TAKE ME TO PARADISE--
THE TRAVEL FILM AND THE REAL WORLD

Lois Kuter

There is a curiosity about other people and places that is satisfied in many ways. Some people go to the extreme of becoming anthropologists or folklorists, while most remain amateur students of the world around them. The travel film is one form of presentation of other people and places which has attracted a large and devoted audience. This paper deals with just who this audience is and why they watch travel films; who travel filmers are and how they document their travels in relation to their own values and their perception of the audience; and, how a travel film is presented. After an introductory identification of the films and their audience, the paper is divided into the following sections: The 'Travelogue' Style and the Beautiful; The 'Documentary' Style and Real Life; The Travel Film as a Personal and Familiar Experience; and, The Unfamiliarity and Specialness of Travel Films and Filmers.

Conclusions about the audience will be drawn from 86 responses to a questionaire given February 28, 1975, at the Indiana University Travel Adventure Series (a series of six travel films narrated live by the filmer); from interviews with audience members at film showings at senior citizen activities in Bloomington, Indiana; from my own observations as part of the audiences; and from interviews with three filmers, a film distributor, and the program director of the Indiana University travel film series. Information about filmers was also drawn from these interviews as well as from articles by and about travel filmers. Conclusions concerning the films were drawn from advertising in travel film catalogs and the trade journal, *Program*, and from my own viewing of twelve films--two with narration by the filmers, six shown in the context of senior citizens' activities, and four shown on television.

The travel lecture where the filmer accompanies his film and narrates it live before an audience is usually found in a lecture series. There are about 1000 series (six programs each) presented annually in the United States, with over 500 professional travel lecturers, and audiences ranging from a few dozen to 6,000.[1] Starting in the late 1800s with hand-colored slides, the travel lecture tradition has steadily grown to become a business with a trade journal of its own and yearly conferences to discuss publicity, competition, and policies of lecturing.

Film lecturers have only recently become professionals in the sense of being able to earn a living from their films. Payment for film lectures depends upon the reputation of the film-maker and usually runs between $200 and $500 with the norm at $350.[2] For the most part earnings are invested in the next film. A love for work which combines travel and photography rather than money is stressed as the attraction to travel filming.

Equally dedicated to the travel film, the audience is, in general, loyal in attendance and appreciative of the films. The ages of the audience range from children accompanying their parents to people in their nineties. But the audience is usually conceived as being on the older side; indeed, the majority of travel film enthusiasts seem to be over forty with a high percentage of retired people. Although some people

think young people could enjoy them, travel films have become associated with an older audience and are shown in old peoples' homes, in clubs or organizations of middle-aged or older people, and in contexts generally not conducive to a younger audience.

Besides a reputation for appeal to old people, the travel film is characterized as good family entertainment. The alternative it provides to the obscenity and violence felt to be part of films shown in movie theatres is an important factor in the appeal of the travel film; this is exemplified in the Grand Rapids, Michigan travel film tradition which was established thirty to forty years ago as an alternative for strictly religious community members.[3] The increasingly loyal attenders at the New York Town Hall travel lecture series is described as follows:

> Many of the regulars at Town Hall feel that in signing up for the entire season's series of 30 Thursday evening film lectures they're striking a blow against the counter culture. They're registering their resentment against today's commercial movies on which, incidentally, they bestow a wholesome x-rating. 4

Travel film lecturers themselves are viewed, on the whole, as nice average people who are not terribly unlike their audience in taste for good clean entertainment.

The travel film lies in a "twilight zone" of being neither academic in nature nor pure entertainment.[5] In describing the function of travel films, both "entertainment" and "education" appear side by side with such descriptions as "educational entertainment"[6] or "informative entertainment."[7] It is this double aspect which lies beneath the distinction of "travelogue" and "documentary" styles of travel filming.

