

# **BEYOND TEXT? CRITICAL PRACTICES AND SENSORY ANTHROPOLOGY**

**Editors**

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## Introduction - The Sense of the Senses

### Encounter

The idea of *the encounter* is a central leitmotif in both anthropology and art. The discipline of anthropology was largely founded upon the ethnographic encounter with alterity—whether through face-to-face encounters in the field or facilitated by material artifacts and textual accounts—through which social, cultural and moral differences are made explicit, negotiated and represented. Encountering difference through the archetypal spaces of fieldwork, the museum and the monograph, combined to establish, even reify, a particular kind of anthropological subject in the social imaginary. Encounters with otherness have been equally foundational to the production, practices and reception of art. Works of art, including images, films, objects and performances, have long served to bring different social worlds, aesthetic practices and audiences into contact or conflict with each other. It is an encounter that produces hybrid, mimetic and appropriated forms and which opens spaces for discussion and interpretation, thereby creating an uneasy alliance between art, language and theory that is often in tension and never settled. In all these contexts, the encounter makes possible a kind of de-familiarisation or *ostranenie-in-action*: a dialogue with other ways of thinking and being, wrapped in global power and politics, whereby the process of making strange is already at work. However, encounters with difference do not only have the capacity to defamiliarise and unsettle the ordinary but also vice-versa, i.e. to domesticate unknown, exotic and alien cultural artifacts by bringing them into the realm of common knowledge, theory and familiar moral spaces.

Encounters with alterity are rooted in, express and test out, the relationship between sensory perception, knowledge and interpretation, thereby encapsulating a key question in *Beyond Text?* concerning the relationship between anthropological understandings of the world and different modes of aesthetic practice and production. It is also a question about the subjecthood and status of the objects of artistic or anthropological enquiry, about the ways in which images, sounds and objects combine to affect us and transform our knowledge of ourselves and others, about how

art plays upon our nervous systems but is frequently understood through language, text and reading as the privileged means of analysis and representation. *Beyond Text?* advocates that there are still new, critical insights to be made through text and in writing culture and aesthetics into anthropological theory but at the same time argues that there are other modes of representation—including the combinations of visual, aural and material productions assembled in this book and the accompanying DVD—that facilitate different kinds of theoretical, sensory and interpretative encounter and which utilise non-linguistic and non-textual knowledge. As neurology has long shown, not all thought processes take place in language and routinely incorporate various non-linguistic and non-symbolic modes of thinking and being that operate beyond or at the threshold of language. However using or accessing such knowledge in practical research contexts or in pursuit of a better understanding or representation of the social lives of other human beings is far from straightforward. It is the kind of knowledge that Dwight Conquergood claims ‘is anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community, but is ephemeral’ and as such is different from the propositional or declarative knowledge that ‘is anchored in paradigm and secured in print’ (2002: 145).

### **Experiment**

There are multiple ways that encounters with otherness and alterity can be approached or characterised. One way is through experimentation, including experimental methods, new modes of writing and alternative exhibition making. In the realm of ethnographic writing, Clifford and Marcus’s watershed volume *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (1986) famously made the case for new literary styles of ethnographic composition that were cognisant about, and set against a political background of, post-colonial representation, the epistemological limits of language and the canonical problematic of ‘voice’. The problem of writing and representing culture, which centered on the issue of *of, for whom, and to whom* the anthropologist is speaking (and from what position they claimed the authority to do so) also served to reinforce the idea of *text* as the primary means and testing grounds for the discipline. Marcus himself regrets that the aesthetic implications of *Writing Culture* were not taken up by anthropologists, and that its impact has instead largely focused attention on issues of textual and ethnographic authority. Writing in Schneider and Wright 2005, Marcus and theatre practitioner Fernando Calzadilla,

attempted to realise anthropology's theoretical, aesthetic and sensory concerns in the field by creating a multi-sensorial structure in a Venezuelan marketplace consisting of pipes, plastic-sheets, asphalt, onion sacks and carrier bags in collaboration with the market's workers. The aim being to emphasise through the everyday materials of the market, the material affects and occasional violence of daily market life under the looming presence of the Venezuelan oil industry. Such an approach, gives an example of how the theoretical, textual and documentary imperative found in anthropological analysis might productively be transformed into fieldwork techniques and ethnographically grounded modes of representation that can communicate the properties of people's everyday lived experiences as they emerge in action.

Such approaches follow in the pioneering footsteps of Victor Turner's attempts to bring ethnography to life through performance and drama. Turner was particularly interested in how corporeal experience and emotion could be evoked through the aesthetics of the performing body, and explicitly recognised that ethnography—whether understood in terms of fieldwork practice or as a mode of dissemination and representation—is a particular type of performative and collaborative activity that can be used to research and represent the complexity and diversity of human experience. Turner's students would not only read ethnographies but enact and perform them in order that the social life and rituals of other places could be brought to life and partially experienced, if not understood, in their nervous systems and bodies. Here, Turner's emphasis on *experience* recalls the word's close etymological link with *experiment* insofar as both terms share the same root where *ex* signifies "out of," while *peira* means "attempt, trial, test". Conceptualised and enacted as such, experience retains the character of a testing-out in the face of the unknown and the unfamiliar. Consequently, rather than being concerned primarily with the past or present, experience is often explicitly orientated toward the future, implying a type of movement toward something not yet known or experienced, rather than something that has already happened, defined and interpreted. Experience, when used in this sense of a testing out or experiment vis-à-vis something whose outcome is undetermined, sets up the possibility for establishing new existential perspectives and understandings.

