

FILMING NGĀ TAONGA PŪORO:  
THE POTENTIAL OF EXPERIMENTAL FILM IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL  
AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

*In this article we discuss the potential of experimental film as an extended method of ethnographic enquiry within anthropology and ethnomusicology. Taking a point of departure in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with Māori carvers, composers, and musicians in and around the discourse of ngā taonga pūoro (traditional New Zealand Māori musical instruments), we examine how anthropologists, through the medium of film, may get closer to understanding alternative approaches to music-making within the discourse of the contemporary taonga pūoro tradition. Drawing inspiration from ethnographic film we explore the possibilities and also representational implications regarding the use of experimental film-making as a research tool within the canon of anthropological and ethnomusicological scholarship. We argue that there is space for experimental film in the anthropological discipline, especially when exploring multi-sensorial phenomena, such as music.*

*Keywords:* visual anthropology; experimental film; ngā taonga pūoro (New Zealand Māori musical instruments); mimesis; Aotearoa/New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

This article takes its point of departure in the contemporary taonga pūoro (New Zealand Māori musical instruments) tradition and the potential of experimental film as a method in anthropological and ethnomusicological enquiry. Fieldwork conducted in 2015 by Lowe involved working with many key people<sup>3</sup> within the vanguard of the renaissance of the contemporary taonga pūoro tradition, including composers, musicians and wood carvers. Lowe explored how, and to what extent, ngā taonga pūoro practitioners approached music-making in relation to the markedly evocative concept of mimesis. An

additional research objective aimed at using the medium of experimental film to try to convey a sense of the musicians' corporeal experience of music-making within the taonga pūoro musical paradigm. This latter point reflects a surprising absence of experimental modes in much classical ethnomusicology using film, where the film medium is used to record and document music practices around the world, often serving the purpose of archival research footage rather than using cinematic language to produce narrative and/or experimental films.<sup>4</sup>

This article is divided into three sections. The authors firstly contextualise the field and expand on the initial research objectives regarding ngā taonga pūoro and mimesis. The second section looks at the medium of experimental film as a research method and explores the editing processes in relation to the research questions. It is important to note that at the conclusion of this section, the reader will be asked to watch the short film, 'Where I Am is Somewhere Else' (2016), in preparation for the third section, which discusses how the film was realised and critically reflected upon by Lowe and others.

[ 1 ]

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Lowe's journey into Te Ao Māori, the Māori world or dimension, was with Wiremu Green, a tohunga whakairo (master carver) and tohunga whakapapa (genealogy expert) from Kirikiriroa/Hamilton. Wiremu introduced Lowe to whakairo (carving) – with a particular emphasis on the production of and use of pre-steel tools used for carving wood – and mātauranga Māori (knowledge/philosophy). The idea to enter into the discourse of the revitalised music tradition of ngā taonga pūoro<sup>5</sup> through the medium of whakairo was to try to get closer to an understanding and appreciation of the tactile embodied-ness involved in the creation of animated 'things', from the conception and construction of the instruments to their sounding within various performance contexts, thereby strengthening the overall (internal/external) understanding(s) of ngā taonga pūoro as a contemporary medium of cultural and artistic expression. Entering into the Māori world through carving is important because it provides the context for the subsequent sections. It is also important here to acknowledge those who kindly gave their time to Lowe and gifted him with their knowledge.

This article takes its point of departure in the contemporary ngā taonga pūoro tradition in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Ngā taonga pūoro, meaning 'singing treas-

ures', is the collective contemporary term for the sound-producing devices (and their voices) used by New Zealand Māori (Flintoff 2004).

It is important to note that the initial work in the late 1980s regarding the revival of the instruments was carried out by Haumanu revitalisation movements across the country, led by Richard Nunns, Brian Flintoff, and the late Hirini Melbourne. They, along with significant others, were highly instrumental in collating knowledge about these instruments together with Māori from various iwi (tribes) around Aotearoa. In 2004, Hirini Melbourne and Richard Nunns released a CD called 'Te Ku Te Whe' (1994), which Nunns said 'was to celebrate the voices from the past: to let people hear these extraordinary beautiful instruments in the sense that it is a voice that could come from nowhere but this country' (Whalley 2005, 61). This insight into Te Ao Māori through the medium of sound sparked interest in many contemporary composers of the Western Classical tradition, which created in its wake a new musical identity, especially in combination with digital technology that resonates with a post-colonial Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 21st Century.

The work of Haumanu has been continued by the second generation of players of the contemporary taonga pūoro tradition, including Rob Thorne, Jo'el Komene, Tāmihana Katene, Ariana Tikau, Horomona Horo and Alistair Fraser, all of whom Lowe interviewed during his fieldwork in 2015.

The engagement with ngā taonga pūoro, both making and playing, not only encourages a journey of self-discovery into and through Te Ao Māori but also allows for the potential of opening oneself to heightened levels of perception through both the handling of tangible material things to the voices that emanate from the instruments when played. 'You have to establish a relationship with the taonga, a relationship that can sometimes be very intimate', said taonga pūoro practitioner and carver, Jo'el Komene, during an interview in September, 2015. Thus it is essential that you get to know your taonga and the various materials that are used to make them, such as wood and bone. The making of ngā taonga pūoro can be seen as a transformative process of one living material into another living thing, taking the instruments beyond their external physical dimensions as simply devices that produce sound phenomena into their internal spiritual dimensions that are integral to their individual being.

