

**Carta, Silvio. 2015. *Visual Anthropology in Sardinia***

**Peter Lang:** Oxford-Bern-Berlin-Bruxelles-Frankfurt am Main-New York-Wien.

**(Volume 19, New Studies in European Cinema series of Peter Lang edited by W.Everett and W.Goodbody). £ 45.00.**

**209 pp. ISBN 978-3-0343-0998-1.**

Based on a number of Carta's previously published articles and a doctoral thesis on the subject of Sardinian documentary and ethnographic cinema, this volume investigates the distinctive qualities of Sardinian anthropological filmmaking and sheds light on the history of non-fiction film in the island, articulating some of the paradigms characterizing Sardinia as an ethnographic object per excellence.

What Carta outlines, spanning from non-fictional to docu-fiction, observational, "classic ethnographic", pedagogical and collaborative filmmaking, is part of a much wider material and immaterial domain that composes the visual anthropology of Sardinia. An island-country that has a long tradition in demographical studies and where Antonio Gramsci, one of the main ancestors of cultural studies, was born. One of the main hypothesis in the book is that two *cinéastes* in particular, Vittorio De Seta and David MacDougall, have contributed to the shaping of an anthropological filmmaking that resisted stereotypical reinforcements of Sardinian "primitivism" and essentialism and opened the way for an explorative and collaborative methodology that serves the purposes of a post-modern anthropological approach. The film by David MacDougall, "Tempus de baristas" (Time of the barmen) was premiered in July 1993 in Nuoro, at the Istituto Superiore Regionale Etnografico ISRE which coproduced it. MacDougall is one of the most relevant theorists in the field of visual anthropology and a very prolific anthropological filmmaker, and his position in the history of the discipline is fully acknowledged. For De Seta some words of introduction are necessary for the readership of this review: he is an Italian director (he died in 2011 ) that developed his distinctive style and practice characterized by a non-romantic ethnological gaze towards the subalterns. He released *Banditi a Orgosolo* in 1961. Even if not Sardinian, he was born in Sicily and he understood the condition of Southerners from inside. The obituary in the Guardian saluted

"(...) De Seta's style as that of an anthropologist who speaks with the voice of a poet." His films are mostly exploring the South both as social condition and as territory. He was an intellectual, but not an academic, therefore he could freely move between the poetic, the folkloric and the sociological. When he decided to make films in Sardinia at the end of the 1950s, he had read Cagnetta, an Italian anthropologist that investigated the phenomena of banditry and insularity. Carta demonstrates how De Seta was an anthropological filmmaker *malgré soi*, especially because he let the local actors offer their quotidian context to exploration and intervene on the content. De Seta was freely making use of docu-fiction, as Flaherty and Rouch. However, as Carta rightly observes, he did make a choice that jeopardized the anthropological efficacy of *Banditi di Orgosolo*: he used Italian voices to dub the Sardinian, a language that was oppressed, but survived with pride; to be able to speak it in a film, had a value in terms of empowerment. The dubbing in Italian, served the purpose of distribution in the continent, a compromise that would seem unavoidable for that time.

Bandits and shepherds are paradigmatic subjects of study in Sardinian ethnology, and Carta explores the Italian peninsular dominant discourses, its relation to colonial political power, the historical construction of the Sardinian subaltern as Other, through its cinematic representation. The historical span covers the Fascist period, the post WWII, the years 1960-70s and comes so far as the years 1990s, sealed by *Tempus de Baristas* as a milestone.

By exploring MacDougall's film as an innovative depiction of Sardinian pastoral society, Carta embarks in proving how, the responsive style of the camera, more than other styles, allows for a cinematic exploration in which the subjects can more easily be met in their own worlds, and left free to co-construct moments of reality that are important for them. Such moments cannot be re-enacted or pre-conceived before the actual camera is there to catalyse their emergence. The profilmic and performative aspects are emerging through the co-constructive enactment that such a practice enable. The instance is to depict, not to represent. Carta's book is an attempt to say something about what constitutes reality and the making of motion pictures, a very important subject in the history of film studies, philosophy, communication and visual anthropology. The book is therefore a serious attempt to understand the power of such a

cinematic stance and if it constitutes an epistemology at all.

ROSSELLA RAGAZZI

*Tromsø University Museum, The Arctic University of Norway*