanafelt 2004; Escolar 2012; Baxstrom 2013; Goslinga 2013; Strassler 2014; Kyriakides 2016.

⁴ The Bijagó language has been classified as a main independent branch of Western-Atlantic sub-family (Sapir 1971; Ruhlen 1987:101; Segerer 2000: 4). Important morphological and lexical variations have been reported from island to island. Segerer (2000: 10) has circumscribed four main groups, while Luigi Scantamburlo (2000: I, 7) write of five main variants. All variants

life of the village and intimidating writings (such as ‘danger of death’), it is said that the interior of the temples - always guarded by a sentinel - constitutes a visual experience out of the ordinary. Colours and lines give life to mythical creatures in which the animal merges with the human, defying any experiential distinction, and creating a dense and vibrant oneiric landscape.



FIGURE 1: *Kandjá Kaorebok* Bijante. Photo: Chiara Pussetti.

however have nominal classes (Segerer 2000: 16; Scantamburlo 2000: 18). In this work, I have adopted a simplified transcription, as proposed by Scantamburlo (2000).



FIGURE 2: Paintings on the *kandjá kaorebok*. Bijante. Photo: Chiara Pussetti.



FIGURE 3: Paintings on the *kandjá kaorebok*. Bijante. Photo: Chiara Pussetti.



FIGURE 4: Paintings on the *kandjá kaorebok*. Bijante. Photo: Chiara Pussetti.



FIGURE 5: Paintings on the *kandjá kaorebok*. Bijante. Photo: Chiara Pussetti.

Rumours about the interior of the temple had reached my ears, but standing outside it was impossible to see the secret images, because the entrance was closed by a heavy curtain and - due to the blinding light of the day and to the total absence of windows - the interior of the temple was deeply dark.

Despite the years spent living on the islands and the linguistic competence acquired, there were, nevertheless, symbolic, and physical spaces that were precluded to me: spaces where I could not enter, aspects that could not be talked about, which could not be named and even less explained.

‘Those who know’ learned bodily, emotionally, and sensually about the spiritual world around them, acquiring the capacity to ‘imagine’ or ‘see the invisible in their mind’, beyond words. The ability to

perceive and experience the invisible is acquired during a long and highly ritualized educational process, in which alternative modes of perception and imaginative techniques for evoking the invisible are stimulated.

After a couple of years of continuous stay in the village, I was allowed to take part in the ritual journey that would take me into the sanctuary of the spirits. The story of this initiation ceremony is another story altogether; the story of when I learned to transport a dead man on the last journey to the beyond, like a ‘pirogue of spirits’ (*uruté⁵ iarebok*).



FIGURE 6: Paintings on the *kandjá kaorebok*. Bijante. Photo: Chiara Pussetti.

After a couple of years living in the village, I was invited to participate with the other young women of the initiation of the dead (*eraké iarebok*, the theatre of spirits) (Pussetti 1999, 2001, 2005). Crossing this initiatory threshold, through a series of ritual passages that would have transformed me into an adult woman, was an essential condition for my complete integration in the village of Bijante.



FIGURE 7: *Eraké iarebok*. Bijante. Photo: Chiara Pussetti.

⁵ The term *uruté* (b.) is used exclusively to refer to the pirogues used once in battle, now disappeared from the archipelago. To designate the canoes used today for fishing they use the word *kadúme* (b. plural *nadúme*). Probably the last image of a Bijagó war pirogue, according to recent authors (Gallois Duquette 1983: 224; Henry 1980, 1989), is that taken by Bernatzik in the thirties (Bernatzik 1967: 153).



FIGURE 8: *Eraké iarebok*. Bijante. Photo: Lorenzo Bordonaro



FIGURE 9: *Eraké iarebok*. Bijante. Photo: Lorenzo Bordonaro



FIGURE 10: *Eraké iarebok*. Bijante. Photo: Lorenzo Bordonaro

I spent days in the temple, dancing unceasingly to exhaustion, constantly immersed in artistically powerful and disturbing images of creatures characterized by an ambiguous, polymorphic, and changing nature: neither women nor men, or perhaps both things together, wild animals, snakes, and fishes, all at the same time. The spirits of the boys who died before completing the rite of passage that would lead them to adulthood are represented as white and evanescent shadows, entering in the women's body like in a pirogue to reach the place of the dead, at the bottom of the sea (*anarebok*)⁶.

The paintings allude, indicate, and evoke without clearly explaining in order to preserve the hidden, ephemeral, evanescent, and immaterial characteristic of the spiritual dimension. The images in the temple should not only be white (*n'ororok*) or at least very clear (*n'ojón*), but if possible they must have the transparency (*n'eden*) of the water and the glare (*n'ottreine*) caused by excessive brightness of the sunshine on the water (*n'orijirij*).

The deep immersion in this mesmerizing ambient - the muggy womb of the temple, impregnated with the sweet smells that attract the spirits (smell of overripe fruits, fresh sugar cane juice and rum) - works as a multisensory learning to expand and nourish my imagination with the past dreams and visions of my informants. My naked body was covered with blood, eggs, and alcohol to invite the spirits to come to me. I was forbidden to move, speak or eat on my own. The older women fed me with their hands, when they thought it was necessary, regardless of my will. Ignoring my bodily needs was a necessary process to allow the spirit of the dead person to enter inside me. For days, I had no notion of the normal passage of time, as the village noises were covered by the continuous sound of drums. The old women then taught me the dance of the dead, or rather the theatre of spirits (*eraké iarebok*): the staging of the individual characteristics of the dead and of the past warrior ethos that belongs to the collective memory. They dressed me like a spirit, covering me in white clay, continuing to play the rhythm of the ancestors

⁶ In the bijagó language "an" is a prefix of place: *anarebok* means literally "the place beyond where the spirits are". The *anarebok* is also called *kokpekentó* that means "under the sea".

(Bordonaro 1998). This imposed confinement in the sanctuary was interrupted in the day that I returned to the village, dancing the dance of the spirits and dressed as a pirogue of spirits. The songs that narrated my successful transformation accompanied my return to the village:

Aì, nabanme è tourebok n'na turè

Alas! you put inside me a dead person

Chiara Nobe orebok, Nonan Nocouton, open npennan Nog, Nonan Nocouton.

Chiara is possessed by a deceased, it's a big thing, my daughter struggles because it's a big thing.

Chiara massaba Ni, Nou No orebok. Ndjoun, Nobè kadjabanne ka na te Nona ta banme orebok ka nô òrora; No sena Nate tan Nabù Nona nban te mecan Nog.

Chiara now has a secret, and it is a thing of the dead. Look, people smile because we have placed a deceased in a white; to our great joy, you know the secret.

Òroura una wa ba Niok n'dè mata erogonu

It is said that a white girl goes to the initiation ceremony, the news comes [from Bijante⁷]

Enhominka ne peda tan komba kuoco ti ba ban orebok kanourora

The Nhominka⁸ come all from the three villages, to put a deceased into the white

Ah!Ah!Ah! Udò ta Nassocop a nan Nuno, obatan "Basena" ubaka

Ah!Ah!Ah! She wears flip flops in the forest, if she arrives "Basena"⁹ takes them away

Teté, Mutúkp Kumbonki,

Teté, play the sacred drum!

Lead the spirit into Chiara

Orebok madak!

Soul of the dead, dance!

Chiara, Omgbá Okanto, nátan mojón n'ajóko.

Chiara, woman-child, finally now you see the world.

Omgbá Chiara, mobdo kèn anonson okinka

Child Chiara, go to my mother the priest

Okenemát

So that she continues giving birth to you¹⁰

This ritual experience expected to re-educate, alter or expand my cognitive, sensorial, emotional, bodily, and eventually spiritual competences, allowing me to connect to other dimensions of reality. The goal of confinement in the temple is to enter into such trance-like or ecstatic experience, transforming one's sense of self, one's notions of what is real, indeed, one's view of the world. The final goal of the ritual is to reborn as someone else, transcending everyday reality and learning to see the world from another perspective, with the eyes of the spirit. Like any other intense relationship, the relationship with a spirit involves decentralizing (taking one's eyes off oneself or moving outside oneself), alternating different perspectives, being permeable, and learning by imitation how to relate to others. The deeper the participation, the more one can expect changes in one's dreams, perceptions, sensory capacities, and visions. The transformation process contributes to the production of not only meaningful and valid ethnographic knowledge, but also near to the worldviews and experiences of those we represent.

Clearly, the ethnographer is not a child who observes the world without preconceptions. In the field we carry a baggage of conscious and unconscious assumptions that condition the direction of our

⁷ I carried out my fieldwork mainly in the village of Bijante (Island of Bubaque).

⁸ In Bubaque, an analysis of the social organisation of the village actually reveals that the generational divide is one of its basic features. The main social distinction at the village is in fact between young men (*iamgbá* the children) and the elders (*iakotó*). A complex system of age grades and age classes leads the young men through several steps towards the status of elder. Young men belonging to an age group before initiation constitute an age class, whose members will move synchronically through the following rituals that regulate the passage from one age grade to the next. The name of the age classes are many times those of other ethnic groups, such as in this case the Nhominka - a group of Senegalese fishermen installed in the Bijagó archipelago (Mendes Fernandes 1987: 58-94). I do not intend to offer here an exhaustive description of the social organization of the inhabitants of the island of Bubaque. For detailed anthropological descriptions of the communities of the islands produced in post-independence period, see Scantamburlo (1991 [1978]); Gallois Duquette (1983), Mendes Fernandes (1989, 1995), Henry (1994), Pussetti (1999, 2001, 2005).

⁹ Basena is the name of the *ocandegn'* of the village of Bubaque. The *ocandegn'* (b) is a ritual officer chosen by the elders, to control the proper conduct of young people in the initiation ceremony.

¹⁰ The expression metaphorically indicates the protection and care of a mother towards her daughter. We could freely translate as: "look after me like a child".

gaze as the same ability look and know how and what to see. However, during the fieldwork we continually learn and we change, even without paying attention, repeating the same actions, in a sensual, corporeal and mimetic way. We immerse in a process, imperfect and never definitively concluded, of social knowing-how.

The ethnographer, like a sponge, absorbs new experiences, schemes, analogies, emotions, postures, dreams, and imaginations. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan defines this learning process as “impregnation” (1995), a progression of repetition, empathy, floating attention, abduction and mimesis. According to the local conception of person (Pussetti 20015) emotions, affects, ideas and dreams - like diseases or viruses - can pass from one person to another, especially if they share a relationship of proximity, easily penetrating the permeable bodily boundaries. This transmission takes place involuntarily and daily, without taking notes or turning on the recorder, simply by being, eating, and sleeping together.

As Barbara Wilkes claims:

“Nor does it signify that one has “gone native.” Instead it is an opportunity to glimpse the moral, emotional, physical, intuitive, and spiritual realities and experiences of others first hand as we take part in the transformations our hosts experience. Thereafter, we have an obligation to determine what such experiences may add to our perceptual and conceptual understanding, not only of our fieldwork cultures, but of all human phenomena including ourselves” (Wilkes 2007:75–76).

However, despite this total immersion and imaginative apprenticeship, I had no contact with the spirits in the temple. I was perfectly aware that, notwithstanding the time spent living in the village of Bijante, I had not become ‘one of them’. I had certainly become at least to some extent ‘one with them’, a competent member of their society: competent enough to understand, to respond and interact coherently in their physical and symbolic world. I reflected in other articles on the role of empathy in the construction of ethnographic knowledge, suggesting as an alternative the concept of “resonance” coined by Unni Wikan (1992)¹¹. But maybe this “feeling-thinking” competence didn’t extend to the realm of the imagination; maybe I was not competent enough to connect or to resonate with the Bijagó spirits. I was dressed like a pirogue. I danced like a pirogue. I was exhausted from trying, but I did not feel any spirits, I did not see the shadows of the dead, I was not carrying anyone else in me. Definitively, I was not a pirogue, not like the other women. So I relaxed and stopped thinking about spirits, or waiting for something. And so it was, that - several months after my ritual reclusion in the temple - a spirit appeared to me.

The python Serpente

The vision happened at the most propitious time: when I was not expecting. I was sleeping peacefully in my bed, when a strange noise in the room woke me up. I remember turning on the light and sitting on the bed to better observe the room. I felt like I was wide-awake and in fact I was worried about extremely rational issues: was there someone in my room? A thief? Was it an animal, maybe? To my dismay, I saw on the floor a large python crawling in the direction of my bed. The python is an animal that belongs to the local fauna and I had already met it in other circumstances, in the forest, or on the banana trees: I had never seen, however, a python in my room, certainly not next to my bed. I remember that I was literally chilled by panic and unable to move. I thought clearly that staying still would have been my best chance to survive. The python rose upon the bed and crawled on my body. Tracing its passage, it leaved a black mark on my belly. A meaningful skin mark: the python tail divided into two tails, allowing it to walk as a human.

¹¹ Resonance is similar to attitudes that one can define as empathy or *verstehen* and is reminiscent of the “living with” of Michael Jackson (1996, 1998), the “know-how” of Paul Stoller (1989), the “sympathy” of John Leavitt (1996), or the “ethnographic empathy” of Renato Rosaldo (1989).



FIGURE 11: Tattooing the skin mark. Photo: Chiara Pussetti



FIGURE 12: Painting the skin mark. Photo: Chiara Pussetti

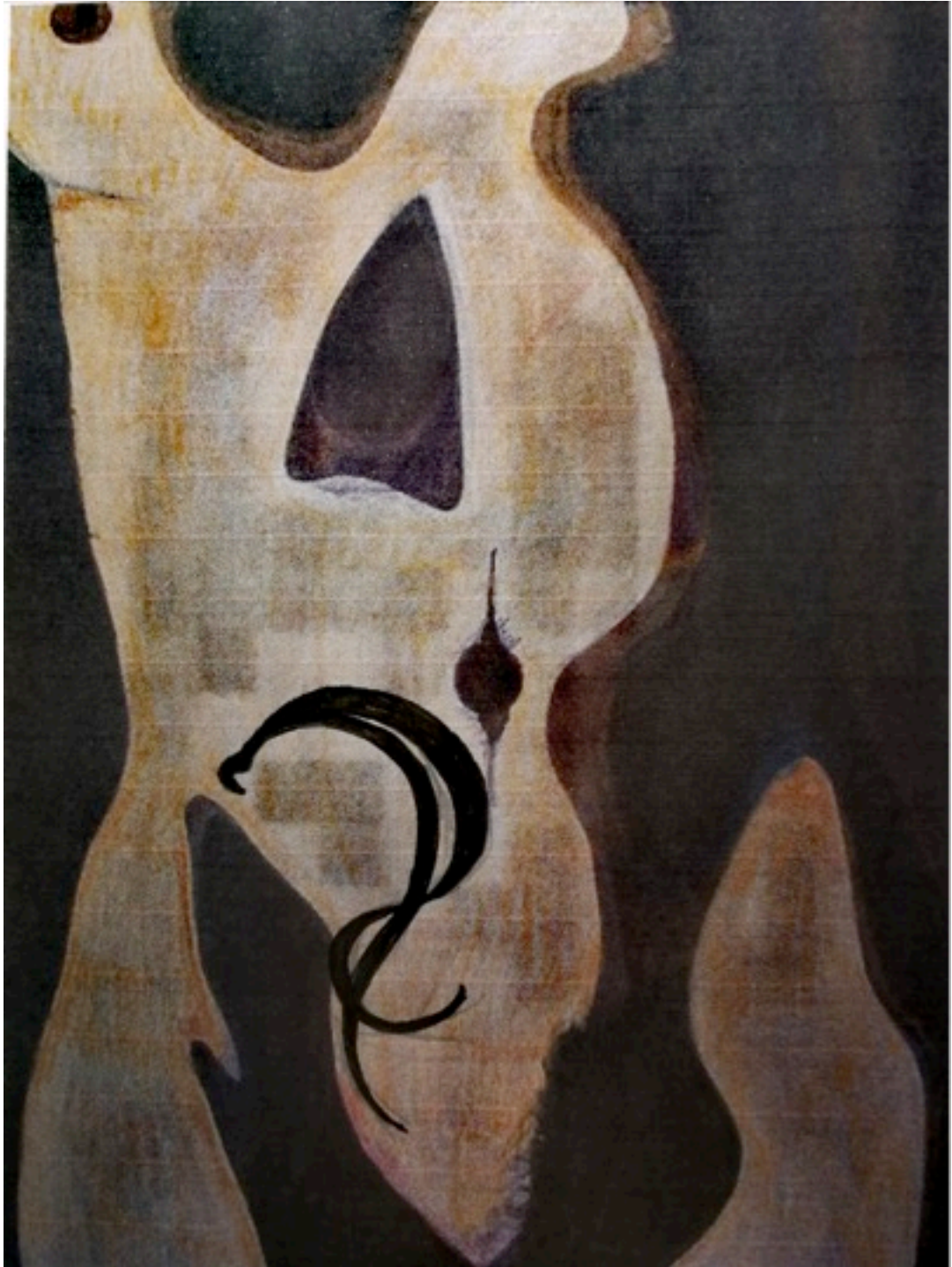


FIGURE 13: Painting the skin mark. Photo: Chiara Pussetti

Slowly, it moved away from me, standing up like a human being. I was not sure if it was animal or human, male or female. I sat up in bed scared and perplexed, with my heart pounding until morning. I could not be sure that this was a spirit, but I was convinced that I was perfectly awake and that something was there. I remain convinced of this to this day. But what, precisely, do I think this python with two tails was - a real animal or a spiritual manifestation - I am not as certain. I tried to maintain a stance of disbelief toward the existence of spirits and occult forces, but still the chimeric image of the python walking in my room was too vivid and intense to be only a dream. I could not say with certainty that the python was true; nor that it was an illusion. The ontological transgression that it represented, against all my hardest suppositions, forced me to doubt.

A few hours later, Tcharte Banca, the famous carver, diviner, and healer of the village of Bijante, who has the power to see the invisible with his mind, suddenly appeared on the door of my bedroom, asking me if I had already met my 'Serpente'. I knew he was waiting for this moment, as I knew that the python is one of the most frequent images in the sanctuaries. What I still cannot explain is why he appeared that very morning and how he could guess the contours of my vision.

It is forbidden to speak openly about Serpente, just like any other dangerous entities. Naming means evoking. 'Those who see' the spirits can, however, reproduce silently its image by drawing it or carving it into the wood. I had never talked with anyone about Serpente. However, I have seen python representations in the temple and I knew Tcharte's wooden polymorphic sculptures very well. After my vision and before I could draw it inside the temple, I began to draw my own version of Serpente in my notebook, showing it to the diviner and asking for help to those who see the invisible and who better know the entity.

Drawing or sculpting the Serpente together with my informants and comparing our artistic production, based on our individual visions and imaginations, I was able to understand aspects that I could not ask directly. Much of the knowledge of the spirit has occurred observing gestures, recurring motives or altering details following reproaches and suggestions.

Observing and reproducing drawings and sculptures, I have discovered that Serpente is not only a python, but also a mermaid, a fish or a water snake, and that can assume the seductive appearance of a white woman with eyes with the colour of the sea. Serpente challenges all our established categories, inviting us to think beyond our taken-for-granted notions of reality: half woman, half fish, it can transform into a python with shining, hypnotic eyes or into several other animals.

The Serpente body can also have all these shapes at once, becoming a strange, sinuous and ambivalent figure, where human and animal, male, and female are blurred and mixed up in a unique body that at the same time is a terrifying creature and a synthesis of all the beings, merged in an erotic embrace.



FIGURE 14: Erotic representation of Serpente. Sculpture: Tcharte Banca. Photo: Chiara Pussetti

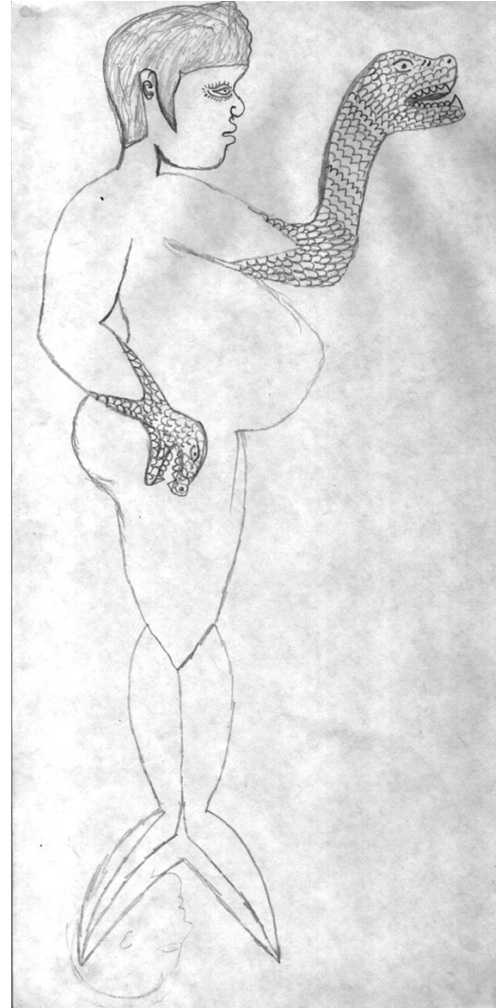


FIGURE 15: Serpente. Drawing: Tcharte Banca. Photo: Chiara Pussetti

If it is forbidden to speak openly about the Serpente, it is still possible to negotiate with him/her through a diviner. The diviner works as a type of interpreter or mediator in business negotiations with the spirit. Serpente is an *erande* or *eraminde*¹², a spiritual being belonging to the Bijagó pantheon, generally represented as a python and associated to water sources or to unusual landmarks. Each *erande* has individual features (name, gender, origin, desires, qualities, and idiosyncrasies) and specific powers. A diviner is able to recognize its characteristics. While in their daily lives nobody speaks about *erandes*, into the temple, after the initiation, the acolytes have the opportunity to access different representations of these spirits and to listen to stories of people who have had trade or intimate relations with them.

Serpente, however, is a particular *erande* that comes from afar. Its name reveals the foreign origin: Serpente is in fact a *kriol* name – which is often spelled among Bijagó speakers as *Serafinte*. Serpente is a powerful spirit living in the sea, which frequently takes the form of a gorgeous European woman, usually naked, with blue eyes. Also ‘her’ long straight hair suggests it is from elsewhere, as ‘her’ white skin, and the eyes as colour of the sea. Serpente is clearly associated to the water element: the body is light, even transparent like water, bright like the sun reflected on the sea at sunset, dazzling as light itself. Its realm at the bottom of the sea is said to abound with luxury, parties, prosperity, and flashy goods.

Serpente grants wealth, commodities and success to the acolytes. But these favours, as everybody knows, are paid at a high price: a contract with Serpente requires an important economic investment or promise of fulfilment of the debt. Serpente speaks the vocabulary of the occult economies (Comaroff and

¹² The word *iran*, or *irã* designates, in *kriol* (the vehicular language that speakers of different native tongues use to communicate in Guinea Bissau), every entity or ritual object (Henry 1994: 88). The term *iran* derives from the bijagó *eraminde* or *erande*, a term that designates a power originally linked to an old python living in the sea (Henry 1994: 89; Carreira 1961: 508).

Comaroff 1999): it is a business-spirit and in exchange for the wealth it provides, it demands sacrifices, such as the blood of animals and in some cases, it is alleged, even the blood of those closest to the beneficiary, such as family members, or better still the debtor's own new-borns. The excess is Serpente's principal characteristic. Serpente wants too much, is too attractive, too fair of skin, the eyes are too brilliant, the hair excessively long and blond. The clothes shine like the sun, the jewellery blind the eyes of observers. Serpente desires the same things that she offers: luxury, beauty, prosperity, pleasure, and expensive things, like cosmetics, jewels, perfumes, and watches.

Like the better-known Mami Wata, Serpente offers material wealth and success in life, but at a high price¹³. A deal with Serpente implies paying back the debt, usually with a very high interest. As Tcharte once told me, with a loud laugh, a relationship with Serpente, as with some beautiful woman, requires an important economic investment. She seduces and then destroys those who approach her. Isabel Mesquitela, in her work on Guinean cloths (1996) talks about a *bajuda iran cego* (kriol) (a python-girl), a Serpente who takes the form of an attractive woman to seduce people and dominate them with her power. Beautiful women are thus often held to be an incarnation of the Serpente: "you are beautiful like a Serpente" is a very popular compliment in Guinea Bissau.



FIGURE 16: Serpente. Drawing: Pedro Banca (Tcharte's son). Photo: Chiara Pussetti.

Tcharte, who claims to have an intimate relationship with a Serpente, told me this story. He had been the Serpente's faithful lover during years. Then he betrayed Serpente with a woman, his wife Koká. Serpente appeared to him like a brilliant python, writhing and menacing him.

"«*Konhakpanáð, Kabara Kagónt Eti Kakpaná, Nhodorokak Eti Kakpaná, Nhiokpekekpekek Ankugbí Eti Neti Nejijóke*», (I was terrified, my chest burned with fear, I was immobilized with terror, I was trembling all over my body like through the cold wind)".

As any other woman, Serpente is jealous, demanding and possessive, she sucks the blood, she wants everything, she wants your babies and the flesh of your family. Serpente, in my interpretation of the images that portray 'her', represents the reflection of the new, free, seductive African urban woman, of her autonomy, agency, freedom, and attractive appearance.

¹³ The Serpente's cult - always individual and generally secret due to the ambiguous nature of this relationship - is diffuse in all the Guinea Bissau and clearly it is linked to the cult of the water spirit called Mami Wata, diffused all along the coast of West Africa. Explicitly and clearly non-indigenous, linked to urban culture, Serpente and Mami Wata represent the western style of life, condensing the fascination of material wealth with the dangerous temptations of 'modernity' (Bastian 1997; Drewal 1988; Geschiere 1997; Gore and Nevadomsky 1997; Salmons 1983; Van Stipriaan 2005).



FIGURE 17: Serpente. Drawing: Koká (Priestess of the Bijante village) Photo: Chiara Pussetti

For Tcharte, my ambiguous connection with Serpente was immediately clear. I had been chosen by the entity; I was her daughter; I looked like her. Observing the drawings of my informants, I suddenly realized that in their representations of the entity, they were drawing me. I was not a pirogue, like the other women. I was a Serpente, who had come from far away.



FIGURE 18: Serpente. Drawing: Koká (Priestess of the Bijante village) Photo: Chiara Pussetti.

Hallucination-based ethnography

Visions are a meaningful form of agency composed of socially significant cultural representations and collective memories. They draw their significance from the social and historical context in which they appear and work actively as cultural means of constructing and reconstructing the reality. In other words, we can observe our visions and dreams to reveal deep elements of the world that we live in.

Visions are also multisensorial encounters, embodied experiences and sentient ways of knowing. I allowed myself to 'be affected' by the oneiric landscape of my informants and by the mesmerizing ambient of the theatre of the spirits, submitting my sentient body to the field and discovering new 'vivid' and 'immersive' ways of understanding. To "lend one's body to the world" (Stoller, 1997, xvii) is a vulnerable act, and in this process I have inevitably reconfigured my senses in order to resonate with the

field, and to create new interactions between my research participants, their complex world and myself. I have adopted a methodological perspective that has allowed me to lose control, and to be vulnerable and transformed by spiritual and cognitive maps different than my own. I have tried to think beyond “my taken-for-granted notions of the real” (Goulet and Miller 2007:11), accepting to be affected by entities who inhabit unseen worlds, without reduce them to metaphors for something else.

