

## **Drawing with a Camera?**

### **ethnographic film and transformative anthropology**

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#### **Abstract**

Drawing has emerged as a recent focus of anthropological attention. Writers such as Ingold and Taussig have argued for its significance as a special kind of knowledge practice, linking it to a broader re-imagining of the anthropological project itself. Underpinning their approach is an opposition between the pencil and the camera, between ‘making’ and ‘taking’, between restrictive and generative modes of inquiry. This essay challenges this assumption, arguing for a dialectical rather than a polarized relationship of these elements in drawing and filmmaking. It highlights particular insights that follow from a dialogue between written and film-based anthropologies and links them to broader debates within the discipline – for example, debates about ways of knowing, skilled practice, improvisation and the imagination, and anthropology as a form of image-making practice.

**Key words:** drawing, ethnographic film, skilled practice, improvisation, ways of knowing, imagination

Over the last few years, the practice of drawing has become an important focus of anthropological attention. The work of Ingold (2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) and Taussig (2009, 2011) has been crucial in catalyzing interest in an area of cultural practice more usually considered the preserve of the art school. This new disciplinary turn, however, cannot be understood in isolation. It is part and parcel of a broader re-examination of drawing being undertaken by scholars and writers in a number of different fields – artistic research, art history, philosophy etc. (Cain 2010; Petherbridge 2010; Hendrickson 2008; Nancy 2013).

In this essay, we discuss recent anthropological work on drawing and consider how this new focus of interest engages broader questions within the discipline. Our objectives are two fold: firstly, to examine whether conceptions of drawing as articulated by Ingold and Taussig offer a way of thinking more productively about forms of anthropological inquiry pursued through different media; and, secondly, to ask how a more expansive dialogue between those pursuing textual and filmic work might serve to enhance certain key debates within contemporary anthropology about ways of knowing (Halstead et al 2008, Harris 2006, Marchand 2011, Stoller 1997, 2008), skilled practice, improvisation and the imagination (Ingold 2001, Crapanzano 2004, Harris and Rapport 2014, Hallam and Ingold 2007, Janowski and Ingold 2012, Jackson 2005, 2012), and the nature of the anthropological task itself (Grimshaw 2001, Grimshaw and Ravetz 2005, 2009).

Although it is sometimes claimed that the longstanding distinction between anthropology's so-called 'visual' and 'textual' wings is out of step with current practice (Schneider and Wright 2006: 8; Pink 2011: 143-4), there remains a lack of productive exchange within anthropology between inquiries developed through writing and those pursued through film (or other non-print forms), especially when it comes to theory.

Developments in one domain often fail to register in the other. Rather than rehearse the well-known litany of complaints about this situation, however, we are interested in whether the recent interest in drawing offers a bridge across this disciplinary divide. What are the generative theoretical possibilities that might follow from discovering common ground?

Central to the essay is our attempt to bring selected classics from the tradition of ethnographic film into dialogue with anthropological writing about drawing. The purpose is not to use films to illustrate ideas articulated through writing but to juxtapose these different modes of anthropology to ask certain questions. On the one hand does Ingold's and Taussig's work offer a language for articulating particular qualities of knowledge practice, explored (amongst other places) through the medium of film? On the other hand, can a more serious engagement with film as a mode of anthropological inquiry throw into relief limitations in current writing about drawing? What might it mean to draw with a camera and what new insights are yielded by bringing together anthropologies pursued through different media?

Our interest in engaging these questions partly stems from the desire to foster a more expansive anthropological dialogue. At a time when anthropologists are increasingly working through a range of media (writing, drawing, photography, soundscapes, web-based etc.), it seems important to create a critical language that can encompass diverse approaches and perspectives – one that enables us to talk to one another; while, at the same time, allowing us to preserve and understand what is unique to the specific forms or media through which problems are engaged.

At the same time, however, the concerns of this essay grow out of puzzling moments we encountered in our own filmmaking work. Separately, we were involved in projects about practices of making. Each of us found ourselves reflecting on the problem of how to describe and account for aspects of our projects in terms that were anthropologically

meaningful. For example, during the making of *Beautiful Colour*, a portrait of artist Ian Partridge, Ravetz became intrigued by how, while painting, her subject created a distinctive space around himself. Ravetz observed Partridge, a man with learning disabilities who lacked autonomy in other areas of his life as he slowly assembled a world from the shapes, colours, textures, sounds and movements of his painting practice. As he did so, he spoke of his delight in making, giving expression to a particular way of being in the world that Ravetz subsequently identified as *reverie* (Ravetz 2011).<sup>1</sup> **Figure 1.** Tracing the emergence of reverie with her camera became one of Ravetz's central concerns as a filmmaker. But, at the same time, she was uncertain as to whether this state of being – both intangible and yet perceptible – was adequately encompassed by existing conceptions of skilled practice that focused on its materials and social contexts rather than its experiential dimensions (e.g. see Grasseni 2007, Ingold 2001, Lave and Wenger 1991).

For Anna Grimshaw, the experience of completing a short piece, *A Chair: in six parts*, raised related questions -- ones that also seemed difficult to address in ways that articulated effectively with debates within anthropological writing. Assembled from materials that remained after the completion of a larger film project, Grimshaw initially regarded *A Chair* as an unexpected bonus, a 'left-over' piece whose making was enjoyable simply for its own sake. Some time later she began to reflect on her feeling that the work seemed to have edited itself. The film's different parts or movements and its overall shape seemed to have coalesced without conscious intervention.<sup>2</sup> **Figure 2.** She began to wonder whether her lack of investment in the outcome, her willingness to relinquish control over the editing, was crucial to the film finding its own form so to speak. Was this just a fanciful notion or was there something more to be explored here about the role of the imagination in the making of anthropological knowledge (Harris 2007, Harris and Rapport 2014, Marchand, 2012)?