Incorporating Turner's ideas and techniques alongside those used by creative artists

(Irving 2007, Schneider and Wright 2005, 2010) and utilised by other disciplinary approaches (Crapanzano 2005), including that of applied drama (Thompson 2005), auditory journeys (Cox 2008), collaborative ethnofiction (Sjöberg 2008) and art therapy (Hogan and Pink 2010) might help develop new, practical approaches to knowing, theorising and representing fundamental questions about social-life and human experience. The commitment to practice not only generates empirical data for investigation and textual analysis but helps ensure that the debate is not conducted at levels of theoretical abstraction remote from the lives and concerns of the anthropological subjects that are represented.

If this places anthropology more squarely in the experimental or subjunctive mode, then it is telling that Marcus's own presentation at the *Beyond Text?* conference in 2007 argued that the key to the whole conference was the ? in the title, and it is in this exploratory and open-ended spirit that we have assembled this collection of textual, visual and audio works. The idea of experimenting with non-textual productions and ethnographic exhibition making builds upon the disciplinary concerns about the politics and power of representation but is also influenced by the ideas and practices of science. This is the idea of museum, gallery or website as a laboratory site where various elements are brought into relation with each other in a transformative process capable of generating new phenomena and new knowledge (Basu and MacDonald 2007). Ethnographic productions, exhibitions and other forms of representation, rather than fixing or reifying cultural difference become 'experiments in meaning making' with 'no sure idea of what the results may be' (ibid: 1-2). Or as Ingold suggests:

Every text, story or trip, in short, is a journey made rather than an object found. And although with each journey one may cover the same ground, each is nevertheless an original movement. There is no fixed template or specification that underwrites them all. (Ingold 2007: 16)

The challenge in attempting to go *Beyond Text?* is not simply to explore modes of experimental practice, methodology and representation that are made possible through audio and visual technology but to stay mindful of the question of how 'voice' might be politically and morally articulated or positioned in forms beyond the written word. The creation of such experimental ethnographic contexts and media spaces, explicitly

links the realms of sensory perception, aesthetic appreciation and the operation of technology in describing cultural otherness, and can be seen as part of a history of modernity that Michael Taussig describes in his work *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993). Taussig draws on the works of James Frazer and Walter Benjamin to argue for the magical power of the copy, as manufactured through technologies such as photography and the gramophone, to create a sensuous sense of contact with what has been copied. The representational force of the copy is derived from this stickiness of the referent as an affective presence of the original.

### **Power of images/agency of objects**

The possibility of using images, objects and sounds to think with anthropologically, as well as for ethnographic representation, intersects with theories in visual studies about the ‘power of images’ and from material culture studies about the ‘agency of objects’. These theories have reinforced attempts within visual anthropology to recognise the ethnographic value of artistic works and practices and have also highlighted the capacity of anthropological film-making and exhibition-making to overcome the descriptive limits of text in evoking qualities of presence and feeling. These qualities evoke the idea of *aesthesis* in its original meaning of sensory perception and bodily feeling. The embodied dimension of the aesthetic forms the basis of what Eagleton describes as “deep subjectivity”: a nervous and sometimes dangerous area of activity that raises important epistemological questions for anthropology and its basis in the face-to-face encounter and extended participant observation in the field. The subsequent theorisation and translation into text of the corporeal and aesthetic experience in the field, recalls Baumgarten’s (1714-1762) emphasis on the rational interpretation of the senses and his influential definition of aesthetics as the “science of the senses.” Baumgarten’s attempt to rationalise the senses was critiqued in subsequent years—not least by Tolstoy who saw Baumgarten’s model as counter productive to the making and understanding of art—however anthropology continues to struggle to find ways of representing and theorising the sensuous encounter in the field. The in-depth engagement with and participation in other people’s social, sensory, aesthetic and political lives, combined the systematic application of method and theory, and, we are told, differentiates anthropology from other disciplines, and from other forms of encounter, such as journalism or travel. Sensory and aesthetic impressions, especially in the initial few



weeks of fieldwork when they are perhaps the strongest, are mostly dismissed as irrelevant as the anthropologist gains a greater in-depth knowledge and understanding. What might be gained, we must ask, in taking seriously the ephemeral and fleeting senses that we encounter in the field but do not achieve the requisite stability to enter into language, let alone theoretical interpretation? Can these sense impressions be ascribed an equal, but different status to other forms of knowing, and if so what epistemological and ontological underpinnings should we draw upon to differentiate the modes of knowing and understanding that emerge, and how might these be represented? Of course, the anthropological method of combining extended periods of co-dwelling with rational inquiry and textual representation does not guarantee understanding and sometimes reveals deep-seated discrepancies. At times, the disparity reaches the point of an incommensurable difference and radical otherness that not only challenges anthropology's epistemological grounding, but its whole *raison d'être*. Thus, at the end of *Triste Tropiques*, Levi-Strauss, who set out in pursuit of Rousseau's dream of finding a people untainted by modernity, finds the Brazilian Indians he encounters too different to enable effective communication and mutual understanding. Indeed, the failure of Levi-Strauss' quest is telling, for certain aspects of human experience are destined to remain incomprehensible to linguistic kinds of representation no matter how thick the textual description or how deep the textual analysis.

The case for using non-textual media in anthropological, art-based or aesthetic productions and representations is sometimes accompanied by a naïve posture or antagonism towards language. Janet Wolff's concluding essay for *Beyond Text ?* identifies the academic trends behind these aesthetic attitudes as: the turn to 'affect'; the (re)turn to phenomenology (and post-phenomenology); actor-network theory in sociology and science studies; theories of the post-human (human/animal, human/nature, human/technology); theories of materiality; emphasis on the agency of objects; the turn to neuroscience in the humanities and social sciences; the insistence on 'presence' as an unmediated encounter'. Wolff goes on to make the case 'for a certain caution in relation to tendencies to abandon too hastily the solidities of cultural and sociological theory'. The theoretical turns that Wolff describes, suggests that while there may be opportunities for opening up and engaging with the senses in anthropological enquiry there are dangers to be had in the diminishment or loss of a

critical attitude and social perspective.

