

# Three modes of experimentation with art and ethnography

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Whilst the *Writing culture* critique since the mid-1980s has led to a number of experiments with ethnographic writing, the visual side has been neglected. Thus this article argues that by looking at the work of Oppitz, Downey, and Lockhart, which has not been considered in the canon of visual and general anthropology, anthropologists can develop new strategies of visual representation and research in regard to (1) conceptualizing closeness to and distance from the ethnographic subject, (2) the multiple positioning of the participant observer, and (3) developing new formal possibilities of visual representation. In doing so, anthropologists can start to address the unfulfilled potential of visual experimentation inherent in the *Writing culture* critique. This article then discusses three examples of experimentation with art and ethnography, that is, *Shamans of the Blind Country*, by anthropologist and film director Michael Oppitz (part-narrated by the writer William S. Burroughs), the video- and installation work of pioneer video artist Juan Downey among the Yanomamö, and the experimental film and photographic work *Teatro Amazonas* by contemporary artist Sharon Lockhart in Brazil, based on a collaboration with anthropologists.

## Prelude

In this article I shall discuss three examples of experimentation with art and ethnography. By 'art', I mean the visual arts in the widest sense (including film, video, photography, installation), and by 'ethnography' that method of fieldwork and participant observation which continues to define a core of social and cultural anthropology. Two of my examples are works by artists, Juan Downey (a pioneer of video art) and Sharon Lockhart (a contemporary photographer and film-maker), and one is by an anthropologist (and, on this occasion, film-maker), Michael Oppitz. Discussing work usually classified as belonging to different historical periods and genres of contemporary art and anthropology bears a certain risk, and at the same time offers the potential for exploration, precisely because it allows us to challenge previous borders and categorizations across the two disciplines. To my knowledge, Downey's and Lockhart's work have not been considered by anthropologists,<sup>1</sup> and the anthropological side of their work does not receive central treatment by art writers.<sup>2</sup> There are rather few artists and visual anthropologists who would be familiar with Oppitz's film.<sup>3</sup> He is more widely known (especially among German-speaking anthropologists) for a substantial written *oeuvre* in anthropological theory, that is, the interpretation of French structuralism (which also informs his film) and, among area specialists, for the ethnography of Nepal

(Oppitz 1975; 1988*b*). The above, I contend, is indicative of the general reluctance that exists within anthropology, including its sub-discipline of visual anthropology, to engage beyond a narrative textual paradigm<sup>4</sup> with visual work in the contemporary arts, and within art writing (with the exception of Hal Foster (1995)) to engage seriously with the anthropological practice of fieldwork.

All three works share a sense of experimentation which pushes the boundaries of their respective genres (film, video, photography, and installation), and are based on a profound engagement with the lives of others, characteristic of ethnography. I shall first discuss Michael Oppitz's epic film *Shamans of the Blind Country* (1978–81), and then Juan Downey's video (and installation) work among the Yanomamö<sup>5</sup> (especially his video *The laughing alligator*, 1979), and finally, Sharon Lockhart's film and exhibition *Teatro Amazonas* (1999).

The fundamental aim of this article is to consider new possibilities of experimentation in visual research and representation which so far rarely have been contemplated by anthropology, and which also have important implications for contemporary art. It is not that experimentation as such is alien to anthropology or indeed visual anthropology (Gregory Bateson, Michel Leiris, Jean Rouch, and, more recently, David MacDougall,<sup>6</sup> come to mind here), but what is called for now is a new engagement with visual forms of research and representation beyond the sub-disciplinary confines of visual anthropology – and this is why dialogue with the arts is important. On the other hand, through engagement with long-term fieldwork and collaboration with anthropologists, contemporary artists can develop a new framework within which to position themselves in their appropriations of others' cultures, beyond the recent 'ethnographic turn' (Coles 2000; Foster 1995).

Over the last two decades, the so-called *Writing culture* critique (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Marcus & Fischer 1986) has left an impact on anthropology in terms of the reassessment of ethnography and writing. However, as acknowledged by one originator of the critique, George Marcus, as well as representatives of the preceding ethno-poetry movement, Jerome and Diane Rothenberg, the new experiments that resulted from it remained largely confined to writing. As Rothenberg and Rothenberg write: '[T]he visual side (hand and eye) of ethnopoetics has generally been ignored in favor of the oral side (mouth and ear)' (1983: 139), while Marcus observes: 'By the mid-1990s, I had just about given up hope that the aesthetic issues that were implicated in the so-called *Writing Culture* critique of anthropology during the 1980s would be developed by anthropologists themselves' (2006: 95).

Yet the visual in its entirety was hardly considered by anthropologists, and visual experiments remained few and at the margins (rare examples are books such as *Eskimo realities* (Carpenter 1973) and *Hogans* (McAllester & McAllester 1987 [1980])). Even visual anthropology, on the whole, continued to be a text-based discipline, following linear narratives (Schneider & Wright 2006). Innovation in ethnographic film remained confined within this paradigm (Grimshaw 2001; Loizos 1993), and hardly any anthropological film-makers and visual anthropologists have engaged with the possibilities of film as explored by experimental film-makers and visual artists, such as manipulating the image itself. Rare exceptions are Robert Ascher's films, with images directly painted on celluloid (Ascher 1993). David MacDougall, perhaps the anthropological film-maker most sensitive to art, who argued that visual anthropology practice 'may need to define itself not at all in terms of written anthropology but as an alternative to it, as a quite different way of knowing related phenomena' (1998: 63),

mentions experimental film only in passing (1998: 220). MacDougall also considers that '[d]espite the dreams of some social scientists for a panoptic film record providing a comprehensive account of an event, the camera can record only a *single* perspective at any one time' (2006: 34, emphasis added). Whilst this is certainly true for each single camera, such a position does not enter into serious dialogue with how experimental film-makers and visual artists have long explored, especially for installations, the possibilities of multiple visual recordings, and split and multiple screens. Such practices in the contemporary arts precede the digital hypermedia age by several decades, yet the application of digital media in visual anthropology remains largely didactic and text-based in origin (Biella 1997; Pink 2001). Some passing mention of the possibilities of 'art and drawing in ethnographic research and representation' is made by Pink (2004: 7); however, this remark does not engage with the entire range of contemporary art practices.

Despite radical reflexive moves (including rejection of traditional participant observation),<sup>7</sup> and acknowledging the constructedness of ethnographic fields as historically and spatially contingent sites, *fieldwork* – as a method – still retains its defining position at the centre of contemporary social and cultural anthropology, with contemporary fieldwork entailing a variety of multi-sited practices in a globalized world (Clifford 1997; Marcus 1995). I consider that fieldwork is better conceived of as a set of fluctuating relationships between anthropologists and their ethnographic subjects than as a compact and solidly demarcated method. It is this relationship, in terms of *proximity* to and *distance* from its chosen ethnographic subject – moving in and out of focus – that characterizes the three projects under consideration.

