

Visual anthropology and sensory ethnography in contemporary Sardinia: a film of a different kind

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(Received 9 December 2010; final version accepted 23 March 2011)

This article reads David MacDougall's *Tempus de Baristas* (1993) as an instance of the rejection of the didacticism of documentary films driven by the logic of the written text. This ethnographic film about the life of three goat-herders is one of the films that allows the Sardinian-speaking subjects a space and, therefore, a far more prominent role in the total cinematic construction than has usually been the case. *Tempus* marks the definitive departure from the transmission of written socio-anthropological knowledge that is typical of expository documentaries. The article concludes that the filmic approach of which *Tempus* is a landmark produces a corporeal and emplaced knowledge that counterbalances the abstract vision of many documentaries about the author's native island and questions traditional forms of scholarly communication, opening up new areas of ethnographic understanding.

Keywords: visual anthropology; ethnography; Sardinian culture; individuality; corporeal images

An ethnographic film

For many people the words 'anthropology' and 'cinema' go together like bread and gasoline. (Gray 2010, x)

In this article I will examine David MacDougall's *Tempus de Baristas* (1993), an ethnographic film that represents a landmark in the visual representation of the Sardinian 'culture'.¹ I will interpret the film as one of the films that allows the Sardinian-speaking subjects a space and a far more prominent role in the total cinematic construction than had usually been the case.² The film provides the occasion to address the enduring question of voice, which lies at the centre of both anthropology and ethnographic film (Chen and Trinh T. 1994).³ *Tempus* is a film about the life of three herders in Urzulei, a small highland town in the Sardinian territory known as Ogliastra. The Sardinian goat-herders are Franchiscu, his son Pietro and their friend Miminu. The film succeeds brilliantly in following the herders' lives with sheer curiosity. This observational spontaneity is one of the strengths of the film, which 'depicts the sympathy and rattachement among three Sardinian mountain shepherds' (Taylor 1998, 10). The film is an exploration of the transformations taking place in one of the mountainous territories of Sardinia. The preoccupations and

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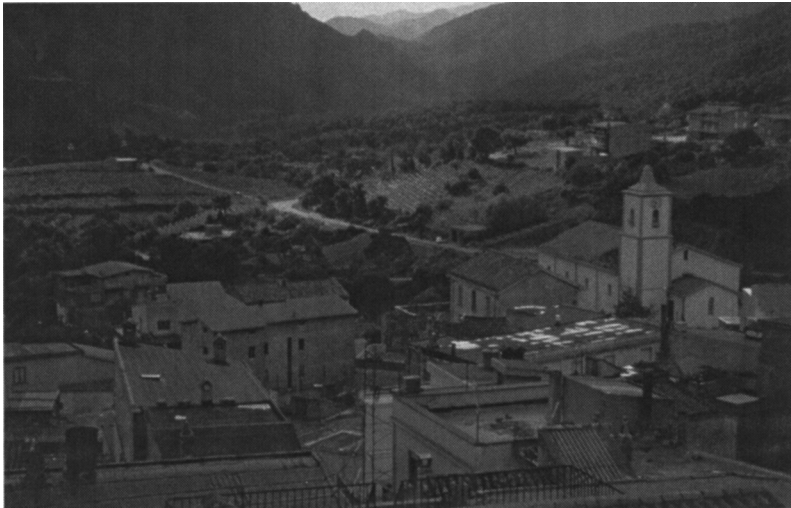


Figure 1. The town of Urzulei, in Sardinia's interior.
Credit: David MacDougall.

problems of the herders are, in this respect, especially interesting. Another theme of the film is the relationship between men in a Sardinian highland town, their marginal condition and their place within the larger community. In this sense, *Tempus* is an 'inquiry into male gender identity and the construction of the emotions among Sardinian shepherds' (Taylor 1998, 14).

At another level, *Tempus* represents a fascinating case study for understanding the social status of the herders in Urzulei. Their position within the community, in effect, attests to the marginality of the herder. Miminu, for example, feels the burden of his solitude, which partly derives from his position as an unmarried herder. He is the only one of the herders who has not found a wife. In this way the film reveals that the societal model prescribed by the community is based on marital status and that changes in economic status have altered the opportunities for herders to marry. Thus, we may infer that one of the main themes of the film is the herder's solitude, a condition which emerges with special emphasis in the separation between pastoral life and urban sociality. The relationship between urban and pastoral life is developed from the points of view of three different generations of shepherds. Franchiscu, Pietro, and Miminu (a bachelor in his forties) evoke and embody these with their different values and concerns, future prospects and expectations. Unsurprisingly, one of the recurrent themes in MacDougall's films, often co-directed with his wife Judith as sound recordist, is the intergenerational transmission of culture. In this respect, the film is also the story of the relationship between a father and a son. On the one hand, *Tempus* makes the viewers share the experience of Franchiscu, a goat-herder worried about his son's future and about the future of the *cuile* (goat camp), that, as he says, is considered unauthorised by the *legge Galasso*. On the other, we see Pietro helping his father at the pastoral camp. This young man appears uncertain as to whether he will pursue a different career from that of his father.



Figure 2. Miminu's *cuile* during the filming of *Tempus de Baristas*.
Credit: David MacDougall.

One of the key features of *Tempus* is that it slowly explores the protagonists' lives, which are neither constrained by the space of the film nor mere reflections of predictable economic processes. As Marazzi (1994, 88) notes in his review of the film, the herders are not sociological, statistical generalisations; rather, they embody a personal attitude towards general issues and concerns. Their complex personalities interact with the filmmaker in the creation of lived knowledge. This knowledge is both perceptual and situated. It emerges in a way that has very little in common with the sorts of planned scripts that dominate the visuals in many social documentary films about Sardinia. This is especially true when we consider that the subjects in the film, shown in all their stubborn concreteness, appear as human beings with an intellectual life that is interesting in itself. In his comments about *Tempus*, MacDougall writes: 'I wanted to show the three protagonists as I saw them through the camera and as I felt them to be, richly and uniquely, in themselves – perhaps through the qualities of film, as no one had seen them before' (MacDougall 1998, 46). *Tempus* is an important film because it refuses the intermediation of written academic work about the goat-herders. This refusal of pre-existing knowledge foregrounds the phenomenological significance of the emotional affinities developed during a transcultural encounter at the expense of pedagogic illustrations.

