

HyperCameras

impossible images made with hybrid machines (responses to photography in anthropology)

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MANIFESTO

The underlying idea for this collection came from my perception of the hyper-real nature of the photograph, and a desire to investigate the interaction between anthropological images and pictures that illustrate the invisible. Given this, the use of the HyperCamera (as I have termed it) seemed the only method that would facilitate this aim.

A HyperCamera is a hybrid machine designed to capture images of the invisible.

All of the following pictures have been made using such a hybrid to create a visualisation of something that is either too small to see, non-corporeal or virtual; in each case the components of the HyperCamera are described, as are any relevant processes.

The pictures have been created in response to images from 'Photography and Anthropology' by Christopher Pinney (2011) and other works. The nature of this response is described in the text accompanying each image, and the 'seed' images are also reproduced (here I cite academic fair-use), alongside the 'response' image.

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PART I: images of the virtual

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Virtual #1 – 'The Shattered Illusion'

The Family Tree (226, 69, 21) - Moderate - Ghost Rider Ranch



HyperCamera: Second Life server farm / the internet / PC with Second Life viewing software

Image: Second Life (SL) screengrab with visible GUI (Graphical User Interface)

Response to: 'August Shower' by E. E. Evans-Pritchard

This image utilises the visible Graphical User Interface (which is easily removed) to respond to Evans-Pritchard's famous 'tent' photo, whereby the presence of the pole and the flap shatters the illusion of being 'in' that world. The presence of the GUI also achieves this, as any pretence of immersion within the environment is removed by the existence of the interface.

Poremba (2006) writes 'It]he removal of visible interface elements is particularly revealing in terms of remediated photo aesthetics, as a more accurate visual depiction of a game image would be to contextualize the screenshot within the interface'; this image conforms to the notion of accuracy rather than aesthetics.

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'The Shattered Illusion': response and seed



'The Shattered Illusion' by the author (2010)



'August Shower' by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940)

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Virtual #2 - 'untitled snapshot 3'



HyperCamera: Second Life server farm / the internet / PC with Second Life viewer and Photoshop

Image: SL fuzzygraph (processed with 'blur' filter)

Response to: '..man in the form of a bird' by Steven Feld

The idea of representing movement through the use of the fuzzygraph is prevalent in the work with the Kaluli carried out by Steven Feld and this image of an avatar in motion is a response to this.

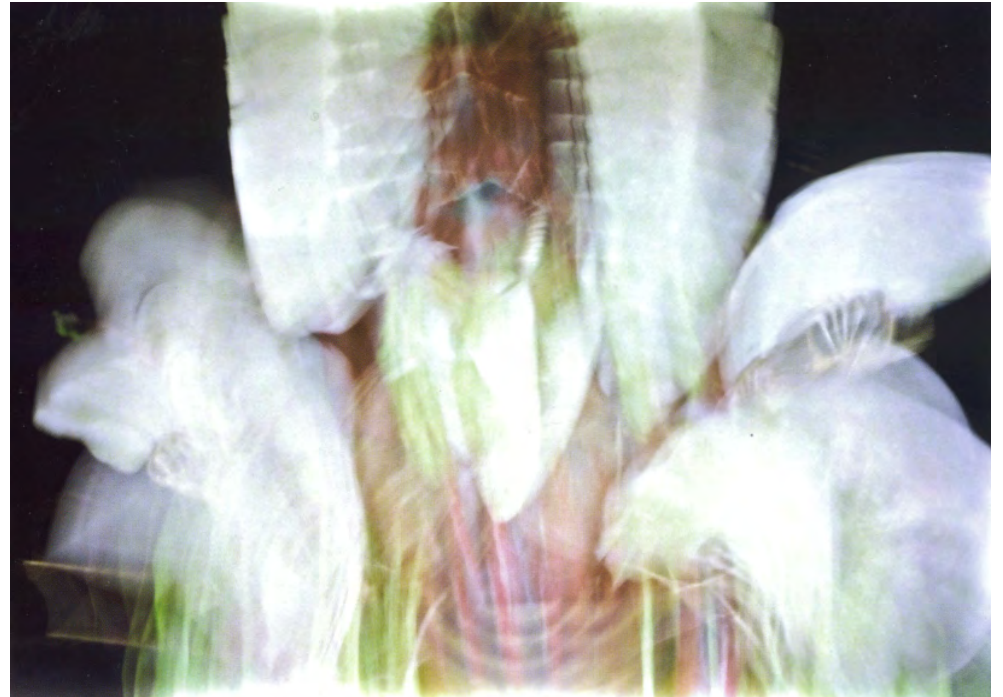
The blurring is applied in the direction of motion and, though this is entirely a simulation and exaggeration, Feld's '..man in the form of a bird' also contains an element of this; the photo was taken with a long exposure due to the lighting conditions, thus accentuating the impression of movement.

