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Fieldwork with a Cinema

Kari G. Heider

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There are two sides to fieldwork with a cinema, one the purely scientific side, the other the showman's. Success in both fields demands a realisation of the needs of each, a thorough grasp of technique and a spirit of compromise. [Hilton-Simpson: 1925]

Introduction

Recently, in a book on ethnographic film addressed mainly to anthropologists, I laid out in some systematic detail my thoughts about the subject as seen from the perspective of a practicing ethnographer who had made and used films. In this article I would like to continue the discussion, touching on a few points which have turned out to be particularly interesting, unresolved, or controversial, and also attempt to locate the discussions of ethnographic film in relation to the terms of other cinematic debates.

My major concern has been with those films that are based on ethnographic understandings of a culture, and I sketched a system that would allow us to discuss different attributes which contribute to the ethnographicness of a film. There is certainly a good deal of scholastic exclusiveness in this. It appeals to the authority of a particular academic tradition to say that ethnographic film is doing, through film, what ethnographers have been doing in their books and articles. Now this is meaningful to other anthropologists who already have a good idea of what ethnography is all about (whether it is called ethnography, ethnology, or social anthropology). But to others it is hardly a helpful definition, for ethnography is itself a fuzzy category and attempts at definition of the field tend to be fatuous.

Ethnography once meant the study of exotic cultures, and this study resulted in a cross-cultural perspective which persisted even when we began studying our own cultures. Perhaps the most important criteria of ethnography for this present discussion are (1) theoretically based analysis and description; (2) fieldwork, in which the scholar goes to live for an extended time in a community, making the most varied sorts of observations and inquiries;[2] (3) concerns with actual, observable (and so filmable) behavioral patterns as well as with the ideal cultural norms; (4) holism; and, of course, (5) truth[3] (see Heider 1976:6–7).

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Holism, the insistence on studying and explaining human behavior in context, is the hallmark of ethnography.[4] I have emphasized holism in thinking about ethnographic film, because one of the strengths of film is its ability to contextualize behavior—to show, in a single shot, many things at once in complex interrelationships. Thus, I am concerned with working out how the holistically based ethnography can best mesh with the contextualizing potential of film.

The concepts Whole Bodies, Whole People, and Whole Acts are holistic goals for ethnographic film. They are discussed at some length in my book, *Ethnographic Film* (1976), but may be summarized here: Whole Bodies suggests that, since humans normally involve their entire bodies in interaction, it follows that the cinematic use of facial close-ups and alternating cutaways in filming conversations deprives viewers of important and interesting information; Whole People suggests taking advantage of the specificity of the film image to develop rounded views of a few individuals rather than showing anonymous interchangeable people in masses; and Whole Acts suggests that behavioral acts in their totality, not just their obvious peak moments, should be represented. Most ethnographic films violate these principles most of the time and are weaker for it.

The notion of truth is part of a great paradox: on the one hand, we assert that truth is a possible and necessary goal in science, but on the other, we acknowledge that neutrality, or nonselectivity, is not possible.

How does one handle this paradox?

One might reject the concept of truth as hopelessly naive, saying that since all perception, description, and analysis are a matter of aesthetic choice or political preference there can be no truth.

Or, one might take a stand of methodological purity and rigor, from which relativism would be denied as mere sloppiness.

A third position would be to accept both the goal of truthful understanding and the notion that there may be different ways to approach truth. I think that some such compromise would be held by most social scientists.

When I suggest that anthropologists have learned to live with this paradox, I mean that "truth" and "neutrality," as absolutes, are not words that start arguments. The arguments we do have ultimately revolve around questions of which paradigm is the most useful; which accounts for the most important data and loses the least; and which has more desirable degrees of truth or neutrality.

Finally, ethnography has a tradition of empathy with other cultures, and most ethnographers would claim at some point that their work helps to reduce ethnocentrism. Yet, ethnographers find it hard to achieve the same understanding when studying their own cul-

ture. It is an old truism that ethnographers have turned ethnocentrism inside out: they respect all religions but their parents'; they defend the most remarkable practices abroad but condemn their own cultures. One sees this often in ethnographic films— the closer they are to home, the more they turn from understanding to muckraking and subtle denigration of individuals and customs. (This is especially evident if one contrasts Roger Sandall's empathetic films about Australian Aboriginals with his more recent film, *Weddings,* a basically cynical treatment of three white Australian couples.)