Between observational and participatory cinema

Tempus was made by David MacDougall without the partnership of his wife Judith.⁴ It is worth stressing that throughout his career MacDougall has produced extensive writings and essays to explain his methods of exploring the nature of cinematic vision.⁵ He has been, among others, a pioneer of observational cinema and its desire to show the social world as it is. The advocates of this kind of cinema denigrate re-enacting and the sterility

of exegetic films. Influenced by Italian Neorealism, observational filmmakers maintain in their work a sense of the temporal dimension of life 'caught unawares'. In a sense, the filmmaker becomes a masked presence recording the flow of events that unfold before the camera. This type of orientation gave rise to an inconsistency within observational cinema, since objectivity and observation are quite different concepts. Carroll summed up the paradox at the heart of direct cinema, pointing out that 'critics and viewers turned the polemics of direct cinema against direct cinema. A predictable *tu quoque* would note all the ways that direct cinema was inextricably involved with interpreting its materials' (Carroll 1983, 17; quoted in Winston 1993, 47). A filmmaker, however invisible, cannot record the real unthinkingly. In fact, observational filmmaking was always quite personal. The technical availability of lightweight equipment and synchronous sound recording opened new possibilities to shoot on locations previously inaccessible to the old technology. Spontaneous dialogue allowed the filmmakers to dwell on elements of personality, adding biographical and ethnographical notes to the emotional density of conversations.⁶ In a period characterised by an 'end of ideology' political climate, the MacDougalls contributed to developing the filmmaking style that took advantage of the availability of portable technology and sync sound recording engineered by people like Pennebaker (Stubbs 2002, 2).

With *To Live with Herds* (1974), they decided to modify the practices of anthropological cinema.⁷ The move was motivated by a desire to transcend the ascetic distance and objectivity of observational films in favour of a more intimate, participatory style. The new approach introduced a different conception of vision. MacDougall's essay *Beyond observational cinema* (1975), marks this point of departure from the orthodoxy of observational practices. The participatory approach, developed especially by fieldwork researchers in the social sciences, evolved out of the observational style, with which it shares many features. The difference between participatory filmmaking and observational cinema is a matter of degree, for the former was more an opening up of what was already inherent in the latter, i.e. the central role of authorship and of the filmmaker's eye. Although paying close attention to the details of social life is faithful to the original cinematic premises of observational cinema, the participatory style stresses the corporeal interaction and collaborative presence of the filmmaker among the subjects. The bodily presence of the filmmaker as a social actor is what marks the subtle difference between observational and participatory cinema. The former is hinged on the discreet anonymity of 'being here', whereas the latter accentuates the 'being there': the direct encounter and personal involvement in the actual flow of cultural life. The main innovation of the participatory style lies in the focus on the ethnographic encounter itself. The notion of 'participatory style' is significant because it indicates the active role of the camera in anthropological inquiry, but is also significant in stressing the collaborative role of the natives in the production of a shared anthropology.

Tempus is, to a great extent, an observational and subtly participatory film. But there is no thought of claiming to be a 'fly-on-the-wall' film: its intense realism seems to follow a relatively undirected actuality. The fusion of the techniques of observational style and those of anthropological fieldwork provides some sense of a direct encounter with another world, the world of the Sardinian herders. One can see that *Tempus* is indeed subtly participatory, but it is never picaresque or rambling. Clearly, MacDougall's observational and, at the same time, participatory camera style is distant from the dominant trend in documentary film, and from the conventions of contemporary fiction filmmaking.⁸

Epistemology and open-endedness

One of the key areas of documentary film theory concerns how the documentary form legitimises its truth claims. Different documentary modes have different effects on cultural representation.⁹ MacDougall's cinema is animated by epistemological concerns and questions of knowledge. As an ethnographer/filmmaker, he can be understood as a radical empiricist, for his films re-create the elusive and problematic experience of fieldwork. Through its emphasis on three shepherds immersed in the bustle of life, *Tempus* places value on empirical descriptions and feelings without privileging theory. It is a unique film because it is also about research and the assembly of conversations and impressions in the process of acquiring knowledge. In *Tempus* MacDougall tends to dwell on uncertain and inconsequential aspects of life, without being soaring or sensational. Instead of providing distillates of written anthropological knowledge, the film appears as a phenomenological device to register the informal aspects of a 'culture', namely the fleeting scraps and fragments of ordinary experience. This kind of empiricism, in its attempts to convey the themes of cultural life, goes beyond the encyclopaedic commentaries and explanations of voiceover commentary. It is an attempt to use film as an intoning, poetic device rather than an instrument for a dry and analytical accompaniment. An anti-positivistic attitude is revealed in the evocative texture of the visuals. Such a position tends to re-create the atmosphere of fieldwork experience and the normal activities of anthropologists when they try to grasp another way of life. It is a perspective that rests on the belief that knowledge and understanding are always partial and provisional.

All this is perhaps evident in the non-expositional character of the film, which makes its more general points by showing rather than communicating cultural ideas in the form of analytic arguments. The narrative does not rely on logic and conceptual arguments, and it is largely undeclared. Its flow is conducted by poetic juxtapositions that invite memories of the research encounter. Nevertheless, the film has a definite and rather conventional chronological narrative form that moves toward the fate of the characters: what will happen to Franchiscu's *cuile*? What will Pietro do? *Tempus* is expressive of a more general theoretical mood that acknowledges film as an experimental means of exploring and knowing a social reality. This mood is exploratory and inquiring rather than declaratory and authoritative. It is clear, then, that the film opens an area of inquiry in the full complexity of cultural encounters without trying to provide an analysis of an entire society or capturing an unambiguous actuality. As an expression of shifting social relationships developed during a series of encounters, the film does not 'explain'. It explores a reality instead of illustrating a theory. However, there is such a thing as explanation by demonstration. In fact, we come to understand why certain characters do certain things: the film 'explains' the actions of the characters through its structure. *Tempus* 'creates the conditions in which knowledge can take us by surprise' (MacDougall 1998, 163). It does so by revealing the subtle changes in the relationships embodied in the ethnographic encounter itself. In this manner the film becomes an interactive process in which social exchanges develop progressively in the interstices of filmmaking. This process creates a complex network of relationships between subjects, filmmaker and audience. In effect, the film becomes the focal site of insights and polyphonic voices.

