

### Editorial

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This issue centres on the many ways social connections unfold across species, brought into view through collaborative reflection, attentive observation and incisive critique. We present five films that were recorded (and produced) in Chile, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Jordan and the UK. The films explore questions around urban memory, health and well-being, water scarcity, social class and the act of ethnographic filmmaking itself. Despite their differences in subject matter, what links these projects is a visual and visceral focus on the practice of social connection (within and across species) and an attentiveness to the complex process of finding one's place in the world.

A retired cab driver contemplates his past and present through fragments of domestic memorabilia tucked away in his home. Members of an urban community gardening project dig their hands deep in the soil, building a community through shared sensory engagements with their natural environment. Inhabitants of a desert region debate their dependency on water and confront the political dynamics that underlie the uneven access to this essential resource. A young couple undergo a fraught ritual to become reintegrated into their home community after years of exile. A visual anthropologist reflects on how the process of making a film is entangled with complex moral, aesthetic and methodological questions.

Taken together, these works invite us to sit with the fine-grained textures of lived experience, and to become more attuned to the ethical intricacies involved in any act of representation. The films foreground the quiet negotiations, sensory encounters and forms of relational labour that shape everyday life, while highlighting the broader environmental, political and historical forces that contour local realities. Through their thoughtful explorations of experiences that affect all of us in different ways, including what it means to navigate the passage of time, to confront environmental crisis and a changing climate, or to conduct research in different parts of the world with a camera, these films and their protagonists deepen our understanding of what ethnographic cinema can evoke, and remind us of the possibilities and responsibilities inherent in capturing the human (and more-than-human) aspects of our lives and the worlds we inhabit.

## The Films

*Jimmy's Archive*, (25 minutes, 2023), directed by Robert Deakin

In Jimmy Watters' apartment in Poplar (the former Docklands of East London), the shelves, tables and cupboards are filled with artefacts of times past– 1970s London. As Jimmy delves into his cupboards of carefully kept memorabilia, stories emerge of family, school, music and the rapid changes in the neighborhood where he has lived for over thirty years. Jimmy's personal archive exists as a conversation across time, a link to a future that once felt open and optimistic. From his cupboard emerges a baptism certificate, music posters from the '70s and three intact tickets to a David Bowie concert. 'People my age were once fourteen and big fans. Their mums and dads were saying, "Why are you listening to that terrible man with orange hair?" But now they are chairmen of big companies. It has a cultural significance, doesn't it?'

*Jimmy's Archive* is a collaboration between anthropologist Robert Deakin and James (Jimmy) Watters, a retired London Black Cab driver who now spends much of his time at home. As treasures from the collection are shared, Jimmy's narratives unfold with enthusiasm, nostalgia and a touch of melancholy. This is a story of aging and resilience in a gentrifying urban landscape that to Jimmy looks less and less like home. The film poses questions about displacement and the human cost of urban change. *Jimmy's Archive* is a celebration of collecting as a creative act of memory, one that fulfills an existential desire in search of origins, meaning and the need to leave a thumbprint somewhere in the world.

*Wind and Words* (12 minutes, 2019), directed by Roger Canals

*Winds and Words* is a short film that peels back the layers of the always evolving and unpredictable process of making films across cultural boundaries. It explores the process of making authentic films about intangible and non-visible aspects of culture, about what it means to access the world outside the viewfinder's frame. The director explicitly addresses some of the fundamental questions and conflicts that anthropologists and filmmakers confront in their work. It is a persuasive experiment in reflexive filmmaking, one that holds up a mirror to the camera and invites viewers into the process of making ethnographic films.

At the start of the film we observe anthropologists at work, interacting with local community members and filming scenes for *Chasing Shadows*, a feature-length work by the same author, about a prophetic movement in Guinea-Bissau (published in *JAF* in 2021). In a reflexive voice-over, the filmmaker presents his thoughts on the ethical, methodological and epistemological uncertainties that accompany the process of ethnographic filmmaking. From behind the camera he offers viewers a provocative invitation to watch the footage as participants rather than as observers: 'Cinema is the art of shadows,' the opening title proclaims. 'The camera allows us to reproduce reality in movement, mummify time, and transmute our vision of the world into images. But cinema also opens up a possibility for us to get closer to others, to interact with them. To show others how we see them, and grasp how they see us'.