THE "TRAVELOGUE" STYLE AND THE BEAUTIFUL

In the context of travel films, the word "travelogue" connotes a film that shows where someone traveled with an emphasis on the places and things that the filmer saw and thought worth showing to an audience. It documents a trip and the activities and viewpoint of the traveler, while a "documentary" attempts to show the places and people visited without inclusion of the filmer in most cases, with the intent to show what a place is "really" like. Defining "reality" as the mundane and drab, ugly, or difficult aspects of life, travel filmers avoid presenting it, although they are well aware of the less pleasant side of the places they visit. They feel that this aspect of a place is already taken care of by other filmers or writers, and often feel a duty to present the other side of the picture--a selection of reality which includes the pleasurable and beautiful aspects of the world. In the words of one of the best known and earliest travel lecturers, Burton Holmes:

> "I picture what is beautiful in the world. I know there are slums and malnutrition and hardship, but I leave those to others. I show the best hotels, art galleries, boulevards, restaurants. I specialize in comfort and beauty." 8

Travel filmers believe that audiences want to see the beautiful side of the world in travel films and be convinced that there is some good in the world after all.

The travel film not only documents beauty that a filmer sees, but incorporates the aspects of paradise, beauty and magic that might be considered wishful thinking. Titles indicate this aspect of travel film content: "Micronesia, America's Pacific Paradise", "Enchanting Peru", and "The Magical Island of Ceylon." Documenting paradise as a goal of travel films is described as the role of a film crew sent to the South Pacific:

> Imagine yourself bound for the fabled South Seas. Unlike Captain
> James Cook, whose superlatives about the South Pacific were con-
> sidered to be pure fantasy by his fellow Englishmen, you will
> bring back proof of the paradise--in pictures. 9

The paradise and charm of the South Seas may be fabled, but it is found also in Siam with a "fairy-like atmosphere of gilded temples, doll-like dances, elephants, royal barges, and island palaces"[10] and Europe as well has its fair share, which can be found described in travel guides as well as documented in films:

> Leichtenstein--independent "story-book" principality on the east
> bank of the Rhine between Switzerland and Austria. Recommended as
> one of the last unspoiled lands on European Continent. 11

Charm and paradise are primarily expressed by the scenic beauty of a place. Beautiful landscapes and natural wonders such as waterfalls, mountains, forests, and lakes are a standard part of travel films, and there is often an emphasis on the unpolluted, pure aspect as contasted to the filmer's or audience's own experiences. In this way, even the "almost-extinct" Caribe Indians are found to live beautifully "without a hint of modern convenience but plenty of fresh air, clean water, peace and quiet."[12]

The depiction of beauty is not only a case of an optimistic view of the world, but is tied to the tourist industry, which maintains an optilistic view of travel in a conscious effort to urge people to travel. The photographic industry also has an interest in urging people to travel since people usually take pictures of their vacations. In film descriptions, places are often depicted as tourist attractions and good picture-taking locations. Content of travel films includes not only the beautiful scenery a tourist would want to see, but all the "places of interest and historical sights" that visiting tourists often take pictures of. Tourist accomodations and shots of tourists enjoying themselves are also a part of travel films which sometimes serve as guides for future travel. Although they cater to the audience interest in the ancient and historical sights, many films also carefully emphasize the modernity of places. There is a contrast of interesting and old with comfortable, familiar, and new, not only to make tourists feel at home, but to perhaps shatter illusions about the "primitive" and "backward" aspects of the exotic non-western parts of the world:

> The only place in the Free World where one can experience the full,
> exotic flavor of Chinese life at its best. It's a land rich in

heritage, warm in hospitality, still steeped in tradition, yet embracing the modern technology of our atomic age.[13]

In addition to beautiful scenery, travel filmers usually find beautiful people to document the positive side of life around the world:

. . . Yugoslavia is mainly people, people you will like and respect, people of integrity and common sense, a friendly people of proud heritage building together for tomorrow.[14]

Although carried away with the assumption that travel films exist solely as tools of the tourist industry, Barsam expresses the extreme of the travel film as it depicts the beautiful and comfortable:

With tourism as their goal, they make little effort to approach their subject from a creative or dramatic point of view; indeed, they often focus on the most ordinary customs in an attempt to record the life style of a particular people. Smiling faces, tranquil villages, sunny beaches, towering mountains, rushing waterfalls--every cliche in the travel agent's book is paraded in front of the static camera in the hope that Mr. and Mrs. Armchair Traveler will feel secure enough to leave the comforts of their own home for a few weeks in a "strange land," a "land of contrasts," but not with so many contrasts--so say the films-- that they will be uncomfortable.[15]

