

Editorial

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JAF (*Journal of Anthropological Films*) publishes films that impart an anthropological understanding of a given cultural or social reality, expressed through narrative and cinema craft. A great variety of films have been submitted from every corner of the world. Many have evolved from anthropological research, from work by regional filmmakers, students of visual anthropology, and artists and scholars from widely varied disciplines. The idea of publishing films in a peer-reviewed academic journal is new; however, anthropological filmmaking has had a long evolution. To reflect this history, *JAF* encourages the submission of both newly produced and older films within diverse genres and styles.

In this issue we present four films that span more than two decades in their production: *Sonotoki* (2012), Amanda Belantara's mediation on "modernology" as seen through images of a Japanese city at the height of a winter's snowstorm; *Our Courtyard* (2006), Frode Storaas and He Yuan Wang's account of a family in SW China struggling to regain a cultural property taken from their family; Martin Gruber and Jochen Becker's *Sleeping Rough* (2002), an unvarnished portrait of a community of homeless people in Hamburg; and *Funeral of a Paramount Chief* (1994), by Rolf Scott, Peter Ian Crawford, and Trygve Tollefsen, documenting the death and funeral rites of a Chief of the Papua-speaking Reef Islanders in the Solomon Islands.

With this issue, *JAF* is pleased to introduce its new editorial team:

Bjørn Arntsen is a social/visual anthropologist and filmmaker teaching in the Master of Philosophy in Visual Anthropology program at UiT-The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø. He has conducted fieldwork and made films in Northern Norway and Cameroon, including *The Fish that Disappeared*, about the loss of fish stocks in Lake Chad and the accompanying decline of traditional livelihoods. In addition to visual anthropology, his research interests address human-environment relations and migration, the ways in which ethnographic film contributes to anthropological understanding, and the similarities and differences between the perspectives and methods of ethnographic film recordings and more conventional anthropology.

Alyssa Grossman is a social and visual anthropologist whose work spans the themes of cultural memory, critical heritage and material/visual culture. Her fieldwork primarily has been in Romania, investigating sites and practices of remembrance work in post-communist Bucharest, with a focus on everyday objects, landscapes, images and discourses of memorialization. She has worked as a Lecturer at the University of Liverpool's Department of Communication and Media since 2019, joining the editorial team of *JAF*

in 2022. She is particularly interested in exploring creative and experimental approaches to ethnographic filmmaking, and in developing new spaces in this journal for trans-disciplinary and artistic methodologies.

Osmund E. B. Grøholt is a PhD-candidate in social anthropology at the University of Bergen. For his PhD project he is working on industrial heritage processes and their materiality, bureaucracy and narratives in Telemark, Norway. He has previously done fieldwork in Bolivia, focusing on urban youth, temporalities and memory. Osmund has been working with *JAF* since early 2020 as editorial production coordinator, facilitating the technical and administrative side of the journal. As co-editor, Osmund hopes to help strengthen the journal's position as a unique channel within sociocultural anthropology by making it more widely known beyond the sphere of visual anthropology.

Leonard Kamerling is an ethnographic filmmaker and Curator of Film Emeritus at the University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks, Alaska, where he produced more than a dozen community-collaborative films about Alaska Native cultures and indigenous issues. In 2006 his film, *Uksuum Cayyai: the Drums of Winter*, about Yup'ik Eskimo traditional dance, was named to the National Film Registry of the US Library of Congress. Throughout his career he has been concerned with issues of cultural representation in film and the role that ethnographic film archives can play as repositories of traditional knowledge and memory. Len has been a coeditor at *JAF* since 2019.

The Films

Sonotoki, by Amanda Belantara, 18 minutes

According to the filmmaker, *Sonotoki* was inspired by the Japanese architect and ethnologist Kon Wajiro, who in the 1920s founded the practice of “modernology,” an experimental science of everyday observation. Through drawings, graphics and sketches of trivial phenomena such as cracks in bowls, furniture arrangements, moustache shapes and lengths of skirts, Wajiro documented banal details in Ginza, capturing the life and spirit of the city's residents in the aftermath of a substantial earthquake. *Sonotoki* (translated as “moments”), produced in 2012 during a residency at the Aomori Contemporary Art Centre in Japan, is Belantara's filmic version of Wajiro's homage to the ordinary and the mundane.

Shot in black-and-white, with carefully framed, fixed-camera, extended takes on the streets of Aomori at the height of a cold and snowy winter, the film is anything but colorless or static. Even when there is little movement on screen, the sounds captured by Belantara give the images a heightened dynamism and sense of aliveness. Crows call out in the bleak sky, bells ring faintly in the distance, shovels launch piles of whiteness from the edge of a tall roof. Car engines strain to cross slippery streets, high heels stumble on an icy path, tires squelch through layers of slush. In one sequence, as clouds of snow are blown across the horizon, you can almost hear each individual crystal settling on the frozen ground. There are few direct interactions with the camera and minimal spoken words, only a collage of fragmented voices evoking the taste of snow, the feeling of walking on air. Sweeping, scuffling, chatting, slipping, waiting, rustling. Here the viewer is given time and space to contemplate this white world, the fixed and fleeting details of its visual and social landscapes and great mounds of ice sitting on the streets like huge, prehistoric animals.