Much of our thinking about ethnographic film has been phrased in terms of how film strengths can be used in ethnography. David MacDougall (1969:24, 25) suggested that:

If he [the anthropologist] rejects a structural use for film, he effectively rejects everything but its technology. . . . Like writing, film becomes singularly crude and inarticulate without its syntax, and is reduced to a kind of notetaking.

But what is this structure, this syntax? We need to approach the linguistic analogy gingerly. Metz, for example, laid out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the analogy, especially emphasizing that the basic unit of the cinema, the shot, is

not comparable to the word in a lexicon; rather it resembles a complete statement (of one or more sentences), in that it is already the result of an essentially free combination, a "speech" arrangement. [Metz 1974:100]

The important implication here is that structure exists both within the shot and in the joining of shots in editing.

Realism v. Nonrealism: Two Tool Kits

Following this thought, we are quickly drawn into the theoretical battles which have been raging in film theory concerning the structure of shots (*mise en scène*) and editing (montage), two features that are often set up as polemic alternatives. Although the argument has centered on fictional films, it can help us to think about ethnographic film, particularly on the simplest level of technique.

The debate has centered on cinema and reality: should cinema reflect reality or should it create a new, cinematic reality? The pioneers of film, Méliès and the Lumières, serve as totemic ancestors for the two moieties. The Lumières' straightforward films of everyday events were the charters for subsequent realism, and Méliès's fantastic film inspired the nonrealists.

I have no intention of intruding on decades of film theory debate, but there are some points that have come up which seem of particular relevance to ethnographic film. As an ethnographer, I have felt more comfortable with the realists like Bazin, because they have been speaking more to our concerns. Henderson (1971:33–34) has made the valuable suggestion that these are really two types of theories:

part-whole theories and theories of relation to the real. . . . Examples of the first are those of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, which concern the relations between cinematic parts and wholes; examples of the second are those of Bazin and Kracauer, which concern the relation of cinema to reality.

For better or for worse, ethnographers have been primarily concerned with the relation of ethnography to reality. Even as we have asked part-whole questions of myths and other data, we have rarely examined our own ethnographic monographs—or ethnographic films—in this light.[5]

Bazin, in discussing the era of silent films, distinguished between "those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality" (1967:24). He also discussed film "in which the image is evaluated not according to what it adds to reality but what it reveals of it" (ibid.:28).

In addition to the ideology which is promulgated in programmatic pieces and in interviews, we can talk (on the very general level of ideal type) about a technical tool kit, a bundle of techniques which are characteristic of the two different schools and which are the means whereby ideology is translated to the screen. Thus, realistic cinema uses long takes, wide-angle shots, and deep focus, while impressionistic cinema is characterized by montage, close-ups, and shallow focus. On the whole, ethnographic film has more use for the realistic tool kit.[6]

In this connection, it is useful to think about a famous series of examples which Kuleshov and Pudovkin discussed in the 1920s (Pudovkin 1949:60–61; 117; 140). (Actually, there seems to be some question as to whether they were actually experiments, but that is irrelevant here since they work as thought experiments also.) These formed a sort of charter myth for the theory of montage during its heyday in the 1920s and 1930s. In each example they showed that meaning was attributed to the film as a result of the juxtaposition of shots, not because of any meaning inherent in any one shot. According to Pudovkin:

Guided by the director, the camera assumes the task of removing every superfluity and directing the attention of the spectator in such a way that he shall see only that which is significant and characteristic. [1949:58]

In other words, it is essential to this illusion that the constituent shot have minimal context, an effect which can be achieved by extensive use of the close-up shot.

Bazin (1967:36) points out that this montage "by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression" because it defines which details are important by suppressing the rest. Or, as Sandall (1972:196) put it in a critique of some shots in *Dead Birds,* "when a close-up is entirely bare of contextual evidence you can make it say anything at all." Bazin hailed the depth of field introduced in the 1930s by Renoir, and, especially, Welles in *Citizen Kane,* as a "dialectical step forward in the history of film language" because it enhances the "unity of image in space and time" (1967:35).