What is at stake here is the acuity of insight into social mores and national political values made in Catherine Russell's chapter and her critical reading of the Japanese film and television genre of 'home drama' about 'ordinary people'. She construes this work of interpretation not as a simple reading or semiology of images but 'as a sensory mode of ethnography, which is nevertheless virtual—a phantasmagoria of cultural practices and feelings'. Russell's essay points towards a relationship between writing, reading and the senses, which involves a vital, lively, sensory intelligence. It is a mode of apprehension that Paul Carter's essay describes in terms of the Phaedric dialogue between Plato and Socrates, where the writing on the wall of the Delphic injunction - 'know thyself' - reveals not the *logos* of the Word as a 'language of reason' but an 'older role' where 'logos and mythos, language and mouthing or story-telling, have not been torn apart. Logos retains its spiritual – its dynamic – power.' For Carter, this power of logos is a sensual force that allows us to recognise in the 'event of the thing' (the sound of words) and the thing itself, an excessiveness, ambiguity and luminosity of meaning. It moves us from a visual apprehension of writing to an auditory one which has implications for 'anthropologists who fail to read in writing the limits of what can be said' and which the contributors to *Beyond Text?*'s section on Sound address in various ways. Their works support Carter's argument for reading beyond semantic meaning and paying attention to what may be listened to in 'the time of the speeches, the auditory attachments that counterpoint and punctuate them'.

This is a call for a sensibility that acknowledges the poetic dimensions of evocation over representation and recalls anthropological experiments in ethno-poetics led by Jerome Rothenberg and Dennis Tedlock in their ground-breaking journal *Alcheringa/Ethnopoetics*. Founded in 1970, this initially self-published literary journal, combined transcriptions and translations of oral and ancient poetry, original works by poets who were anthropologists and occasional disk recordings fitted into a sleeve inside the journal's front cover (Tedlock 1999: 157). The combination of text with audio and visual material on the DVD for *Beyond Text?* draws on the example of *Alcheringa* and likewise aims to bring together artists and anthropologists so as to explore, experiment and test the limits of text and the textual paradigm in

anthropological enquiry.

### **Iconophobia – Writing**

There is historical concern in anthropology about the capacity and power of images to represent and communicate in ways that text cannot, which Lucien Taylor describes as a kind ‘iconophobia’ (Taylor: 1996). At the root of this concern is the paradox of the image versus text relation in anthropology where for the image to have documentary value it should as Christopher Wright and Arnd Schneider have pointed out (2005), be allowed to ‘speak for itself’ and inhibited as little as possible. However, the potential for multiple interpretations of the image means that within academic circles there is invariably an attempt to constrain and direct its meaning by surrounding it with devices such as narrative structure, voice over, subtitles, captions and explanations. It is an issue that highlights the tension between the oft-quoted claim in visual anthropology that images are ‘more accessible’, and that the ethical and political concerns expressed by the indigenous, marginalised or threatened subjects of those images and who may wish to control that access or instead create images by and for themselves.

This book asks, and attempts to demonstrate, how this relationship between text and sound and image might be productively reconfigured in fieldwork and other contexts so as to lead to new forms of practice and representation in anthropology and beyond. This should not be taken as a romantic or defensive posture about the need for the discipline to recognise the value of artistic creations that have the presence and potential to transgress or enhance the conventions of academic text. For it is hardly sufficient to argue that non-textual media can obviate the obscurantism of specialised academic language, only to find that they have become part of another rarified language of art appreciation. Instead our aim is to argue that there may be critical and creative competencies at work in artistic, non-textual or media productions and show how these have the capacity to offer anthropological insights of equivalent value to the standards set by the written text. The problem of going *Beyond Text?*’ is not the literary question it might at first appear to be and should not be confused with existing critiques of approaches to ‘culture as text’ or ‘discourse’, nor should it be taken as a call for anthropologists to engage uncritically in experimentations with media other than writing which might result in an evaporation of the social, political or historical.

In other words, going *Beyond Text?* does not seek a liberation from text or from social and theoretical concerns but to open a conversation about how to recognise, use and analyse those works in film, photography and sound that currently exist on the margins of the discipline. This is also a pedagogical issue. Images, recordings, artworks and other media are not only central to the teaching of anthropology but there is often a point at which a student asks if they can produce a film, performance, photographic essay or sound recording as part of a dissertation. But in order to do so usually have to justify it in text and explain why it is necessary and what it is doing that a conventional ethnographic text could not. This orthodoxy is also widely reflected in the professional, disciplinary criteria for academic recognition and advancement which, unlike journal articles and monographs, has great difficulty in assessing non-textual media as viable forms of research and knowledge production.

