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Toward a Researchable Film Language

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TOWARD A RESEARCHABLE FILM LANGUAGE[1]

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In the course of reading and talking about the numerous publications concerning anthropology film, a constant problem has been apparent to us. This is the tendency to confuse various filmic styles and techniques with an anthropological methodology of research film. In order to shift gears considerably and move away from this "cookbook" level of discussion, we have written a paper whose character is principally epistemological and conceptual, rather than methodological and stylistic. The concern of this paper is to facilitate a system of thinking by positing a particular interrelationship of ideas. It is not a radical or visionary exegesis, but a discussion which proceeds from the point at which we now find ourselves, utilizing what "knowns" already exist.

With this in mind, a few short caveats are offered: This is a position paper, an exposition of thinking in progress. It is neither a scholarly review of particular accomplishments nor an attempt to define or delimit a field of work. Hence we have excluded the usual scholarly references. Further, because we are synthesizing considerably and writing to a broad readership, sections of the paper will appear suggestive but substantially lacking to readers of certain orientations. Much background material and detail has been omitted; we encourage correspondence in the pages of this journal regarding such issues that our readers think invite fuller discussion.

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This paper is essentially a discussion of three filmic paradigms: the locked-off camera (LOC), conventional film language (CFL), and researchable film observation (RFO). By three filmic paradigms we mean three distinct process-to-product systems which take in conceptual organization (before filming and editing), image collecting and ordering (editing), and filmic interpretation. The starting point of the paper is the LOC paradigm, currently fashionable as a social science research film methodology.

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Our first argument is that a positive association between LOC filming and the generation of reliable research footage is unprincipled. We will show that the LOC paradigm, conceived as a set of working instructions for research filming, is founded on dubious assumptions about the film perception-translation-communication[2] system, human observational process and observable realities, and scientific process generally. In addition, we are concerned that questionable ethics are involved.

In arguing the weaknesses of the LOC paradigm we do not propose that it be substituted by conventional film language. We believe that CFL is artificial and has little to offer the researching filmer.

An alternate paradigm, beyond the event-chopping artificiality of CFL and the naivete of LOC, is discussed. The RFO approach is evaluated as it relates to the other two in terms of the central criterion raised in this paper, that of "maximized researchability."

The thrust of our thesis is that generating researchable film depends on a sophisticated research problem, on maximizing the seeing/hearing potentials of the film technology observation system, and on the translation-communication skills of the researching filmer. Therefore, RFO is not a static process but a creative one, relying on intuitive as well as improvisational skills.

LOCKED-OFF CAMERA AND CONVENTIONAL FILM LANGUAGE

The concern of this section is a description and a comparison of the LOC and the CFL paradigms. For purposes of graphic comparison, we will use a typical social science filming situation, the psychological interview.

Physically, the LOC apparatus consists of an immobile camera or cameras, fastened in one position to a tripod so that it/they will not tilt or pan (i.e., move vertically or horizontally). The lens is set at a single focal length for a single angle and makes no optical movements ("zooms").

The two essential aspects of this methodology are: (a) the camera is hidden, be it behind a curtain, one-way mirror, or special shooting booth with a peep-hole for the lens. While the subjects may or may not be informed of their being filmed, the camera is obscured from their view; much like the TV "candid camera," it is invisible by its location. And (b) the camera does not have an operator who is introducing human choice or selection into the filming situation beyond selecting the angle, focal length, camera height, f-stop, and sound taking positions. In other words, no new qualifiers are being introduced by the filmer; in fact, the start/stop function of the camera may even be programmed by an intervalometer. The LOC product is an essentially secret record made through time with a constant frame being held by a hidden, non-humanly operated camera.