An integral concept within Te Ao Māori is whakapapa, which 'is the genealogical descent of all living things[...] everything has a whakapapa: birds, fish, animals, trees, and every other living thing; soil, rocks and mountains' (Barlow 2015, 173). Every thing is therefore seen to be autonomous and a participant

within complex dialogical whanaungatanga (relationships, kinships) that are inter-dependently intertwined and active through whakapapa.<sup>6</sup> The relationships between the materials of the instruments and their resultant sounds are all connected through whakapapa, thereby linking the living world to the world of the ancestors. As mentioned by Harvey (2005), ‘human artefacts not only enrich the encounter between persons, but are often themselves experienced as autonomous agents [...] not only do humans express themselves, so too do those persons who are transformed’ (pp.56–57).

*Taonga pūoro, mimesis and composition*

A somewhat over-simplified definition of mimesis is that it covers the relationships between reality and its various (re) representations. Michael Taussig (1993) referred to these interactions between the ‘real’ and its representations as ‘sentience and copying’, the two-layered nature of mimesis, whereby the self acknowledges and comes into sensuous contact with alterity, before the self renders a copy(s) (second-nature) without completely losing the sense of its (reflexive) self (p.80). Willerslev (2007) referred to a mimetic encounter between Yukaghir hunters and their prey (moose): an encounter of mimetic empathy, which ‘is situated in and defined by difference as much as similarity [...] forcing the imitator to turn back on himself [the reflexive self], thus preventing him from achieving unity with the object imitated’ (p.12). Another example of a mimetic encounter, this time in sound, can be seen in Lowe’s fieldwork on taonga pūoro. Pre-European Māori used to use small instruments, such as poi āwhiowhio or the karanga manu, as bird lures (Figures 1 & 2) to summon birds. The whirling, chattering imitative sounds emanating from the poi āwhiowhio created the illusion, or second-nature of bird song.

Mimesis, and its related terms mimicry and imitation, can be seen (a) in the physical forms of the instruments – some of which are simply found complete or nearly complete (Thorne 2012) – or are made into the likeness of something from the natural environment, such as the pūtōrino that resembles the case moth’s cocoon (Figure 3); and (b) in the sounds, or more appropriately, the voices, produced by the instruments. The kōrero, or stories about the instruments, are crucial in forming an understanding that goes beyond their material forms into the spiritual dimensions, combined with knowledge about the whakapapa of the instruments, such as their connections with Hine Raukatauri, the goddess of flute music. As reported in Flintoff (2008), Hine Raukatauri is regarded as the ‘touchstone for all Māori flute music’ because it is through her stories – singing to a male lover, how the kōkako swallowed her cocoon – that her voice(s) are then amplified and voiced through flutes (p.65).

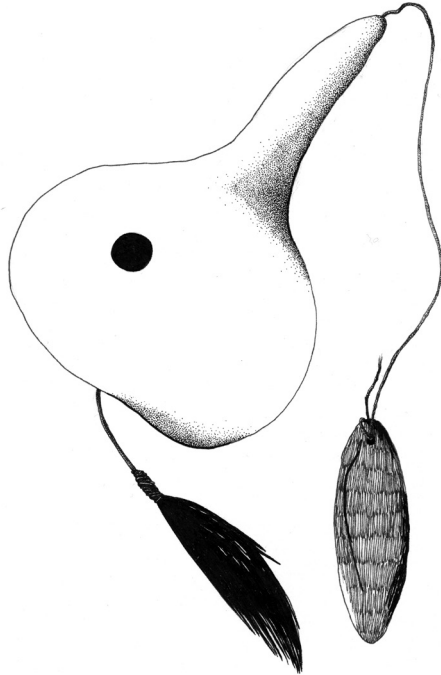


Figure 1. Illustration of a poi āwhiowhio. ©Eli Maria Lundgaard, 2018.

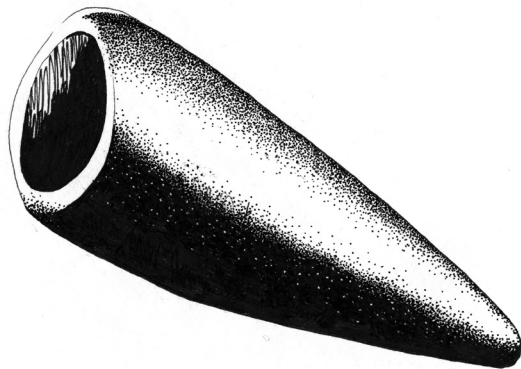


Figure 2. Illustration of a karanga Manu. ©Eli Maria Lundgaard, 2018.



Figure 3. Illustration of a pūtōrino. ©Eli Maria Lundgaard, 2018.