It is in this vein that I have explored the contents, preconditions, and ethnographic relevance of my vision, shifting from participant observation to radical participation (Fabian 2000:120) and to “observation of participation” (Tedlock 1991) and recognizing that “critically understood, autobiography is a condition of ethnographic objectivity” (Fabian 2001, 13).

My vision - constituted by local cultural images and re-shaped by my imagination - reveals to be both a social fact (as its elements were provided by a collective imaginary) and an individual experience (as I compose the single fragments in a form meaningful to me). Embodying the images of the main theatre of the spirits - the sacred temple - I have allowed myself to ‘be affected’ or to ‘be written by their world’ instead of only ‘writing their world’, which is so characteristic of our academic approach. At the same time, my drawings and paintings - giving the invisible a tangible form and consolidating thus its “affecting presence” (Armstrong 1986) into the human world - worked as dispositifs of reality contributing to create locally new imaginaries and to ‘affect’ other people.

Looking at artistic processes as methodological devices, I consider that this exchange of artistic practices and visual communication with my informants in the field contribute to my anthropological research, facilitating social interaction, allowing to access topics that can not be talked about and to capture the non-verbal dimensions of being, going beyond words, exploring the unspoken and grasping emotional, sensorial, and internal imaginary worlds (Pussetti 2013, 2018). To engage visually with others in the field is definitively a dialogic practice or a form of collaborative ethnographic knowledge that transforms informants and spectators into active knowledge co-producers. Exploring the resonance of my drawings with those of my interlocutors in the field, comparing our vision of the spirits, I had access to a form of imaginative, mimetic, and non-verbal communication that constitutes the main form of knowledge transmission in the ritual sphere.

Aesthetic practices are particularly suited to elicit, communicate, and embody unarticulated experiences and concealed understandings of the world. Images, rather than only representations of reality or visual systems of meaning, are powerful social agents, acting as visual devices with and on the body (Belting 2011; Pinney 2004) and transforming the viewer’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Like words (Austin 1962), images actually do things: oneiric, emotional, relational sensuous, and sensitive transformative things that enchant human experience.

Extraordinary experiences proved to be useful forms of imaginative knowledge – in emic terms, “spiritual or mental knowing” a normal and recurring feature of nonverbal learning and communication in my informant’s lives, particularly in the context of ritual activities. As Johannes Fabian reported in the 1991 ground-breaking essay, “Ethnographic Objectivity Revisited: From Rigor to Vigor”: “much of our ethnographic research is carried out best when we are ‘out of our minds,’ that is, while we relax our inner controls, forget our purposes, let ourselves go”. Fabian (2007) defined the experiences of personally and socially significant visions and dreams in the context of fieldwork as ‘the ecstatic side’ of fieldwork, inviting anthropologists to pay attention to their imaginings and ecstasies in the production of ethnographic knowledge.

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“NON TROVO PACE PIÙ”

**NOTE RELATIVE ALLA RICERCA SU/DI FRANK CANCIAN, ANTROPOLOGO
VISIVO NELL’ITALIA DEL SUD**

Vincenzo Esposito, *University of Salerno*

ABSTRACT

In 1957 a young American researcher, Frank Cancian, took 1801 photographs of Lacedonia, a small town in southern Italy, in the province of Avellino, in Campania. His photos describe the living conditions of the villagers and their work, in particular the peasants, the craftsmen, the middle class but also their social, economic, political and religious life during six months: from January to July. He also wrote an interesting field diary, in which he noted the problems related to fieldwork. In those years, many American researchers went to southern Italy to study the life and culture of peasants, such as Edward Banfield who developed his theory of “amoral familism”. Cancian’s work, however, proposed a partial critique of Banfield’s ideas

These materials are the subject of the research that the “Annabella Rossi” anthropology laboratory (University of Salerno - Department of Cultural Heritage Sciences) carries out in agreement with Pro Loco “Gino Chiccone” and the Municipality of Lacedonia.

This essay constitutes a first account of this research. An attempt to place Cancian’s figure and work in the flow of historical and cultural events after the Second World War.

KEYWORDS

Ethnographic photography, history of anthropology, anthropology of southern Italy

Bio

Vincenzo Esposito is an Associate Professor at University of Salerno.

He is a member of the Governing Council of CEIC (Ethnographic Center – Campania); In the past he was member of AICS – Italian Association of Scientific Film and Scientific coordinator of the CDCP (Center for the study and documentation of popular culture - town of Mercato S. Severino - Salerno). He is also Fellow and Councillor (from 2007 to 2010) of AISEA (Italian Association of Anthropology, Ethnology and Folklore). In the present he is Fellow and Councillor of SIAC (Società Italiana di Antropologia Culturale).

His recent researches includes Cultural Heritage into Irno’s Valley (Salerno); Anthropological interpretation of the work of Fabrizio De Andrè; Anthropological interpretation of the work of Andrea Camilleri; Ethnographic fiction/Ethnography of fiction; The visual research of Annabella Rossi; Festivals, pilgrimages and cultural identity in Cilento’s Folklore; Tarantism, new Tarantism and identity in Salento (Brindisi); Traditional festivals of the Province of Salerno; cultural performances/entertainment as cultural performance. He won in 2007 the “Premio Penisola Sorrentina Arturo Esposito - Le due costiere”, for the communication of the results of an anthropological research through audiovisual systems (video and monograph “3 marzo’44”, Salerno 2006. Subject: memories of the Balvano railway disaster and the 600 deaths of the 8017 train).

espovin@unisa.it

1. Non trovo pace più

Con tali parole si chiude il taccuino di campo di un giovane antropologo americano venuto in Italia nel 1957, con borsa di studio *Fullbright*. Voleva dedicarsi alla Filosofia e invece si ritrovò a studiare una piccola comunità meridionale perché fu inviato a Lacedonia, un paese dell’Irpina posto a più di cento chilometri da Napoli, verso est, più vicino a Foggia che al capoluogo campano.

Lo indirizzò in Irpinia, Tullio Tentori l’antropologo-direttore dell’allora Museo Nazionale delle Arti e delle Tradizioni popolari di Roma. Tentori si era recato negli Stati Uniti, nel 1948, a studiare la cultura

materiale dei nativo-americani e, fin dal suo ritorno, aveva lavorato per introdurre nella realtà culturale e in quella accademica italiana l'approccio e il metodo dell'antropologia culturale di tradizione americana, la centralità del *fieldwork*. Il suo impegno etico e scientifico lo portarono a concentrarsi sul Mezzogiorno. Condusse ricerche a Matera, in particolare sulle condizioni abitative, economiche e socio-culturali nel quartiere *Sassi*. Fu così che conobbe e collaborò con Friederich Friedmann, sociologo tedesco, professore all'Università dell'Arkansas, amico personale di Adriano Olivetti, arrivato a Matera nel 1949 con l'obiettivo di studiare (e contribuire a "creare" - sogno olivettiano) "comunità".

Nel 1957, Frank Cancian si era appena laureato, lui figlio di immigrati italiani negli *States*. Si definiva un "fotografo esperto con un crescente interesse per l'antropologia" [Cancian 2013: 4] e con un sogno nel cassetto: "combinare le due cose" [ibidem]. Il prof. Tentori, grazie alla sua conoscenza della realtà meridionale e alle sue relazioni lo introdusse nella "comunità" lacedoniese nella quale Cancian si insediò il 5 gennaio 1957 e dalla quale si distaccò il 5 luglio dello stesso anno, dopo aver scattato 1801 fotografie "etnografiche" (interpretazioni antropologiche di un contesto culturale ma anche "prove d'arte" realizzate in b&n) ed aver redatto 75 pagine di un diario ricco di commenti, indicazioni, riflessioni. L'esperienza italiana di Cancian gli permise di laurearsi in antropologia "meno di tre anni dopo" [ibidem]. Nell'ultima pagina, la settantacinquesima del suo diario-taccuino, viene riassunto – per iscritto ma, leggendo, sembra di guardare una fotografia – il senso del suo percorso, della sua ricerca, delle sue interpretazioni del contesto in cui aveva operato: sentirsi vicino a coloro che aveva incontrato nella loro diversità essendo a sua volta, lui diverso per loro [Cancian 1957: 57]:

5.7.57 venerdì 7 a.m.

Alle 5.30 questa mattina ero seduto su una collinetta e ascoltavo una donna che mi parlava del figlio in Australia e mi disse anche del figlio a Torino.

Piangeva e diceva "Non trovo pace più".

Si riferiva, probabilmente, a quella pace interiore che spesso si perde quando si cerca di razionalizzare il senso di ciò che senso non ha. Cosa che capita anche agli antropologi, per dirla con Ernesto de Martino, quando tentano di "rigenerare nella propria mente le pretese culturali" che appartengono agli altri; di interpretare etnograficamente i meccanismi culturali "inventati" dagli "altri" per garantirsi la "presenza" come centro di decisione e di scelta [Esposito 2019]. Cosa che, forse, capitò anche a Cancian nel suo soggiorno a Lacedonia del '57. L'impossibile relazione tra le proprie specifiche modalità di "dell'esserci" e quelle operanti in Alta Irpinia, una delle tante regioni del Mezzogiorno italiano, dotata di palesi specificità. Infatti

appare evidente al giovane studioso che la categoria di "familismo amorale" di Banfield non poteva spiegare la comunità di Lacedonia, che era stata teatro di straordinarie lotte del movimento contadino per l'occupazione delle terre dal 1943 al 1950. Lotte che avevano reso i contadini soggetti di storia, consapevoli del proprio ruolo all'interno della società [Pignatiello R. 2013b: 155].

"Quando Cancian arriva a Lacedonia", continua Rocco Pignatiello

il conflitto politico, che aveva caratterizzato il decennio passato, non è del tutto spento: nell'anno precedente, nel '56, alle elezioni comunali le sinistre sono state sconfitte. Per la prima volta ha vinto la lista della DC. Sindaco è Giuseppe Di Geronimo. Ma già nel '60 di nuovo torna a vincere la sinistra. Alcune foto ritraggono i manifesti elettorali, i convegni sulla riforma agraria, le discussioni politiche in piazza. Segni evidenti di un conflitto che accende ancora gli animi dei cittadini e che continuerà fino alla fine degli anni '80. Egli incontra nella piazza insegnanti, artigiani, funzionari, commercianti, molti contadini poveri e studenti dell'Istituto magistrale provenienti dai paesi vicini [ivi: 157].

Lo studioso parla con loro e soprattutto fotografa quei momenti, riporta nei suoi appunti quelle storie ascoltate, trasformate in immagini, le quali

Tutte insieme tracciano il ritratto della condizione umana di un mondo contadino colto in un momento di grandi trasformazioni epocali: il boom economico, il consumismo, la libertà dei costumi, l'emancipazione delle donne, la trasformazione della famiglia patriarcale [ibidem].

Le foto e i diari di Cancian ritornarono negli Stati Uniti d’America insieme al loro autore e rischiarono di smarrirsi per sempre. Dei sei mesi di discontinuo ma attento e prezioso lavoro “sul campo” poteva non rimanere alcuna traccia. Il prof. Cancian si dedicò alla ricerca e allo studio delle culture messicane per più di trent’anni.

2. Nevicate eccezionali, il caso, la necessità, le fotografie del ‘57 perdute e ritrovate

L’inverno del 2012 è stato uno dei più freddi e ricchi di precipitazioni nevose che l’Italia ricordi. Quasi ovunque cumuli di neve, strade bloccate e temperature spesso sotto zero per alcune decine di gradi. Il mese di febbraio fu caratterizzato da un grande freddo, come si suole dire, siberiano. Era sconsigliato a tutti di mettersi in viaggio, con qualsiasi mezzo, per qualsiasi destinazione.

Gerardo Ruggiero e sua moglie Luigina, da tempo non abitavano più a Lacedonia ma decisero di rientrare in paese proprio in quei giorni glaciali. Luigina provò a navigare attraverso internet per aggiornarsi sul meteo e sul rischio di rimanere intrappolati dalla neve sulle strade e sulle autostrade dell’appennino centro-meridionale. Per caso scorre una piccola fotografia, nella moltitudine di immagini della rete relative al tempo meteorologico, restituite dai motori di ricerca quando digitava la parola *Lacedonia*. Una piccola fotografia in bianco e nero raffigurante un volto di donna. Le sembrò familiare, non sapeva ancora quanto. La necessità di capire perché le sembrava di conoscerla, quella donna d’altri tempi, la costrinse a cliccarci su e così scoprì che la donna ritratta altro non era che sua suocera, la cara Rosa Antonia detta Letta. Chiamare il marito e averne la conferma fu questione di un attimo fu così che Gerardo ricordò che sua madre gli raccontava che “una volta, quando faceva la fornaia, un giornalista americano le aveva fatto tante foto, che poi avrebbe pubblicato in un giornale americano, perché era una bella donna italiana” [Ruggiero 2013: 6]. Lui non l’aveva mai presa sul serio quella che credeva essere “una favola inventata, raccontata vicino al camino che ogni volta si arricchiva di un particolare diverso”. Ma non si trattava di una bugia. Il fotografo, però, non era un giornalista ma uno studente che sarebbe diventato il docente di Antropologia della University of California-Irvine, il prof. Frank Cancian.

Gerardo contattò il professore che fu ben lieto di ricostruire con lui e con la collaborazione della Pro loco “Gino Chicone” di Lacedonia, il periodo trascorso in Irpinia. Fu così che le foto del 1957 furono ritrovate e fu così che iniziò il loro viaggio di ritorno verso Lacedonia. Cominciò con una prima mostra che si tenne in paese nell’agosto del 2012. Antonio Pignatiello detto Tonino, presidente della Pro Loco, la promosse insieme agli altri soci. Fu possibile perché Gerardo, Tonino e gli altri della Pro loco convinsero il prof. Cancian a individuarne alcune fra le più significative – una cinquantina ne scelse – e a curarne l’allestimento a distanza. La mostra fu allestita in piazza, all’aperto, e fu seguita dalla pubblicazione di un catalogo, su consiglio di Franco Arminio, curato da Rocco Pignatiello [2013c].

Quella mostra e quel libro stavano per diventare molto altro perché, in realtà, l’intero corpus delle foto di Cancian realizzate nel paese, ritornò a Lacedonia qualche anno più tardi, in un pacchetto postale di cartone riciclato, simile a quelli che gli emigrati meridionali spediscono dall’America ai parenti rimasti nei paesi d’origine, pieni di regali e di curiosità. Il pacchetto di Cancian giunse a Lacedonia nel mese di maggio del 2017.

Tonino ha ricostruito nelle sequenze di un video – realizzato dal Laboratorio di Antropologia “Annabella Rossi” del Dispac-Dipartimento di Scienze del Patrimonio culturale dell’Università degli Studi di Salerno – l’arrivo in paese di quel pacchetto proveniente dagli *States*. Conteneva 1801 negativi e altro ancora. L’indagine sul Fondo Cancian di Lacedonia è stata affidata, per convenzione firmata a gennaio 2019 tra la Pro loco, il Comune di Lacedonia e l’Università degli Studi di Salerno- Dipartimento di Scienze del Patrimonio culturale, proprio al gruppo antropologico di ricerca del Laboratorio “Annabella Rossi”, coordinato da chi scrive e composto da Antonio Severino e Ugo Vuoso.

Quando la scatola arrivò, Tonino, che aveva tenuto i rapporti con il Comune, con la Sovrintendenza e con le istituzioni territoriali, fu preso da una sorta di grande emozione, da fargli tremare le mani; una curiosa commozione che lo spingeva a voler scoprire e sapere cosa contenesse il pacchetto. Un contenuto che giunse nelle sue mani dopo sessant’anni (1957-2017). Cancian – dice – più volte gli ha ripetuto che i suoi materiali avevano corso addirittura il rischio di essere cestinati in occasione dei suoi trasferimenti e dei molti traslochi.

Il pacco postale contiene due box e una scatola che in origine conteneva carta fotografica alla gelatina e sali d’argento la quale, attualmente, conserva i provini a contatto, ottenuti nel ’57, dai negativi

realizzati nel formato Leica (24x36), in bianco & nero. Anche se, secondo Tonino, il prof. Cancian non avrebbe mai allestito una camera oscura in paese, ma non ne è proprio sicuro.

I due box, contraddistinti dal n.1 e dal n.2, contengono proprio i negativi. Il sistema di conservazione è molto sofisticato e “isolante”. Impedisce che il materiale negativo si deteriori e/o danneggi. Nei contatti avuti, Frank Cancian ha illustrato ai suoi interlocutori il criterio di catalogazione dei materiali utilizzato. Ogni foto è contraddistinta da una stringa alfanumerica composta da tre parti.

La prima parte è la sigla A5 per i negativi e i provini, A6 per le scansioni digitali dalle quali trarre gli ingrandimenti. La seconda parte della sequenza è rappresentata da tre numeri su base 100 che costituiscono quattro serie (da 101 a 103, da 201 a 218, da 301 a 347, da 401 a 403). Ad esempio, A5 101 significa che si tratta di un negativo su pellicola della serie individuata come “cartella 101”. La terza parte della stringa è il numero progressivo dei singoli negativi. In totale, spiega Tonino, la scatola di Cancian contiene 71 cartelle suddivise nei due box.

Il n.1 protegge le cartelle 101-326 e contiene 332 strisce da 4, 3 e 2 negativi formato 24x36 per un totale di 1180 immagini e 49 strisce composte da un solo negativo. Così spiega Tonino e aggiunge:

Il box n.2 conserva le cartelle 327-403 e contiene 154 strisce da 4, 3 e 2 negativi per un totale di 520 immagini e 52 strisce da 1 negativo.

Sommando il contenuto dei due box si raggiunge dunque la cifra di 587 strisce per 1801 immagini negative formato Leica, 24x36. Ovvero l'intero Fondo Fotografico Cancian donato dal suo autore alla Pro loco “Gino Chicone” di Lacedonia.

Dietro quei numeri e quelle lettere si celano le immagini della signora Letta e della sua famiglia sull'uscio di casa; quelle di due signorine, due sorelle, quella con l'abito scuro e quella con la veste chiara che posano tra i campi di grano. Ci sono le foto delle bambine sull'uscio della masseria e quelle della contadina con il fazzoletto sulla testa che mostra un secchio di zinco e dei barilotti con la canna per spinare, offrire ai braccianti o bere, in campagna, tra i campi sterminati del grano. Ci sono le foto delle bambine dai riccioli biondi che giocano sulle scale e con gli adulti: saranno sorelle anche loro? C'è una signorina che sorride in un abito a righe... ma forse è sposa e madre... o forse solo una fidanzata che insieme a un giovane uomo posa con una ragazzina più piccola. Il bracciante invece si riposa su una panchina, indossando il suo basco e fumando una sigaretta, il colletto a pistagna della camicia è aperto. Anche il giovane, fotografato davanti alle scatole di cotone da sarta, ha una camicia, a quadretti chiari col colletto alla francese. Fuma piccoli mozziconi che accende pericolosamente, con la testa sul fuoco di un fiammifero offertogli da qualcuno. Ci sono le foto dell'uomo con la coppola e quelle di chi indossava una palandrana tradizionale. C'è l'uomo al bar, seduto comodamente, camicia bianca e occhiali all'americana. Ci sono tante foto di bambini che piangono, ridono e giocano a “uno n'pont' 'a luna”, salgono sui carri agricoli o gironzolano per il paese, a piedi o in bicicletta magari gustando un gelato. Altri lavorano nei campi. Ci sono i ritratti, in paese e fuori, di uomini, di donne, del prete. Ci sono le foto dei panorami, dei tetti, dei campi, del “mondo” di Lacedonia, in Alta Irpinia.

Ci sono le foto di un anziano che passeggia tra i campi, impettito, col suo cappello con le falde larghe, la sua giacca di tweed, il suo panciotto e il suo bastone, la sua sciarpa. Passa tra campi, imbocca una lunga e tortuosa strada bianca che serpeggia verso il giorno che verrà mentre un cielo plumbeo incombe su Lacedonia e sul suo contado, nell'Alta Irpina, nella valle del Calaggio, nei primi sei mesi del 1957. Questo primo gruppo è composto da 296 fotografie appartenenti alla serie delle 1801 immagini realizzate da Frank Cancian...

506 foto furono invece riprese in campagna, dall'alba al tramonto, giorno per giorno, mese per mese. Uomini, donne, attrezzi e animali, a volte i bambini, che scendono verso la valle dei campi, spesso ripresi di spalle, spesso di fronte o di profilo in modo che anche la pendenza della ripida stradina bianca potesse essere rivissuta da chi osserva le immagini. Sono le foto della mietitura del grano e della raccolta del fieno, con le donne ai piedi del carro che roteano – quasi una danza – forconi sovraccarichi, nel 1957. Sono le immagini degli attrezzi utilizzati, poveri e faticosi: zappe, falcioni, falci e falcetti. Mostrano la vigna, la modanatura del grano, la potatura dell'ulivo. Ci sono le foto dell'amico Filippo Chiauzzi, di sua moglie Anna Cardellicchio e dei suoi figli, le loro cose e i loro animali, il loro lavoro e la loro disinteressata ospitalità. C'è una foto di Frank con Filippo, abbracciati sotto un albero. Filippo mostra i suoi scarponi da contadino. Frank ha la Leica appesa al collo su una polo aperta e sudata. Avranno lavorato insieme nei campi? Chi avrà scattato la foto che li ritrae insieme? Le immagini di un'altra masseria mostrano uomini e oggetti, mobili e indumenti, cappelli e pastrani, maschi e femmine, anziani e bambini e, soprattutto, il rapporto spaziale e culturale esistente tra loro e le cose. Le foto della scuola

rurale mostrano bambini alle prese con il maestro, forse con un Direttore, forse in visita ispettiva alla sede disagiata. Ci sono lavagne minuscole che ospitano grafie incerte di lettere maiuscole e piccole operazioni aritmetiche a due cifre. Ci sono i giochi dei bambini; ci sono piantine d'erba o di fiori sulle cattedre, per terra, sui banchi scalcagnati. Ci sono le foto del ritorno a casa, in paese, la sera dopo il lavoro, con l'asino ricoverato vicino al fornello economico a legna; con gli uomini, più tardi, riuniti ad ascoltare le notizie e la musica alla radio.

Ci sono le foto del “Cantiere scuola del Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza sociale per i lavoratori disoccupati del comune di Lacedonia”: le foto ritraggono una stragrande maggioranza di lavoratrici; donne impiegate a realizzare una strada. Chissà dove porterà sembra chiederci Cancian...

468 immagini raccontano il paese, la piazza forse in un giorno di festa con l'allestimento delle luminarie; la gente indaffarata e spensierata ma anche attenta e pensierosa. C'è un manifesto del cinematografo, con Gregory Peck e Audrey Hepburn, sullo spazio della pubblica affissione. Sopra vi è stato appiccicato anche un manifesto del PSI che annuncia il comizio dell'Avv. Arduino Donatiello della federazione socialista irpina: parlerà del XXXII Congresso del suo partito – Venezia 6-10 febbraio 1957 – svoltosi dopo il XX Congresso del PCUS del '56 e i fatti d'Ungheria (“Nenni prosegue nella sua condanna dell'URSS e la sua critica al PCI e si va sempre più precisando l'obiettivo dell'apertura a sinistra verso la DC e dell'unificazione con il PSDI. [...] La linea di Nenni ottiene la maggioranza [...] Dopo complesse trattative Nenni accetta la conferma a segretario – *Avanti!* 7-12 febbraio 1957” cfr. <https://www.socialismoitaliano1892.it/2017/10/03/xxxii-congresso-psi-1957/>). Ci sono le foto dell'avvocato Donatiello sul palco del comizio del 3 marzo, alle ore 17 in piazza e quelle del maresciallo dei carabinieri, forse il giorno dopo, che fuma. Ci sono i vicoli e i passanti, le donne incinte, i contadini con l'asino e le due guardie in divisa che sfrecciano sulla stessa motocicletta, una guida e l'altra si regge; il punto di ripresa è sempre lo stesso, un angolo della piazza (come nel racconto di Auggie, il tabaccaio di New York nel film *Smoke* girato nel 1995 da Wayne Wang e Paul Auster). Alcuni fotogrammi raffigurano le attività economiche ambulanti, coi carretti di indumenti estivi e biancheria ma anche con l'autovettura cabriolet di due piazzisti di colore (saranno stati eritrei?), vestiti in maniera sportivo-elegante, due imbonitori che arrifano i passanti del posto... è, forse, il “gioco del pacco”? ... Ci sono immagini dei comportamenti della gente al forno... ma il forno è quello “a paglia” di Letta, la mamma di Gerardo Ruggiero. Al bar, ci sono gli uomini che leggono il giornale e fumano ma anche qualche bambino e la famiglia del gestore, dietro al banco della mescita. C'è un padre che, in abito da cerimonia, accompagna sua figlia in abito bianco per le strade del paese. Lei deve sposarsi e la damigella le regge lo strascico. Il corteo nuziale è lungo e ricoperto da ombrelli... piove... “sposa bagnata...”. L'acqua potabile viene raccolta alla fontana in barili di legno che vengono poi trasportati nelle case, in testa, da donne con il cercine a protezione del capo, su alcuni carretti, con la carriola. C'è la foto del momento preciso in cui due barilotti cascano per terra da un carretto senza sponde. È un'istantanea di Cancian che li ferma a mezz'aria per sempre. Ci sono le foto delle donne che con la cesta della biancheria corrono a lavare i panni sporchi. Il lavatoio è fuori, in campagna e bisogna percorrere le stesse strade bianche che all'alba vengono calpestate dai contadini diretti al lavoro.

Anche a Lacedonia pioveva, nel 1957, e chi non aveva l'ombrello poteva essere “bloccato” con il passo sospeso e mosso nei fotogrammi formato Leica di Cancian...

279 immagini mostrano il sentimento religioso dei lacedoniesi, nel 1957. In queste foto c'è tutto il paese, tutti coloro che erano già transitati davanti all'obbiettivo del giovane fotografo-studio statunitense in occasione della realizzazione delle serie fotografiche di cui si è detto sopra. Solo che questa volta sono stati fotografati proprio in quelle posture, atteggiamenti, collocazioni e modi di fare i quali, visivamente piuttosto che fisicamente, sono necessari per “costruire” e “incorporare” il loro sentimento religioso – che poi è sentimento identitario – in grado di proporre e dar vita a una “comunità affettiva”, sentimentale dell'appartenenza a un determinato contesto sociale, economico, politico, culturale. Modi e gesti – individuali, in gruppo – del cantare e del camminare, del pregare e del parlottare, dell'inginocchiarsi e del comunicarsi accostandosi ai sacramenti, del giocare e dell'ascoltare la banda; insomma i modi della partecipazione alle feste, alle processioni, ai pellegrinaggi con tutti i rischi e i pericoli, materiali e spirituali, che ciò comporta, fosse anche il guado di un fiume o un tentativo di corteggiamento non previsto, per spingersi, con le statue dei santi e della Madonna caricate sulle spalle, oltre i confini materiali e simbolici del proprio essere e delle proprie certezze, fino al limite dell'ignoto. Farlo “religiosamente” per poi saper ritrovare la strada di casa intesa sia come abitazione che come “comunità”, appunto, “degli affetti”, dei sentimenti quindi dell'appartenenza e dell'identità.

