

FILM AND BOOK REVIEWS

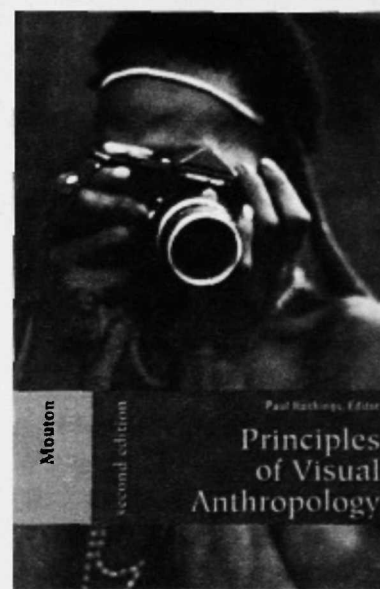
Principles of Visual Anthropology, 2nd Edition.

Hockings, Paul, ed.

Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995.

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The importance of the original publication in 1975 of Paul Hockings' *Principles of Visual Anthropology* cannot be underestimated. Along with Karl Heider's *Ethnographic Film* (1976), Hockings' collection is regarded by people outside of the field as the best representation of visual anthropology. This is troubling at times. If one uses a keyword search on the two most popular terms in our field, visual anthropology and ethnographic film, the Hockings/Heider title domination always appears. While these texts serve as excellent historical markers in the field, their continued presence as contemporary standards is disheartening. The purported status of the second edition of Hockings' text as a new standard reflecting the development of visual anthropology is not fully reflective of the field over the last several years. It is this dilemma that will be addressed primarily in this review.

If one constant has remained in visual anthropology since the original conception of *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, it is a divide between practitioners and theorists. As Margaret Mead states in her landmark introduction, "I believe the best work is done when filmmaker and ethnographer are combined in the same person" (p.7). While many documentary filmmakers tend to place their films within the arena of visual anthropology, few tend to concentrate or employ any type of anthropological methodology within these films. The dual capacity of ethnographer and filmmaker is rarely contained in the same person and the concerns of the former are usually ignored anyway. This supposed fundamental prerequisite outlined by Mead still eludes the context of the majority of films placed within visual anthropology.

As a representation of the papers presented at the 1973 International Conference on Visual Anthropology, the collection weighs heavily toward the bias of practitioners who are not concerned with other aspects of visual anthropology. Herein lies the criticism and praise of the text. As a collection, it is exemplary of a film conference attended primarily by filmmakers who are not that interested in the anthropological side of visual anthropology. While this phenomenon is still apparent at any given film festival or conference as well, there is a large body of new theoretical work that has been produced since this time. Hockings' continued concentration on the making of film rather than any of the theory that has emerged in the past twenty years suggests that his definition of the field is not as expansive as it should be. Perhaps the work does not exist in the quantity that it should, but there has been quality research into media, film, television, body, print, hypermedia, etc. with an anthropological bias since 1973. With the exception of Faye Ginsburg's study of television in several arenas, where is this work? While the collection could be solely faulted for the exclusion of a multitude of work done in the past twenty years

(see, for example, Crawford and Turton, 1992; and Taylor, 1994), the continued exclusion of the initial semiotic studies of Sol Worth (1978) and the reflexive explorations of Jay Ruby (1980) is a disservice to any student starting in visual anthropology who might seek out this book for the claim of its title.

For the unknowing newcomer to visual anthropology attracted to the claim of *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, they are steered into a field apparently still mired in 1973. Hockings makes no apparent effort to separate essays collected from the original conference and those collected for the second edition except to say in the introduction that the division does exist. Consequently, to the beginner, visual anthropology becomes a field obsessed with sequence filming, "how to" guides for production, and a field excited about the new possibilities of a medium called videotape. The appearance of random discussions and postscripts following a few of the initial essays does not remedy this problem. The lack of a comprehensive introduction by Hockings does nothing but contribute to this confusion and the stasis that the collection projects. Yet, even with this criticism the collection deserves praise for the history that it contains. There are several essays whose shoulders we now stand upon in visual anthropology that are a must read for any person claiming this identity.

The recent death of John Weakland speaks metaphorically to the amount of work done in visual anthropology on anthropological research devoted to feature film. With the exception of Banks (1992) and scattered work from others, no one working out of anthropology has explored this topic since since "Feature Film as Cultural Document." One of the original criticisms of this collection was its lack of insight into media and its sole concentration on production parameters. Weakland's essay emerges from this milieu and has stood the test of time, perhaps unfortunately, as the predominant methodological exploration of feature film anthropologically. Although primarily relying on psychoanalysis, Weakland still contributes many of the methodological elements essential to anthropological feature film analysis. In order to study feature film in an anthropological fashion, one must fundamentally treat the production context of the film, provide a content analysis, and provide some ethnographic reception component. In his contribution Weakland calls for the exploration of the intention from the filmmaker and audience as well as making gestures toward the placement of films as cultural entities.

