

**Joshua A. Bell, Alison K. Brown and Robert J. Gordon (eds),
Recreating First Contact: Expeditions, Anthropology, and
Popular Culture. Washington, Smithsonian Institution
Scholarly Press, 2013. ISBN 978-1-93562-314-4. 276 pp.,
60 b. & w. illus. \$49.95.**

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11 This volume brings together a dozen or so studies that afford vivid insight into the diversity and
12 complexity of expeditionary collecting between the First and Second World Wars. The chapters
13 are structured more or less chronologically and explore an impressive range of expeditions and
14 collecting practices in diverse locations: Africa, the Americas, the Soviet Union, Iran, New Guinea
15 and Australia. The expeditions variously collected zoological, botanical and ethnographic
16 specimens, recorded census data, and shot still and motion pictures. Their aims fluctuated from
17 scientific to popular/commercial, to governmental and military. The editors seek to challenge the
18 persistence of the rhetoric of first contact that expeditions and their films helped to create, by
19 excavating their histories of global interaction and exchange and the visual economies they helped
20 to create. They argue that adventure expeditions of this period, and more particularly the film
21 footage shot, constitute a missing link between anthropology and popular culture – one that has
22 been consistently downplayed in the history of anthropology.
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28 Being able to mount an expedition – to locate, explore, collect from and visually document
29 encounters with supposedly hitherto uncontacted peoples was a mark of modernity. It was modern
30 not only in a technological sense of deploying air- and seaplanes, steamers and motor vehicles, but
31 in the filmic representation that the endeavour brought forth. Harnessing this immensely popular
32 new medium allowed expedition members to shoot footage for scientific, educational,
33 entertainment, propaganda or personal ends. Sometimes the promise of a film and box office
34 revenues were a means of mobilizing the resources needed to undertake the project, as well as
35 catering to popular demand afterwards. This form of adventure capitalism thus afforded a strategy
36 for upward mobility. Cinema was instrumental in shaping these modern adventures both through
37 its compression and its reorganization of time and space, and by using powerful visual tropes. It
38 combined footage of exotically clothed (or naked) indigenes, their material culture, and their
39 dances, with dramatic shots featuring the expeditionary technology – such as the Fairchild FC-2
40 W1 seaplane in New Guinea, or the 1928 Series 12B Sedan from the H.H. Franklin Manufacturing
41 Company in the Prairies of Western Canada. The vehicles were cast as significant social actors
42 that both facilitated adventure and doubled as stage sets for filmed encounters, such as that
43 between a group of New Guinean Hula gathered around the Fairchild at low tide; or the Franklin
44 automobile with Piikani leader Imoyikini at the wheel, wearing a costume that is now part of the
45 Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (maa) collection. Emergent
46 visual technologies such as still and moving images, as well as sound technology, were used to
47 collect things that could not be physically obtained, such as landscapes, people, and performances.
48 While the editors indicate the Napoleonic Wars as the limit of their genealogy of expeditionary
49 anthropology, Kuklick in her afterword pushes the horizon back to Cook's three
50 late-eighteenth-century voyages in her discussion of the salvage anthropology. The genealogy
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5 could have included earlier representations of such encounters: Albert Eckhout's
6 mid-seventeenth-century ethnographic portraits painted in Dutch Brazil (R. Parker-Brienen,
7 *Visions of a Savage Paradise. Albert Eckhout Court Painter in Colonial Dutch Brazil*
8 (Amsterdam, 2006)).
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11 Interwar collecting is seen as an extension of the salvage ethnography mode of the late
12 nineteenth century. Influenced by the social evolutionary framework of the day, anthropologists
13 believed that since traditional attire, ceremonial paraphernalia, and domestic material culture were
14 doomed to become obsolete, it was imperative to collect and preserve it as historical evidence of
15 earlier ways of life. Haddon was one of the first to shoot film footage during the 1898 Cambridge
16 Torres Strait Expedition to complement the extensive collecting that was also undertaken. The
17 potential of this new medium was quickly appreciated in early twentieth-century scientific circles:
18 Felix von Luschan was an early advocate of film through contact with Haddon. Although histories
19 of anthropology tend to emphasize how ethnographic research professionalized and individualized
20 after Bronislaw Malinowski's long-term, participation-based fieldwork (1914-18), this volume
21 shows certain expeditionary continuities mixing with popular understandings to reproduce some
22 of the very stereotypes that anthropology sought to debunk. Film was used by some as a rapid way
23 of recording context, sometimes for public purposes such as the American Museum of Natural
24 History (amnh)'s visual education programme; for others it was about recording more personal
25 memories of a journey. Other expeditions made use of film for commercial, propaganda or
26 military purposes. When read against the grain, obscure archival footage provides illuminating
27 insight into then current practices, assumptions and contradictions.