Esemplare, per ricordare tutto ciò, la fotografia che ritrae tutti raccolti intorno alla statua della Madonna delle Grazie, ripresi dall'alto dal giovane Frank. Sembra quasi una coreografia posturale, a forma di cuore, di coloro che si sentono uniti e protetti sotto il manto invisibile perché simbolico della loro Diva più importante, condotta in processione dalla cappella aldilà del fiume Osento fino alla chiesa al centro del paese. Si rappresentano, all'occhio fotografico, come una comunità identitaria affettiva che nulla ha mai potuto e mai potrà scalfire [cfr. anche Esposito 2014].

Cancian ha fotografato il pellegrinaggio alla Madonna delle Grazie, la partenza all'alba, il guado dell'Osento, l'arrivo alla cappella, i comportamenti in chiesa, il ritorno e l'arrivo in paese. Ha realizzato immagini fotografiche anche della Festa di San Filippo Neri, della Processione del Corpus Domini, dei festeggiamenti in onore della Santissima Trinità, nei suoi sei mesi di permanenza nell'Alta Irpinia. Partecipando, osservando, dialogando e fotografando insieme ai suoi interlocutori lacedonesi.

La scatola contiene dell'altro. "Il discorso non finisce qua" afferma infatti Tonino Pignatiello. Il professor Cancian, durante il suo soggiorno in Irpinia, redasse degli appunti, scritti durante le sue escursioni sul campo o immediatamente dopo, sul finire della giornata di ricerca etnografico-visiva. 75 pagine originali del diario di campo, scritte fittamente, con grafia minuta, dal gennaio 1957 al luglio successivo. Scritte con penna stilografica su fogli di carta da quaderno componibile. Numerati da 1 a 75. Tutti i giorni, il professore, allora studente, si recava in giro per il paese e per le masserie in campagna. Queste note di campo raccontano le sue giornate a Lacedonia; fanno riferimento alle situazioni in cui si è ritrovato, ai luoghi attraverso cui è transitato, alle persone incontrate, a partire da Filippo Chiauzzi e sua moglie Anna che per primi lo ospitarono appena giunto. Furono i suoi amici più cari in paese insieme al sig. Nicola Quatrate [Cfr. ASLA Antonio Pignatiello, asla_ZOOM001.WAW Lacedonia 24.04.2019]. Il pacco esiste ancora, nella sua composizione originaria, ed è gelosamente custodito da Tonino Pignatiello in un luogo a tutti segreto.

A proposito delle sue amicizie "di campo" e dei suoi riferenti scientifici in Italia, il professore ha scritto:

Il mio debito di riconoscenza più grande e antico si esprime nei confronti degli abitanti di Lacedonia, che molti anni fa mi hanno consentito di scattare fotografie fra di loro, nel loro paese e nelle loro case. Nella piazza, nei bar, nelle strade e nelle case private ho conosciuto, parlato e fatto visita a molte persone cordiali e molti amici. I miei amici più stretti sono stati Filippo Chiauzzi e Nicola Quatrate (fu Rocco). Rinnovo i miei ringraziamenti a tutte queste persone. Per me ricordare quei giorni è ancora una gioia.

Fra coloro che mi aiutarono a raggiungere Lacedonia ricordo la defunta Cipriana Scelba, direttrice del programma *Fullbright* in Italia, che trasformò la mia borsa per studiare filosofia in un supporto al mio lavoro fotografico, e il defunto professore Tullio Tentori, un eminente antropologo culturale italiano, che mi fornì preziosi consigli sul mio lavoro antropologico, e nel 1957 mi mandò a Lacedonia [Cancian 2013b: 94].

3. Lacedonia e gli anni '50. Tra antropologia, storia e note di campo

Lacedonia era – ed è – uno dei tanti paesi del Sud; uno dei tanti di quelli della cordigliera appenninica considerata come una delle tante aree interne. La Regione Campania, oggi, così le definisce:

Le Aree Interne rappresentano un'ampia parte dell'Italia – circa tre quinti del territorio e poco meno di un quarto della popolazione – eterogenea al proprio interno, distante dai grandi centri di agglomerazione e di servizio, con traiettorie di sviluppo instabili e problemi demografici, ma tuttavia dotata risorse e di un forte potenziale di attrazione che mancano alle aree centrali. Si tratta di aree:

significativamente distanti dai centri di offerta di servizi essenziali (istruzione, salute e mobilità);
dotate di importanti risorse ambientali (risorse idriche, sistemi agricoli, foreste, paesaggi naturali e umani) e culturali (beni archeologici, insediamenti storici, abbazie, piccoli musei, centri di mestiere);
profondamente diversificate, per sistemi naturali e a seguito di secolari processi di antropizzazione.
(<http://www.regione.campania.it/regione/it/tematiche/strategia-aree-interne-pd4f>)

Aree ricche soprattutto di problematiche irrisolte ancora oggi, tanto da richiedere, proprio nel 2019, la nomina di un Consigliere del Presidente della Regione Campania per le aree interne, l'avv. Francesco Todisco, il quale coordina un "Tavolo aree interne per una Regione più vicina ai cittadini".

Lacedonia è un paese "lontano", oggi come nel 1957, che vi rientra a pieno titolo, un paese a rischio di spopolamento; un paese che si sta spopolando, sempre di più anche in presenza della qualità delle risorse individuate dalla regione Campania:

I contadini, già all'inizio degli anni '50 sono costretti ad emigrare, in un primo momento verso i paesi del nord Europa, con contratti per lo più stagionali; successivamente verso la metà degli anni '50 verso il triangolo industriale, Milano, Torino, Genova. E questa volta per non tornare più. Nel corso di dieci anni, dal '51 al '61, secondo i dati del censimento, vanno via da Lacedonia circa 1000 persone. Un vero e proprio esodo (...). Oggi, secondo l'ultimo censimento del 2011, Lacedonia conta appena 2400 abitanti. La struttura della popolazione per fasce d'età è di tipo regressivo: solo 11% è la popolazione da 0 a 14 anni. Più del doppio, il 26% circa, da 65 anni in poi. Il resto, il 62% da 15 a 64 anni [Pignatiello R. 2013a: 86-88].

In questo borgo nel quale “mancano strade, fognature, acqua, servizi igienici elementari”, che nel 1961 contava 6532 abitanti, di cui più del 78% dediti ad attività agricole povere, di mera sussistenza [ivi: 84], arrivò il 5 gennaio 1957 Frank Cancian, sulla scia politico-culturale lasciata dalla presenza e dall'opera di altri studiosi del Mezzogiorno e della “Questione meridionale”, provenienti dall'area anglosassone come, ad esempio, Banfield [1958] e Friedman [1953], “influenzati” anche dal lavoro di Carlo Levi, Rocco Scotellaro e, per certi versi, Ernesto de Martino. Giunse, si insediò e lavorò in una di quelle zone del Mezzogiorno che, alla stregua della “Montegrano” studiata da Banfield, potevano “essere considerate come rappresentative della comunità contadina di montagna” [Cancian 1961: 260, n. 6].

Banfield, come tutti sanno, aveva condotto le sue ricerche in un paese in provincia di Potenza che in realtà si chiama Chiaromonte. Il suo lavoro sul campo era durato nove mesi nel '55. Ne seguì una delle più famose e controverse pubblicazioni sul Mezzogiorno italiano, quel volume intitolato *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* tradotto nel '61 in Italia con il titolo di *Una comunità del Mezzogiorno*. Solo la riedizione del 1976, curata da De Masi, recuperò, in traduzione, il titolo originale e sottolineò le criticità dell'interpretazione stereotipica e pregiudiziale del Sud d'Italia proposte dal lavoro di Banfield,

una ricerca imprecisa e contraddittoria (...) i cui errori di contenuto, di metodo e di forma sono stati tutti attentamente rilevati e puntualmente denunciati da una miriade di commentatori che (...) hanno fatto dell'indagine di Banfield una sorta di modello negativo, un esempio concreto di come non s'ha da fare ricerca ma col quale, tuttavia, chiunque voglia interessarsi del Sud è ormai costretto a confrontarsi [De Masi 1976: 9].

Tra tali commentatori va annoverato certamente Cancian che nel 1960 pubblicò in *Anthropological Quarterly* una sua recensione parzialmente critica al libro di Banfield, poi tradotta e pubblicata in forma di saggio breve anche in Italia [1961: 259], nella quale contesta al collega statunitense un uso etnografico non condivisibile del concetto di *ethos*. Quell'*ethos* dei chiaromontesi ovvero i loro “sentimenti, valori, credenze ed idee” dai quali scaturirebbe il loro discutibile *Familismo amorale*, quella modalità dell'esistenza ego-familocentrica, incapace di generare comportamenti politici, sociali, economici emancipatori e progressisti in un borgo considerato rappresentazione emblematica dell'intero meridione italiano.

Non lo riteneva giusto, proprio in quegli anni, Alberto Mario Cirese il quale scriveva su *La Lapa* che chi aveva avuto modo di “concepire il Meridione come davvero tutto “omogeneo” ed allineato sul gradino meno recente del suo sviluppo” sbagliava perché è vero che il Mezzogiorno “è sì rappresentato da certe zone chiuse ed isolate, ma (...), proprio per questa ragione, non può considerarsi rappresentativo di tutta la realtà meridionale” [Cirese 1955: 227-228].

Non lo riteneva giusto nemmeno Ernesto de Martino – come vedremo oltre – e non lo condivideva appieno neanche il giovane Frank Cancian il quale, scrive Maria Minicuci [2003: 143], apparteneva a quel gruppo di studiosi statunitensi i quali, in qualche maniera “problematizzano il modo in cui è stata descritta” la società contadina del Sud. Non un “mondo ideologico “fuori” della storia della nazione e della civiltà moderna”, per dirla con Cirese [ibidem; cfr. anche de Martino, vedi oltre] ma, scrive Cancian [1961; ibidem], meglio pensare ad un contesto culturale dotato di una specifica *world view*, a una visione del mondo che deriva dalle (e non produce le) condizioni di scarsità e arretratezza economico-sociale in cui versa il Mezzogiorno italiano, privo delle attenzioni e delle tutele istituzionali fondamentali. Insomma, uno scambiarsi di posto fra la causa e l'effetto. Per Frank Cancian il luogo emblematico in cui tale ripensamento critico fu constatabile etnograficamente, come spiegò nel suo saggio, fu dunque Lacedonia, il paese irpino nel quale, appunto, si insediò nel 1957. Il borgo nel quale e per il quale lavorò osservando, dialogando, fotografando. “Non ruba immagini. Costruisce relazioni,

amicizie, pone domande, prende appunti. Fotografa solo se le persone accettano di essere fotografate. Fa in modo che esse si mettano in posa e si raccontino” [Pignatiello R. 2013a: 86].

Bisognerà aspettare la fine degli anni Settanta del '900, in Italia, quando Carol Counihan [1980], un'altra ricercatrice statunitense che condusse ricerche nel paese di Bosa, in Sardegna, insieme a Lorenzo Spezzatini, per ritrovare un uso della fotografia come metodo etnografico in grado di coinvolgere la popolazione locale in un esercizio pubblico di antropologia visiva, un esperimento fotoelicitativo, evidentemente dialogico, critico e riflessivo [cfr. anche Esposito 2008: 74].

Negli anni '50 invece, secondo la ricostruzione di De Masi [1976: 12], nell'ambito del Centro di Specializzazione e ricerche Economico-Agrarie diretto a Portici (NA) dal prof. Manlio Rossi-Doria si era formato un gruppo di studiosi di sociologia rurale, del quale faceva parte Rocco Scotellaro. Quel gruppo che, ancora secondo De Masi [ibidem] – il quale cita l'allievo di Rossi-Doria, Gilberto Marselli [1962:123] – costituendosi in sezione specifica del Centro, fu in grado di

assolvere un compito di documentazione su certi aspetti del Mezzogiorno, svolgere delle ricerche sociologiche in appoggio a quelle tipicamente economico-agrarie, *assistere gli studiosi stranieri ospiti dell'Italia meridionale* e, non ultimo, approfondire i rapporti di collaborazione con esperti di altre discipline e con altri gruppi (c. vo mio).

A partire dal 1952, per citare ancora De Masi [ibidem], tali studiosi “assistiti” dal Centro di Portici, furono

Il prof. George Peck dell'Università di Lehigh [che] aveva intrapreso una ricerca su Tricarico; il prof. Frederik Friedman dell'Università dell'Arkansas [che] viaggiava nel Sud per studiarvi la miseria delle popolazioni meridionali e mettere a punto le idee che sarebbero poi sfociate nella ricerca-intervento sui Sassi di Matera; il prof. Donald Pitkin dell'Università di Harvard [che] preparava la sua tesi di dottorato su Sermoneta. E subito dopo sarebbe stata la volta di Banfield a Chiaromonte, di Cappanari a Bagnoli del Trigno, di Moss e Thomson in varie zone del Sud, di Lopreato a Stefanoconi, e poi via via fino a Meyriat in Calabria, ad Hawley a Napoli, ad Allum ancora a Napoli e nel Casertano, ecc.

Forse fu lo studio di Friedman su Matera “l'esperimento socio-antropologico” più interessante del periodo anche se, scrive De Masi, si inserisce pienamente in quel filone di studi (sopra citati) “accomunati da un atteggiamento di sufficienza riformista, volontarista, illuminista, paternalista, anticomunista e interclassista”, fatto salvo il lavoro di Percy Allum “per la sua esplicita impostazione Marxista” [De Masi 1976: 12-13]. Tuttavia, proprio lo studio di Friedman [1956] su Matera, paradigmatico di tutta la ricerca nordamericana sul Mezzogiorno, fu foriero di prospettive metodologiche di grande interesse: la forte accentuazione della ricerca sul campo, il coinvolgimento degli studiosi nella vita quotidiana dei gruppi e degli individui dei contesti osservati, la comprensione reciproca tra tutti i soggetti coinvolti nelle indagini, ricercatori, collaboratori, “informati” [idem: 14]. Ciò nonostante emerse e prevalse, nelle indagini scientifiche di quegli anni, una sorta di retorica sociologica di tipo conservatrice e filostatunitense la quale offrì “una copertura scientifica” alle velleità e ai progetti economici capitalistici (imperialistici) nordamericani “che attribuisce la responsabilità del sottosviluppo (...) non ai paesi capitalistici ma alle popolazioni (...) tarate da una cultura che non le spinge ad associarsi ed organizzarsi e che perciò impedisce il loro progresso [Colombis 1975: 469].

Mi sembrano, ancora oggi, interessanti anche se prive di risposte, le riflessioni di Domenico De Masi sul senso della ricerca socio-antropologica nordamericana in Italia. Mi si perdonerà, perciò la lunga citazione:

Va notato che la storia della ricerca sociale realizzata nel dopoguerra in molte zone del Centro e del Sud è ancora tutta da riscrivere e potrà essere considerata esauriente solo quando avrà risposto a domande inquietanti di questo tipo: perché, durante la guerra fredda, gli Stati Uniti investirono somme ingenti per raccogliere dati sociologici nel nostro paese? che utilizzazione fu fatta di questi dati? quante notizie, invece di essere pubblicate, presero la via degli archivi “riservati” su cui è basato il potere occulto di certi “corpi separati” che operano negli Stati Uniti? È un puro caso che i sociologi americani, affluiti in Italia in così gran numero e con tanta disponibilità di denaro, fossero tutti anticomunisti, o le loro ricerche rispondevano ad un preciso disegno del governo e delle fondazioni statunitensi per tenere sotto controllo i partiti marxisti e la classe operaia dei paesi “alleati”? e quale fu, in tutto questo, il ruolo giocato dai centri di ricerca italiani cui si appoggiarono gli studiosi stranieri? I sociologi nostrani che accompagnavano questi studiosi nelle

comunità del Mezzogiorno erano all’oscuro dei pericoli politici insiti in queste operazioni culturali o fino a che punto ne condividevano gli intenti anticomunisti?

Come si vede, i nodi storici ancora da sciogliere sono tutt’altro che secondari e solo il loro chiarimento permetterà un giudizio completo sulla fase feconda ma ambigua attraversata nel dopoguerra dalle scienze sociali così come furono coltivate in Italia ma soprattutto nel Centro e nel Sud. Per ora sappiamo soltanto che, a prescindere dall’intento scientifico (ancora da chiarire) dei sociologi e degli antropologi venuti d’oltre oceano, le loro ricerche svolsero *oggettivamente* un ruolo di affiancamento rispetto alla politica conservatrice ed anti-operaia che i governi democristiani andavano attuando in quegli anni dominati, a livello internazionale, dalla guerra fredda e dalla contrapposizione frontale dei blocchi [De Masi 1976: 15-16].

Dunque, furono anni di ricerca intensa, metodologicamente innovativa e politicamente orientata in senso conservatore. È quindi ancora oggi lecito chiedersi cosa ci facessero in Italia tanti studiosi e ricercatori provenienti dagli *States*. Naturalmente è impossibile rispondere in maniera esaustiva, vista la numerosità dei casi e le diversità caratteriale delle molte persone coinvolte. Possiamo solo ripensare, criticamente e sinteticamente, alla storia del decennio 1947-1957 che vide la fine del secondo conflitto mondiale, l’attestarsi in Italia delle truppe alleate, la guerra fredda di un mondo diviso in blocchi, la ripresa dell’economia mondiale e nazionale in particolare, la speranza di quel futuro migliore che in Italia si sarebbe chiamato *Boom economico*.

Così, fin dalla fine della Seconda guerra mondiale l’interesse statunitense verso l’Italia si manifestava su un piano economico-militare. La storica contemporanea Simona Colarizzi [2005: 300 e passim] ricorda che nel dicembre 1943 la FEA (*Foreign Economics Administration*), un ente statunitense fondato per elaborare politiche economiche nei territori di guerra, invia in Italia una commissione di esperti presieduta dal democratico Adlai E. Stevenson che elaborò una relazione tecnica:

Il rapporto Stevenson traccia un quadro desolante del Sud, smentendo clamorosamente molte false convinzioni dei comandi militari, prima fra queste l’autosufficienza alimentare delle regioni occupate: la popolazione non ha di che nutrirsi e non può continuare a sopravvivere con poco più di 600 calorie al giorno, un terzo cioè di quanto ha bisogno un corpo umano a riposo [ibidem].

Inoltre, tra il ‘44 e il ‘45, nonostante l’arrivo di 450 milioni di dollari in merci, la FEA e l’UNRRA (*United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*) poco possono fare per le zone occupate. Gli aiuti vengono utilizzati soprattutto per esigenze militari mentre le *amlire* messe in circolazione non fanno altro che ingigantire il mercato nero, con effetti inflattivi disastrosi. Nonostante ciò, “per un momento, le grandi città del Sud dove risiede lo stato maggiore e la burocrazia militare alleata, sembrano sommerse da un fiume di denaro e tutti si illudono di essere diventati ricchi” [ivi: 301]. Cosa ben descritta dalla letteratura e dal cinema in capolavori come *Napoli milionaria!* di Eduardo De Filippo (1945), *L’oro di Napoli* di Vittorio De Sica (1954), *La pelle* di Curzio Malaparte (1949), testo – quest’ultimo – corrosivo, macabro e perturbante. Opere che descrivono un paese che si avvia verso il baratro morale, economico, culturale.

In tale temperie, Colarizzi, vede nascere la sfiducia e il disinteresse dei contadini e cittadini meno abbienti meridionali verso il mondo politico del Mezzogiorno e nazionale. Un disinteresse che preoccuperà gli intellettuali più impegnati sia a sinistra che nel mondo cattolico.

Per Valerio Castronovo [2005: 353], ai finanziamenti erogati dalle agenzie internazionali andrebbero aggiunti “altri 110 milioni di dollari” provenienti dalle “rimesse degli emigranti”, “Avevano consentito di disporre di un volume di importazioni non solo di beni alimentari e medicinali, ma anche di combustibili e di materie prime, altrimenti di gran lunga superiore alle disponibilità valutarie interne”. Tuttavia, continua lo storico [ivi: 359], le speranze statunitensi di veder crescere la loro economia interna, attraverso il disavanzo commerciale formatosi a loro favore nelle relazioni con i paesi occupati-liberati, favorito dal *Buy American Act* del ‘48 – compra i prodotti americani in cambio dell’erogazione di prestiti – vennero disattese. Se nel 1947 il blocco comunista aveva visto la nascita del *Cominform*, l’Occidente assisté al varo del “piano Marshall” che in tempo di Guerra fredda, attraverso massicci aiuti economici all’Europa, doveva servire alla “riorganizzazione del mercato internazionale, che valesse a rafforzare i legami economici e politici con l’America” [ivi: 379-380]. Un piano che, nonostante “Gli stanziamenti di cui ebbe a beneficiare l’Italia fra il 1948 e il 1952” ammontassero “complessivamente a 1470 milioni di dollari pari all’11 per cento del totale Erp (*European Recovery Program*)”, non vide il decollo dell’economia italiana in quanto

Non tutti gli aiuti destinati a rimettere in sesto il nostro potenziale industriale e a finanziare investimenti agricoli e opere pubbliche vennero impiegati a questo scopo. Rimase infatti inutilizzata una consistente riserva in capitali (senza confronto, per esempio, con quella di pertinenza della Francia) mentre una quota non certo indifferente del “fondo di contropartita” ottenuto dalla vendita delle merci donate all'Italia fu convertita (...) al rafforzamento oltre misura delle riserve valutarie [ivi: 383].

Non essendo stati raggiunti gli obiettivi del “piano Marshall”, che puntava attraverso le forniture e il supporto tecnologico ad un rapido sviluppo dell'economia industriale italiana e dell'occupazione, numerose furono le critiche rivolte al governo italiano di De Gasperi. Le più dure obiezioni ai comportamenti economici italiani furono presentate, nel febbraio del 1949, da Paul Hoffman al Congresso degli Stati Uniti d'America in un rapporto del *Country Study*.

Per le autorità americane le indicazioni fornite dal governo italiano erano, comunque, incompatibili con lo spirito e le finalità del piano Marshall, il quale intendeva agire da decisivo fattore di propulsione e di ammodernamento della vita economica dell'Europa occidentale, sulla base di orientamenti e di tecniche di programmazione di tipo keynesiano. (...) i capisaldi della politica economica che il governo di Roma intendeva tener fermi, erano esattamente l'opposto di quanto l'Erp proponeva per rialzare il basso livello produttivo dell'economia italiana e affrontare il problema della disoccupazione [ivi: 385].

È altrettanto vero, conclude Castronovo, che le conclusioni di Paul Hoffman, amministratore dell'Erp per l'Italia, rispecchiavano la posizione minoritaria di alcuni esponenti del governo De Gasperi, in particolare quella di Ugo La Malfa il quale “aveva insistito, in particolare, sull'opportunità di convertire gli aiuti Marshall” in investimenti finalizzati ad incrementare la “produttività e avviare a soluzione” il “problema delle cosiddette aree depresse” le quali erano in maggioranza allocate nel Mezzogiorno [ivi: 386].

Ma allora, cosa ci facevano in Italia tanti studiosi e ricercatori provenienti dagli *States*? E soprattutto, da che parte stavano e perché? Una risposta indiretta, emblematica, a tali quesiti può essere ritrovata nella relazione che Guido Martinotti presentò al convegno dedicato a “La crisi del metodo sociologico”, svoltosi a Torino nel maggio del 1971 i cui atti furono pubblicati l'anno successivo. Martinotti [1972: 134-142] esaminò il problema causato dalla necessità strumentale di una “avalutatività del metodo sociologico professionale” negli USA come “dispositivo” di “istituzionalizzazione” della disciplina e del suo pieno inserimento sia nella partizione disciplinare accademica sia nel seno delle istituzioni politico-economico-amministrative statunitensi. Lo fece ponendosi, in quanto sociologo, la domanda “nel nostro lavoro da che parte stiamo?” e, riprendendo le conclusioni del collega statunitense Howard S. Becker [1970] il quale, nel saggio *Whose side are we on?*, precisava che i sociologi (e per estensione tutti gli studiosi di scienze umane, compresi gli antropologi culturali), proprio perché sottoposti alle continue pressioni relative al senso della “valutatività” così come a quello della “avalutatività” delle scienze sociali, non possano “in nessun caso evitare di stare dalla parte di qualcuno” poiché “i gruppi oggetto della ricerca sono sempre inseriti in una struttura gerarchica: noi possiamo stare con i subordinati (gli *underdogs*) o con i superiori, *tertium non datur*” [idem: 136]. Ma non è tutto, continua Guido Martinotti al quale lascerei le conclusioni di un ragionamento che si avvale

anche delle riflessioni di Gouldner e Nicolaus sulla sociologia americana negli anni '60-'70:

(...) scegliendo il punto di vista dei subordinati, i sociologi fanno il gioco di chi ha il potere, perché “gli enti che finanziano le ricerche hanno un bisogno disperato di informazioni sugli *underdogs* ...più o meno per le stesse ragioni per le quali i governi coloniali sostenevano ricerche analoghe fatte dagli antropologi”. Quest'argomentazione è stata sostenuta con particolare forza da Martin Nicolaus, un sociologo radicale che ha presentato una comunicazione violentissima durante la famosa A.S.A. Convention di San Francisco del 1969. Nicolaus sostiene che “gli occhi dei sociologi... sono rivolti verso il basso mentre le loro mani vengono stese in alto... i sociologi stanno di guardia nella guarnigione e riferiscono ai padroni sui movimenti della popolazione occupata... la sociologia ha lavorato per creare e aumentare un'iniqua distribuzione della conoscenza, e ha contribuito a rendere la struttura di potere relativamente più potente e meglio informata, e quindi a rendere la popolazione sottomessa relativamente più inerme e ignorante” [Gouldner 1964: 227 e Nicolaus 1970: 275-277, cit. in Martinotti 1972: 139].

In sintesi, mentre il “postulato della sociologia avalutativa” ha contribuito ad innalzare la disciplina a un livello di – presunta – elevata scientificità che ne ha legittimato e favorito l'ingresso nelle istituzioni

accademiche, il “postulato della disciplina valutativa e schierata” è servito invece “a legittimare la sociologia nei settori della cultura non-accademica, o sedicente tale” rappresentata, in generale, da “esponenti della cultura umanistica politicamente impegnata, artisti, uomini dei *mass-media* e così via. Questi gruppi hanno in comune fra loro e con gli studenti – che proprio per questo vi trovano il loro principale riferimento ideale – l’impegno politico, soprattutto di tipo ‘espressivo’” [Martinotti 1972: 141]. In altri termini, anche il discorso di critica al “potere istituzionale” non può non essere intrapreso senza una modalità di istituzionalizzazione di un (altro) potere.

A testimonianza di tutto ciò, con una consapevolezza evidente e da una prospettiva etnografica locale e tuttavia ben inserita nella temperie storico-culturale appena descritta, ci sono i “diari di campo” del giovane Frank Cancian sui quali il gruppo antropologico di ricerca del Laboratorio “Annabella Rossi” ha intrapreso uno studio interpretativo e specifico, non disgiunto da quello delle 1801 foto e della loro ricezione e riuso patrimonializzante nel contesto lacedoniese. Tuttavia, anche in questo resoconto preliminare della ricerca in corso, sarà necessario riassumerne il contenuto e il senso.