### **Corporeal Presence, Art Making and Social Critique**

A number of the epistemological, practical and representational concerns thus far discussed were raised in David MacDougall's book 'The Corporeal Image' (2005). MacDougall calls for a visual anthropology that is not reliant on textual paradigms to justify itself and refers to the capacities of media to generate 'co-presence', meaning the ability to combine image, sound, text and object to evoke sensory experience and the simultaneous presence of different sensory phenomena. MacDougall has long argued that visual anthropology should overtly try to convey impressions, experiences, and understandings that resist or exist beyond spoken and textual description and explanation, while lamenting that anthropological films are too often fashioned as 'texts by other means' through for example an over-reliance on interviews and talking heads (MacDougall 2005). The *Beyond Text?* conference was designed to respond to MacDougall's call for visual anthropology to develop alternative objectives and methodologies but it rapidly became evident that these questions were pertinent to many other fields of inquiry and held important implications for practice-based research across the arts and social sciences, especially in regard to the epistemological and evidential status of the material being produced. There was an astonishing, even overwhelming, response to the call for papers, which took us out of what might have been a parochial concern with visual anthropology. It offered the promise of a step away, or step beyond, simply arguing for 'more' visual material in social science products and the false choice between on the one hand,

realist, observational and documentary practice, and on the other experimental, sensory art and practice based phenomenological approaches to research and representation. It is a dichotomy that misconstrues the long and intricate history of the relationship between art-making and social analysis and critique, which includes art movements such as constructivism, surrealism and the social documentary movement, the idea of the document and the essay as they may be expressed through film and photography and sound and themes of appropriation, participation, collaboration and the everyday. Arnd Schneider's opening essay for *Beyond Text?* and other works by Schneider and Wright (2005, 2010, 2013), Wright 1998) deal with many of these movements and themes, by tracing out, through examples of art-works, the possible paths of artistic practice not taken or dismissed by anthropologists. Much of the contemporary debate about this field revolves around the cautions expressed in Hal Foster's essay 'the artist as ethnographer' (1996) and the possibilities inherent in Nicholas Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics'.

Foster's essay critiques the appropriation of ethnographic methods as a form of political action in areas of site-specific art and argues that because artists do not always participate in an extended, in-depth ethnographic involvement over a long time - and see the site as 'readymade' for representation - 'the other' is not always properly engaged or acknowledged in the creation of the project. Participation is also central to the anthropological possibilities and pitfalls of Bourriaud's project to make the inter-relations that emerge between persons in the context of making or viewing art, the basis for the specific work's aesthetic form and appreciation. As Claire Bishop (2004) has pointed out, while this project may have political potential in democratising gallery spaces and encouraging dialogues between artist and audience, it does not distinguish the particular quality of relationships activated through the work nor differentiate them from other works of 'relational art' which could include artistic experiments in participation in German theatre during the 1920's or contemporary forms of socially and politically engaged performance art. Another critique of this notion of relational aesthetics is by Grant Kester who rightly points out some of the contentious issues surrounding words like 'participation' and 'collaboration' in terms of the power dynamics involved with the production of artworks, and this is a key area of concern for anthropologists (Kester 2004, 2011)

Within anthropology, creating new forms of ethnographic participation and collaboration with artists or using artistic practices presents another set of challenges (Irving 2011, Schneider and Wright 2005), as with applied drama (Sjoberg 2008, Thompson 2005). Marcus's notion of the 'para-site' as a space for artists and artistic practice located beside or in the field, where relations may be identified in particular ways as flowing, entangling, severing and transforming, is part of a sustained and exciting attempt to realise an ethnography made by design, collaboration and conceptual work. Likewise, from a background in critical and literary theory, David Carroll (1987)'s notion of para-aesthetics, argues that art often retains a capacity to open up and outline a conceptual territory that academic theories and ideas tend to follow, in the way that experimental techniques of writing, method and representation pursued by the impressionists, surrealists and situationists opened up ways of thinking that only many years later became accepted into social science.

### **The realm of the Senses**

Elsewhere in anthropology it is within the realm of the senses rather than notions of participation, conceptual work or design that claims are made for an approach to anthropology as aesthetic production. Harvard University's 'Sensory Ethnography Lab' under the leadership of Lucien Taylor is a leading example of an approach to media production led by and directed towards a sensory engagement with the subject that plays with and against the power of the image. Taylor's film with Ilisa Barbash *Sweetgrass* (a segment of which is presented on the enclosed DVD) about the last migration of sheep through Montana's Absaroka-Beartooth mountain range offers a prescient example. After being roundly rejected by many anthropological film festivals, Taylor explains his approach thus: 'Ambiguity, or any kind of aesthetic opacity that isn't readily translatable into the limpid clarity of expository prose, is somehow lacking for anthropologists, in their quest for "cultural meaning," which they're hell-bent on linguifying. And as often as not, out of all recognition. Clarity for me is an illusion, a product of a certain kind of cultural textology.' However a broader and engaged audience can be found elsewhere and Taylor showed some of the material filmed during the making of 'Sweetgrass' as a single-screen video installation at the Marion Goodman Gallery in New York alongside work by the British artist Steve McQueen, while his recent film with V er ena Paravel *Leviathan* found audiences in cinema and gallery spaces far beyond those that anthropology

normally reaches. Similarly Cox and Carlyle's 'sound film' installation 'Air Pressure' has been exhibited to diverse public audiences in galleries and arts festivals around the world, achieving a social impact on understandings of the scientific and environmental issues that it describes which would have been difficult if not impossible to achieve through normal academic means of textual representation.

A different approach to Taylor's is in evidence in the argument for multi-sensoriality articulated by Sarah Pink who sees the 'Future of Visual Anthropology' (2006) in the capacity of media systems - notably Hypermedia - to provide a practical means of combining the visual, the aural and the written. In so doing the privileged and discrete position of vision in the discipline may be overturned and 'sensory ethnography' may become a means of doing an applied anthropology with relevance to the public sphere. The blurring of borders between what are sometimes still considered within anthropology as discrete media, is an area that is extremely productive for anthropologists to creatively explore. The rise of so-called 'new digital cinema' (Willis 2005) and digital anthropology, show how earlier distinctions - such as those between documentary and art - have been superseded by a more fluid digital realm. This does not mean that any medium specificity can be willingly ignored, quite the opposite, but that the blurring results in works which previously would have been consigned to the category of 'art' now fit just as well in the category 'documentary'. This does not entail sidestepping issues of truth or ethics but reveals them as key areas of dialogue and discussion between disciplines.