Practitioners seemingly engage with these personas (mimetic empathy) when they approach taonga pūoro composition: an embodying of and a getting to know the materials and their sounds, or voices, their wairua, or spiritual essence, in the environment, through performance. Improvisations within taonga pūoro are often realised through metaphor, in that a metaphor serves as the red-thread that permeates the composition, transforming sound phenomena into second-nature. Practitioners envisage sounds as seen and therefore imagined through empathy, referred to by Levin (2006) as ‘synesthetic metaphor, whereby one sense modality, namely vision, is represented in another, that is sound’ (p.91). In an interview with Jo’el Komene about how he envisaged sounds, Jo’el said:

You get into levels of hearing about what’s the most prominent sound, what’s perhaps the next underlying sound and then you get to a level where we are hearing but there is nothing to be heard, it’s a visual thing, where you can look at something, something visual and turn that into a sound. (Jo’el Komene 26.09.2015)

Furthermore, practitioners re-imagine landscapes (inner-landscapes), which they have seen, hence tying the instruments to the land and to the spirit world through whakapapa. Practitioner and maker, Alistair Fraser, mentioned how he often thinks about landscapes around Aotearoa that he has visited, thereby engaging himself in a heightened spatial-sensory awareness of particular to-

pographies housed in his memory. As Alistair was describing one such image, namely Farewell Spit on the northern South Island, he was gesturing like an artist by painting shapes in mid-air, punctuating what he saw in his mind with sweeping strokes of his hand. These inner-images correlate also to where he had found the instruments, for example, his go-to kōauau made from the leg bone of a black swan he had found at Farewell Spit, establishes a whakapapa with its place of origin and the inner landscapes he associates with it.

How can one convey these two compositional approaches, namely envisaging images and imaging places, in relation to the complexity of mimesis? The resultant experimental film, 'Where I Am is Somewhere Else' (2016), attempts to initiate the mimetic faculty in the viewers via empathetic ties (mimetic empathy), whereby the viewers instinctively look for similarities in the film (both in sound and image) and compares what they see and hear to their own oeuvre of corporeal experiences. The film therefore explores the ties, or relationships between sound and image, addressing in particular, relationships that are asynchronous. As Iversen (2010) stated, 'the most usual and widespread function of sound in film is in unifying the flow of images' (p.80). The unification between sound and image (cross-sensory interactions) is concerned with what works in foretelling emotional responses in the viewer, i.e. what touches them. The film is in part inspired by Heusen and Allen (2014), who proposed an asynchronous ethnography 'as a way to challenge the "historical sedimentation" of traditional ethnographers, of the numbing embedded in either/or relations between the senses and their modes of representation and inquiry' (pp.126–127).

[ II ]

SEDUCING THROUGH THE EDIT

Since the so-called 'crisis of representation' in the 1980s (cf. Clifford and Marcus 1986), there has been a steady orientating away from the positivist/objective anthropology towards a more self-reflexive, phenomenological anthropology in fieldwork and in the writing up (and representation) of anthropological material into academic texts. More importance has been placed on intersubjectivity within the field, encouraging a sharing of life (and phenomena as they appeared) as lived and breathed by anthropologists with their informants and not about their informants – or as Trinh T. Minh-ha would say, 'speaking nearby' (Chen 1992, 87).

There is a blurred distinction between the subjective and objective realities that constitute our experiences: a reflexive looking back in the mirror at ourselves

through the vehicle that is the body, the ‘thing inserted between the rest of the material world and the “subjective” sphere’ (Husserl in Carmen 1999, 212). Ethnographic film, along with other modes of visual representation, such as photography and performance practices, have since (re)emerged as alternative methods of validated representation. Despite the current (arguably) excessive use of visual media, visual anthropology, combining visual media and the critical aptitude of the discipline of anthropology, still offers considerable promise. The camera may be seen as an imitation of the human eye, a bodily extension of ourselves that often has its own agenda. It could be seen as a microscope in the sense that it has the potential to home-in on elements of life (visible abstractions of reality, or that which is invisible potential) in all its complexity, thereby potentially opening up new windows into what it means to be in the world.

Is reality represented justly through standard observational cinematic approaches, or does it require the experimenting of material to propose ‘new ways of presenting [and pushing further into the] human experience’ (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009, 142). And, furthermore, may the observational sensibility serve as the foundation of an experimental anthropology? The authors argue that it may, because observational cinema has the ability to explore sensibilities within the real, and that in order to explore subjectivity, film is the ideal medium as its elements mimic human sensory modalities, in which a concept becomes the subject of investigation from within the social context. What is important is the self-reflexive nature of film as a method of ethnographic enquiry. As taonga pūoro practitioners navigate their way between the here and there (mimetic empathy) in composition, so too does the anthropologist, who sits precariously on the preverbal fence of disbelief, sliding off at intervals towards either side, only to clamber back on and regain the position as the in-between.