Human choice is, of course, minimally involved. Frame, angle, and focal length are consciously selected by the researcher in coordination with his needs for a specific data level for his after-the-event film examination. In some scientific work this means an extremely microscopic frame area. In social science filming (and particularly the case of the psychological interview), we are, however, generally speaking of extreme wide angle coverage, showing full figures

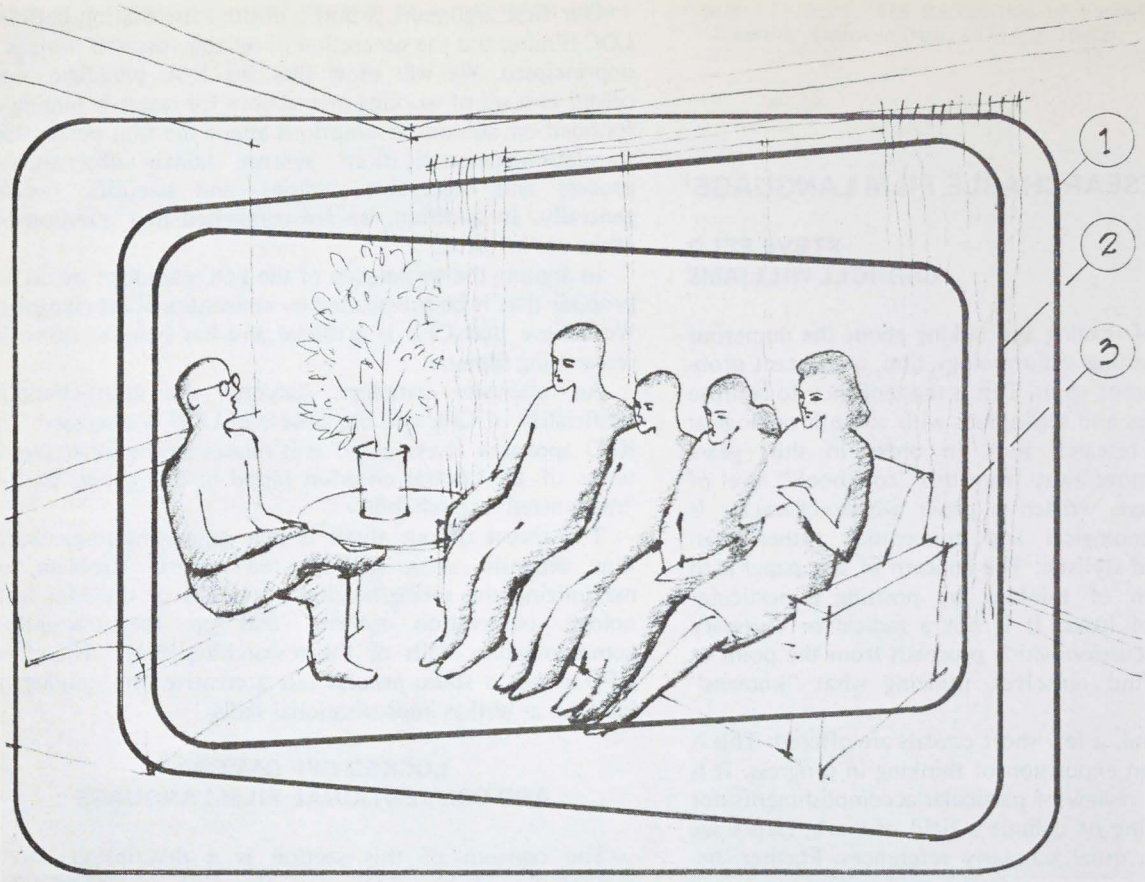

Figure 1

and contexts for all of the participants. See Figure 1 for some typical angles of inclusiveness in such framing.

At this point we shall turn to the assumptions that underly the usage of the locked-off camera. (1) First, it is assumed that the human observational system is inadequate for some chosen observational tasks; that it can't get "all the data all the time." Human memory and sensory inputs are thought to be overloaded by the amount of significant data that exists in a situation; thus, another recording system is imperative. (2) In order to create laboratory-like objective recording, film must be used. Film is thought to be a non-biased recording device capable of adequately imaging "reality" when, and only when, it is conceived and produced not as an "art form" but as a research tool that can perform para-human tasks. (3) Film is also thought in this paradigm to be essential because research requires total data across a total time base. All behavior is assumed to be signal—there is no noise. Therefore, the only way to get the total signal, while at the same time eliminating all human filtering is to film with no compression or expansion of the time base: a one-to-one record.