The different connections made by Taylor, Cox and Pink between sensory perception, anthropological research and representation and non-textual media, reinforces the case made by the anthropologist of the senses David Howes, about how McLuhan and Ong's writings on the role of media in shaping social forms led to his own work on the historical and cross-cultural construction of the senses (1991, 2003, 2005). Howes is critical of McLuhan's categorisation and ordering of the senses as functions of technology and instead argues for an understanding of the sensorium that is an expression of and for social forces. This has implications for correspondence theories of truth and the kinds of ethnographic claims that are made on the basis of supposed correspondences between the 'ratios' of the senses as they are constituted through social relations and how they are modeled into the design and practical application of

media technologies (Howes 2003: 10). Accordingly, the media works brought together in *Beyond Text?* are presented in categories of 'Photo-essay', 'Sound', and 'Film' not because each defines a technology of the senses but rather because they provide a technology for the senses. They are designed to open up a space of anthropological encounter that is characterized not by the differences in media technology - such as between analogue and digital or monochrome and color; as in Patrick Sutherland's photographic essay of life in Spiti and Jennifer Deger's film about Yolngu aesthetics *Christmas with Wawa* - but rather by the critical and phenomenological insights offered by thinking with and through images, objects and sounds. The sensory faculties of looking, listening and feeling that are activated by these media sometimes flow separately and at others mix and merge together in ways that transform our perception, experience and understanding of the world. In other words they are important, necessary and alternative means of anthropological knowledge and analysis; although they may require different critical faculties from those involved when assessing the virtues of ethnographic texts.

What may be required from anthropological approaches to using and making film that is different from the critical faculties of working with texts is a kind of active looking, or an attention to various acts of looking that some practitioners have called an 'intercultural regard' (Deger 2006: 223). It is a kind of looking which may address the problem identified by a Yolngu filmmaker Bangana in Deger's work, that:

“You guys [balanda (white) anthropologists] keep looking, looking, looking but you just don't see” (in Deger 2006: 221)

The engagement with active looking has implications for both practitioners and their audiences. For example, Deger argues that when watching some of the films made by the Yolngu community she has worked with in Australia, balanda (white or non-Aboriginal) audiences must “surrender the impulse to know and thereby master the 'world as picture' and grasp something crucial about seeing from a Yolngu point of view” (Deger 2006 p.223). Films made by the Yolngu, and facilitated by Deger, are about the types of experiential knowledge that can be provided by and through film, whereby the image cannot be subsumed by words or textual explanation. Deger's work for *Beyond Text?* explores this kind of intercultural looking, the outcome of



which she describes as a “film with Yolngu aesthetics, rather than a documentary about them” (Deger this volume p .?).

The work of filmmakers presented in this volume ranges from the more observational style of Taylor/Barbash, to the episodic montage of De Silva, and the textural filmmaking of Greenhaugh. Taylor and Barbash's film *Sweetgrass* follows Montana shepherders in the US on what may be one of their last transhumance journeys through the mountains. Their kind of observational filmmaking with its long shots and minimal camera movements is one that ‘privileges the sensory’ and ‘refuses to abstract from the particular’ and concerns the creation of a particular kind of inter-subjective space where anthropological knowledge can emerge (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2010: 135). This is similar to arguments made by Laura Marks that film enables a visceral opening out towards difference (Marks 2000: 19) and by Grimshaw and Ravetz that -

“observational cinema, contrary to much critical opinion, is not then about creating an accurate transcription of the world. Instead it hinges upon connection, expressed in an almost intangible, empathic moment...the distinctive techniques and aesthetic of observational filmmaking no longer appear as evidence of a simple-minded scientism or old-fashioned ethnographic realism. Instead they can be appraised as constitutive of a reflexive praxis, a way of *doing* anthropology that has the potential to creatively fuse the object and medium of enquiry.” (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2010: 136 emphasis in original)

This is no longer a matter of arguments about transcribing reality, but about achieving a certain kind of empathy, and indeed the convergence between new observational work and certain kinds of artistic endeavour commented on by filmmaker Hito Steyerl, suggest that a form of ‘documentary uncertainty’ is a necessary element of all exploration of social realities through film (Steyerl 2011). Jeff De Silva's film *Balkan Rhapsodies* consists of a montage of seventy eight small film fragments that combine to form a larger view of life during and after the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and play on this notion of documentary uncertainty. Functioning individually as micro films, the cumulative effect is one that allows a broad range of narratives to be drawn

out. Cathy Greenhaugh's film *Cottonopolis* makes use of observational techniques in pursuing the materiality of cotton production across several continents, but like Silva's, draws out analogies between the film form and the subject matter. *Balkan Rhapsodies* suggests the uncertainty of a single overarching view of events through the use of micro moments, *Cottonopolis* suggests a kind of material affinity between film and weaving. Steven Feld and Virginia Ryan's film collaboration from *The Castaways Project* questions the status of film as 'documentation' through representing various aspects of their material collaboration on a project that connects the slave trade in West Africa with more contemporary forms of economic exploitation. Taken together these filmic experiments argue that anthropologists need to think more attentively and directly about looking and perception, about how people *engage* with the works produced, as well as how they are crafted. One useful example of a kind of observational empathy at work, and one that also demonstrates the convergence of art practices with ethnography, is a film by Ben Rivers called 'Two Years at Sea', a deeply ethnographic and intimate portrait of the life of a solitary recluse in Scotland shot on 16mm black and white film (Rivers 2011). The film pays particular attention to the grain and textures of its protagonist's life and demonstrates the kind of productive convergences that are possible between visual anthropology and filmmaking more broadly. The radical nature of this redefinition of observational filmmaking is in the questions it poses for existing models of the generation and representation of anthropological knowledge.