Both *Beautiful Colour* and *A Chair* belong to an established genre known as the “process film”. Often slighted, it tends to be viewed as the literal or descriptive documentation of technological or cultural practices – threshing, water carrying, children at play, canoe building and so on. But given the intriguing anthropological questions raised in our own process films, we became interested in thinking more seriously about the genre. We found the writing of Ingold and Taussig on drawing was crucial in both illuminating -- and *obscuring* – critical aspects of the process film. Moreover, it was immensely valuable in offering a bridge across separate areas of disciplinary practice. Our concern, however, has not been to make a case for the process film as an illustration of contemporary ideas about drawing. Instead we propose a re-evaluation of the process film as a foundation for critically engaging questions of process, forms of knowledge and the nature of anthropology itself.

### **Anthropology and drawing**

Over the last few years, Tim Ingold (2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) has taken up the question of drawing and argued for its significance as a knowledge practice that brings together doing, observing and describing (2011b: 17). Ingold’s interest in drawing is part and parcel of a broader and more radical project that he has articulated through a series of publications. It involves no less than a reorientation of the anthropological enterprise as a whole. Having initially outlined his case by challenging established approaches founded upon dualities of mind and body, culture and nature, humans and animals, subjects and the world, Ingold has continued to develop and extend the scope of what might best be described as a ‘phenomenological’ anthropology. At its center are a series of key notions – most notably, process, improvisation, making, movement, relationships, material engagements, skilled practice – that express a new way of exploring and imagining the anthropological task. Drawing has emerged as one of the central elements in this reconfiguration. For Ingold, it has been an important, reflexive medium through which he has understood and

clarified his particular anthropological practice. In the opening pages of his recently edited collection, *Redrawing Anthropology*, Ingold declares that he is: ‘driven by an ambition to restore anthropology to life, and by the conviction that drawing – understood in the widest sense as a linear movement that leaves an impression or trace of one kind or another – must be central to our attempts to do so’ (2011b: 2).

For Ingold, drawing is a mode of what he calls ‘way-faring’ – a movement in and through the world that is fundamentally open-ended and improvisatory in character. It involves leaving a trace, marking a line rather than creating an image or representation. In particular, he draws attention to the centrality of observation to the practice of drawing, explaining:

‘By this I do not mean the distanced and disinterested contemplation of a world of objects, nor the translation of objects into mental images or representations. I refer rather to the intimate coupling of the movement of the observer’s attention with currents of activity in the environment. To observe is not so much to see what is “out there” as to *watch what is going on*. Its aim is thus not to represent the observed but to participate with it in the same generative movement’ (2011a: 223, original emphases).

According to Ingold then, to draw is to be drawn, literally and metaphorically, into the world, to engage through eye, hand and body with its contours and movement and to generate a line or trace that charts a journey both shaped by and shaping of the material landscape through which one navigates. In this way, Ingold seeks to reconnect observation with participation, observation with description challenging commonplace assumptions that they are opposing or hierarchically organized practices of anthropological engagement.

Ingold’s commitment to drawing as a way of engaging and knowing the world becomes the basis for his call for a ‘graphic’ anthropology or anthropography (2011a: 222). By this, he refers to a new kind of project that is founded in *making* (the title of his new book,

Ingold 2013). *Making* for Ingold is a key term – one that allows him to sharply differentiate his approach from those that have long prevailed in anthropology. The latter, Ingold suggests, manifest a ‘painterly aesthetic’ -- one that tends to be oriented toward a concern with ‘compositionality and totalization over improvisation and process’ (2011a: 222). In proposing a different kind of anthropology, one that recasts practices of movement, observation, participation and description as kinds of drawing and making, Ingold eschews forms of inquiry that involve the imposition or projection of analytical frameworks on the world. It hinges on a crucial but unacknowledged distinction between drawing (as a verb) and the drawing (the object or representation that results from the process). Ingold’s concern with the former is conceptualized as a continuous and emergent practice. Understood in this way, drawing is not about ‘framing’ but ‘entwining’. Knowing is fundamentally relational – that is, a knowing with rather than knowledge *of* or knowledge *about*.

Ingold is not alone among contemporary anthropologists in his engagement with questions of drawing. Michael Taussig (2009, 2011) has also sought to revive interest in a practice that has often been overlooked or relegated as something preliminary to more developed or sophisticated graphic or representational forms. He, too, anchors his discussion of drawing in his own practice as an anthropologist, beginning his exploration with an incident he witnessed as he sped along the freeway in Medellin. He saw a woman, at the entrance to the road tunnel, sewing a man into a white nylon bag. So striking was this scene that Taussig made a note in red pencil in his notebook reading ‘I swear I saw this’ followed two days later by a sketch (2009: 270). Taussig’s acknowledgement of the drawing’s potency is a reflection of his longstanding interest in sympathetic magic (with its key notions of copy and contact) and how it functions in modernity (Taussig 1994). The question of pictures and their hold over us, however, shifts here from Taussig’s longstanding concern with the magical quality that emanates from representations, to the process of picture-making

itself. Taussig asks (2009: 265): what happens when one makes a picture? Why draw? What happens to sympathetic magic when we draw? What can the process of drawing tell us about the agency of pictures?

In particular, Taussig is interested in the corporeal, immersive and exploratory quality of drawing and the complex web of relationships it generates between the drawer, what is being drawn and the viewer. Like Ingold, Taussig understands this sort of practice not to be about an enclosing or framing but rather an opening out -- ‘a line drawn is important not for what it records so much as what it leads you on to see’ (2009: 270).<sup>3</sup> Taussig seeks to recuperate drawing as a distinctive way of connecting with and knowing the world.

In common with Ingold, he conceives of drawing as a movement into the world. But there is a significant difference between their approaches too. For Taussig, this movement into the world is also a movement toward the magical – one that resides both in the activity of drawing *and* in the representational qualities of a drawing. The purpose of anthropology, Taussig argues, is to render an ‘incomplete translation’ of unfamiliar experience, thereby avoiding the dissolution of the mystery of the new and unknown into ‘the certainties of the known’ (2009:271-272). Drawing then functions as a way of making contact with that which is unknown and unarticulated. Understood in this way, it becomes a form of registering, a ‘witnessing’: ‘if I say that my drawing is an act of witness, what I mean to say is that it aspires to a certain gravity beyond the act of seeing with one’s own eyes. To *witness*, as opposed to *see*, is to be implicated in process of judgment . . .’ (Taussig 2011:71, original emphases). Drawing, for Taussig, goes to the heart of the anthropological enterprise. Its significance follows from its fundamental dynamic – its emergent, generative qualities (‘imaginative logic of discovery’) that express something profound without enclosing or rendering it in terms of the familiar.

