Visual Anthropology Review

Here, There, and Everywhere: *Leviathan* and the Digital Future of Observational Ethnography

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Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor's Leviathan *(2012) is often analyzed in terms of its radical film language and the unique immersive spectatorial experience it creates. Contrary to this approach, which tends to rely on a critical discourse of rupture and newness, this article discusses the film in terms of the continuities it forms with the observational sensibility in ethnographic filmmaking.* Leviathan*, it argues, marks a noteworthy maturation of this tradition by deploying digital technologies to create new conditions of visibility and listening. Registering explicitly and self-reflexively how its makers are inextricably bound up with the world they document,* Leviathan *marks new horizons for participatory observation in ethnographic cinema.* [digital, documentary, ethnography, *Leviathan*, observational]

Introduction

The opening sequence of Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash's *Sweetgrass* (2009), an experimental documentary about what may be Montana's last generation of sheepherders, portrays sheep in snow-covered grasslands. Capturing them with unnoticed presence in a group formation, the camera quickly turns to focus on one single sheep in a lingering close-up. The animal suddenly becomes aware of the camera and surprisingly turns to face it in silence. It is an intriguing and atypical moment in a film whose subjects seem to remain largely unaware or unmoved by the filmmakers' presence. Such a humorous breach of contract, a violation of the typical admonition not to look at the camera in an observational film, is a wink to the audience that communicates right from the get-go a subversive approach toward ethnography. *Sweetgrass*, a film that utterly transports the viewer into a rural setting where a unique way of life is soon to disappear, comes with no expository voiceover, respects no dramaturgy, and excludes any interaction between filmmaker and subjects. While it remains a work of nature ethnography, in which "landscape and sheep, rather than people, are identified as crucial elements" (Grimshaw 2011:250), it undermines any pedagogic aspirations and attempts to introduce ambiguity to the very act of its interpretation.

An early milestone in the development of Castaing-Taylor's strategy as a documentary filmmaker, *Sweetgrass* is a typical product of Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab, the innovative film program that he is currently directing.[1] As such, it moves beyond the long-standing practice of written ethnography and attends to "the many dimensions of the world, both animate and inanimate, that may only with difficulty, if at all, be rendered with propositional prose."[2] The film's subjects are recorded and observed patiently, and we are never given any directorial guidance as to how to read and understand its images. Using mostly long and uninterrupted takes to follow interactions between people and animals in one rural landscape, Castaing-Taylor and Barbash align their cinematic style with the recent "aesthetic turn" in observational ethnography (Grimshaw 2011:259). Such a nonauthoritative rhetoric as a mode of film practice is fiercely advocated by Castaing-Taylor in an essay he wrote back in 1996 to counter what he identifies as the overall prejudice against ethnographic film. Opposing what he describes as "an abhorrence of imagery" in a field that has traditionally perceived film as "logically inferior" to anthropological texts, Castaing-Taylor endorses an aesthetic that tends

Visual Anthropology Review, Vol. 31, Issue 1, pp. 12–19, ISSN 1058-7187, online ISSN 1548-7458. © 2015 by the American Anthropological Association. DOI: 10.1111/var.12057.

toward "long takes, synchronous speech, and a tempo faithful to the rhythms of real life, and that discourages cutting, directing, reenacting, interviewing" (Taylor 1996:67–68, 75). He regards the indexicality of filmic images as a quality that bestows ethnographic cinema with the potential for open-endedness, making it "susceptible to differing interpretations in a way anthropological writing is not" (Taylor 1996:75).

In their essential critical history and in-depth appraisal of the tradition, Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009:160) make a case for the significance of the observational in contemporary ethnographic work and suggest that the observational be undertaken not "from a place of theory but from the perspective of everyday life." Such an act of rapprochement between theory and pragmatics is a critical stance that interests me because it offers a way of reading the tradition by moving away from the term "observational cinema" toward the notion of "observational sensibility" (138). In this way, it strives to convey the openness and expansiveness of an anthropological project that is by now already well developed.[3] It is from this perspective that I wish to look at Castaing-Taylor's recent and more formally adventurous documentary *Leviathan* (Castaing-Taylor and Paravel 2012a)—a film he codirected with his Sensory Ethnography Lab's associate Véréna Paravel. *Leviathan*, I will argue, marks a noteworthy maturation of the "observational sensibility" and explores the extended contours of this tradition within new conditions of visibility and listening enabled by digital technology.