In the same way that the assembled film-works in *Beyond Text ?* explore critical practices of perception through modes of looking and media creation the five sound works on the DVD are examples of the anthropological insights that may be had in recognizing what Paul Carter calls 'the erotic ear', that is open to the sense of background 'noise' showing 'that listening is always a listening in and overhearing and being overheard' (Carter: this volume). It is this that 'makes the encounter theatrical and choreographic not symbolic' and as such the works presented here all use sound recording practice to try to make sense of the sensory excess that is normally eliminated from an exchange when it is translated into or analysed through text. The perceptual differences that are at stake here, Jean Luc Nancy identifies as between hearing as the perception of sound as resonant space and the active listening

to the *logos* of sound. As he puts it:

‘perhaps it is necessary that sense not be content to make sense (or to be logos) but that it wants also to resound’ (Nancy, 2007: 6).

The invitation to listen links the five sound works which describe a variety of scenes of sonic relations between bodies, living matter and the environment. John Wynne and Tim Wainwright’s video portrait of patients on a heart and lung transplant ward in Harefield hospital, London reveals the ‘curious mixture of sensory deprivation and sensory overload’. John Levack Drever’s study of the ‘auditory culture of crowds’ in Hong Kong questions the sense we may make of language when it is absorbed into the sonic backdrop of competing urban sounds. Steven Feld and Virginia Ryan’s collaboration is a meditation on the forced movements, departures and returns of people and things as part of the slave trade and its legacy, evoked through a linked composition of the sonic materials found along the space of Ghanaian shoreline at Accra, at Pram Pram, Jamestown, Labadi, Anomabo, and Korlegonno. Carlyle and Cox’s sound film also deals with numbers, repetition and economies of scale in a ‘sound film’ portrait of the conflict between the resonant life of a farm and the cacophonies of the airport that surrounds it in Narita, Japan. Similarly, Cusack’s poetic reverie about the human and environmental legacies of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster is played out resonantly at a multi-species level as well as through the logos of voice and song. Finally, Louise K. Wilson’s sound installation explores the technical machinery deployed by sound recordists and submariners for over-hearing and mishearing the bio-aquatic conversations of the Plymouth Sound on England’s south coast. Taken together, all these works demonstrate the insights that may be revealed through the critical application of perception, something that Steven Feld has long argued for in stating that ‘Until the sound recorder is presented and taught as a technology of creative and analytic mediation, which requires craft and editing and articulation just like writing, little will happen of an interesting sort in the anthropology of sound’ (2004: 471).

Notwithstanding the critical-creative competencies evident in the works we have assembled here, it is important to acknowledge that there are inherent risks when attempting to create multi-sensory ethnographies that include what Carter calls ‘a

return to the desire to mimic the other and to ‘stage a confrontation with the real’ through greater intimacy but in so doing’ to ‘inscribe into them ‘the face of death’. However, mimetic the device, there is an assumption of translatability and a ‘normalization of communication.’ More critical still is the perceived risk that the technological specificity of media such as film, photography and sound will result in the conflation of sensory perception with what the specific technology makes available to us, so for example we end up confusing the act of seeing with what the camera makes visible in ways that reduce our understanding of seeing to looking at images. This is the position staked out by the anthropologist Tim Ingold who in a series of phenomenological and ecologically inspired writings about perception and the environment (1993, 2000) argues against a representational theory of knowledge about the senses (2011). Against the representation of ‘virtual worlds of sense’ by way of their slicing up into ‘scapes’ and pathways, Ingold proposes that practices of walking and drawing may offer an immersive understanding of how ‘every living being is a particular nexus of growth and development within a field of relations’ (2011: 314-15).

*Beyond Text?* with the emphasis firmly on the ? offers an alternative stance towards the capacity of non-textual media as tools for ethnographic research and representation and seeks to put this into practice by way of the accompanying DVD. In the process of creating the works on the DVD there is a working through of ideas – that Paul Carter calls *Material Thinking* (2004) which is not simply about the operation of the technology’s in question, and thus may avoid the determinist trap that Ingold warns of whereby the mechanical means of production and the representational artifact are confused with the act of perception itself. The assumption that technologies of visual, sound and object production constitute forms of analysis and description in their own right, (alongside their adroit co-option or ‘appropriation’ by indigenous and marginalised peoples) has contributed to the idea of media as theoretical “objects of study”, rather than a practical means of doing anthropology.

As such *Beyond Text?* argues for an experimental, practice based approach and explores the sensory perception and knowledge of the world that is made possible through the use and reception of different media practices and technologies. Our proposal is that this understanding is not necessarily the same as that which is arrived

at when the primary mode of documentation and representation is the written text. Nor is it a simply a function of the technology or media in question, but instead is the coming together and participatory immersion of the anthropologist or artist practitioner with the subject through their use of media. In this vein Christopher Pinney productively suggests a model of the ethnographer as akin to a negative exposed during fieldwork (Pinney 1995). There are various ways of describing this immersion, for example in ethnographic film-making, Jean Rouch famously referred to it as a state of 'cine-trance'. This immersive and integrative process—which centres on the relationship between sensory practices and the social and cultural environment which is being represented—is important to articulate, as it addresses the subtle human and technological dynamics involved in negotiating between the demands that images, objects and sounds make of us in their recording and representation, what anthropologists and artists want from them and the responsibilities they place upon us to actively engage with the world. It also highlights the critical competences necessary in accounting for and ideally including within the representation, the political and ethical dimensions of the collaboration. Considering the analytical and multi-sensory properties of different media in these terms brings anthropology into a constructive dialogue with cultural domains linked to visual, sound, and material culture studies, and extends existing scholarship in the anthropology of the senses and visual anthropology.