THE "DOCUMENTARY" STYLE AND REAL LIFE

The travel filmmaker is in one sense a professional tourist with good camera equipment, but this is only partially the case and not at all applicable to many travel filmers. Although travel filmers present the beautiful aspects of a place, there is also a concern to show "real life." With what they consider an increase in audience "sophistication," and demand for "social content," filmers feel that there is presently a shift away from the "travelogue" style of film to the "documentary." This style is associated with the presentation of more facts and analysis in the narration, but the shift is not necessarily towards more "objectivity." Julien Bryan, an early and well-known travel film lecturer (contemporary with Burton Holmes) is felt to epitomize the "documentary" style, but as a dedicated young man with a message,"[16] his films were by no means less subjective than those depicting beauty and paradise. However, the inclusion of social and political problems is associated with "reality" in the context of travel films, and is a departure from the "travelogue" style.

Bryan made a radical departure from the "picture postcard" travelogue and gave his audiences realism and analysis of life in other countries. . . He filmed communist Russia, Nazi Germany, imperialist Japan in the 1930's and thus told a disillusioned, depression-ridden America what was really going on in the world.[17]

Although travel films have social content in the sense of pointing out a problem to be corrected or avoided, the inclusion of more "real life" is usually associated

with depiction of more "real" people--the ordinary citizens of a country and their activities:

> Today we are no longer presenting the shadow travelogue that just shows the best restaurant, the best hotel, the best museum. . . Now we go in depth. We entertain, and we picture the places you must see if you are a tourist, but we also show the daily life of the worker, something about the schools and hospitals, principal industries, and how a country balances its budget and so forth.[18]

Because people in themselves are felt to convey the spirit of a place, an emphasis is found on close-up shots of peoples' faces--usually pretty women, wrinkled old people, and most commonly, children.

"How people live" has always been a part of the travel film to some degree and is often conveyed by showing activities such as dancing, celebration of festivals, strolling through markets, or work in a factory or shop. This is a large part of the content of travel films shown today, but as well as showing large anonymous masses, there is inclusion of a few individuals as the filmer knew them. Often an artist or craftsman will be a focus, and shots will include not only his working hands, but also his family and pets, and the inside of his home.

THE TRAVEL FILM AS A PERSONAL AND FAMILIAR EXPERIENCE

Showing the friends of the filmer is part of the personal expression expected and valued as part of travel films. The filmer and his subjectivity are intentionally included, creating a tie to the audience:

> This is what can turn your travelogue into a smooth-moving, exiting and very personal expression, where people talk to people about people.[19]

> If exploration lectures and T.V. travelogues are a success, it is, I repeat, due to the fact that behind the clumsy images there is presence of the person who shot them.[20]

Advice to tourist photographers stresses the personalization of photography and the desirability of making it record what was meaningful and important about a trip or vacation for the photographer. This aspect, along with the unhesitating acceptance and valuation of subjectivity, is shared by the professional and the amateur in making travel films.

The travel-accounting structuring of filming is shared as well by anthropologists who use such a system to document their fieldwork. Jay Ruby discusses the fact that anthropologists tend to use a system of taking still photographs which most closely resemble "someone from his own culture on vacation."[21]

> The experience is exotic and to be recorded visually so that it can be remembered and shared with others who were not there. A good tourist attempts to get a complete photographic record; so does the fieldworker.[22]

The retelling of a trip involves narration as well as visual images, and both the film and its narration are structured to form a story. Good design and continuity in presentation are considered necessary for success in travel description.

> Taking a tip from television travelogues, you will notice there is always a plot, no matter how loose. Fundamental human nature strives to create unity.[23]

Although its use varies greatly, background music or sound is important in structuring a film. Music is used where one would normally expect it but, in the live-narrated travel lectures especially, synch sound is rare even though music may have been taped at the event shown in the film. Music is most often a general background to the film and is used to highlight a filmer's feelings of drama or excitement, to direct a viewer's attention to a change of scene, or to fill in where narration stops accompanying the film. Travel film viewers vary in conscious attention paid to the music--some having definite feelings concerning appropriateness. One long-time attender of travel films felt that the film influenced his hearing of the music, and the "Grand Canyon Suite" became meaningful as it was used to accompany shots of the Grand Canyon.