Le note di Cancian cominciano, ovviamente, con il suo arrivo a Lacedonia. La sera prima della vigilia della Befana del 1957. Incontra delle persone, tra cui un sindacalista amico del suo ospite Renato con il quale era in corrispondenza da almeno quattro anni; stava studiando proprio le condizioni sociali economiche e abitative del contesto lacedoniese. Il problema fondamentale del paese sembrava essere la mancanza di acqua e luce nelle case. Il materiale di studio del sindacalista sembrò a Cancian molto interessante. L’osservazione diretta del contesto gli confermò la presenza tali problematiche. Di mattina molte persone si dedicavano all’approvvigionamento idrico. Gli viene presentato Filippo insieme alla sua famiglia. I bambini gli sembravano allevati come gli “spartani”. Una sera partecipò, invitato, a una festa in casa del segretario comunale. Fondamentalmente si trattava di un ballo. Gli uomini erano molto più liberi delle donne nel ballare con loro e giocherellavano con le donne, le quali attendevano gentilmente di essere scelte per ballare. C’erano professionisti e proprietari terrieri. Si tenne anche una lotteria riservata alle donne con indumenti di nylon, smalto per le unghie, cosmetici, ecc. Nei giorni successivi, lo si intuisce leggendo la fitta scrittura della stilografica, si festeggia l’Epifania con regali ai bambini e con innumerevoli, interminabili partite a carte, il divertimento preferito dai lacedonesi. Il lunedì Cancian, insieme a Renato, si recò al mercato per comprare delle scarpe e apprende l’arte della contrattazione con gli ambulanti.

Tutti così cominciarono a riconoscerlo, a conoscerlo e a chiedergli fotografie. Mangiava, a volte, nell’osteria gestita da una vedova. Quando non lo faceva, la donna gli chiedeva il motivo. Conobbe Aldo, della Cancelleria della Procura. Si parlava di maltempo e di sigarette. Gli chiedevano, per le strade che percorreva avanti e indietro giorno dopo giorno, se era vero che studiasse la povertà della gente. Chiese così a Renato di insegnargli un po’ di italiano.

Studiava e si organizzava per fotografare. Nelle note si chiedeva spesso se fosse venuto il momento di farlo, vista la particolare situazione. Conobbe una famiglia di proprietari terrieri, la famiglia Bonaventura. Famiglia ricca, proprietaria di terre e di trattori. Dialogava, con i suoi interlocutori, di lavoro e di attitudini a lavorare; di emigrazioni e della condizione dei muratori negli USA.

A casa di Filippo aveva conosciuto la moglie e i suoi figli. Filippo si scusava per le condizioni in cui versava la casa di sua madre e si scusava anche per il mancato intervento dello stato sulle strutture e sulle infrastrutture di Lacedonia, sul pubblico e sul privato. Il suocero di Filippo lo invitò a casa sua. Voleva sapere cosa faceva, perché era intenzionato a fotografare il Sud Italia, perché fosse venuto da così lontano fino a Lacedonia. Poi, davanti al fuoco, si passò a bere del buon vino, prodotto della sua vigna, parlando della povertà. Il figlio del suocero di Filippo aveva frequentato l’istituto magistrale e provò ad affrontare con Frank alcune questioni di filosofia.

Le situazioni si ripetevano giorno dopo giorno. Il giovane studioso annotò nel suo diario di aver visitato qualche masseria – di una, in particolare, descrive bene la suddivisione dei poveri spazi interni, con gli ambienti comuni tra uomini e animali da soma e da cortile – e di aver incontrato persone anziane che sembravano ancora più anziane e tanti bambini e giovani, maschi e donne. Racconta di aver mangiato con i contadini e con i padroni, piatti poveri e meno poveri, baccalà, mele, patate. Nei “piatti grandi di stufato, la forchetta passava di mano in mano”. Qualche donna, pensava, aveva costruito qualche fantasia amorosa sul suo conto. A volte, dopo pranzo, gli raccontavano di strane usanze come quella del mettere delle monete nelle tasche dei defunti. A volte, passando davanti alla trattoria della vedova, veniva invitato all’interno perché lei e le sue figlie volevano che Frank le fotografasse. Poi bevute di vino e partite con le carte da gioco.

Ogni tanto si allontanava da Lacedonia per recarsi a Roma e poi ritornare in Irpinia. Capi che la piaga della scarsità di lavoro colpiva anche i giovani intellettuali, diplomati al Magistrale, futuri insegnanti i quali, dopo almeno dieci anni di disoccupazione, continuavano a non lavorare. Cose, queste, che riportò anche in suo saggio, lo stesso in cui riprese il tema di coloro che, a Lacedonia, proponevano di affiancare la coltivazione dell'olivo a quella del grano per aver più *chances* di reddito (Cancian 1961). A volte consolava gli amici in pena per le malattie dei figli e dei parenti stretti, lontani, a Napoli in ospedale.

L'aula della scuola rurale era ricavata in una stanza disabitata di una masseria. Dimessa come il resto dell'abitazione. Una volta ci fu la visita del direttore didattico.

In paese si ascoltava la radio e c'era un televisore davanti al quale, chi poteva, si fermava. Anche Cancian, per vedere *Lascia o raddoppia?* Condotta da Mike Bongiorno.

Frank dedicava parte del suo tempo a studiare il fenomeno dell'emigrazione, frequentando uffici pubblici e comunali in cerca di dati. Partecipava, e fotografava incontri e matrimoni. Documentava la fabbrica dei mattoni e discuteva con gli iscritti al sindacato CISL. Qualcuno si rivolgeva a lui per un aiuto sulle pratiche necessarie per emigrare. Nel suo diario scriveva anche della politica locale; di quei comunisti che non lo erano più per trovare lavoro e spesso si chiedeva se fosse veramente giunto il momento di fotografare.

Si parla, nel diario, anche della D.C. e della paura dei democristiani di perdere voti a favore della sinistra. Scriveva lettere d'amore per conto di persone di Lacedonia, indirizzate lontano, oltre oceano.

Nel diario racconta anche dei suoi tentativi metodologici di preparare e somministrare ai lacedonesi dei questionari che si rivelavano sempre insoddisfacenti per tutti.

Su una strada bianca si imbatté in un gruppo di 8 donne e 2 uomini che spostavano pietre in un cantiere, appunto, stradale. Scrisse che il discorso fu deviato sui temi della sessualità. Volevano sapere come si dice in inglese avere rapporti sessuali. Tutti si prendevano in giro gioiosamente e anche le ragazze più giovani accettavano e proponevano quel gioco.

Naturalmente non mancano pagine, nel taccuino di Cancian, sulle feste religiose come quella di San Filippo e quella della Madonna delle Grazie per la quale, nel 1957, parteciparono al pellegrinaggio più di 200 fedeli, convinti delle radici secolari o millenarie della manifestazione. Feste dal costo esorbitante, da sostenere senza il concorso della parrocchia, della chiesa.

Parlò con i contadini, il giovane Cancian, della loro consapevolezza di essere importanti in quanto agricoltori, curatori della terra e della scarsa considerazione economico-sociale del loro ruolo così importante.

Chissà quando arriverà l'acqua a Lacedonia e chissà quante case hanno il gabinetto al loro interno, si chiedeva.

Il 1° maggio Frank tornò in Irpinia. Si era trasferito a Roma per un attacco d'asma. In tempo per assistere al comizio dei comunisti per la Festa del lavoro. Aveva assistito, ad aprile, a un comizio del Partito Socialista Italiano. Cancian annota che avrebbe dovuto indagare sulla reazione dei cittadini all'intervento del PSI contro la DC la quale era ritenuta incapace contro i problemi della disoccupazione. Furono invece lodate le politiche internazionali statunitensi.

Poi riportò, ancora una volta, nei suoi appunti, la necessità di raccogliere dati statistici sulla produzione agricola e sulla forza lavoro impiegata e su quella disoccupata. Mentre gli anziani morivano e il gelo distruggeva le colture. Paura per il futuro raccolto del grano e impotenza nei confronti delle calamità.

Fotografò, Cancian, anche le modalità dell'allattamento al seno di una madre col suo piccolo.

Raccolse le opinioni stereotipe sui contadini e sui braccianti di una ricca proprietaria terriera della località "Macchia lupo", conservatrice e filo fascista. Stesse opinioni raccolte da un giovane poliziotto in servizio nel reparto celere.

C'è anche qualche nota sulle sue mancanze metodologiche: non era stato presente alla seconda fase del pellegrinaggio alla Madonna delle Grazie, quello del ritorno alla cappella del 2 giugno 1957.

Gli giunse notizia, e la riportò nel diario, di uno strano *affaire* di violenza e di estorsione forzata di denaro, legato a vicende amorose e forse massoniche. Del caso se ne stava per occupare la Giustizia.

A Lacedonia, conclude Cancian nel suo diario, "‘conquistare’ è un concetto che non esiste ‘campare’ piuttosto – e ‘campare’ più a lungo e meglio". Così, scrivendo, ripensava a quella donna che gli raccontava del figlio emigrato in Australia e gli diceva, seduta su una collinetta, della forte pena, della mancanza di quell'altro figlio, anche lui lontano, a Torino: "piangeva e diceva 'Non trovo pace più'".

In quegli stessi anni un ricercatore, un etnologo napoletano aveva già cominciato, precorrendo i tempi, a praticare una forma di riflessione critica sulla cultura meridionale che si allontanava dal comparativismo naturalistico, quello francese in particolare per “rivendicare il carattere storico della etnologia, e limitare il procedimento naturalistico all’eurisi filologica, o al pratico ordinamento dei fatti in attesa di una storiografia che sarà” [de Martino 1941: 7].

Era lo stesso ricercatore che non si trincerava dietro paraventi scientifici per non schierarsi con gli oppressi, le minoranze, i diseredati, come quando scriveva:

ho denunciato la limitazione umanistica della etnologia tradizionale, a cui era preclusa la via a diventare vero umanesimo e vera storia a cagione del fatto che l’oggetto della ricerca – i popoli coloniali e semicoloniali e il mondo sociale subalterno per entro gli stati colonizzatori – non viveva nella coscienza culturale borghese come mondo di uomini, ma di cose, come insieme strumentale, come natura sfruttabile e padroneggiabile [de Martino 1950, 306; ora in Pasquinelli 1977: 90].

Era quello che scriveva “Ma io entravo nelle case dei contadini pugliesi come un ‘compagno’, come un cercatore di uomini e di umane dimenticate storie, che al tempo stesso vuole rendersi partecipe, insieme agli uomini incontrati, della fondazione di un mondo migliore” [de Martino 1953: 313-342, in part. 316, ora in Rauty 2015: 118]. Erano quegli stessi uomini che chiedevano a lui, ricercatore borghese e critico, venuto da Roma, di essere rappresentati correttamente a livello istituzionale, quindi culturale: “Dite, raccontate, che noi cafoni non siamo poi delle bestie, e che quaggiù non c’è soltanto miseria” – [de Martino 1980: 127]. E lui, comunque, non evitava mai di individuare e segnalare sia le frizioni esistenti tra sistemi valoriali contestuali diversi sia la necessità di una “moralità politicamente condivisa”, denunciando le condizioni di oppressione (era attivismo sociale?) con la precisione della conoscenza culturale del contesto (era, la sua, un’etnografia rigorosa?). Certamente sapeva unire, in qualche modo, come pochi hanno saputo fare, politica e cultura, prassi e disciplina scientifica senza mai farle entrare in contraddizione.

Come vedremo, era lui che esortava i suoi lettori a vigilare sulle forme concrete e pericolose dell’irrazionalismo legato, ad es., ai comportamenti furiosi e violentissimi che si manifestarono tra i giovani di Stoccolma nel Capodanno del ’56: “Questo pericolo è l’angoscioso essere afferrati dalla nostalgia del non umano, è l’impulso a lasciar spegnere il lume della coscienza vigilante” – [idem: 169]. O su quelle dell’etnocentrismo assoluto e del relativismo universale: “Non dunque un europeocentrismo dogmatico, e neppure un irrelato relativismo culturale formano la base della ricerca etnologica” – [de Martino 1977: 392] recuperando quest’ultimo, secondo me, in una forma più “tecnica”, necessaria alla ricerca, quella di un relativismo metodologico il quale culminava nella pratica riflessiva dell’etnocentrismo critico: “una etnologia che metta in causa la civiltà occidentale” – [idem: 6]; che reclamava un “uso” “della cultura occidentale come centro di riferimento e al tempo stesso come unità di misura destinata ad essere messa in causa” – [idem: 5]. In definitiva, uno studioso che soprattutto si mostrava attento a interpretare in modo “diverso” l’incombere della storia nei “diversi” contesti culturali da lui indagati, quelli magico-religioso-folklorici del suo mondo contemporaneo.

Non si trattava di uno “studioso dell’esotico” e nemmeno, dicevo, di un relativista incallito o di un comparativista abitudinario ma di un intellettuale impegnato in un’Antropologia orientata da valori, uno studioso capace di elaborare “attraverso l’arco di un’intera vita professionale, un orizzonte valoriale specifico, intrinsecamente legato al suo mestiere di antropologo” consistente in “quella forma di “umanesimo moderno” che sarà l’umanesimo etnografico” [Signorelli 2015: XX]. Un etnologo ben consapevole, in anticipo sugli altri, che il mondo in cui viveva il più remoto dei nativi era oramai lo stesso in cui viveva anche lui. Lo spiegava chiaramente quando scriveva nei suoi appunti della necessità di fondare seriamente questo “nuovo umanesimo”, più adatto ai tempi:

Questo umanesimo etnologico, le cui condizioni sono state poste dall’epoca delle scoperte geografiche, può maturare solo ora, nell’epoca che vive la crisi del rapporto coloniale e della società che lo esprime, e che vede non soltanto moltiplicarsi i rapporti interculturali, ma è impegnata come non mai a fondare una nuova solidarietà dei rapporti umani sul nostro pianeta: “Il mondo è poco” [de Martino 1977: 393-394].

Era uno “storicista” quell’intellettuale partenopeo e, teorizzando il suo “umanesimo etnologico”, dichiarava l’importanza del reciproco riconoscersi attraverso quel confronto etnografico in grado di mettere a nudo, negli uni come negli altri – gli osservatori e gli osservati, nella loro “danza” dello scambio

reciproco del ruolo – gli errori e le manchevolezze, i malfunzionamenti e gli squilibri, della propria rispettiva temperie culturale, altrimenti opaca al solo sguardo autoriflessivo. Ripeto: “il mondo è poco” scriveva, intendendo, forse, che era diventato troppo piccolo già ai suoi tempi, troppo rapidamente percorribile nonostante il serio pericolo di crisi delle istituzioni e dei rapporti che si vivevano in società chiuse e reciprocamente sorde, ostili, arroccate localmente. Se oggi il mondo sembra essere “troppo pieno” è proprio perché già da allora era diventato troppo piccolo, già da allora era diventato veramente “poco”. Forse, per tutto ciò, non aveva accettato “l’invito a partecipare alla ricerca di Friedman [su Matera], prendendo le distanze in modo netto da lui e dal suo *entourage*”, pur avendolo incontrato su richiesta di Rocco Scotellaro e Rocco Mazzarone [Faeta 2006: 119]. Cosa ricordata anche da Tullio Tentori [2004: 66-67].

Questo intellettuale politico-etnologo-filosofo era Ernesto de Martino, colui che diede un importante impulso al radicarsi delle discipline antropologiche in Italia. Con i suoi studi sulla magia e sulla religione, con i suoi scritti meridionalistici, con il suo contributo – pubblicato nel 1977, dopo la sua morte avvenuta nel ’65 – all’analisi della temperie problematica del suo tempo, da lui interpretata, in questi ultimi scritti, come una sorta di repertorio di possibili “apocalissi culturali”, de Martino fornì ai suoi interlocutori una serie di elementi etnografici e etnologici utili non solo alla riflessione sulla crisi attraversata dal mondo suo contemporaneo ma anche a quella sul senso stesso, sul significato più generale da attribuire al concetto di crisi in ambito storico, scientifico, artistico-letterario, antropologico culturale, filosofico, psicologico e psicopatologico.

Come si intuisce, un interesse per le comunità meridionali completamente diverso da quello legato al “Familismo amorale”, quell’*ethos* che secondo Banfield aveva prodotto negli abitanti di Chiaromonte (emblematica raffigurazione del Sud col nome fittizio di Montegrano) incapacità di “lavorare” per il bene comune, per lasciare spazio solo a comportamenti finalizzati al “bene immediato della famiglia nucleare”, al proprio “benessere” inteso però al livello minimo di sussistenza nell’ottica di “meglio a me che agli altri”, in assenza di qualunque forza statale o pubblica calmieratrice. Comportamenti “familistico amorali” ritenuti necessari da ognuno degli abitanti e pre-supposti da ognuno di essi per tutti gli altri, nell’ottica del “se non lo faccio io la faranno gli altri a me”. Un *ethos* da tutti condiviso capace, così, di produrre solo asocialità e disinteresse per la comunità, per la politica e, come diremmo oggi, per il bene comune. Ma si sbagliava.

3. Banfield, Cancian, l’antropologia, la storia della fotografia

Fu in questo clima e per questi motivi che Edward C. Banfield, nel 1955, “Quando arrivò in Italia, con l’aiuto di Manlio Rossi-Doria e Gilberto Marselli (uno dei suoi studenti) viaggiò per il Mezzogiorno, trovando a Chiaromonte (...) un ambiente perfetto per la sua ricerca” [Ferragina 2009b: 268-269].

Fu in questo clima e per questi motivi che Frank Cancian, con l’aiuto di Cipriana Scelba e Tullio Tentori, arrivò a Lacedonia qualche anno dopo. Ed è utile qui ricordare come fu proprio Cipriana Scelba, nel suo ruolo di direttrice del programma *Fullbright* in Italia, a trasformare la borsa di studio del giovane Frank in un supporto concreto al suo lavoro etnofotografico.

Dunque, tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta del Novecento, in periodo di guerra fredda e di “blocchi” contrapposti, una folta schiera di studiosi e di fotografi *engagé* (in un senso o nell’altro) operò in Italia e in particolare nel Mezzogiorno. Come ha scritto Francesco Faeta [2019a: 309] in una sua recente nota dedicata a Cancian:

Per sintetizzare, senza alcuna pretesa di esaustività, da un lato abbiamo l’assai nota esperienza di Ernesto de Martino in Lucania e Salento, condotta con la collaborazione di una nutrita *équipe* di giovani ricercatori e operatori dell’immagine; e poi quelle di Diego Carpitella, Franco Cagnetta, Clara Gallini, Annabella Rossi, Amalia Signorelli, Tullio Seppilli, Gilberto Antonio Marselli, Guido Vincelli, Rocco Mazzarone, Tullio Tentori, Danilo Dolci, Alessandro Pizzorno, praticamente in tutte le regioni del Sud. Dall’altra quelle di Edward Banfield, Anne Parson, Frank Cancian, Leonard Moss, Alan Lomax, Andreas Fridolin Weis Bentzon, Donald S. Pitkin, Friedrich Friedmann, Sydel Silverman, Irwin Sanders, Gallatin Anderson, Joseph Lopreato, John Davis, Jean Meyriat, Jane e Peter Schneider e numerosi altri, anch’essi sparsi in svariati paesi e villaggi meridionali.

Ma tutto lo sforzo “sul campo”, sia quello investigativo che quello documentaristico, non portò alla realizzazione di un *corpus* condiviso di conoscenze sulla realtà culturale meridionale:

Italiani e stranieri non ebbero, tranne poche eccezioni, contatti reciproci, e i rilievi degli uni e degli altri non entrarono a far parte di un patrimonio unico e dialogante di dati e conoscenze. A volte, nei confronti degli studiosi stranieri vi furono forti malintesi e aspre polemiche, mentre alcuni di loro furono (sbrigativamente) accusati di essere al soldo di organismi investigativi occidentali, e segnatamente nord-americani, interessati ad acquisire conoscenze circa la realtà sociale italiana (...) Il clima della guerra fredda, da un lato, l'egemonia culturale della sinistra marxista e la sua diffidenza per le scienze sociali, unitamente all'*imprinting* neorealista delle rappresentazioni del mondo popolare italiano, non facilitarono certamente il dialogo, la comprensione, la collaborazione [ibidem].

Dunque, mentre il rapporto della fotografia e del documentarismo cinematografico con la ricerca antropologica risulta ben noto agli studiosi – conclude Faeta – meno si conosce della documentazione per immagini, raccolta nel nostro Paese, da ricercatori del calibro di Alan Lomax, Andreas Fridolin Weis Bentzon, Jean e Peter Schneider, John Davis, Friedrich G. Friedmann. Fra questi, Frank Cancian presenta un particolare interesse in quanto è “una di quelle (poche) figure di antropologi che hanno riassunto nella medesima persona i due ruoli di studioso e operatore visivo, con un apporto critico interessante, che s’inserisce in uno dei nodi più dibattuti della problematica scientifica dell’etnografia e dell’antropologia visuale” [idem: 310]. Perché, come ha scritto Michele Smargiassi, “Cancian invece voleva un paese di relazioni (nelle foto si vede quanto sia affascinato dai gesti “parlanti”, da buon etnologo) e di contraddizioni. Perché non era un poeta, come Strand, ma un antropologo. (...) I paesani di Cancian ridono. Guardano spesso in macchina: sanno che c’è il fotografo e noi sappiamo che lo sanno. “È meglio se la gente mi conosce e sa che sono lì per scattare foto”“. E ancora,

A Frank, del pittoresco della miseria importava niente. Era un ricercatore. Aveva 22 anni soltanto ma sognava di fare antropologia visuale. Si proponeva di “capire come le persone vivevano e fotografarne la quotidianità”. Si riteneva “un documentarista con un punto di vista”. Fotografò quel borgo per sette mesi, con cura, metodo, attenzione, immersione. [http://smargiassi-michele.blogautore.repubblica.it/2019/08/27/frank-cancian-lacedonia-paul-strand-luzzara-fotografia-antropologia/comment-page-1/].

Per intendere al meglio il ruolo delle immagini fotografiche nel periodo che vide la presenza di Cancian a Lacedonia, è necessario ripercorrere in maniera molto sintetica la storia della fotografia, italiana ma non solo, che, dagli anni '30, transitando attraverso il secondo dopoguerra, arriva fino agli anni '60. Storia che ovviamente si intreccia con una definizione, quella di “neorealismo”.

Così – cfr. il primo capitolo del volume di Antonella Russo [2011: 3-94] dedicato alla *Storia culturale della fotografia italiana* – per neorealismo bisogna intendere quelle particolari narrazioni fatte per immagini e parole. Certo il cinema sonoro può avere, di fondo, tale caratteristica. Ma per le immagini fisse e per la scrittura letteraria le cose cambiano. Certo, letteratura e fotografie sono state e potranno continuare a essere “realiste” ma “neorealismo” è sinonimo di un movimento che storicamente si colloca nel secondo dopoguerra ed è contraddistinto più per il tentativo di riuscire a coniugare le due modalità comunicative che per una serie di principi programmatici: “le difficoltà nel definire il *neorealismo fotografico* sono causate dall’assenza di manifesti e programmi ideologici” [idem: 7].

Di *neorealismo fotografico*, in senso più proprio, si cominciò a parlare dalla caduta del fascismo o, almeno, dal 1945.

Intanto, negli anni trenta, negli USA, c’era stata la *FSA-Farm and Security Administration*, l’agenzia governativa rooseveltiana che aveva promosso l’uso massiccio della fotografia documentaria per mostrare agli americani i gravi problemi che attanagliavano le campagne e il disagio sociale degli agricoltori di quel paese in seguito alla *Great Depression*. Foto che dovevano apparire veritiere e poco “artistiche”, in grado di fare propaganda per il presidente e per il suo *New Deal*. Una sorta di fotodocumentarismo antropologico schierato dalla parte degli “invisibili”, coloro che contavano meno che niente a meno ancora contavano a causa della grande crisi.

In Italia invece, in quegli anni, il modello di proposta fotografica in stile FSA aveva vita difficilissima. La dittatura fascista non poteva tollerare fotografie contrarie all’idea di una schietta e sana popolazione contadina, operaia e cittadina come quella mostrata dalle immagini di propaganda ministeriale: tutti fascisti, tutti lavoratori e tutti contenti. O quasi, tranne le debite eccezioni, seppure sottoposte alle censure del regime, che “raccontavano” una realtà più grigia. Ad esempio, i “fototesti” (immagine più scrittura combinate insieme sulla pagina stampata) pubblicati sulla rivista *Tempo*:

Lattuada lavorava come redattore a “Tempo”, il settimanale diretto da Alberto Mondadori che ricalcava il modello americano di “Life” e che, grazie ai suoi fototesti, si sarebbe affermato tra le più importanti riviste illustrate italiane. Il primo numero, del 1° giugno VII (1939) presentava in copertina il ritratto eroico del *Minatore di Carbonia* – ripreso dal basso secondo un punto di vista *worm’s eye* alla Rodčenko – eseguito da Lamberti Sorrentino (...). Il fototesto continuava nelle pagine interne, mostrando uno spaccato della vita dei minatori: l’entrata al pozzo, le mogli sugli usci di casa in attesa del rientro del marito, i dormitori dei lavoratori scapoli, le fasi della raccolta del carbone, il giorno di paga” [idem: 18].

Federico Patellani che aveva pubblicato su *Quadrante* (1935) – rivista diretta da Massimo Bontempelli – degli: “originali fotomontaggi di operai al lavoro nei cantieri dell’Africa orientale”, s’impose su *Tempo* (1939) con “le immagini in “ripresa diretta”, dei lavoratori impegnati nell’allestimento della Mostra d’oltremare di Napoli o nello scarico delle merci nel porto di Savona” [ibidem]. Insomma, un panorama fotografico e narrativo associato al frondismo di epoca fascista che ebbe come ulteriore esempio l’*Almanacco letterario Bompiani* (1941) sul quale apparve, tra gli altri “quel diario visivo del futuro regista Luigi Comencini, intitolato *Vita d’ognuno*, in cui, in virtù di un’impaginazione “cinematica”, ai giochi di scolaresche spensierate si alternavano vedute aeree di parate militari, momenti di preparazione alle battaglie e attese di giovani donne” [ibidem]. Rivista sulla quale apparvero anche i volti anonimi dei passanti degli *Incontri quotidiani* e del *Paradigma del verbo essere*, di Enrico Peresutti [ibidem]. Immagini “dimesse” evocative di un prossimo tramonto della dittatura, di un dopoguerra terribile e doloroso ma auspicato e immaginato; foto già, in qualche maniera neorealiste. Come quelle che Patellani realizzò a Matera negli anni ’50 [cfr. Calvenzi 2010].

Secondo Antonella Russo, che cita Alberto Asor Rosa [1975], la fotografia neorealista italiana visse solo per un breve periodo “e cioè dal 1940 al 1949” e già nel 1950 era diventata “un prodotto editoriale destinato specialmente alla stampa illustrata [Russo 2011: 9]. L’Italia pensava alla ricostruzione e si avviava al cosiddetto *boom economico*. Tutto sembrava semplice e invece era complicatissimo, poliedrico, sovrapposto, dissonante come ben suggerito da Italo Calvino nella sua celebre definizione:

Il “neorealismo” non fu una scuola. (Cerchiamo di dire le cose con esattezza). Fu un insieme di voci, in gran parte periferiche, una molteplice scoperta delle diverse Italie, anche – o specialmente – delle Italie fino allora più inedite per la letteratura. Senza la varietà di Italie sconosciute l’una all’altra – o che si supponevano sconosciute –, senza la varietà dei dialetti e dei gerghi da far lievitare e impastare nella lingua letteraria, non ci sarebbe stato “neorealismo”. Ma non fu paesano nel senso del verismo regionale ottocentesco. La caratterizzazione locale voleva dare sapore di verità a una rappresentazione in cui doveva riconoscersi tutto il vasto mondo: come la provincia americana in quegli scrittori degli Anni Trenta di cui tanti critici ci rimproveravano d’essere gli allievi diretti o indiretti. Perciò il linguaggio, lo stile, il ritmo avevano tanta importanza per noi, per questo nostro realismo che doveva essere il più possibile distante dal naturalismo. [Calvino 1987: 9].