We could weigh montage against *mise en scène,* but they are, after all, only techniques which result in more directed images or in greater "unity of image." On the whole, I support the goal of Bazin's unity in ethnographic film.

The extreme version of this position, translated into technical terms, would result in single-take films, shot in wide-angle with deep focus.[7] Now, research footage is a very special case here. It is often film shot by an ethnographer, but it is not intended as part of a finished presentation film. Rather, it is used to capture the image of behavior so as to analyze it through careful frame-by-frame viewing. I think, in particular, of footage of a psychiatric interview involving one psychiatrist and a family of two adults and four children. Because of the way in which the footage was shot, the analysts were able to examine the coordination and synchrony of various sorts of movement across the entire group, discovering features of the group dynamic which would have been lost if the footage had been shot by a more mobile camera. (This was a film by Christian Beels and Jane Ferber, 1973.)

The principle is well illustrated in some videotapes of therapy sessions which I recently saw. The obvious way to shoot them was a single long shot which would include the entire bodies of both psychiatrist and patient. Instead, two cameras were used with a split-screen image so that the psychiatrist was shown on one-half of the screen, full body, and the patient in head-and-shoulders close-up on the other half. As a result, much information was lost about the interaction (e.g., it was not possible to know when eye contact was being made) and about what the patients were doing with their hands, bodies, and legs. As it happens, research with film and videotape allowed people like Bateson, Birdwhistell, Lomax, and Ekman and Friesen to demonstrate how much important information is continually being expressed and communicated in whole bodies and in both sides of a conversation. Their research has had a direct impact

on thinking about ethnographic film. In particular, we can now appreciate how much those two staples of the impressionistic tool kit, close-ups and short shots, violate the cultural integrity of behavior. (However, I would have to agree with Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead that in most of these respects we have still not caught up with the filming Bateson did in Bali and New Guinea in the 1930s. See Bateson and Mead 1976:42.)

One can point to other examples in the area of research footage in which the extreme realist tool kit is advantageous. Adam Kendon had his footage of greeting behavior shot in wide-angle and so was able to pick up unexpectedly early stages of greeting sequence (Kendon and Ferber: 1973). Charles Goodwin's analysis of conversation (1981) likewise depends on shooting a group at, say, a dinner table, with wide-angle lens and fixed camera. As I examine my own videotape records of New Guinea Dani behavior, which I shot as part of a study of child rearing, I am most appalled when the camera zooms in—I must have had something in mind at the time, but now, years later, these zooms make no sense.

These are all cases where film or videotape was used for research or discovery. By definition the researcher is not always sure what will be significant and cannot close in on some behavior of interest without sacrificing other, potentially important data.

Like any principle, the admonition against close-up shots, montage, shallow focus, and even camera movement can certainly be overdone. This is true even for research footage, and certainly holds for ethnographic film. I do not mean to exclude those techniques totally from our repertoire. Even *Citizen Kane* has close-ups and montage. But as a practical manner, most fancy camerawork with the impressionistic tool kit is not justifiable.

I would like to suggest that the logical techniques for ethnographic film are those of the realistic tool kit and that deviations from it should be carefully justified.

It is dangerous to propose any principle like this; it is too easily converted into the extreme case and rejected. I do not advocate a cookbook application of shooting techniques. I particularly do not envision religious observances of sacred laws. (The religious overtones are already uncomfortably strong in film theory: note Bazin's use of the term "belief" cited above, and particularly the subtitle of Kracauer's *Theory of Film* [1960], which promises *The Redemption of Physical Reality*.)

But I do commend the realistic technical bundle to ethnographic filmmakers. I am prepared to show, in my own ethnographic film and on research videotape, countless examples of unjustifiably short or close shots.

Having said all this, let me now turn around and suggest that there are moments when elements of the nonrealistic tool kit can well be used in ethnographic film. First, montage: most events shown in ethnographic films last longer than a film should, and editing is inescapable, even when it destroys the temporal unity of an event.