To further clarify the nature of the LOC paradigm, a comparison with conventional film language will be helpful. First, what do we mean by "conventional film language"? By "conventional" we are referring to the theatrical mode of filmic translation that is definable in terms of the filmmaker's ability to "shoot to cut" (edit) and the audience's competence to "read" (interpret) the sequence of images. In other words, the acceptable mode of temporal and spatial condensation and ordering of an event, or message about an event, such that, when projected, it will be comprehended easily. By "film language" we will make a limited analogy. Essentially, we are referring to the fact that the formal structuring of filmed units can be described roughly in a way similar to that of the syntactic component of a language. Film images are collected in order to be concatenated in a meaningful way. Two processes are involved: the conjoining of units and the embedding of lower order units within higher order units. The interplay of these factors is what creates recursivity in the structure of film. For instance, a sequence opens with an establishing shot (ES), moves to a medium shot (MS), then to a closeup (CU), to a reverse point of view closeup (CU-R), then back to a medium shot (MS), returning to a fuller establishing shot (ES). Within a skeletal ES to MS to CU to MS to ES format there are infinite possibilities of lower order insertions. Within the segment MS-CU-MS there is a smaller set of possibilities, using extreme closeups (ECU), reverse point of view closeups (CU-R), and cutaways or reaction shots (CW). The point is that there is an already established "film language" which allows the filmmaker, through translation, to break down and reconstruct aspects of an event to construct a communication about the whole event.

With the use of synchronous sound, the time component

Figure 2

of the event may be kept intact while the spatial orientation and point of view is changed or alternated by intercutting two or more camera angles. The collecting of the images and the editing process are governed by rules and conventions of acceptability within genres and codes. Only so much variation in the concatenating of shots can take place before the viewer decides that he is watching some sort of avant-garde film where the filmmaker is "saying something" in an unconventional manner. Such judgments make up a viewer's film interpretation competence. Similarly, the filmmaker's competence involves knowing how to "shoot to cut," i.e., to collect the images so that their montage will "read" to the viewer as he intends it to and that his idea will be communicated.

To compare this paradigm to the LOC approach described earlier, here is a storyboard illustrating how CFL would "cover" the same psychological interview that the LOC records with the single angle frame (see Figure 2).

In the storyboard we have an eight-shot pattern which gives an idea of how CFL breaks down and then reconstructs the natural flow of the action using various focal lengths, angles, points of view, and spatial orientations. The sequence begins with a wide establishing shot (ES), moves in for a side angle medium frame (MS), to a close up (CU), switches angles and "mirrors" the closeup with its reverse (CU-R), pulls back and reverses angle for another medium frame (MS), goes to the reaction shot cutaway (CW), then to another type of medium shot (MS), and finally back to the establishing shot orientation marker (ES).

A typical CFL approach to interview material is found here in the embedded MS to CU to CU-R to MS-R pattern (numbers 2, 3, 4, and 5 of Figure 2). This is the "ping-pong" effect where camera A gives a medium shot from the side angle, combining profile and full faces. Camera B then intercuts a cross shot CU of the profiled speaker. The reverse angle CU is then ping-ponged using either composition. Then camera B pulls back for the reverse medium shot. The ping-pong closeups within the MS angles can be repeated *ad infinitum*, although in long sequences reaction shots are usually added for various purposes.

It is important to note that we are not only describing a system for shooting to cut hard-matched action shots, i.e., a sequence filmed by two cameras for intercutting the angles. In fact, the MS to CU to CU-R to MS-R sequence and all of its variants can be filmed in a single continuous take, with the moves being made totally by the walking, panning, and zooming of one cameraman. In other words, we are not equating CFL with cameras on tripods. In fact, much of what nowadays is inappropriately labelled as "*cinéma-vérité*" is no more than theatrical CFL without the hard cuts. Many so-called "non-conventional" cameramen are obeying the same "shoot to cut" rules as the two camera storyboard team, even when shooting long uninterrupted takes and moving about freely with lightweight crystal sync handheld equipment.

While many have come to label any piece of grainy, poorly exposed, handheld, shaky-frame, first-take piece of "live" news footage as *cinéma-vérité*, one can see that we are talking of the same filmic structuring that governs daily TV soap operas. The moves, the angles, and the rhythms are equally predictable in either case and, upon close notice, show little deviation from the rules cited above.

Finally, we should note that we have made very general characterizations. Although we have approached film's syntactic structure using linguistic jargon, this is not the place to expound a theory of ciné-semiotics, if such a thing exists. The fact that we are anthropology filmmakers forces us to say that we have deliberately not dealt with cultural differences in film structuring. While we believe this to be an essential question, it is beyond the scope of this preliminary statement. What we have described as CFL, then, is no more than European-American CFL; we do not suggest that there is a pan-human predisposition to structure and organize film sequencing in the same way.

