



The undocumented everyday: migrant lives and the politics of visibility

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For Shuster, new television exposes:

... the negativity that animates the world of the contemporary United States ... This, I would argue, is the dominant position within new television, which appears to suggest that, as works of art, the shows of new television serve the function of revealing the pitfalls and failures of the contemporary United States (171).

Such a statement begs obvious questions that may include 'what about shows that are American made but not about America, such as Netflix's *Narcos: Mexico* (2018–present)?' 'What about shows that implicitly comment on American values, but are not explicitly about them, like HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–present)?' Would *The Bridge* (2013–14) qualify as 'new television' because it is 'about' America while the superior Danish-Swedish series *The Bridge (Broen/Bron)* (2011–present), from which it was adapted, be disqualified because it is un-American? The answer to the latter would be yes because Shuster's definition excludes the vast entirety of TV production outside of America.

Structurally, **New Television** is essentially a book of two 'halves,' with part one (chapters one and two) examining television's indebtedness to film, photography and storytelling and establishing 'an analytic framework' for part two (chapters three to five), which applies this framework to television drama. It is a critical work with unquestionable ambition and on the positive side the author's passion for the drama he values shines through. For him 'at its best, new television cues us into possibilities that we might not otherwise see, presents understandings of ourselves and our world that we might otherwise miss or ignore, and gives voice to people and creatures who otherwise might remain silent or beyond the bounds of discourse.' (202) Yet, negatively, such possibilities apparently only exist if they are presented in drama, understandings of ourselves are only applicable to Americans and the silenced voices can only ever be fictional, as factual television lies outside of the parameters of 'new television.'

Ultimately, the book frustrates because it does not convincingly define what 'new television' is. It slips between calling it a 'genre' (121) and a 'thematic mode' (5), the television under discussion is not intrinsically new and nor does it encompass 'television' in all its various and global forms. Its major drawbacks in credibly delineating new television, therefore, are that it neglects to look

beyond the borders of the United States and fails to clarify what constituted 'old' television' before endeavouring to redefine it.

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Reviewed by Darcy White, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

The Undocumented Everyday takes as its starting point an investigation into the many ways in which Mexican and Central American undocumented migrants, have utilised documentary forms as a response to a 'political context in which they have been both racialized and criminalized' (xi).

Focussing on the period 2000–2012 (post 9/11, during the George W. Bush presidency and the first term of Barack Obama's administration) Schreiber examines 'the particular salience of self-representation as a common trope' of the documentary in this context (x). Through the production and circulation of photography, film, video and audio, migrants evidence and contest their circumstances, across the United States and in the US/Mexico border regions. The focus on photographic media is indicative of this book's 'primary concern with struggles over the idea of documentation, documentary forms, and self-representation' (3). It considers particularly 'the significance of "subjective" aesthetic forms' (3) and a 'mixed-genre aesthetic' where documentary forms are combined with domestic and vernacular image making (35).

Central to the book's thesis is a cogent challenge to the liberal humanist faith in the positive effects of some forms of documentary. Building on the work of Sontag, Rosler and Tagg, this careful study of self-representation within the sphere of activism, contests the 'seeing-is-believing' paradigm and tackles, head-on, questions of 'who has the power to represent whom and what events are made visible or invisible' (xii). Schreiber finds that increasingly strategies of self-representation confront the supposed 'gift' of citizenship' (xiii), noting a powerful shift towards a far more defiant call for 'rights' where statements assert:

'we are not going anywhere' and 'this is our country too' (xvi).

The first three chapters consider projects that have been coordinated by individuals, advocacy groups, social service organisations that 'relate migrant self-representation and "visibility" within documentary photography to political agency and empowerment' (32), an approach 'rooted in liberal humanism' (32). For each case study, the context is established, the details of the particular projects are fully described and followed by an evaluation of the production, dissemination and effects of the approach used.

Chapter 1 – 'We See What We Know', considers the self-representation of the everyday lives of day labourers and domestic workers through a mixed-genre aesthetic. Here Schreiber begins to reveal 'the predicaments of photographic self-representation' (35) where important elements are missed by viewers and where images may be 'cynically appropriated for the state's neo-liberal disavowal of the conditions' the group aimed to address (77). The ways such images are used can 'limit – rather than prompt – particular forms of engagement and action' where they are 'incorporated into a framework of government benevolence and sentimentalization' (77).

Chapter 2 – the 'Communities Without Borders' project (2003) centred on a group of migrants from Oaxaca, living in a Hudson Valley community, understood by many, as essential to the regeneration of the town. Mexicans hoped that the project would evidence the difficulties of separation for themselves and the communities left behind, and call attention to the underlying economic causes of migration. The project, led by staff from a network of health-care centres, created a 'photographic bridge' as a means to apparently close the distance between the new and home localities (115). Schreiber argues that whilst communities were visualised as 'belonging' to more than one locality where 'daily life in ... disparate locations' appear to exist 'side by side' (82), in reality they never saw one another during this time due to militarised border controls limiting movement.

Chapter 3 – discusses a collaborative art project using disposable cameras to document Mexican migrants on the move to the US and the surveillance activities of an anti-immigration group, to enable participants from 'both sides' to be represented. Schreiber demonstrates how, in framing the project in terms of self-representation through an exhibition, a book, and a website, the organisers 'construct a visual equivalence' between these two groups that is 'significant for

understanding the inadequacies of visibility' (120) calling this the 'artifice of equality and equivalence' (122). However, although 'shaped by unequal relations of power' (122) images produced by the migrants, 'unsettle' the project through an 'implicit critique of its normative terms' (123).

