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**Drippings, Recordings and Revelations: Jackson Pollock, Maya Deren, and the Realist Aesthetics of Ethnographic Film**

It is generally assumed that the invention of lightweight 16 mm synchronous sound camera-equipment in the late 1950ies meant an important improvement for documentary and ethnographic filmmaking. Seemingly, with this new equipment the aural and visual aspects of events could be recorded more faithfully than ever before. This generated a substantial change in the style and scope of documentary film-making, resulting in the “direct cinema“ or “cinéma vérité“ movements. One of the central ideological arguments of this new technique of filming was its presupposed ability not only to represent real-life phenomena, but to provide a view behind the surface of things – to evoke an understanding of the invisible mechanisms underlying visible evidence. Thus, it was thought, life would reveal itself within its depiction in film. In the 1960ies ethnographic film adopted direct cinema methods to represent the lives and cultures of non-western people. By focussing on aspects of „other“ cultures not immediately comprehensible to western audiences, ethnographic film had to cope with the problem of translating the seen and heard. Nevertheless, the idea that filming with a portable camera, while synchronously recording sound, might preserve a trace of the phenomenal reality, as well as its deeper structure of meaning, dominated ethnographic film production for a long period of time, and to some extent still does. The aim of my paper is to show that this concept of realism is derived from artistic notions. I concentrate on tendencies that evolved in the US from the 1940ies to the 1960ies, leaving aside the somewhat different development in the french cinéma vérité approach. Although strongly differing in medium, artistic aspiration, and shape, works such as the abstract paintings of Jackson Pollock, the footage shot by avant-garde film-maker Maya Deren in Haiti, on the one hand, and documentaries by Richard Leacock and ethnographic films by David MacDougall, on the other, reveal certain formal similarities. Most obvious are a common emphasis on processual aspects of image-making, the choreography of movements, and the attempt to establish a delicate balance between control and accident. My hypothesis is that these means are used to aesthetically relate the visible surface of the images to an assumed conceptual depth. The things depicted seem to become transparent to reveal their implicit emotional or social structuring. The notion of conceptual depth plays an important part in legitimizing the images‘ claim to authentically represent, or rather present, a reality that generates and at the same time transcends the world of appearances. This method of evoking an impression of pictorial authenticity has become an important topos of modernist artistic concepts. As a conclusion, I will discuss the implications of its use with regard to the realist approach of ethnographic film.