

Editorial

VOL 10 NO 01

Alyssa Grossman (University of Liverpool)

Leonard J. Kamerling (University of Alaska Fairbanks)

Martha-Cecilia Dietrich (University of Amsterdam)

Åshild Sunde Feyling Thorsen (University of Bergen)

Our current issue features works that showcase a truly diverse array of topics and approaches. The pieces we present here include a film shot in 16mm, which remediates archival traces to evoke colonial histories and violence; a documentary that uses an old dollhouse to elicit memories about a Swedish family's traumatic past; a sensory ethnography of an archaeological site in Bulgaria; and a collaborative project exploring the thoughts and experiences of a group of teenage boys who are recent immigrants to Finland. In all of these cases the films unfurl gradually, through partial narratives, fragments of stories. We the viewers are invited to actively piece together their underlying messages, to make our own connections between the images, voices, sounds, materialities and relationships that are conveyed on screen.

What emerges across these works is less a sense of cohesion than a productive tension between different styles and approaches. Each film operates within a unique register, sometimes observational, sometimes archival, often deeply sensory and intimate; yet they sit alongside one another in a way that highlights their differences rather than smoothing them over. This variety is not accidental; it reflects an interest in how distinct cinematic languages can be used to approach memory, history and the textures of lived experience from multiple angles.

At the same time, these films consistently resist linear narration. They unfold as processes of revelation rather than explanation, asking the viewer to stay with feelings of uncertainty and to navigate shifting perspectives. What binds these works together, then, are not unified stories but a shared attention to fragments of pasts, conversations, archives, embodied encounters and partial histories. Their meanings are not delivered but assembled—meticulously, and often imperfectly—through the act of viewing itself.

The films

Couple More Shovels for a Few More Levs (2024, directed by Pauline Shongov, 42 minutes)

It takes a bit of time to begin to understand what is happening in this film. The opening shot, extending for nearly two minutes without a cut, reveals hands deep in dirt, figures crouching close to the ground amidst a backdrop of sawing and banging and crushing noises. As the larger physical setting is gradually revealed, we come to understand that this is an archaeological site on the outskirts of a Bulgarian city, where a crew of mostly male, chain-smoking, pension-aged laborers are working to extract cultural artefacts long buried in the soil. We follow their bodily movements as they chip away at the earth, turn over rocks, haul cartloads of dirt to a steep mound at the edge of the site.

The camera drifts through this landscape, animated by the living, breathing motion of the human hand and eye behind it. We overhear bits of passing conversation, jokes and gossip— about people’s relationship troubles, their voting habits, their uses of technology. We hear about meagre salaries, ill family members at home, construction work in a nearby town, how many relatives are now living abroad. The snakes or rats that might be hiding beneath the stump of a tree. An acquaintance renowned for his ability to consume 30 meatballs in a single meal. We never find out exactly who these workers are or what specifically they are looking for, but this is not the point of the film. There is one moment when a man uncovers a bit of glass, which he believes might be part of a bracelet, and he tells his compatriot to keep digging, shovel by shovel, because ‘that happens to be the work of archaeology... to unearth, not just to dig’. It also happens to be the work of this rich, multisensory film: slow and careful looking, focused perseverance and a commitment to sift through the rubble of life to catch a glimpse of whatever treasure might come to the surface as the interactions and events unfold.

Oh, These Beloved Hands (2023, directed by Rachel Runesson, 25 minutes)

Eighty years after an accident that claimed her father’s life, an elderly woman finds a path to confront her loss and mourn a parent she never knew. This film follows Lisbeth Svenson and her adult son as they explore the impacts of grief and trauma that have reverberated through generations of their family, unnamed and largely unresolved, clouded by time. Lisbeth’s granddaughter, filmmaker/anthropologist Rachel Runesson, sets this process in motion by retrieving a family heirloom— a dollhouse— and bringing it to her grandmother’s house to spark conversations and memories about this difficult time.

The miniature world of the dollhouse becomes a powerful emotional conduit between the present and the past, the living and the lost. Old photographs, newspaper clippings documenting the tragedy and the very kitchen in which the film is set, serve as vessels for memory, allowing Lisbeth to externalise feelings that language alone cannot hold. This patient and restrained film takes us from an everyday domestic space into the emotional landscapes of an extended family across multiple decades. It carefully considers the connections between grief, memory and storytelling,

and sparks a process for Lisbet to reclaim a living sense of her own father, to transform her grief and pass on old and new memories to the next generation.

Requerimiento (2020, directed by Andrea Bordoli, 8 minutes)

Requerimiento presents a diverse and rich collection of images and audio over its 8-minute duration: a burning bonfire, the sounds and visuals of a green forest, humming noises, ink illustrations of a mythological character. Two humans flee from a beastly serpent; an active volcano threatens destruction. A slithering snake evokes sensorial unease. A voiceover distorted by static tells us that a meteor hit Central America 10,000 years ago and that its shards were used for making tools and weapons, before being brought to Europe for examination by the Spanish Conquistadors in 1776.

The meteorite and the serpent are also shown as objects of scientific study; printed labels and specimen jars suggest that they might be part of an old research collection in a museum. The way the objects are presented here brings to mind how most ethnographic collections have been created—accumulated and classified according to the European colonial project of organising the world. The lifeless snake in the specimen jar cannot be more different from the gliding serpent; its movements are lost, its rubber-like body stretched out with a metal tool by a museum professional. The act of preserving something for research, for eternity, has obliterated the snake's kinetic qualities and transformed it altogether. Tiny snake bones emerge from small containers, forming a puzzle that allows us to describe the specimen as a vertebrate. Objects are categorised, given names and transmuted into linear time scales and scientific systems. What remains and what is lost when myths and living beings are forced to conform to the rules of science?

Hanging Out (2023, directed by Mari Korpela, 20 minutes)

Temporary labour migration among skilled professionals is an increasingly global phenomenon, often involving the relocation of families and children. Yet the perspectives of these accompanying young people remain underexplored. In this ethnographic film project, Korpela examines the everyday lives, perceptions and experiences of expatriate children and youth in Finland.

During her fieldwork, Korpela collaborated with a group of 14-year-old boys in a Finnish town, filming their leisure activities and social interactions. The resulting film is a reflexive account of this collaborative process, foregrounding both the researcher's presence and the boys' agency in shaping the narrative. The film depicts the boys' free-time activities and the conviviality of their shared experiences, while also capturing their interactions with one another and with the researcher. Importantly, it includes their own reflections on life in Finland and their experiences of being positioned as 'foreigners' within a local social landscape.