Without taking a positivist approach, I suggest that one important issue has to do with the proximity to the perceived subject of appropriation, in this case indigenous cultures, or, more generally, the cultural 'Other' – for both artists and anthropologists. Drawing a purely metaphorical parallel with quantum physics here, it is intriguing that Heisenberg's uncertainty principle<sup>8</sup> in German is referred to as *Unbestimmtheitsrelation* (literally 'relation of uncertainty'), but also as *Unschärferelation* (literally relation of fuzziness, blurredness, or 'out-of-focus' principle). It is this relative positioning of focus to the perceived object, to seize the basic idea, or what Jonathan Crary has called 'the relation between the observing subject and the modes of representation' (1990: 1), which is of interest to my discussion. Arguably, then, the degree of focus that visual artists apply to their chosen subject (here indigenous cultures and, more generically, the cultural 'Other') is an appropriate criterion, albeit shifting in its content, which can be used in understanding their work.<sup>9</sup> On this basis I can already draw some brief distinctions between the three works. Michael Oppitz's *Shamans of the Blind Country* is based on long-term ethnographic observation, and repeated stays of the film crew in the field, informing a specific aesthetic of film-making. Juan Downey's *The laughing alligator* is the document of a singular experience of the artist and his family among the Yanomamö (which problematizes his role as observer, and his influence on ethnographic 'reality'). Sharon Lockhart's *Teatro Amazonas*, in the finished work at least, seems on the surface to be the most distant from her ethnographic subject (the population of the city of Manaus in the Brazilian Amazon, and neighbouring river regions).

We might also think of the three works as situated in different fieldwork paradigms, with the first two seemingly enfolded within a more traditional frame (of the singular fieldwork experience), and the third being more fragmented, an expression of

latter-day reflective fieldwork and the impact of globalization. Yet, as we shall see, such initial typologies only imperfectly characterize the works under consideration, and do not do full justice to them.

### *Shamans of the Blind Country*

*Shamans of the Blind Country* is a film by an anthropologist, and director on this occasion, Michael Oppitz. Few copies of *Shamans of the Blind Country* survive, and it is rarely seen in public; nor is it mentioned in standard, canonical treatments of visual anthropology. Yet it can arguably be considered a substantial achievement of combining art (in a rather special sense, as we shall see) and ethnographic film in the late twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> In fact, one of the few anthropological reviewers, Linda Stone, writing in *American Anthropologist*, clearly considered the film a 'landmark in anthropological filming' which should stimulate discussion on the 'relationship between "science" and "art" in the field of anthropology' (1988: 1049), but there is no evidence of such discussion among any of the visual anthropology authors mentioned in note 1.

The film combined rigorous ethnographic research during shooting and editing<sup>11</sup> with a structuralist approach to theorizing social and mythical reality (i.e. French structuralism as applied to anthropology and semiotics),<sup>12</sup> and a concern for the aesthetics of film-making and editing that was developed from both. Shot on 16 mm, with Oppitz as director, cameramen Jörg Jeshel and Rudi Palla,<sup>13</sup> and sound recordist Barbara Becker, the film is just under four hours long – an unusual length for a film in any genre, let alone an ethnographic study or documentary. Intriguingly, *Shamans of the Blind Country* was not only co-produced by a major television station (Westdeutscher Rundfunk), but also shown on prime-time television in its full length (Oppitz 1989: 86).

On superficial viewing of a few sequences taken out of context, we could gain the impression of a conventional ethnographic film, in that it portrays a cultural 'Other' (i.e. the world of the northern Magar shamans), gives a precise idea of location, and apparently follows a linear, explanatory narrative (further underscored by the use of spoken commentary). Yet this film is unconventional in a number of ways, and the first impression is quickly overcome by quite a different agenda.

The revelation of structural relations underlying observed reality is the primary conceptual tool guiding this film (as it is in Oppitz's writings<sup>14</sup>), and it is this approach which also informed the filmic language and editing style of the opus, coupled with an almost obsessive preoccupation with the veracity of events and situations. Oppitz would not allow for staged scenes (except on one occasion, a four-second image of a royal pheasant staged by a Magar helper – see Fig. 1).

The film crew maintained utmost restraint in avoiding interference with observed events, to the point of shooting a number of nightly shamanic séances without using artificial light.<sup>15</sup> This programme of non-intervention into filmed reality was also adopted by the 'direct cinema' movement of the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>16</sup> yet in marked contrast to the latter's stance of 'non-preconception' (Grimshaw 2001: 84), Oppitz's editing style and use of commentary are inspired by French structuralism's agenda (epitomized by Claude Lévi-Strauss) of revealing the abstract logic of social and mythical relations. In addition, as we shall see, the film uses different forms of commentary and sub-titles to achieve a work of artistic synthesis. However, there is no contradiction in the film-maker's aesthetic programme. A thorough ethnographic familiarity on the part of the film-maker and anthropologist is combined with a structural analysis of the



**Figure 1.** 'The only staged sequence: four seconds of staging a royal pheasant'. (Caption from Oppitz 1989: 124; my translation. Photograph courtesy Michael Oppitz.)

social life and cosmology of the Magar. The material is then transformed by means of a genuinely filmic language that turns the film effectively into a work of art.

Oppitz has explained his approach as the 'beauty of exactitude':

In my opinion, it is exactitude which matters most. Exactitude creates a genuine aesthetic, a beauty which does not follow the standard rules of artistic conventions. It is the *beauty of exactitude* [English in the original]. I believe I could not have made the scenes more poetic if I had chosen more attractive landscapes. Here, everything is in the right place, because we shot at the right time at the right location. A topographical authenticity is created, which cannot be faked. Likewise, there is an exactitude of atmosphere, which as a documentary filmmaker you have to capture. If you succeed, exactitude will transform into beauty, and a genuine power will inhabit the images. Furthermore, this will give you satisfaction, even if the spectators do not necessarily notice how far this exactitude reaches ... [Exactitude] produces its own kind of beauty. Therefore, exactitude, as I demand it both for verbal and non-verbal ethnography, is an *art practice* (Oppitz 1989: 120, second emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

Oppitz also uses commentary to subtle effect by employing two speakers with clearly distinct voices: himself and Christhart Burgmann in the German version, while in the English version he lets American Beat author William S. Burroughs speak part of the commentary. The selection is not random: Oppitz chose Burroughs for his smoky and slurry voice (Oppitz 1989: 139), and for his artistic affinity to shamanism, and altered states of mind and perception.<sup>18</sup> But still the match would have been too obvious. In order to create a contrast between the real-life role of the speaker and the information contained in the commentary, Oppitz as anthropologist and film director, and Burroughs, as a poet and writer of fiction, speak the matter-of-fact *non-literary* part of information of the commentary in the German and English versions, whereas the other two speakers (with their more conventional 'newsreader' voices) speak the mythological passages of the commentary. Clearly, this signifies another *structural* use of the possibilities of sound and narration in film as a deliberate 'inversion of roles' (Oppitz 1982a: 15) which achieves a tension, if not counterpoint, to the factual information, rendered more poetic by Burroughs's roughened voice.

