Audiovisual Media and Identity Issues in Southeastern Europe
Audiovisual Media and Identity Issues in Southeastern Europe

Edited by

Eckehard Pistrick, Nicola Scaldiferri and Gretel Schwörer
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Preface ................................................................................................................................................... ix
Steven Feld

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1
Eckehard Pistrick

**Part I: The Field, the Senses and the Media**

A Tool for Research, a Source for Identity Construction:
Considerations and Controversies on the Use of Audiovisual Media........................................ 14
Nicola Scaldaferri

Noisy Images, Colourful Sounds: Representing the Senses
of the Carnival Body................................................................................................................................ 37
Panayotis Panopoulos

From Research Materials to Collaboration – Representing Three
Generations of Serbian Musicians........................................................................................................ 51
Lorenzo Ferrarini

Filming and Screening the Gypsy Funeral Wake:
Between the Representation of Sorrow and its Effect ........................................................................ 75
Filippo Bonini Baraldi

When Local Cultural Politics, State Television and the Anthropologist
Meet......................................................................................................................................................... 86
Marica Rombou-Levidi

‘The Medialised Field’ – Reflections on the Experience of Reality
and the Experience of Media................................................................................................................ 109
Eckehard Pistrick
## Part II: Constructing Southeastern Europe through Sounds and Images

Images of Folk Life in Wartimes: Austro-Hungarian Volkskunde and Photography of Southeastern Europe ......................................................... 130
Christian Marchetti

Multipart Singing CD Booklets as Artefacts of Bulgarian and Corsican Musical Identity .......................................................... 149
Yves Defrance

Picturing Public Space: Ethnicity and Gender in Picture Postcards of Iraklio, Crete, at the Beginning of the 20th Century ........................................ 171
Aris Anagnostopoulos

“How we became what we are”: Notes on a Photographic Exhibition in Northern Greece ................................................................. 192
Antonio Maria Pusceddu

Family Photographs in Socialist Albania: State Photography and the Private Sphere .......................................................... 210
Gilles de Rapper and Anouck Durand

Bulgarian Folk Music in National Television-Audiovisual Forms of Identity Construction .......................................................... 230
Veselka Toncheva

Questioning Socialist Folklorization: The Beltinci Folklore Festival in the Slovenian Borderland of Prekmurje ........................................ 238
Ana Hofman

Locating Local Identity in Photography – The Case of Mirdita, Northern Albania ............................................................. 258
Andreas Hemming

Why was Iordan not Interested in Pictures of Dancing Gypsies? A Bulgarian-Romani Music Festival and the Discourse of “European Civility” ............................................................. 273
Eran Livni
The Visual between Norm and Excess: Towards a Political Iconography of Postsocialist Serbia ................................................................. 291
Daniel Šuber and Slobodan Karamanić

Coda: Balkanising Taxonomy ............................................................... 312
Nela Milic

Contributors ......................................................................................... 326
FROM RESEARCH MATERIALS TO COLLABORATION – REPRESENTING THREE GENERATIONS OF SERBIAN MUSICIANS