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'untitled snapshot 3': response and seed



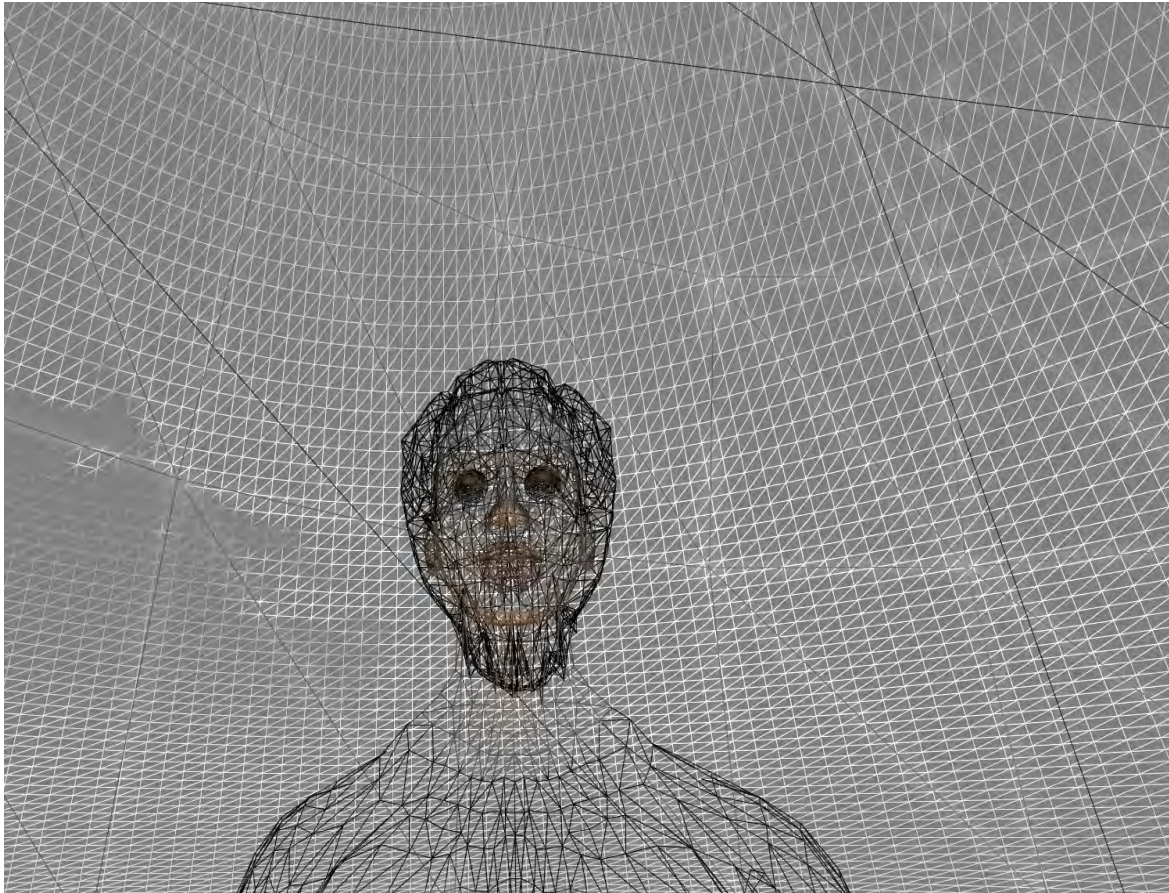
'untitled snapshot 3' by the author (2007)



'...man in the form of a bird' by Steven Feld (c1980s)

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Virtual #3 – 'At Gibson'



