

Feminism Moves

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In 2022, abortion bans hit the people of the United States. Despite the shockwave from that legislative move, the onslaught of cruelty has already always been for those who reside under systems with a lack of reproductive health care access and for those who feel the weight of the primacy of life that pervades moral codes (Singer [2022](#)). How do we respond as writers, filmmakers, artists, and editors to such impending and gendered violence? In our inboxes, authors inundated us with research about feminist moves for creative and ethical frameworks. We present those articles here, curated in ways that address the beauty and gaze between subjects and interlocutors of ethnographic film. Another thread that runs throughout is a concern with *form*. Can experimentation with the form of visual scholarship—the shape and feel of anthropological knowledge—open up new modes of sitting with experience?

Feminism as a framework speaks to our first research article, “Feminist Sensory Ethnography,” in which the filmmaker-anthropologists of Ethnocine, Emily Hong, and Elena Guzmán, provide a feminist and decolonial manifesto of movement toward thinking with sensory ethnography possibilities as relational imagistic projects. They play with animation and direct cinema in their examples of sensory ethnography that draw from feminism as both an expanded form of visual anthropology and a critique of some of the oological ethnographic films of the twenty-first century. Their descriptions of *Leviathan* (Castaing-Taylor and Paravel 2012) and *El Mar La Mar* (Bonetta and Sniadecki 2017) acknowledge the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) as a starting point that feminism can move ethnographic cinema to three core techniques: “a multisensorial theory of the flesh, sensory accompaniment, and narrative intimacy.” Hong and Guzmán define feminist sensory ethnography as both methodological approach and political stance that recognizes the power of these techniques lies in their ability to push “from margin to center” (hooks [1984](#)) an ethnos rooted in “relationality, care, and embodied subjectivity.” They depict filmic engagements that seek intimacy with their subjects while holding onto aesthetic innovations of immersion from observational cinema. Form, outlined in their filmic descriptions, is part and parcel of these feminist moves. Later on, we hear from our Dialogue participants in ways that contribute additional nuance to these genealogies.

“Collaborations across Cinematic Objects” is a Dialogue feature edited by the Documentary Practices graduate research training group mediated by Cynthia Browne at Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. The SEL-trained filmmaker, Diana Allan, who has recently co-founded the McGill Critical Ethnography Lab, discusses filmmaking production as both art and representation with the co-founders of the Berlin-based production platform pong, Merle Kroger and Philip Scheffner. For this conversation, documentary practice, whether art and/or anthropology, necessitates collaboration. The participants tease out multiple genealogies surrounding anthropological and experimental filmmaking, focusing on the “contingent and negotiated relations between filmmakers and their subjects.” The Dialogue participants reflect on what makes it possible to make collaborative and independent films. In doing so, they account for differences not only between European and North American filmmaking contexts but also between the infrastructural conditions surrounding different projects (e.g. independent art collectives versus academic filmmakers). The dialogue pays close attention to engagements with colonial archives and different aesthetic and formal strategies for working collaboratively “in and

against” these colonial collections. Allan describes the process by which she transforms digital archival footage into analog material for her film *Partition*. Here technology and form reclaim, but also interrogate, material from British and Israeli colonial archives. Similarly, Scheffner describes pong's use of sound recordings of so-called colonial soldiers-made-prisoners-of-war who have returned to France, Britain, Germany, and Russia from former colonies. Devising ways to avoid reproducing colonial structures of representation, Scheffner invokes the voice of ghosts as a way to unsettle, challenge, and reactivate these archival images. In both examples, reanimating the archive is also an attempt to engender a “polyphonic fracturing of meaning” that situates documentary practice as a mode of critical, reflexive, and often political engagement with the past.