One of the most significant aspects in MacDougall's intellectual agenda is that *Tempus* does not offer a resolution of the doubts and questions raised by the story. Since the story is both incomplete and sketchy, the viewers are not offered closure but glimpses of possible



Figure 3. Codula landscape during the filming of *Tempus de Baristas*.
Credit: David MacDougall.

outcomes through the fragments of social situations. Indeed, many of the insights and questions emerging from a series of interconnected events brought together in the film are not resolved but, rather, initiated. This open-endedness of meaning raises new issues, leading inevitably to further questions stimulated by what is unsaid in the film. Rather than closing issues off, and without introduction, the matter in the film places the spectators in the pastoral camp, among the shepherds and goats. The film is notable for a lack of contextualisation and historical information, which is virtually intrinsic to the style of filmmaking developed by the MacDougalls (Barbash et al. 2000–2001, 2–14).¹⁰ An example will serve to illustrate how the open-endedness in *Tempus* works. When the film ends, we do not know whether Pietro will continue his studies or whether he will work at the goat camp. This uncertainty depends on Pietro's choice, which is projected beyond the space of the film. This technique, I think, questions the normative powers of the herders' social identity. We can only fantasise about what will happen in the uncertain and ambiguous territory of Pietro's future.

Filmmaker, subjects, and ethics

One of the central features of MacDougall's approach to cinematic realities is that it involves a set of encounters. The process of filmmaking is understood as an instrument to communicate fieldwork experience. Its main aim is to communicate the subjects' experiences. In this respect, *Tempus* offers an understanding of filmmaking as a research instrument. The film does not suppress trivial incidents as interruptions. This commitment to relaxation and informality catches an element of the participatory style, expressed within a series of voluntary, non-contrived situations. The intimate work of the camera opens an arena of inquiry in which unexpected, serendipitous intrusions are acceptable.

Before starting the film, MacDougall had lived with the Sardinian herders for several months, walking around with his camera and getting to know his subjects. He followed the same persons in different situations and activities. The benefit of this technique is that the subjects become familiar with the presence of the camera and with the filmmaker as a person, not just as a filmmaker. Ultimately, the subjects become uninterested in, or accustomed to, the presence of the ethnographer/cameraman, who is not seen as a guest to be entertained and shown around. Working in this way, the subjects are not always aware of the moments in which the camera is switched on.

Perhaps equally important in MacDougall's method is the consolidation of the filmmaker's role as a witness engaged in an open interaction with the persons being filmed. In many respects, the researcher/filmmaker operates as an intermediary between the people in the film and the spectators. In *Tempus*, MacDougall's subjectivity is the central conduit for the messages of the highland herders and their conversations with the people who engage with them as viewers. This intermediary role between the subjects and a wider audience is based on participation and observation. In this process, the filmmaker should be responsive and open to changes. As I have noted, the film is, in fact, constructed from fragments of the herders' real lives, recorded after a period of interaction with them. Given these premises, we may add that the film suggests a respect for individuality premised upon humility, an attitude that is not found in many previous documentaries in which the Sardinian highland herder figures prominently. This distinctive feature of the film is influenced by the observational theories of the relationship between filmmaker and living people, according to which the anonymity of the Voice-of-God should be judged not only as a reductive simplification, but also as an unethical imposition. Therefore the poetic humanism of *Tempus*, which the film shares with De Seta's work and the sensitivity of Flaherty, derives from a fundamentally moral orientation.¹¹ In parallel with the principle of respecting the integrity of the herders, the sensitivity towards the subjects may also be seen as an assumption of responsibility on the part of the filmmaker in preserving the native structure of events.¹² The commitment to preserve the integrity of the subjects' lives is also apparent in the use of subtitles. Subtitles render the Sardinian language in simultaneous translation, thus allowing us to learn much from the herders themselves, and from their conversations.

Unprivileged camera and long-take

I suggest that we consider MacDougall's camera style in some detail. Early in his career, MacDougall often made unusual choices with regard to his use of the camera. In the 1960s, under the stimulus of the technological innovations that made it possible to record sound on location, he developed the notion of 'unprivileged camera style' (MacDougall 1982). An unprivileged style may be regarded as a camera that recognises the physical rootedness of the filmmaker's body in space, namely a camera eye that speaks with a 'human' voice. This camera eye acknowledges the limits and fallibility of the filmmaker, whose action is often governed by chance and by human, partial perception. If the camera is 'humanised', it is not because the camera is literally similar to a human eye, but because a simulation of eyesight calls into question the assumption of a neutral observer. It is important to point out that an unprivileged camera style is defined in contrast to a privileged camera style. The latter, which is typical of Hollywood's cinema, does not have

an acknowledged observer. One example is the shot taken from a vantage point that transcends the limitations of human vision. Strictly speaking, the privileged camera takes up a disembodied position anywhere in a scene. For this reason, it is considered to imply asymmetrical power relations. The privileged camera has been accused of surveillance and objectification of the subjects. In effect, these dehumanising tendencies essentially involve anonymity and a desire to spy on other human beings.

The most significant aspect of MacDougall's unprivileged approach is an embrace of authorship, associated with the acknowledgement of the filmmaker's presence within the research setting. The emphasis on positionality is an act of authorial responsibility that maintains an awareness of the filmmaker's social situatedness. This reflexive stance is significant, for it acknowledges the act of filming and, at the same time, removes the impression of omnipotence from the observer. In *Tempus* the camera often appears as an eavesdropper, which creates a poetic vision of intimacy. Far from being a mere recording instrument, the camera adopts an emic perspective that reassures us of the filmmaker's focus and sensitivity towards the herders. The position and movement of the camera, which operates as a filter in the hands of the filmmaker, expresses respect and patience towards the subjects' integrity. The intensity of the camera reminds us of the eye of the author quietly watching – or even presenting – a vision, and certainly monitoring himself without a desire to intrude. It is erroneous to assume that the camera is passive because the filmmaker's presence is radically de-emphasised and undeclared. His presence, in places, is felt in the occasional and explicit glances of the subjects towards the camera, or in the shifting positions and movements of the camera itself. As critics, we should recognise that reflexivity does not necessarily need to be overt.