Ingold and Taussig are deeply indebted to the essays of John Berger (especially 2007)

for their understanding of the distinctive qualities of drawing as a practice. Each utilizes Berger's writing as a framework for conceptualizing a new anthropology and, in making their respective cases, both Ingold and Taussig follow Berger in calling for the re-evaluation of drawing – an activity that has, historically, been marginalized, dismissed as childlike, 'primitive', or viewed as preliminary in relation to other communicative forms (Taussig 2009: 268). Berger's explication of drawing's uniqueness hinges, crucially, on questions of temporality. It serves as the basis for a number of other distinctions he proposes -- most notably between drawing and painting, and between drawing and photography (2005). Put in simple terms, the difference is characterized as between practices of 'making' and practices of 'taking'. If the former is conceptualized as a *line*, the latter is conceptualized as a *frame* (Ingold 2011a: 179). In the case of drawing, the line charts the movement of an expansive process of discovery. For certain kinds of painting, from the Renaissance up until the modernist revolution, and for photography, however, the frame serves to freeze time, to isolate and circumscribe a particular moment from the ongoing flow of life (Ingold 2011a: 179).

Taussig takes up this question -- why draw, rather than take a photograph? He suggests that there is an intimacy (corporeally-based) in drawing that is missing from working with a camera (2009: 265-266). Drawing involves, literally, a drawing toward, a movement toward and into the subject, a merging or intertwining that is transformative – of both drawer and that which is drawn. Ingold, while not going quite as far as Taussig and his notion of sympathetic magic, has – as we have seen -- also argued for a 'transformative' anthropology, what he has called a 'graphic' or anthropography (2013:3-4). For Ingold, the camera is crucial to the case he makes, serving as a negative counterpoint to the kind of inquiry he seeks to advocate (2011a: 225). He, too, works with a distinction between the pencil (making) and the camera (taking) – and this distinction becomes the basis for the

contrasting anthropologies that he is concerned to expose. Not surprisingly, the former is characterized as a generative, dynamic project, while the latter is static and enclosed. If one is expressive of an approach Ingold refers to as a knotting, meshing or gathering (2011a:149), the other one is about ‘framing’ (2011a: 225).

In the next section, we look more closely at the process film. We examine some of its distinctive features and evaluate the kind of inquiry that has been pursued by means of the genre. Specifically, our intention is to bring examples of the process film into the anthropological debate about making and drawing. On the one hand, we ask: what insights into the process film might follow from the work on drawing by Ingold and Taussig? On the other hand: how might these films challenge Ingold’s and Taussig’s assumptions about the camera and how it might be used as a tool of anthropological practice? In short: can one draw with a camera?

### **The Process Film**

The process film has long been a mainstay of ethnographic cinema. Some of the earliest footage produced by anthropologists involved the recording of different cultural processes. For example, Haddon’s films made in the context of the 1898 Torres Strait Expedition might be described as ‘process’ films – albeit incomplete ones, given the technical difficulties he faced in getting the camera to work effectively in the field (Griffiths 2002: 134). Despite these setbacks, it is clear from the four minutes of surviving footage that Haddon’s approach was not ad hoc but coherent and consistent, an expression of his commitment to recording unfolding events presented as a sequence of actions with its own internal logic. In this way, Haddon’s films from the Torres Strait bear a striking resemblance to the early Lumière shorts. Each film is comprised of an extended, single shot that encompasses a whole scene with a discernible beginning, middle and an end. If the Lumière brothers offered scenes from Parisian life – feeding a baby, watering the garden, playing

cards, Haddon gave his early audience a glimpse of a very different – but similarly ordered – cultural world.

The two most extended sequences from Haddon's Torres Strait material – the re-enactment of a long suppressed ritual, Malu Bomai, and Shake-a-leg, a dance performance by visiting aboriginal peoples -- present Torres Strait Island culture not only as continuous – an unbroken movement from beginning to end, a performance with own internal logic and forward momentum -- but also as fundamentally improvisatory in character. The Islanders, like Haddon as camera operator, were improvising - constrained by their situation yet using whatever was at hand and so responding creatively to limitations (most notably, wearing cardboard cutouts for ceremonial dress).<sup>4</sup>

Haddon's Torres Strait films offer early evidence of film's potential as a medium through which to explore and render culture as process – indeed as a living, improvised set of practices. But Haddon's filmmaking approach with its emphasis on the single, static shot also calls attention to the relationship between framing and movement, and by extension between culture as prescriptive or normative and performance as emergent and forward-moving. In the work of Haddon's successors, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, the former of these elements was emphasised. Unlike Haddon, Bateson and Mead were largely indifferent to the inherent rhythm and generative movement of cultural practice. Instead they fragmented the unfolding character of life into discrete behavioral segments enclosed within a generalized hypothesis about culture (for example, *Character Formation in Different Cultures*).<sup>5</sup>

In decades that followed the work of Bateson and Mead, anthropologists developed an interest in the process film as part of an archiving and salvage endeavor. There was a concern to document and record cultural practices in ways that would bring together science and film, or put film in the service of science. The foundation in 1956 of the Institut für den

Wissenschaftlichen Film in Göttingen, Germany became an important focus of this ambition. The attempt to place film at the service of scientific endeavour meant the generation of records -- weaving, canoe-building etc – in which certain qualities of the moving image, namely the camera's capacity to capture the fluid character of cultural processes were considered much less important than the indexical recording capacities. Strictures on the objectivity of filmmaking were later embodied in a number of attempts to legitimate the field of visual anthropology (most notably in Rollwagen 1988 and Heider 1976). For those concerned with salvage or with the generation of film records for analysis, the aesthetic possibilities of the film medium were not acknowledged. They were downplayed in favour of what was being documented. The aesthetics of realism were not acknowledged and, in resolutely holding to a literal or descriptive approach, filmmakers opted for what they believed to be "science" over what was consigned to the category of "art".<sup>6</sup>

The Yanomami films of Asch and Chagnon, especially *The Ax Fight* exemplify this kind of approach, so too the collaborative work of Morphy and Dunlop in the context of Aboriginal Australia (Morphy 1994). Here we find the process film at the center of an anthropological inquiry predicated on principles that posit a separation between data and analysis – between practice and theory, participation and observation, fieldwork and interpretation. The camera generates data about events and activities that are then juxtaposed with explanatory frameworks that originate outside the unfolding cultural moment itself. Although *The Ax Fight* starkly exposed the problem of this kind of approach, it has remained the case that conceptualizing filmmaking as about data production, results in the amplification or modification of established understandings rather than a questioning or subversion of them.