Nella sintesi della Russo

Nel 1945, quando si pose la questione della costruzione di una democrazia di massa e, insieme, la sua rappresentazione con immagini di “un popolo che andasse verso il popolo”, intellettuali, registi, artisti e fotografi risposero a quest’urgenza elaborando immagini capaci di saldare insieme la caduta delle illusioni, la fine del fascismo e le speranze nate da quell’esperienza della lotta armata spontanea che fu la Resistenza [idem: 21].

Questo fu il neorealismo, una temperie culturale che aveva espresso una modalità per rappresentare l’Italia e gli italiani in maniera unitaria nonostante, anzi grazie alle diversità linguistiche, economiche, sociali le quali, anziché dividere, collegavano tutti e tutto ciò che era sopravvissuto alla catastrofe. È in questa temperie culturale, tanto vissuta quanto rappresentata, che arrivarono in Italia gli antropologi, i sociologi e i ricercatori statunitensi, tra cui Banfield e Cancian. Studiosi che presumibilmente, seppur appartenenti a generazioni diverse, avevano avuto modo di confrontarsi con il pensiero e con le politiche del 32° presidente degli Usa, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, e del suo New Deal; a volte in maniera critica, fino a distanziarsene – soprattutto Banfield – su posizioni conservatrici. Sicuramente si erano imbattuti nei lavori fotografici della FSA-Farm Security Agency, diretti da Roy Emerson Stryker dal 1935 al 1942. I fotografi FSA impegnati sul campo furono: Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Arthur Rothstein, Ben

Shahn, John Vachon, Marion Post Wolcott, Russell Lee, Jack Delano, John Collier Jr., Carl Mydans e Gordon Parks. Realizzarono settantasettemila fotografie, in bianco e nero, della “Grande depressione” nelle campagne e nelle città statunitensi, e, dal 1939, altre 644 immagini a colori (<http://photogrammar.yale.edu/map/>).

Nel 1932, un giovane fotografo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, aveva fotografato l'Italia cogliendo quegli elementi culturali lontani dagli stereotipi eroici e mediocrementemente grandiosi proposti dal regime fascista. Ritornò in Italia negli anni '50, fermandosi a Matera [cfr. Biscaglia 2010], Salerno, Napoli, Ischia e giungendo a Scanno dove realizzò alcune delle sue immagini più famose di quel periodo. Immagini che per la forza della composizione e della capacità simbolico-evocativa mostrata, contribuirono, nel bene e nel male, nei limiti di una forma di “orientalismo interno” [Faeta 2005] all'idea che dell'Italia si formava nel mondo. Accanto a Cartier-Bresson è necessario ricordare, per le stesse ragioni, per la capacità delle sue foto di essere descrittive ma anche evocative di sensazioni e produttive di “stereotipi artistico-sentimentali” dell'Italia del dopoguerra, i lavori di David Seymour, Foto entrate di diritto nella storia della fotografia internazionale. Foto capaci di mostrare – lo scrive Russo [2011: 148] – al pari di quelle scattate da Cartier-Bresson in India e in Cina “un Meridione dai costumi e dai rituali arcaici che ben si confaceva alle immagini del Punjab, dell'Egitto e di Teheran”. Un'idea frutto di “scoperta” ma anche di invenzione, di “costruzione” politico-culturale. Come accadde “inevitabilmente anche durante le spedizioni demartiniane in Basilicata [Ricci 2010].

Nel 1952, Cesare Zavattini aveva proposto a Giulio Einaudi un progetto di ricerca verbo-visiva o, meglio, scritto-fotografica – l'evoluzione del fototesto – sulla vita nelle città e nei paesi italiani; una collana di libri monotematici intitolata “Italia mia”. Di quella collana fu realizzato solo il primo volume, quello su Luzzara, paese natale di Cesare, in collaborazione con il fotografo statunitense Paul Strand, dal titolo *Un paese*. Anche Strand, a quell'epoca in Italia, aveva proposto a Einaudi un libro di sue fotografie da accompagnare con un testo letterario. La sinergia fu subito evidente [Russo 2011: 150-151 e passim] e il libro si stampò dopo la permanenza a Luzzara del fotografo che realizzò, nel 1953, 200 fotografie, cento delle quali furono inviate a Zavattini per le quali scrisse un testo che riportava confidenze e racconti orali ma anche notizie storico-geografiche. Le fotografie di Strand rappresentavano ritratti, particolari e paesaggi del paese emiliano. Non tutti i critici furono d'accordo sulla validità del volume imputandogli una discordanza fra foto e testi. In particolare, al critico Enrico Falqui “non sfuggì quel divario tra le immagini rigorose, “assolute” di Strand e le didascalie dirette, “spontaneiste”, di Zavattini, che provocava una certa disarmonia”. Ciò era dovuto “anche all'accento popolaresco del testo zavattiniano, in contrasto con le immagini “etnografiche”, da studio scientifico, di Strand” [idem: 156]. Franco Fortini, inoltre, rilevò nel volume “una certa astrattezza rispetto alla situazione reale in cui versava l'Italia”, amplificata dalla “solemnità di quella fotografia, insolitamente dura, tanto poco italiana” tanto da “far apparire il libro come il prodotto di un neorealismo a uso e consumo degli americani” [idem: 154-155]. In una sua lettera a Nancy Newhall – riportata da Russo – Strand definisce con rigore il suo modo fotografico di procedere. Come aveva già fatto, fin dal 1915 nelle sue campagne fotografiche a New York, in Francia, in Messico e nel New England, scrisse: “Non cerco il momento speciale, l'espressione o l'attività speciale (...) Un conto è fotografare delle persone, un altro è far sì che ad altri importi di loro, rivelando il nocciolo della loro umanità” [idem: 158].

Tuttavia, nessuna delle fotografie di Strand venne utilizzata per la più famosa mostra fotografica del periodo, *The Family of Man*, progettata e organizzata a partire dal 1952 da Edward Steichen per il MoMA di New York, dedicata all'Uomo, alla sua “umanità” ritenuta, dal curatore, rappresentabile per immagini. La mostra fu inaugurata il 24 gennaio 1955. Essa intendeva rendere omaggio all'intera umanità e fungere da messaggio di pace in tempo di “guerra fredda”. Giunsero al MoMA, che aveva diramato un apposito invito, milioni di fotografie dalle quali i curatori ne estrassero, alla fine, 503 dalle quali si ritenne si potessero evincere “gli elementi, le emozioni e quel sentirsi collegati a tutti gli altri esseri umani” [idem: 171]. La mostra fu allestita in Italia, dall'USIS, nel 1956, a Roma e a Firenze, nel '59 a Milano e a Torino. Roland Barthes la criticò intelligentemente nel suo volume *Miti d'oggi* [1974, 172-174] ritenendola una mitizzazione e/o naturalizzazione dei temi umani più conflittuali come la morte, la nascita, la famiglia il lavoro, ecc., una maniera di presentare la “comunità umana” priva di differenze, di conflitti e tensioni. Una mostra comunque memorabile tanto per chi la ritenne l'espressione di un “nuovo umanesimo americano” quanto per coloro che scorsero in essa lo strumento divulgativo del liberalismo statunitense [ivi: 175-176].

Nel luglio del 1957 uscì il primo numero dell'edizione italiana di *Popular Photography* contenente un saggio su uno dei più importanti maestri della fotografia italiana, Paolo Monti. L'edizione italiana ricalcava la formula e alcuni contenuti di quella in lingua inglese, fondata nel 1937 (terminò poi le pubblicazioni nel 2017). Dal 1947, anno di avvio del Piano Marshall, al 1949 (data di ingresso dell'Italia nella NATO) l'edizione italiana si trasformò "seppur indirettamente" in strumento di propaganda del piano di aiuti economici d'oltre oceano "promuovendo attivamente la fotografia americana per diffondere una visione neolibera in funzione anticomunista" e, insieme all'*USIS-United States Information Service* delle ambasciate e dei consolati nordamericani, promosse "attivamente un'operazione di colonizzazione culturale massiccia, tendente a contrastare ogni possibile ingerenza sovietica in Italia" [ivi: 179].

Nel 1952, Ernesto de Martino annunciò e intraprese la sua spedizione in Lucania. La prima di una serie di "discese sul campo" che lo portarono in Basilicata e poi in Puglia. Pur non essendo interessato – a differenza dei colleghi statunitensi – a studi di comunità ma fondamentalmente teso a interpretare quella dimensione storico culturale meridionale legata alla presenza di modalità magico-religiose simbolicamente arcaiche e pur estremamente funzionali nella coesione della sua esperienza di ricerca, l'etnologo napoletano utilizzò, in qualche modo, la fotografia nelle sue ricerche. Certo, in maniera ancillare nei confronti delle sue interpretazioni verbali proposte poi per iscritto nei volumi della cosiddetta "Trilogia meridionale" – *Sud e Magia* [1959], sulla bassa magia cerimoniale lucana; *Morte e pianto rituale* [1958], sulla lamentazione funebre, in particolare quella lucana; *La terra del rimorso* [1961], sul fenomeno del tarantismo pugliese. Si avvale della collaborazione dei fotografi Franco Pinna, Michele Gandin, Arturo Zavattini, Ando Gilardi. De Martino era interessato alla storicità dell'"esserci nel mondo" più che alle dinamiche di elaborazione della vita sociale, culturale e comunitaria in senso socio-antropologico [Sul rapporto tra de Martino e i collaboratori-fotografi cfr. Blasco, Marzocchini 1994; Faeta 2003; 2006; 2007; Gallini e Faeta (a cura di) 1999; Mazzacane 1996; Esposito 2007; 2012; Gilardi 2017].

Le fotografie realizzate dai suoi collaboratori fotografi costituirono un corpus di immagini del Mezzogiorno del tutto dissimili da quelle scaturite dagli scatti dei fotografi neorealisti "di maniera", incapaci di andare oltre la sensazione, il sentimentalismo banale, lo stereotipo, il sensazionalismo. Immagini certamente problematiche anche quelle cosiddette demartiniane, in conflitto con le direttive e le aspettative dell'etnologo e altrettanto capaci di generare, magari involontariamente, processi di "orientalismo interno" [Faeta 2005] ma sicuramente più vicine all'idea che la fotografia dovesse essere, servire come strumento di ricerca, di conoscenza, di interpretazione e di denuncia. Forse simili, forse diverse da quelle dei loro colleghi statunitensi che operavano nelle stesse latitudini, nello stesso periodo.

Foto nate da un impegno che proseguì nell'opera e nei lavori dei fotografi demartiniani anche nelle occasioni più distanti, nel tempo e nella prassi fotografica, da quelle scaturite, problematicamente, dall'incontro con de Martino. Immagini che circolavano ed erano ben conosciute in Italia negli anni '50-'60 del secolo scorso (cfr. Faeta e Gallini 1999; Faeta 2006; 2007; Baldi 1982; 2010; Marano 2007; Esposito 2007; Imbriani 2017).

In questa temperie e in questo momento storico Cancian arrivò in Italia e si installò a Lacedonia, Alta Irpinia, nel 1957, barattando la sua borsa di studio filosofica per una di ricerca fotografica che oggi definiremmo antropologico visuale. Mostrò un impegno non indifferente nel suo lavoro e una differenza di atteggiamento morale ed etico-professionale verso le comunità meridionali meno avvantaggiate dalla storia e dalla temperie socio economica di quegli anni. Mostrò un atteggiamento profondo, curioso, interessato e rispettoso dei suoi interlocutori, dialogico e riflessivo, come mostrano le sue 1801 foto b&n formato Leica e i suoi diari di campo. Insieme costituiscono un patrimonio culturale fondamentale per aggiungere tasselli conoscitivi e interpretativi delle vicende e della "vita" umana, seppur legate ad un piccolo centro dell'appennino meridionale, di quegli anni. Un patrimonio che è stato affidato, affinché venga correttamente studiato, al gruppo di ricerca del Laboratorio di Antropologia "Annabella Rossi" dell'Università degli Studi di Salerno-Dipartimento di Scienze del Patrimonio culturale, da me coordinato. Un'interpretazione che sarà restituita e messa a disposizione della comunità di Lacedonia, in quanto "patrimonio" culturale locale, e degli studiosi che ne vorranno fare richiesta per utilizzarla nei loro ulteriori percorsi di ricerca e di approfondimento.

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L'ETNOGRAFIA VISIVA DEL "FONDO SABINA CUNEO": PRIME OSSERVAZIONI

Anna Rosa Azzarello, *Independent Scholar*

ABSTRACT

The "Sabina Cuneo Collection", recently given to the MuCiv (Museum of the Civilization) in Rome, represents one of the most wide deposits of Italian ethnographic photography, especially dedicated to the ritual and festive forms in the South. Its scientific reorganization is underway, opened by a small significant exhibition of the photographer's production, and is curated by Anna Rosa Azzarello, with the scientific supervision of Francesco Faeta.

KEYWORDS

Ethnography, Photography, Southern Italy, Museum of Civilization

BIO

Anna Rosa Azzarello graduated in Educational at the University of Messina with a Cultural Anthropology thesis on the stereotypical representations of women in Calabria in contemporary literature. She received her PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the same University, with a fieldwork thesis on the contemporary social and cultural reality of the Jewish community of Rome. He attended the Visual Ethnography course at the SEV (School of Visual Ethnography) of the ISFCI (Institute of Photography and Integrated Communication) in Rome. Since 2016 she has been dealing with the conservative rearrangement of the "Fondo Sabina Cuneo" of the MuCiv (Museum of Civilizations) in Rome. At the same Museum, in 2018, she curated the exhibition *Memories of Archives. Fondo Sabina Cuneo*, has collaborated in a filing program of the Photographic Archive and in the realization of the exhibition on the storyteller Ciccio Busacca (curated by Mauro Geraci) and, since 2019, she is the holder of a collaboration contract. She is currently included in the team that is preparing, with the collaboration of the ICDe (Central Institute for Folklore, Ethnology and Anthropology) the exhibition of ethnographic photographs taken in the Italian Mezzogiorno, in the 1950s, by the American anthropologist Frank Cancian, curated by Francesco Faeta, still at MuCiv.

annarosa.azzarello@gmail.com

Il 23 novembre 2018 ha avuto luogo, presso la Sala Diego Carpitella del MuCiv - Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari (MNATP) di Roma, nell'ambito della rassegna MAV (Materiali di Antropologia Visiva) 2018¹, la presentazione ufficiale del "Fondo Sabina Cuneo", confluito al Museo, per donazione della famiglia dell'etnofotografa, prematuramente scomparsa nel settembre del 2016.

L'esposizione fotografica, organizzata per l'occasione dal MuCiv con la collaborazione dell'ICDe (Istituto Centrale per la Demoetnoantropologia), da me curata, con la collaborazione di Francesco Aquilanti, commissario interno della mostra, ha tentato di render conto, già prima di ogni operazione di riordino necessaria e prevista, della consistenza e rilevanza scientifica del fondo in oggetto. La mia curatela si è posta come primo saggio pubblico di un lavoro che, sotto la direzione scientifica di Francesco Faeta, sto seguendo da due anni nelle complesse e complicate fasi di selezione e ordinamento preliminare, imballaggio e trasferimento dei materiali che compongono il Fondo; dallo sgombero, nel giugno del 2017, della casa-studio romana della fotografa, all'ingresso dei materiali in Museo, nel novembre dello stesso anno.

¹ MAV, riprendendo la formula originaria elaborata da Diego Carpitella, è un convegno-rassegna dedicato all'etnografia visiva e all'antropologia visuale, curato da Emilia De Simoni, Laura Faranda, Francesco Giannattasio, Giovanni Giuriati, Antonello Ricci, che si svolge presso il MuCiv con cadenza biennale.

L'esposizione, ha inteso presentare in forma antologica - pur nella parzialità che è insita in un lavoro di riordino scientifico ancora da intraprendere - il lascito, frutto dell'appassionato lavoro realizzato (indicativamente, dagli anni Ottanta-Novanta del secolo scorso ai primi quindici anni di quello attuale) da Sabina Cuneo con l'attiva e costante collaborazione di Carmine Puzo, compagno di vita e di ricerca fino al 2013 quando, anch'egli in modo improvviso e prematuro, venne a mancare. Si sono esposte immagini di Cuneo, in modo prevalente, e di Puzo, in un'occasione che è stata, al contempo, indicativa di alcuni aspetti della produzione fotografica degli autori e anticipatoria del percorso di un impegnativo progetto che esiterà, in fase avanzata di riordino dei materiali, in una più completa e documentata mostra che avrà luogo, si auspica, sempre presso il MuCiv.

Si è scelto di presentare materiali *vintage*, direttamente curati dagli autori, provenienti, in parte, da un'acquisizione effettuata dal MNATP nel 1999, relativa a 17 *portfolio* di feste popolari nel Mezzogiorno italiano, in parte, dalla recente donazione. Tre le serie di immagini presentate: *Un sistema festivo nel Mezzogiorno italiano, Muri, Roma 1999*.

In apertura, fotografie legate al contesto rituale e festivo, realizzate dagli autori tra il 1994 e il 1998. Una selezione che ho ricavato dalle immagini presenti nell'archivio fotografico dell'ex MNATP che documentano, complessivamente, diciassette feste religiose, ciascuna accompagnata da una scheda descrittiva. Schede puntuali, circostanziate e corredate di note bibliografiche, scritte a mano da Cuneo, che ne attestano l'accuratezza etnografica e la sensibilità antropologica. Più in dettaglio, tredici immagini, una per località, hanno illustrato il lavoro nella sua ampiezza, per soffermarsi poi, con maggiore puntualità, su quattro occasioni scelte come rappresentative del più vasto lavoro.

Occasioni presentate al visitatore in una duplice veste narrativa: la scrittura (le schede olografe, di cui si è prima scritto, sono state scannerizzate e stampate su pannelli) e le immagini. Questi approfondimenti di tipo monografico sono dedicati al *Venerdì Santo* a Procida, alla *Festa delle Lucerne* a Somma Vesuviana, alla *Ndocciata* ad Agnone, ai *Misteri* a Trapani.



IMMAGINE 1: Sabina Cuneo e Carmine Puzo, Autoritratto

Al rigore etnografico e documentario della prima serie, sottolineato dall'uso del bianco e nero, dalle sequenze, dai dettagli, seguono le immagini a colori della serie *Muri* realizzate, presumibilmente, alla fine degli anni Novanta, che rinviano al lavoro più squisitamente creativo e concettuale di Sabina Cuneo, ai suoi duraturi interessi per l'informale e per la fotografia astratta. La terza e ultima serie, *Roma 1999*,

presenta un'ampia selezione dalle 50 fotografie della mostra tenutasi a Palazzo delle Esposizioni nell'estate del 2000. Si tratta di scatti fotografici relativi alla scena urbana romana, realizzati da Cuneo nei mesi che precedettero il Giubileo. Sono le immagini di un enorme cantiere che colgono un momento particolare, di soglia e di passaggio, della vicenda della città; con notevole sensibilità per le geometrie e per il colore, ma anche con apprezzabile capacità di restituire la cifra antropologica dello spazio osservato.

Non ho conosciuto Sabina Cuneo personalmente, né conoscevo il suo lavoro. L'ho "incontrata", per la prima volta, due anni fa quando ho varcato la soglia di quella casa, in Via Donizetti, da lei e suo marito a lungo condivisa, con l'incarico di coordinare le operazioni di messa in sicurezza dei materiali. Mi sono ritrovata in una sorta di affascinante e colto bazar fatto di una biblioteca di migliaia di volumi, di maschere tribali e fotografie appese alle pareti, casse di rullini, di positivi e negativi, di dischi, CD, DVD, VHS, e oggetti etnografici di vario genere. Uno spaccato denso, tangibile, di intelligenza vivida e curiosa.

Più in dettaglio, il "Fondo Sabina Cuneo", pervenuto presso il Museo delle Civiltà, consta di negativi analogici in bianco e nero, realizzati, come ho anticipato, dai due autori. Si tratta, a una prima ricognizione inventariale, di 7.650 fogli da 36 fotogrammi ciascuno, la maggior parte dei quali accompagnati da provini analogici a contatto su carta, per un totale di 275.400 fotogrammi circa, di argomento etnografico, antropologico e sociologico, con particolare riferimento al sistema delle feste popolari nel Mezzogiorno italiano, continentale e insulare. A tale nucleo, che copre prevalentemente gli anni Ottanta-Novanta del Novecento, si aggiungono i file digitali, relativi al periodo 1990-2016, risultanti da scatti fotografici degli autori e da file digitali da scannerizzazione di negativi originali, di medesimo argomento dei negativi analogici, per circa 3.500.000 file, archiviati e sottoposti a un primo, preliminare, ordinamento tematico e areale, custoditi in 12 *hard disk*. Questo cospicuo materiale fotografico è accompagnato da documenti cartacei d'interesse scientifico (lettere, fogli volanti, dépliant e locandine di mostre, di convegni e dibattiti, presentazioni e iniziative varie, inviti, etc.), e da materiali sonori e audiovisivi, sia direttamente realizzati, sia acquistati, contenuti in audiocassette, videocassette, CD e DVD, in massima parte di stretta attinenza con i temi e gli argomenti presenti nella documentazione fotografica. È accompagnato, ancora, da taccuini e diari di campo, da appunti e schede di lavoro, sia manoscritti che dattiloscritti. Il Fondo si compone inoltre di un cospicuo numero di originali fotografici da negativo o da file digitale stampati dagli autori o comunque sotto loro direzione. Si tratta di circa 2.000 immagini *vintage* di formati vari, impresse su carta baritata, politenata, lambda (o supporti digitali similari); di volumi della biblioteca specialistica di antropologia, demologia, etnografia, fotografia, nonché di pubblicazioni locali legate alle occasioni d'interesse etnografico (ordinate per ambiti regionali), per circa 6.700 pezzi; di oggetti d'interesse etnologico ed antropologico di provenienza europea ed extraeuropea, raccolti durante le campagne di ricerca o in occasioni di viaggi (maschere, *ex voto*, oggetti legati alla pietà popolare, bastoni decorati, copricapo, etc.); dell'intera attrezzatura fotografica adoperata nelle campagne di ricerca.

Tracciare la biografia culturale di Sabina Cuneo, ripercorrerne le traiettorie, gli spaesamenti in giro per il mondo nei tanti luoghi in cui lei, figlia di diplomatico, ha vissuto sin da piccolissima per poi rientrare a Roma, sua città natale, nel 1971 all'età di quindici anni, è stato per me il primo passo nel percorso di comprensione del suo sguardo - dei suoi sguardi - sulla realtà².

Alla fotografia Sabina si era avvicinata per la prima volta in modo sistematico per un lavoro di ricerca sulla monumentalità funebre italiana, legato ai suoi studi di Storia dell'arte. Cominciò poi a usare la macchina fotografica come mezzo espressivo all'inizio degli anni Ottanta, influenzata dall'informale. Le sue fotografie astratte vengono esposte in tre piccole esibizioni a Roma, presso la galleria "La mente e l'immagine", nel 1993, nel 1994 e nel 1995, e in una mostra presso la Fotogalerie Wien, nel 1995. Alla fotografia etnografica, e all'antropologia, si accosta, ancor più tardi, a partire dal 1994, sull'onda delle suggestioni che promanano dagli studi e dalle fotografie di Lello Mazzacane, di Mario Cresci, di Mimmo Jodice, di Marialba Russo, di Marina Malabotti e di Francesco Faeta. Il teatro della sua ricerca sarà il Mezzogiorno d'Italia; il tema elettivo quello delle feste religiose, che la fotografa illustra con un lavoro minuzioso e capillare condotto sia in bianco e nero che a colori, prima con macchine fotografiche analogiche e poi digitali. Un lavoro di ricerca incessante - condotto, come si è detto prima, in tandem

² Per più approfondite notizie relative alla biografia di Cuneo rinvio alla voce corrispondente in Wikipedia, da me redatta con la collaborazione tecnica di Daniele Toti.

con Carmine Puzo (l'apporto di quest'ultimo all'opera complessiva esitata nel Fondo andrà attentamente vagliato nel lavoro di riordino e studio) - che la porterà a peregrinare in innumerevoli città e borghi del centro e, soprattutto, del sud Italia, con un'attenzione particolare per la Lucania. Suoi punti di riferimento in questo lavoro di ricerca, gli antropologi impegnati sul terreno al Sud. In particolare, Francesco Faeta con cui ha avuto frequenti contatti e scambi e Francesco Marano, incontrato sul terreno e più volte ritrovato in quello straordinario crocevia di vicende antropologiche ed etnografiche che è Matera.



IMMAGINE 2: Sabina Cuneo, *Il Venerdì Santo*, Procida 1997.

È troppo presto, naturalmente, per effettuare un bilancio critico relativo all'importanza del Fondo nel contesto complessivo delle ricerche italiane di etnografia europea ma, per l'ampiezza della rilevazione, per l'accuratezza dell'osservazione, per la vastità e sistematicità della produzione, per l'ampio arco temporale documentato, mi sembra di poter affermare che esso s'inserisca autorevolmente (e in linea di continuità) in quello straordinario lavoro di documentazione e studio del Mezzogiorno, condotto a partire dal contesto demartiniano, e sviluppatosi poi, a livello di rilevazione etnofotografica, con i lavori, certamente di diverso orientamento metodologico e di diversa cifra stilistica e narrativa, di Franco Pinna, Ando Gilardi, Arturo Zavattini, Annabella Rossi, Lello Mazzacane, Mario Cresci, Mimmo Jodice, Marialba Russo, Marina Malabotti, Francesco Faeta. Anche sul piano più circoscritto dell'apporto patrimoniale mi sembra che il Fondo s'inserisca con una rilevanza notevole nel contesto archivistico del MuCiv, integrando l'importante mole di documenti fotografici ivi custodita. L'auspicio è che la custodia, assai spesso sinonimo di giacenza passiva, si traduca in adeguata conservazione e intelligente valorizzazione di questo come di tutti i patrimoni culturali, che non chiedono di essere posseduti, ma condivisi. Solo nella fruizione e nella circolarità del sapere che da essa deriva, questi materiali, altrimenti inerti, torneranno a dire, a raccontare, a farci capire.

CONVERGENCE OF THE PRACTICES OF DOCUMENTARY AND CONTEMPORARY ART IN HONG KONG: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC WORKS OF TANG KWOK HIN AND LAW YUK MUI

Hoi Shan Anson Mak, *Hong Kong Baptist University*

ABSTRACT

This article is part of a research project funded by the University Grants Committee, Hong Kong. The project title is 'Convergence of Documentary Practices in Contemporary Arts in Hong Kong'. We collected 230 artworks from 31 artists/artist groups for textual analysis. Twelve artists were selected for a focus study and interviews. Eleven short edited interviews with English subtitles, together with information on the artworks and artists, are freely available online to anyone, especially researchers and teachers, interested in using the materials for their own projects. There are also artworks (with artists' permission) that go with artists' interview, hence audience can better comprehend when artists referring to their artworks. URL: <https://docuarthk.wixsite.com/research/artists-n-z> Among many findings, autoethnography is shown to anchor an interesting point of intersection across disciplines. This article explores autoethnography, originally applied as a qualitative research method, echoes with the practices in reflexive documentary and the ways being used by contemporary visual artists in Hong Kong. This writing examines autoethnographic artworks by Tang Kwok Hin and Law Yuk Mui regarding notion of homes and relational autoethnographic subjectivities.