LORENZO FERRARINI

Early in the morning, the sun is not yet on the rise. Tonight there was a frost, for the first time this fall, and the grass outside has lost its deep green colour to turn greyish as the leafless trees on the side of the hill. As I step out of the door, leaving the warm and silent house behind, I see the old family house on my left, with its sloping roof and the two small windows on the first floor. A linden tree stands at the centre of the yard: on the other side the wooden buildings of the cowshed and the tractors’ garage. In the distance I see the fat profile of two straw sheaves emerging through the morning mist. I am looking for deda (grandpa) Milenko, I know he wakes up first to feed the animals, split wood for the stove and perform other duties. Video camera in hand, I walk around the complex: I start from the cowshed, get to the pigsty and the sheep shed, walk past the straw sheaves following the fence until the doghouse at the back of the main building. He is not even in the firewood deposit. As I am on my way to get back inside the house I see him appearing in the distance, from the direction of the vegetable garden. Wearing a discoloured blue raincoat and matching garrison cap, he carries a big plastic bag full of peppers and carrots, proceeding with a stoop, but rapidly. He smiles and tells me something I cannot understand, and I reply with a very basic dobar dan (good morning). Milenko is a thin man, his face bears the signs of time spent working in the fields, still he looks younger than his 80 years and he is witty and bright-eyed. He repeats, this time pointing at the house and then mimicking somebody shaking and chattering his teeth. I grasped the word zima, it means cold: he is asking if I was cold last night. I try to answer ne (no), and dobre (good). He gets the message and smiles. As the frozen grass crackles under our feet we walk together to the house door, where he drops the bag with the vegetables he just picked from the garden.
We then continue up to the cowshed, Milenko from time to time tells me something I cannot understand, smiles, opens his mouth as to speak again but then gives up, with a sigh. He will keep telling me short sentences, but our way of communicating will become more and more based on gazes and gestures. I follow him keeping a few steps between us, and I have started to film. He walks turning from time to time in my direction, sometimes talking to me, sometimes to the small, hungry cats that follow him all the time. He opens the wooden door of the cowshed, a warm and dark room with the floor covered in straw. As my eyes adapt to the darkness and I turn up the camera’s gain, I see two cows tied to the opposite wall. Milenko is putting together a large bunch of maize plants taller than him, hugging it with his arms and staggering toward the manger. It is hard for him to drop the sheaf into the trough, as the hungry cows start to snap at the maize leaves hanging from his arms. With a few jerks and curses he finally manages to accomplish the task, and from the doorstep I see him smiling at me. Next we move to the nearby sheep shed. Again he turns to me, saying words I do not understand but pointing resolutely at one spot on the ground beside the sheep shed’s door. With gestures and words, he is telling me to wait there while he is going inside to let the sheep out. He disappears in the low wooden shed, leaving the external wicket open. I position myself in the spot he pointed out, preparing the camera by framing the fold’s two small doors. Suddenly the sheep rush out all together, running right beside me. I frame the exit, pan to a close up of the woollen bodies rushing by, and finally shoot the sheep grouping together a few meters away. Last comes Milenko, pushing them toward the meadow that flanks the house. From time to time he turns to me, as if to check if I am pleased with what I am seeing. Once the sheep are quietly grazing the short grass we head through the gate in the wooden fence that surrounds the complex. As the sun begins to rise from the treetops, the frost melts and the straw sheaves start to steam. As we enter the house, welcomed by a pleasant warmth, I think back to the sequence I just shot and realize that if I have the feeling from the LCD screen that it looked very good, it was mostly thanks to Milenko’s attitude toward me and the camera. While he kept working all the time, he acknowledged the presence of the camera collaborating with me in the shooting. I recall getting the same feeling the day before, as I was photographing him butchering a sheep we would eat for the following three days. He had been very careful in letting me record every stage, stopping from time to time and trying as much as possible not to cover the focus of the action with his body. He would even try to alert me before he would move to something else, so that I could be prepared, at least as far as our very basic ways of
communicating allowed. When I had to film the sheep getting out of the sheep shed, he showed me the right spot to catch their quick exit, knowing where I would not have been in their way and where they would head once let loose. And at times I got the feeling he was checking, with a sharp look, if I was satisfied with the shooting.

We leave our muddy shoes in the entrance, and put slippers on. As we open the kitchen door we step into an even warmer room, thanks to the wood stove. Milodraga, Milenko’s daughter-in-law, has prepared a rich breakfast for the whole family: her daughter Kristina and Milenko’s wife, Danica. I sit at the wooden table and join the other guests that came to the house with me, Nicola and Elisa. Verbal communication starts to work again between Italians and Serbians, thanks to Kristina’s role as an interpreter. Milenko reports about our short filming session while we enjoy coffee, biscuits, roasted peppers in oil, fresh cheese and butter. Most of this food is prepared with the vegetables grown on site by Milenko, or with the milk from his cows. The same goes for the strong rakija we have been drinking, homemade from plums grown around the house. The whole family is very proud of feeding its guests with its own products, as if the fact that they come from the family’s land adds a more personal and intimate dimension to their quality. It is about time for Miladin and Ivan, Milenko’s son and grandson, to arrive from Gornji Milanovac to join the rest of the family. In the meantime, I begin setting up the dining room using old carpets woven by baka (grandma) Danica as a dowry. Mixing red, black and white in geometrical patterns, they are very thick, made out of heavy wool threads. I place them all around the sofa to minimize sound reflections from the floor and the walls. I also set the microphone stand so that it won’t get caught in the field of view of the video camera I placed on a small tripod in a corner, to record a continuous wide shot. I will operate the other camera concentrating on medium shots and close-ups. As I am going through a final check of the cameras’ placement and settings, I hear the roaring sound of Miladin’s old Volkswagen Golf approaching from on the dirt road.

The Mirković Family

In October 2010 the LEAV (Ethnomusicology and Visual Anthropology Laboratory) of the University of Milan started a research on the Mirković family, three generations of Serbian musicians. As part of the research team comprised of Elisa Piria and Nicola Scaldaferrri, I participated by shooting photographs and video during the four days we spent in the old family house in the village of Koštunići. In this small village in Central
Serbia, part of the Šumadija district, we asked each member of the family to perform alone and in groups, recording 17 hours of video, 9 hours of audio and taking more than a thousand photographs. Additionally, we recorded interviews with the youngest, English speaking generation and digitized the family’s photographic archive, dating back to the early 1940s.