A very different kind of process film, however, can be discerned within the history of anthropological filmmaking. One profoundly subversive of disciplinary assumptions and

conventions, it embodies an approach that we will suggest importantly anticipates contemporary calls for a graphic anthropology. Crucial to its challenge as an alternative mode of intellectual inquiry is the medium of film itself. The work of John Marshall, Jean Rouch and David MacDougall is especially significant in this regard.<sup>7</sup> Their innovations as anthropologists hinged upon a radical shift in perspective and position as filmmakers. Crucial was an abandonment of overarching frameworks and explanatory categories that had hitherto served to organize film as data.

Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall approached filmmaking as a way of moving through the world, an exploratory process in which knowledge did not exist prior to the encounter between filmmaker, subjects and the world but was generated in and through these unfolding relationships. At the heart of the new inquiry was a mobile, embodied camera – a camera that became an extension of the senses and body of the filmmaker. It entailed the relinquishing of a privileged or optimal view of the world from an imagined place outside it. Instead the filmmaker took up a partial, situated position alongside those with whom they were working.

John Marshall was one of the first to experiment with a new kind of approach. Although Marshall's long standing commitment to working with the Ju/hoansi people is widely known, his unusual curiosity and inventiveness as a filmmaker is often overlooked or not properly understood. Marshall began to experiment with what he called "event" films. This small-scale work stands as an important counterpoint to the longer more elaborate composite works about the Ju/hoansi for which Marshall is best known but which he had begun to see as illustrative of rather abstract anthropological concepts rather than explorations of life as it was being lived. Hitherto both his filmmaking techniques (the handbook method) and his anthropological approach had involved the imposition of a structure onto improvisatory social practice. But increasingly Marshall relinquished

elaborate narrative frameworks and he began to experiment with short films built around the exploration of fluid social processes.<sup>8</sup>

*A Joking Relationship* exemplifies this new approach. Here, in a remarkable twelve minute sequence, Marshall charts the complex, ambiguous and highly charged interaction between a young woman, !Nai and her uncle. Working with a handheld camera, Marshall inserts himself (and the viewer) in the midst of a struggle that is by turns playful, affectionate, threatening, and flirtatious. The camera is so close to !Nai and her uncle that shots are continually moving in and out of focus. We are amidst a tangle of body parts – wrists, arms, torsos, shoulders. Marshall's camera movements reflect the elaborate dance of his subjects as they slip in and out of each other's grasp, alternately fusing and separating until, finally, !Nai shakes herself free and steps out of the frame.

What we see in *A Joking Relationship* (and his other short films) is Marshall's interest in small moments, understood not as bounded or isolated segments but as dynamic flows of unfolding relationships. Marshall seeks to render the fluid texture of these events from a place inside, working so intimately that his camera seems to almost touch his subjects, to brush against them, to be entangled in a network of inter-subjective relationships. The resulting films are not a statement about something but more of a choreography made up of a dense web of movements in and through particular situations.

*A Joking Relationship* is an important example of Marshall's attempt to align his anthropological approach with the distinctive qualities of the film medium. Hence, although this work and his other short films are focused around what Marshall calls 'events', they are not bracketed as discrete or bounded but instead they are rendered as porous, expansive moments embedded in the broader ongoing processes of social life. Marshall's concern as a filmmaker is to find a creative resonance between the medium with which he is working and the currents of Ju/hoansi life. It emerges from his position within what it is he is

documenting, such that the film charts a movement through a particular moment in conjunction with others – including the viewer. The final film is not a representation of the event but is continuous with and inseparable from the event itself. Marshall's short films are akin to sketches – a kind of emergent “thinking through making” (Ravetz 2011: 159) – an exploratory line that does not enclose from without but expands laterally and stretches forward. The short film is less of a bounded entity, a representation, than a gathering place where different subjectivities (including those of the viewer) intersect and where new forms of engagement and understanding emerge.

If John Marshall experimented on a small scale, Jean Rouch pursued a bigger and more ambitious anthropological agenda through the medium of film. But in important ways the changes Rouch made in his filmmaking practice mirror those that Marshall was experimenting with during the same period. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the early 1960s, Rouch emerged as a highly original and innovative figure whose work consistently challenged conventional understandings of both cinema and anthropology. In contrast to Marshall, who has always remained something of a shadowy figure, Rouch's exuberant personality has been hard to ignore, though his particular contributions as an *anthropologist* are not much known beyond the rather narrow field of ethnographic film (Stoller 1992 is an important exception). Central to any understanding of Rouch's anthropology, however, is the fundamental shift he effected in his filmmaking practice – a shift from what might be called *documentation* to *transformation*.

From the beginning of his career, Rouch was interested in the classic anthropological topics of ritual and possession. His initial explorations as a filmmaker, however, followed a fairly conventional approach. His early work comprised documentations of the ritual process from a place of detachment. It was as though the filmmaker was standing outside, looking at the events as they unfolded in front of his camera. As Nannicelli (2006) pointed out in his

discussion of Rouch's changing approach, *Les Magaciens de Wanzerbé* manifested all the techniques associated with what he called 'representation' – that is, the film opens with a map and textual information, the camera work is distanced and is located above the human subjects such that it looking down at them, there is narration that explains the sequence of events that make up the ritual. In every way, it is classic explanatory anthropology – film as sort of data gathering or documentation of action folded into a pre-existing interpretive framework provided by the anthropologist. Cultural knowledge is represented as an objective body of knowledge that is enacted and reproduced through the ritual process.