Narration ties film images together in a story but, more importantly, it is used to create a feeling of familiarity in the travel film presentation and provides a personal tie to the audience in its informality. This familiarity can also be found in travel writing and is described in the policies of travel column editors.[24] Intimacy is created in a light style of narration with the use of anecdotes and humor, and is found in both tourists' and travel lecturers' presentations.

Besides creating a comfortable atmosphere in the use of familiar content and structures of film and narration, the presentation allows the audience to identify with the film and filmer. The film-maker is not anonymous but is visibly present in the film, or, in the case of travel lecturers, on stage with live narration, which further personalizes the film-showing event. Although similar films can be seen on television with narration by the filmer in the studio, this alternative has not been a threat to the live lecture series; in fact, television may even serve as a promotion for them.

The travel film is above all a personal account of one's experiences in and reactions to a place, and their conveyance to an audience--whether in a private home or at a large film lecture--is ideally successful enough so that the audience participates directly in the film. This is expressed by amateur photographers as well as travel film promoters. In a letter to Wolfe Worldwide films, an amateur photographer described his travelogue as follows:

> I produce my shows in a story-like way. I make the audience feel that they are part of the show, that they are making the trip with me.[25]

Descriptions of films also convey this sense of engaging in the activity shown, and Film Lectures Inc. has the following to say about the films they distribute:

> . . . all over North America people traveled with us, seeing the usual, the significant, the new, and different, meeting people of other lands,

learning how they work and play. A film lecture is truly an Adventure in
Travel, live, in-person entertainment proven over the years before thou-
sands of audiences.[26]

The ability to "experience" a film is conveyed in the idea that travel films serve
as substitutes for travel. Travel, per se, and the dream of "seeing the world"
are valued highly--travel films and books are viewed as a means of acquiring this
precious experience:

> In the catalogue of man's dreams, taking a trip around the world ranks with
> making a million dollors, being elected president of the United States, or
> inheriting a South Sea Island.[27]

> People are inveterate armchair travelers, and will seemingly endure the
> most banal images and the most unctuous narration in return for a few
> hours on the beaches of Hawaii or in the remote villages of Ireland.[28]

People value films for their ability to "preserve memories" and allow them to
"relive" a trip; they enjoy seeing films of places to which they have already
been, because they can fill in gaps in their own experience.

THE UNFAMILIARITY AND SPECIALNESS OF TRAVEL FILMS AND FILMERS

While the travel filmer creates a feeling of familiarity and shared experience
with the audience, he is set off from them as a specially skilled and knowledge-
able traveler and filmer. Knowledge of a place visited is considered crucial
for recording one's impressions or capturing the spirit of "real life." Read-
ing about a place before visiting is included in advice to tourists to improve
their photography, and travel film lecturers spend an average of five or six
months researching for their next film. As well as accumulated knowledge,
travel filmers are felt to have extra ability and experience as travelers, which
qualifies them to make better films. Living in a place for a period of time is
believed to be necessary in order to pick up the "feel" and record it accurately,
an idea not dissimilar to a philosophy of fieldwork expressed by anthropologists.
The following describes the learning process of one travel film crew:

> They not only photographed all they saw but studied extensively each
> country, learned several languages, and in so doing, gained first-hand
> knowledge of the world, its people, their customs and cultures.[29]

A perceived need to adapt to growing audience demands is met not only in providing
more content of "everyday life" and people, but also in using photographic tech-
niques which suit an audience's expectations. It is the young people, especially,
who are seen as a challenge, because "they're so accustomed to visual things,
and to rapidity, things, moving and changing, that you have to keep up with that."[30]
In order to attract the younger audience, who are considered to be more apprecia-
tive of photographic technique and inventiveness in editing, films are updated
by deleting such things as old cars and out-of-style fashions.[31] Although the
audience is typically perceived as old and pleased with almost anything colorful
that comes on the screen, the questionaire at the film lecture series in

Bloomington, Indiana, showed that an appreciation for professionalism and the quality of photography of travel films was not limited to the young.

