

Real Fictions: Converging Landscapes and Imagination in an English Village

Authors : Edoardo Lomi

Abstract : A problem of central interest in anthropology concerns the ethnographic displacement of modernity's conceptual sovereignty over that of native collectives worldwide. Part of this critical project has been the association of Western modernity with a dualist, naturalist ontology. Despite its demonstrated value for comparative work, this association often comes at the cost of reproducing ideas that lack an empirical ethnographic basis. This paper proposes a way forward by bringing to bear some of the results produced by an ethnographic study of a village in Wiltshire, South England. Due to its picturesque qualities, this village has served for decades as a ready-made set for fantasy movies and a backdrop to fictional stories. These forms of mediation have in turn generated some apparent paradoxes, such as fictitious characters that affect actual material changes, films that become more real than history, and animated stories that, while requiring material grounds to unfold, inhabit a time and space in other respects distinct from that of material processes. Drawing on ongoing fieldwork and interviews with locals and tourists, this paper considers the ways villagers engage with fiction as part of their everyday lives. The resulting image is one of convergence, in the same landscape, of people and things having different ontological status. This study invites reflection on the implications of this image for diversifying our imagery of Western lifeworlds. To this end, the notion of 'real fictions' is put forth, connecting the ethnographic blurring of modernist distinctions—such as sign and signified, mind and matter, materiality and immateriality—with discussions on anthropology's own reliance on fictions for critical comparative work.

Keywords : England, ethnography, landscape, modernity, mediation, ontology, post-structural theory

Conference Title : ICCA 2020 : International Conference on Cultural Anthropology

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : August 27-28, 2020