Before continuing with a discussion of film paradigms, other factors regarding the relation of film to research needs and potentials must be pointed out. It is only after these factors have been discussed that we can critically evaluate the utility of the LOC and CFL approaches to film research.

RESEARCH AND RESEARCHABILITY IN HUMAN AND FILM OBSERVATIONS

The aim of this section is to discuss research using film, and the researchability of film footage. Basically we will argue that the filming observer must be the human observer who knows and understands the differences and similarities of the filmic and human perception systems. Moreover, maximizing the researchability of footage is dependent upon imagining an event in a way that you look at it, so that you can look at it on film (over and over) and hence do research with it.

First, what do we mean by "research with film"? We mean using film in some way to solve a problem. In this process *film is neither a research method nor a technique—but an epistemology*; it is a design for how to think about and hence create the working conditions for exploring the particular problem involved.

Anything that one collects on film can be researched. In large measure, however, recent examples of social science "research film" appear to be attempts to mimic hard science through linear cause-effect thinking. The researcher/scientist thinks he knows what the film will show because he doesn't believe that the filming process has anything to do with creating the conditions through which he will deal with a chosen problem. Research then becomes a planned closed circuit, oblivious to the levels of information the filmer and filming situation are or are not adding, and much less aware of what film's potential role might be. Film is thus seen as a research recording tool which makes a record of something you already know, and already know how to study. It is no more than a black box whose product is available for research.

This is far different from our conception of researchable film. For us, researchable film means maximizing the research potentials of a problem, in terms of both its "knowns" and "unknowns" by using the film observation/translation process as a creative input related to the research design. For a film to be researchable one must be able to look at it; being able to look at it means being able to see in it what was seen in the event itself by the researcher. By researchability, we mean observation as seen through the camera, primed by how the skilled observer would see the event without the camera.

The first set of skills in this process involve indepth training in the research area. The ability to generate sophisticated research is the result of a long period of orientation, awareness, sensitivity, and sharpened intuitions in the chosen discipline.

The second set of skills requires the acquisition of justified self-confidence in handling motion picture technology. Only at this point can one integrate the capabilities of film with the needs of research design. Learning film translation skills explicitly means learning CFL as a baseline competence system, and LOC as an alternative to it. In order to film the way you want, you must know what kind of film you don't want.

The skill family that links these first two involves perception, specifically, the different workings of the eye-seeing and the camera-seeing systems. What pulls it all together for maximizing researchability is the filmer's understanding of

how to use film-seeing to translate what the human seeing system is responding to in the observation process.

The eye sees with one focal length, optically similar to a 25mm lens on a 16mm cine camera. The camera lens, on the other hand, can exist in a variety of focal lengths, either fixed ("prime" lenses) or variable ("zoom" lenses). The eye resolves data at a higher level than any camera lens system and has a single point of sharp focus. Simultaneously the eye is always receiving soft focus inputs. The camera lens images an entire frame in sharp focus, whatever the lens system. The area of peripheral data that can be taken in by the camera is always less than the peripheral input of the eye, although the camera's resolution of the area is much higher.

The eye's ratio of sharp to soft focus is a product of the shifting signal-to-noise sorting process in the brain. The eye is coupled to a variable focal length brain, while the camera has no autonomous brain attachment. Four examples can clarify the differences: (1) The brain allows the eye to shift to wide angle viewing, lowering sharp focus, so that an increased level of coding of all input can occur. (2) Conversely, the brain allows the eyes to shift to sharp focus on another (possibly high level) signal, reducing the level of every other input. Two other possibilities are illustrated by an interaction triad: (3) When person A shifts from sharp focus in the area of person B to sharp focus in the area of person C and then back to sharp focus in the area of person B, often (depending on the spatial situation of the triad) person A still has input from the peripheral soft focus vision of person B. Or (4), persons A and B are interacting and conducting appropriate eye contact, but person A is really perceiving and interpreting person C. All four of these situations (and obviously many more) are beyond the capabilities of any lens system hooked into a brainless camera.