The travel filmer is set off from the amateur by a certain creativity and artistic ability to find interesting images and put them together into a coherent film. Filmers and audiences both express the idea that photographic talent is something that you "have" and rarely "learn," and this "picture sense" and an "intuitive eye" marks the good travel filmer. Originality is increasingly important as the competition within the travel film (also travel writing) business grows. A conscious effort is made to avoid the old stereotype of the boring nature of travel films, which is often the butt of jokes about home slide shows of the family vacation. Humor is sometimes used to break a potential monotony of mountains and buildings, but excitement and movement result from using the "unexpected." Showing the familiar and old things by means of a new camera angle or unfamiliar framing, as well as from the perspective of an unusual form of travel, are now standard techniques. Professional travel filmers invariably advise tourist picture-takers to be experimental with the use of unfamiliar angles and lighting, or with editing in the final presentation of a travel account.

The professional travel filmer is also set off as an adventurer of sorts who is willing to go places a tourist would not go and do things a tourist would not do. Some filmers have in their background adventurous activities such as stunt flying, mountain climbing, elephant chasing, or skin diving to mark them as explorers. The quest for excitement is not merely an innovative technique of photography or editing, but a search for an adventurous place to film as expressed in film titles such as "Expedition Peru," or "Exploring Hiawathaland." A more explicit expression is found in a quote by F. L. Coffin offered as an explanation of the appeal found in multi-media travel shows:

> "Even if the odds are a hundred to one that a man will never recover a solitary doubloon," Coffman suggests, "he will persist in hunting for treasure. Why? Because after the dream of quick, easy riches goes, he will be intoxicated by the spirit of adventure."[32]

Part of the fascination of the travel film (and also travel writing) can be identified in its satisfaction of curiosity about things "off the beaten track." A special value is attached to the presentation of things a tourist cannot see, whether because of his tourist role, lack of time or money, or some sort of difficulty or taboo in reaching a particular place.

> Ken Wolfgang, 'adopted' for several years by a Japanese family--living, talking, working, and playing with them--discovered this side of Japan which few foreigners ever know.[33]

> This motor journey provides a rere look at a part of the world where few Westerners have ventured, and where journalists are seldom permitted to film.[34]

The travel filmer is special in his ability to find a place unknown to the tourist's traveling experience and also in his ability to film any place in an adventurous way.

Something to please everybody can be found in a travel film--perhaps only a little of it, but it is there. The ability to depict contrasts in scenery, life styles, levels of antiquity and modernity, as well as types of people, of any place in the world is important to the travel filmer who believes that diversity is in itself valuable and who enjoys showing audiences new places and differing aspects of living. This includes the things near and dear to the American tourist, as well as the strange and unique; the spirit of any particular place can be found in this diversity. As expressed by Burton Holmes in 1948, the travel filmer attempts to show what is unique about a place:

> This whole thing has got to change. We can't show just mountains and hotels, the waitresses and that sort of thing anymore. Get out there and dig for things worth looking at, things you find only in that place, things that will make the show worth seeing. Give your audience something to remember. If you do that, you can go on forever."[35]

CONCLUSION

The travel film is above all a personal account of a travel experience. Because its structure and style are similar to that used by tourists and amateur photographers on vacation, audiences are able to feel a personal relationship to the filmer. In this sense, the travel filmer seems to create a clear communication of his feelings about a place and his experiences of it to the audience. He shows things familiar to an audience and expected by them; he uses a story structure which makes sense and is used by the audience members themselves to present travel experiences; and he presents the film in an informal and personal manner which enables audience involvement in the film and which encourages as much identity as possible with the filmmaker and his subjectivity.

However, there ia a high value placed on creativity and photographic skills in the creation of a film that is exciting structurally as well as in content. Showing the unfamiliar and hard to reach places is an important part of most travel films. Although beautiful scenery and pleasant people sometimes seem overwhelming, travel filmers express a desire to show "real life" in the sense of showing the ordinary, and do not try to make the world look like an ideal United States. Showing "real life" is most often done by showing personal relationships with everyday people of the places visited and by showing the full diversity and variety of people, scenery, and things which can be found. The idea of depicting "reality" in the sense of social problems and unpleasant aspects of living is not strong in travel films, even though filmers are aware of social problems and the less picturesque parts of places they visit. They are capable of including critical comment on social, political, or ecological situations, and on occasions do so directly, and always do so indirectly in the mere choice of what they show in a film. A travel film is a strong statement of values and is accepted as such by filmers and their audiences.

NOTES

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