

VOL 7 NO 01

Editorial

Bjørn Arntsen (UiT-The Arctic University of Norway)

Alyssa Grossman (University of Liverpool)

Osmund E. B. Grøholt (University of Bergen)

Leonard Kamerling (University of Alaska Fairbanks)

This issue of the *Journal of Anthropological Films* includes films from Iceland, Belgium, Denmark, the Solomon Islands, the United Kingdom, Australia and Japan. The films contribute anthropological insights through topics related to water, technology, memory, myth, the collaborative process and education. As in the previous issue, the films published here span more than two decades (between 1997 and 2022), and include a self-reflexive, polyphonic video essay, a doctoral research project incorporating a collage of observation and memory, a film that employs creative framings of classical research footage, a collaborative ethnographic documentary, and a non-linear, non-verbal sensory ethnography.

Bringing together these very different projects, we aim to underline the idea that contemporary anthropological filmmaking involves a multitude of methods, compositions and configurations. The forms and approaches of these works range from the traditional to the experimental, demonstrating the breadth, diversity and vibrancy of existing strategies within the field.

The Films

Tributary, directed by James Davoll, Paul Dolan and Pete Howson, 12 minutes

Tributary exposes water as a source of energy and infrastructures that, as the film's abstract notes, "support our digital lives". The film opens with a moon-like and barren landscape where water is only visible in the form of clouds and faraway snow. A river then appears, cutting through the topography. It flows calmly before turning into a roaring waterfall which feeds into the pipes of a hydroelectric power plant, converting the water to humming electricity. Geothermal heat is similarly controlled, capped and put to work by a power plant shrouded in steam in a rocky Icelandic landscape. Midway through the film, the setting changes to a data centre, suggesting where the hydroelectric power is put to use. Visually, the centre forms a sharp contrast to the organic landscape at the beginning of the film – white, clean surfaces, straight lines, blinking lights and displays. The modern aesthetic is accompanied by intensifying layers of eerie digital sounds implying the data centre's escalating need for energy to keep up with the ever-increasing data.

The piece offers no contextualizing voice-overs or textual explanations. However, the filmic narrative emerges through careful editing and framing as it connects the different streams of water, electricity and data through an assemblage of technologies and infrastructures (landscapes, pipes, cables, servers). Human figures are far apart, visible only through brief and distant glimpses. Still, this critical narrative vividly reveals how data storage (including that of JAF's films) critically depends upon the intensifying use of resources in areas often hidden from view.

Where Things Go, directed by Baptiste Aubert, 75 minutes

Where Things Go is a film about material culture, collective memory, nostalgia, and a group of dedicated men passionately trying to ensure that the traces of an industrial past are carried into the present and made accessible to future generations. The textile factories in the Belgian town of Verviers were shut down during the 1960s. With the aim of establishing a national wool museum, some of the old textile machines were salvaged. The museum was never realized, but a group of retired men still gather in the warehouse where these machines are stored, working on bringing them back to life. Discussions and problem-solving occur as the heavy machines are moved around and reconstructed from spare parts. Reservoirs of experience-based knowledge are revealed as the men discuss the functioning of the machines and piece them back together. We are provided with glimpses into the past, in particular through the stories of two men and their former involvements with the industry. One of these men carefully reconstructs a yarn-winding machine as he recounts his motivations for joining the industry and his varied work experiences in France, Belgium and Morocco. The other proves to be a driving force behind saving what is left of the industry's objects and archival materials before the buildings are demolished and end up in the garbage heap.

Patient observations of the men's working processes are combined with thoughtful questions from the filmmaker. Woven into the film are also visits to Vervier's flea markets, where the histories of old weaving shuttles are conveyed alongside those of the vendors who part with them. These passages offer another layer of filmic representations of the collective memories of the once prominent textile industry in this Belgian town. *Where Things Go* is part of Baptiste Aubert's PhD project at the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

Tuo Dolphins, directed by Rolf Scott and Peter Ian Crawford, 23 minutes

On an August night in 1996, a school of striped dolphins came ashore near the village of Tuo on Fenualoa in the Solomon Islands. Dolphins beach with some regularity there, providing an important source of food and giving rise to a legend about the origins of this event. The film presents both a historical occurrence - the beaching of the dolphins, and the legendary/mythological context that explains it.