Leviathan, I will show, disentangles observation from the scientific premise of capturing an objective reality. As such, its filmmakers' orientation toward the world moves further away from entailing a neutral or detached gaze. Forming a multiperspective point of view that at times creates a synergy between film technology and the human body and other times adheres to inhuman viewpoints, *Leviathan* rejects the typical guiding rationale in observational film, based on pursuing a subject or following a narrative. Looking at how its tactics are expanding existing directions for participatory observation in ethnographic cinema (e.g., MacDougall 2005 or Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009), I will argue that *Leviathan* focuses less on providing an accurate transcription of reality and more on reflecting and communicating the intimate relationships its filmmakers maintain with such reality. I will also extend my discussion toward the aural dimension of the film and argue that *Leviathan* emphasizes the sonic indeterminacy that often characterizes observational films by separating sounds from their origin and context.

Reevaluating *Leviathan*: Beyond Spectatorial Immersion

Leviathan opens not with a self-reflexive wink but with a formal challenge. In a biblical reference that immediately brings to mind the enigmatic opening sequence of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), the film commences in complete darkness. Within an empty black screen, light slowly emerges and an abstract red shape suddenly appears. Bright and oversaturated splashes of yellow, blue, and red colors flicker on the screen in an amorphous dance, like shapes in a Len Lye animated extravaganza. It is difficult to understand what it is that we are watching, where we are being placed, or whose point of view we are embodying. We cling to the sound, which does not provide much orientation either: noises of burbling water, clanking chains, or the cranking of gears build a chaotic audial landscape that engulfs the image. Such cacophony of sounds joins a kaleidoscope of impressionist images taken from oblique camera angles to eventually thrust us in the midst of pouring rain on what seems to be the deck of a midsize industrial ship. With no voiceover or clear dialogue to serve as a compass to our viewing experience, we are saturated with a chaotic mosaic of small details with only our imagination capable to help us put those bits into some form of spatial perspective.

Many reviewers discuss *Leviathan* in terms of its potential to plunge an audience within the audiovisual praxis of these aesthetics of chaos, to provoke a viewer into experiencing what it feels like being on the deck of a fishing trawler. Such film-as-an-experience discourse, although not yet fully fleshed out in academic terms but overtly spread out in critical writings about the film, tends to focus on how *Leviathan* generates an immediate, corporeal, and prelinguistic experience of reality. The film, so the argument generally goes, captures the