In fact, Oppitz uses four types of commentary in the film, each corresponding to a different level of abstraction: (1) mythical speech – the narrator telling stories; (2)

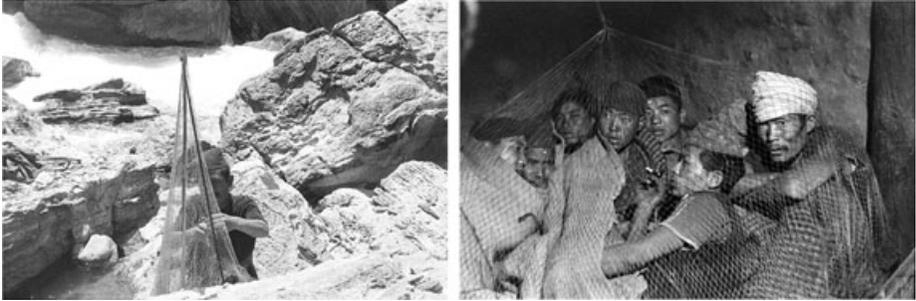
ethnographic speech – the narrator explaining symbolic actions; (3) subtitles for Magar dialogues and shamanic songs; and (4) explanatory insert titles on the moving image, when the commentator's voice would seem disturbing. This somewhat risky operation, consciously retaining much spoken commentary (albeit employed in differential modes for distinct types of information), was done at a time when voice-overs and commentary were generally overwhelming and almost drowning images in most conventional documentary productions for television; and when narration through the voices of the subjects of the film, developed by observational and participatory cinema since the late 1950s (e.g. by David MacDougall and others), was rising to the fore in visual anthropology and in specialist British TV productions.<sup>19</sup> However, Oppitz, like Rouch, relies on what MacDougall (1998: 165) calls the 'poetic power of commentary', and rather than starting with a conventional centring of location, time, and event, *Shamans of the Blind Country* opens with the epic origin myth of the first shaman (recounted by the calm voice of the narrator), and follows his meandering journey. Importantly, the accompanying images of the majestic landscape of the Himalayas are not gratuitous, but always specific, achieving a visual poetry directly relating to the mythical narrative. Hence the images chosen for the film are exactly those mentioned by the shamans, providing the precise mythical topography (Fig. 2).

The film follows Magar shamans in a number of healing, initiation, and funeral practices, often with very long observing shots and sequences. The focus is on the shamans, whom we get to know as individuals, and not so much on the villagers, who remain a collective group, practising high-altitude agriculture, transhumance of sheep and goats, and matrilineal cross-cousin marriage (Oppitz 1988b: 20). The film editing is structural in the sense of creating a semiotic meta-language, employing a structuring device, not unfamiliar from fiction film, of what Oppitz calls 'thematic blocks' (1982b: 19; 1988a: 307), for example when cutting from a herd of wandering sheep and goats to a discussion on the migration of souls, or from the nets of the fishermen in the river to a fisherman's net, protecting a family from an evil spirit in a shamanistic séance (Figs 3.1 and 3.2).

There are altogether twenty-five such thematic blocks in the entire film, conjoining both the sacred and profane aspects of specific themes, and Oppitz explained the theory



**Figure 2.** 'Landscape evoked in the shamans' songs'. (Caption from Oppitz 1989: 118; my translation. Photograph courtesy Michael Oppitz.)



**Figures 3.1 and 3.2.** 'Meshing nets to catch fish – cut! – Men under protective fishing nets. The combination of thematic blocks'. (Caption from Oppitz 1989: 59; my translation. Photographs courtesy Michael Oppitz.)

behind his approach thus: 'Such parallels or interconnections between different realms of expression in society exist more often than we assume. It is here that film can reach the level of conceptual thinking' (1988a: 308). The 'art of precision', or 'beauty of exactitude' (Oppitz uses both terms), in this long poetic essay on Magar shamanism is both in the commentary and in the images, which oscillate between thick description and structural abstraction, and sometimes rely on the observational eye of the camera, which is not unlike the shaman's eye on its visionary flights, seeing things from above and at great distance. Significantly, the film was also appreciated by contemporary artists (specially by those interested in anthropology, such as the eminent painter Sigmar Polke). When Oppitz showed the rushes to Joseph Beuys, the acclaimed twentieth-century artist who had stylized himself as a shaman, Beuys exclaimed, 'They [i.e. the Magar shamans] literally stole everything from me' – according to Oppitz, the self-irony in this reversal of appropriation was intended (Oppitz 1989: 84).<sup>20</sup>

The film is dedicated to Maya Deren, the 1940s experimental film-maker who famously used a Guggenheim grant for film-making to write a highly unconventional ethnographic monograph on Haitian Voodoo (Deren 1953), and a subsequent book Oppitz dedicated to Robert Gardner.<sup>21</sup> With these dedications Oppitz clearly acknowledges not just his indebtedness to these film-makers, but also his preference for poetic and aesthetic experimentation in relation to ethnographic reality (and in opposition to any facile documentary realism); the film itself and its specific structural language become the interpretative tool to understand Magar shamanism. The images obtained through a hard-focused ethnographic eye, and the film's commitment to an aesthetics of exactitude, become the building elements for the later thematic blocks, which in structuralist terms express the theoretical concerns of the film: myth, society, and religious practices. On other occasions, Oppitz has also collaborated with artists who have themselves been influenced by French structuralism, such as Lothar Baumgarten (whose work would require separate treatment),<sup>22</sup> and more recently he promoted and co-edited the work of Australian artist Robert Powell, *Himalayan drawings*, again underlining his concept of the beauty of exactitude (see Powell (ed. Oppitz) 2001).

### ***The laughing alligator***

The seemingly rigid self-imposition of ethnographic exactitude appears to have all but dissolved in our second example. *The laughing alligator* is a case of artistic

experimentation with ethnography, in this instance by a pioneer of video art, Juan Downey. Trained as an architect in Chile, Downey came to New York in 1965, and was connected to video and kinaesthetic art from the 1960s to the early 1970s. He participated in New York's video collectives and production groups, such as the Raindance Corporation and Electronic Intermix, Inc., who were experimenting (before the digital age) with multi-channel video and multiple projections.

In 1973 Downey initiated Video Trans Americas (which would occupy him in various projects until 1979 [Fig. 4]) – a somewhat idealistic enterprise, which was intended as a video survey and travelogue of indigenous cultures from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, spelled out in the following programmatic statement:

Many of the cultures of the Americas exist today in total isolation, unaware of their overall variety and commonly shared myths. This automobile trip was designed to develop an encompassing perspective among the various populations which today inhabit the American continents, by means of a videotaped account, from the northern cold forests to the southern tip of the Americas, a form of evolution in time, playing back one culture in the context of another as well as the culture itself in its own context, and finally editing all the interactions of space, time, and context in a work of art. Cultural information is to be exchanged mainly by means of a videotape shot along the way and played back in villages for people to see others and themselves.

The role of the artist is here conceived to be a cultural communicant, an activating anthropologist with visual means of expression: videotape (Downey 1998: 330).