NOTE: Watch the film ‘Where I Am Is Somewhere Else’ (2016) (preferably with headphones). LINK: <https://vimeo.com/175595506>

Film: *Where I Am is Somewhere Else*

The overarching narrative or diegesis of the film is based on the concept of journeying, derived from Russell G. Shaw (Figure 4), who is stacking stones in the Kaniwhaniwha River, near Mount Pirongia, North Island, Aotearoa. Shaw’s journey, in which he was constructing and successfully completing a tower made of stones, is paralleled by the entities of the forest, all of whom are watching him and coming in and out of play as he is working, thereby accentuating the multi-perspective empathetic approach to composition. The film takes the whakapapa of the hue, or gourds – which practitioner Alistair Fraser has used



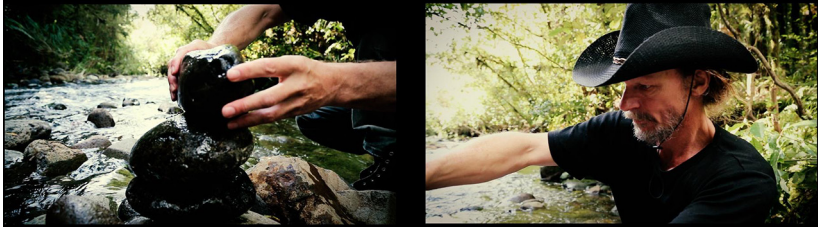


Figure 4. Russell G. Shaw stacking stones in the Kaniwhaniwha River, Waikato.

© Sebastian J. Lowe.

in composing the soundtrack – into consideration, because the ancestress, or mother of the family of gourds, *Hine pū te hue*, is referred to as the god of peace: ‘All the musical instruments made from hue are like their ancestress and sing songs that are peaceful and calming to the human soul’ (Flintoff 2004). The film refers to the *Hine pū te hue* as the peace-giver, or the interventional release of cinematic tension between the unifying agents that reside within – and are representations of – the sounds and images.

Other recorded sounds have been added to the film in an attempt to accentuate the mimetic faculty used by the two *taonga pūoro* practitioners in approaching improvisation within today’s contemporary tradition: from mimicry to imitation and beyond into representational dimensions of reality – that is, mimesis. ‘How real does the copy have to be to have an effect on what the copy is of?’ asked Taussig (1993, 51). He concluded by giving some examples of how unreal the copy can be and yet still hold incredible potency over the original (*ibid.*).

The film uses split-screens with the intention of moving away, but not completely, from a temporal linear narrative in order to explore the more spatial dynamics of montage, i.e. the micro-narratives, or meta-narratives, that are in conflicting ‘intra-framic’ dialogue (Figure 5) within the ‘single’ frame (Eisenstein 1977). Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian filmmaker and film theorist, discussed the nature of montage in film, proclaiming that the potential dialectic relationship between the cells (the film shots and all their constituent elements, including cuts) can create a synthesis that goes beyond the mere assemblage of film material. Film elements were not simply linkages, or ‘bricks arranged to expand an idea [i.e. some sort of linear narrative]’, as referred to by other film theorists, such as Lev Kuleshov, but moreover comprise explosive ‘cells that are working towards collision and conflict’ (Eisenstein 1977, 37). Successful use of montage has the potentiality to allow for spaces to open up between the film elements thereby creating a third greater image(s) that takes form in the minds of the



Figure 5. Russell G. Shaw removing a pebble from the river bed. ©Sebastian J. Lowe.

viewer: an invisible, intangible ‘third thing’ that is only visible to the mind’s eye. These ‘surplus images’, as referred to by Willerslev and Suhr (2013, 1), can be brought into dialogue with Murch (2001) and his curiosity as to why the cuts work when we, as a species, have, until fairly recently, experienced life as a continuous projection of images that move forward in real-time. Why do we accept the cut and the ‘total and instantaneous displacement of one field of vision with another; a displacement that sometimes also entails a jump forward or backward in time as well as space?’ (p. 5). Murch’s answer is that edited film can resemble the discontinuity of our thought patterns and/or dreams, potentially seducing us into other possible realities, similar to those we experience in our dreams (ibid.).

This approach to analytical enquiry aligns also with the findings of Heusen and Allen (2014) and their asynchronous ethnography, where they look at the cracks or the gaps between sound(s) and or image(s) in resistance, or both. Such an asynchrony occurs when an image does not match the sound we hear. Taussig (1993) spoke of these gaps or cracks as being ‘flashes of recognition’ or moments of reflexivity, whereby the flash is defined by both similarity and difference (p. 40).

At the beginning of the film the sounds of a New Zealand forest emerge one by one: you hear the laborious buckled click of the male cicadas, followed by the sound of water bubbling over rocks. You can also make out the faint calls of a riroriro, or grey warbler, in the distance. The human subject, Russell Shaw, comes into view on the left side of the screen. He is crouching in the middle of the Kaniwhaniwha River, slowly stacking stones on top of one other. The deep rumbling sounds, which you hear from the very beginning of the film, are from the hue puruhau, which is a large gourd that is played across the opened neck like a bottle (Figure 6). Alistair’s sharp intake of breath is also heard intermittently from the gourd, adding further tension to the deep, dark, ominous growling of the hue puruhau.