Rouch's later work, most notably in *Jaguar, Moi, Un Noir* and perhaps most fully realized in *Tourou et Bitti*, is distinguished by a very different approach. No longer working with the notion of documentation, with the camera being used to 'capture' events assumed to unfold whether filming is taking place or not, Rouch began to experiment with the camera as a catalyst. As *Tourou et Bitti* reveals, this meant creating events, making something happen, exploring process not as culturally defined but as something fundamentally improvisatory in character. For Rouch himself, this short film was a kind of watershed in clarifying his conception of what he called the *ciné-transe*.<sup>9</sup> *Tourou et Bitti* comprises a single, extended shot of just under ten minutes. Rouch approaches a Songhay village in Niger where he anticipates the beginning of a possession ritual. Walking into the ritual space, he begins to film the musicians as they await the arrival of the spirits. When the spirits fail to arrive, the drummers stop. But Rouch continues to film. His actions serve to catalyze a response. The drummers resume and the spirits take up possession of the bodies of those present, fusing filmmaker, participants and spectators into a single experience. Here we can see the crucial shift in Rouch's anthropology. His films are no longer *about* a process but are the process itself – often a literal journey through time and space that the filmmaker (and viewer) undertakes in conjunction with a handful of subjects. The film becomes transformative

space. It cannot be summarized or enclosed within an explanatory framework but comprises an ongoing encounter between subjectivities and the world that is reanimated with each screening.

The movement away from the conventions of what might be termed cognitive-based anthropology was perhaps most fully developed in what became known as the ‘observational’ turn in ethnographic filmmaking (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009). A decade or so after the innovations of Marshall and Rouch, David MacDougall emerged as both a leading practitioner and commentator on a new kind of inquiry that was inseparable from the medium through which he was pursuing it. Although frequently misunderstood and misrepresented, observational filmmaking was predicated on a radical change of anthropological perspective. It involved the relinquishing of both exposition and the conventions of dramatic narrative in favour of an open-ended exploration of the details of everyday as they unfolded through the course of filmmaking. In place of the imposition of an explanatory cultural framework that enclosed social processes, observational filmmakers situated themselves within the flow of life, embedding themselves in a network of dynamic relationships understood to be continually in movement.

From the outset, MacDougall approached the filmmaking task as something open-ended, a way of asking questions from a place inside the world. His early film, *To Live With Herds*, was in many ways a first step on the way to a new kind of inquiry – an incompletely realized piece. His later work, particularly *the Turkana Trilogy* (*Lorang’s Way*, *A Wife Among Wives* and *Wedding Camels*) exemplifies the fundamental reorientation of MacDougall’s perspective as an anthropological filmmaker. For here he started to self-consciously work with what he called an ‘unprivileged’ camera style as the critical foundation of his practice. By this he was referring to the radically different position he adopted as a filmmaker. In place of a conventional or ‘privileged’ anthropological view, one

built upon a pretense of standing outside or above social life in order to most fully represent it, MacDougall proposed a new kind of endeavour that took as its point of departure the filmmaker's actual position in the world. As he acknowledged, this position was partial and situated, the result of filmmaking practice being woven into an unfolding web of relationships (1998: 199-208).

There were profound consequences for the kinds of knowledge that could emerge from this change of perspective and position. As *The Turkana Trilogy* shows, it is produced out of a continuous process of engagement between subjects and the world. This new conception of knowledge is inseparable from filmmaking as a *medium* of knowing. In *Lorang's Way*, for instance, MacDougall's biography of a Turkana elder, the filmmaker does not offer a summary of a life or use an individual to exemplify cultural truths. Instead he conceptualizes the film as an open-ended space for an expansive encounter between subjects, filmmaker and audiences. Knowing emerges *through* this encounter rather than being separable from it. *Lorang's Way* then is less a representation of someone and more a trace that extends beyond the duration of the film.

### **Filmmaking, drawing and anthropology**

Despite different emphases and locations, the innovative work pursued by Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall was expressive of a profoundly new anthropological approach. It reflected a shift away from culture conceptualized as a relatively static object to be studied and represented through film, toward a concern with relationships and processes in which the filmmaking practice and medium are intertwined within the ongoing inquiry. MacDougall has characterized the difference between these two endeavours as 'films about anthropology' and 'anthropological films' (1998:76).<sup>10</sup>

Dissatisfied with their original techniques and assumptions, each of the filmmakers sought to take up a different position in the world -- moving from a place conceptualized as

external to what they were documenting to a live and negotiated position within it. Crucial to this transformation of position and perspective was the embodiment of the camera. The filmmaker no longer used immobile camera technologies to frame ongoing social processes, as if these were entrenched expressions of culture. Now he/she was part and parcel of the processes themselves, active participants in the generation of cultural forms. In important ways, the film becomes a journey, its shape and character expressive of the relationships that form it. The film carries the imprint of subjectivities brought together and created through the encounter. Hence the work – anthropological film – is open, unfinished, reactivated with each screening rather than something bounded. It becomes an expansive space between subjects, filmmaker and viewer. The kind of anthropology forged in this encounter is no longer about the transmission of bodies of knowledge but involves the generation of a more temporal, mobile knowing pursued through engagement and relationship.

If the work of John Marshall is rarely acknowledged by anthropologists (beyond screening *The Hunters* within introductory classes), Rouch's films tend to be discussed in the specialized terms that he proposed for them. These terms -- most notably, *ciné-transe*, ethno-fiction, *anthropologie partagée* --- are most usually cited by those working in the field of ethnographic film. But beyond this they have had very little saliency. The problem is that this specialized terminology has often functioned to designate the uniqueness of Rouch's work rather than to facilitate a broader conversation about what it might represent as a particular anthropological endeavour and how it might challenge disciplinary norms and assumptions. The case of MacDougall, however, is the most perplexing – given the consistency with which he has engaged anthropological questions in both his films and associated writing. Despite a substantial body of work extending over some forty years, it has gained virtually no traction at all within the broader discipline.