Although the work was initially conceived of as travelogue, a perhaps superficial and tenuous connection to anthropology (especially to action anthropology in vogue in the 1970s)<sup>23</sup> is already evident in this first statement, when Downey speaks of 'the activating anthropologist', and indeed in many of the video-works resulting from his travels. The statement also reveals Downey's preoccupation with the role of the participant observer in the field, and his aim to integrate indigenous people in the filmic process as participants, both as viewers and recorders, as well as potential communicators of their



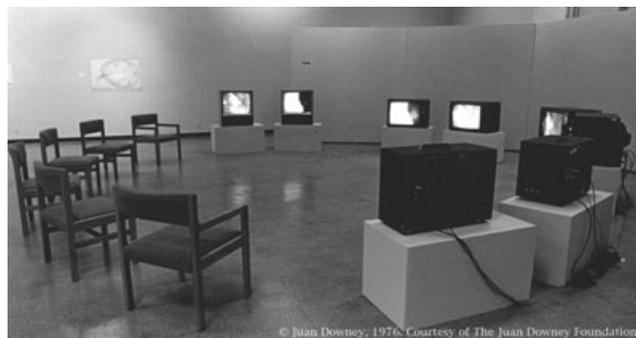
**Figure 4.** View of the van used during the Video Trans Americas project. © Juan Downey, 1976. Courtesy of The Juan Downey Foundation.

own visual production across ethnic boundaries. Downey's work with indigenous peoples in southern Venezuela stands out in the project, as it was based on extended fieldtrips of two months among the Guahibi (August–September 1976), and seven months among the Yanomamö (November 1976–May 1977), resulting in major experimental video-works (*Guahibi*, *Yanomamo healing one (é-two)*, *The laughing alligator*), as well as the creation of installations using the videos and inspired by the Yanomamö *Shabono*, a circular arrangement of individual houses under one common roof (*Moving Yanomami* [Fig. 5]).

The Yanomamö, of course, are one of the most researched and visited indigenous groups by anthropologists, artists, and other inquisitive travellers.<sup>24</sup> In contemporary art, Lothar Baumgarten has produced intimate photographic images (which were shown at Documenta 10<sup>25</sup>), based on his long-term stay of over a year, in 1978–9 (Sztulman 1997).

Downey established himself among the Yanomamö in 1976, hence before Baumgarten, but at a time when both Napoleon Chagnon and Jacques Lizot had established a major reputation as their ethnographers, and when Timothy Asch's film *The ax fight* had just been released in 1975. Downey met Lizot in the Yanomamö hamlet of Tayeri in 1976 (Downey 1998: 342). I could not ascertain from the published material at my disposal (i.e. Downey 1998) whether he was aware of any anthropological writing on the Yanomamö (or, indeed, Timothy Asch's film) *before* his departure. Later, Downey uses a text from Lizot in one of his video-works (*The abandoned shabono*, 1978). However, responding to my letter relating to this issue, Lizot affirms that Juan Downey had knowledge of his early writings in Spanish on the mythology of the Yanomamö (e.g. Lizot 1975), and later also read the Spanish version (Lizot 1978) of *La cerle des feux* (Lizot 1976). Once they came to know each other in the field they became friends and Lizot saw the artist several times thereafter in New York, and once in Caracas. However, Lizot considers that his inspiration was rather indirect, and he has not collaborated in any of the artwork or written on Downey's work (J. Lizot, pers. comm., 24 April 2006).

Downey also knew of Chagnon's work: a letter, sent in 1976 from the Silesian Mission station Navaca, urges New York gallery-owner Leo Castelli to read *Yanomamö: the fierce people* (Downey 1998: 181). The 1998 catalogue gives no indication as to whether Downey knew of Chagnon's work *before* visiting Venezuela and Yanomamö territory. However, responding to my query in this respect, Chagnon considers that



**Figure 5.** Juan Downey *Moving Yanomami*, video installation, Mandeville Art Gallery, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla. © Juan Downey, 1976. Courtesy of The Juan Downey Foundation.

Downey knew his book before visiting the Yanomamö (N.A. Chagnon, pers. comm., 10 May 2006). Thus Downey was familiar with and directly engaged with anthropological writings of both Chagnon and Lizot, to the point of recommending Chagnon's book to a New York gallery-owner, and using extracts from Lizot's work in his own artwork. This evidently shows a profound intention to make sense of Yanomamö culture and society, informed not only by artistic intuition, but also by anthropological insight, whilst at the same time retaining a critical and reflexive stance to both forms of knowing and representation.

Downey's approach is different from most ethnographic films of this period and earlier (with the exception of Jean Rouch) in that he brings the role of the observer into play, or rather plays with the position of the observer (by this I mean not just making the observer visible, but casting him/her as a participant actor), as well as experimenting widely and even wildly with the technical possibilities of video.

Downey's methods are certainly different from most ethnographic film and visual anthropology of its time, and arguably in the present, in their experimental use of formal devices used by video artists, that is, the experimental use of split screen, manipulation of the images themselves, and use of multiple projection screens and installation. To transform lived spatial experience into three-dimensional site-specific representations beyond a textual paradigm (obviously self-evident to artists working with sculpture and installation) is a novelty for anthropology even today. In anthropology (including visual and museum anthropology), such practices are relegated to temporary interventions by contemporary artists in anthropological and other museums, often critically reflecting on the institutions' role as repositories of appropriated artefacts.<sup>26</sup> For permanent exhibitions, however radical their approach and use of multimedia, curatorial practices in most cases continue to follow a canon of explanatory, text-based authority characteristic of these educational institutions. Downey brought a sensibility for multiple representations to his video-work which influences his role and approach as a film-maker/observer – in making visible his own position in the field, to his subjects, and involving them in representational practices.

*The laughing alligator* constantly plays with the participant observer role of Westerners immersing themselves within other cultures, as anthropologists, artists, or other travellers. Downey achieves this meta-commentary by casting his wife and daughter, who accompanied him on this trip, as commentators and participants in staged scenes. He also plays with genres of 'hard' scientific description, juxtaposing these with synaesthetic effects, through the manipulation of the images, to convey the imagery of hallucinogenic illusions during shamanistic séances. For instance, his wife Marilys Downey is cast as a fictional newsreader-type of commentator behind an image of the Empire State Building, explaining with an authoritative voice the use of the hallucinogenic drugs among the Yanomamö. Accompanied by her commentary, the next sequence shows the detailed process of the extraction of drugs from three different kinds of tree bark and subsequent preparation of the mixture to be used (see Chagnon, Le Quesne & Cook 1971 for an overview on the use of hallucinogenic drugs among the Yanomamö). This is at one point inter-cut with her commentator's image once more, but as in the first instance, the picture is flickering, as if to indicate a different stage of perception or state of mind. We then see Marilys Downey in the hold of a Yanomamö shaman who is putting his hand to her throat and jaws. This image is followed by the ingestion of the drug itself, administered by one Yanomamö to another with a blowpipe. A sequence of Yanomamö Indians in trance follows, chanting shamanic songs. The horizon of the images is then deliberately turned

upside-down: we see a Yanomamö in trance at the top of the picture. Finally, the colour structure and phasing of the image itself is manipulated with a video synthesizer to give the impression of altered perception, as with psychedelic drugs, similar in form and evoking much the same effects as used in earlier psychedelic film and images from the late 1960s. The point here is not whether these are accurate representations of the imagery obtained and perceived during such séances (in fact, they are not),<sup>27</sup> but to open up a new realm of visual experimentation in the interpretation of cultures that textual and visual practitioners of anthropology have so far largely avoided. Of late there have been calls, for instance by MacDougall (2006: 60; also Pink 2005), for ethnographic film practice to engage with the varieties of sensuous experience.<sup>28</sup> But these suggestions for reform are still expressed in and biased towards a narrower, realist paradigm of film-making, and certainly have not advocated manipulation of the image itself, turning the horizon upside-down, or using other devices employed by experimental film-makers and video artists.