HyperCamera: Second Life server farm / the internet / PC with Second Life viewer

Image: SL wireframe render

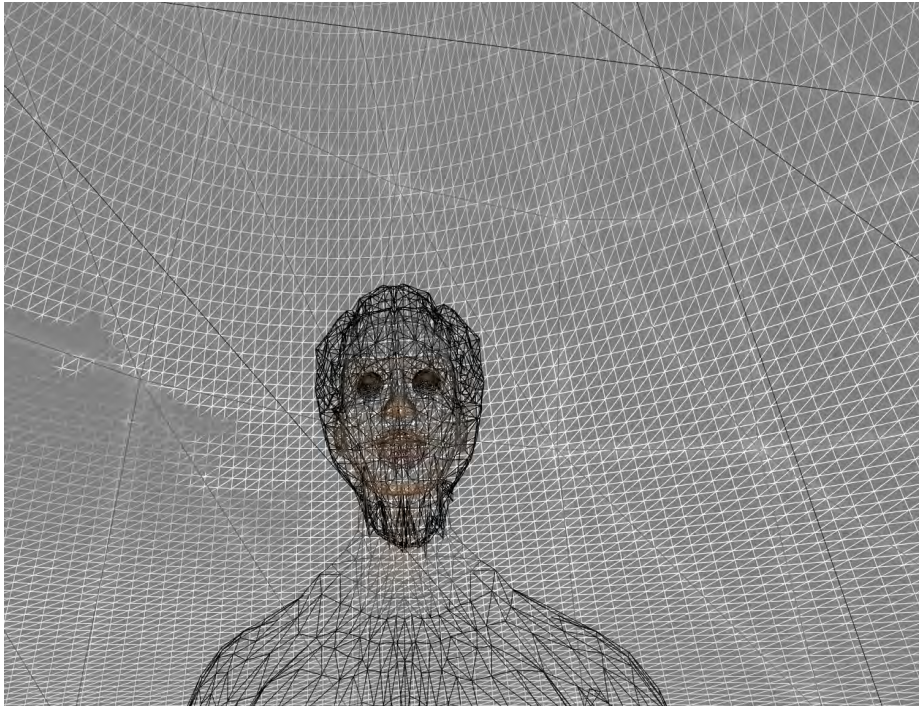
Response to: J.H. Lamprey's anthropometric photographic methods

This image is a reflection on the nature of photography as revealing only surfaces. The wireframe function of the virtual environment allows surfaces and textures to be wholly removed, leaving the polygon structure of the objects and agents visible and rendering everything essentially transparent.

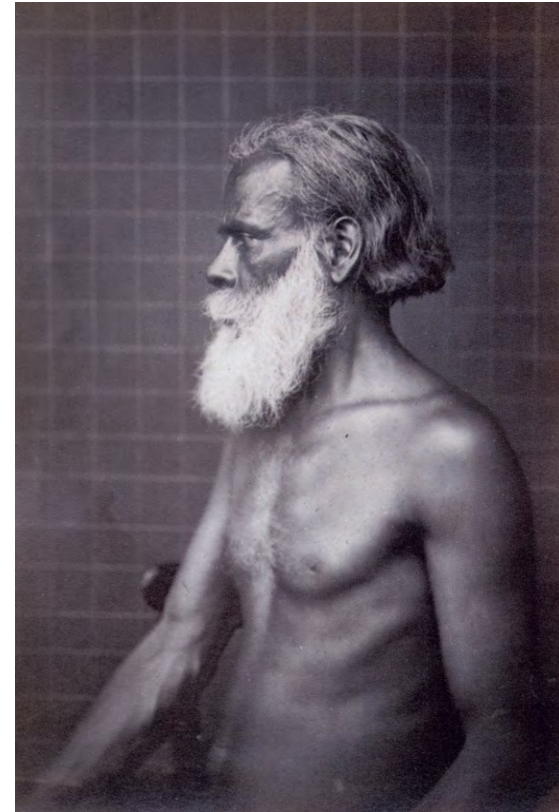
It is also a response to anthropometric photography, of which J. H. Lamprey was a major proponent, whereby subjects were photographed against a grid to enable accurate measurement of characteristics. This renders them as a class of object; wireframe also does this, by representing the subject as a series of components.