In actual experience, there are choices of point of focus, intensity of focus, rate of focus shifts, and attention paid to soft focus. On the screen, choice is far more limited. Soft focus peripheral vision cannot be produced by an optical camera system; screen focus is all sharp, usually the result of the cameraman preadjusting for hyperfocal distance. In film, the frame is present, the movements you see are not your own, and the lack of frame movement is also uncontrollable. The lens system must adjust for framing; the eye adjusts only to create a sensing system pathway.

The eye has an incredible ability to move in and out of space very rapidly. Initially, the eye's search pattern establishes context, marking the parameters of the space it is in. Further search clarifies this immediate instant marking system. Then a more semi-randomized pattern sets in, with the eye triggering on the signal to noise flow in the event. As a result of this process, the search settles into rhythmic patterns. This does not amount to a stringing together of the different "holds" and "moves" the eyes make; rather, it is a rapid sorting process.

The camera lens system cannot replicate the search pattern of the eye or reproduce *in extenso* the exact signal-to-noise ratio the eyes triggered on. And the camera lens cannot search at the rate the eye searches, shifting soft to sharp focus ratios instantly. This is why it is possible to sit in a chair and observe an action from one place, but impossible to shoot a film of the same observation from the same single sitting position. The camera must move flexibly in order to maintain the framing that includes the information that the eye is triggering on.

Up to this point we have spoken as if the image were the entire film. It should be clear that everything said about collecting visual information applies equally to auditory information. Microphones and our ears exhibit differences of the same order as camera lenses and our eyes. This is why it is imperative that the soundman understand the relation between acoustic energy and space. Otherwise, it is impossible to record sound with both the spatial and the psychological dimensionality that matches the image.

A final aspect of these sensing systems remarks concerns scale and the process of after-the-fact viewing. Viewing a piece of 16mm film on the screen is different than viewing it on a Moviola picture head. (Think of the experience of seeing the same film in a theatre and then on TV; the difference is not just one of resolution.) Both the relation of the size of the filmer to the size of the subjects, and the height of the angle to the size of the shots, involves framing the image so that the distance of the film watcher to the viewing surface can be interpreted appropriately.

We have shown that the differences between the human eye and the camera lens system critically affect the way one can see an event with and without the camera. Moreover, the experience of watching the event on the screen is different from either that of observing the event with the naked eye or observing it through the viewfinder. We have obviously left out numerous often-made trait list differences between film and the eye; e.g., the latitude of film's sensitivity to light, shadow, and color as compared with the eye, and the inability of film to handle high contrast ratios, low light levels, and so forth. We conclude that an awareness of the limitations and potentials of film in relation to the naked eye are crucial skills for the research filmer.

We know that *film cannot replicate what we see with our eyes*; film is not real. Yet it is capable of recording what some of our sensory systems trigger on in the observational process. Researchability, then, means thorough usage of the existing human sensing-measuring systems, conscious awareness of the ongoing sensing process, and the ability to translate this in the way film is able to see. The researchable film, as an image of what was seen in the event, is not a collection of *a priori* knowns, but is deliberately instrumental in the discovery process of revealing significant unknowns.

At this point we will turn to a third film paradigm, what we call researchable film observation. We believe that RFO is a non-black box way to use film in the research process, a way to use film to see. In the next section we will outline why RFO is a more principled research paradigm than CFL or LOC.

TOWARD RESEARCHABLE FILM OBSERVATION

In order to explicate RFO, we will first turn to an evaluation of the LOC and CFL approaches. Our discussion is framed in terms of the notion of researchability previously presented. Our principal remarks are directed to the comparison of the LOC and RFO paradigms, in that LOC is explicitly conceptualized as the research alternative to CFL.

The first level for reviewing LOC filming concerns the fallacies of its underlying assumptions. One assumption is the

inadequacy of the human observational apparatus. This is methodologically hopeless. Despite the degree to which one considers our sensing systems as limited, they are the best and only measuring tools we have. One can use film in a way that allows the footage to reflect our own measuring systems, rather than operate on the pretense, as LOC does, that film is independent of them.

The human perception system, with its selectivities and biases, is far superior to any attempt to eliminate it through brainless instruments. What and how we see is more important than what and how we don't see. When you opt for LOC, you opt for a way that you cannot possibly see. Hence, the LOC reduces rather than enhances the importance of human observational skills. Starting with the inadequacy of the sensing systems, rather than with their potentials, is giving up before you begin.