Except for the rare theoretical gesture by a visual anthropologist, if one is not providing a treatise on production they are usually contributing the classical war story. "The Camera and Man" and "Our Totemic Ancestors and Crazy Masters" by Jean Rouch emerge from the Hockings collection as two classics of visual anthropology. If the importance of Jean Rouch to visual anthropology has ever been questioned, these two foundational essays provide evidence of his invaluable contribution. While the first article serves as the classic filmmaking "war story," we see in both the initial evidence of a shared anthropology which has become an ethical guide for the field and a large theoretical contribution for practitioners. The two articles by Rouch are also telling in their foreboding predictions. Rouch questions what promises and dilemmas will appear when "...the dreams of Vertov and Flaherty will be combined into a mechanical 'cine-eye-ear' which is such a 'participant' camera that it will pass automatically into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it" (p. 98). Depending upon one's bias in this debate, the notion of an indigenous cinema labeled as ethnographic film has either beneficially or detrimentally dominated visual anthropology for the past several years.

Along with Rouch, David MacDougall provides an ethical scale to pursue in his contribution to the Hockings collection. Now published in several places and languages, "Beyond Observational Cinema" has become a standard in any assessment of visual anthropology. In this article MacDougall presents the first set of challenging questions to the sacred observational texts. The possibility that a camera can reify the colonial roots of anthropology can never be left to ponder. MacDougall was one of the first not only to outline these dangers of the observational method, but to provide a means of escape from this ethical dilemma through the articulation of participatory strategies. MacDougall also bears witness to the faults of some of the writings surrounding his piece in the Hockings collection by pointing out that mere sequence-filming and data gathering notions of visual anthropology are at fault for possessing no theoretical integration. MacDougall's articulations toward a participatory cinema were intended to integrate not only theory, but to counteract the detrimental, albeit sometimes unintended, representational consequences of the observational method. As evidenced in his postscript, MacDougall has since called for an intertextual cinema to mediate these dilemmas. An

entire article on the strategies of intertextual cinema from MacDougall would have been more appropriate for the second edition and proves the inability of *Principles of Visual Anthropology* to reflect a field that has progressed in the past twenty-three years.

In his conclusion, Hockings states in reference to visual anthropology that, "The papers in this collection clearly document the need and the growth of that subdiscipline..." (p. 507). As mentioned previously, the fundamental importance of this publication in 1973 cannot be underestimated, but its failure to incorporate the growth of visual anthropology adequately up to now is not only disappointing, but contradicts this statement. Any collection claiming to reflect visual anthropology in the past two decades should include articles on the impact of indigenous cinema, reception analysis, and expanding theoretical ventures beyond relations to cultural anthropology, just to name a few, to properly show the "need and growth" of the field. Paul Hockings has provided a great service by reprinting these classic essays, yet the collection could have made greater leaps toward the claim of its reflection of the expansion in the field in the last twenty years. Perhaps he will provide us with another collection building upon the post-scripts?

REFERENCES

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MENARCHE IN THE EURO-AMERICAN TRADITION (MAKES US BLEED)

A REVIEW OF

PERIOD PIECE (1995)

JENNIFER FRAME AND JAY ROSENBLATT
30 MIN., VIDEO (\$45 RENTAL, \$195 SALE)
JAY ROSENBLATT FILM LIBRARY
22-D HOLLYWOOD AVENUE
HO-HO-KUS, NJ 07423

GILLIAN GOSLINGA-ROY
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Period Piece, by Jennifer Frame and Jay Rosenblatt, is a bittersweet look at the Euro-American cultural construction of menstruation. Shot on video in a studio and sporting modest film production values, it features testimonials from an ethnically diverse group of women, old and young, who share very candidly and at times exuberantly their menarche stories. What makes the film original, however, is a selection of amusingly dated archival footage taken from 1950s educational films "for girls," which the filmmakers intelligently intercut with the testimonials to make their point with humor: women are denied their embodied experience of menstruation and this denial is nowhere more poignantly and ironically experienced in a woman's life than at menarche.

The 1950s footage works so well because Rosenblatt and Frame draw primarily from the menarche story of young (white) Molly, whose girlish excitement at becoming a "woman" fuels all sorts of practical questions, all answered very reasonably by her mother, and a mock classroom situation in which a very diligent and equally reasonable teacher (tone is of the essence here) lectures a group of neatly dressed and very attentive young (white) girls on the proper biology and personal hygiene of menstruation. Both these plot lines lend themselves beautifully to ironic juxtaposition with the "real" stories of the "real" women interviewed in the film, for whom menarche is anything but a reasonable experience, and the filmmakers exploit every opportunity. If Molly has a nice, rational chat with her mother when she first bleeds, very few of the women in real life have this experience. Rather, their mothers, fathers,