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'At Gibson': response and seed



'At Gibson' by the author (2011)



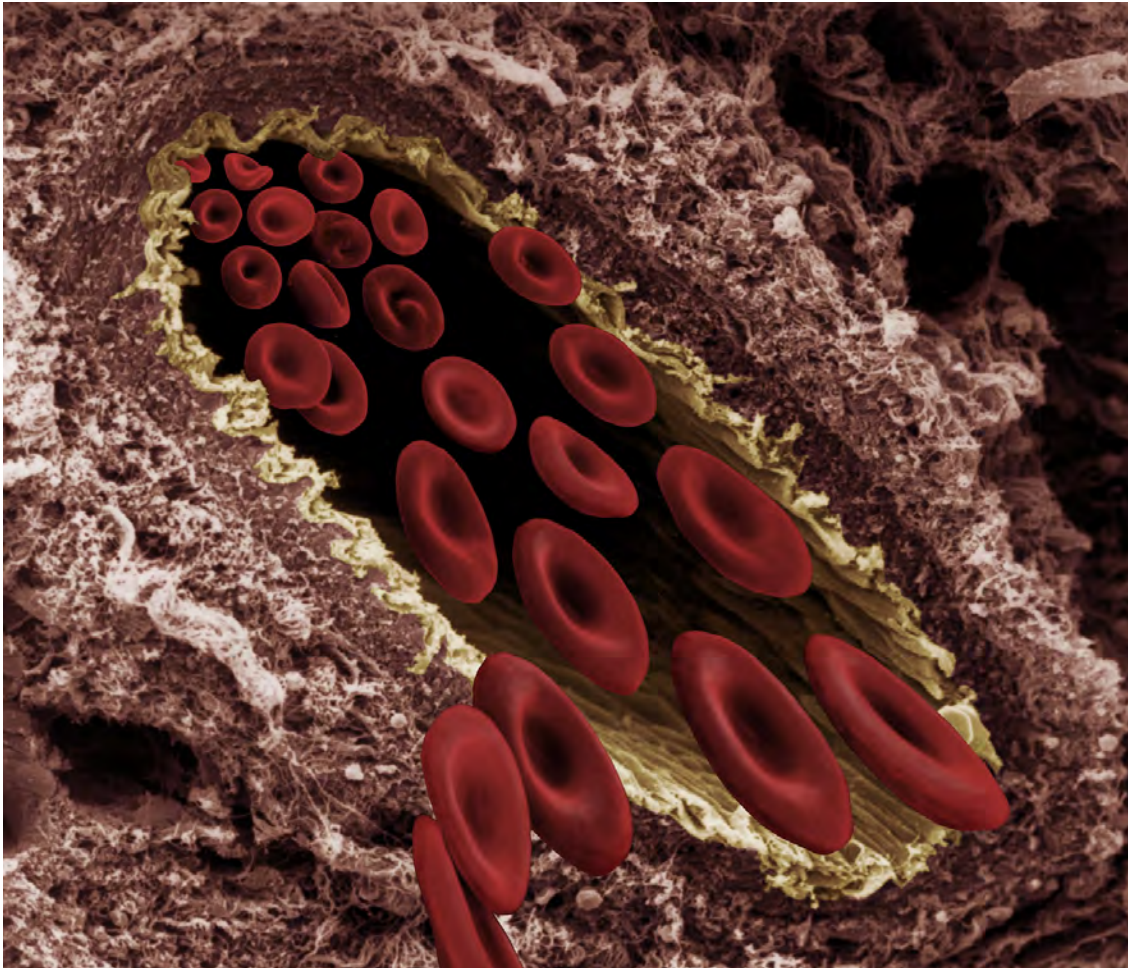
'man photographed against a Lamprey Grid'. unknown photographer
(c1870s)

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PART II: images of the invisible

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Microscopic #1 – 'Haem'



HyperCamera: electron microscope / camera / PC with Photoshop

Image: composited, coloured electron micrograph showing red blood cells on a background image of an artery