A second assumption is the idea that film is a non-biased recording device, capable of adequately imaging reality for research purposes. This is equally ludicrous. By its very light-optical-chemical-mechanical-acoustical-electrical-electronic nature, film has its own peculiar limitations of selectivities and biases. But again, it is the human process that is crucial. Bias (stripped of its usual negative connotations) results from what the filmmaker does with the technology.

Cameras do not "tell *the* truth." With a lens system that makes an image optically reduced in size and that projects it onto a material with a limited sensitivity to light, shadow, and color at a chosen and fixed frame rate per second, the reality of film is only a function of the physiology of the eye. Remembering that film transport systems (both camera and projector) are collecting/displaying still image samples of the event, there is thus no data collected/displayed during transport (holes).

A third assumption is that the full frame is necessary in order to get total data on the film; all events are signal and there is no noise, and the full frame eliminates human filters. Again, these notions are unfounded. Total data is not definable by a framing system or pattern in any *a priori* sense; it is only a function of the research problem at hand. The idea that the widest frame equals the most data is based on the idea that the wide frame is the closest approximation of human peripheral vision. This, too, is naive. There may be instances where a wide frame is the right one for the data being filmed, yet in terms of significance, the unquestioned assumption of the utility of locking-off the wide frame tends to minimize rather than maximize data. This is because of the optical resolution in the frame, the inability of the eye to resolve both the central and peripheral in sharp focus simultaneously, and the fact that we do not have single freeze-frame brains. Blocking out the actual experiential quality of event perception is not a way to maximize the data level of film for research.

The approach to behavior as "all signal, no noise" is an oversimplification. All behaviors may have significance imputed or attributed to them, and it is obviously important to understand the patterns in which behaviors co-occur (X is happening while Y is happening while Z is happening). But it is untrue that everything that happens is always significant. Significance is social; it does not derive from the *a posteriori* categories of the researcher as he attempts to explain what is in the film. Meaning is the result of cultural and social assumptions, conventions, and strategies that human beings bring with them into interactional settings.

Clearly, insignificant information may be imaged in the film frame. In addition, information outside of the frame may be contributing noise to the event itself. By their nature, cameras image less noise and microphones collect more noise than the interactants themselves actually experience. Film cannot show where people's heads are at when they enter a situation. But it can respond to the immediate signal-to-noise stream that the interactants create. A filmic approach that seeks to be researchable starts from the human observational base, understanding the signal-to-noise flow in the event, and translating this to a high signal, low noise film.

Whatever the signal-to-noise ratio of the actual event, LOC filming cannot give an "all signal, no noise" picture of what is happening. A non-moving, non-responding camera cannot shift with the constantly shifting signal-to-noise ratio of the event being filmed. Only the flexible camera, operated by the observer whose intuitions and response patterns are locking-in to the signal-to-noise ratio of the event itself can produce a researchable film.

A final aspect of this last assumption involves the desirability (assuming the possibility) of eliminating human filters. This appears absurd. All experience is filtered in some way; the idea of filtering as a negative bias is naive here. The camera itself is a filter; it interacts with the human observational filtering of the event. Filters can be used to advantage in research. This is why it is essential that the researcher, who has been trained in the observation of his subject, is also the filmer. The idea that filters—cognitive or technological—can be eliminated is the idea that it is desirable to generate footage with no point of view. To the contrary, we believe that research using any footage is a function of filtering through the observational training and sophistication of the filmer.

We have indicated that the underlying assumptions of the LOC approach are unjustified. In addition, we wish to point out that the issue of "objectivity" has been falsely construed here. When compared to the arbitrariness of CFL, LOC may appear a more realistic and more objective approach to film for research. Yet, when one considers that the baseline of the LOC paradigm is the attempt to eliminate human perception, human creativity, human understanding, and human filtering from the data gathering process, we are left with the fact that LOC shooting hardly heightens objectivity. Rather, LOC is a reflection of the idea that the camera can be a robot and perform independently of human volition.

Moreover, LOC is less objective, in that it actually increases the possibility of lost data. In the realm of knowns, this includes fine-grain motion level cues and the general resolution of micro-data. In the realm of unknowns, numerous meta-communicational information can be lost.

