



## Volume 4, Issue 2

# [Re-view] Review of Arnd Schneider's *Expanded Visions* (2021)

Michelangelo Paganopoulos

**Keywords:** multimodal ethnography

**Recommended citation:** Paganopoulos, M. (2021). 'Review of Arnd Schneider's *Expanded Visions* (2021)', *entanglements*, 4(2):82-84.



### Licensing

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

# [Re-view] Review of Arnd Schneider's *Expanded Visions* (2021)

Michelangelo Paganopoulos

This collection of essays develops Schneider's previous collaborations (2006 with Wright, and 2014 with Pasqualino) on the entanglement between anthropology and art, and the "artefactual" status of anthropological research (p58). The volume focuses on the emergence of the "third" ethnographic space between avantgarde cinema and visual anthropology as a self-reflective and critical ethnographic space, looking at how this space emerges in works with conceptual, epistemological, and practical orientation, within the wider context of decolonization and community participation. These expand from observational and community cinema to more "radical" entanglements between avantgarde film and visual anthropology (p1). As in his previous work, Schneider masterfully focuses on how this entanglement emerges as a process: "How can, then, the ideas and practices of experimental film be made productive for anthropology, and what is their radical epistemological potential?" (p1); and/or "How can this hallucinatory, dreamlike power of the image be transported into an expanded visual anthropology and anthropology at large?" (p9). The aim of the collection is, on the one hand, "to think with film [...] and what it can do with anthropology" (p18) and, on the other, to present an ethnographic study of filmmaking towards a "global ethnographic scene" as a way of decolonizing the curriculum (p20). Schneider focuses on the image as a kind of overlapping "matte" of "reality", "stretching, if not to the absolute, then surely beyond the original photograph's finiteness [...] of what the 'reality' extending from the photograph might have been" (p.11). Here, he takes cue from Youngblood's classic "expansive" cinema (1970), looking at transcendence not as a consciousness but, rather, as a means of disrupting the hyperreal representation of the image (i.e. "to let reality not appear 'more real than real'" (p8).

Each chapter focuses on a specific theme(s) in relation to the work of specific artists, which illustrate theoretical concepts in anthropology, as well as practical concerns in ethnography. Ch.2 looks at the work of Oppitz, Downey, and Lockhart, raising questions over the "profound reflection on the relationship of the research process to the final work" (p42). C.3 returns to the "structuralist" and "materialist" filmmaking of the 1970s, focusing on Malcolm Le Grice's optical devices towards the utopia of a "panoptic anthropology" (p54), raising the self-reflective question regarding the positioning of anthropologists in the "field" and the use of manipulated perception and time in changing it ("anamorphosis", p61). The next chapter looks at a series of photobooks in terms of the collaboration between author Hubert Fichte and photographer Leonore Mau, the ethnographic value of John Haviland's photofilms and the visual poetry of Dick Blau. The rest of the chapters turn away from perception, towards the emerging ethnographic "field" via Javier Olivera's production of *El Camino* and counter-involvement of the "indigenous" [sic] Mapuche community as a means of disrupting the hyperreality of representation (ch5); Argentine community cinema and new forms of sociality via digital filmmaking (ch6); an "anthropology of abandon" of dystopian landscapes, such as Cyrill Lachauer's portrayal of Las Vegas (ch7); and restitution as the active means of filmmaking in museum installations (ch8). A conclusion to the book is, however, absent, as the volume leaves the reader with an "avantgarde" sense of open-ended incompleteness.

The emphasis on the process of filmmaking and its entanglement with anthropological thought, through which the two emerge as one (the “third space”), is by far the strongest aspect of the book that makes it a must-read for students of both visual anthropology and the arts. However, the overemphasis on visual anthropology and avantgarde falls short in articulating a “world vision”, or alternative “world visions,” which would allow the development of a critique of the “absolute,” and/or a theoretical framework within which all these works can be accommodated. For instance, although the author refers to Youngblood’s “expanded cinema,” he limits “vision” to optical effects and/or nostalgic memory whilst completely omitting the most radical aspect of the term as a means of expanding consciousness and its ideological implications. Furthermore, the distance between the ethnographer and the “community” [sic] remains as rigid as ever, at least in the text. Indeed, the “communities” discussed do not show any interest towards avantgarde filmmaking—or visual anthropology, for that matter—as if the “community” remains an entitlement of the bourgeois representation.