KEYWORDS

Autoethnography, Home, Hong Kong Contemporary Arts, Experimental Ethnography

BIO

Anson Mak is a researcher-artists, specialized in moving image and sound. She currently works as Associate Professor in Academy of Visual Arts in Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong. She is especially interested in experimental ethnography and manipulation of super 8 film in the digital era. In the last 10 years, she has been doing research-creative works, bridging conventional researches methods and creative art works in the field of visual ethnography. Her works are shown in many international film festivals and exhibitions.

www.aahsun.com

Introduction: Auto-ethnography at the Junction of Various Disciplines

This article is part of a research project funded by the University Grants Committee, Hong Kong. The project title is 'Convergence of Documentary Practices in Contemporary Arts in Hong Kong'. We collected 230 artworks from 31 artists/artist groups for textual analysis. Twelve artists were selected for focus study and interviews. Eleven short edited interviews with English subtitles, together with information on the artworks and artists, are freely available online¹ to anyone interested in using the materials for their own projects and research. Among many findings, autoethnography is shown to anchor an interesting point of intersection between the two disciplines.

With Documenta creating waves every 5 years and more and more contemporary artists working on documentary-based works, studying the ways in which Hong Kong artists work has become inevitable and necessary. In the last two decades, debates, publications and conferences² across disciplines have paid increasing attention to the core issues of documentary and art, especially with regard to objectivity vs subjectivity, factual vs emotional and expressive representations (Pearce and McLaughlin 2007, Lind and Steyerl 2008, Balson and Peleg 2016). A collection of essays by contemporary artists on their own practices and perspectives has also been published (NAi Publishers 2005). Autoethnography is a vital

¹ <https://docuarthk.wixsite.com/research/artists-n-z>

² The book, *Truth or Dare, Art and Documentary*, edited by Pearce McLaughlin and published by Intellect, Bristol, UK, is a collection of conference presentations held at Whitechapel Art Gallery and Tate Modern in 2006.

anchor point of interests. It appears in documentary studies and as a qualitative research method in the field of anthropology and sociology. Autoethnography in documentary studies has proliferated under various names: personal cinema, personal documentary, domestic ethnography, video diaries, electronic essays, experimental ethnography, avant doc, etc. (Russell 1999, Renov 2004, Austin and de Jong 2008, MacDonald 2014).

At the academic debate on autoethnography as a qualitative research method, there are two diverging paradigms, as explained by Anderson (2006) in a journal article entitled 'Analytic Autoethnography'. One paradigm focuses on conventional methods of data collection (the research subject has to be visible and actively engage in the text and the research has to include informants other than the researcher/subject herself/himself) and data analysis (the researcher must analyse data on herself/himself and other informants, and s/he must submit to theoretical analysis). The other paradigm stresses contexts of engagement and experiential levels: evocative, emotionally expressive, subjective, etc. There are so many interpretations of autoethnography that pages of Chang's book *Autoethnography as Method* are dedicated to clarify the author's argument that autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details originating from anthropological and social scientific inquiry (Chang 2008: 43-51).

The following definition of autoethnography is a balanced regarding the two paradigms above, 'autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation' (Bochner and Ellis 2000: 742). In this article, I am interested more on the subjective and emotional aspects of autoethnography, issues as follows:

1. The perspectives of artists/researchers regarding research methods and fieldwork practices, reflexivity in data collection and analysis, relational subjectivities and the expression of cultural and social knowledge via emotional and artistic means. As noted by Sparkes, 'Autoethnographies can encourage acts of witnessing, empathy, and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to sociological understanding in ways that, among others, are self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, and self-luminous' (Bochner and Ellis 2002: 222).

2. The reading and interpretation of autoethnographic texts and artworks; that is, whether an audience can proactively engage in exploring self/cultural experience together with the artists/ethnographers. This is related not only to the perspective of audience's reading but also as a result of the artistic means and representation tactics. We need an active audience, not passive spectators. 'I wanted readers to feel that in describing my experience I had penetrated their heads and hearts. I hoped they would grapple with the ways they were different from and similar to me' (Ellis 1997: 131).

Decentralisation

The emerging artists Tang Kwok Hin and Law Yuk Mui were both born in the 1980s in Hong Kong. Some of their major works use method and practices of autoethnography to geographically, historically, culturally and emotionally explore and re-inscribe the notion of home(s).

The term 'central value' describes the prioritisation of Hong Kong's development as a global financial and commercial centre. The term originates from the name 'Central District', a district in the middle of Hong Kong Island that is home to most of Hong Kong's financial corporations. Central District is located at the heart of Victoria City in the colonial times. The term 'central value' also refers to the top-down centralised political control exerted by communist China. Tang is an indigenous inhabitant³ of Yuen Long (in the far northwest of Hong Kong), and Law resides in Tseung Kwan O (eastern Hong Kong), the new town developed out of Junk Bay in the 1980s. The homes of the two artists are in very different cultural and geographical settings. Tang's ancestors were residents long before the British came, whereas Tseung Kwan O, Law's current home, was a new town built by the British colonial government. Despite the differences historically and culturally, both artists focus on the edges of Hong Kong, rather

³ 'Indigenous inhabitants of the New Territories (Hong Kong)' refers solely to men (and their sons and grandsons) who were resident in Hong Kong's New Territories before 1898. They have special rights to preserve their customs and free land on which to build houses. These rights were preserved under the Hong Kong Basic Law after the handover of Hong Kong from the British to the People's Republic of China in 1997.

than its “central” areas. This is an essential and meaningful strategy for decentralisation and decolonisation, although delivered via personal trajectories.

Law held a solo show entitled *Victoria East*⁴ in Videotage, Hong Kong in 2017. She has lived in Tseung Kwan O, the former Junk Bay, since childhood. The area was named ‘Tung Hau’ (picture 1), referring to the eastern end of Victoria Harbour, in the *Convention between Great Britain and China Respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory* signed between the Qing dynasty and the British government. The British colonial government used the landfill for dumping trash until the 1980s, when Hong Kong needed space to develop new towns other than the central Kowloon area. The place was then renamed Tseung Kwan O, and is today a town with a population of 400,000. Naming the exhibition *Victoria East* rather than using the town’s name was a tactic that ironically locates the exhibition in a de-colonialised setting, reinscribing the idea of Victoria city/Victoria Harbour as anchor/centre. Through fieldwork research and the use of materials from the town’s landscape and seashore for the production of the artworks, Tseung Kwan O could then be reclaimed as a powerful subject or (re)-centre of Hong Kong, not the ‘other side’ east of Central. I shall explain Law’s work in details in later sections. Geographically, Tang’s exploration of an area in the far northwest of Hong Kong, Yuen Long, which covers history, traditions and the notion of home, is based on a similar strategy of decentralisation to search for and inquire into identity. However, I should emphasise that decolonisation as a discourse is not a defining quality or aim of Tang’s or Law’s artworks, but a by-product. Both their artworks and this article focus on auto-ethnographic experience, the production of cultural knowledge and the depth and subtlety of emotional connection between the artists and their subjects.

In an interview conducted for this research, Tang said, ‘I did not pay attention at all to politics when I was young. Not until I went to university did I start to notice the news and social issues. I repeatedly tell this very story that I went to the city for the first time only when I was 18 years old. Being an indigenous inhabitant is a very special identity that made me rethink a lot of issues, including power structures and the right to own land... It also made me think about issues of inter-generations, as I live so very differently from my parents. There are certain kinds of contradictions – regarding inter-generations, regarding my own life in the village and in the city. Then I wanted to start exploring myself, my home and my family.’

This long reflective process of gradual realisation of the ways political and cultural identity mutually shape one and other resulting in changing inter-subjectivities, is exactly the decolonialisation process. Studying and reflecting upon self and familial relations for cultural and political implications is actually also, the method of autoethnography.

Tang then developed an interest in re-observing the customs of his village and the ways of life of his parents and other relatives living there, with which he seems to be very familiar of. He used a video camera as a tool for his re-exploration of various special customs, such as the Mid-Autumn Festival and Linear New Year. As a visual artist with a fine art background, he is also interested in materiality, objects and his (grand-)grandfather’s belongings. These objects and their cultural materiality carry great significance and traces of history of the village and its community.

Grandpa Tang is an exhibition/installation⁵ accompanied by a single channel video⁶ and objects. In the exhibition space (photographs 2-7), Tang uses everyday objects owned by his grandfather and ancestors from 1800 to the 2000s. These objects include family photographs, letters and pieces of writing, records, drawings by Tang’s grandfather’s father, boxes, cabinets and medicinal oil. The objects are either hanging on the wall or put in cabinets. They are rare and important items that should be preserved as part of local community history, which have been neglected in Hong Kong’s grand narrative history. The raw concrete space of the exhibition is in sharp contrast with the homely objects. This alienating effect mirrors the contradiction of Tang’s own identity as a villager yet in this big cosmopolitan Hong Kong. Due to the delicate texture of papers, the private handwriting, the fading colours of the drawings and Tang’s decision to install these small objects on the walls, viewers must get really close in order to see them. This setting and the resulting act of close-seeing, all contribute to the reflection of the sense of distance with our families/ancestors and history in an intense emotional dimension. Hence, it goes far

⁴ *Victoria East*, exhibition documentation <http://www.lawyukmui.com/portfolio/victoriaeast/>.

⁵ There are several versions of the exhibition; this is the most recent one (2017) at the time of writing: <http://www.tangkwokhin.com/2019/03/grandpa-tang-2017.html>.

⁶ Grandpa Tang, video URL: <http://vimeo.com/240440282> 14 min.

beyond mere presentation of fieldwork materials, but demonstrating ethnographic knowledge in a deep emotive realm. The exhibition also turns, both Tang and the audience into witnesses to all of these fading materials that can be easily destroyed. Ellis writes about the interaction between autoethnographic texts and their receivers. 'My open text consciously permitted readers to move back and for the between being in my story and being in theirs, where they could fill in or compare their experiences and provide their own sensitivities about what was going on' (Ellis 1997: 131). We as audience witness the objects of histories together with Tang, flowing back and forth within Hong Kong's historical time and back and forth between Tang's and our own family stories, emotions and conflicts with ancestors and history.

Re-exploring the notion of home through the lack of memory

Autobiography, often discussed alongside autoethnography, works through memories. In the last 40 years, people have become increasingly interested in self-narratives, as demonstrated in the shift from novels to memoirs (Chang 2008: 32) and from expensive ethnographic films to low-budget (or even zero-cost) video diaries (Renno 2004: 171-180). Memoirs and video diaries all work through memories, unfolding personal experiences into a public representation. Benjamin's *Berlin Chronicle* may be one of the most frequently cited texts on how autobiography places memories front and centre. What I found interesting about the autoethnographic works of Tang and Law, however, is that they work the other way around. The artists conducted their research due to a *lack* of memory, a *lack* of archival materials and historical documents, and thus a lack of ways to review and understand the past that actually shapes the present, and also the future.

Russell writes about the conventional ethnographic film, which is based in social observation and seeks to present a form of cultural knowledge; yet the colonial context makes this knowledge bound to produce otherness. However, in her view, this otherness should not be 'vanished.' Instead, it 'can be transformed, expanded and modified as otherness is still very much with us as new hierarchies and forms of differences are constantly being produced in postcolonial culture' (Russell 1999: 10-11). Such a transformation should not diminish otherness but rather liberate from within, from artists' own subjectivities and identities. In post-colonial Hong Kong, people have long lacked memories of their own community/homes and local history. Both Tang and Law respond to the *lack*, as a reason to set off their autoethnographic journeys: for Law, missing information on the original landscape before the artificial rendering of the coastline by the reclamation of land for Tseung Kwan O; and for Tang, missing information of the origins of the everyday-life customs of his family's (and his very own) village. These are the 'outer' subjects the artists want to observe, participate in, re-explore, re-inscribe and eventually liberate from. This "lack" is essential cultural knowledge due to the colonial political conditioning. Hence, the self and the other are placed and aligned on the same plane, transformed from within, culturally and politically.

The single channel video in *Grandpa Tang* exhibition/installation starts with several close-ups on objects. The first is an old black and white wedding photograph of Tang's grandfather and grandmother (pic 8). It is staged not as a photograph but as a framed photograph (an object) hanging on the wall, as is customary among elder generations in Hong Kong. Family photographs are part of the spatial arrangement of homes. Thus, regarding representation of the artwork, the photograph is not merely an photograph in itself but as an cultural object placed at home that makes specific notion of home. The cultural context and ways of life of Tang's parents' generation, handed down from their ancestors, are then further emphasised. Only until Tang's generation does this spatial practice – hanging family photographs on the wall ceases, which metaphorically points to the changing notion of homes.

Major festivals, in particular, amplify unique cultural patterns. The beginning shot of the *Grandpa Tang*, on the photograph on the wall is followed by a close-up of Tang's father's hand as he tidies up in preparation for the Mid-Autumn Festival, which is one of the most important traditional festivals. It stresses family unions/gatherings. The full moon symbolically suggests a full union of family members. In Tang's village, most people are relatives, forming a big "Tang family". The festival itself demonstrates the unique clustering of big single-surname families of Hong Kong indigenous inhabitants in villages. Festivals traditionally pay tribute to ancestors with ceremonial practices that have been passed on from generation to generation. Lunar New Year is another major festival. The video shows Tang himself getting rid of the old and redoing a new couplet in red on both sides of the door. This is an important

tradition to indicate a new beginning and a new year with good fortune to come. We hear the voice of his father teaching him how to align the couplet correctly. We see the artist doing an everyday task, a traditional act that is what his father and his grandfather's fathers repeatedly did for years. In a way, traditions, as cultural patterns, are repeated performances from which later generations can learn and uphold. I saw the artist's posting of red couplets as a performance of his own identity, the expectations of his parents and his self-reflections, which differ from and yet still relate to tradition and the complex thoughts regarding the idea of home. For Tang, a camera is like an attentive inner and outer eye, searching for people, stories and objects that generally remain unnoticed, and placing reflections and thus representations of the self and others on an equal plane as a kind of exploration of inter-subjectivities.

This is how domestic ethnography plays out in the inner and outer spaces of the lives of the subjects under study, who are also the art-makers themselves. Domestic ethnography refers to 'work engages in the documentation of family members or, less literally, of people with whom the maker has maintained long-standing everyday relations and has thus achieved a level of casual intimacy. Because the lives of artist and subject are interlaced through communal or blood ties, the documentation of the one tends to implicate the other in complicated ways; indeed, consanguinity and *co(i)mplication* are domestic ethnography's defining features. By *co(i)mplication* I mean both complexity and the interpenetration of subject/object identities. To pursue the point yet further, one could say that domestic ethnography is a kind of supplementary autobiographical practice; it functions as a vehicle of self-examination, a means through which to construct self-knowledge through recourse to the familial order' (Renov 2004: 218).

Psychological truths

To extend further the discussion of domestic ethnography related to a lack of memory, Tang has another very interesting work, entitled *Nancy*,⁷ which is about his unborn sister. The video is a top down fixed frame shoot overlooking a photo album that his mother's hands flipping through page by page. As she looks through the photographs, so does the audience at the same (limited and fixed) speed (picture 9). Tang collected photographs from the Internet of girls named Nancy, composing his imaginary sister. As he only knew about bits and pieces of his mother's experience, he wanted to connect with his mother via a fictional narrative of his unborn sister. He stages a viewing of the photographs at the same time as his mother, interrogating family histories, questioning family relationships and supplement the lack of memory of a family member through this fictional intervention. Interestingly though, the photographs are real (from the Internet of girls called Nancy), depicting Nancy(s)' studies, birthday parties, picnics, travelling and gathering with friends. The mother's experience of her unborn child, her hands and her experience of reading the photo album are also real yet on a ironized fictional photo album. '(D)omestic ethnography offers up the maker and her subject locked in a family embraced; indeed, as we have seen, subject/object positions are at times reversed' (Renov 2004: 229). In this case, subject/object positions are beyond reversed; they are blended. The absent subject, Nancy, points to the psychological truth of Tang's mother, and Tang's own lack of memory all become subjects of the artwork, and the expressive dimension of the emotional touch.

The structure of the video includes inter-titles that create punctuated moments of pause for thoughts while looking at the photographs. The inter-titles are in the first person voice of Tang, as if a brother were talking to his fictional sister, the 'I' and 'you'. The voices are real, explaining that Tang's father still talks about his unknown daughter, and expressing how Tang misses Nancy and tries to find her traces in various places. These are all real emotions of Tang. In the process of searching, the artist fills in the 'lack', and the missing affection, to sketch a hidden family history and story that aims not as outer facts but inner reflections and perhaps innermost emotions.

The expressive quality of the visual work lies in the images themselves. The formation of the ethnographic experience involves looking at past photographs as a form of fictional narration, bouncing back and forth between Nancy's (and Tang's) family stories and the audience's own experience. The

⁷ *Nancy* 2017 exhibition documentation <http://www.tangkwokhin.com/2017/06/nancy.html>.

Video URL: <http://vimeo.com/220284314>, 8 min.

Installation view URL: <http://vimeo.com/220340542>, 4 min.

experience of looking at the album, with the speed of Tang's mother's hands flipping through the photograph album and the pauses created by Tang's "voice" in the form of inter-titles, along with the experience of looking at the content of the photographs, which echoes people's common expectations of reviewing photographs from everyday life to 'remember' important moments in life (in this case, the absence of life), work together with the audience's own experience of the relationship between siblings. Truth in auto-ethnography is often internal; psychological rather than external. Watching the dry-skinned aging hands of Tang's mother flipping through photographs of her unborn fictional daughter is the most touching moment of the video.

'Self-representation likewise shifts into something much more fluid and open, discursive and intersexual, even fictional and fantastic' (Russell 1999: 314).

Expressive formal experimentation

The expressive formal experimentation in *Grandpa Tang* is executed through the aesthetic of fixed frame close-up shoots. The video comprises a series of close-up shoots from the beginning until the middle of the work. A journey into family memories is set off by an old wedding photograph of Tang's grandfather hanging on the wall, followed by close-ups of the hands of Tang's father and other objects and food for the Mid-Autumn Festival, such as cups, fruits (grapefruit and taro), joss paper, paper money and incense, which are burned as a tribute to ancestors. Close-ups shots are normally used to amplify the impact of objects and are often used as giving details out of an overall environment in conventional cinematic language. Close-ups tend to serve as supplementary detailed information in general situations. However, Tang uses close-ups without wide shots to deliver information of general conditions. Hence, the close-ups shots defamiliarise everyday life, stripping away its usual connotations by amplifying textuality and materiality of objects, not the event-orientated information. This alienated and segmented presentation suggests a different perspective to both Tang and the audience to re-observe and re-examine the activities and relationships of families (traditional villagers) in this cultural festival and setting. He focuses on objects and investigates ways in which the materiality of objects conveys his observations and feelings. The work is developed further in abstractions through images of burning paper and incense, fireworks in the sky, smoke rising from fire against the night sky and a blurry full moon, alongside mundane chat between Tang and her mother. Hearing these voices, cultural context fades away, becoming secondary and serving as mere background. There is no information on where, what or why. This type of work is quite commonly being criticised as a lack of useful 'information' and 'ethnographic knowledge'. Yet, I take it as a form of autoethnography, which is often 'opaque, circuitous, in pieces' (Austin and Jong 2008: 46). It is 'opaque' in the genuine expression of affection and emotion of the artist (who is also the subject being studied); circuitous in its subtle and poetic aesthetics, which require active interpretation from the audience on the cultural objects and events; and in pieces in terms of its complex and barely conveyable internal inquiry of inter-subjectivities.

In the video work, not until the part on Lunar New Year do images turn into wide shots delivering relatively more informative situations, presenting the traditional activities for instance, sharing roast pork, greetings and 'poon Choi' gatherings.⁸ The video work moves between defamiliarised close-ups of everyday objects and contextualised depictions of the unique cultural traditions and activities of the village, caught by Tang's reflective eyes for participant observation, re-observing people and events with which he has been familiar for many years. '(D)omestic ethnography of the sort I am outlining is exclusively an exercise in self-inscription. Put another way, these works could be said to enact a kind of participant observation that illumines the familial other while simultaneously refracting a self-image' (Renov 2004: 219).

Law's formal experimentation also heavily relies on abstraction and defamiliarisation. Similar to Tang, as an artist with a fine art background, she is interested in materiality, yet lies in natural landscape, for instance trees, hills and sea. In a work entitled *On Junk Bay, The Plant: 1990 – present*, a video installation,⁹ Law re-explores the landscape of a hill that she passes every day. One must pass through

⁸ A tradition of families gathering for dinner, eating outdoors in large groups and putting many dishes in a big bowl shared by everyone seated at a round table. This tradition is common among Hong Kong's indigenous inhabitants.

⁹ *On Junk Bay, The Plant: 1990 – present*:

<http://www.lawyukmui.com/portfolio/on-junk-bay-the-plant-1990/>.

hills to enter the town of Tseung Kwan O, which was created by reclaimed land. The landscape of the hill has become a routine visual experience for residents of Tseung Kwan O. It is an everyday, mundane landscape seen repeatedly from the bus window. Buildings in the public housing estate in which Law lives are named after plants¹⁰. For Law, plants, trees and hills have become personalized iconic symbols denoting the idea of home. In the installation work (picture 10), various types of plants are placed in low light interacting with the projection, casting shadows on the walls. Among these shadows is a video work.

This video work¹¹ is composed of a one-take shot along the road to Tseung Kwan O, an everyday visual experience for Law. She substantially slows down both the sound and the images to extend the momentary experience of a repetitive dull routine. The visuals are accompanied by text on screen, with no voices. We hear the artist's voice in our minds by reading the text, offering us something resembling a personal chat. Due to the extremely slow speed of the video, we can see trees which originally is fast moving view of landscape from cars, in details. The images work with the actual sound distorted by slow speed. The processes of looking and listening dramatically extend over time. In the text on screen, Law explains where she lives, the names of the plants/buildings we see and her curiosity about the trees in the hill, which had been there long before the town was built by reclamation. The trees and hill are the object and landscape of the pre-town history, which is exactly the lack in Law's memories and records of this history. It also renders an analogy of rich varieties of and good survival of plants on the hill to ways of life of people living in Tseung Kwan O.

Hong Kong is an immigrant city. In the 1940s-50s (when the Communist Party took over China) and the 1960s and 1970s (during China's Cultural Revolution), numerous people immigrated illegally to Hong Kong, including Law's mother. In addition, the British built new towns in Hong Kong and brought people in through public housing projects. Law and her family were moved to Tseung Kwan O as part of this trajectory. Their migration was a path to rebuild home, yet this was an unstable notion of home, creating unique memories for temporary homes that is a shared experience to many Hong Kong people. This in fact is a strong contrast to the idea of homes of indigenous villagers with fixed geographical and familial ties for Tang. In the book *Documentary Now*, which gathers the notes of contemporary artists doing documentary-based works, Marjoleine Boonstra writes, 'Documentary for me means a story where there's a clear concept, where image, sound and narrative line represent different layers and emotions. It is a construction in which you can discover things, create a new reality. With a line of approach that condenses and orders things in such a way that the film's intention become clear. The poetry of reality.' (NAi Publishers 2005: 119-120) 'The poetry of reality' is an appropriate description of the formal strategy and aesthetic of Law's works.

Research Methods and Fieldwork

Curiosity about the pre-town history of Tseung Kwan O led Law to work further on the area -- her solo show entitled *Victoria East*¹² (2017). Before describing and analysing the exhibition, Law's research methods should be discussed. Her fieldwork practice is not merely a tool for collecting materials. Rather, bodily and emotional experience during fieldwork is also accounted for the aesthetic decisions of the artworks and the setting of the installation in the exhibition. Fieldwork is not neutral, and contemporary artists conducting research do not produce mere ethnographic data. It is their experience *as* the artworks themselves.

The following description of detailed fieldwork is from an interview I conducted with Law. Originally, she wanted to find a particular hill in Tseung Kwan O, which can match the shape of a hill in an archival photograph. She hiked up a hill in Sau Kei Wan (east of Hong Kong Island) and realised that high-rise buildings in Tseung Kwan O town blocked the view of the hills. Hence, she decided to travel by boat to a small island in Sai Kung (on the eastern tip of the New Territories) and hiked up the small hill there. At that point, she could finally see the hill she had been looking for but at the back. As the view of one side of the hill was blocked, she had to move around to the other side to see and photograph it. She

¹⁰ King Lam Estate. In Chinese: 景林 means landscape and trees. It is a public housing estate began in 1990 in Tseung Kwan O.

¹¹ Video URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaE9rvnoS2Y>

¹² *Victoria East* URL: <http://www.lawyukmui.com/portfolio/victoriaeast/>

found this fieldwork experience very interesting because it was like a bodily performance -- using her body to interact with the hill. This fieldwork experience guided her to include slide images (photographs) of the hill (present and past), a map of her sea trip and the locations of the hills, and a video of the sea (above and beneath the surface of the water) in the final presentation of the exhibition.

For Law, the most important issue is the discovery of her physical and psychological reflections during her fieldwork experience in which bodily experience is essential. The fact that she could not see the hill on one side motivated her to travel by boat across the sea to a small island. As a result, she discovered the shape of the coastline, which was not the original aim of her fieldwork. On approaching the Tseung Kwan O cemetery, she realised that the coastline was artificially straightened due to reclamation, that was very different from the natural coastline. The contrast between the visually straight and naturally curved lines made Law decide to produce a sculpture. The only remaining original natural coastline in the town, was cast on a metal plate as a sculpture, with a video documentation of the casting and welding, as part of the exhibition.

The exhibition comprises three video projections. The biggest one, at the centre, is displayed on a transparent screen (picture 11). It shows the seascape (above and beneath the surface of the water), accompanied by sound obtained by underwater hydrophone. As the screen is transparent, the underwater images fall on the screen, walls and floors (as if the floor were the sea). The audience is overwhelmed and surrounded by a seascape that represents the pre-town history of Tseung Kwan O, in which the land we walk on today was originally the sea. It is a highly poetic and emotional representation of the history of a town, geographically and spatially. The second video documents a technician casting and welding the shape of the natural coastline on a metal plate, and the metal plate is also part of the exhibition (picture 12-13), set behind the main video projection.

The third video is an abstract image of a flapping flag (picture 14) that is another set of work in the solo exhibition. Tseung Kwan O has a special political history. Tiu Keng Leng which located in the area of Tseung Kwan O, was once a village housing former Kuomintang officials and their followers who had escaped to Hong Kong from China after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). National flags of Taiwan were put up everywhere in the village, and the British allowed them. In the 1990s, and approaching the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China, the Hong Kong government decided to clear the area, along with the new town planning of Tseung Kwan O. This is not a hidden history, but was planned to be forgotten. She sets up a desk with a small lamp, with photographs of the landscape, people and objects of Tiu Keng Leng on the desk, similar to a domestic environment at home. The abstract seascape images reflected all over the exhibition space, contrasting with the domestic homely setting of the desk, photographs on desk and small lamp. Via this artistic and cultural ethnographic fieldwork presentation, it recomposes and questions both Law's and our own understanding of homes and history -- Tseung Kwan O history and Hong Kong history, Tseung Kwan O as home and Hong Kong as home. The exhibition has created an unique and reflexive spatial and cultural experience for the audience about Tseung Kwan O. 'Subjectivity subsists within image culture as an "other reality" -- a utopian space where parallel universe is linear neither in time nor in space, moving across histories and geographies to produce a dialectics of cultural representation' (Russell 199: 313).