Like Guzmán and Hong, our next research article author, Anna Grimshaw, firmly believes that film needs a place in anthropology. And perhaps more importantly, that a critical and engaged anthropology needs film. In “Extending the Frame,” Anna Grimshaw, considers how visual anthropology and, by extension, its practitioners might “move beyond the limitations of the self-standing film.” Emphasizing the important, but also unique, role that ethnographic film plays in both anthropological research and pedagogy, the author-filmmaker argues that rethinking and reinventing cinematic form can, in fact, “extend the frame,” making it possible to widen ethnographic film's reach, rendering it more visible, more accessible, and more circulateable to alternative publics. Drawing on examples from ethnographic film's broader canon—including *Hangar Trilogy* by Jean Lydall, the *Indian Masculinities Series* by Harjant Gill, and Nicola Mai's *Sex Work Trilogy*—Grimshaw examines how the multipart form gives filmmakers more space and time to insist on particular themes while also giving viewers a more layered, complex, and non-linear experience, one that resonates with the experience of reading ethnography. In a similar vein, she also discusses her recent work in Maine describing how her multipart approach allows her to discover her subject. Here, the act of filming—the kind of observation and engagement that it affords—takes center stage. In rethinking cinematic form, the temporality of ethnographic filmmaking becomes more flexible, allowing both makers and viewers to sit with images and filmic narratives, making it possible to experience and consider “other ways of knowing” (MacDougall [1998](#), 84).

Our next research article, “A Chronology of Seeing,” by Mariam Abazeri, tracks how a participatory video project unfolds over time. Reflecting on a 6-year project in the Takab district in South-Central Iran, Abazeri portrays how a participatory video initiative became a vehicle for shifting attitudes on gender norms and addressing local water security concerns. The piece illustrates how women's positionalities are reconfigured as they become filmmakers capable of turning their gaze toward the everyday issues that shape community life. Over time, participants assume other subject positions, becoming the narrators of their own lives. Here time and collaboration give way to new knowledges and practices, as well as other kinds of advocacies. Other ways of knowing drag with them entangled forms of engagement that make space for other activisms. In our last research article, Rajat Nayyar coins the term “granular activisms” to elucidate, indeed complicate, conventional notions of activism. Exploring new engagements with the camera and the unpredictable potential of performance-based methods, Nayyar considers how the act of vocalization can reveal the grain of the female voice. Almost an exercise in what Pauline Oliveros described as “deep listening,” the author's ethnographic practice considers how visual anthropology might also learn to listen and how, in doing so, it too is capable of providing

other forms of engagement that consider the political potential of the feel, sound, and grain of voice. Here, too, visual anthropology takes on more complex, multimodal, and multisensory forms through intimate relations between ethnographer and interlocutor as the ethnographer takes care to listen.

Our different authors approach image-driven scholarship as a site for different kinds of activism, forms of engagement that are as much about making power dynamics and unacknowledged problematics visible as they are about rethinking who is represented and how. This also gives way to experimentation with visual form, expanding definitions of how visual anthropology produces knowledge. In her Critique of *Shifting Worlds, Shaping Fieldwork: A Memoir of Anthropology and Art*, Katarzyna Puzon describes how author Susan Ossman provides an intimate, personal look at the intersections between research, life, and knowledge. Through her description and analysis, Puzon argues that Ossman's creative engagements with art and anthropology—both thinking and inventing with forms of expression—provide new ways of experiencing social life and producing anthropological knowledge. In contrast, our second Critique observes how forms of insidious engagement carry with them other kinds of media like those designed for surveillance and destruction. MF Baveye unpacks Thomas Dekeyser and Andrew Culp's *Machines in Flames*, a film that follows the search for CLODO, the Comité Liquidant ou Détournant les Ordinateurs (Committee for the Liquidation or Subversion of Computers), a small collective that set fire to computer facilities and event spaces in France during the 1980s. Activating archival evidence and nighttime scenes of urban pursuits, the film approaches computer screens “as both camera and subject, lens, and canvas” in order to reconsider how we interact with computers and thus the world. Baveye highlights the tensions that the film accentuates—the directors' creation of an internet archive tracking a group that originally sought to destroy internet technology, the friction between surveillance and admiration—to highlight the piece's utility for debate and pedagogy regarding “the ethics of ethnographic subjecthood and the use and creation of digital archival resources.” Similarly thinking through forms of surveillance, our Page feature by Taylor Genovese, *Under the Shadow of the Wall*, visually explores Sonoran Desert landscapes, specifically the wall demarcating the U.S.-Mexico border, in order to investigate how border materialities take on specific but discontinuous politico-affective forms. Through her juxtaposition of image and text, Genovese presents a critical, sensorial experience that reflects on how surveillance imposes itself on landscape and, thus, on bodies and persons.

Forms in this collection enable kinds of relations between filmmaker and subject, ethnographer and interlocutor, artist, and archive—increasing intimacy or demarcating barriers sometimes in moments of violence and sometimes in moments of care. As anthropologists, we must attend to how forms can also enable motion, hoping, and working toward more feminist moves.

References

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