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constant rise and swing of the sea and produces accordingly a disorienting and nauseating effect that is often described by critics using the phenomenological term "immersion."[4] Moreover, the prominent critical discourse of *Leviathan* tends to align itself almost completely with the self-declared goals of the Sensory Ethnography Lab and its filmmakers' statements.[5] While I agree that *Leviathan* is not reducible to a set of statements on what commercial fishing is all about and that its abstract and artful audiovisual language may be described in sensorial terms, I also find the dominant focus on spectatorial perception as a sensuous experience quite limited in its value. First, as Scott McQuire (2007:149) notes, "immersion is a condition which has become overdetermined," and in a film that provides several self-reflexive winks and distractions that sidestep unmindful submersion, it is never easy to generalize about such spectatorial positioning. Second, a phenomenological reading of *Leviathan* that frames cinematic spectatorship in those explicit terms is arguably meant to explain how a viewer, responding to events on the screen, is able "both to sense and to be sensible, to be both the subject and the object of tactile desire" (Sobchack 2004:66). Such "cinesthetic subjects," to borrow Sobchack's terminology, always carry an embodied vision with which they are able to preconsciously translate seeing to touching and vice versa. *Leviathan*, as I will further illustrate, does not carry consistently a humanly embodied point of view, and does not offer simple mirroring between subject and object. Admittedly, much of its footage is created without anyone looking through a viewfinder to see what is being shot. While certain segments are made with amateur and handheld GoPro cameras attached to the helmets of the fishermen and covered in waterproof containers, other parts drift away to embrace inhuman perspectives, where cameras are put on ends of long wooden sticks and moved around on the slippery deck or in and out of the water. Very often the grinding sound that is heard over the image is intensely loud and repetitive, and the fishermen's labor is filmed from within the machine that is producing it. Switching arbitrarily from a human perspective, there are filmed encounters between camera and reality that constitute a disembodied gaze. While Irina Leimbacher (2014) creatively suggests that "*Leviathan* simply extrapolates 'sensory' from the human body to the body of the world itself—to the bodies of matter, nature, economic exploitation," I am skeptical as to whether such playful expansion of the phenomenological mode is adequate to accurately describe the experience of watching *Leviathan*. Can a viewer really feel what a fish feels, viscerally align with a machine or an object, or sensorially perceive exploitation? Phenomenology, on the other hand, may in fact provide a valuable set of tools for describing the interaction between filmmaker and subject within the observational. As I will show later, Grimshaw and Ravetz's (2009) phenomenologically inflected mode of inquiry may be used to shed light on how experimental camera practices in *Leviathan* emphasize the experiential aspect in an ethnographer's point of view.

In an excruciating effort to film from impossible positions and angles, Castaing-Taylor and Paravel are not really interested in imitating or simulating the familiar patterns of human perception, nor do they wish to simply augment human vision with digital means in a Vertovian manner. Much like *Sweetgrass*, *Leviathan*, in my opinion, is an experimental effort at expanding the possibilities of observational cinema by redefining spatial perspective and changing the existing hierarchy in documentary between image and sound. It defamiliarizes itself from the coordinates of perception by creating a destabilized film language that borders on an anarchy of aesthetics. Keeping in mind Castaing-Taylor's fascination with a less authoritative observational mode in the service of ethnographic goals, I suggest that with such radical new language, *Leviathan* is not an avant-garde endeavor for its own sake, but includes moments of abstraction in which the observational does not necessarily bring visual or audial knowledge. In one particularly striking example, the camera emerges from within the storming ocean, rises up to capture flying seagulls, dives back into the water, and so forth. The viewer, trapped between water and sky, is suggestively asked to build in his mind a superimposed image of those separated spaces, an effect of abstract beauty rather than of epistemological value.[6] The shifting points of view of the crewmen, the fish, and even the boat itself keep us critically distanced and persistently alert in trying to comprehend the logic of this new film grammar.

"Knowledge through Contact": From Neutral Detachment to Intimate Participation

What does it really mean to call *Leviathan* an observational film? Direct cinema, the tradition that became a central tenet in observational documentary during the 1960s, privileged a small filming crew that carried a nonfixed, tripodless 16 mm camera while following notable subjects through dramatic situations. In *Leviathan*, though, things work quite differently, and there is no drama or story that guides comprehension or interpretation. Also, the camera does not persistently inhabit

a point of view that we, as viewers, could have conceivably embodied, as in the much desired feeling-of-being-there created from behind the shoulder of John F. Kennedy on his way to make an election speech in *Primary* (Drew 1960), or in a backstage room with Bob Dylan in *Don't Look Back* (Pennebaker 1967). While direct cinema typically deals with noteworthy personalities placed within situations of drama and suspense, *Leviathan* "unfolds as a sound-image spectacle that in many ways operates beyond the familiar 'crisis structure,' intentional gaze, and performed social gesture that we associate with direct cinema" (Wahlberg 2014). The fly-on-the-wall metaphor has been used for years now to describe the unique position that ostensibly allowed direct cinema filmmakers to witness and document events unobtrusively and with minimal intervention. *Leviathan* offers a reinterpretation of such a metaphor and expands its cognitive implications. Admittedly, a fly does not see the world in the same way a human being does. Because of their spherical shape and protrusion from the fly's head, the eyes give the fly an almost 360-degree view of the world. Thus, a fly sees reality in a mosaic way—thousands of tiny images coalesce and together represent one visual image.