Conclusion: Autoethnographic Text

I wish to render this conclusion in autoethnographic form, as my very own autoethnographic text. As a researcher-artist with a background in film/cinema who does experimental ethnography and currently teaches at a contemporary visual art school, I have been pulled and pushed by various forces -- academic, artistic, familial, activism. I have been asked the question 'Why do I have to watch your story?' innumerable times since the late 1990s. On learning about autoethnography, I was better able to articulate my answer. I still remember how shocked I was on reading a book on autoethnography (2003) by Carolyn Ellis that describes the author teaching a class on autoethnography as the book itself. It is constituted by descriptions of context, people, emotions, relationships and events that are as detailed as field notes, as touching as a novel. 'Oh, this echoes the reflexive nature of modernist cinema and personal essay film, and the notion of form as content and the process as the artwork in contemporary art!' I exclaimed to myself.

I shall also never forget Susanne Gannon's *Sketching Subjectivities* (Jones, Adams and Ellis 2013: 228-243), which comprises an academic debate in the first half and a personal letter to Ellis in the second half about their shared experience of losing family members. Scholars like Renov and Ellis have written about autoethnography for more than three decades and are still facing challenges. I was astonished to find that Tang and Law, visual artists from a fine art background, make autoethnographic works so very well, and yet without stressing this purpose or even being aware of it. Their genuine intention to explore life and the expressive, poetic qualities of their artworks along with cultural ethnographic knowledge have touched my heart. And yes, I consider this to be an academic finding, a personal finding and an essential insight.

FIGURES

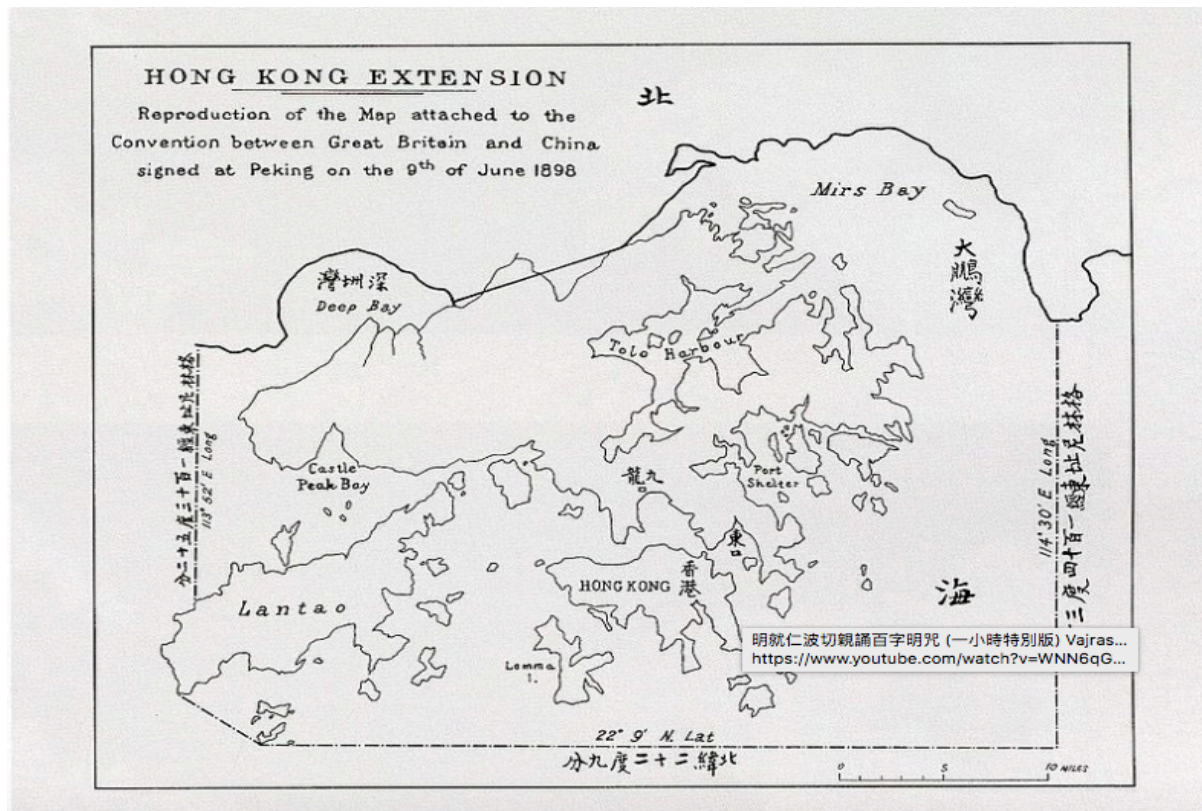


FIGURE 1: Tung Hau” which refers to the eastern end of Victoria Harbour, at *Convention between Great Britain and China Respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory*







FIGURE 2-7: from <http://www.tangkwokhin.com/2019/03/grandpa-tang-2017.html> Grandpa Tang Installation view



FIGURE 8: *Grandpa Tang* (video screen shot)



FIGURE 9: *Nancy*

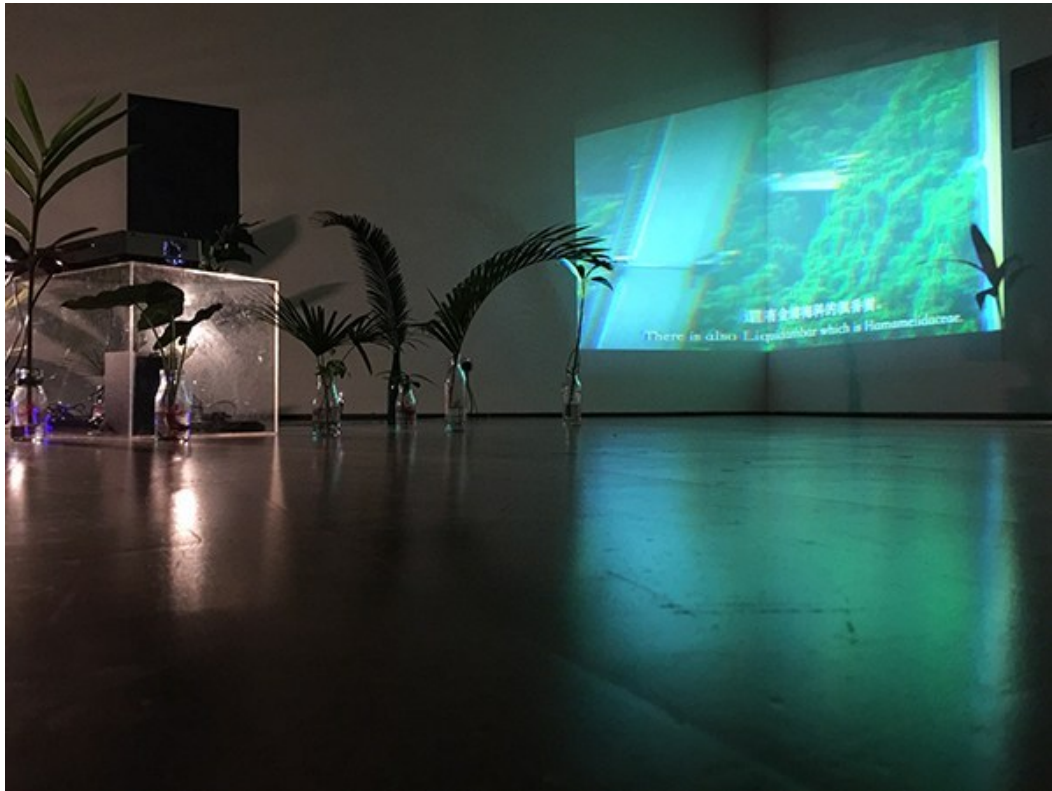


FIGURE 10: Installation view of *On Junk Bay, The Plant : 1990 – present*



FIGURE 11: Transparent screen and the video falling on screen, floor and walls, at installation, *Victoria East*.

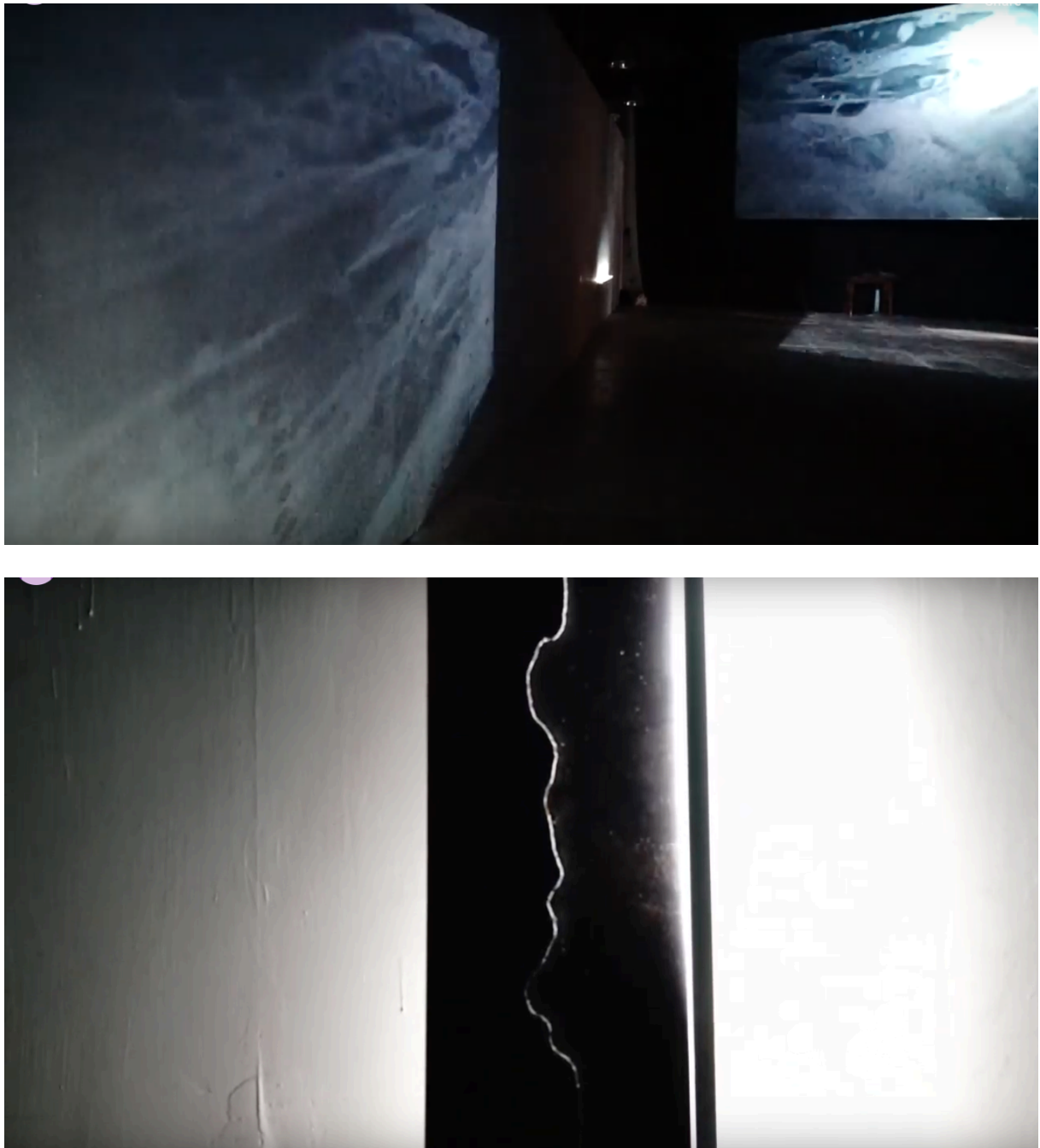


FIGURE 12-13: The second video is the documentation of a technician welding the natural coastline on a metal plate, and the metal plate is also part of the exhibition, set behind the main video projection, at installation, *Victoria East*.

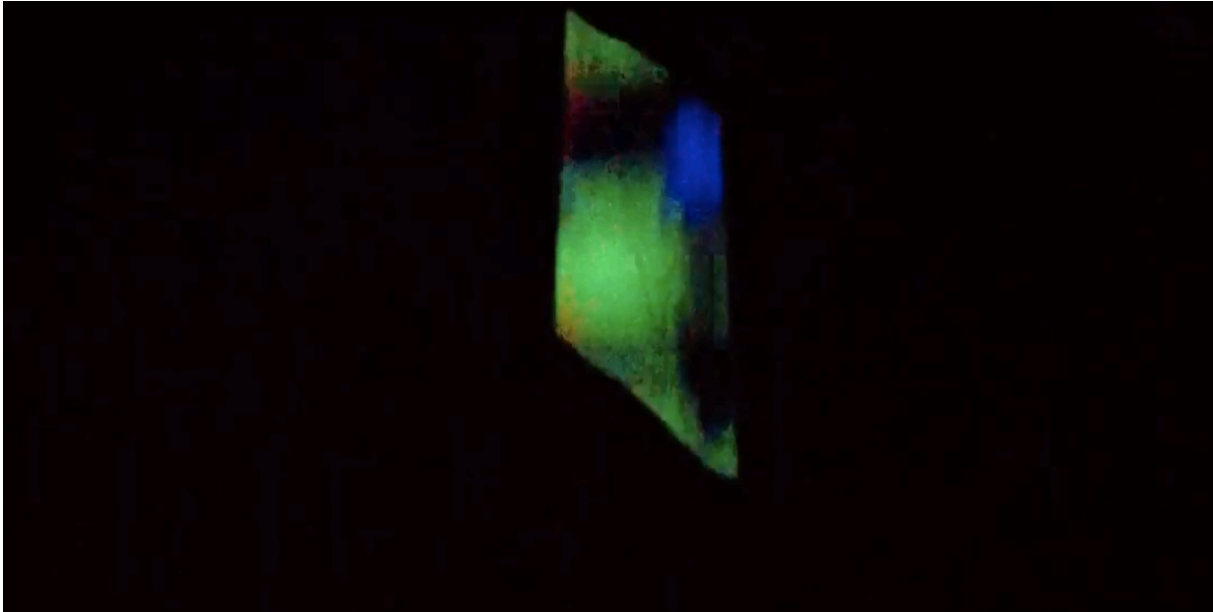


FIGURE 14: An abstract video of a flapping flat about Tiu Keng Leng. at installation, *Victoria East*.

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POETIC VISUALITY. AN ESSAY ON THE CARCERAL EXPERIENCE

Martha-Cecilia Dietrich, *University of Bern*

ABSTRACT

This photo essay is the result of a research project conducted in collaboration with TIP (Theatre in Prison and Probation) over a period of two months as part of a weekly drama workshop inside HMP Styal - one of fourteen women's prisons in the UK. Based on applied theatre methods and the participatory use of photography, the aim was to create a dialogue with eight women inmates by evoking and exploring the experience of imprisonment.

Capacities were limited due to spatial restrictions and prison regulations, but the spoken word fell short to describe the extraordinary experience of ordinary people in prison. With the participants involvement, we arrived at a methodology that at its core considered photography as a form of dialogic engagement. Facilitating the use of a camera and contributing to the creative process of crafting images that elicit a sense of 'imprisonment as experience' inspired us to think about 'poetic visuality' as a form of ethnographic inquiry and expression.

Participatory photography, as particular mode of producing knowledge, reveals the relationship between form and meaning, experience and expression, however incomplete these articulations may be. It is precisely this incompleteness that leaves space for author and audience to imagine the carceral experience, not as reproduction, but as authored evocation.

By expanding our ethnographic tools beyond the written word, does however not absolve the ethnographer from the ethically and epistemologically problematic legacies of the discipline, nor from the power regimes that underpin such technological practices (Takaragawa et.al. 2019). The potential for re-thinking the prison experience lies in recognising and exploring positionalities and relationships between persons as well as their technological appropriations.

KEYWORDS

prison, experience-led ethnography, participatory methods, photography, poetry

BIO

Martha-Cecilia Dietrich is a lecturer, filmmaker and post-doctoral fellow at the University of Bern. She completed her PhD in Social Anthropology with Visual Media at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in 2015. She is a researcher in residence at the Summer School at The Futureworks School of Media in Manchester, where she specialises in participatory and collaborative filmmaking methods and editing support. Her research is situated in the fields of political anthropology, memory in post-conflict settings and filmmaking as research method.

martha-cecilia.dietrich@anthro.unibe.ch

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By expanding our ethnographic tools beyond the written word, does however not absolve the ethnographer from the ethically and epistemologically problematic legacies of the discipline, nor from the power regimes that underpin such technological practices (Takaragawa et.al. 2019). The potential for re-thinking the prison experience lies in recognising and exploring positionalities and relationships between persons as well as their technological appropriations.

A sense of Styal

The space is marked by ten feet tall fences and its heavy steel doors are the only gateways in and out of prison. When entering or leaving, our equipment was thoroughly checked since cables and other parts may disappear and be used as means for self-harm or attempts of suicide, which in the last decade has become a problematic issue for this particular prison¹.

HMP Styal is set in Cheshire, south of Manchester, on the edge of a small village bearing the same name. The facility is surrounded by fields and thin woodland. Styal is one of the largest closed female prisons in the UK with over 450 inmates (as of February 2017). From the 1890's the main prison buildings served as an orphanage until 1956 housing over 350 children. In the beginning of the 1960's the Victorian cottages were adapted to house a women's prison, which opened its gates in 1962. Later, in 1999 a wing or block in a more conventional prison style, was added at the eastern edge of the cottages. There are other buildings spread around the area that serve as chapel, gym, library or administrative facilities. Women are organised into households, each having communitarian rights and duties to meet. There is a distinct atmosphere of a separate and contained society underlined by a feeling that something is about to burst at any moment. Walking through the cottages, women sit behind barred windows, waving, shouting or asking questions from above. There are houses for younger and older inmates, for the mentally-ill and for those who struggle being locked up with others. In the houses, private space is limited and often shared with up to six other inmates. Outside, the occasional bleat of a goat or the twitter of a duck from the neighbouring tranquillity area is followed by sounds of keys and heavy doors opening or closing. High security fences, cameras and people in uniforms are a reminder of where we are. A siren announces the end of a working day. A huge flow of women starts moving towards the dining halls. The pace of movement is slow. No one is running or moving against the flow. Movement appears confined to the parameters of departure and arrival. Actions within the common areas and hallways is prescribed by codes of conduct and marked by the repetitive processes of a daily routine. It is a "daily cycle of movement giving expression to the boundaries of their universe and the division within the totality". (Ardner 1997: 43)

Styal accepts adult prisoners and, in some cases, young offenders. According to Styal's governor Kate Robinson, around 80% of the women have a serious drug or alcohol addiction, up to 60% have been victims of physical or sexual abuse and about 30% have harmed themselves before coming into prison. The crimes they have been charged for vary as do the scale of their sentences, with some women staying for days and others for life. According to several statistics collected by the UK Home Office most female offenders come from very different, but difficult backgrounds. Once inside, inmates have to build an identity, an existence adapted to the constraints of being imprisoned. "The 'theatre of action' to some extent determines the action". (Ardner 1997: 2) Social life in prison is shaped by divisions and hierarchies between inmates and inmates and staff. Space, as much as time, is an ambiguous components in prison life. "Doing time" means to wait until a specific amount of time has passed. Each day new prisoners arrive and others leave shaping the overall construction of a social (in-) continuity between the inmates and reinforcing the notion of temporality.

¹ BBC documentary on Styal Prison (2004): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H58pY4NLXB4>

“Inside outside, outside in, where does life begin?” (inmates quote)²

Very early in the project, two concepts began to encompass our dialogues and interactions: that of absence and presence. Even though in a prison context these terms are often understood in their actual physicality, during our workshops, they were important signifiers to describe disrupted notions of being and belonging that cut much deeper than their literal meaning. With terms like “inside”, our research participants referred to different forms of presence: “inside my head”, “inside my cell” or “inside a system that is forced upon me”. Prison for some is a form of punishment or an exercise to separate good people from bad people. For others, it is a way to dip into temporary ease and escape unbearable lives and difficult decisions. And there are those for whom prison is a place that offers reflection, recovery and improvement. For most it is all three things at different times. Outside signified spaces beyond the prison walls with undefined boundaries and a fragile freedom. Outside could be a dangerous place full of overbearing responsibilities and evil temptations. In their experienced simultaneity, notions of absence and presence blur an imagined separation that binds existence to place. Inside and outside - absence and presence are in a contradictory, but complimentary, divided, but aligned relationship shaping the women's overall experience of their reality. As one of the prisoners said: “they just are”.

Approaching research in prison

Most conversations about prisons focus around policies and institutions that form part of what we know as the criminal justice system. There have been plenty of debates which inspired a critical look at the logics, methods and politics underpinning these “correctional” systems and the facilities that implement them. Fewer discussions, particularly within anthropology have sought to answer perhaps more philosophical questions like, why we punish and what we want punishment to do (Liebling 2005). Almost immediately, we are confronted with enormous questions like, what is justice, which moral values underpin it and how can justice be put into practice? Disciplines like psychiatry, psychology, sociology, criminology, and to some extent modern philosophy have been central to analysing logics, structures and socio-cultural dynamics of crime and punishment throughout the 20th century. (Foucault 1965, 1979; Leps 1992) In more contemporary work, as Lorna Rhodes stresses in her article “Towards an Anthropology of Prisons”, the drawing of the kneeling prisoner illustrated by Foucault’s discussion of Bentham’s panopticon remains an icon of disciplinary subjection and an “omnipresent subtext in discussions of the modern interpenetration of power and knowledge”. (Rhodes 2001: 65) A raising awareness on correlations between the social texture of society and the prison population (Wacquant 2000), has invited to extend the gaze from the prison microcosm to broader networks and relationships of power, private capital and political decision-making. An enormous body of work is dedicated to solving the flaws in the system and to transform the idea of imprisonment as a form of retribution to a more comprehensive approach. “Crime prevention”, “inmate rehabilitation” and “punishment diversification”, are the new guiding concepts in discourses that seek to transform the prison experience (Uggen et. al. 2006, Kleis 2010). At times however, politics seems unresponsive to such developments. In 2014, the UK’s justice secretary Chris Grayling decided to re-introduce correctional measures like compulsory uniforms, banning books from being sent to prisoners, and turning cell lights off at 10.30 pm in institutions for young offenders. Fortunately, these measures, proven to instil depression and anxiety among prisoners, were short-lived³, but examples like these are a clear indication for the public’s division over possible routes of dealing with presumed criminals. In this context, research has a responsibility towards building arguments that may improve, if not fundamentally rethinking the system.

The challenges of getting access to highly regulated environments in which research is constrained, makes experience-led ethnography in prisons a frustrating endeavour. Understanding the prison experience without experiencing prison as prisoners, poses another methodological as well as ethical challenge. Anthropologists, who entered the interior life of prisons as interviewers (Feldman 1991, Thomas 1993, Timbur 2009), workshop facilitators (Dietrich 2009, Corral 2014), or slipping into the role of staff (Fleisher 1989), each inspired a critical reflection on the ways ethnographic research in prisons is designed and conducted.

² In accordance with prison regulations we have refrained from publishing names of inmates who participated in this project.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jul/26/from-court-fees-to-a-books-ban-chris-grayling-short-lived-justice-policies>

For this project, our participants considered TIP's facilitators and me as part of the institution. We used the same entrance as people working in prison, but without the uniforms. A visitor's card made the difference and different to the officers, we were assumed to be there not to contain, but to entertain. The participants' motivation grew with the idea that expressing their experiences to us would contribute towards institutional change. And if that was too much to expect, they would still improve their prison record getting points for extra curricula activities. This was the basis for our dialogue.



FIGURE 1: Birdview Styal Prison



FIGURE 2: Applied Theatre Workshop with TIP



FIGURE 3: Fight and Defence



FIGURE 4: What's Me



FIGURE 5: The system beats you



FIGURE 6: Feel yourself



FIGURE 7: Togetherness



FIGURE 8: Facing bars



FIGURE 9: What to do



FIGURE 10: No title

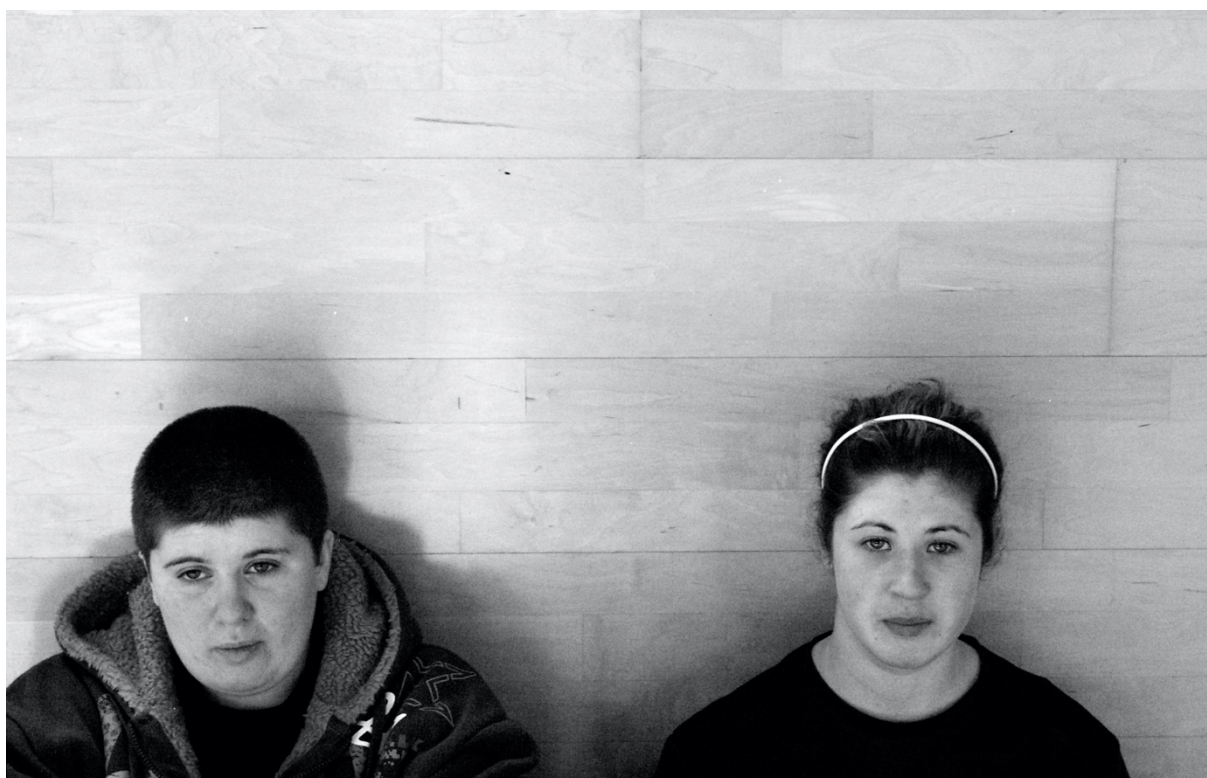


FIGURE 11: No title

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INDIAN POST-DIGITAL AESTHETICS

Katja Müller, *Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg*
Rajkamal Aich, *creative director at TV18*

ABSTRACT

The artwork by Rajkamal Aich, presented in this photo-essay, is an example of post-digital aesthetics. His work combines photography with drawing and thereby creates new visions and contexts of mundane objects. A deconstruction of his work and an evaluation of the production context allow an understanding of this decidedly Indian form of what has been called post-digital aesthetics. Viewing and analysing his artwork provides an understanding of one contemporary form of art in India, as it develops at the crossroads of photography, digital art and classical painting.