At ca. 01:38 mins the high-pitched whirling sounds of the poi āwhiowhio come into the picture, reminiscent of the calls from the riroriro heard at the very beginning of the film. The whirling is joined by a soft tapping on the side of another hue, a hue puruwai, which is a gourd filled with its seeds and rotated musically, to create rhythmic patterns such as the ‘soothing [trickling sounds] of a bubbling stream’ (Flintoff 2004). The point of mimetic analysis regarding a crack or gap of resistance is at 01:43 mins (Figure 7) and depicts a split screen showing the same image of a small catchment of water, the difference being is that the image on the left-hand side of the screen has been slowed down forty per cent to create a resistance between the similar images. The soft punctuating sound signature of the hue puruwai, which comes in slightly before the image, serves to imitate the way the light bounces off the ripples of the water at different speeds, thereby creating a unification of sound and image. The image could be said to emerge out of the sound, an example of a synesthetic metaphor and a moment of resistance, whereby the silent image is transposed through a possible representation of sound: the rattle of the hue puruwai is the sound of the ripples, as seen (and heard) by us.

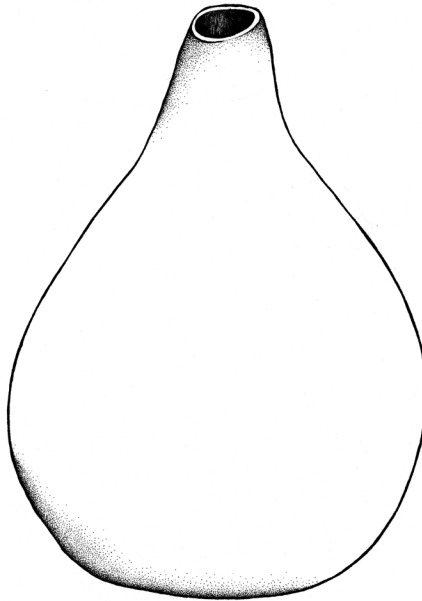


Figure 6. Illustration of a hue puruhau. © Eli Maria Lundgaard, 2018.



Figure 7. Light bouncing of ripples. ©Sebastian J. Lowe.

The second example of sound-image interaction is at 02:04 mins when the screen fades to black. However, you can still hear the sounds of the forest in your headphones. The reason for this black screen is to allow your imagination to see other images, as mentioned by Alistair Fraser, who spoke of ‘seeing images of places he had been to when he performed’. This black visible space allows the viewer to journey briefly to another locality, before being brought back into the following sequence, introduced by the soft yearning, melodic voice of a *kōauau pongāihu*, a nose flute made from a small gourd, giving form to a dazzling forest; green and vibrant in the glorious, afternoon sunshine (Figure 8).

The third and final example is in the use of haptic visuality, inspired by Laura Marks (2002), who discusses haptic visuality as mimetic: ‘[... The haptic image] presses up to the object and takes its shape [in an effort to become]’ (p. xiii). It is an oscillation between what she calls ‘smooth (haptic) and striated (optical) space’, a toying between ‘a sensuous closeness and a symbolic distance [the chiasma between the subjective and the objective]’ (Ibid. p. xiii). The film uses haptic visuality to achieve optical mimicry and imitation, drawing on the abstract closeness in both sound and image to show a moving towards the Other. It is not merely the mimetic act of re-representing the sounds and images as they are found, but their rendering to be possibly more truthful, that

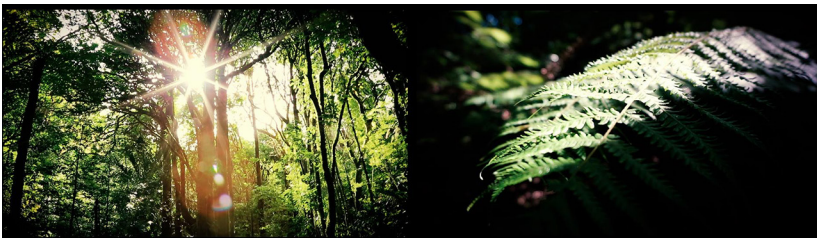


Figure 8. Green and vibrant in the afternoon sun. ©Sebastian J. Lowe.

is, enhancing their inner qualities to create a response in the viewer. As Laura Marks (2002) aptly states, ‘haptic cinema puts the object into question, calling on the viewer to engage in its imaginative construction [pulling] the viewer closer [into Alterity]’ (p.16).

The example for haptic visuality is at 06:20 mins and is part of a sequence filmed underwater using a GoPro camera. This haptic image depicts a constellation of bubbles that look like stars exploding (Figure 9). The underwater sound, which creeps into the sequence at 04:42 mins, comprises sound frequencies that have been rendered from their original sound-source, creating a new sound that hints at another possible reality. The additional and incessant pulsating sounds of an almost static-like noise are the rendered sounds of the cicada sound bite you hear at the beginning of the film, albeit at a slower speed. These sounds, together with the slow ominous yearning voices from the pūkāea hue (small pūkāea made from the neck of a gourd), clash with the images of the bubble-clusters, resulting in a destabilising polyrhythmic acoustic situation between sound(s)-image – and yet they all work, despite the clash.