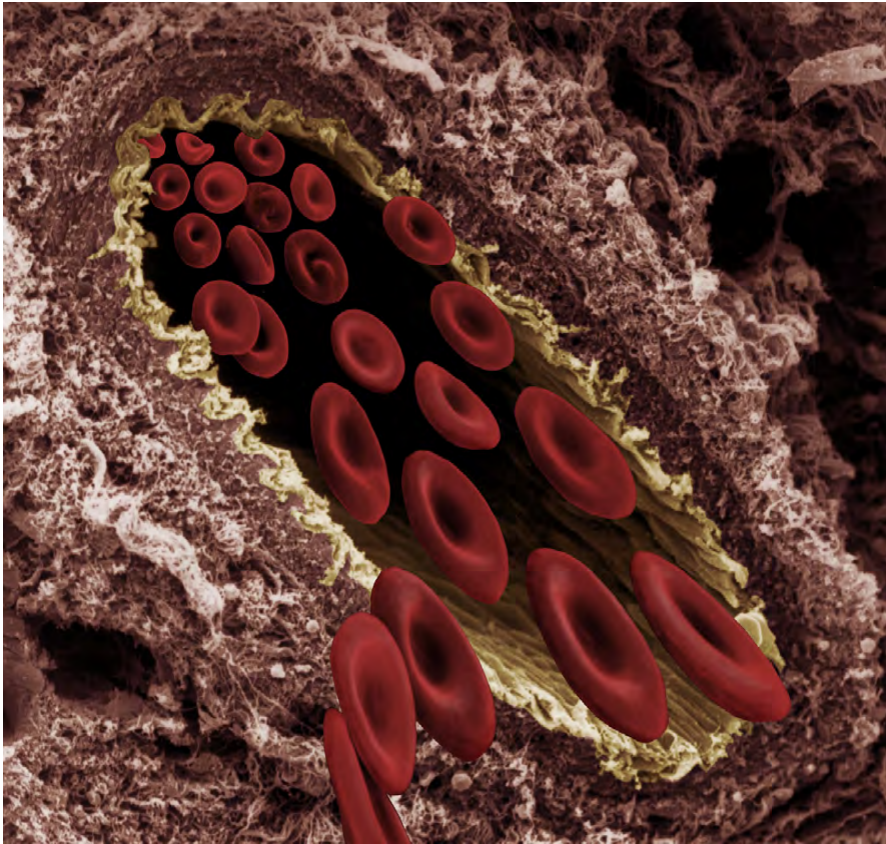
Response to: Javanese 'backdrop' photography

This image has been artificially coloured at the post-production stage. As a result of this, and the composition of two micrographs, this picture ceases to be an index of reality and becomes instead an iconographic representation of blood flowing.

Though the colouration of this image was my first thought (and I sought to use it as a response to over-painted Indian photography) what came through in the end was the use of the backdrop to create an impression of something illusory. This image is nothing like reality, but looks as if it should be. It is therefore a response to the Javanese photographic practice described in Strassler (2010) utilising backdrops to create (among other things) 'virtual travel photos'.

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'Haem': response and seed



'Haem' by A. J. Wilson (1999)



'Tan Gwat Bing and a companion pose against a “Dutch” backdrop'. unknown photographer (c1900)

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Microscopic #2 – 'Partial Portrait of [the author]'



HyperCamera: electron microscope / camera

Image: electron micrograph of a spermatozoa

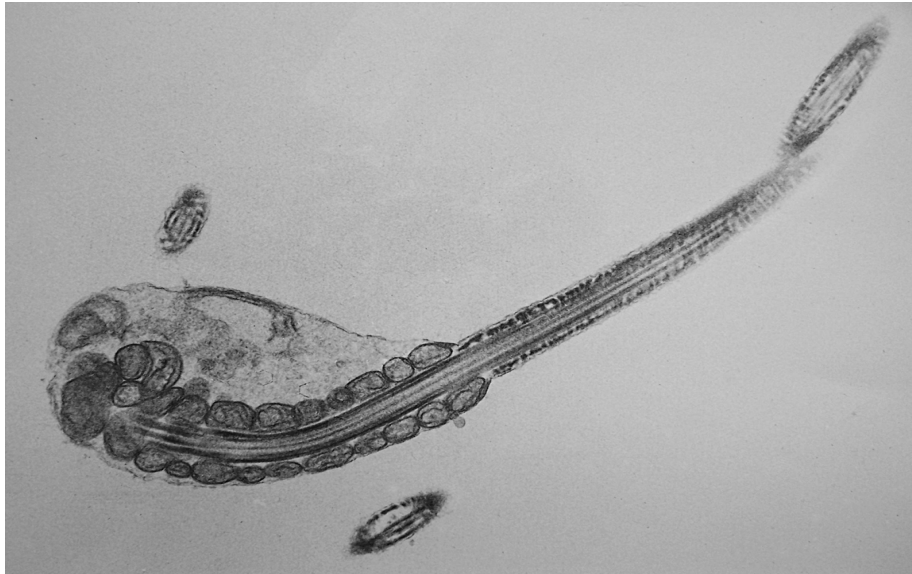
Response to: 'Malinowski with natives' by Billy Hancock

This image is a partial portrait of the author and, as such, is a response to the images of Malinowski in the Trobriand islands taken by Hancock.