KEYWORDS

India, digital photography, art, photography, visual art, painting, Indian art

BIO

Katja Müller is a social anthropologist with research interests in visual anthropology, material culture, museum and digital anthropology, as well as environmental anthropology. She has been with the Leipzig ethnographic museum for three years, and received her PhD with a thesis on colonial photographs and objects from India. In 2015 she joined the Halle University, where she is researching digitization of cultural heritage. For this work she has been affiliated with the Centre for Digital Anthropology, UCL London. Additionally, since 2014 she has been working for UTSydney on coal and renewable energy projects.

Rajkamal Aich is a data visualizer, infographist and photographer based in India. He received his Bachelor of visual arts from Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata, and has been working with Times of India and Economic Times, among others. In 2016 he became art director at TV 18. His artwork and paintings has been featured nationally and internationally in newspapers, magazines, books and online media.

www.katjamueller.org
www.rajkamalaich.com

Post-digital aesthetics

Post-digital aesthetics has gained ground and attention as a term for contemporary art produced with digital means, albeit with focus decidedly on Euro-American art production. It is situated in a European art tradition that tries to term eras of art, such as postmodernism or impressionism. Post-digital art is less to be understood as art after the digital age, but rather combines a notion of digital with the post of post-colonialism or post-feminism (see Cramer 2014). It is art that is well aware of the digital turn in all levels of contemporary life and recognises it as a given. It consequently situates itself in this context, be it through applying digital means excessively, through criticising aspects of it, or through a retro movement preferring analogue methods or appearances. James Bridle (2012) coined the term new aesthetic for similar visualities in art. He draws attention to how machine generated images influence human ways of seeing: we are very much accustomed to street view and satellite views. Digital renderings and virtual realities allow for the distinction between image-making and ‘the real world’ to dissolve. Algorithmic categorisation influences the way we see things. And in digital photography it is the tools we use that shape us and our ways of seeing – an aspect that is not new to digital and online photography, “[b]ut what seem contemporary are the rapid shifts between tool-using and tool-shaping – decompiling,

reverse-engineering, hacking and rapidly iterating those technologies” (Bridle 2012: 71). This allows a rapid and multiple skipping from the physical world to the digital one, back and forth. This again changes the way we perceive of and deal with photography, this supposedly objective depiction of the truth, and other images.

Digital photography

For Indian post-media aesthetics, the role of photography plays an essential role. Drawing on Rajkamal Aich's artworks as an example for Indian post-media aesthetics, we can see that photography has become an omnipresent medium. Aich uses digital photographs of (Indian) everyday scenes or objects as a background or basis of his work.

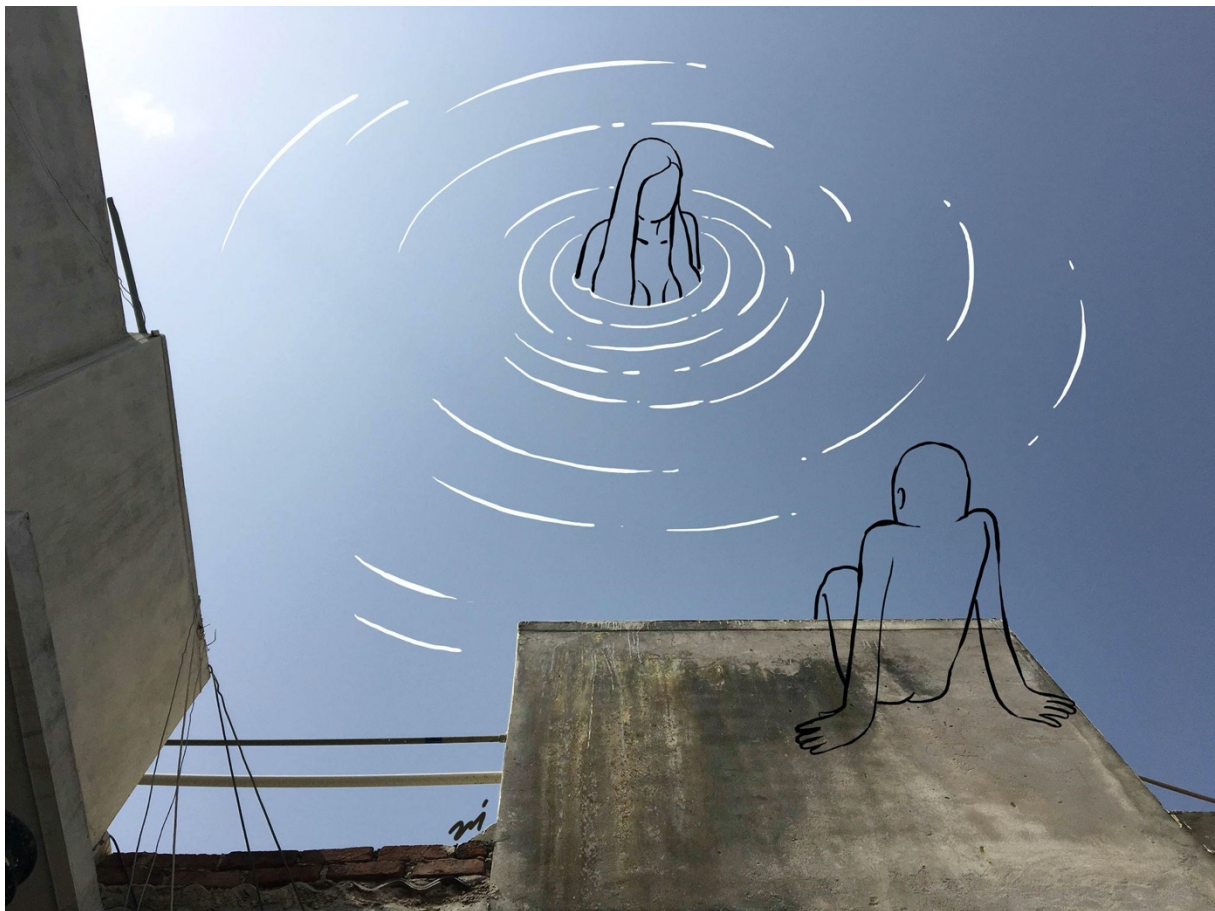


FIGURE 1: Washed off concrete rises into the sky in many Indian cities. Aich photographed the common sight, that he – like so many others – see every day.



FIGURE 2: Auto rikshaws, in the typical yellow-green colours, are not only in Delhi a common sight. The drivers usually wear a uniform and are like this one often stuck in traffic.



FIGURE 3: Paying attention to the details of the everyday: Aich captured parts of a neon tube, a plug, a cut off cable, and a pipe, referring to common improvisations of infrastructure.



FIGURE 4: A street seen from inside a shop: Again constructed as a trivial ‘snapshot’, this photo shows typical traffic in the background – motorbikes, a car, an auto rikshaw – and the common paper plastic packed sliced white bread in the foreground.

The everyday scenes and objects resort to the usualness of photography as a medium. Aich rightfully assumes that photography in India has been moving from its conventional division into family studio photography and professional photography towards a medium where the distinction between lay and professional photography is vanishing and where private photography is not restricted to being photographed on special occasions.

The country has its own history of photography, which is intertwined with European developments. Photo cameras were first introduced to the subcontinent in the 1840s; the first photo studios opened in the 1860s. The first decades saw photography in India to be a medium of the upper classes and their ambition to be portrait in photo studios, and at the same time the British ambitions to document, regulate and rule the country. After independence, at the latest, photo studios also became a place for 'the common man' having his photo taken, while single members of the Indian upper and middle class became professional photographers. Mass market cameras entered Indian households only slowly. In the 1970s the Click III became hugely popular, but with a cost of 300 Rupees remaining a status symbol that not everyone could afford.

The worldwide introduction of digital photography in the early 1990s saw also in India a subsequent move away from the process of exposing a light sensitive carrier material to ultraviolet light towards capturing a scene through sensors, which write information based on binary code on a storage medium. The advent of digital cameras co-occurred with the market liberalisation of the country in 1991, facilitating easier access to the medium's hardware. It was technical changes in combination with easier access to the medium that changed the way professionals, lay photographers, and viewers relate to the medium. Photography became more and more ubiquitous, and the distinction between professional and amateur photography began to diminish.

Today, digital photography and its online dissemination peaks worldwide at an estimated capture of a million selfies a day, 350 million photos being uploaded on Facebook (in 2013, Smith 2013), 40 billion on Instagram (in 2015),¹ and a multitude of this abundance of digital photographs on online and offline storage devices. India contributes to these numbers, with Indian internet users accounting for 462 million, and 250 million Indian active social media users (in 2018).² Digital photography has especially among the new (rich) Indian middle class become an integral part of everyday life (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007, Upadhyaya and Vasavi 2008). Photography is no longer only used for documenting special occasions, but for capturing everyday life. It becomes less a medium for memory making, but increasingly one for communicating current experiences (van Dijck 2007). Technical contexts of digital cameras and the internet slightly alter viewing habits, as spectators are no longer used to seeing only perfect photographs or extraordinary scenes, but photography as a common medium entered as good as every aspect of Indian lives.

Painting and drawing

Rajkamal Aich's photographs of mundane objects and scenes display these viewing habits in the age of digital photography. He does not foreground this ubiquity, but uses it as a background that he enhances with his brushstrokes and pencil drawings.

¹ According to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instagram#User_characteristics_and_behavior.

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/309866/india-digital-population/>.

³ The penetration of digital photography is, however, by no means equal across the country and its citizens, but remains stratified according to class and caste. Class and caste influence access to smart phones, photo cameras and the internet, leading to a digital divide that also the comparatively low-priced data bundles can't offset.



FIGURE 5: Caption: Locks are used to seal the dented shutters of a shop or store. Aich painted a woman's head on the photograph, turning the three locks into the lady's ear jewellery.



FIGURE 6: The common man or the common woman can with their smartphone cameras now easily click away and capture everything. Here Aich photographed the floor: A crumpled chai cup and a cigarette butt on the dusty, brownish grey ground. Through Aich's brushstrokes they become the setting for a cat curling on a sofa, underneath a floor lamp.



FIGURE 7: Aich also singles out objects through masking it out or cropping the background. Here, a dung cake becomes a woman's bun, and both the bun and the dung cake are part of everyday life in India. Aich makes use of objects and scenes, which especially an Indian spectator will be most familiar with, and which furthermore are gaining acknowledgement as being if not 'worth' so at least not being objected to being photographed.

Other than 'common people' might do or think, Aich's artwork requires a careful and conscious creation process. He frames, selects, waits for the right light. He buys adequate equipment from small box cameras to high-quality paper, to flowers or cow dung. He likes to control every detail of a photograph in order for the idea to come out most brilliantly and for him to establish a connection to the art he creates, which consequently enables him to create good and meaningful pieces of art.

Through the selection and framing processes as well as his drawing, Aich expresses himself as the trained professional artist that he is. Growing up in Kolkata with his father Samir Aich, being a renowned artist himself, the Rajkamal Aich has encountered art, artists and the Bengali art scene early in his life. After graduating from high school, he was admitted to the reputed Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata, where after five years of training he graduated in visual arts. His artwork and paintings have gained national and international attention, being featured in several books on visual art as well as in online and offline newspapers and magazines.

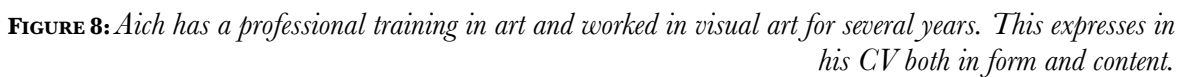




FIGURE 9: Aich has been working for Times of India for several years; his designs also embellished the newspaper's front page.

Aich's artwork might seem at first glance to be not the most expressional or sophisticated paintwork. We argue that this is one aspect of post-digital aesthetics he incorporates: The accelerated speed of visual flow provides the average viewer with less time to take an image in. Hence Aich creates pieces that are easy to grasp. Yet, his artwork at the same time subtly asks the viewer to think out of the box. It disrupts the mentioned conventions of seeing omnipresent photography. Aich adds brushstrokes that create a different scene on top of the photograph. Aich unsettles the habits we developed through the ubiquity of photography, assuming that photos can be taken at all times and that they portrait what is there at a given time. He challenges the viewer to see things differently, to see things that are not so obvious, but nonetheless potentially present in the photo.

It can be argued that this request to use your imagination in everyday life comes with a slight undermining of photography as being an objective medium. This critique, already voiced before the introduction of digital photography, can be understood as being embedded in externalizing the 'beyond' of colloquial photography. There is a sheer endless potential for 'seeing' in photographs, that Aich taps on. He frames the photograph, not only in terms of using the photo camera as a technical devise to do so, but also by inserting artistically his view of the scene.



FIGURE 10: Scratches in the wall turn into planes' vapour trails.



FIGURE 11: Aich makes us see the ordinary differently, so that a carelessly discarded, broken rubber band on concrete becomes a girl's jumping rope.



FIGURE 12: Directing the view and the imagination: Aich drew a paper-like white moon on a weathered wall that he photographed. He thereby converts the bamboo ladder leaning on this wall into a staircase to the sky.

Indian post-digital aesthetics

In sum, when reading Rajkamal Aich's artwork as an example for Indian post-digital aesthetics, we find an expression of these in the context of India's changing relation to photography: Once a medium characterized by a colonial agenda and photo studios, the access to digital cameras in combination with an increased visualisation in an ever-expanding internet use (especially of social network sites), photography understandably plays a major role in contemporary aesthetic. Indian post-digital aesthetics is thereby rooted in the new rich Indian middle class, in which a digital life has become a given. The Indian middle class has always had a strong relation to fine arts, be it visual arts, literature or music, especially in Bengal and Kolkata. It does thus not come as a surprise to see the new aesthetics here in combination with artistry from that area. Aich in his artwork draws and paints with electronic and felt pen, pencil and colour onto and around photography, resorting to his rootedness and studies in Bengali fine art.

In reverting to graphic art and photography, Rajkamal Aich finds a way to cater to the taste of his employers in newspaper and television media. It allows him to be creative as well as make a living

through his artistic skills. With regards to contemporary aesthetics, this style can be understood as way of dealing with the accelerated speed of media perception in the age of the internet. With the amount of visuals increasing and the span of attention diminishing, his comparatively easy to grasp visual artworks exemplify another aspect of an aesthetics situated in the context of changing acquaintance with especially digital photography and art.

This leads to the question of haptics, requiring further investigation. The haptics of an art piece are less relevant – in India as in other countries – when it comes to art disseminated online. The human-computer interface has replaced the physicality of a ‘conventional’ art object. The calibration of the screen, the adaptability of websites and editing software is now the (material) infrastructure determining the perception of net art, of digital photography and online videos. Rajkamal Aich, for example, uses exclusively digital photography, and paints also with digital pens. However, he refers to a handful of earth, mounted and framed in a white wooden frame as the most meaningful piece of art he has ever created. It is earth that Aich brought from a visit to his ancestral place in Bangladesh. He brought it for his grandfather who could not make the journey back to the place from where he once migrated from during the partition of India and Pakistan.



FIGURE 13: The framed crumbs of soil from his ancestral place in Bangladesh decorate the walls of Rajkamal Aich's home.

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**EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE I. HIS BURIAL AND THE RASTAFARIANS IN
SHASHAMANE, ETHIOPIA. A TWO-PART DOCUMENTARY
HAILE SELASSIE FILM PROJECT (2016–2019)**

Günther Schlee, Verena Böll, Ambaye Ogato, Robert Dobslaw, *Max Planck Institute*

The anthropologists Günther Schlee and Georg Haneke attended and filmed the burial of Emperor Haile Selassie I in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on the 5th of November 2000. The Haile Selassie Film Project enabled the project team to produce a two-part documentary with these historical film material and further recordings.

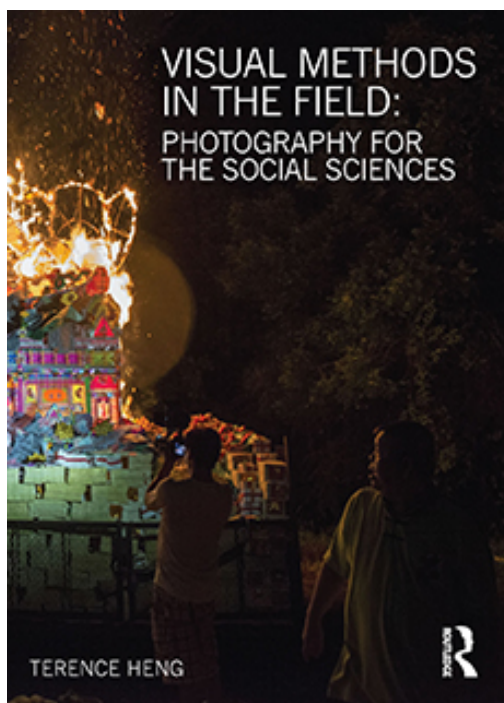
Team Members: Dr. Verena Böll, Dr. Ambaye Ogato, Robert Dobslaw

The main topic of the two-part documentary is the burial of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. Haile Selassie I (23 July 1892 – 27 August 1975) was officially buried only 25 years after his death. The ceremonies took place in the capital Addis Ababa on the 5th of November 2000. The highlight of the burial was the laying out of the sarcophagus on the square of the Holy Trinity Cathedral and the mourning service with Abuna Paulos. The first part of the documentary accompanies the burial and comments modestly on the background and circumstances of the funeral service.

The Rastafarian worship Emperor Haile Selassie I as God and Messiah. The Rastafarian, attributing their name on the first title (Ras) and birth name (Tafari) of Haile Selassie, only attended in minority on parts of the ceremony. Several Rastafarian are living in Shashamane, Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Selassie I granted land in Shashamane to the “Black people of the World” as a thank-you present for their support during the Italian war and occupation (1935-1941). The second part points out the perspectives of the Rastafarians about the death and burial through interviews with Rastafarians in Shashamane, Ethiopia. Relatives of the emperor, representatives of the Emperor Haile Selassie I Memorial Association and of the Association of the Patriots also have their say (Interviews: 2012, 2013, 2017, 2018, 2019).

Watch the video on the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology website:

<https://www.eth.mpg.de/cms/en/media/haile-selassie-film-project>



Terence Heng

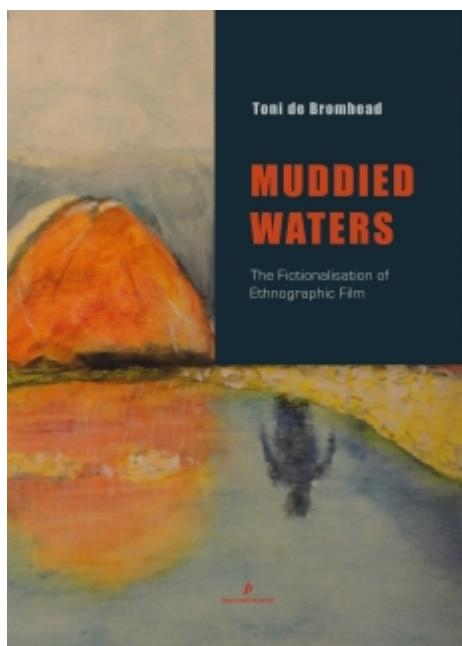
Visual Methods in the Field: Photography for the Social Sciences, 2016, Taylor and Francis

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781315749594>

The use of images, particularly photography, has been steadily gaining popularity in academia, but there has not yet been a book that deals with the act and process of photo-taking in the field. Drawing upon 21 years of photographic experience and sociological research, Terence Heng's immersive and narrative style will:

1. introduce photography as a qualitative method;
2. discuss the intricacies of, challenges in and opportunities for using a camera in the field;
3. explore common themes and topics in social science research, including photographing rituals, space, people and objects;
4. advise on navigating the always evolving technological landscapes of traditional, digital and mobile photography.

Visual Methods in the Field: Photography for the Social Sciences is a photography guide written for researchers by a researcher. Using in-depth ethnographic case studies from research done in various urban environments, this book will act as a crucial bridge for students in geography, sociology, education, media studies and other social sciences to incorporate photography into their research repertoire.

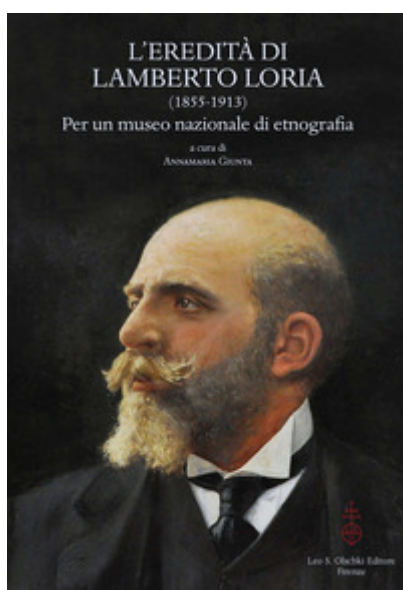


Toni de Bromhead

Muddied Waters. The Fictionalisation of Ethnographic Film, 2019, Intervention Press

<http://www.intervention.dk/cat1/muddied/muddied.htm>

Visual anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers continue to disagree on what is and what is not ethnographic film. Meanwhile the situation becomes ever more unclear, possibly to the detriment of ethnographic film. Toni de Bromhead now tackles this problem from the point of view that an ethnographic film must, by definition, offer reliable ethnography. She does this by closely examining a number of documentary films about southern Italy, made from 1948 to 2018, some made by great Italian filmmakers, such as De Seta, and others by respected non-Italians, for instance David MacDougall.

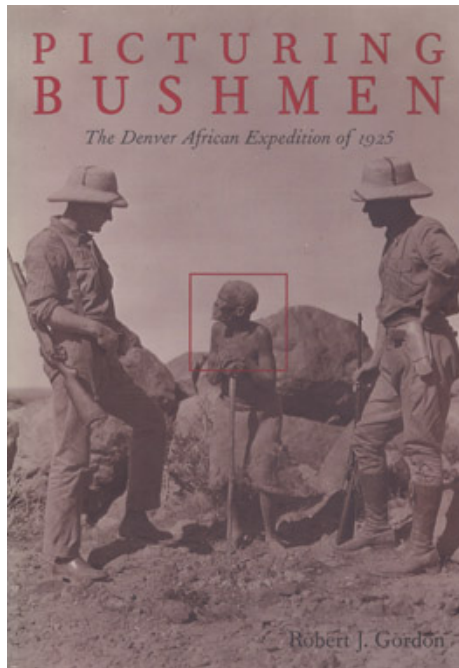


Annamaria Giunta (a cura)

L'eredità di Lamberto Loria (1855-1913). Per un museo nazionale di etnografia, 2019, Olschki

<https://www.olschki.it/libro/9788822266323>

L'eredità di Lamberto Loria (1855 – 1913) – Per un museo nazionale di etnografia, Olschki, a cura di Annamaria Giunta. Decisamente troppo poco noto, Loria, vissuto a cavallo fra diciannovesimo e ventesimo secolo, è invece figura di studioso e intellettuale di assoluta rilevanza, cui si deve in un periodo nevralgico della nostra storia un impulso fondamentale per lo sviluppo della disciplina che si occupa di dare un metodo alle ricerche delle scienze sociali, che mettono al centro l'uomo e ne descrivono usi, costumi, caratteristiche. Il volume curato da Annamaria Giunta, raffinatissimo, è un vero e proprio scrigno di tesori. Da leggere.



Robert J. Gordon

Picturing Bushmen. The Denver African Expedition of 1925,
1997, Ohio University Press

<https://www.ohioswallow.com/bookPicturing+Bushman>

The Denver African Expedition of 1925 sought “the cradle of Humanity.” The explorers returned claiming to have found the “Missing Link” in the Heikum bushmen of the Kalahari—and they proceeded to market this image. As Robert J. Gordon shows in *Picturing Bushmen*, the impact of the expedition lay not simply in its slick merchandising of bushmen images but also in the fact that the pictures were exotic and aesthetically pleasing. Like all significant events, the expedition and its images had unanticipated consequences.

The Denver Expedition played a key role in romanticizing bushmen. Indeed, its image of bushmen has permeated Western mass culture. Before the expedition, bushmen commonly had been presented as impoverished savages. In its wake, the bushmen of South Africa have inspired commercial advertisements, art exhibitions, and novels. Bushmen are frequently the archetypal “other” to Western intellectual and popular thought. Explaining the impact of the expedition involves, in part, considering the culture of visualization that gave the expedition direction and in turn was influenced by it.

Although Rob Gordon is an anthropologist, this study ranges into questions of film theory, history, and popular culture. It offers a perspective on coffee-table books, ethnology, and the nature of research on those labeled “others.” While suggesting how “ethnographic photographs” might be appreciated, *Picturing Bushmen* is also a subtle analysis of the perennial issues that haunt field workers—especially what and how they “see” and how their perception is influenced by the mundane in their own societies.



Gabriella Avagliano

Tracce del Mezzogiorno nel Documentario Etnografico. Cultura popolare e trasformazioni sociali in Lucania (1958-1971), Cava De' Tirreni, Area Blu Edizioni, 2019

La Basato su un'indagine capillare dei documentari etnografici prodotti negli anni '50 e '60, questo libro restituisce un affresco variegato e complesso delle molteplici immagini della Lucania di questo periodo. Tali preziose testimonianze rivelano luci ed ombre di una terra che, sebbene ancorata alle sue radici e alle sue credenze popolari, si avvia a confrontarsi con i nuovi modelli e stili di vita promossi dal progresso e dal boom economico. L'autrice racconta la Lucania, non senza interessanti incursioni nelle altre regioni del Sud Italia, recuperando immagini altrimenti dimenticate, che contribuiscono in maniera significativa ad una più approfondita conoscenza di culture e realtà storicosociali oggi scomparse quasi del tutto.



Alexander Koenlsler, Pietro Meloni

Antropologia dell'alimentazione. Produzione, consumo, movimenti sociali, Roma, Carocci, 2019

http://www.carocci.it/index.php?option=com_carocci&task=schedalibro&Itemid=72&isbn=9788843098422

Quale rapporto intratteniamo con ciò che mangiamo? Perché in alcuni contesti culturali certi alimenti sono considerati sacri mentre in altri vengono disprezzati? Che cosa c'è dietro il crescente interesse per i cibi biologici e le forme di consumo alternativo come i gruppi di acquisto solidale? In che modo il capitale finanziario condiziona il mondo dell'alimentazione? Come cambia l'alimentazione con l'uso delle nuove tecnologie? Se uno degli obiettivi principali dell'antropologia è decostruire il senso comune, il compito dell'antropologia dell'alimentazione è quello di stimolare l'immaginario individuale e collettivo ad ampliare l'orizzonte sui modi in cui pensiamo il cibo. Facendo dialogare etnografia e teoria, gli autori si occupano di tabù alimentari, dispositivi tecnologici, intrecci fra attivismo alimentare e altermondialista, "utopie concrete" della neoruralità.