‘Where I Am Is Somewhere Else’ (2016) attempts to explore the potential of the artifice, which is an extension and a re-representation of the real through mimetic technology by opening up new worlds of perception in working within the discourse of taonga pūoro. In re-creating the similar, the film encourages the viewer to participate and to share intersubjectively in and hopefully be seduced by second-nature. For a film to be successful the viewers need to have

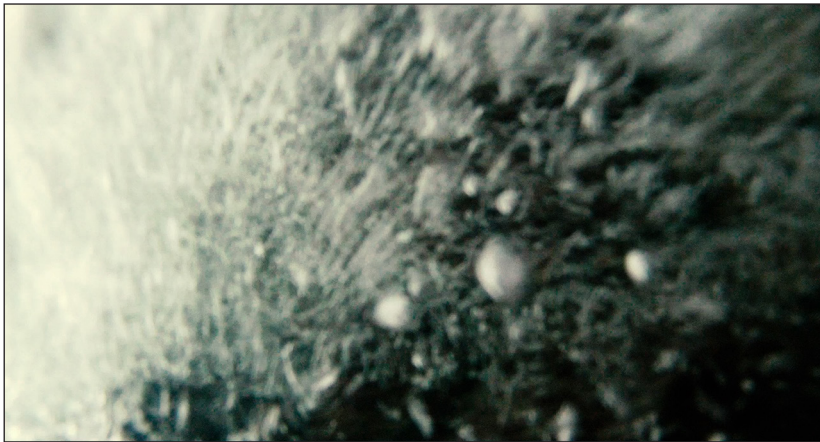


Figure 9. Exploding [haptic] stars. © Sebastian J. Lowe.

surrendered themselves to the film, that is, to have become in a sense one with the film through their corporeal engagement with the sensuous experience that is the filmic experience. The magic of film, in the hands of the magician (the editor), creates a pseudo-realism that is more real than real, depending on how much we give ourselves to the film and in turn what the film gives to us in bestowing our thoughts and feelings with material to chew on, digest and subsequently reflect upon in relation to our own corporeal experiences of living in the world (Bazin and Gray 1960, 7).

The film aims to enable one to identify with the exterior world through the medium of the found sounds and images in dialogue with voices of taonga pūoro played by practitioner Alistair Fraser. The audience members become active performers in the film, providing their own meaningful utterances to the shapes and forms that dance in front of their eyes. The film attempts to get closer to the concept of mimesis in relation to taonga pūoro, utilising various cinematic techniques to hopefully seduce the viewer into mimesis. Instead of trying to capture life in its rawest form, as encouraged in several observational cinematic genres, such as in *cinéma vérité* ('truth cinema'), Herzog (in Prager 2007) seeks what he referred to as ecstatic truths, that is, 'the search for that which exceeds language's capacity to express it' (p.5). Similarly, in 'Where I Am is Somewhere Else' (2016), there is a focus on poetry over prose, in an attempt to realise something new.

Experimenting with film pushes the conventional boundaries of what ethnographic film is (and could be) and 'conveys to the audience an understanding open to [a myriad of] interpretation' (Crawford 1992, 75). To convey some sense of a corporeality one needs to come in contact with the subject material, in order to improvise with the mimetic material (representations of reality) within the contours of the imagination and arrive at a new analytical point of departure. Ravetz (2005) expresses the need for greater range of experimentation, allowing for 'the extension of the anthropological imagination, [which is] an essential part of the ethnographic task' (p.78). Experimental film attempts to push through the real in not only representing the Other, but also 'reflexively critiquing, commenting on, and deconstructing the 'fly in the I'<sup>7</sup> i.e. the 'I' of the Western Eye' (after Crawford 1992, 79).



FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS (IN THE MIRROR)

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror (Foucault 1984, 4).

In this section we discuss the efficacy of ‘Where I Am is Somewhere Else’ (2016) in relation to the discourse of representation film constitutes a relational, mimetic experience, whereby our mimetic faculties engage viscerally with the life-worlds of others, human or otherwise (Jackson 2013). Drawing upon Foucault (1984) and his notion of the heterotopia (referring back to the opening analogy about the utopia of the mirror), a film could be seen as a place of in-betweenness, a place where juxtapositions of elements from the life-worlds of others are present in their own absence, subjugating us to comparative interrogation.

Since the release of ‘Where I Am is Somewhere Else’ (2016), we have reflected a great deal on who and what we have set out to represent, and furthermore, if we have been successful or not in communicating this phenomenon. In relation to representation, Crawford (1992) explores the dichotomy between text and image, suggesting that neither text nor image exists in its purist form, but instead in combination as oscillating parts of two interconnected (cyclical and not linear) processes he refers to as othering and becoming. Through these processes, meaning is generated through the simultaneous paradoxical presence and absence of both the field subjects and the anthropologist in the creation of textual and filmic representations, in plural referring to products (after Fabian 1990), such as films and monographs. The importance of this distinction between text and image emphasises the reflexive praxis of the anthropologist in relation to how he or she represents the Other through the use of representational modalities. Furthermore, these representational modal determinants are dependent on their respected forms, namely text or image and the essential combination of the two, in which ‘[...] words and images are constituent elements of both visual and verbal processes of representation’ (Crawford 1992, 71).