It is clear that until recently the innovative work pursued Marshall, Rouch and

MacDougall was out of step, conceptually and methodologically, with disciplinary thinking. Anthropological filmmaking, if acknowledged at all, was (and still is) viewed as insufficiently theoretical, too concrete or specific, too open-ended. On the one hand, anthropologists have tended to mis-read or simply ignore how this kind of work constitutes *anthropology*, interpreting it instead according to conventions of data and analysis, description and interpretation. On the other hand, compared to the work of ‘artist-ethnographers’ such as Castaing-Taylor, Butler and Mirza, it is seen as naïve or artless – a rather straightforward kind of process film.<sup>11</sup>

### **Re-evaluating the process film**

The recent interest in drawing offers a framework for characterizing the kind of anthropology Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall were pursuing through the medium of film. Ingold’s and Taussig’s explorations of making practices offer a language by which the process film might be re-evaluated, since they enable us to articulate aspects of filmmaking that otherwise have remained tacit, apparently non-anthropological. Hitherto it has been difficult to describe in terms that made sense to anthropologists the intellectual seriousness of an inquiry that did not adhere to the conventional disciplinary framework.

At the same time, we suggest that Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall importantly anticipated key concepts proposed by Ingold and Taussig. In forging alternatives to the camera as a technology of capture, these filmmakers generated process films that expressed the idea of drawing as a means of ‘knowing with’ rather than knowing about. As early as the 1950s Rouch and Marshall were experimenting with cultural forms rather than passively documenting culture as an object. Their work was self-consciously relational - open, unfinished, indeterminate. Their process films depended on the trace-making capabilities of the embodied camera drawn into the world as a generative part of action, showing the filmmakers’ commitment to the co-evalness of time between self and other (Fabian 1983) in

distinction to a spatialising time.

Bringing together Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall with Ingold and Taussig, enriches our understanding of the kind of anthropology that can be proposed through the model of drawing. While the influence of this model on anthropology – the movement towards a fully graphic anthropology - remains to be seen, we suggest that drawing has opened up a space for a more expansive conversation between different modes of anthropological inquiry. Ironically, one of the primary obstacles in the way of an expansive dialogue is a series of assumptions about the camera: ‘[t]he camera interrupts this flow of visuo-manual activity and cuts the relation between gesture and description that lies at the heart of drawing’, Ingold declares (2011a: 225). Neither Ingold nor Taussig consider the possibility that one might be able to draw with a camera. Photography or filmmaking are not recognized as *practices*, with the camera functioning as a tool that can be embodied. The camera is presented as a technology that through its ‘projective’ framing, diverts the possibilities of ‘intervening in the fields of force and flow wherein the forms of things arise and are sustained’ (Ingold 2011a:178).

Central to Ingold’s and Taussig’s presentation of drawing is the evocation of an open-ended, exploratory practice. Drawing is a verb. It is characterized as temporal, a continuous movement that escapes borders through unimpeded flow. As such, it is inimical to the frame. In this way, drawing as an expansive, fluid practice comes to be contrasted to other forms of image- or mark- making which are seen as bounded or ‘projected’ -- painting and photography being prime examples. By asserting the distinction between ‘making’ and ‘taking’, between the fluid and exploratory and the extractive and enclosing, Ingold and Taussig are also, of course, calling up sharply contrasting modes of anthropology. On the one hand, there is an improvisatory, forward moving anthropology and, on the other, a static project confined within a fixed frame. In asserting this distinction, as we noted earlier, both

Ingold and Taussig direct their attention toward the former, *drawing* as a process at the expense of the latter, *a drawing*, a representation. But if we take seriously the idea of the camera as a tool rather than a technology and recognize that certain kinds of filmmaking can be considered forms of drawing, the relationship between process and representation becomes more complex and interesting. Crucial is a new conception of the frame.

Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall – in different ways -- eschew the imposition of a Bateson and Mead framework onto culture from an imagined place outside what is being represented. Instead, in their hands, the frame becomes something flexible, organic and emergent from within the shared environment in which subjects and filmmakers (and by extension viewers) are situated. Following Ingold, we might say that what distinguishes their respective filmmaking approaches is the improvisation in relation to tool use through an interweaving of action and perception, tool and body and surroundings (2011a: 56-61) The camera's position – what can be seen, what cannot, what can be anticipated, what cannot – becomes congruent with the perspective of those inhabiting the same space as the filmmaker. Out of this attunement comes an ever-changing frame. Yet the frame also contradicts the idea of entirely open-ended action, focusing selectively on particular experience.

One of the most frequently discussed scenes in *Lorang's Way*, Lorang's mapping of his place in the world for MacDougall to film, offers a concrete instance of what might be implied in this process of framing. For here we see MacDougall's relinquishing of an encompassing perspective in favour of a camera that, like Lorang himself, looks out from the metaphorical centre of the world. Lorang's gesture is graphic, his arm produces a line in space, drawing us to attend to and imaginatively experience the line he sets in motion. The limits of what the camera can see is aligned with Lorang's own perspective – his arm gesturing toward the horizon, pointing beyond the frame. The alignment of frame with Lorang's line of sight works to heighten, rather than diminish, the viewer's sense of the

unfolding, expansive character of the world being shown. **Figure 3**

By suggesting the techniques of Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall can be likened to practices of drawing, our initial concern was to use Ingold and Taussig as a means for articulating the kind of anthropology such filmmakers have pursued. But we also discovered that bringing filmmaking into recent anthropological debates about drawing was a first step in rethinking notions of the camera, framing and the vexed relationship between structure and agency in understanding forms of improvisatory practice. The process films of Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall throw into doubt certain assumptions about the restrictive nature of the frame, while highlighting other generative possibilities -- namely, the responsive and gestural elements of framing rather than its fixity, the role of the frame in catalyzing creative activity and in stimulating heightened states of awareness.