In *Les maîtres fous,* Jean Rouch used montage to show the referent of a symbol. When the egg is smashed on the head of the possessed man playing the Governor-General, Rouch cuts to a shot of the real Governor-General of the colony in full regalia to show us the white ostrich plume streaming down his hat and tells us, visually as well as verbally, that the egg is meant to symbolize the feather. (This cross-cutting has a parallel in a written analysis of a myth.)

Sandall had discussed this footnoting or cross-referencing technique in connection with his film *Mulga Seed Ceremony,* and asks how far such explanations should go (1975:127). It is not a question which can be answered in the abstract. When Rouch interrupts the possession ceremony of the Hauka to show us the British trooping of the colors, it seems a most fitting visual technique which adds immeasurably to the film.

Also, in *Les maîtres fous* Jean Rouch uses flashbacks in the final sequence to juxtapose the men as they appear in their everyday contexts with their exalted forms in their possession states. And in *The Nuer* there are sequences of quick cuts of several objects of the same type which build a visual generalization by showing a range of examples.

An occasional close-up shot can be of tremendous use in clarifying some detail. In short, nonrealistic montage it can, if used thoughtfully, enhance the understanding of reality. In a similar sense, MacDougall (1978:423) has pointed out that montage ("the juxtaposition of scenes") has sometimes been used "as a conceptual device" in ethnographic films. But there is a great danger that zoom shots and slick cutting will be promiscuous and not guided by any conceptual sophistication. We are entitled to ask the makers of ethnographic films to take the same responsibility for their cinematic statements as ethnographers must take for a scholarly book or article. The author of a scientific publication cannot disclaim responsibility for a paragraph by saying "no, it's not really true, but I liked the way it sounded." Yet often filmmakers feel that they are immune from this sort of close scrutiny. Three recent examples from ethnographic films made by some of the best ethnographic filmmakers make the point.

In a film about a rancher (*Coniston Muster* by Roger Sandall), there is a scene in which the rancher talks admiringly about the Israelis followed immediately by a close-up of a truck which has "Hitler's Revenge" painted across the grill. The filmmaker said that he had not noticed the motto when he was cutting the shots together, that the truck scene was shot elsewhere and had nothing to do with the rancher, and that, in any case, he liked a bit of "fruitful ambiguity" in his films.

In a sequence from another film (*Weeding the Garden* by Timothy Asch), showing a man, woman, and their child in conversation, the camera at times held all three in frame and at other times moved in tightly on the woman. The filmmaker had no explanation for his close-ups, and did not consider it a reasonable issue.

In a third film (*Kenya Boran* by James Blue and David MacDougall), an arrogant young man, who has returned to his native village from the city, has long talks with his father and his closest friend, telling them what fools they are to stay in the village. Although clearly the importance of the scene lies in the interactions between people, the camera holds in on the young man's face most of the time. Again, the filmmakers are not interested in accounting for their choices.

The moral: ethnographic films must be ethnographically accountable. And, I would argue, in most cases the better the ethnographicness, the better the cinema.

Descriptive Realism v. Interpretive Realism: Ideal Types and Continua

My use of the term "ethnographic film" for films that reflect ethnographic understanding is fairly narrow when compared with MacDougall's statement that "an ethnographic film may be regarded as any film which seeks to reveal one society to another" (1969:16). He claims a far larger chunk of the documentary film space than I do. But rather than repeat my earlier analysis of the attributes of ethnographicness (Heider 1974:46–117), it may be useful to step back with MacDougall for a moment and chart some of this wider space.

There seem to be two main foci: *descriptive realism,* where the events tend to speak for themselves; and *interpretive realism,* with a relatively intrusive and interpretive ethnographer. There is also *native realism,* another aspect of descriptive realism, in which the people themselves describe their own culture.

Descriptive Realism

Richard Leacock, one of the pioneers of Cinéma Vérité, represents this school; he said: "I believed that we should go out into the real world and record the way it really is" (1971:195) and says, of himself and his colleagues:

> We now subjected ourselves to a rather rigid set of rules. If we missed something, never ask anyone to repeat it. Never ask any questions. Never interview. We rarely broke them and when we did we regretted it. [ibid.:196]

Other important figures in documentary film, Fredrick Wiseman and the Maysles brothers, represent this same ideology of nonintervention, eschewing interview techniques as too directive.