Leviathan offers such multiperspectiveness that is neither attuned to nor motivated by any logic of narrative comprehension. Thus, there is no consistent drive or pursuit of a certain object or subject that justifies the abrupt camera movement, the distorted compositions, or the oblique camera angles. Such an attempt to achieve an omniscient viewpoint without a leading narration or subject is grounded, in my opinion, in a familiar (and traditional) desire of the observational "to witness the totality of an event" (MacDougall 1998:129). At the same time, though, the camera in *Leviathan* does not function merely as a detached surveyor operating in an unquestioned scientific manner. Its engagement in the act of observation is constantly acknowledged, and its operators are committed to a specific kind of observation which, according to Grimshaw and Ravetz, "hinges upon connection, expressed in an almost tangible, empathic moment" 2009:136). Providing a renewed perspective on the observational, approached through a useful prism of phenomenology, Grimshaw and Ravetz offer one possible model by which we could understand camera movement in *Leviathan*. Scientific detachment is abandoned and replaced by "knowledge through contact" (136), and the filmmakers' active attention to the world, intertwined with those of other sentient beings, is made concretely visible.

In fact, earlier understandings of the observational in ethnography similarly disentangle the tradition from notions of objectivity and detachment and focus on how the camera does not simply capture reality from a distance. Colin Young, who formulated the basic principles of the observational documentary, remarks that in order for the observational approach to work, "it must be based on an intimate, sympathetic relationship between the filmmaker and the subject—not the eye of the aloof, detached observer but of someone watching as much as possible from the inside" (Young 1995:109). David MacDougall (1998:134), whose thoughtful writings and committed practice serve as a huge point of inspiration for Castaing-Taylor, similarly holds that "beyond observational cinema lies the possibility of a participatory cinema, bearing witness to the 'event' of the film and making strengths of what most films are at pains to conceal." In MacDougall's films, as Taylor notes in his introduction to *Transcultural Cinema*, an observational approach to documentary is formulated "not in contradistinction to participatory or 'reflexive' propensities, but rather as their consummation" (Taylor 1998:3). The nature of observation in both *Sweetgrass* and *Leviathan*, I believe, is foregrounded by MacDougall's understanding of reflexivity as intrinsic to the act of documentation and interaction as a strategy that formulates meaning.

Interaction with the filmed subject in *Leviathan* is uniquely achieved with digital visual aids. The tiny GoPro cameras create an almost tangible intimacy with reality when placed in impossible positions, thus serving as a substitute to human perception. In one scene in the film, the GoPro camera intimately shares the working space of the fishermen while the latter focus their attention on cutting fish. The extreme close-ups on their sweaty skin, detailing the many bruises and tattoos on their worn-out bodies, attest to the hardship of their exploited labor by privileging observation of things to which we usually do not pay attention.[7] Grimshaw and Ravetz's (2009:155) observation that experimental anthropology deals with the neglected and unremarkable "not as an object of scrutiny but as a space to be opened up between seer and seen" rings true about *Leviathan* here. By capturing in a similarly unobtrusive manner a wounded bird hopelessly trying to climb the deck until it is forced to stumble back to the ocean (a wink toward the filmmakers' possible responsibility toward their subject),[8] or a beer can swept as waste together with the dead fish (a hint at reading the film ecologically), *Leviathan* reassembles reality from its leftover traces and opens up a space for further contemplation.

As I have shown, *Leviathan*'s film language suspends familiar structures of causality and coherence we may associate with the observational tradition in

documentary studies. In the spirit of *Sweetgrass*, an extensive amount of digital long takes are used in the film to reflect the ambiguity of reality it intimately engages with. However, because these long takes switch perspectives so rapidly and erratically, they often create the illusion of montage editing, and it is hard to pinpoint where they begin and where they end. This may strike a peculiar chord for most viewers, being conditioned by conventional film language to identify a long take as mostly patient, coherent, and with specific and clear point of view. In *Leviathan*, once the GoPro camera dips into the water for the first time, the humanly embodied position is ruptured, and the perspective obtained by the long take becomes clearly inhuman (while at the same time achieved by extending a human reach on a long stick; see figure 10 in the color gallery as an example of a disembodied position achieved by extending the human reach).

