



Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life

Anna Grimshaw, Amanda Ravetz

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Once hailed as a radical breakthrough in documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, observational cinema has been criticized for a supposedly detached camera that objectifies and dehumanizes the subjects of its gaze. Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz provide the first critical history and in-depth appraisal of this movement, examining key works, filmmakers, and theorists, from André Bazin and the Italian neorealists, to American documentary films of the 1960s, to extended discussions of the ethnographic films of Herb Di Gioia, David Hancock, and David MacDougall. They make a new case for the importance of observational work in an emerging experimental anthropology, arguing that this medium exemplifies a non-textual anthropology that is both analytically rigorous and epistemologically challenging.

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