The "observational cinema," which Colin Young and David MacDougall and others were developing in the Program in Ethnographic Film at U.C.L.A. during the 1960s, was similar in intent. In their position statements, they try to forge a careful stand between the naive claims of objectivity, on the one hand, and overt imposition of a theoretical interpretation on the other.

An early statement of the principles of observational cinema came from M. W. Hilton-Simpson:

> We sternly set our faces against recording anything which was not done by the natives *for themselves.* Nevertheless the temptation was strong . . . [but] the result would have been that we be branded as liars by the first scientist who observed the error on our film at home. [1925:326–327]

What has been called "reportage film" is similar to observational film (see Asch, Marshall, and Spier 1973). MacDougall further argues that "beyond observational cinema lies the possibility of a *participatory cinema*" (1975:119), that is, to involve the people who appear in the film in the production of the film. MacDougall traces this idea to Flaherty, who involved Nanook and the other Eskimos in his filmmaking process. Rouch (Levin 1971), the Rundstroms (1973), and Krebs (1975) have turned the subjects of films into actual collaborators who were intimately involved in decisions of content, shooting, and editing. The next logical step in subject involvement was to have the people make their own films about themselves. The Navajo project run by Worth and Adair (1972) was an important attempt to develop a methodology for this sort of approach. Bellman and Jules-Rosette (1977) attempted similar projects in Africa.

Another side of MacDougall's participatory cinema is the move to describe the filmmakers (and the anthropologists) at work, an approach which rejects the fiction of the nonintrusive outsider and turns the ethnographer's presence into a strength of the film. (See also my discussion of this, 1976:50–63, 101.)

Interpretive Realism

The descriptive approaches are all characterized by a methodological delicacy that is lacking in most ethnographic films, where the imposition of a theoretical framework is more obvious. As Jean Rouch put it:

> I think that to make a film is to tell a story. An ethnographic book tells a story; bad ethnographic books, bad theses are accumulations of documents. Good ethnology is a theory and a brilliant exposition of this theory—and that's what a film is. [Levin 1971:140]

Now, we are really dealing with a matter of degree. Once we recognize the impossibility of real neutrality, or objectivity, in filmmaking (and I hear no voices to the contrary), we are concerned with the selectivity, with the basic thesis or bias. And here I think that we can contrast interpretive realism with the descriptive realism described above. But the contrast is more accurate if the two forms are seen not as opposed categories but as opposite ends of a continuum. Many of the classics of ethnographic film fall toward the interpretive end: Flaherty, certainly; Marshall's early film *The Hunters* (some of the later films edited out of his San footage move away from interpretation); Gardner's *Dead Birds;* some of Rouch's films (especially *Les maîtres fous* and *The Lion Hunters*); and Asch's *The Feast*—all have the stamp of ethnographic interpretation. At the descriptive end are films like David MacDougall's *To Live with Herds,* long synchronous-sound documents of people caught in the midst of their daily activities, discussing things of importance and nonimportance.

One can make too much of the differences. Issari (taking his clue from James Blue) tries to define two schools: the American School (Leacock et al.) versus the French School (Rouch et al.). Such categories are much too rigid to help us deal with the reality. But the basic idea is important, and one of the most telling questions one can ask about an ethnographic film is this: where does it stand on the continuum between description and interpretation? Or, put another way, to what degree does the film try to interpret behavior, and make that interpretation explicit, and take responsibility for it?

But the terms "descriptive" and "interpretive" themselves are loaded with connotations and can cause trouble. James Blue (1978) uses "open" and "closed" to describe the same descriptive-interpretive continuum. Closed thinking and closed films are authori-

tarian, even fascist, because they impose the film-maker's vision of the events on the viewer. However, these labels put the ethnographer in a bind—few of us will cheerfully admit to being closed, much less fascist. Yet the essence of science *is* interpretation. The scientist *does* deliberately try to impose an order on reality.