By shifting their position as filmmakers and placing themselves into the flow of forward moving experience, there were real limits on what Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall could know, hear, see, and show. Unlike the ‘privileged’ position that they had previously occupied, where framing had meant imposing a line around something and enclosing it, Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall began to work creatively with the constraints of an unprivileged or situated perspective and generated something new. The result was not the imposition of a definitive ‘outline’ onto an object called culture, but the tracing of an ever-changing line. Their process films throw into relief the crucial interplay between conflicting currents that animate improvisatory practice. From this follows a number of new questions – what distinctive states of consciousness emanate in moments of improvisation? Can such states be understood as “ways of knowing” (Harris 2007, MacDougall 2006, Ravetz 2011)? How might a new conception of framing contribute to contemporary debates about the imagination within anthropological work (Crapanazano 2003, Harris and Rapport 2014)?

### **Toward a transformative anthropology**

In an interview with Enrico Fulchignoni, Jean Rouch once likened his filmmaking to jazz: ‘a jam session between Duke Ellington’s piano and Louis Armstrong’s trumpet, or fiery encounters between strangers that André Breton sometimes gives us accounts of’ (Rouch in Feld 2003: 186). Here Rouch draws attention to an arena of cultural practice that has long been recognized to have improvisation at its core. Making such a link between filmmaking and a particular kind of music-making is rich and suggestive and lends weight to the view that the relationship of structure to agency is not only integral to improvisational practice itself, but is often perceived by musical improvisers to be highly generative. This is a question addressed by Berliner in his major study of the form, *Thinking in Jazz* (1994). Specifically, he seeks to challenge many of the assumptions associated with jazz – that it is essentially a spontaneous and intuitive mode of musical performance (1994: 2). In an attempt to sort out his own confused thinking about jazz, Berliner’s research with musicians leads him to discover ‘the remarkableness of the training and rigorous musical thinking that underlies improvisation’ (1994: 15). Understanding this becomes crucial to grasping the nature of jazz as a creative practice. For Berliner, it is impossible to understand moments of innovation without, at the same time, recognizing their roots in pre-existing cultural and musical models.

Rouch’s own practice is usually described in terms of its improvisational character and he is celebrated for his bold approach that blurred the boundaries between truth and fiction, the ‘real’ and the ‘imagined’. But, in working in new ways as an anthropological filmmaker, it is clear that Rouch was self-consciously playing with and against existing modes of anthropological practice. Moreover, in making what he called the *ciné-transe* an integral part of his practice, Rouch’s work raises a further question, one that is frequently sidestepped in anthropological discussions of drawing and related forms -- namely the distinctive subjective states associated with moments of improvisation. Rouch’s claim to

enter a different reality while filming has been hard for commentators to interpret. It is often viewed as an appealing, if rather fanciful, dimension of his exuberant personality but something that cannot be replicated or seriously evaluated (Henley 2009: 349). The assumption that the *ciné-transe* is a personal idiosyncrasy rather than a broader experiential phenomenon fails to take into account the very connection that Rouch himself pointed to – that between filmmaking and jazz. But in so doing, he was clearly aligning his own experiences of heightened awareness with those most typically attributed to jazz musicians who, during performance, become ‘possessed’ – at one with the moment that unfolds around them.

The notion of the *ciné-transe* proposed by Rouch challenges understandings of skilled practice as reducible to a practical or material alignment of eye, hand, body, movement and material (Ingold 2001, Grasseni 2007, Lave 1991). It raises a question about other aspects of the improvisatory process that are more difficult to characterize and that have not perhaps been adequately addressed within recent debates about knowing (Harris 2007, Halstead, Marchand 2012). Specifically, it refers to those specific states of consciousness sometimes called awareness or attunement that, under certain circumstances, emanate in a kind of holding space, what Milner called the ‘framed gap’ (Milner, 1987: 81). Although Ingold once referred to this in relation to his own music making: ‘I experience a heightened sense of awareness, but that awareness is not of my playing, it *is* my playing’ (2001: 413), he has not gone much further in articulating in anthropological terms what is meant by this. Taussig, too, appears to gesture toward something similar in his invocation of the term ‘magic’ with respect to drawing. But it is not clear from Ingold’s and Taussig’s work, how, when and under what circumstances these particular states of consciousness emerge, or, indeed, their significance for a ‘transformative’ anthropology. Taussig has warned of ‘a thin crust of reality under which lurks the hocus pocus swamp’ (2009: 264).

The work of Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall offers a productive way of thinking about the creative role of the frame and how it might function as a vibrant element at the heart of their innovative process films. For what is significant, we suggest, is not the absence of framing but what framing makes possible. Rather than conceptualizing the camera as marked by an inert structure (akin to a pastry cutter) – something perhaps seen by Ingold as a technological device that severs gesture from description (2011a: 225), we interpret the embodied camera as part of a continual framing and reframing process that produces a particular kind of heightened consciousness. This mode of consciousness or attunement – the attention to *something* rather than everything - involves a dynamic mode of focusing which retains the relationship between what lies within and beyond the frame. Framing of this sort extends rather than reduces the continuity between gesture, observation and description that is drawing.<sup>12</sup>

For both of us as filmmakers, our interest in *Beautiful Colour* and *A Chair* was in the problem of how to craft and render meaningful those aspects of making that exceeded existing anthropological conceptions of process. In carefully aligning our own approach with that of our subjects, we were attempting to open up a space within our films that mirrored the creative space that Partridge and Coperthwaite actively made for their own improvisational practice. Our concern was with the nature of heightened attentiveness and how, as a manifestation of what might be called “the imaginative”, it might be understood as a particular way of knowing – one that was expansive and generative. These questions encompassed both the substantive and formal aspects of our anthropological filmmaking – that is, what our subjects were doing and what we ourselves were doing in the space between the known and unknown, structure and agency, the material and the imaginative. We sought to work with the distinctive qualities of the film medium to engage modes of being and knowing without translating them into the familiar terms of anthropological explanation:

‘More than any other medium of human communication, the moving picture makes itself sensuously and sensibly manifest as *the expression of experience by experience*. A film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood.’ (Sobchack quoted in Moore 2012, added emphases).

