

**When Art and Anthropology Meet.
Introduction to Visual Anthropology**
Maija Mäki

Jari Kupiainen & Liisa Häkkinen (eds). 2017. *Kuvatut kulttuurit. Johdatus visuaaliseen antropologiaan*. [Pictured cultures. Introduction to Visual Anthropology.] Tietolipas 253. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. ISBN 978-952-222-837-6.

Translating the title of this book shows the multidimensional layers of the contexts in a concrete way. The title, *Kuvatut kulttuurit*, can be translated, for example, as “filmed”, “photographed” or “described” cultures. The articles deal with all these features of visual anthropology: film production, photography and the essence and methodological aspects of visual anthropology today and in past centuries. The book gives an interdisciplinary impression; the writers are experienced researchers and film-makers in the field, and some of them also represent both these professions. This variety of writers creates an interesting atmosphere to the whole book. The book is the first Finnish attempt to describe visual anthropology as a specific field of anthropology and ethnology.

The book consists of three chapters that cover theoretical aspects as well as the historical background and methodological variety of visual anthropology. The editors describe the production process as slow and difficult, especially due to financial issues. For the reader, the slowness turns into a positive feature. The articles are very informative and especially interesting if one researches the sources and film materials that are used in the articles. The first chapter describes and defines the concept of visual anthropology from different perspectives. The articles of Jari Kupiainen (Visual anthropology in the twenty-tens) and Ilkka Ruohonen (What is anthropological film?) summarize the definitions, main concepts and historical developments of visual anthropology and anthropological and ethnographic film industry. In addition to being part of the scientific research process, film-making is also seen as part of the artistic and aesthetic documentary film making tradition. Documentarist Jouko Aaltonen writes about the connections between documentaries and ethnographic films and claims that Finnish documentarists have taken influences from anthropological films even though they do not necessarily recognize it themselves. According to Aaltonen, Finnish documentarists use approaches that share similarities with phenomenological research and participatory methodologies, which are familiar to ethnologists.

Mirja Metsola and Sirkku Dölle have written excellent articles about the historical development of Finnish ethnographic films and ethnographic photo collections in Finland. Metsola tells the story of Finnish ethnographic films, from the first documentary experiments at the beginning of the 1900s to the development of “television ethnography”, the Finnish public broadcasting company Yleisradio. Metsola also brings up interesting historical details, e.g. the influences of Sakari Pälsi and Kansatieteellinen Filmi Oy. Sirkku Dölle gives a fascinating description of the history of ethnographic photography in Finland as well as perspectives to the archives.

The only photographs of the book appear in Metsola’s and Dölle’s articles and in Mervi Löfgren’s article on gender in family albums included in the same chapter. It would have been nice to have more photographs, especially in the third chapter describing methodological aspects of visual anthropology. The methodologically emphasized third chapter is diverse and cross-cutting as a whole. One very positive feature is that the editors not only describe the field of visual anthropology in Finland, but they also, especially in the third chapter, point out the connections and effects of international development.

Another good choice made by the editors is that they have decided to translate the article “Consonant Camera” by Evgeny Aleksandrov, professor of visual anthropology, into Finnish. In addition, the summary of a panel discussion held at the Viscult 2010 festival offers a great opportunity to read a vivid discussion between internationally respected theorists and documentarists.

The book portrays concisely the educational reality of visual anthropology today. In Finland, there are no possibilities to study anthropological or ethnologic film-making, and university courses on visual anthropology are not very common either. It is, however, possible to study anthropological film-making in Tromsø, Leiden and Manchester, as well as in several universities in the United States. Without proper and continuous education in Finland, we will not have professional anthropological or ethnologic film-makers in the future either. The most tenacious persons will find those educational possibilities in foreign countries, and documentarists might become interested in ethnographic methodologies independently, but the future development remains more or less unclear, which is a shame. At least, the fruitful dialogues among anthropologists, ethnologists and documentarists should be continued, in film festival contexts but also in education, art and research projects.

For me, as an ethnologist more interested than involved in the field, it was interesting to realize that researchers and film-makers feel that, over the years, they have been in the margins of the fields of research and the documentary scene, even though visualization has been a remarkable trend in the global Western world in past decades. Textually oriented researchers might feel that

visual anthropology is more art than science, and in the documentary scene visual anthropology might be regarded more as science than art. Visual anthropology lies in a long-lasting liminal state between anthropology and cultural analysis. This is probably typical for other interdisciplinary contexts as well. The unfamiliarity and the feeling of marginality and otherness can also be a strength of the field. As documentarist Jouko Aaltonen (p. 81) writes, usually the most interesting places are found in the shadows and blind spots.

AUTHOR

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