Our Courtyard - Bai people of South West China, by Frode Storaas and He Yuan Wang, 59 minutes

Yang, a *Bai* elder in rural South West China, observes the courtyard that his family shares with three other families. “We go back many generations,” he says, before reading the names of his ancestors inscribed on the courtyard’s gate. One of the families of the courtyard plans to sell their share, giving Yang and his family the opportunity to buy back a part of their ancestral heritage, taken from them during the land reforms of the 1950s. At the same time, Yang’s son has qualms about whether he should repurchase a piece of his clan’s history or build a new house.

The film invites viewers to observe everyday life in the courtyard. The inhabitants tend their animals, prepare food, plough the fields, and go to the market. These are unremarkable, ordinary events. The filmmakers focus on the slow pace of life from which the narrative emerges. However, the film reveals the strained relationship between Yang, who sees the courtyard as belonging to his clan, and the neighbors, who are determined to sell their section. “We are the rightful owners,” Yang proclaims, while arguing that the asking price is too steep. While tensions run high, Yang points out that they would never confront each other “face-to-face.”

Our Courtyard is about much more than the routines of everyday life. Rather, it is about the storms brewing unseen beneath the surface. The film shows how the post-reform Chinese context creates a tension between the courtyard’s perceived heritage value (for the Yang clan), and its economic value as a real estate property. Revolutions and reforms of the past still resonate in the film’s present as Yang and his family navigate and consider their future possibilities.

Sleeping Rough, by Martin Gruber and Jochen Becker, 42 minutes

It is six o’clock in the morning. Two men wake up near the steps of an urban public building in Hamburg and start their daily chores. They pack up their belongings and find a place to store them, meet up with friends who have spent the night nearby, and head for a park to have a bite to eat and some beers. Jokes, laughter and friendly teasing dominate as the group gathers. They talk enthusiastically about their friendships and the coveted freedom of “sleeping rough.” Their easy camaraderie is challenged by their open talk about the conflicts that emerge and the problems of trust within the group. A woman who has managed to get off the street and rent a room of her own talks about the importance of belonging to a group, to have someone you can turn to when the unexpected happens or just someone to watch your belongings when you have to find a bathroom. We learn that some in the group earn a small income from selling street magazines.

Sleeping Rough was shot during the summer of 2001, following six months of ethnographic fieldwork. It is an unvarnished portrait of a community of homeless men and women living their lives on the streets of Hamburg. Homeless people are frequently represented in the media as pariahs. This film, however, portrays members of a population that is both self-reflexive and critical as they navigate their daily lives “in public.” The observational style of the film, interrupted only by occasional questions from the filmmakers, provides the participants with a non-judgmental space for expressing their singular takes on life. The extended time the filmmakers spent developing relationships within this small community of homeless men and women is clearly reflected in their openness in sharing the stories of their journeys with the camera.

Alfred Melotu, the Funeral of a Paramount Chief, by Rolf Scott, Peter Ian Crawford and Trygve Tollefsen, 45 minutes

The Papua-speaking Reef Islanders in the Solomon Islands archipelago considered Alfred Melotu a “Big Man.” As the Paramount Chief of the Anomabu Traditional Area, he was given this honorary title affirming his knowledge, wisdom and power. A Big Man is someone of traditional authority, a highly influential person among Reef Islanders.

In 1994, Danish anthropologist Jens Pinholt visited the Reef Islands and filmed the Paramount Chief in his home, on his many properties, and during discussions about documenting the customs of the Reef Islands. Unfortunately, when Jens Pinholt returned with a film crew in 1996, Alfred was on his deathbed suffering from cancer. In spite of his illness, he was still considered a Big Man. Alfred agreed to let the film crew record the end of his life and his funeral, so that the rituals would be carried into the future. When Alfred Melotu passed away on the 1st of February, his funeral rites were delayed for months while his family planned the ceremonies, notified relatives living abroad and raised the funds necessary to send their chief to the realm of their ancestors in appropriate style.

In 2002, Jens Pinholt wrote in *Pacific People of the Solomon Islands*, “What was going to be a film about the life of a Paramount Chief and his endeavors to preserve the cultural traditions of his people, became a film about his death and funeral.” The community hoped to use the film to educate future generations about the rituals and customs of Reef Islanders. Alfred’s family planned to use the film as a document to help their clan protect his land and possessions from other Big Men. “I could of course capture only snapshots of the event's entirety,” wrote Jens Pinholt, “but there should nonetheless be enough here to give you a sense of the importance of this event to the people of the Reef Islands.” The film was shot in 1994 and 1996 and completed in 2002.