There is an irony here: in recent decades ethnographic training has reacted against a mere data-collecting approach. In the United States Franz Boas, with his endless Kwakiutl blueberry muffin recipes, became (somewhat unfairly) the epitome of that style. We learned that data collected without any theoretical purpose is meaningless. And further, we learned that the choice was not between a theoretical framework and a nontheoretical (or "open") framework. Rather, it became obvious that theory of some sort was inescapable. If the assumptions guiding collection of data in notebooks, boxes, or here, on celluloid twenty-four times a second, were not explicit and examined, then they would be implicit and unexamined. To deny theory is not to avoid it but only to be ignorant of it. Yet now we see filmmakers who speak about ethnographic film in a very Boasian manner. Of course, styles of the social sciences, like those of art or dressmaking, are in continual oscillation. But part of the reason why ethnographers and filmmakers often puzzle each other may be that when they happen to meet they are actually trying to move in quite opposite directions.

Colin Young (1975:69) thinking along these lines, makes the distinction between telling a story (which he dislikes) and showing us something (which he likes). He objects to the interpretive, didactic films primarily because

we are . . . locked into a single argument. We inherit someone else's view of the subject (not always the film-maker's) and are given a take-it-or-leave-it option. [ibid.]

MacDougall (1975:116) also speaks of "ethnographic films containing crude or dubious interpretations." But then, in an earlier paper, MacDougall praised Marshall's *The Hunters* as "a rare and special film, reflecting the kind of understanding of a culture which permits a meaningful interpretive rendering" (ibid. 1969:21).

The main reservation that Young and MacDougall have about interpretive films is that interpretation may turn out to be wrong, and if so, then "each attempt that fails can be viewed as an opportunity lost to add to the fund of more routine ethnography" (MacDougall 1975:116).

As it happens, *The Hunters* is a good test of this concern. The film reflects the basic interpretation of San (Bushman) life held by anthropologists in the mid-1950s—that the San are on the verge of starva-tion. Subsequent research showed that this is not true (see the discussion in Heider 1972:32) and that San subsistence techniques are more flexible and varied than had been suspected; the contributions which the women make by gathering wild foods, and even farming, provide a stable base to the San diet. So the film, by selectively focusing on the men's hunting, shows the dramatic but undependable side of San subsistence. And thus Marshall's film, like the ethnography of the time, is in part wrong. But all is not lost. It remains, with reservations, a fine and accurate picture of San hunting culture. Thus, it is possible for a film to be discredited in part but still retain good ethnographic value.

Ethnographers are more committed to interpretation, and perhaps more accustomed to taking such risks, than Young and MacDougall would prefer. In fact, it is hard to imagine ethnographers warning their colleagues away from interpretation on similar grounds.

If "the test of observational cinema is the strength of its evidence," as Sandall (1972:96) claims, then interpretive realism must face two tests: the strength of its evidence and the validity and staying power of its theoretical base as well. These are, of course, much the same criteria used to judge any ethnography.

And here, I think, both sorts of film, interpretive as well as descriptive, have an interest in the realistic technique bundle. Surely one of the reasons why *The Hunters* so well withstands the loss of part of its conceptual base is the "strength of its evidence." John Marshall is a master of the long take and the wide-angle shot, and it is his informed use of filmic holism which gives *The Hunters* its abiding value.

Let us return to the concept of realistic films in general. It helps to use the ideal types (here, descriptive realism and interpretive realism) to bring out the major variables of realistic films, but it would be a mistake to assume that we can actually find ideal types running through a projector somewhere. We can talk about different mixes of description and interpretation; and we can see how descriptive films might examine not just the native situations, but might also include a description of the investigatory process itself, or might give an increasingly prominent role to the natives' own views. And, finally, these films can all vary in their particular choices among the realistic and impressionistic tool kits, or technical bundles.

As we have seen, many people have grappled with the problems of finding appropriate techniques and structures to represent ethnographic reality. The various terms which have emerged in the discussions can be listed as follows:

descriptive realism   v.   interpretive realism

open   v.   closed
                        authoritarian
                        totalitarian
                        fascist

                        didactic

showing   v.   telling

observational cinema

reportage film

Films which are more sciencelike are described by the words in the column on the right. But there is a great danger that the words in the left column will be used to give the appearance of respectability to films made by people who do not know what is going on and do not care to invest the time to analyze it.