*Our Little Garden* (59 min, 2024), directed by Sointu Toiskallio

‘Excuse me, Mrs. Calendula’, one of the protagonists asks a plant before plucking off her petals. The central landscape in the film *El Huertito* is both a garden and a refuge for people seeking nature, health and social connection, and offers an endearing perspective on the relationships at the heart of an urban gardening project in Chile. These are relationships filled with respect, curiosity and admiration. The film is driven by shots of hands deep in the earth, eyes in awe of what nature has to offer and enthusiastic voices describing what it means to be connected to the soil, plants and the animal world when we allow ourselves to do so.

The film not only brings together people from all walks of life but also different kinds of knowledge, presenting numerous ways of understanding the world through its scenes of tasting, smelling, planting and spiritual affinity. The lushness of a garden created through curiosity and dedication in the midst of Santiago’s bustle and noise truly makes this a place protagonists and viewers alike would want to inhabit. This film is an ode to slowness, dedication and multispecies relationships.

*Living Water* (77 minutes, 2020), directed by Pavel Borecký

Where is the driest place on earth? The film *Living Water* is set in Wadi Rum, a vast desert in Jordan where the sandy landscape hides a large basin of underground freshwater. The once parched environment radically changed when the first well was drilled in 1964, and Bedouins began inhabiting the area and establishing villages. Today this landscape features wells every five kilometres. The film shows how the presence of water has led to a new way of living in the desert, including the possibility of growing crops using irrigation. It also calls attention to the population’s complete dependency on the Disi water basin for sustaining their everyday subsistence.

Beautifully composed images of landscapes and infrastructure map out the journey of the water across vast desert landscapes. Interviewees from local communities and representatives of the state offer conflicting views about the process of water distribution, all of which illustrate the difficulties of navigating scarce resources across local, regional and international politics and needs. Moving between all the locations in Jordan that are today receiving water from Disi, and emphasising their distance from the desert, the film shows us the complex and extensive scale of human reliance upon a very limited and non-renewable resource.

*The Lost Child* (90 minutes, 2023), directed by Rolf Scott and Olaf Smedal

This film invites viewers into the highlands of Flores, Indonesia– in a village where residents have traditionally fallen into the social categories of ‘aristocrats’ and ‘commoners’. A decade prior to the making of this film, Ludis, one of the village’s noblewomen, secretly married Anis, a commoner. This was a forbidden act, historically punishable by death. Having stayed away from the village over the

ensuing years, the couple now wish to return. But Ludis is considered unclean and dangerous, and the only way they both can be accepted back is to undergo the Nuka Nua ritual, a two-day event that marks Ludis' transition to a lower social status by formally acknowledging her subordination to her family of origin. The ritual involves not one, not two, not three, but seven animal sacrifices, which are portrayed in graphic detail, alongside scenes of divinations, conversations with ancestors, midnight processions, dancing in the village plaza and community feasting.

The directors offer an intricate balance between face-to-face interviews and slow, deliberate observational sequences of the ritual, with written intertitles providing key contextual information. While we are privy to the stages that mark Ludis' and Anis' symbolic deaths and their process of becoming integrated into a new familial hierarchy, we hear about their feelings of yearning, sadness, longing, fulfilment and relief as they undergo this physically and emotionally challenging experience. When the filmmaker asks the couple why they wished to go back to their village after such a long period of estrangement, Anis replies, 'However far we travel, at one point we have to return.' He points to the 'lost child' from the Gospel of Luke as inspiration; for them, the ceremony offers a means to ask for forgiveness, to express gratitude to those they had left behind, to pay their respects to the inhabitants and navigate the complex logic of the underlying social order of the village.

**Viewer Advisory:** This documentary contains graphic scenes of traditional animal sacrifice. Some viewers may find these images distressing.