Cristina Grasseni's concept of "skilled visions," while not simply synonymous with observation, may provide a useful framework for understanding such moments of in-betweenness in terms of embodiment. Vision, according to Grasseni (2010:4), should not be taken simply as detached observation, but is always "embedded in multi-sensory practices, where look is coordinated with skilled movement, with rapidly changing points of view, or with other senses such as touch." Grasseni offers a way to rehabilitate vision as a function that forms an interplay with other senses and regards observation as a process that could benefit from sensory apprenticeship in order to reinvent conventional ways of seeing. While beyond the scope of this article, examining specific moments in *Leviathan* from Grasseni's perspective may account for how digital recording technologies help to restructure different practices of looking and facilitate the filmmakers' access to the documented environment.

Moreover, several long takes in *Leviathan*, whether carrying human or inhuman perspectives, produce a gaze that is repeatedly acknowledged by clashing with the reality observed. Put a bit differently, while MacDougall wanted the filmmaker's intervention to be acknowledged partly through audible comments or questions—verbal tactics of the cinéma vérité tradition that are thoroughly eschewed in *Leviathan*—such a position is reconceptualized here and replaced by moments of reflexivity that emphasize such encounters between camera and subject. Thus, when the camera floats on the wet deck alongside dead fish, it takes the perspective of one of them, bumping into the others; when the fishermen are handling the metal chain, water is splashed right at the camera and leaves marks on its lens; and when the fishing net is carried on the deck, it fills the frame with fish, using the camera's "fourth wall" as part of the containing space (see figures 7 and 8 in the color gallery as examples of violently trespassing the boundary between the world of viewer and the world documented). On the one hand, those are moments that violently trespass the boundary between the world of viewer and the world documented. On the other hand, they are also instances of self-reflexive attractions where the gaze becomes entirely complicit in disclosing its origin to the viewer and reminding her that other practices of looking can move beyond detached observation.

Grinding Machines and Clanking Chains: An Auditory State of Contingency

Observation does not occur in *Leviathan* on the visual level only. Filmmakers working in the Sensory Ethnography Lab are also strongly committed to the aural dimension, where "sound is not accompanying the image," as Scott MacDonald (2013:264) observes, "but surrounds it, and the image unfolds within it." Thus, the filmmakers of *Leviathan* use a combination of amateur and professional technology to capture the heavy noises of grinding machines on the boat together with the ocean water crashing against the ship. In such a chaotic aural landscape, consisting of crunching, squelching, and shrieking noises, it becomes hard to clearly differentiate between foreground and background spaces and the disorienting sound engulfs the viewer in 360 degrees. The audio, recorded mostly with GoPro and DSLR small microphones that are limited in their sensitivity, lacks clarity and directness, and encourages what Hunter Snyder refers to as "cognition through the aural" (2013:177). Castaing-Taylor and Paravel worked with sound designer Ernst Karel to construct a careful sound composition that often comes before the image, attracting spectatorial attention and thus working against the "bias toward vision" that traditionally characterizes observational ethnography (Fabian 1983:106).

In an essay focused on several conventions of sound practices in the documentary tradition, Jeffrey Ruoff imagines what would happen if we listened to many of the scenes in observational films without watching the screen. Calling it a "dizzying experience," he suggests we would hear a "cacophony of clanging, snippets of dialogue and music, and various unidentifiable sound, almost an experience in concrete music," without any identifiable sources in the image to linchpin those sounds (Ruoff 1993:27).[9] *Leviathan* achieves