This brief trip to Serbia is just one part of the research project, which started from the musical activities of Kristina Mirković in Milan, Italy. A classical violin player and at the same time immersed since her birth into the tradition of her family, Kristina is active in different ensembles moving across different musical genres. But she also prepared a dissertation on the repertoire of her family, and in the summer of 2010 conceived, with Nicola Scaldaferri, the idea of creating a kind of family portrait in images and sound. Thus they planned to gather the family together and during a few days to explore their musical repertoire and stimulate them to present themselves to the lens and to the microphone of the researchers. To do research focusing on a single family of musicians stands on an already quite well-travelled path in the studies on Southeastern Europe (Rice 1994, Tole 2007). The idea is to be able to account for the changes in the way music is lived and performed throughout the generations, especially if such a unique continuity is preserved through time. In fact, together with her younger brother Ivan, Kristina is the offspring of a dynasty of musicians starting with her great grandfather, Zarija Jocović, himself a violin player and lutist. His daughter, Danica (b. 1935), married Milenko Mirković (b. 1930), a farmer and bugarija player. Their son Miladin (b. 1954) has been an accordion player for weddings, and married Milodraga (b. 1955) giving birth to Kristina (b. 1981) and Ivan (b. 1983).

With the passing of generations, the ways the Mirković related to music, changed. Their degree of professionalism as musicians increased over time. Milenko, shortly after World War Two, was mainly a farmer and played with his brother and his father-in-law during annual festivities and weddings. It was common at that time, much like nowadays, that at weddings, songs were played on demand, the musicians getting paid at each request. Most of the songs of the wedding repertoire can be grouped under the label of kolo, referring generally to music danced in circles, in different rhythmic patterns. Although wedding parties could last up to three days and Milenko would play at up to three in a row, the impact of agricultural work was strong. Consequently, a ‘playing season’ would delineate in autumn, once the farmers would be done with the harvest, with abundance of food and most of the weddings would take place. For the rest of the year, and especially during the summer, there would just not be time for extended celebrations, although occasionally there would be
music after collective work in the fields. I understand that the income deriving from his playing activity would be a welcome resource for Milenko, but his subsistence would always be dependent on his main occupation as a farmer and his secondary job as a bricklayer. His son Miladin in a certain sense stands in between his father’s role and the figure of a completely professional musician. Living and working in Gornji Milanovac, a town with a population of 25,000 about one hour by car from Koštunići, he keeps a job as a fitter of commercial and industrial refrigeration systems. Still, for most of his life he played accordion during state, army and factory celebrations. When he started concentrating on weddings though, the income generated became comparable with his full time job. He played mainly during weekends and holidays from the 1970s to the 1990s. With a group called Stari Drugari (Old Friends) he moved around a much wider area than his father, especially in the north-eastern Serbian area of Smederevo and Požarevac, but also in Beograd and Novi Sad, and especially from the 1980s to the outbreak of the war he performed for migrants returning back home from Austria, Switzerland or Germany. At that time the musicians hired for a wedding were paid by the married couple, and additionally received money from the guests requesting a song. On the other hand, to play in distant regions required the musician to have a good degree of flexibility, adapting to his clients’ musical tastes, especially as far as stylistic traits are concerned. He would then ‘localize’ newly fashionable music like samba or rumba, turning them rhythmically into a kolo, to make it easier for people to dance. Additionally, he was also required to adapt to more subtle local ornamentations, such as a peculiar regional trill. Therefore, an important investment in time to widen one’s repertoire and keep it up to date was implied. Although he mainly relied on memory to learn new songs, unlike his father, Miladin is able to read music and sometimes would use books, manuals and recordings to familiarize with the style of different regions. Interestingly, during the period he played regularly, he was aware of another kind of investment, spending much of his gains on new, modern and powerful sound equipment. According to Miladin, showing a quality rig improved the appeal of the group, translating into higher profits. Keeping this kind of in-between role was not easy and involved devoting all of his free time to the activities of a musician. During the war in the 1990s he had to lend his equipment for military communications and organized folkloric music concerts for the high ranks of the Yugoslav army, thus finding a role that luckily prevented him from being sent to the front.

A similar flexibility also characterizes the youngest Mirković
generation. Kristina and Ivan, the former in Italy and the latter in Serbia, both make up their living through music-related jobs, somehow like their father adapting to a variety of situations and demands. Kristina plays violin in a classical orchestra, a jazz trio, a multi-ethnic ensemble and performs Balkan music with various Roma and ex-Yugoslavian musicians. Ivan lives in Beograd and works as an arranger and composer for a small recording studio. He also performs on local and national television stations with a few bands as a guitar and bass player. But he also carries on the family tradition as a wedding musician with the Vivo Bend ensemble. The variety of repertoires in their case has expanded in a dramatic way if compared to the step between their father and grandfather. To live on music also means having to be opportunistic, as when Ivan told us about composing and arranging music for television series: he has to conform to standards he considers low and very banal, but he creates this kind of music to comply with the client’s requests. The rationale is clearly that working in this sector is a temporary solution that still leaves him the time to play and compose the kind of music he prefers.