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33 The contributors show that the new medium of film was used together with
34 well-established visual and material practices of collecting, and how these meshed into various
35 institutional and private networks. Many institutions saw the educational potential of nonfiction
36 film for their visual education programs (Griffiths). Members of the international scientific
37 community recognized the scientific potential of film for conducting ethnographic research very
38 soon after its development, as evinced by Felix von Luschan in 1903 (Fuhrmann). Personal
39 ambition undoubtedly played a major role: Cooper and Schoedsack's filming of Iranian Bakhtiari
40 seasonal migration was also a record of their own personal ordeal, for public consumption
41 (Bradburd). Seen as the 'most influential medium in the world' by the League of Nations in the
42 1920s, film also held potential for minor figures concerned with personal upward mobility,
43 through membership of exclusive networks such as the Explorer's Club, New York (Gordon).
44 Members of youth movements such as the Woodcraft League (Griffiths) and Boy Scouts, which
45 aimed to reshape enfeebled manhood by instilling the values of courageous self-sufficiency
46 cultivated in nature, made perfect expeditionary film subjects (Lindstrom). Museums, such as the
47 amnh, used film in the new Automatic Motion Picture Projector, or Dramagraph (Griffith); and
48 taxidermist Robert Akeley asked the Johnsons to make 'authentic films of wildlife in its natural
49 state' for the amnh African Hall (Lindstrom). Film was more a private record for participants in the
50 Franklin Motor Expedition, and of less concern to the maa, eager to augment its holdings of
51 Canadian Prairie material (Brown). Not all expeditions shot film: the joint Adelaide Board of
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5 Anthropological Research together with the South Australia Museum venture to Mount Liebig
6 documented physical attributes – anatomical measurements, teeth, skin, eye colour, blood
7 samples, lung capacity, pain thresholds; made plaster casts of faces and torsos; recorded
8 genealogies and place names, and took photographs. Expeditions were sometimes organized by
9 government departments, such as the Soviet Siberian Statistical Agency (Anderson), and
10 sometimes mounted as international cooperative ventures, as between the US Agriculture
11 Department and the Dutch Committee for Scientific Research to New Guinea (Bell). What was
12 conceived as a scientific expedition could end as a military reconnaissance and mapping project in
13 the service of the Wehrmacht, in the early 1940s (Stoeker). The use of film as if it were evidential
14 rather than speculative in postwar television documentaries, such as *Lost World of the Kalahari*
15 (Laurens v.d. Post, 1957), where Bushmen are portrayed as the ‘pristine primitive’ (Van Vuuren).
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20 Although there is no mention of it in the book’s title, film is thus central to most of the
21 chapters – as a sort of optical unconscious that penetrated the material and visual practices of
22 interwar expeditions, whether or not a film was made. The spectacular dimension of early
23 twentieth-century cinema, to which Benjamin refers, percolated through into the nonfiction films
24 that were increasingly produced by interwar expeditions - along with lecture tours, lantern slides,
25 radio broadcasts and books. These increasingly popular products were perhaps attempts at
26 re-enchanting the world in the aftermath of devastation and search for new forms of heroism
27 following the First World War. Whereas Benjamin refers to the way cinema exploded the familiar
28 dungeons – ‘[o]ur pubs and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our factories and
29 railway stations’ (W. Benjamin, *Our Street and Other Writings*, London 2009, p.251) –
30 expeditionary films transported audiences, for whom the new technologies of travel were often out
31 of reach, into the blank spaces on the map which they could explore vicariously in the company of
32 dashing, well-equipped adventurers. The resulting popular misunderstandings perhaps explain
33 why professional anthropology distanced itself from its historical entanglements with expeditions,
34 film, photography and material culture – at least until the visual and material ‘turns’ of the late
35 twentieth century. Kuklick remarks in her afterword that ‘we are obliged to acknowledge that the
36 developments described in this collection were less survivals of moribund practices than markers
37 of continuities that still persist’. Rethinking received truths, she suggests, ought to lead to more
38 engagement by anthropologists with the task of enlightening popular audiences.
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45 That said, as Wintle reminds us, it was the determined and intrepid archivists who rescued
46 from neglect and photochemical and plastic film decay to whom we owe the bits and pieces that
47 survive. ‘Without the vision and perseverance of both explorer and archivist, these treasured
48 images – and the greater knowledge of our world they engender – would not now exist’. The great
49 merit of the contributions to this volume lies in unravelling some of these fascinating cases from
50 the archive. The editors have assembled a coherent chronological and analytical sequence of cases,
51 providing a cogent argument about the inter-war contact zone between adventure and
52 anthropology, and have crafted an immensely enriching addition to the history of collections.
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For Peer Review

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