With the deliberate casting of different commentator and participant roles for his wife in these séances, Downey makes the valid point that the use and altered sensory perception through hallucinogenic drugs is culturally specific and contingent. Downey's reflexive moves, in problematizing his observer role and relation to the Other, are also brought to the fore by his extending the video camera to the Yanomamö (Figs 6 and 7), both to record new material and to view recorded material amongst themselves and elsewhere (a considerable time before this approach was favoured in anthropology).<sup>29</sup>

Downey, evidently, in a highly subjective manner, mixes different genres of travelogue, diary, and ethnographic observation, as well as autobiographical interspersions as constant self-references. With irony and humour, his video-work is an early deconstruction of the unified, Western ethnographic gaze and its scientific pretences, but it also remains a highly fragmented document of the necessarily incomplete communication with another culture. Ultimately, we learn more about Downey than about the Yanomamö.



**Figure 6.** Yanomamö with video camera. © Juan Downey, 1976. Courtesy of The Juan Downey Foundation.



Figure 7. Two Yanomamö with CCTV video camera. © Juan Downey, 1976. Courtesy of The Juan Downey Foundation.

Downey's other video-work on the Yanomamö, *Yanomamo healing one (&two)*, an intimate observation of healing practices, invites potential comparison with the films by Timothy Asch, and the less accessible artwork by contemporary artist Lothar Baumgarten, including both his published photographs (see Zabel 2001: 66-80) and his yet unreleased film *Aristokraten des Urwaldes* ('Aristocrats of the Jungle', shot in 1978-9). Such a comparative project, which I intend to carry out in future research, might reveal the different degrees of perception, representation, and recognition of Yanomamö otherness among these three visual practitioners, similar to the investigations by art historian George Kubler into nineteenth-century scholars of Pre-Columbian art, who constituted for him a cognitive foil to make visible different forms of recognition of otherness (Kubler 1991).

### **Teatro Amazonas**

*Teatro Amazonas* (1999) by the artist, photographer, and film-maker Sharon Lockhart is based on a collaboration between the artist and two anthropologists, Ligia Simonian and Isabel Soares de Souza, and demographer Djalma Nogueira in three Brazilian field sites: the city of Manaus, the Aripuanã River, and Apeú-Salvador regions.<sup>30</sup> The entire artwork of *Teatro Amazonas* was first shown in an exhibition in Rotterdam in 1999 (Lockhart 2000), and consists of a 35 mm film of thirty-eight minutes (the exact length of the film reel), and four series of photographs, all accompanied by a catalogue for the exhibition. The film is also available for rent on its own. Lockhart had been inspired to make the film by Werner Herzog's feature film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), which tells the story of a manic adventurer-impresario (played by Klaus Kinski), wanting at the end of the nineteenth century to fulfil his presumptuous dream to build a grandiose opera house in the middle of the Amazon region.

However, Lockhart's approach is quite opposite to that of a narrative feature or even documentary or ethnographic film. Her approach is structuralist in the sense employed by experimental film-makers, that is, the conditioning characteristics of the film itself, such as the length of the reel and the shooting mechanism (here the fixed camera),

become the structuring devices (see note 12). In the strict sense, *Teatro Amazonas* is an 'audiovisual documentation of the reception of a musical performance' (Martin 2000: 15) watched by a full audience in the opera house of the city of Manaus in Brazil. The fixed camera is positioned in the middle of the stage and looks inquisitively, yet unmoved, at the audience, whom we thus observe for thirty-eight minutes through the camera's 'still' frame whilst the music, sung by a choir in the orchestra pit, ebbs away (Fig. 8). Both the camera, in its central position on stage, and the audience are the performers in this film. As beholders, we focus on people's gestures, as well as sounds from the audience during the performance, such as coughing in the intervals, moving on the seats, and whispering to one's neighbours. At the same time, *Teatro Amazonas* is the collective portrait of a city, encapsulated, for the duration of the musical performance, in the opera house.

Lockhart collaborated with the demographer Djalma Nogueira for the casting of the audience. As Ivone Margulies explains in her catalogue essay:

Using a list of the city's neighbourhoods based on the most recent census, he [Nogueira] matched the number of seats in the camera's field of vision with the number of people that could be cast from each neighbourhood. Smaller neighbourhoods had proportionally fewer representatives than larger ones. This representativeness ensured that the audience included a broad participation of the city's residents, not just the local elite (2000: 97).

So, fieldwork, in an empiricist-positivist sense of demography, lies at the base of this film. Whilst the film itself is a monumental artifice (just as the opera house is monstrously and monumentally set in the jungle), as a final 'totality' it is the outcome of the process of research and creation that went into its production. Therefore, the film as the final product of the artistic-anthropological research process contrasts in important ways with the anthropological monograph, which would also contain information on methodology, and occasionally appendices and statistical data. Significantly, it also differs from narrative ethnographic film, which usually conveys the broader context of the fieldwork and the 'culture' it portrays. In fact, as mentioned before, *Teatro Amazonas* can be considered a 'structural' film in the expanded sense of that term as used by experimental, conceptual film-makers (not to be confounded with French



**Figure 8.** Sharon Lockhart. *Teatro Amazonas*, 1999. Still from a colour film in 35 mm, 38 minutes. Copyright Sharon Lockhart 1999. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, and Neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

structuralism, see also note 12). Here the immanent material qualities of the film and its recording equipment, *not* narration, become the structuring devices (in the case of *Teatro Amazonas* the music was specifically composed for its length). Therefore, one would entirely misread *Teatro Amazonas* as a narrative film; it does not provide any context at all; further information is only given in the catalogue, in terms of original artwork, photos of interview locations, photos from family albums (Figs 9.1 and 9.2), the portrait of one woman, and stills from the film, as well as through essays from art critics.