The adoption of an unprivileged style results in the refusal of conventional film-editing. It is noteworthy that the MacDougalls' films are all feature-length documentaries. Such a choice affects the content and internal narrative of films like *Tempus*. Therefore, I would like to analyse MacDougall's defence of the long-take. Doing so helps us understand how one of the most influential ethnographic filmmakers in the English-speaking world today theorises the unprivileged style of his filmmaking practices. In today's mainstream media and television documentary the long-take is confined to marginality. The *terra incognita* of the long camera take is very often considered a hindrance, for its length leads to annoyance and impatience in the audience. This judgement is obviously relative to a specific set of cultural expectations. On another level, take duration plays a crucial role in altering the viewer's engagement in a fundamental way: less is really less (MacDougall 1992–1993). When the rushes – the 'raw material that comes out of the camera' known as ethnographic footage – are reduced in the process of editing, the cutting of the unmade (also known as 'notional') film closes off the indeterminate plurality of meanings that the long-take, as MacDougall suggests, seems to share with still photography (MacDougall 1978, 406). The sense of historical contingency and openness to the uninterrupted unfolding of a scene captured by the camera is partly lost. This is due to the montage phase of production, which dictates what is relevant. The editing condenses the spaciousness of the encounter between the viewer and the material in the rushes, at the expense of the viewer's interpretation. Thus the directorial decisions to eliminate the 'excess' meaning in the rushes narrow the interpretive participation of the spectator. No doubt the unmediated richness and the internal contextualisation of the shot depend also on its duration.

As we have seen, *Tempus* generates meaning through relationships of juxtaposition and correspondence that replace voiceover commentary. The use of long scenes structures and

organises the untidy reality before the camera, bringing the viewers close to the illusion of 'being there'. The structural elegance of the film is close to the raw data of the footage; that is, the ethnographic equivalent of taking notes during the experience of fieldwork. This minimalist style of film-editing provides a sense of intimate detachment. The ordered simplicity of the assembled sequences preserves much of the integrity of the pro-filmic scene usually felt in the rushes. The result is an understated narrative structure created by the cumulative force of selected sequences edited into each other. From an examination of the use of montage, *Tempus* appears as a mosaic of long scenes from which a series of overlapping associations emerge to demand close attention. The long-takes deal with concrete actions and settings rather than abstract cultural patterns, creating a sense of visual suspense that marks a departure from authoritative and didactic filmmaking. Thus, the film's editing preserves the natural integrity and sequence of actions. A respect for the real duration of events highlights their continuity in time, reducing the distance between filmmaker and audience. Indeed, the long-sequence shots give the impression of being within the microcosm of the herders' experience. The viewer perceives the continuity of temporal fragments in a way that mimics the perception of a real observer. A good example of the long-take in *Tempus* can be found at approximately 35 minutes, a third of the way into the film, in the scene of conversation at the lunch table in the *cuile*. This subjective shot of several minutes' duration speaks in the present tense: the time of the viewer coincides with the diegetic world of the film. Clearly the scene has been shot so as to make editing in the editing room redundant. The primary focus of this realistic shot seems to be the herders' joking relationships and communal reciprocity. From a single point of view, MacDougall lets us sense not only what the herders say but also how they laugh, their facial expressions and the sounds they make. The duration of the shot creates a cumulative power that plays an important part in the subjective reproduction of a scene of practical living.

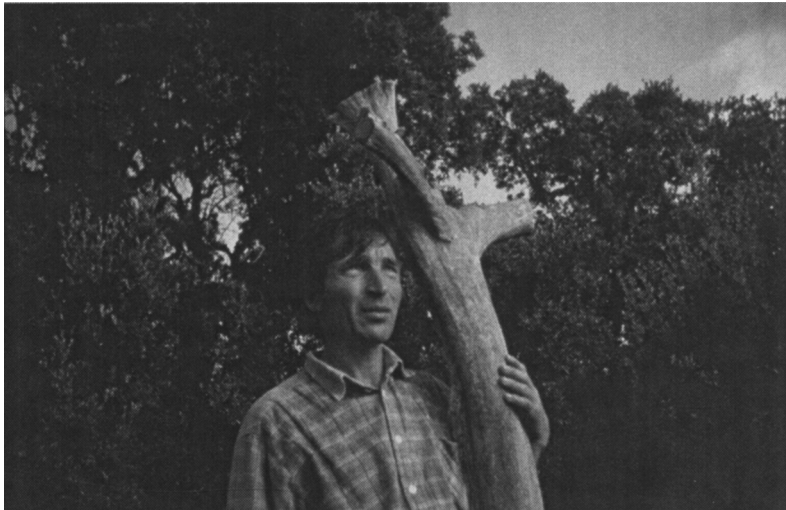


Figure 4. Miminu during the filming of *Tempus de Baristas*.
Credit: David MacDougall.

The use of long scenes is also apparent in the need to allow the events to unfold. This need is related to the filmmaker's choice to complete an action within a single shot rather than fragmenting it, or to the kind of restraint that allows the individuals in the film to express their subjectivities. MacDougall's way of editing preserves much of the interpretive complexity of a scene by respecting the nuanced density of time and being. As MacDougall writes:

The scene of Miminu making cheese in *Tempus de Baristas* would work only if it were kept long; otherwise it would be merely a technological process. But kept long, it begins to communicate a sense of Miminu's solitary life and his internalisation of the details of his work. For me, when the cheese appears it's like a moment of creation, the beginning of a new world. (Barbash et al. 1996, 384)

This observational, subtly participatory style is the consequence of a development of the post-war Italian neorealist projects envisaged by Zavattini. MacDougall's theorisation of the long-take is also reminiscent of Bazin's call for a cinema of duration. By this Bazin meant that long-takes and depth of field should be privileged because they are somehow more respectful of the pro-filmic scene (Zavattini 1966, 216–28; Bazin 1971; Grimshaw 2001, 131). His emphasis on the integrity of time and space are part of a defence of an idea of realism grounded in narrative and stylistic features.