This intergenerational variety notwithstanding, a few common traits are shared by all three generations I came in contact with. One that may seem secondary but should not be overlooked is the intimate, family dimension of music. When all three generations manage to gather in the Koštunići house, often for festive circumstances, it is common to hear them playing together. This not only confirms that they are able to meet on the ground of a shared repertoire, but also reinforces the association of this repertoire with an affectively charged place that is considered one of true belonging. As generations settle progressively more and more distant from Koštunići – Gornji Milanovac, Beograd, or Milan in Italy – and music becomes more and more of a job, family gatherings renew the experience of playing music as a pleasure. Milenko for example stopped playing in public after his brother’s early death, but sometimes takes up a guitar or sings with his relatives. But possibly it is from Kristina’s dissertation that the link between place, family and affects shows the most, in the form of childhood memories with a hint of nostalgia. Much of this common repertoire, taking of course into account the many changes over time, is wedding music. All three generations played for wedding parties, because of their importance among the lifetime rituals and as a source of income.

**Research Materials**

Thinking back to those four days I spent in Koštunići, I wondered about the soundness of that experience as part of ethnographic research. Still I
am trying to make sense of what is still an on-going process. First of all I was worried because of the brevity of our stay in Serbia, but also because nobody in the research team was able to speak Serbian. Given my training as an anthropologist I am used to think that recordings should be part of a wider process of extended research, including a long-term familiarization with the ways of living of the people involved. The fact of dealing with musical performance should not exempt them from this approach, as the place of music in society and the need to observe it in context has been remarked on and widely accepted since long ago (Merriam 1964, Blacking 1973). I am particularly concerned by the use of audio and visual recordings in the field here, as in my opinion many anthropologists and ethnomusicologists still approach them with a naivety that is unparalleled in ethnographic writing. Even acknowledging the on-going struggle of visual anthropology to establish itself as an approach with solid theoretical foundations, one has to admit that so many ‘mainstream anthropologists’ still make a completely uninformed use of visual and acoustic media. In part, there seems to be a persistent empiricist belief according to which cameras and sound recorders ‘gather data’ in a fairly neutral way. These data will later be the subject of analysis, and this stage will be very epistemologically aware, complex and reflexive. Also strictly connected is the very concept of ‘research materials,’ meaning for example footage that is not shot for editing and publication, but just for internal use as audiovisual field notes. While I am not stating that all what is recorded is meant for publication, this does not mean that what is not shot for publication should be recorded with a realist, empiricist concern for ‘documenting’. Somehow I see a relationship with Margaret Mead’s ideas as expressed in her introduction to the Principles of Visual Anthropology (Mead 1975), and the worries of those concerned with urgent or salvage anthropology. Furthermore, even anthropologists that Geertz labelled as suffering from epistemological hypochondria (1988: 71) sometimes seem to be perfectly at ease with what they call a ‘document,’ as if it spoke by itself. My main contention is that it is very difficult to be able to unleash the potential of audiovisual media to generate a different kind of knowledge from written text if we keep treating recordings as transparent representations of their object, or transparent representations of the experience of the researching subject (see Ferrarini 2009). Just like ethnography is a method and, even if there is no clear-cut agreement on what it is about, we by now share the belief that it can be applied to any social group in any country of this increasingly complex world, then I expect ethnographic recordings to be framed into an anthropological methodology. The field should rather be approached with specific
strategies tuned to the research context, chosen after a deep enquiry into local custom and visual/acoustic culture. Otherwise, what makes my gaze anthropological, if not an approach? The idea that it is the object that makes the research of anthropological interest is long dead, as in ethnomusicology – perhaps with some more difficulty – it is accepted that the old idea confining classical music to musicologists and ‘the rest’ to ethnomusicologists has become untenable (Blacking 1973, Nettl 1983, Nettl 1995).

To come back to the short Serbian experience, I did not want to be neither another data gatherer nor a producer of ‘research materials’. The sheer fact that the time we had was too limited for anything more than what we did was not much of a comfort. At the same time, to claim that my work there represents just my point of view and my subjective experience of that reality would equate to an admission of failure. As much as I can be an advocate for reflexivity in anthropology, if the discipline should ever become unable to say something on its object, then it would no doubt be next to useless. Additionally, from the point of view of the ethics of fieldwork, I felt that such a short-term relationship was characterized by a very unequal and unfair giving relationship. The researchers would visit for a few days, record loads of excellent music, enjoy a wonderful hospitality and eventually leave, to realize some kind of product that would bear their name as authors. Equally characterized by a one-way direction is the knowing relationship between the researcher and persons conceived only as his/her objects of study. This ‘predatory’ aspect is especially evident when dealing with recordings and was classically criticized by Susan Sontag in her seminal work On Photography (1977).