**Figures 9.1 and 9.2.** Sharon Lockhart. Interview Location: /Survey of the Aripuanã River Region, Furo Grande Community, Aripuanã River/ Interview Subjects: Josefa Miranda Alves, Isaques Pereira de Souza/ Interview Subjects: Clorisvaldo Pereira Miranda, Joana D'arc Dias dos Santos/ Interview Subject: Maria Lúcia Pereira Miranda/ Photographs from the Collection of Maria Lúcia Pereira Miranda/ Anthropologist: Ligia Simonian. 1999. Copyright Sharon Lockhart 1999. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, and Neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

However, no primary data from the anthropological investigation are provided in the catalogue or otherwise made evident, for example by providing samples or extracts of interview transcriptions, or the statistical data which formed the basis for the selection of the audience in the film. The only indications of such information come from the captions in the credit list of the photographs from the other sites of Lockhart's project, where the interview locations, the two anthropologists, and the portrayed individuals are credited.

Thus Lockhart has deliberately made her work devoid of contextual meaning of the type that anthropologists will mostly be looking for in their analysis of cultures, and yet, paradoxically, her work is precisely the outcome of a collaboration with anthropologists and a demographer. For, in fact, the sampling of the cast for the film could not have otherwise taken place, and nor could the photos have been shot in the interview locations, which in one of the photo series only show the very emptiness of human dwellings (Fig. 10).

But do not the interiors of the houses also indicate to us something about their inhabitants? By curtailing a part of the information (i.e. by not showing the inhabitants of the interview locations), which is maybe the most literal and expected form of information, Lockhart is also constraining us to watch more closely, and search for meaning 'in between' (2000: 29).

This is not to say that house interiors as shot by Lockhart could not also have been photographed by anthropologists (leaving artistic merit aside). The point is that in almost any case (with the possible exception of *Hogans* – a photographic-ethnopoetic book on Navajo house songs, by McAllester & McAllester 1987 [1980]) they would either be shown *with* their inhabitants, or displayed *in conjunction with* photographs of



**Figure 10.** Sharon Lockhart. Interview Locations/Family Photographs. Interview Location: Survey of the Aripuanã River Region; São Miguel Community, Boca do Juma River, Brazil. Interview Subject: Francisco Colares. Anthropologist: Ligia Simonian, 1999. Copyright Sharon Lockhart 1999. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, and Neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

their inhabitants, or be embedded in explanatory text *about* their inhabitants.<sup>31</sup> It is this totalizing, explanatory, and authoritative power of the ethnographic eye that Lockhart's work challenges. By taking away the aura from the photographs (i.e. by deliberately leaving people *out* [Fig. 11]), she makes us aware of the dehumanizing aspect of colonial ethnographic photography, which left people *in* as anthropometrically studied specimens (Edwards 1992).<sup>32</sup>

The film, on the other hand, as final product, in its artifice-like form, seems completely removed from ethnographic reality, and in its constructedness could not be more distant from the approaches to which visual and other anthropologists are usually accustomed (entailing the provision of context and thick description) – thus turning into a veritable anathema to observational participatory cinema and ethnographic photography.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, in the many faces we see in the audience (and knowing that they have been chosen as a cross-section of the population), there reverberates the sense (perhaps an illusion) of a holistic and total portrait. There seems to be a totality in the sense of statistical coverage of the social universe of the city, which eerily alludes to the dominance of social engineering inherent in statistics and social sciences (in the Foucauldian sense). This amounts to a 'complete', almost panoptical view, which represents the totality of the location (place or city), but where the individual lives (or a representative sample of them) are not portrayed or played out in narration, as would be the case in



**Figure 11.** Sharon Lockhart. Interview Locations/Family Photographs. Interview Location: Survey of the Aripuanã River Region. Santa Helena Community, Boca do Juma River, Brazil. Interview Subject: Maria Francisca de Jesus. Anthropologist: Ligia Simonian, 1999. Copyright Sharon Lockhart 1999. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, and Neugerriemschneider, Berlin.

an ethnographic monograph, a novel, or an ethnographic film in the participant-observer tradition. Certainly, in terms of structural-experimental film-making, the film can be thought of as a total unit as regards equivalent duration of film and music, a single fixed camera position, and the contraposition between audience and choir. However, ultimately, the viewer remains curious about the multitude's experience, or, rather, the multiple experiences in the audience presented to us as a social and visual totality. This curiosity remains unfulfilled and is decisively provoked by Lockhart's approach, when she juxtaposes, as if in a play of *double entendre*, the fixed camera on centre stage (representing the beholder of the final film) with the audience in the opera house, who in turn are watching the camera on stage.

### Coda

In this article I have shown three modes of experimentation with ethnography and art, all of which have different implications for the ways in which anthropology and contemporary art define their relationship, appropriate from each other, and might develop future collaborations.

From Michael Oppitz's *Shamans of the Blind Country* we can certainly retrieve a preoccupation with the veracity of ethnographic detail that informs the aesthetic choices and which, in turn, respects and exploits the properties of the chosen medium or genre, film. From his concern with precision, Oppitz succeeds in developing an aesthetic which is proper to this genre, whilst at the same time respecting and working with the internal properties of filmic language, and integrating it into a structural analysis of society. If Oppitz resolutely opposes staging of events, Lockhart's *Teatro Amazonas* seems to be the ultimate example of artifice (as a conceptually structured experimental film), with the staging of a cross-section of the population of Manaus watching a musical performance in an opera house. Yet this total event (or total work of art, which integrates various genres of film, performance, and photography) is inextricably linked to the anthropological and sociological investigation that preceded it.

In Juan Downey's *The laughing alligator*, as well as in his installation work (*Moving Yanomami*), a concern for ethnography and the researcher-artist's own positioning within it are clearly expressed. Downey also emerges as a precursor to what can now be done more comprehensively by digital technology, such as split screens<sup>34</sup> and manipulations of the image (with almost endless possibilities). Yet such potentials, new for anthropology, remain severely restricted in visual anthropology, which primarily follows single-focused, text-based models.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, Downey reminds us of the creative use of space in video, installation, and other visual works, which in anthropology-art collaborations have hardly begun to be explored by anthropologists.<sup>36</sup>

To return to our opening remarks on the in-and-out-of-focus movement as an optical metaphor for varying proximity in relation to ethnographic subjects, and the implicit challenges for representation: Oppitz's *Shamans of the Blind Country* appears to be constantly in hard focus, the camera follows ethnographic detail, and the aesthetics of the work are developed from close observation during long-term fieldwork as well as structural analysis. Downey, on the other hand, has a shifting and wavering camera (often hand-held; facilitated by lighter digital video equipment that has now become almost a norm), as apparently loose as the structure of his film – so, in a metaphorical sense, the overall focus is blurred and constantly changing. Lockhart,

finally, offers a seemingly static view, a total and continuous frame within which we imagine a close-up of each individual, but which is ultimately denied as we cannot penetrate the subjects' individualities.