A different kind of knowledge

The issue concerning parity among modes of expression is crucial to understanding the relationship between *Tempus* and other films informed by socio-anthropological knowledge. MacDougall's view is especially critical in articulating a more collaborative relationship between ethnographic film and the prose of mainstream anthropology. In general, there is a danger that film is treated as a mere subsidiary of written forms of ethnography. The exclusive dependence on words may overlook what MacDougall calls the 'potential incommensurability of sensory experience and anthropological writing' (MacDougall 2006, 60). He suggests that there are contradictions and fundamental 'discontinuities between what one can do in writing and in film or video' (Barbash et al. 1996, 374). Scholars should look for a more balanced fusion between video as a multisensory medium and forms of ethnographic enquiry conducted through language. They should seek to open new avenues to give expression to anthropological understanding by turning to 'the visual, auditory and textual modes of expression found in film' (MacDougall 2006, 60). The passage from conventional literary forms to an image-and-sequence approach represents a potentially subversive perspective. An image-centred approach is a bold attempt to draw attention to the material quality of images, but also a challenge to a discipline driven by words. The shift from written to visual in anthropology marks out new conceptual possibilities: Can all knowledge be represented by and conveyed through words? In what sense does the knowledge produced through writing differ from the evocative and emotional power of imagery? Can image-making be a method of disclosure of cultural knowledge rather than a set of technical skills subordinated to academic discourses? These questions are somewhat rhetorical but they raise several important issues, such as the problem of the integration of a visual perspective into ethnographic enquiry. Among the most notable of these issues is the idea that the exploratory function of image-making can be invoked to question writing as a method of

cultural inquiry. If we follow MacDougall, we cannot escape an acknowledgement that seeing is a form of knowledge but also more specifically that images are in themselves important bearers of knowledge. The next question that arises is related to the differences between the knowledge produced through scholarly communication and the knowledge produced through visual media. In this way, MacDougall draws attention to the specificities of working with visual media, and to the tensions between these specificities and the knowledge produced through the keyhole of the written word.

My purpose in looking closely at the complex relationship MacDougall posits between image and word is to point out that the undirected potential of images opens new avenues for a conception of film that tries to de-exoticise Sardinian 'culture'. *Tempus* deviates from the conventional documentary films about Sardinia because it attempts to view Sardinian 'culture' from a perspective which is inherently phenomenological. This phenomenological dimension erodes and counterbalances the strangeness and distance of many representations of the highland herders living on the island, not least because the film concerns itself with the complex and fluid lives of three individuals. When he was interviewed by Alan MacFarlane, MacDougall revealed that he was asked to make a film in Sardinia by the Ethnographic Institute in Nuoro (ISRE), presumably because they wanted a film made about mountain shepherds by a complete outsider, a film that would bring a different perspective to the subject. As MacDougall observed, 'the director of the institute believed that most of the films that had been made about shepherds stereotyped them and he wanted a fresh approach'.¹³ Indeed, in many films and documentaries about Sardinia's interior, made by both insiders and outsiders, the highland herder is mostly associated with the history of Sardinian *disamistades* (enmity) and *vendetta* (vengeance). Among the examples of these films are Massimo Pupillo's *Gente di Barbagia* (1960), Piero Livi's *I 60 di Berchideddu* (1964) and *Il cerchio del silenzio* (1965), Libero Bizzarri's *La disamistade* (1967), Romolo Marcellini's *Civiltà dei pastori* (1967), Fiorenzo Serra's *La legge della vendetta* (1968), Giuseppe Ferrara's *Banditi in Barbagia* (1969) and Antonio Bertini's *Tre disamistade* (1969). These documentaries usually deal analytically with the forms of social control exerted by the pastoral community and with illegal activities among Sardinian herders such as the *abigeato* (the stealing of beasts of pasture). On the other hand, in *Tempus* there is neither a suggestion of the past of tensions between the herders and the Italian military presence nor a discussion of the genealogical role of the herders in the formation of the Sardinian cultural identity (Salzman 1999, 632). For this reason, *Tempus* seems an ingenious response to documentaries that celebrate the pseudo-sociological authority of an expert over the life of others. In fact, it suggests that social change can be explored without the imposition of an exegetic commentary speaking for the subjects in a patronising way. The film is neither narrated by way of exoticism nor participates in the creation of human types; rather, it displays three individuals and gives visual prominence to their actions. This, I would argue, has important implications for the deconstruction of the primitivism and exoticism of Sardinian 'culture'. The 'decolonisation' of our thinking allowed by *Tempus* is a relative one: it involves a filmmaking style that de-emphasises the position of an observer whose presence is de-centralised, not eliminated. Ultimately, it involves focusing on social forms of intimacy and emplacement.

In seeking to expose the distinctive features of the visual as against the written, I am trying to show the many ways in which *Tempus* creates a kind of lived knowledge that contrasts with the exoticising tendencies implicit in the abstract schematisations of many documentaries about my native island. For it is my belief that the aural and visual details

of film convey a kind of knowledge that differs fundamentally from the self-validation of interviews designed for the extraction of textual information and from the declaratory omniscience of voiceover commentary. Images can assume a communicative role, but perhaps, above all, they work in a more symbolic and diffuse way. In *Tempus* images work primarily through a series of associations and resonances evoked by the juxtaposition of extended scenes. During the experience of fieldwork, as in everyday life, we witness events and actions that are too rapid, and certainly too complex to be recorded in writing. For example, in the scene of Pietro and his friends playing *morra* (a hand game played by two or more people), which is seen at 23 minutes into the film, as the players are throwing fingers at each other Pietro bursts out laughing. This moment is given special emphasis by MacDougall's startling cut into the next scene. The rapidity of Pietro's reaction followed by a straight cut, as captured by the camera, is just too complex and sudden to be recorded in writing. Unlike writing, film renders and establishes the cultural style in which people act, move, speak and perform. The rich visual texture of film draws attention to the nuances of a particular situation. This visual richness is, in some embodied way, literal. Indeed, MacDougall's conception of people in the world is 'predicated on a notion of presence, that there is something "out there"' (Grimshaw 2001, 132). This is evident in a number of revealing passages such as the ones of the herders' hands.