The staged and performed nature of these images make them only partially 'real', and the fact that this is a group photo does not diminish the truth – this is primarily an image of Malinowski, 'the ethnographer', at work. The 'natives' within the frame are as much props as is the gourd in Malinowski's hands and 'Partial Portrait..' should, strictly speaking, be called 'Sperm with Mitochondria' to make the response complete.

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'Partial Portrait of [the author]': response and seed

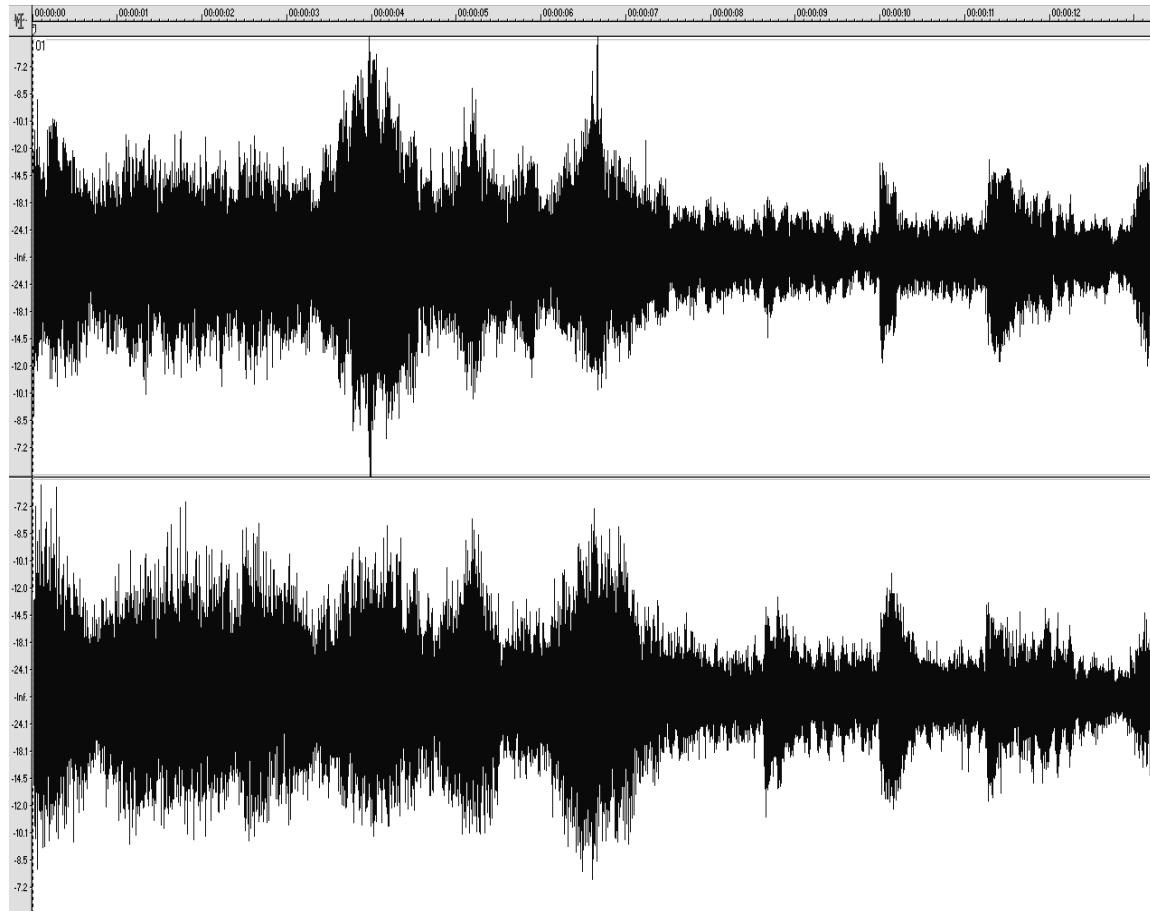


'Partial Portrait of [the author]' by A. J. Wilson (1997)