Although LOC fashions itself as scientific filming, its mechanical working instruction approach to methodology has little in common with science. Science is not an accumulation of meter readings and formulae, for methodology depends heavily upon chance, creativity, and guesswork, as well as the sharpened intuitions of the researcher. Thus, in reducing the potential of film to a non-seeing, non-translation black box approach, the only scientific reliability of LOC might be in filming a wax museum!

We believe, moreover, that there are ethical as well as epistemological objections to LOC filming. Invoking science as a justification for stealing footage is antithetical to a humane approach to research. Attempts to justify LOC filming based on the idea that the camera's presence is disruptive are also untenable. Whatever the methodology, every researcher must deal with rapport problems that arise; cameras are not a special exception. We do not believe that the camera's presence ruins data; on the contrary, the skilled film researcher should be able to catalyze the event as it is being filmed. Filming involves human contact and human sensitivities in the process of interaction. Part of the research filmer's skills involve his ability to maintain rapport while the camera is in his hands. Hiding the camera is a denial of the need for an appropriate relationship between those who film and those who are filmed. If the "live" filming process alters behavior significantly—and we don't believe it does—we would prefer to deal directly with possible behavior alteration as a film research problem, rather than to resort to hidden cameras.

One might object that the preceding discussion is loaded; that there are instances where those being filmed are informed that they will be secretly observed and recorded. We do not see this as a more successful way to get unbiased or unacted footage. Peep-holes inspire no kind of confidence at all, whether or not the subjects are informed that they are on camera.

It is clear that LOC is neither a seeing film language nor a principled methodology (much less epistemology) for doing research with film. Hence we do not see it as a viable alternative to CFL. At the same time, we would not argue that CFL presents an alternative to LOC.

As noted, CFL is based on principles of artificial spatial and temporal condensation which inhibit researchability. The selectivity of CFL is derived only minimally from the structure of the event itself; for the most part, its structure comes from the traditional "shoot to cut" or narrative and causal rules of our culture which insure angular, temporal, and matched action continuity.

Even when CFL is framed within a *cinéma-vérité* shooting style involving first takes of non-staged actions, the constant zooming, emphasis on the verbal, and restructuring of the event for storyline reportage and statement-making mitigates against the research use of the footage. What is absent in *cinéma-vérité* filming is an explicit comprehension and translation of the event as internally structured, and the presence of the researcher-cameraman, whose unique skills result in a unique imaging of the event. Thus we propose that beyond the naivete of LOC and the arbitrary restructuring of CFL lies another approach—researchable film observation.

Researchable film observation is the generation of footage that shows the filmer's through-the-camera experience of the event. RFO shows how a researcher within a specific research context chose to see an event as it happened. The crucial argument here is that what we *do* see, not what we never see, is what should be on the film in order to maximize its researchability.

For us, RFO is a new film "language." It begins with two axioms: the structured integrity of entire events and the epistemological bases of the human observational process. Hence, RFO has no need to artificially present images either through the non-seeing of LOC or the reconstructed rhythms of CFL. Filmically, this may result in long uninterrupted takes of the ongoing flow of interaction, angle and focal length changes justified by the triggering pattern of human response and intuition in relation to the structure of the event, and handheld crystal sync shooting for optimum flexibility and optimum interaction between the filmer and his subjects. This simplification of technological procedures likens RFO to *cinéma-direct*. It differs in that the person behind the camera is not making a film-statement but is a researcher with a specific research problem[3] in mind.

The new film language of RFO means reducing the distinction between footage and finished film. The product of RFO shooting is a record of human experience and interaction in a particular cultural and research context. Some might insist that this is "mere" footage because it lacks titles, credits, background music, storyline, and so forth. Our thinking is that such criteria have nothing to do with whether the product is a presentable film communication about how someone chooses to see something. When filmmakers and filmviewers become competent in looking at how film—and filmmakers—can see the structured integrity of events, there will be no difference between footage and films; a non-theatrical film language will then emerge, bringing the acts of filming, observing, and participating together into a unified activity.

RFO has nothing to do with "pretty pictures" (even when one is filming a beautiful event) or "making movies" to illustrate verbal concepts. It has nothing to do with making visual books or teaching devices, although the latter may be a secondary usage. It has to do with research. Research means questions, problems, thinking designs, discovery patterns, creative and intuitive probing. With film, research means exploring the seeing process, sharpening filmic observation through sharpened human observation.

