



Between matter and method: encounters in anthropology and art

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the end of the book. The Weimar films include, for instance, the tellingly titled *Schatten* (*Warning Shadows*, Arthur Robison, 1923) as well as renowned works like *Nosferatu* (Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922) and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1922). Sadowski also reaches far beyond the films of 1920s Germany, integrating cinematic examples such as *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, USA, 1941) and productions by the Lumière brothers. The author's approach demonstrates a special interest in the deliberations behind films, considering what the film crews bring to the figurative table and seeking to distinguish between planned and unplanned shadows.

The Semiotics of Light and Shadows consists of a short introduction and six chapters – the final pages of the last chapter implicitly serving as an epilogue. In the first chapter, Sadowski illustrates how mythology and folk tales from diverse countries and time periods have thematized shadows, turning 'a natural optical phenomenon into a meaningful visual sign' (11). With reference to semiotics, he understands shadows as 'iconic index[es]' (24), which are inherently tied to, as well as optically reminiscent of, the entities that occasion them. In situations where people cannot discern these entities, the semiotic potency of the shadows increases. Sadowski discusses how evolution has taught *Homo sapiens* to regard such separate shadows both as intriguing and, for all they know, as harbingers of pending hazards – which comes to bear when cinema audiences see shadows on film. The book moves in the next chapter on to the different categories of shadows and engages with their painted versions in art history, pointing out their weight for the cinema. The third chapter shows in particular how art practices that preceded the filmic medium, such as shadow theatres and silhouette portraits, fed off the indexicality of shadows, and how Weimar cinema builds on these practices. Subsequently, Sadowski explains the technological and semiotic origins of lighting and shadows in film history. In the two final and longest chapters, the author focuses on the film industry of the Weimar Republic and on the styles of Expressionism and the New Objectivity. He examines a series of significant filmic case studies and how shadows and light operate in them. During the film-by-film analyses, Sadowski continuously draws connections between these case studies.

His extremely keen eye becomes visible in the more than 100 black-and-white illustrations. Beyond screenshots, the astutely chosen and extensively captioned images encompass, for instance, paintings and photographs. The author's sentences flow nicely.

His wording is as clear as his book's structure, systematically dividing chapters into sequences of subsections. In the course of the book, Sadowski repeatedly and wonderfully brings the visual shadows closer to readers through his language, finding puns and metaphors in what he calls '[o]ur chase after shadows on Weimar screen' (6).

References

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The relationship between anthropology and art is increasingly explored in contemporary anthropological practices. Since there is no one established way of working within an anthropology illuminated by the arts and art practices, Gretchen Bakke and Marina Peterson offer a 'multi-authored musing on the nature of creative action' to explore the tensions and questions between the interdisciplinary crossings of anthropologists and artists (xiv). A rather peculiar book, *Between Matter and Method* brings together a dozen anthropologists who include creative and critical elements of artistic practices and processes into their writings and research methods. The book's peculiarity lies in its experimental approach, at least to some extent, with some contributions reading as if they were work-in-progress pieces or explorations of ethnographic writing; their content is diverse and their focus is very much on the 'artistic process emergent in contemporary anthropological practice' rather than in the subject matter or the outcome (xiv). The chapter Another World in this World is an interesting intervention in the book; it 'gives pause' (xvii), as the two editors note, and presents most of the texts and images that the contributors of the book produced during a twenty-

minute writing exercise carried out as part of a workshop they attended. The other pieces are scattered throughout the book.

For those readers with curiosity and an open mind, the essays provide food for thought. Rachel Thompson uses the essay as a method of research and mode of production; her contribution is an essay about the film essay made by the author, with the film essay being a method, not a genre. Natasha Myers writes about an oak savannah ‘to unsettle assumptions about the innocence of the ecological sciences’ (75). In providing techniques to slowly moving around, Myers guides the reader in becoming a sensor. Keith Murphy offers yet another way of thinking about contemporary anthropological practice. Linking the ethnographer with the artist and designer, Murphy considers how this relationship ‘might transform how the ethics of ethnographic intervention are traditionally conceived in anthropology’ (97). Murphy challenges here the idea that ethnographic interventions cause harm to the subjects under investigation and the integrity of ethnographers’ work. Instead, Murphy suggests adopting an approach that is more transparent and productive, and therefore less ‘objective’ by drawing on Nicholas Bourriaud’s (2002) book *Relational Aesthetics*. Roger Sansi also borrows from Bourriaud’s arguments to discuss the concept of the gift in anthropology, or as Sansi puts it, ‘one of the hallmarks of ethnographic theory’ (117). Going

beyond the relation between anthropology and art as a give and take of ‘ethnographic methods in exchange for visual methods’, Sansi absorbs the social relations and ‘participative society’ in his approach to the gift in anthropological practices (127).

Towering above and linking all contributions in *Between Matter and Method* is the question of ‘What is happening?’. The authors have the courage to elaborate their unformed thoughts through their writings, embracing ‘thought as creative, common work’ in anthropological practice (xvii). This approach might not work for every reader of this book. Nonetheless, the book serves both experienced and emerging anthropologists with an open mind, who want to include artistic practices and processes in their research methods and ethnographic writings rather than just focus on outcomes and subject matters. Readers appreciating the book’s approach to an artful anthropology may also value the flipbook in the corner of each page, a rather quirky intervention for an academic book.

Reference

Bourriaud, N. 2002. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon, France: Les Presses du reel.

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