### **Dialogue, imagination and sensation**

The notion of dialogue is but one way of conceiving the kinds of encounters that are contained in *Beyond Text ?*, being as Schneider points out and Steven Feld has demonstrated in a hugely important body of sound and film works, an anthropological trope that involves a conversational exchange about difference where meaning is emergent, multiple, negotiated and sometimes opaque. This notion takes us back to the auditory argument about the dynamic, sensual power of *logos* in the Phaedric dialogue discussed in Carter's chapter along with a number of other contributions that deal with the echoic and reflective properties of sounds and images and which allow us to think sensorially, through the differences between looking and seeing, hearing and listening, touching and feeling. The dialogue between people and things, flowing through matter as sense, operates at different levels: as metaphors in Feld's sound piece *Castaways* about the resounding waves on the slave beaches of the Ghanain

coast and in Cox and Carlyle's 'sound film' about the screaming crescendo of jets landing and taking off over the last farm remaining inside Narita airport in Tokyo, Japan. Migratory and dissipative sounds that threaten to drown out language and voice are also the subject of the sound work *Ochlophonic Study #3: Hong Kong* by John Levack Drever, where the roar of the urban crowd becomes a metaphor for a profound sense of otherness and a feeling of what Canetti (1967) calls 'a marvellously luminous, viscid substance' induced by the state of 'defying words'. The subject of voice and the political implications of its positioning returns in the performed conversation that becomes a cry of protest in James Thompson's photo-essay *Looking for Liebeskind*, about the attempts by the celebrated architect Daniel Liebeskind to impose a housing scheme as a vision of the future onto communities uprooted by the Tsunami in Sri Lanka. There are also multi-species conversations between nature and culture for example, in the interactions between the ranchers, sheep, dogs, and horses in Lucien Taylor's film *Sweetgrass*, and in the interchanges between insect and bird life and the testimonies of those still living among the debris of Chernobyl in Peter Cusack's sound piece, or in the contested relationship of the sounds of bio-aquatic life and shipping traffic heard by submariners in Louise K Wilson's sound work *contest behaviour*. Other dialogues are orientated inwards as personal explorations of the interior life of the body and the imagination and have to do with those dealing with the immanency of death caused by illness and state terror. Accordingly Degarrod, Wynne, De Silva and Irving's pieces are all orientated inwards towards personal explorations of the interior life of the body and the imagination, including those that deal with the immanency of death caused by illness and state terror. As Degarrod, Wynne and De Silva, show, experiences of illness, disruption and displacement are accompanied by complex streams of reflection, mood, memory, reverie and imagination that are not necessarily articulatable in words or readily made public. Conventional social-scientific approaches and measures are often too static to capture or fully do justice to the fluidity of perception and lived experience—especially among those living with illness, existential uncertainty or political instability—and perhaps are best addressed by forming close working collaborations with interested persons to developing a set of mutually defined research aims and modes of description to articulate their experience.

On this issue, Vincent Crapanzano's work *Imaginative Horizons* (2004) offers a

sustained critique of the empirical presuppositions of social science, including a discussion of how the complex lifeworlds brought into being by the imagination are largely understood as intangible, immaterial and irrelevant rather than empirical phenomena worthy of investigation. Crapanzano draws upon a range of literary and psychoanalytic examples to argue that people's imaginary worlds are not subjective irrelevancies but are constitutive of action, practice and bodily experience. However, Crapanzano's argument is not with objective, social-scientific inquiry or empiricism *per se* but rather with the narrow definitions and reductive accounts of what constitutes 'reality' in conventional approaches. Following William James's plea to reinstate 'the vague and inarticulate to its proper place in our mental life', Crapanzano suggests that to understand human behaviour it is necessary to pay closer attention to 'a dimension of experience that insofar as it resists articulation, indeed disappears with articulation, has in fact been ignored' (2004: 18). Crapanzano is largely directed towards philosophical and literary understandings of the human rather than practical fieldwork techniques and ethnographic research methods: a major challenge therefore concerns how we might combine theoretical and methodological approaches so as to practically research the complex realms of imaginative expression and experience.

Crapanzano's approach indicates why the representation of the modes of experience and expression dealt with in Degarrod, Wynne, De Silva and Irving's pieces are important and necessary. That being said, these representations also raise ethical questions about artistic methods which as Schneider points out may bear a different weight of responsibility for artists than for anthropologists whose accountability is tied to anthropology's historical associations with colonialism and its contemporary involvements with US military and intelligence programmes. For, unlike poetic, literary, or artistic attempts to understand and represent people's lifeworlds, an anthropological approach has a duty to offer truthful and empirically justifiable accounts of people's experiences, ideally in which the subjects can recognise themselves and their experience, which raises significant epistemological, methodological, and ethnographic problems.