Engagement with these three works in anthropology, which so far have not been considered by the mainstream of the discipline or even by the sub-discipline of visual anthropology, is important for a number of reasons. Future art-anthropology collaborations can learn from all three, thus starting to address the unfulfilled potential of visual experimentation as promoted by the *Writing culture* critique, and thus overcoming the still dominant narrative paradigm among visual practitioners of anthropology. This strategy can be carried out in regard to: (1) how to conceptualize distance from or proximity to the ethnographic subjects; (2) new possibilities of transformation in the process of representation; (3) the multiple positioning of the participant-observer in relation to the Other; (4) the development of new formal possibilities (e.g. split-screen, installation, use of space, and a range of techniques explored by experimental 'structural' film-makers such as Lockhart) now greatly enhanced through new digital technologies; and, finally, (5) a profound reflection on the relationship of the research process to the final work, whether we call it art or anthropology.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> There is no reference to Downey's videos and Lockhart's film in MacDougall (1998; 2006) and Russell (1999), or indeed other book-length treatments of visual anthropology since the 1980s (e.g. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin 2002; Loizos 1993; Pink 2005; Rollwagen 1988; Ruby 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Rush mentions Downey, but does not refer to his anthropologically informed video-work among the Yanomamö in the 1970s (Rush 2003: 70, 140). The essays accompanying Lockhart's exhibition (Lockhart 2000) mention her collaboration with anthropologists, but do not further develop this.

<sup>3</sup> To some small degree this might be accounted for by the presently non-existent distribution of the film, of which the rushes and the prints of the English version have been lost, while only a dated print of the German version survives in Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. An S-VHS master is kept at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich. Copies for research or screenings are made available upon special request.

An interview with Oppitz was published in *Visual Anthropology* in 1988 (Oppitz 1988a). Most of the other writing relating to the film is in German (Oppitz 1982b; 1989), or not easily accessible pamphlet material (Oppitz 1982a).

Brief mention of the film is made in a historical overview of ethnographic film, published in 1984 (Petermann 1984: 51), and it was reviewed in *American Anthropologist* (Stone 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Among the exceptions are MacDougall (1998; 2006) and Grimshaw (2001). Departing from within traditions of anthropology and visual anthropology, Grimshaw & Ravetz (2004) discuss some contemporary art practices, whereas Schneider & Wright (2006) suggest considering the entire field of contemporary visual arts as of relevance to anthropological practice, and, in particular, visual anthropology.

<sup>5</sup> There are a variety of spellings; I shall adopt Chagnon's (1968). Where other authors (i.e. Downey) adopt a different form, I have left it in the original.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the Gregory Bateson-Margaret Mead photographic collaboration *Balinese character* (1942), Michel Leiris's diary *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934), or Jean Rouch's film *Les Maîtres fous* (1954). For David MacDougall's writings, see MacDougall (1998) and (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Arguably, this critique started with Hymes (1969), and has gone through many renewed rehearsals since.

<sup>8</sup> This states that the 'position and velocity of an object (i.e. atoms or sub-atomic particles) cannot both be measured at the same time' (*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, 2002, p. 1917).

<sup>9</sup> My emphasis is on the more visual metaphor of the two renderings of Heisenberg's principle (i.e. *Unschärferelation* 'as out-of-focus' principle). A different if related emphasis, focusing on the agency of the film-maker, has been suggested by Paul Henley, according to David MacDougall: 'Documentary filmmakers commit what Paul Henley once called the "sin of Heisenberg", forever interfering with what they seek' (MacDougall 1998: 48; the original source is not provided).

Heisenberg's uncertainty principle has also been used as a metaphor for understanding Jean Rouch's film practice as based, in a figurative sense, on scientific principles (Hoveyda 1992 [1961]: 249). I am grateful to Barbara Filser for this reference.

<sup>10</sup> The film won considerable critical acclaim with reviews, amongst others, in *The Nation*, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Die Zeit*, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. It was also shown out of competition at the Berlin Film Festival.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to Oppitz, the film also credits anthropologist Charlotte Bosanquet (now Charlotte Hardman) with ethnographic research. The crew usually stayed three months in the field (three such stays altogether), after which the exposed reels were sent to New York for development. With the rushes Oppitz then undertook a painstaking process, lasting four months after each shooting trip, of 'darkroom ethnography' (Oppitz 1982: 14; 1988a: 312) where shamans from the village would come to Kathmandu and translate and interpret every single take.

<sup>12</sup> The film is not 'structuralist' or 'structural' in the senses in which these terms have been used for certain experimental films since the 1960s, where they denote the manipulation of the film material, or conceptual structuration of the filmic form, with the aim to simplify the shape of the film and make the spectator constantly aware of the underlying filmic illusion (Sitney 2000 [1970]).

<sup>13</sup> Initially, Oppitz tried to get Mario Masini (through the producer Giuliano Negri), the cameraman who had shot *Padre padrone* for the Taviani brothers, but he was unavailable after he had received the Palme d'Or at Cannes (1989: 95).

<sup>14</sup> For example, his analysis of marriage alliances among the Magar (Oppitz, 1988b).

<sup>15</sup> This was possible because the negatives were brightened up with chemtone (Oppitz 1982: 23), a chemical process introduced in 1975 by TVC Laboratories, Inc. and used on night scenes of movies such as *Taxi driver* (Martin Scorsese, USA, 1976). The procedure was especially appreciated by cinematographers because of the then existing lower film speeds (Monaco 2000: 102).

<sup>16</sup> On 'direct cinema' in relation to ethnographic film-making, see Grimshaw (2001) and MacDougall (1998; 2006).

<sup>17</sup> In 1985/6 Oppitz was a visiting professor at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Texas at Dallas, where the interview was recorded by Iranian documentary film-maker Ahmand Alasti; a full translation was published in Oppitz (1989), English extracts from the original appeared in Oppitz (1988a). A conversation with film students at New York University was published in Oppitz (1982).

<sup>18</sup> Burroughs travelled to Colombia and Peru in 1953 in search of the ayahuasca hallucinogenic drug used by Amerindian healers and shamans. His experiences are recounted in a series of letters to Allen Ginsberg; see Burroughs, Ginsberg & Harris (2006 [1963]). I am grateful to Michael Taussig for this reference. On Burroughs, who read anthropology and literature at Harvard, and his relation to the visual arts, see Sobieszek (1996).

<sup>19</sup> For, example, in Granada Television's *Disappearing world* and the BBC's *Under the sun* series. More specifically on sub-titling in ethnographic film, see MacDougall (1998: 165-77).

<sup>20</sup> Beuys's self-stylized role of shaman and his concept of art as 'social sculpture' are beyond the scope of this essay, but see Harlan, Rappmann & Schata (1984 [1974]), Rosenthal (2005), Tisdall (1979); also Schneider (2006: 34-5).

<sup>21</sup> I.e. Oppitz (1989). On Gardner's work, which provoked much controversy in mainstream anthropology, see Loizos (1993) and MacDougall (1998: 72; 2006: 117 n. 8).

<sup>22</sup> See their joint book (Baumgarten & Oppitz 1974).