Film brings together meanings, emotions and sensations, but it also makes the real manifest. I would like to stress this point, which MacDougall makes explicit in his writings. In *Tempus*, the cinematic medium is used to show rather than to say. The object of doing so is to engage with life in a completely new way. The effect for the viewer is like having a mimetic experience of the world. The spectator 'encounters' the highland herders in the reality of filmmaking. The most easily identifiable feature of this conception of film is that *Tempus* does not talk about the Sardinian herders; rather, it shows their movements within the Sardinian landscape and the uses of it. Given this filmmaking agenda, the film seeks to render not only accidental events and dynamics between subjects, but also relationships expressed nonverbally. This agenda is apparent in MacDougall's observations about the use of subtitles in *Tempus*. He writes:

Perhaps the most serious limitation is that subtitled dialogue tends to make us conceive of films more in terms of what they *say* than in what they *show*. This can pose a problem if the filmmaker wishes to emphasise nonverbal elements in the film, particularly in scenes of conversations. I faced this problem towards the end of *Tempus de Baristas*, in a scene between two of the main protagonists, Pietro and Miminu. To me their manner toward each other was far more important than what they actually said, and I took the chance that by this time the viewers would care enough about them, and understand them well enough, to respond to them substantially on a nonverbal level. (MacDougall 1998, 175)

At one level, it is possible to interpret *Tempus* as an expression of visual experience and its uncaptioned virtues. The film exhorts us to consider images not so much as vehicles of messages or explanations of theories, but as data of recorded behaviours-in-context that can serve for the development of new theories. At another level, *Tempus* represents a call for an elevation of visual anthropology from a subfield position to a more critical role in cultural inquiry. In advocating such visual practice, it is worth bearing in mind that MacDougall's films are works 'in which small events – the tiny and yet compelling patterns of everyday life – were given the kind of attention that Virginia Woolf or some such novelist has given them' (Young 1982, 7). More specifically, writing about *Tempus*, Taylor (1998, 10) observes that in 'its texture and structure, it is perhaps the most novelistic of the

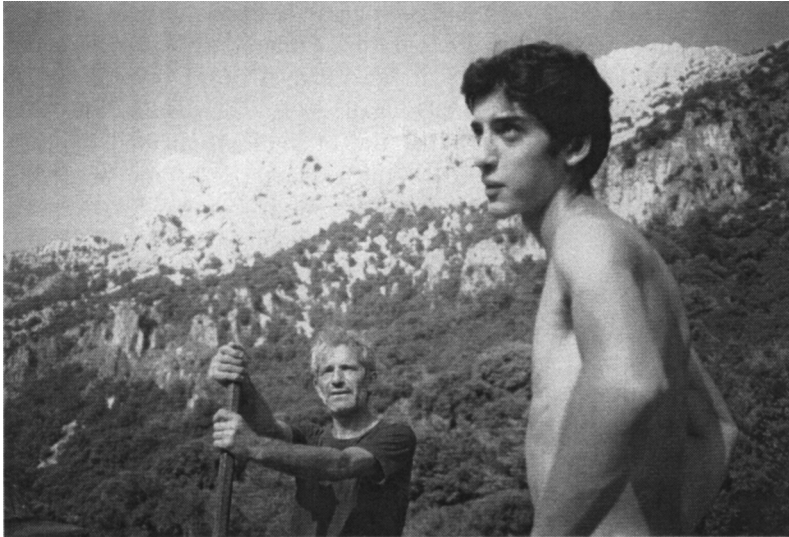


Figure 5. Franchiscu and Pietro Balisai Soddu during the filming of *Tempus de Baristas*. Credit: David MacDougall.

MacDougall's films'. The anthropological interest of MacDougall's novelistic filmmaking style in this particular film lies 'in his capacity to capture the living, internal time of the people he is filming, thus giving meaning to their actions and decisions' (Marazzi 1994, 90). By interpreting *Tempus* in this light, I want to draw attention to the central role accorded to images in the description of particular socio-cultural systems. The film also seeks to give focus to the verisimilitude of moving images and their evocative power as a form of sensory memory. According to MacDougall, images are 'inherently reflexive', since they always refer implicitly to the scene of their creation. This point calls for critical reflection. Although images do not speak for themselves in the guise of a discourse, they invoke an antecedent event. To a large extent, *Tempus* does not say: it shows. And, in showing, it does convey a different kind of knowledge. My own interpretation is built upon the idea that there is a meaningful way, however difficult to grasp, in which we can say that films and images 'speak for themselves', not least because films and images, like memory, involve the senses (MacDougall 1994; Seremetakis 1994).

Body and senses: corporeal images

It is thought by authors such as Schneider and Wright (2006, 13; quoted in Pink 2009, 135) that 'sensual experiences involved in fieldwork normally disappear from anthropological writing'. In *Tempus*, the dimensions of the local, the personal and the experiential are particularly prominent. The film is structured according to a phenomenological approach informed by the developments of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The film emerges from the unfolding of a narrative whose rhythm resembles the sensory awareness of social experience. As MacDougall claims, film creates 'spaces analogous to those we experience

in everyday life' (MacDougall 2006, 25). This suggestion may offer new understandings of the role of the body and the senses in ethnographic filmmaking, for corporeal images 'are not just the images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relations with the world' (MacDougall 2006, 3). Reading this statement by MacDougall evokes the importance of the use of audiovisual media in ethnographic research. Significantly, as *Tempus* reveals, the experiences of the herders are shown corporeally, that is, by linking the filmmaker's body to that of the subjects. For MacDougall 'we see through our whole bodies, and any image we make carries the imprint of our bodies; that is to say of our being as well as the meanings we intend to convey' (MacDougall 2006, 3). This phrase, again, is suggestive of the attempts to combine cultural meanings and forms of metaphoric expression in a visual fashion that mirrors the complexity of embodied social experience. Critics frequently refer to this renewed interest in the multi-sensorial, embodied engagements of emplaced bodies as the 'sensory turn' in the social sciences. This discussion of the sensoriality of filmmaking also provides a route into a renewed interpretation of the senses as interconnected: the senses are inseparable from one another.¹⁴ The development of visual methods to reveal a phenomenological reality that elicits embodied understandings is predicated upon the claim that film is not a disembodied product 'about something'. More generally, MacDougall understands the production of ethnographic knowledge in terms of 'social aesthetics', namely the 'creation of an aesthetic space or sensory structure' (MacDougall 2006, 105). For although written anthropology often seeks the opposite of this, ethnographic films like *Tempus* re-present the tactile and physical qualities of the experiential domain of the subjects' life, achieving a heightened impression of presence. The metaphorical forms and poetic devices used in *Tempus* reveal the sense of geography of the herders by disclosing the fleeting, ephemeral moments of their mobile interpersonal relationships. This is very important, because it is difficult to render the movements and material interactions of the herders in fine detail by means of a written monograph.