Degarrod's essay is insightful on this issue. Her collaborative research about the memories of forced migration among Chilean exiles in California involved her subjects in each step of the process of creating a series of maps and videos for an

installation that incorporated their feedback and concerns into the work. John Wynne's collaboration with the photographer Tim Wainwright, *Transplant*, about a heart transplant ward in Harefield Hospital outside London is similarly sensitive to the dangers of voyeurism and the necessity of remaining constantly sensitive to hospital and patient demands. Irving's piece offers a different kind of encounter in order to try to engage with and represent the transient streams of inner dialogue, imagery and reverie that exist beneath the surface of urban life. Drawing on modernist writers such as Dos Passos, Celine, and Dostoyevsky his photo-essay and accompanying sound recordings derive from a practice-based, research project, *New York Stories*, for which he recorded more than a hundred interior dialogues of random strangers encountered as they moved around the city

Through these dialogic encounters, our aim is to extend experiments in ethnography that have drawn upon the sensory, literary and cinematic imagination, such as the juxtaposition of image-text in the photo-essay (Mitchell 1994) or when adopting techniques of montage in film. To a certain extent, montage is already prefigured in lived experience. When a person walks, as has often been noted, they are like a film director who strolls the streets, perceives images, and mentally records their visual experiences, creating a movie in their head by way of the images they encounter, including all the various cinematic techniques of looking, editing, close-ups, long shots, flashbacks, fleeting or lingering gazes, cutting away, and the use of the different kinds of optical effects, incidental music, ambient sounds, and narrative voices that are encountered in the street. Here, movement is a creative act of *poesis* that continuously generates complex dialogues and juxtapositions of sound, image, texture, taste, and aroma within the flow of everyday life. It also creates many different cross cuttings and juxtapositions of subject matter, tone, scale, rhythm, motion, sound, volume, contrast, and association, akin to the classic techniques of montage from Sergei Eisenstein to Luis Buñuel. Lived montage is generated within all the different sensory registers, including those that go beyond or challenge those that can be effectively represented in film.

The manner in which sensory data is encountered within the flow of daily life was extensively considered by Erwin Straus (1963, 1966), who documented how the body's nerve cells and sense organs register ever-changing combinations of sound and



image and texture that are rendered meaningful by the cognitive capacity to tie information together in consciousness and by the nervous system's ability to rapidly coordinate complex juxtapositions of sensory information in a manner whereby meaning is not closed off but left open for further revision and evaluation. The construction of complex montages of time and space within film are therefore not restricted to editing and cinematic technique insofar as they are predicated upon the human nervous system's capacity for processing and interpreting different modes of sensory data in everyday experience and phenomenological activity, thus displacing the distinction between art and life, as indicated in Gilles Deleuze's summary of "seeing" Francis Bacon's paintings:

The levels of sensation would really be domains of sensation that refer to the different sense organs; but precisely each level, each domain would have a way of referring to the others, independently of the represented object they have in common. Between a color, a taste, a touch, a smell, a noise, a weight, there would be an existential communication that would constitute the "pathic" (nonrepresentative) moment of the sensation. In Bacon's bullfights, for example, we hear the noise of the beast's hooves. (2005: 30)

Deleuze's model of sensation returns us to understandings of aesthetics and aesthesis that are not so much concerned with art or reflection, but life and reality as constituted through the interplay between the different sense organs. An ongoing consequence of being a body in the world is the formation and juxtapositions of sensate experience—sometimes complementing and seamlessly intertwining, on other occasions discordant or jarring—that are continuously generated through the body's sense organs and nervous activity.

Prior to the advent of film and sound recording it would have been nonsensical to define a stage play, circus, musical concert, or sports match as a "live" performance or event because it is only through the subsequent development of technologies and media of recording and representation, such as cinema, CDs and DVDS that such insights have become thinkable or possible. The contemporary understanding and appreciation of "liveness" is thus partially a consequence of modern technology,

illustrating how the invention of photography, film and sound recording, have produced new ways of thinking not just in relation to cinematic and other forms of representation, but about lived and sensory experience and how human beings encounter a world of sound, smell, image and texture. As such, analyzing cinematic and other artistic techniques of representation—such as montage—provides both theoretical and practical ways of thinking about how people’s lived experiences and sensory realities of the world combine and are shaped in movement and action.

Likewise there is the related attempt to explore the question of going *Beyond Text?* through metaphors for thinking about and representing the world. The emphasis in *Beyond Text?* is on metaphors that draw on the material properties of walls (Carter), waves (Feld), surfaces (Irving) windows (Russell, Cox and Carlyle) and engage with the ethnographic potential to use, combine or substitute text with other materials and media. Cathy Greenhaugh engages with *texture* in her film ‘Cottonopolis’ Catherine Russell explores the concept of *textuality*, while the photo-essays by Patrick Sutherland and James Thompson both use combinations of *image-text*. As such, the aim is to address the epistemological and political concerns around a negative sense of plenitude and excess of presence when these sensory elements are combined; a view which has often required anthropologists to emphasise narrative structure, and to offer contextualisation or textualisation as constraints on meaning.

The aim of combining a book and DVD for *Beyond Text?* is to argue for an active and experimental anthropology that is open to a wider range of methods and techniques in research and representation. In some respects this has been happening for a long time through the work of various individuals such as for example the anthropologist Robert Asher’s animations (see Ramey 2011 and Pasqualino/Schneider forthcoming) and a variety of contemporary endeavours – such as Ethnographic Terminalia (<http://ethnographicterminalia.org/>) a collective of visual anthropologists and other practitioners who have put on a series of ground-breaking exhibitions alongside American Anthropological Association conferences in the USA. These examples, and the visual and audio works discussed in this book and presented on the DVD, all argue for the productive possibilities of engaging in forms of perceptual investigation and creation and of taking the the senses seriously in anthropological encounters with alterity so as to formulate sensory anthropology as a form of critical practice.