Since the early 20th century and the advent of new technological advancements, including the introduction of the 16 mm film camera in the 1930s and economically superior (and less heavy) equipment, such as synch-sound recording in

the 1960s, visual anthropology and its various off-shoots began to stray progressively into academic discourses. *Cinéma vérité* (and its North American sister, 'direct cinema') emerged in the 1960s, pioneered by the French filmmaker, Jean Rouch, who highlighted the participatory active nature of the hand-held camera in the field, that is, the provoking agent that worked towards 'an embracing of life itself' (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009, 6). Other pioneers of what soon became referred to as observational cinema, included filmmakers and theorists Herb Di Gioia and David Hancock, and David and Judith MacDougall, all of whom sought to explore and expand the visual non-textual observational cinematic style within the contours of the anthropological discourse.

The observational turn in ethnographic filmmaking appears less a manifesto-driven movement (like dogma for example) or merely an outcome of technological changes and more a process, 'as a series of [ad hoc] improvisations devised by individual filmmakers feeling their way toward something new' (55).

The contemporary phenomenological approach in cinema, which comes under the rubric of observational cinema, was suggested by Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) to be 'considered as a way of being, moving and relating that hinged upon a particular training or education of attention' (p.13). Observational filmmakers are trained through *praxis* to pay attention to and engage with raw-life by participating with an active and somewhat humanised camera in order to explore the sensibilities. Observational cinema has been often referred to as a 'realistic film paradigm' (Suhr and Willerslev 2013, 8) because of its close temporal and spatial adherence to pro-filmic life as lived *mise-en-scène*, allowing slices of social life to breath and emerge as moments of 'grace' (Rouch 2003, 150), i.e. 'addressing the gap between what can be known and what remains emergent' (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009, xvii).

Regarding the self-reflexive fly in the (Western) 'I' nature of representation then, how much context do we give the audience (active), or should the audience be allowed (passive) to evoke their own interpretation from the material as it is simply given? Furthermore, how far should we push through the real to explore and propose new ways of presenting and communicating the human and non-human experience? Experimental film, despite curbing the edges of conventional ethnographic film praxis, offers potential previously unrealised windows of possibilities in addressing social phenomena. Since the advent of observational cinema in the 1960s, there have been a number of filmmakers pushing the conventional boundaries, including David MacDougall, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Robert Gardner, all of whom have explored the reflexivity of the anthropological 'self' in relation to film praxis.



One person in particular, who has caught the authors' Western 'I', is Werner Herzog, an influential German filmmaker known for both his fictional and documentary films, including 'Bells From the Deep' (1993) and 'Grizzly Man' (2005). His approach to documentary filmmaking, as noted by Prager (2007), explores life not in its 'rawest form, but rather for the opposite, for the sublime [...i.e.] the search for what exceeds language's capacity to express it' (p.5). His search for 'ecstatic truths', or moments of the sublime in everyday life, is through his deliberate manipulation of aesthetics (poetics) in contrast to earthly banality (prose), or what he refers to as 'the accountant's truth' (ibid.). 'Where I Am is Somewhere Else' (2016) draws on the poetic powers of aesthetics, in an attempt to get to a higher truth. The material is real in the sense that Lowe filmed Russell Shaw in the river using a Canon DSLR 5D camera, but throughout the editing process, an attempt to push through the banal act of simply stacking stones in a river, to get at something more magical, more ecstatic, and arguably more truthful, was made. Additionally, the entire film project was made using a 1980s Kodak filter, capitalising on the dark colours, especially the blacks, such as Shaw's hat and tee-shirt, which, when subjugated to an additive vignette, crushes them into the black spaces around the frame (Figure 10).

In taking these mimetic moments beyond themselves, that is, through fabrication, Lowe felt he was knocking on the door of something new. Throughout the editing process, Lowe felt closer and more acquainted with the film footage the more he participated with it, likening the connection to how a taonga pūoro practitioner works with mimetic material throughout the composition process: the raw material is placed before Lowe, who worked with it, in order to create something new. The film material would react to Lowe's presence, as Lowe would to it; a post-humanist, collaborative experience. As Russell Shaw reached down into the water to select a stone, Lowe would notice how his facial features twitched slightly, his forehead narrowing questioningly, as he foraged on the riverbed, trying to locate an ideal stone. The camera's attention would be drawn to the water that growled and gnawed angrily at Shaw's ankles, flashing

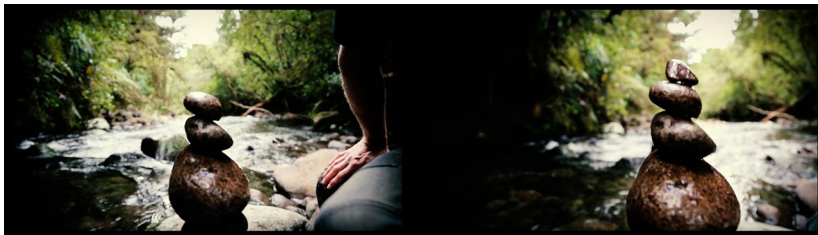


Figure 10. Crushed blacks. © Sebastian J. Lowe.

aggressively like razor blades slicing through the skin of the water. Not only did Lowe start to observe details throughout the editing process, but he began to establish a distance from the material, as the film began to take form and started to come alive. Soon it no longer required his active presence, but instead became a more or less autonomous being, relying only on the catalytic action of Lowe's forefinger to push play and ensure that the volume was turned up.