We may say that filmmaking makes possible the representation of the multi-sensory relationships and interactions between knowing bodies. It functions as a source of knowledge and agency that confronts the inadequacy of written language not just in the representation of sensory experience, but also in researching it. The use of visual media in recording somatic traces and actively participated experiences changing over time is, and should be, an important part of social research. An emplaced ethnography uses visual media to research the materiality of cultural environments, and to evoke the sensory perceptions of experiencing bodies. The involvement of the spectator, in turn, lies in the visual exposure to the space of the research, which seeks to lend the audiences a corporeal and psychological engagement.¹⁵

The innovative features of MacDougall's anthropology find full expression in the notion of situatedness. *Tempus* represents a new engagement with the question of the situatedness of 'culture'. The insights in the film are relevant to understanding relationships that exist in time and place, rather than in disembodied and anonymous social contexts. We have seen that the film draws attention to important aspects of existences anchored in a visible space dominated by the sensory, embodied experiences of a group of herders. This is nicely put by MacDougall, when he writes that filmmaking 'requires interactions of the body with the world in registering qualities of texture and shape, which do not exist independently of such encounters' (MacDougall 1998, 50).

A highly specific context situates the spatial and temporal existence of objects and persons in their local, actual use.

Silence and beyond: emotions and transcendence

It is in the very nature of MacDougall's work to invite sympathy and admiration: we feel an affinity to the concreteness of a personal encounter with the Sardinian rural subjects. Films such as *Tempus* suggest a desire to evoke feelings of intimacy that allow the viewer to get emotionally close to the subjects. This sense of acquaintanceship and communion is built through affectionate evocations which create empathy in the audience, especially feelings of respect. Most notably, the texture of the film, by its very nature, develops an almost wordless intimacy that leads the spectator to feelings of commonality with the value-rich emotions activated in a real encounter. A kind of empathetic framing creates strong associations and connections, filtered by the filmmaker's point of view. Central to this sense of virtual intimacy developed by means of a visual methodology is the power of video recordings in reaffirming the centrality of the body as a site for the expression of deep emotions. *Tempus* succeeds in providing a tactile tour of characteristic moments in the life of the Sardinian herders. In achieving this, it reduces an element of bias that would otherwise distort our perception or, perhaps, lead our attention towards matters that are not salient in their lives. In this regard, *Tempus* opens a communication channel whose conceptual space is given to the subjects. In fact, portraits of the inner life of the subjects, which are clearly conceived as part of the film's texture, are conveyed in a variety of ways. As an example of the verbal reflections of the subjects, it is worth giving a sense of Miminu's voice:

Convieni vendere tutto e cercare un altro lavoro. Nel mondo attuale... nulla va in nostro favore. Questo è tempo di baristi e ristoranti... sulla spiaggia. A parte il lavoro, qui non abbiamo niente. Ti piacerebbe fare il pastore? Ne dubito. Se Pietro lascia Franchiscu, non so cosa può succedere.¹⁶

In this scene Miminu's speech verges on private monologue. The camera is very near to him: Miminu is a man who is very self-conscious of his own subjectivity. In this long scene we see a flesh-and-blood man speaking for himself. His voice, the voice of day-to-day existence, is a concrete commixture of silent pauses and Sardinian dialect. The viewer learns what matters to him, what he believes, and his preoccupations about the shepherd's fragile grip on an economically unrewarding job out of step with the times. It is significant that the title of the film is metonymically taken from the passage in which Miminu reflects on the condition of the herder in the contemporary world: we live in the *Time of the Barmen* in restaurants and beach resorts (a Sardinian viewer may think that Miminu is implicitly referring to the beach resorts of Costa Smeralda in northern Sardinia).

In *Tempus* there is 'an explicit concern with experience, embodiment, subjectivity, intuition, "the quick" – indeed with the transcendent' (Grimshaw 2001, 145). The film often verges, or appears to verge, on the representation of the transcendence of everyday life. This results partly from the contemplation of nature and the beauty of the everyday shown through silent watching. The vision which animates the film opens a space that encourages the audience to focus attention on images, nonverbal sounds and the persistence of the visual frame. These, in turn, can be seen as vehicles for the expression of truths that transcend the immediate moment or situation and more general truths about the human condition.¹⁷ What I wish to suggest is that *Tempus* does not present a realistic vision of everyday life but



Figure 6. Miminu during the filming of *Tempus de Baristas*.
Credit: David MacDougall.

rather opens up the everyday to provide a space for the disclosure of knowledge that is located beyond the limits of written anthropology.¹⁸ Therefore the use of images in *Tempus* does not exclude the metaphysical; rather, it permits the revelation of the transcendent by recreating the ineffable textures of actual life. The emphasis on the ‘imponderabilia’ of social behaviour and on the intangibles of everyday life is bound by codes of reticence, reserve and forms of wonder. In this way, images become the bearers of knowledge unexpressed in academic writing. Not only have images been used to allow background details to step forward, visually and aurally, but they also evoke the metaphysical, namely a kind of knowledge which depends upon an intuitive grasp. This ‘microsecond of discovery, of knowledge at the birth of knowledge’ (MacDougall 2006, 1), is independent of the deployment of some formal analysis, since it is inextricable from the medium of film.