The work of particular filmmakers has much to contribute to current anthropological debates, if – following MacDougall -- it is approached as not about knowing the same things differently but about knowing different things (1998: 257). The questions raised for us by *Beautiful Colour* and *A Chair* are part of a broader concern about how to bring into focus certain knowledge processes that remain unarticulated and resistant to description –states of consciousness that can be more effectively evoked than represented since they are by their very nature *processual*, emergent rather than extant. Such states are implied in the anthropological literature on ways of knowing (Harris 2006, Marchand 2012) and in the recent work on drawing and making, but the fear of Taussig’s “hocus pocus swamp” has perhaps kept a fuller discussion of these aspects of anthropological practice at bay. The new disciplinary interest in the imagination (Crapanzano 2004, Harris and Rapport 2014, Janowski and Ingold 2012 ) might yet offer a place for the more sustained engagement with such issues.

For anthropological filmmakers, however, what has been variously referred to as ‘knowing stillness’ (Moore 2012), ‘reverie’ (Ravetz 2011), ‘attentiveness’ (MacDougall 2006) is precisely what their medium brings to the fore.<sup>13</sup> As we discovered in our own work with certain subjects, it involves both a framing and a leaving open, the generating of an active knowing that hinges upon structure and yet follows from the relinquishing of control. Film does not describe this state or translate it into existing explanatory terms but instead invites the viewer to participate in it. Although particular states of consciousness associated

with improvisational practice have been explored within anthropological filmmaking, those working in this medium have also sought to initiate a wider conversation about how we might go about characterizing such notoriously slippery concepts. In so doing, we suggest that anthropological filmmakers have proposed a way of extending the current dialogue about drawing -- one that reaches beyond the old divisions between filmmaking and writing.

To see the process film as analogous to drawing is to understand it as a means of 'knowing with' rather than knowing about. But we acknowledge that where Ingold and Taussig reject the frame wholesale, the act of filmmaking confronts us with the frame. The work of Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall (and our own) can be understood as drawings in Ingold and Taussig's terms -- traces of an embodied camera drawn into the world. Indeed, we have argued that unlike Mead's anthropology, their framing is mobile and occurs from a fluid and situated perspective. Yet in emphasising these qualities we have also wanted to hold onto the dialectical struggle between open-ended ways of moving fluidly with experience and selective acts of *framing* that experience. It is precisely this dialectical tension that generates heightened consciousness and new ways of knowing.

Ingold's and Taussig's insistence on drawing could be taken much further -- to imply a radical reading of anthropology as an image-making practice (Grimshaw 2001, Grimshaw and Ravetz 2005). But, by focusing on drawing as a verb and eschewing *the* drawing (the resulting image) this possibility is foreclosed. By contrast, we suggest that anthropology understood to be a form of image-making has transformative potential -- that is, an expansive and generative form of knowing. This is possible, however, only if we accept the existence of a creative tension between framing and an open-ended exploration of the world.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Insert link to *Beautiful Colour*

<sup>2</sup> Insert link to *A Chair: in six parts*.

<sup>3</sup> Taussig makes it clear in his essay that while the ‘third meaning in the drawing’ – that which is neither factual nor symbolic—concerns the enclosure of the man (and possibly the women) into the nylon bag, the drawing itself embodies open-endedness.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in the Malu Bomai sequence that lasts barely a minute, Haddon – using a fixed medium-shot -- films three Islanders as they perform a ceremonial dance for the camera. Carefully framed in the midst of dense foliage, the men are wearing hastily assembled skirts, a headdress and mask. They perform for the camera – facing Haddon as they shake their bodies before turning and moving in a circular motion. For a fuller description and discussion, see Griffiths 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Bateson’s and Mead’s footage, shot during their fieldwork in the 1930s, was edited into a series of short finished films by Mead some twenty years later. The seven films that comprise *Character Formation in Different Cultures* are similarly structured. For example, *Bathing Babies in Three Cultures* juxtaposes scenes of babies being bathed in Bali, New Guinea and the United States. Each scene is static and self-contained. It frames a “typical” interaction between mother and child. The connection between the scenes is provided by Mead’s narration. The narration alerts the viewer to those aspects of the behavior that are deemed culturally significant by Mead.

<sup>6</sup> See the exchange between Bateson and Mead (2002) at the end of their lives about the art and science of filmmaking.

<sup>7</sup> Our choice of case studies is, of course, arbitrary and there are many other films that might serve our purposes. But in focusing on selected work by Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall we are taking classics of the tradition of ethnographic cinema and proposing a re-evaluation of their anthropological significance.

<sup>8</sup> During the 1950s, Marshall shot what he called “sequence” films about everyday moments in Jo/hoansi life – men bathing, women talking, arguments, exchanges between kin and so on. Recorded without synchronous sound, Marshall subsequently edited the work into small complete pieces and added audio that he had taken at the time of shooting. For further information about this work, see his essay “Filming and Learning”, in Ruby 1993, 1-134.

<sup>9</sup> See Rouch’s essay “On the Vissicitudes of the Self”, in Feld 2003.

<sup>10</sup> MacDougall clarifies this distinction in the following terms: “A useful method for distinguishing between the anthropological film and the film about anthropology . . . is to assess whether the film attempts to cover new ground through an integral exploration of the data or whether it merely *reports* on existing knowledge, 1998: 76, original emphases.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Castaing-Taylor’s and Paravel’s film, *Leviathan* and Butler’s and Mirza’s project, *The Museum of Non Participation*. It is beyond the scope of this essay to take up questions posed by recent work that straddles the art and anthropology divide. But we explore it in detail within our book-length project, *Moments of Being* where we look more closely at anthropology understood as according to a drawing or painterly aesthetic.

<sup>12</sup> It is akin to the notion of horizon or hinterland that Crapanzano discusses with respect to the imagination – involving, as he puts it, a dialectic between openness and closure (2004:2).

<sup>13</sup> For Moore “stillness” is conceptualized as a state during performance within which “connections are made between actions, perceptions, thoughts and intentions” (2012: 109). Ravetz (2011, 2012) defines reverie as a dreamlike yet active state, a form of absentmindedness that does not distinguish between the seer and the seen, and that creates unusual feelings of unity. MacDougall’s notion of “heightened awareness” hinges on a distinction between concentration and attentiveness, between focus or introversion and an expansive, open consciousness (2006:7).

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## **Filmography**

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Figures:

1. *Beautiful Colour*



2. *A Chair: in six parts*



### 3. *Lorang's Way*