such indeterminacy by remixing fragments of raw sound (material that would be regarded as aural "waste" by most filmmakers), thus giving further articulation to what Wahlberg (2014) calls "the chance-element of imperfect sound in Direct Cinema." The process of de-anchoring the voice from its observable source is achieved here not imaginatively by hiding the screen (as Ruoff suggests we do), but through the tension that exists throughout the film—between the actual and the artificial, the observational and the aestheticized. Freed from their immediately visible association to objects, but never from the synchronicity to the images they accompany, the sounds "resurface in their phenomenological materiality" (Ruoff 1993:27). Because we cannot exactly decipher the origin of the sounds we hear, we are left to concentrate on their technical qualities, with no real contexts within which to place them, nor with clear meanings to attach to them. Following Pierre Schaeffer, Michel Chion (1994:31) terms such an auditory experience as "reduced listening" and describes it as a process where "the emotional, physical and aesthetic value of sound is linked not only to the causal explanation we attribute to it, but also to its own qualities of timbre and texture, to its own personal vibration." In this state of auditory chaos, the ongoing background noise of the trawler's engine may occasionally sound like human screeching and the muffled voice of fishermen like the clanking of chains, creating a horrific effect throughout the entire sea voyage.

Toward the last 20 minutes of *Leviathan*, a film that mostly excludes the verbal or at least renders it completely unintelligible, a surprising focus on spoken language occurs. Extremely exhausted after a day's work, one of the fishermen is shown seated around the ship's kitchen table, staring absently at a television screen while barely able to keep his eyes open. In this strange and atypically stable long take, the camera is occupying a fixed position next to the screen itself, voyeuristically observing the man as he is slowly falling sleep.[10] While the image remains mostly static, inviting our eyes to momentarily rest from the cognitive exhaustion we may have suffered so far, the quiet sound from the television grabs our attention. It is the voice of Mike Rowe, narrating an episode of Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch*, a reality television series portraying life aboard fishing vessels in the Bering Sea (see figure 16 in the color gallery). The humorous pairing between this conventionally dramatized and authored show and the alternatively open-ended film we are currently watching ("the crew just had enough," the voice announces)[11] is a clever hint about the different ways of addressing our experience of the world on film. It also, however, indirectly nods to the limitation of voice (particularly the verbal) in observational ethnography and prioritizes a way of ambiguously showing us a situation rather than specifically telling us about it.

Conclusion

What are we to do with a film like *Leviathan*? It is almost impossible, according to its open-ended and unconventional structure, to know exactly what the filmmakers wished to achieve in *Leviathan* and what should be the "right way" to read it. Castaing-Taylor and Paravel's film may very well be another effort to document vanishing forms of physical labor that are threatened by economic development, like the Norwegian American sheepherding family in *Sweetgrass* or the community in an industrial zone fated for demolition in Paravel's earlier project *Foreign Parts* (Paravel and Sniadecki 2010). If so, *Leviathan*'s melancholic farewell to the past offers a futuristic envisioning of a posthumanist world, where human beings may have no inherent right to set themselves above nature. It is difficult to know for sure because to "read" an observational film," as Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009:54) remind us, "is always to risk screening out what is distinctive to it as a form of expression." While *Leviathan* denounces such stability of interpretation on purpose, it very well nurtures the pleasure of contemplation, empowering the viewer with the freedom to watch things patiently and intelligently.

Surely enough, as the initial laudatory buzz in critical circles is beginning to fade away, it becomes more important to reevaluate whether the film really "changes film culture" (Greene 2013) or creates an experience that is "entirely new in the annals of modern theatrical cinema" (MacDonald 2012). In this essay, I proposed that one should think about *Leviathan* not necessarily through a discourse of rupture that accounts for its total newness, but rather in terms of the continuities that it forms with the observational approach that has long dominated ethnographic filmmaking practice. Having said that, as a radical exercise in spatial perspective and temporal duration, *Leviathan* nevertheless extends the contours of this tradition. Through digital modifications in the film's production, *Leviathan* constructs an outlook on reality that explicitly and creatively registers the way in which its makers are inextricably bound up with the world documented, and its attending to the perceptions of others—not just of its filmmakers—becomes an integral element of the ethnographic inquiry. Such formal freedom—which nurtures the observational not so much as a genre, but as what Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009:138) refer to as a

"sensibility," a filmmaker's "impulse" —allows Paravel and Castaing-Taylor to actively engage with the world and passionately represent it. Aligning with the critical ground established for understanding observational cinema today, I argued here that *Leviathan* should not be theorized simply as a generator of an exhaustive spectatorial experience, but as an important milestone in developing new ways for participation and experimentation in ethnographic encounters on film.