In sum, throughout this article, I have provided a detailed examination of *Tempus*, which I have asserted is an example of a film that offers an inspiring model to doubt the adequacy of established methods and genres of ethnographic representation. As an ethnographic film, *Tempus* is characterised by an emphasis on the deep bonds between the herders and the Sardinian landscape. The hesitation and reticence in *Tempus*, often associated with silence, invite the spectator to find the unsaid in the scenes. The film suggests a natural link between the gentleness and innocence of the Sardinian herders on the one hand, and the unsaid and the inexpressible on the other. Thus, *Tempus* implicitly posits that images possess transcendent qualities that express a kind of knowledge that lies beyond language.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the encouragement of Paul Hockings, the timely suggestions and comments of David MacDougall and of the anonymous readers of an earlier version of this paper, and the patience of his supervisor.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. Sardegna Digital Library. <http://www.sardegнадigitallibrary.it/index.php?xsl=626&id=499>
2. During the last 30 years many documentary films about Sardinia, especially the ones produced by the Ethnographic Institute in Nuoro (ISRE), have been characterised by an avoidance of orthodox voiceover commentary. This change is indicative of a wish to produce intellectually subtle and complex film compositions – i.e. Lutz Marco and Manconi Valentina's *In viaggio per la musica* (2004), Michele Mossa and Michele Trentini's *Furriadroxus* (2005), Ignazio Figus' *I giorni di Lollove* (1996), *Toccos e Repiccos. Campanari in Sardegna* (2000) and *Brokkarios: una famiglia di vasai* (2008). Many of the considerations and theoretical implications drawn in this article apply to these commentary-free films, for they share many stylistic features with *Tempus de Baristas*, which will be the main focus of my attention.
3. Who is speaking for whom? Who does the voiceover speak for? Does the film represent the range of equally valid voices encountered in the experience of fieldwork/filmmaking? These questions have to do with the fundamental difference between those who organise, rationalise and survey as opposed to those who are mapped out, namely those who are the subjects of the film's visual surveillance.
4. The MacDougalls began working in the 1960s. At that time, they were not professional anthropologists. The films that David MacDougall has made alone, or without Judith's participation, include: *Kenya Boran* (1974), *Goodbye Old Man* (1977), *Link-Up Diary* (1987), *Doon School Chronicles* (2000), *With Morning Hearts* (2001), *Karam in Jaipur* (2003), *The New Boys* (2003), *The Age of Reason* (2004), *Some Alien Creatures* (2005), *SchoolScapes* (2007) and *Gandhi's Children* (2008).
5. Ruby writes that generally 'Western creative and intellectual life has not produced many people who are both makers and thinkers, Umberto Eco aside . . . David MacDougall is one of the few ethnographic filmmakers who writes thoughtfully about his own work' (Ruby 2000, xi).
6. Among the factors that might have played a role in the introduction of the observational style are the distrust of media authority, the spread of language advertisement and the unpopular memory of the Nazi propaganda (Aufderheide 2007, 47).
7. Although Judith recorded the sound, David was credited as director. See, for example, Peter Loizos' (c.1993, 91–114) analysis of the Eastern African films made by the MacDougalls in the 1970s.
8. In an email message to the author on February 16, 2011, David MacDougall revealed: 'it is interesting that much of current television documentary "personalises" the film through an on-screen presenter/traveller, but the presence of the film crew following him around is never acknowledged. This erasure is perhaps the truest expression of the fly-on-the-wall style'.
9. As MacDougall argued in an influential article, 'implicit in a camera style is a theory of knowledge' (MacDougall 1998, 202). The sense of the phrase is that a film conveys an attitude – a theory of knowledge or epistemic stance – towards its subjects.
10. The overall effect of the lack of contextualisation is a flavour of life as it is lived. However, we should always keep in mind that film 'is about something, whereas reality is not' (Vaughan 1999, 21).
11. MacDougall expresses his personal concerns when he writes: 'Recently, I've felt increasingly that the most important audience for a film is the people in it. A film like *Tempus de Baristas* is for me a way of communicating with them. But of course, you make a film for other people too. And you make it for itself, to bring it into being' (Barbash et al. 1996, 12).
12. Here is how MacDougall describes his first encounter with two of the protagonists: 'One evening I was taken to a deep canyon outside Urzulei by a young veterinarian who had grown up in the village, and he introduced me to Franchiscu Soddu, a goatherd. I was immediately

- struck by this person's manner. When he spoke, he chose his words carefully, and there was intelligence in the way he listened, in his gestures, in the quality he radiated of reserve and acute observation. He gave an impression of competence and honesty. . . . As Franchiscu talked, I noticed that Pietro was listening intently to everything his father said, and that this was registered with extraordinary clarity on his face. I realised at the moment that if I did nothing else, I wanted to make a film about this father and son' (Barbash et al. 1996, 384).
13. David MacDougall. Interviewed by Alan MacFarlane. June 29 and 30, 2007. http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/DO/filmshow/macdougall1_fast.htm
 14. Specifically, in MacDougall's films, as in his writings, there is an interest in the notion of seeing as a form of touching. He writes that 'although seeing and touching are not the same, they originate in the same body and their objects overlap', for 'touch and vision do not become interchangeable but share an experiential field' (MacDougall 1998, 51). The relationship between touching and seeing is particularly relevant to filmic representation. The approach MacDougall fosters is one in which the visual is interconnected among other senses. He observes that 'we may need a language closer to the multidimensionality of the subject itself' (MacDougall 2006, 116).
 15. Also the words on a page engage the reader's body, for the images of words that trigger our thoughts when we scan a page are translated into physical behaviour. MacDougall mentions that throat surgery patients are forbidden to read because they tend to evoke absent sounds in the muscles (MacDougall 1994, 265; see also Carpenter 1980, 74).
 16. English translation: 'We'd better sell everything and look for another job. In today's world . . . there is nothing going for us. It's all barmen and restaurants. . . on the beach. Apart from our jobs, we have nothing here. Would you like to work as a shepherd? I don't think so. If Pietro leaves Franchiscu, I don't know what will happen'.
 17. To speak of video as a sensory research method that expresses a knowledge which might be neither visual nor verbal is to speak of a visual method providing a vocabulary for the unspeakable. As MacDougall explains, 'showing becomes a way of saying the unsayable' (MacDougall 2006, 5).
 18. This is how MacDougall describes what he calls 'knowledge as being': it is 'knowledge that has no propositional status (of generality, of explanation) except the proposition of its own existence. It remains to a large extent inert, untapped. Only in the will to declare it do we detect the stirrings of thought' (MacDougall 2006, 5).

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