Tuo Dolphins is a story within a story. The first is composed of ethnographic footage from 1996 depicting the dolphins coming ashore and being harvested by the village. When they first appeared, Tuo village elder Moffat Bonunga immediately contacted anthropologist /filmmakers Rolf Scott and Peter I. Crawford, who were conducting long-term research on the island. The villagers wanted them to film this special event, along with a re-enactment of the origin legend that explained the dolphins' first and subsequent arrivals. The film then puts a frame around the original 1996 footage. We see it first on the

screen of an editing table in Denmark, where Moffat Bonunga watches and annotates the filmed events. Bonunga came to Denmark to join anthropologist Jens Pinholt with whom he worked in the Solomon's and it is their conversation about the dolphin legend that provides the through-line for the film. In the original footage we hear elder Cumins Veio explain the phenomenon of the beached whales to a group of younger men. He recounts the legend of two children swept out to sea by strong currents, eventually becoming dolphins themselves - thus establishing an enduring mythical kinship with the people of Tuo village. Both elders have deep knowledge of Tuo cultural traditions and the film is confidently constructed around this indigenous expertise.

Oak Tree, Gum Tree, directed by Catherine Gough-Brady and Christine Rogers, 10 minutes

Collaboration in its various forms has become a constituent part of visual anthropology. Most often it refers to the broad framework of cooperation negotiated between anthropological filmmakers and their research subjects. Filmmakers Catherine Gough-Brady and Christine Rogers take the concept of collaboration in an entirely new direction in *Oak Tree, Gum Tree*, a co-authored video essay in which they serve both as authors and as research subjects. "We decided to collaborate, with each other and with the images," they explain at the start of the film. They are friends and colleagues - but they live on opposite sides of the globe, Rogers in the UK, Gough-Brady in Australia. For three months they filmed and traded images with the intention of capturing both the universality and differences in their lives. "We filmed images, with no context or explanation and sent them to each other". They edited the film in response to each other's contributions, and to the raw visuals themselves. The film uses multiple frames on a wide screen, juxtaposing images that are both experiential and illustrative of the parallel lives of the filmmakers - a neighborhood waking up at dawn, ducks in a pond, a "masculine tableau" of kayakers in the ocean, a city street at dusk seen from the upper deck of a bus.

Oak Tree, Gum Tree (the title is not directly related to the contents of the film) asks viewers to consider the fluid nature of collaboration. On-screen quotes by Trinh Minh Ha, David MacDougall and Joris Ivens, filmmakers who have helped shape contemporary documentary genres, remind us that this video essay is as much about the process of filmmaking as it is about the filmed images themselves.

Heart of the Country, directed by Leonard Kamerling, 83 minutes

This collaborative ethnographic documentary, shot in 1997 and restored in 2022, offers an intimate window into a close-knit community of teachers, students, and parents affiliated with an elementary school in the small northern Japanese village of Kanayama. Its story centres around the school's recently appointed Principal, Shinichi Yasutomo, and his mission to bring "great education to a small school", to "love each child", and to cultivate learning "from the point of view of the heart". Through informal interviews with Yasumoto at work and in his own home, we come to understand his articulate and committed character, as well as his deep desire to establish solid, caring relationships at the core of all pedagogical activity.

In this school, adults and children eat their meals together, laugh and tell each other stories. While Yasutomo is a figure of high status, he does not spend his time shut away in an office. Instead, he sits with the students, chatting with them and asking them about their

work; he hops up and down along with everyone else during the school's daily exercise sessions. Careful, focused camerawork eloquently conveys the relaxed yet attentive body language of the pupils who clearly respect him but are also at ease with him and with the other teachers. The Educational Bureau's unexpected transfer of Yasutomo to another school after only two years evokes great emotion amongst all members of the school, who gather on the street to give him flowers and cards and to bid him and his wife farewell. This film offers its own lessons in "heart-to-heart learning", through attentive, grounded observations that listen closely to all who form part of this community.