The second half of the book displays 'a more critical approach to the notion of 'visibility' ... 'explicitly recognizing that the visual is always positioned within larger structures of power and control' (33) the projects in this section 'call attention to these dynamics' (33).

Chapter 4 – the production of '*Maquilapolis: City of Factories*' (2006) is examined, where a filmmaker and an artist collaborate with a group of women (factory workers and community activists) to produce a critique of the maquila factory system. The women were proactive in considering how they wanted to show themselves. Schreiber notes that they not only used but, importantly, 'revised forms of documentary media as part of their counter-representational practices' (161) and argues that what distinguishes this project is that the collaborative process between the filmmaker, artist and the women 'prioritizes the latter as political activists and emphasizes their role as agents' where the subjects of the film act as co-producers. (161)

Chapter 5 – Schreiber describes 2006 as 'a watershed for immigrant rights organizing' in the U.S. (195). Unlike the case-studies in other chapters this considers an art installation that was primarily textual and audible in form, where the absence of visuals was employed as a tactic to address the disappearance of undocumented migrants through detention or deportation that Schreiber says 'resonates with Judith Butler's call for a "critical image"' (197).

Chapter 6 – examines a significant shift in tactics that emerged around 2010, whereby undocumented youth and migrant activists increasingly adopted a strategy of blatant public visibility – particularly in acts of protest against migrant deportations when, during the Obama administration, detention and deportation was 'intentionally concealed' (235). Schreiber examines videos produced by such activists to document and disseminate their acts of defiance and civil disobedience on their own terms. As before she is particularly interested in examples where she finds evidence of activists revising documentary forms to produce a new politics of visibility. Such activist producers strategically circulate their own 'counter-documents' (video clips), using social media to challenge the state and mobilise others (235).

This is an important book. However, for all its clarity of thinking, the sensitivity and correctness of its ethics, its understanding of the problematics of liberal humanist approaches, the *Preface*, *Introduction* and *Conclusion* would have benefited from further editing, and tighter organisation, for there is a great deal of repetition here.

Schreiber demonstrates that participants in many of the earlier projects made visible the effects of US border policy and policing, and produced ‘migrant counter-conducts’ that set out to challenge their exclusion (36) yet all too often the organisers ‘foreground a ‘national gaze’, augmented by a ‘nativist point of view’ (157). This study illuminates the many ways in which undocumented migrants from Mexico and Central America have creatively devised strategies to challenge the ways in which they are represented, evidence their experiences, motivate others, and make visible crimes committed by the US state. By revising existing documentary forms, and utilising new modes of dissemination, they ‘disrupt the ways in which migrant “illegality” is produced by making visible the effects of border militarization and policing ... on undocumented migrants’ (157).

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Asian video cultures: in the penumbra of the global

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360 pages
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Reviewed by Yang Li, Newcastle University, UK

This essay collection unfolds theoretically and methodologically a panoramic view of Asian video media-culture for readers, which contributes to the conceptualisation of ‘*video* as cultural form and practice across Asia’ in the contexts of social transformations, economic-market practices, and local popular cultures (1). Three key concepts – Asia, video, and culture – can be highlighted around which discussions of the interactions of the mainstream and the marginal and the popular and the subaltern are organised from Asianist perspectives for this volume. This collection also emphasises the notions of ‘penumbra’ and the ‘penumbral capacities’ of the global to highlight the significance of Asia in media studies and culture studies. In this way, this edited book seeks

first, to move past common discourse of light and shadow, centre and edge, that reflect a universalising approach to the global and that necessarily frame Asia (and southern configurations in general) as secondary, supplemental; and second, to foreground the transitional, the processual – to underscore that the global is productively chaotic, always in the process of becoming (6).

In this sense, it is suggested that ‘Asia’ can be conceptualised in light of ‘an additive model of the global’ rather than a stable “‘area studies’ paradigm” (16), in order to reshape a dialogue about Asian video and examine its cultural formations beyond the static/fixed cultural contexts and imaginations of differences in epistemology between the West and the East. In other words, the Asian videomedia in this volume is part of the mainstream of global media and social media; the volume therefore emphasises international videomedia cultural distribution and the division of media/cultural labours within culture force of the Global South, which is often overlooked in (western) media epistemologies and agencies. In doing so, the volume has situated the Asian video forms and practices in relation to questions of the Global South to conceptualise the idea of culture from a critical postcolonial perspective and giving adequate consideration to globalisation.

Postcolonial notions and subaltern studies speak to each other, and postcolonialism and subaltern studies also provide a theorised approach to examine the subaltern understanding of globalisation. Alternatively, subaltern studies can be tied to a discourse on historiography. In this sense, subaltern studies provide a wider perspective to look at history – who is the subject in history, who is visible in history, and who can speak about/in history? The answer is that the historiography of internationalism and nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitist power, meaning that the subaltern (the small voice/image of history) is unseen, unheard and unable to speak. This has also led us to questions of subjectivity in participation in Asian video social media, which concerns the capacity for participation to reform the popular expression and mobilisation through the dynamics of mass culture and subculture in the economic, political, social, and cultural contexts. The discussion of Asian video cultures in this volume attempts to fill the gap of the exploration of postcolonial citizen-subjectivity and global citizen-subjectivity in the contemporary digital culture and media ecologies.

The contributors to the volume each offer new understandings of Asian video culture, which re-