<sup>23</sup> Action anthropology was developed by Sol Tax at the University of Chicago in the 1950s. Rather than working with the government, action anthropology promoted a practical advocacy of the peoples it studied, addressing and trying to resolve their problems and grievances (e.g. indigenous land rights). Other followers of this approach included Karl Schlesier (e.g. Schlesier 1974).

The agenda of action anthropology was also paralleled by documentary, not experimental, film- and video-makers of the late 1960s and early 1970s, such as George Stoney, who trained native American film-makers to make films (e.g. *You are on Indian land*, 1969) and distributed video cameras to social activists (Winston 2001 [1995]: 201). Stoney later founded the Alternate Media Center at New York University. There

is no acknowledgement of this in publications on Juan Downey, but he might have been aware of these developments as they were contemporaneous to his own work, and that of other experimental video artists in New York in the early 1970s.

<sup>24</sup> The Yanomamö have long been visited by anthropologists, among them Theodor Koch-Grünberg in the early twentieth century, and Hans Becher and Otto Zerries after the Second World War. In English- and French-speaking anthropology since the mid 1960s, Napoleon Chagnon and Jacques Lizot became their most famous interpreters. In 2000, Patrick Tierney alleged serious misconduct in the fieldwork practices of both these anthropologists. What ensued has become known as the El Dorado controversy (Borofsky & Albert 2005; Nugent 2001). The Yanomamö have also been the subject of significant works in visual anthropology, such as *The ax fight* (1975) by Timothy Asch (based on collaboration with Napoleon Chagnon). The artist Lothar Baumgarten made a feature-length film, *Aristokraten des Urwalds* (Aristocrats of the Jungle), resulting from his stay in 1978-9, which, however, has not been finally edited and released (Sztulman 1997: 30).

<sup>25</sup> Documenta is held every five years in Kassel, Germany, and is considered to be the major international contemporary art show.

<sup>26</sup> For example, work by Mark Dion, Ruth Jones, Wong Hoy Chong, and Frank Wilson. A discussion of how contemporary artists have problematized and worked with collections and museums, ethnographic and other, is beyond the remit of this article; see, however, Schaffner & Winzen (1998) and Schneider (1993; 1996); also Edwards (2004).

<sup>27</sup> It is well known that most of the imagery in hallucinogenic séances of Amerindian peoples is developed from geometric, entoptic patterns which are also applied in their art of basketry (cf. Guss 1989; Keifenheim 1999; 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Following the so-called 'anthropology of the senses' (e.g. Classen 2005; Howes 1991; 2004; Stoller, 1989; 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Although engineered under different premises, Downey's video-work with the Yanomamö occurs about a decade before video documentarians Monica Feitosa and Renato Pereira brought the video camera to the Kayapo, and before anthropologist Terence Turner, in 1990, turned this into a more systematic project of video self-documentation among the Kayapo, enabling them to make their own videos and to communicate with other tribal groups (Turner 1990; 1992). See also note 23 on early experiments with self-representation of indigenous people among documentary film-makers, another classic example is Worth & Adair (1972).

<sup>30</sup> The expedition to the Aripuanã River region lasted seventeen days, but Martin's catalogue essay does not provide information on the length of the entire project (Martin 2000: 22).

<sup>31</sup> Martin (2000: 24) observes that whilst Lockhart's photographs of empty dwellings bear a certain formal resemblance with those by Walker Evans from *Let us now praise famous men*, in her work there is deliberately no interpreter, writer, or other provider of (anthropological or sociological) context comparable to James Agee's role in the famous precursor project (Agee & Evans 1941), see also MacDougall (1998: 25-6).

<sup>32</sup> Or, on the contrary, it could be argued that the photos of the empty houses depend for their resonance on the ambiguities and suggestion of atmosphere, and thus aura. I am grateful to Ian White for this observation.

<sup>33</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that there is a more ethnographically explicit side to the work, although this was not shown in the exhibition or catalogue. According to Margulies, 'Lockhart shot over the course of a week approximately six hundred casting tapes, in which residents of Manaus auditioned for the film'; and further:

The casting tapes and the portraits of the people seen in the film, were given to each participant as a personal memento. These tapes present a more conventional ethnographic exchange than that imaged in the film itself. We learn about wages, as four municipal cleaning workers sit down to discuss their best working day, payday; about politics, as four girlfriends discuss populist tactics; about family abuse, when a woman explains how she has escaped her husband's beating' (2000: 105).

<sup>34</sup> Split screens, of course, are familiar from early montage film (such as those by Dziga Vertov), as well as more conventional fiction film, such as Abel Gance's *Napoléon* (1927). Grimshaw (2001) provides a good history of early anthropology's abandoning of visual experiment.

<sup>35</sup> Biella (1997) is an example of this (see also Banks 2001: 164-7). Pink (2001: 128f.). discusses 'expressive modes' of photography, but refers to some rather restrained experimentation between text and image in photographic essays, and does not explore the possibility of manipulating the image itself. Conversely, see Edward's work (2004: 199-233; 2006), which, in the context of photographic and museum practice, has discussed the work of contemporary photographers and visual artists, such as Mohini Chandra, Owen Logan, Jorma Puranen, and Elizabeth Williams.

<sup>36</sup> Following from earlier work in Argentina (Schneider 2006), I have recently collaborated with contemporary visual artists in Corrientes province to document and interpret the local Saints feast of Santa Ana. One result of this was an installation that was mounted in the local art museum. This is work in progress, funded by the British Academy (2005-6), see <http://americas.sas.ac.uk/newsletter/octo5associates.htm>.

For a previous installation example, involving anthropologist George Marcus, theatre designer Fernando Calzadilla, and artist Abdel Hernández, see Calzadilla & Marcus (2006).

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## Trois modes d'expérimentation de l'art et de l'ethnographie

### Résumé

Alors que la critique issue de *Writing culture* a suscité, depuis le milieu des années 1980, de nombreuses expériences d'écriture ethnographique, le côté visuel de l'ethnographie a été négligé. L'auteur avance donc qu'en examinant les travaux d'Oppitz, Downey et Lockhart, qui n'ont pas été incluses dans les œuvres canoniques de l'anthropologie visuelle générale, les anthropologues peuvent élaborer de nouvelles stratégies de représentation visuelle et de recherches sur (1) la conceptualisation de la proximité et de la distance par rapport au sujet ethnographique, (2) le positionnement multiple de l'observateur participant et (3) le développement de nouvelles possibilités formelles de représentation visuelle. Par ce biais, les anthropologues peuvent commencer à exploiter le potentiel inexploré de l'expérimentation visuelle contenue dans l'approche « *Writing culture* ». Le présent article discute ensuite trois exemples d'expérimentation de l'art et de l'ethnographie, à savoir *Shamans of the Blind Country*, par l'anthropologue et cinéaste Michael Oppitz (dont la narration est due en partie au romancier William S. Burroughs), le travail de vidéo et d'installation du vidéaste pionnier Juan Downey chez les Yanomamö et l'œuvre cinématographique et photographique *Teatro Amazonas* de l'artiste contemporaine Sharon Lockhart au Brésil, réalisée en collaboration avec des anthropologues.

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