I seem to be at a point of reaching an impasse here, apparently struggling between my position as an external spectator and the internal, informed observer I could not be. But maybe the frame is more complex than this opposition would reveal. The dichotomy between external and internal that emerges from my reflections should put me on the right path to understand the limits of my analysis. In other words, I realize I have been dealing with the worries of approaching the situation whether from a very objectifying or from a much subjectified point of view. The former, when I did not want to produce mere ‘research materials’ and the latter when I refused to think that I could only speak about my experience. The opposition of these two poles is not leading anywhere; rather it led me to completely overlook the role of the Mirković. To make such a short research experience work so well they must have been something more than the object of my gaze, entities with given characteristics with respect to which I debate how to position myself. Then, it can be worthwhile to
read again those four days in the light of ideas which allow us to rethink this subject-object opposition. To do this, I need to start from a large detour in the field of cognitive science. I am going to use some of the work of Francisco Varela, a Chilean biologist and neuroscientist, to propose an alternative he called enactive approach. Although the bridge connecting his ideas, apparently very abstract, and this specific ethnographic case may not seem very evident, the consequences of their applications can have very practical effects on the use of recordings in ethnography.

The Enactive Paradigm

In the most representative work on the enactive approach, The Embodied Mind (Varela et al. 1991), Varela analyzes the two most influential theories in the history of cognitive sciences. Both cognitivism and connectionism, he writes, their own way brought to rethink the very idea of a unitary thinking subject, breaking it down into computational processes or emergent properties (1991: chapters 3 and 5). Both also share the way they rely on representation as reconstruction of given properties of a world that is independent from the cognitive agent. According to this conception, fundamental for both cognitivism and connectionism, the efficacy of a cognitive system is measured by the internal accuracy in reconstructing the properties of the external environment. We get here to a crucial point of The Embodied Mind: after he undermined the concept of unitary self as we are used to experiencing it, thanks to the findings of cognitivism and connectionism, Varela proposes to invalidate the very concept linking mind and world in both cognitivist and connectionist theories. He refers to the idea that mind represents, more or less faithfully, a world with given characteristics that are independent from cognition. The limit of the approaches to cognition previously described is the very idea of representation, of mind as the mirror of nature.

The meaning of representation can be dealt with at two different levels. The first one is described as weak, due to the lack of epistemological depth and to its conventional communicative function: it is a semantic sense, just as in the map-territory relationship or if one considers writing as a simple transcription of actual spoken utterances. The second level is epistemologically much stronger, since it considers mental representation as the basis for cognition. According to this conception, underlying both cognitivism and connectionism, the efficacy of a cognitive system can be judged from the internal representation’s degree of accuracy of the environment’s given and independent characteristics. Cognitive sciences are gradually moving away from this conception, also thanks to the idea of
operational closure (Varela 1979), which is a system where the outcome of the processes is represented by processes themselves. A quotation from Minsky is telling:

“But it makes no sense to speak of brains as though they manufacture thoughts the way factories make cars. The difference is that brains use processes that change themselves – and this means we cannot separate processes from the products they produce. In particular, brains make memories, which change the ways we’ll subsequently think. The principal activities of brains are making changes in themselves” (Minsky 1986: 288).

These kinds of mechanisms are self-organizing and do not work through representation of an independent world but “enact a world as a domain of distinctions that is inseparable from the structure embodied by the cognitive system” (Varela et al. 1991: 140). One can read here a radical critique to the Cartesian foundation of knowledge, to his idea of mind as the mirror of nature, to the subject-object opposition. The acceptance of the latter dichotomy for Varela offers no way out, as the belief in the world’s independent qualities is always mediated by representation. The latter, being by definition always inaccurate, brings in the end a turn toward the self in search of a foundation for knowledge.

At this point Varela moves to the description of his idea of enaction, or embodied knowledge. The main problem with the approaches described above, both forms of cognitive realism, is the way they consider cognition in terms of problem solving, an attitude that suits simple and controlled situations, with discrete elements. This works well for playing chess, a world described mainly in terms of propositional knowledge, but not for the very procedural field of vehicle driving, for example. In the latter case a determining role is assumed by the experience of previous situations, and the representation of objects, properties and events becomes ambiguous, dependent from highly varied contexts and subject to a specific end. The world of common sense is thus opposed to the highly delimited environments of robots inspired by cognitivism: not only more complex and faded, the former is also continuously reshaped by the actions of the cognitive agent. Nonetheless cognitive scientists, for the most part, instead of looking toward those continental European philosophies that remind us the way knowledge is connected to our embodied history and world, mostly rely on semiotically-oriented Anglo-American analytical philosophers. One can think about the differences between the first and the second period in Wittgenstein’s thought, but probably the philosopher closest to Varela is Merleau-Ponty. The proposal is then to consider the subject and object of knowledge, mind and the world or “organism and
This relationship is the enaction, or production, of a world. This world is not reconstructed through representation — be it reconstruction or projection — but created through embodied action. With this term, Varela aims at tying action and perception together with a physical and cultural context, giving knowledge a concrete characterization. Reality is not arbitrarily constructed by the perceiver but depends on him, “because what is considered as relevant world is inseparable from the perceiver’s structure” (Varela 1994: 151). Instead of using perception in order to reconstruct an independent world, we need to study “the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided” (Varela et al. 1991: 200). Merleau-Ponty somehow similarly pointed out, in La Structure du Comportement (1942), that the subject both shapes and is shaped by the environment. Perception works at the enaction — production — of the surrounding world:

“on pourrait dire aussi que le comportement est la cause première de toutes les stimulations. Ainsi la forme de l’excitant est créée par l’organisme lui-même, par sa manière propre de s’offrir aux actions du dehors. [...] c’est lui [...] qui choisit dans le monde physique les stimuli auxquels il sera sensible” (Merleau-Ponty 1942: 11-12).

Varela reports on a few laboratory experiments to underline the cognitive role of action in perception: for example, the case of kittens raised in the dark and later on passively exposed to visual stimuli of the external world, who demonstrated an identical behavior to blind specimens, unable to ascribe qualities to surfaces they had no active experience of. One can apply this conception of cooperative production of world and cognition also to categorization, provided it is conceived as created according to the possibilities offered by objects to a specific perceiver: the concept of affordance by James J. Gibson (1979) seems relevant on this subject. Forms of cognitive realism such as cognitivism and connectionism discovered the absence of the subject through its scientific analysis but, as the most part of western thought offers no alternative to the subject-object complementarity, the subject’s annihilation is performed through objectification. The subjective component is then relegated to the area of representations. The enactive paradigm, on the other hand, questions the givenness of both foundations of knowledge, self and world. It is a quest for a middle way between two extreme approaches to knowledge, absolutism and nihilism, carried on according to Merleau-Ponty’s double concept of body, as lived experiential structure and context of all cognitive
processes. I believe the contribution of such a theory to the methodology of anthropological research can be very innovative. The collapse of the boundaries separating subject and object and their reciprocal determination through structural coupling means a radical critique to the observational method. Fieldwork would no more be conceived as description or documentation of human groups with given characteristics, to be investigated with minimal influence on the researcher’s behalf. Varela is not against generalizations, but suggests how described features spring from a specific encounter of a researcher with a field, and from each one’s histories. From this perspective, what is the point of the search for an unattainable non-influence, according to the fly on the wall ideal? On the contrary, if one considers the critique of cognition as representation and reconstruction of the external world’s qualities, it is possible to rethink recordings, rather than as documents, as the outcome of a field encounter, as the hybrid product of an interaction. The researcher will neither try to reconstruct an ‘authentic’ status quo, nor to hide traces of his presence. But it is not even his point of view to be the focus point; it is the experience of an encounter and a reciprocal determining. Instead of forbidding himself to participate in the situations he is witnessing, the ethnographer can explore the creative possibilities of the production of reality, recording provocation and feedback. It is not so much about altering as it is about giving birth to new situations: instead of verifying hypothesis with a strictly experimental method, it is about creatively expanding the research field in unexpected directions (Ferrarini 2008).

The dialogue between the short research experience in Koštunići and Varela’s ideas brings me to stress and expand on a specific meaning of the word enact, one that is akin to acting or playing in a theatrical sense. That social life has a performative dimension is not a recent idea in the social sciences, and was explored for example by Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective (1959), but also in linguistics (Austin 1955) and of course in anthropology mainly thanks to the work of Victor Turner (1967, 1982, 1987). Varela’s enactive paradigm would add the idea of cooperation to this performance, including the researcher’s intervention. According to this perspective the researcher and his/her subjects are bound together in a relational system, shaping each other in reciprocal interaction. To come back to audiovisual recordings, it becomes important to acknowledge the way they are the outcome of a form of collaboration between the ethnographer and the people he/she studies. And if I think about my experience with the Mirković family, I cannot deny that those four days were strongly marked by a performative character. The most obvious factor is the presence of music and the way the family filled the time we
spent at their house. It was obviously much more intense than any other Mirković family gathering, with recordings going on from breakfast to dinnertime. The rhythms of life in the house were subject to the acoustic requirements of the three researchers and their equipment, implied removing clocks from the walls to stopping Milodraga from cooking and limiting the access to the room chosen for the recordings. In a very broad sense, hospitality itself can be seen as a form of performance, meant as giving and showing to the guest the best of one’s possibilities, trying to meet his expectations. Thus, the family’s choices of staying in the old farmhouse, in its bucolic setting, of killing the sheep only after our arrival and the proud display of tasty food. But it is important to rethink any kind of association of the idea of performing with faking or not being sincere. Using Varela to orient the approach to this situation means precisely an attempt to get rid of issues of authenticity or the very idea of a privileged access to layers of reality in a pristine, original state. As I see it, the recordings made during the four days in Serbia were as much the fruit of a performance as of a collaboration. The whole family was involved in helping us make the most of our stay, giving us what they held as the best of their music, food, landscape and so on. With different approaches, three generations collaborated to let three foreigners create a family portrait: even if with different motivations and degrees of involvement, they all worked for the project to succeed. I tried to give the reader an idea of the way the Mirković are, each of them in their own way, performing specialists and very flexible according to the kind of audience. They are also very self-conscious and attentive regarding the image of themselves they present to their audience, so the kind of perspective I am adopting here is not completely alien to them, I believe. I want to stress how collaboration is always part of the ethnographic project, if its ends are shared, even when it is not explicit or communication is extremely poor. Here Milenko comes to my mind, helping me to film his morning tasks in the best way or butchering the sheep and yet facilitating the work of a cameramen and a photographer around him. To conceive reality in such a dynamic and continuously constructed way as Varela does, also accounts for the degree of unpredictability that characterizes the ethnographic field. In other words, one should not think that the stress on performing implies a static self-representation on the performer’s behalf. The kind of dialogue that is implied in a collaborative research always gives birth to something new, and this situation was no exception. Kristina’s mother, Milodraga, in her daughter’s dissertation is mainly given the role of the musician’s wife, accounting for her life as a working woman dealing with a house full of musicians and a husband often away for weddings. On the second day of
our stay in Koštunići, thanks to our and Kristina’s insistence, she agreed to sing for the recorder, revealing her mastery of traditional vocal ornamentations and a repertoire of traditional songs. This was a surprise especially to her relatives, as she never sung in their presence.