Indeed, the author’s contempt for popular culture in general echoes Bourdieu’s criticism of the disinterested “high arts” in *Distinction* [1979], and/or Rousseau’s famous polemic on the irrelevance and hypocrisy of the Arts in the *Discourse of the Arts and Sciences* [1750], showing that the gap between anthropology as a theory, and ethnography as a practice, remains as rigid as ever. This disconnection from history is touched upon in the final chapter of the collection but is limited within the modernist critique of museum exhibitions within the classic post-colonialist framework, without involving the actual process of enlargement itself, and/or the impact of the latest digital and virtual technologies in turning the tables. Therefore, the reductions of “vision” into a modernist perspective, and “anthropology” into “visual anthropology,” do not allow for the formation of a full critique of “expansion” within the historical context of the formation of a world society (Hart 2003), or a critique towards the potentiality of this entanglement (Fischer 2018, Paganopoulos 2018). This reductionism may also reflect upon the predicament of the study of visual anthropology itself, as an institution whose courses are reserved only for those who can afford to pay the fee and equipment cost.

In conclusion, this highly interesting collection of essays shows how art and anthropology entangle within the emerging “matte” or representation of the ethnographic “field” as a “third space”, by unveiling how the latter changes as it is being formulated and showing the importance of the positioning of both the audience and the participants in this process of making reality. Furthermore, it is yet another excellent collection of essays on art and anthropology by Schneider, this time focusing on visual anthropology with respect to the importance of art in anthropological practice. It bears traces of Schneider’s previous collaborations, which need to be acknowledged as pivotal in opening the third ethnographic space. However, a more rigid theoretical critique and vision(s), beyond the manipulation and/or potentiality of perception, would enlarge the interest in this volume beyond the limits of visual anthropologists and avant-gardists into the real day-to-day and ever-changing world system (Marcus 1995). Unquestionably, the author is one of the mavericks in the field, with this acknowledged by George Marcus himself in his review of the book. However, the collection feels incomplete in calling for alternative vision(s), which, as it seems, are not yet fully articulated.

## References

- Bourdieu, P. 1984 [1979]. *Distinction*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.
- Hart, K. 2003. *Studying World Society*. GARP series no 9. London: Goldsmiths College.
- Fischer, M. 2018. *Anthropology in the Meantime*. Durham and NC: Duke UP.
- Marcus, G. 1995. "The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." In *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1): 95-117.
- Paganopoulos, M. (ed.). 2018. *In Between Fiction and Non-Fiction*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jaques. [1750]. [Discourse on the Arts and Sciences](#), full text in HTML format, at the *Online Library of Liberty*.
- Schneider, A., and Wright, C. (eds.). 2006. *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schneider, A., and Pasqualino, C. (eds.). 2014. *Experimental Film and Anthropology*. London: Taylor and Francis.

**Michelangelo Paganopoulos** is a graduate of the Film & TV Department of Glasgow University, followed by a doctorate in social anthropology (Ph.D., Goldsmiths 2012). Paganopoulos briefly worked as a lecturer and visiting tutor at Goldsmiths, and later took the role of Membership Officer of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth. He has conveyed two ASA panels (ASA12, Jawaharlal Nehru University & ASA15, Exeter University) and edited the volume *In-Between Fiction and Non-Fiction: Reflections on the Poetics of Ethnography in Literature and Film* (Cambridge Scholars). His published articles and book chapters entangle social anthropology with popular film and cultural studies. Currently, he is a member of the "Global Inquiries and Social Theory Research Group", Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ton Duc Thang University, Vietnam. Email: [michelangelopaganopoulos@tdtu.edu.vn](mailto:michelangelopaganopoulos@tdtu.edu.vn)