'Malinowski with natives' by Billy Hancock (1918)

Audio #1 – 'The Sound of Silent'



HyperCamera: media source / PC with audio analysis software

Image: audio wave file screen render

Response to: 'Nanook of The North' by Robert Flaherty

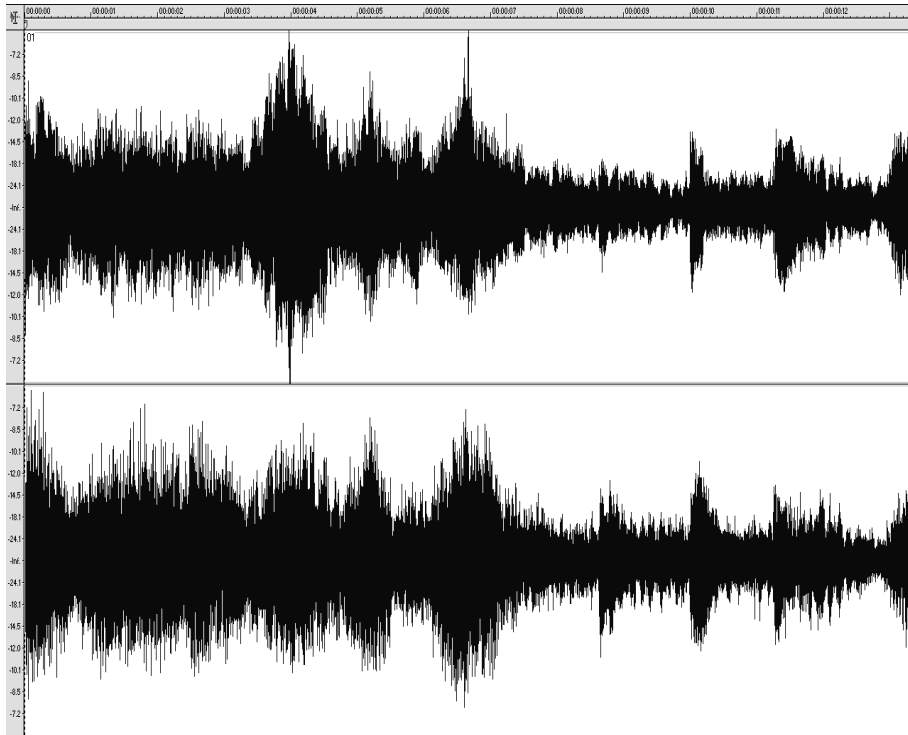
This image is a visual representation of a section from the soundtrack to Robert Flaherty's 1922 film 'Nanook of The North'. Although 'Nanook..' is a silent film, it features musical accompaniment and the audio is a captured section from the famous 'gramophone' scene depicted in the 'seed' image.

Taussig (1993) writes 'that the eye was to become more an organ of tactility than vision' and continues 'Flaherty wallows in a discourse of *spiritual unity* to be achieved through the mimetic' (p.200 - original emphasis).

This visualisation of the audiological seems a fitting response to Nanook / Flaherty / Taussig, and emphasises the synaesthetic aspects of the scene (where Nanook later attempts to eat the record).

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'The Sound of Silent': response and seed



PICTURE CREDITS AND REFERENCES:

Picture Credits

All images by the author except:

- p.6 'August Shower' by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940)
- p.8 '..man in the form of a bird' by Steven Feld (c1980s)
- p.10 'man photographed against a Lamprey Grid'. unknown photographer (c1870s)
- p.12 'Haem' by A. J. Wilson (1999)
- p.13 'Tan Gwat Bing and a companion pose against a “Dutch” backdrop'. unknown photographer (c1900)
- p.14 'Partial Portrait of [the author]' by A. J. Wilson (1997)
- p.15 'Malinowski with natives' by Billy Hancock (1918)
- p.17 'Nanook of The North' by Robert Flaherty (1922)

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References

Pinney, C. (2011) *Photography and Anthropology*. London: Reaktion Books

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Strassler, K. (2010) *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Taussig, M. (1993) *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. London: Routledge