Interaction and Collaboration

Hopefully, my hesitations ended up pointing my attention to some fertile directions. It is not the case to focus on the duration of fieldwork itself, but rather to acknowledge and promote a transformation of the ethnographic method in response to the transformations of the ethnographic field, becoming more and more complex and interrelated (see the debate between George Marcus and Judith Okely 2007). The traditional long-term, more or less sedentary fieldwork is regarded as less and less appropriate to study complex and transnational social formations. I think here for example of the transformations in the work of Steven Feld, who became known with a very detailed study of the weeping and singing of the Kaluli people of New Guinea. His research was sedentary and long-term, according to the canons of classical ethnographic fieldwork. After publishing his celebrated *Sound and Sentiment* (1982) he kept returning to the Bosavi area and produced more works in writing and sound that consolidated his authority as an expert of that region and people. But starting approximately from 2000 on, he started a series of projects focused on bells as acoustic markers of time and space, carried on mostly in images and sounds. The scope of this project was a much more global and comparative one, and brought him to places as disparate as many European countries, Ghana and Japan. This turn in Feld’s work was not well received by some scholars, accusing him of sacrificing ethnographic depth and of working in places where he could not speak the language. I would like to remark that this ‘new’ interest is very coherent with his long-lasting interest in *acoustemology* (1996), and also that some of those ‘incursions’ gave birth to highly collaborative projects with both local scholars and performers, for example in Ghana (Feld 2005 Disc, Accra Trane Station 2007a Disc, 2007b Disc, Annan and Feld 2008 Disc), in Italy (Feld 2004a Disc, 2004b Disc, 2005, 2007 Disc, Scaldaferri forthcoming) and in Greece (Keil et al. 2002, Feld 2004a Disc, 2004b Disc, Blau et al. 2010). To adopt a broader and comparative perspective is a necessity motivated by the transformations in the cultural webs of circulation becoming more and more global, and shared and collaborative projects could help to compensate the limitations in fieldwork length consequent to the researcher’s increased mobility.
But this is just one side to the matter. The theoretical tools provided by Francisco Varela can help delineate a research style that goes beyond documentation, representing the interaction between the researcher and the field. Francesco Marano originally wrote about enactive poetics concerning ethnographic film (2007: chapter 6). Two aspects, deeply interrelated, constitute this approach, and the work of Jean Rouch is an extraordinary model for both. The first is participation as interaction used purposefully as a research tool, as an acknowledgment of the co-constructed character of reality. In 2005 I witnessed a particularly evident example of such a situation while collaborating on a research project about the Maggio festival in Accettura, Italy. Nicola Scaldaferrri, leading the research team, is also a zampogna (a kind of double reed bagpipe) player and is native to a village not far away from Accettura. Here local men are very fond of a genre of singing accompanied by the zampogna, but the local playing tradition has virtually extinguished. So instead of filming, taking notes and interviewing during the days of the festival, Scaldaferrri was forced to play all the time for the local singers. His reflections on this unique perspective resulting from his particular position becomes visible in a dialogue with Steven Feld in the book When the Trees Resound (Scaldaferrri forthcoming). One of the most striking examples of this radical participation is probably Rouch’s film Tourou et Bitti: Les Tambours d’Avant (1971), a single nine minutes plan sequence that leads to the anthropologist triggering possession in the participants, thanks to his recording presence (Rouch 1973, Stoller 1992: 161-173). Rouch was a master in using the camera as a catalyst and in provoking his subjects to action. Other examples are to be found in his previous film Chronique d’un été (1960), which introduces another aspect I take from Varela’s ideas, that of participation as collaboration. In the film, considered extremely experimental for the period it was made, the process of its own making is represented in many scenes, as well as moments of discussion with the participants/characters. In many other films Rouch shared the authoring process with the people he was filming, to the point of improvising the storyline of the film itself with them, and theorizing an anthropologie partagée – shared anthropology. Part of this process was also the sharing of the audiovisual products with screening sessions like that represented in Chronique d’un été. From this point of view Rouch’s master was Robert Flaherty, who used screenings as a fundamental part of his methodology during the shooting of Nanook of the North (1922). That film was, at least from the practical point of view, a collaborative project between Flaherty and his main character Allakariallak. The two would discuss the sequences to shoot day by day, and Nanook/Allakariallak would perform for the camera, as required by the
technological means of the early 1920s. Sequences like the seal hunt and the igloo interiors are among the best-known examples. The main innovation brought by Rouch was to represent this process of co-authoring in the film itself. Steven Feld has drawn inspiration from Rouch to elaborate a methodology he called *dialogic editing* (1987), a way to incorporate local aesthetics into his sound recordings through a process of continuous listening and re-working. A very recent example of ethnographic film mixing both aspects of participation as interaction and participation as collaboration is Zemirah Moffat’s *Mirror Mirror*, explicitly inspired by Rouch’s work, including sequences of self-reflexive inclusion and collective discussion. Furthermore, the film is centred on the relationship of a few queer performers with their every-day and stage performativity, making it even more appropriate to the point I am trying to make. The advantages of elaborating a methodology inspired by Varela’s ideas would then be to explicitly acknowledge the collaborative and shared character of ethnography, a feature that somehow accompanies the discipline since its birth but was omitted from most monographs and ethnographic films alike. Since anthropology has lost its colonial connotations such an omission cannot be justified anymore, and its overcoming becomes an ethical imperative. It is my conviction that the removal of the intersubjective character of ethnography is also part of a Cartesian model of knowledge that requires the separation of subject and object as a precondition for scientific knowledge, bringing with it a visualist bias (Fabian 1983). Varela’s research can be seen as a radically anti-Cartesian project for the way it is centred on overcoming the subject-object division.