Researchable film observation is a reduction of the event-to-film translation process such that the film moves closer to (cognitively) the actual event itself. In doing so, it is the integrity of the event, its wholeness, and its own structure (not the film's restructuring) that is communicated. It is such a perception of the event that makes it researchable.

Much of the potential of RFO is based on comprehending film as a translation process; only then can one appreciate the importance of a reduction of translation steps from the initially perceived world of events (without the camera) to the recoded world organized on film. RFO is not an explication of an event or the event itself, but a translation of the event. This goes back to the distinction that must be made between phenomena and the units of pattern that are used in both their description and explication. An explicit assumption of RFO is thus that human sensing is the only justifiable starting point for film translation. The premises are: there is no such thing as "raw data"; all retrievable data are non-neutral translations, descriptions, or memories of what once happened in time and space. Meaning in the event is first experienced and understood as direct feeling. As a directly experienced event is filmed, the filmer is continually adding and re-combining impressions so that in the next instant, new aspects of further experiencing can be collected in the process of filming.

Thus, RFO makes three distinct contributions to the re-

duction of the translation process: (1) More of the initial intuitive meaning of the event observation is present in the film. (2) The human/film observation process opens itself up to more possible clues, intuitions, and circumstances—a flexibility based on what is alive in the world of directly experienced meaning in action. (3) Biases can now be seen more clearly, as more of the epistemic bases of the selection and collection process can be directly grasped. In sum, RFO is expressive of the fundamentally adaptive and self-correcting nature of human processing.

We emphasize that we are not talking about a film shooting style that exists independently of the events to be filmed. It is relatively easy to copy a shooting style without knowing the motivation for the choices made. Yet, this does not make the product researchable. The camera and cameraman can be moving extensively or little at all. The takes may be short or long shot sequences. In some cases, the frame may remain constant for a long time; in others, it may shift frequently. The filmer must know how to see the event in order to show, with film, how the event can be seen. The exact nature of the shooting strategy is in large part a function of the context—both social and scientific—and the content flow of the event.

There is no one way to do it and there are no rigid discovery procedures. The skills include improvisation, luck, intuition, excellent reflexes, and an acute understanding of researchability, methodology, and epistemology. Researchable film observation is a new film language, but its purpose is not to create new film language clichés. Rather, it aims to expand the research potential of film through a new understanding of the relation of human observational sensing to film observational sensing.

We see RFO as a humanistic and creative endeavor which explicitly recognizes that human filtering is essential. RFO is a record of human contacts. Its purpose is to maximize researchability so that there is in no way an attempt to condemn the product to archives or to a limited audience of specialists.

CONCLUSION

As filmmakers and audience participants we have generated and watched competent and successful CFL, and have observed several varieties of CFL produced by colleagues. Both our personal work and our observations lead us to believe that neither current CFL nor trends in stylistic refinement will lead to researchable film.

In addition, we think, more firmly than ever, that LOC is not a researchable alternative. The epistemological grounds upon which we have criticized LOC are essentially those upon which the critique of all behavioral scientism rest; both derive from an ideology desirous of separating scientific activity from human experience. The aim is objective detachment. A basic feature of the RFO paradigm, by opposition, is the desire to re-center analysis in experience, promoting a continuity of the existential and objective. The scientistic LOC indifference to the conditions of knowing are thus transcended in RFO.

We see RFO as an alternative because it is not a program of "how to do it" but a way of thinking about the variables to be dealt with in order to do research with film. The most crucial input to this new language system is the kind of seeing that the multi-disciplined trained observer can do. He knows how to collect images on film to make it researchable, and is trained to do it. RFO is a way of looking with film that does not conform to conventions imposed from without the research context but responds to structure and experience from within it. As such, it is both an essential input to research thinking, and a truly exciting new kind of observation-participation, embracing the communicational and meta-communicational potentials of human interaction.

NOTES

[1]We wish to thank John Collier, Jr., Ardis Gaither, Jim McDonald, Buck Schieffelin, and Marge Zabor for detailed critiques of an earlier draft.

[2]By "translation" we mean the putting-into-code of messages; when we speak of film as a translation medium we are referring to the use of culturally organized sets of methods for structuring images.

[3]Our emphasis on the importance of a research problem is not an insistence that filming be programmed. We recognize the value of digressive filming within the general framework of a specific research problem.