In watching a film we engage with the screen and the images before us. We take sides, we empathise, we enter into a dialogue with the images in relation to ourselves, our beings are punctuated by 'flashes of recognition', as we swing between the familiar and the different (and back again) (Taussig 1993, 40).

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the reflection process, Lowe's entering into the Māori world and working within its folds, was reciprocated first and foremost by the dissemination of Lowe's thesis at the conclusion of his masterate in visual anthropology at Aarhus University (2016). This collaborative dialogue stretches into the public arena, where, by permission granted first and foremost by his informants, knowledge has been worked and released for the benefit of others. Furthermore, several of Lowe's films have also been selected for various film festivals, including the Berlin Experimental Film Festival (2016) and the Wairoa Māori Film Festival (2017), thereby extending the hand of knowledge to an even wider audience.

The film 'Where I Am Is Somewhere Else' (2016) is an attempt at understanding mimesis within the discourse of taonga pūoro by taking it head on: an attempt at translating mimesis into something tangible that can be seen, heard, felt and subsequently digested by others. Taonga pūoro encourages an awareness of the sonic environment and the improvised playing with mimetic material, which has the potential to go beyond direct imitation and into more abstract representations of reality: from mimicry to imitation and into the (re) representational dimension(s) that is mimesis. It sought to explore these interactions between sound-images, highlighting the various approaches of improvisational composition, namely envisaging sounds and seeing landscapes. We have drawn upon three examples of sound-image interactions that display not only the pulling-power of mimesis as a faculty of the human condition, but also as a method of artistic practice. We argue that there is space for experimental film in anthropology and that experimental forms are perhaps particularly relevant

in subject areas, such as ethnomusicology, in which the forms are conducive to ways of exploring multi-sensorial phenomena, such as music.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Sebastian J. Lowe is a New Zealand anthropologist, musician and filmmaker. He was born in Hamilton, New Zealand, where he undertook study towards his bachelor degrees in anthropology and music. He continued his studies in music (viola performance) in Bergen, Norway, before moving to Aarhus, Denmark, to study for his MSc in visual anthropology (2016). He has since been approved to undertake a conjoint PhD at James Cook University in Cairns (Australia) and Aarhus University (Denmark). His interests include indigenous sound worlds, ecological rights, performance practice and experimental anthropology. He is also the co-founder of Queltehue Film Collective and the blog, 'Word of Mouth'.  
Email: sebjlowe@gmail.com
- 2 Peter I. Crawford has been an active member of the board and film selection committee of the Nordic Anthropological Film Association (NAFA) since the late 1970s. He has written extensively on visual anthropology and ethnographic film-making and has wide experience in teaching the subject both theoretically and practically. Peter is currently professor of visual anthropology at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. He has headed a long-term ethnographic film project in the Reef Islands (Solomon Islands) since 1994. His publishing company, Intervention Press, has published numerous books on anthropology and visual anthropology.  
Email: peter.crawford@uit.no
- 3 These include Wiremu Green (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Wairere), Rob Thorne (Ngāti Tumutumu), Alistair Fraser, Sam Palmer, Jeremy Hantler (Kai Tahu), Dante Bonica, Ariana Tikao (Kai Tahu), Tāmihana Kātene (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Whātua), Ricky Prebble (Ngāti Pakeha ahau), Simon Eastwood, Tristan

Carter, Professor Martin Lodge, Associate Professor Ian Whalley, Joël Komene (Ngā Puhī, Tapuika), Horomona Horo (Ngā Puhī, Ngāti Pōrou), Dr. Aroha Yates Smith (Te Arawa), Dr. Ray Harlow, Professor David Lowe, Dr. Jeremy Mayall, Dr. Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Tamatera and Ngā Puhī), and Dr. Robert Hoare.

- 4 An example is the pioneering work of the Danish ethnomusicologist, Andreas Fridolin Weis Bentzon, who in the 1960s shot many hours of footage in his study of the Sardinian 'national' instrument, *launeddas*, a three-pronged flute, in research that led to his doctoral thesis (Bentzon 1969, see also Crawford 2006). Unfortunately, Bentzon died very young, at the age of 35, in 1971, never having time to complete his film work. Fortunately, however, Dante Olinas and the Sardinian cultural association S'Iscandula took over this task and, using also Bentzon's archival footage, produced several films (see [www.launeddas.it](http://www.launeddas.it)), none of which, however, ventured into more experimental modes of film.
- 5 Haumanu movement was imperatively important in the renaissance, or re-awakening, of a dormant music tradition (taonga pūoro) in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The Haumanu movements around the country were led by Richard Nunns, Brian Flintoff, and the late Hirini Melbourne, alongside the parallel renaissance of Māori language and culture from the late 1980s.
- 6 It is important to remember also that each iwi (tribe), hapu (sub-tribe), and whānau (family) has its own historical accounts, despite there being widely accepted Māori concepts, such as whakapapa, within Māoridom.
- 7 The three modes of documentary filmmaking, as mentioned in Crawford (1992), include the 'fly on the wall': the camera is seen as a tool of surveillance, often exemplified with the use of the tripod; 'fly in the soup': the camera as a participating, provoking agent; and the 'fly in the I': from representation to evocation, whereby something is not only brought to mind and left up to interpretation, but also allows for reflexive critique.

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