The interaction between Varela’s enactive paradigm, the short research experience in Koštunići and some of the above mentioned scholarly work did not necessarily give me an answer to all my worries concerning the use of my field recordings, and the general use of audiovisual recording by ‘mainstream’ anthropologists. Nevertheless in my opinion it can be still useful for researchers to give a radically participatory tone to their works, especially in terms of images and sound. In my case, these reflections will undoubtedly help in the process of editing and the shaping of a final destination for the photographs, video and sounds recorded in Koštunići.
Images

Fig. 1 Ivan Mirković at work in the recording studio, Belgrade, Serbia (photo Lorenzo Ferrarini).

Fig. 2 Three generations: Ivan, Milenko and Miladin Mirković, Koštunići, Serbia (photo Lorenzo Ferrarini).
Fig. 3 Kristina and Miladin Mirković, Koštunići, Serbia (photo Lorenzo Ferrarini).

Fig. 4 Milodraga and Kristina Mirković, Koštunići, Serbia (photo Lorenzo Ferrarini).
Fig. 5 Milenko Mirković and his pigs, Koštunići, Serbia (photo Lorenzo Ferrarini).

Fig. 6 Kristina Mirković performing on stage, Milano, Italy (photo Lorenzo Ferrarini).
Fig. 7 Family portrait: Zarija Jocović with his violin, Koštunići, Serbia, circa 1942, Mirković family archive.
References


Mirković, Kristina. 2007. *I Suoni delle Nozze (Svadbarski Zvuci) L’Attività Musicale della Famiglia Mirkovic di Koštunići (Serbia)*. PhD. Diss., Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy.


**Media Sources**

**Audio Sources**


**Films**


**Notes**

1 The following informations on the Mirković family are mostly based on Kristina’s dissertation (2009) and personal communications. She was fundamental for the organization and the practical realization of the fieldwork in Serbia, acting also as an interpreter. She also read and commented this essay, and has my deepest gratitude.

2 The bugarija is a plucked lute instrument with a flat back profile, somehow similar to a guitar. It is usually found in tamburica ensembles, also in Croatia.

3 Also called oro in the southern regions of Serbia and in Macedonia.
The text I mention was born from an idea by Varela and the co-authors, a philosopher (Thompson) and a psychologist (Rosch). The enactive approach is also prefigured in Varela and Maturana’s book *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Maturana and Varela 1987) and in Varela’s early works.

Goldschmidt describes ethnographic film in general with these words: “Ethnographic film is film which endeavours to interpret the behaviour of people of one culture to persons of another culture by using shots of people doing precisely what they would have been doing if the cameras were not present” (1972: 1).