Notes

[1] For a short overview of the program at Harvard, which may have "the longest continuous history in ethnographic filmmaking of any university in the United States," see Nakamura (2013:133).

[2] Description taken from the Sensory Ethnography Lab's official website at http://sel.fas.harvard.edu.

[3] Some notable practitioners in this tradition include David and Judith MacDougall, Herb Di Gioia, David Hancock, and Robert Gardner.

[4] Several reviewers use the term "immersion" to describe the effect of the film. See, for example, Robert Greene (2013), who calls *Leviathan* "an uncompromising immersion into a specific mini-universe"; or A. O. Scott (2013), for whom the film "offers not information but immersion"; or Karen Nakamura (2013:133), who refers to the overall goal of the Sensory Ethnography Lab as producing films that are about "the conveyance of emotional states through vivid aesthetic-sensual immersion." Interestingly enough, in their excellent analysis of how sound and acoustic modes of perception are foregrounded in *Leviathan*, Selmin Kara and Alanna Thain (2014:193) use a similar vocabulary to describe what they call "sonic chaos": "With little dialogue, no music, caption, and narration, the documentary is nevertheless immersed in a sound bath that assails the audience from the start."

[5] In a recent interview about *Leviathan*, codirector Véréna Paravel expresses the view that "if people accept losing not only their bearings, if they accept being overwhelmed by feelings, it should be actually an imperative for film just to place you back into the experience, into the real" (Juzwiak 2013). Castaing-Taylor follows suit by expressing his own resentment toward conventional documentaries ("I hate most documentaries") and voicing clearly what seems to be at stake in his films: "I think we want to get to a much more embodied, a much more corporeal representation of reality that's almost a presentation of reality" (Juzwiak 2013). In her review of *Leviathan*, Malin Wahlberg (2014) eloquently observes that what is striking in the predominant reception of *Leviathan* is "the submissive attitude of the critics and scholars towards the intentions of the filmmakers and the scientific lab in question, as if the Harvard context of the Sensory Ethnography Lab would automatically provide a legitimacy that commands us to build our interpretations of this film on the statements delivered by the auteurs and the producers."

[6] For an expanded discussion on the fascinating paradox that arises in documentary between the pleasure of looking (spectacle) and the pleasure of knowing (epistemology), see Cowie (2011), especially pages 1–18.

[7] Such a strategy aligns with the ideas voiced by Frankfurt School thinkers in regard to film's relationship to modernity and its ability to expose dimensions of actions and movements that otherwise remain hidden from the human eye. Siegfried Kracauer (1960:46) famously speaks about the revealing function of the camera that renders visible "material phenomena which elude observation under normal circumstances," while Walter Benjamin's (1968:237) notion of the "unconscious optics" describes the camera as an instrument of perceptual unconsciousness, a machine that is capable of looking at details that are not visible to the human eye. "Evidently a different nature speaks to the camera than opens to the naked eye," writes Benjamin, "if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man."

[8] For a more detailed account of this scene as "an affective demonstration of the failure of simply extending a humanist perspective to ecological ethio-politics," see Thain in this volume.

[9] Interestingly, Irina Leimbacher (2014) uses the same term in reference to the film's soundtrack: "At the turbulent threshold of sea and night sky, or the liminal spaces between man and prey, man and machine, we're engulfed by the musique concrète of motors, winches, men, gulls, and the elements."

[10] An extended version of this sequence can be found in Castaing-Taylor and Paravel's (2012b) short film *Still Life/Nature Morte* (presented in the 2014 Whitney Museum Biennial), which includes 28 minutes of galley footage showing the fisherman watching television.

[11] As Christopher Pavsek in this volume rightly notes, *Deadliest Catch* "functions as a placeholder for all those forms of cinema that sensory ethnography opposes."

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