It is time to return to my original position, namely, that ethnographic film should be ethnographic. Surely this is a simple proposition. But it is not universally accepted. And it does not help to use "ethnographic" for any film showing people. The word ethnographic has a long and honorable history, referring to the deliberate, theory-based study and analysis of a situation.

But we have much to learn from both ends of the continuum. To my mind, an ideal ethnographic film would be interpretive, or didactic, in its structure (i.e., presenting the understanding, or the analysis, worked out by a good ethnographer) but yet using the more open techniques—the tool kit of long, wide-angle shots, minimal narration, and the like, thus showing maximal context and giving maximal opportunity to contradict the findings. The weakest moments in Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* come when his understanding has outstripped his footage. Then he must tell the story not with appropriate visuals but with heavy narration over stock footage of birds and landscapes. Yet, *Dead Birds,* like *The Hunters,* is magnificently ethnographic because there is so much that it does understand and explain. In contrast, *The Nuer* has scenes which may be visually quite as satisfying as any in *Dead Birds* or *The Hunters,* but it is deeply flawed by its frequent lack of ethnographic understanding of Nuer culture.

Conclusion

I began this article with an epigram about fieldwork with a cinema which urged compromise. I do not, however, want to end on a note of total harmony. Ethnologists still have to face the film theorists. Henderson has written that:

> Eisenstein and Bazin present a special case—one that has not existed in the other arts (and their criticisms) for a long time. They seek to relate cinema to an *antecedent* reality, that is, the reality out of which it develops in becoming art. . . . It is difficult for me to find any value in this approach whatever: such theories would keep cinema in a state of infancy, dependent upon an order anterior to itself, one to which it can stand in no meaningful relation because of this dependence. We no longer relate a painting by Picasso to the objects he used as models. . . . Why is the art of cinema different? [1971:42]

Henderson's plaint is my challenge: for ethnographic film, the cinema *should* be dependent on ethnography. If that really seems so distasteful, one may avoid it by ignoring ethnography (which is often done) or by inventing a new, cinematographic ethnography (which is sometimes proposed). But I insist that the real collaboration between cinema and ethnography offers so many rich possibilities that it does not have to be scorned by either side.

Notes

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Ethnographic Film Conference at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in Canberra on 18 May 1978. I benefitted from the continuous discussions at that conference and wish especially to thank David and Judith MacDougall, who organized the conference.

2 Mark McCarty, a filmmaker, is on the right track when he says that "we have found that a detailed visual and aural representation of a discrete community demands a minimum of three months' fieldwork" (1975:46).

It is senseless to try to define a magical time, but most ethnographers would suggest a longer period, certainly for the ethnographic field work, if not the filming.

Al Maysles has made what is, to an ethnographer, a curious argument against familiarizing oneself with the situation:

> The better you know somebody, the more you are at a disadvantage. You are no longer curious to put down things familiar to you. The essential you let go by, because you say to yourself: "everybody knows that." [quoted in Blue 1964:24]

McCarty has said much the same thing (1975:47–48). Could one test this, or is it just intuition against intuition? My own experience as a filmmaker (see especially *Dani Sweet Potatoes*) is that the longer I stayed, the better I was able to see the Dani. I think that one could argue this with John Marshall's San (Bushman) experience, although I do not know whether his most interesting, revealing, and intimate scenes of San life were shot at the beginning or later in his visits to the Kalahari.

In my book I wrote that:

> scientific goals are phrased in terms of truth, or at the very least, truths; and scientists speak without embarrassment of the possibility of being more or less accurate. Because of this, the nature of a review of a monograph in *Science* is very different from that of a film review in *Film Quarterly*. [Heider 1976:50]

Bill Nichols, a teacher of film, rose to the bait, and in a review of the book in *Film Quarterly* quoted the first phrase, calling it "a stupefying act of faith" (1977:53).
C. P. Snow said it better than I could:

> By *truth*, I don't intend anything complicated. . . . I am using the word as a scientist uses it. We all know that the philosophical examination of the concept of empirical truth gets us into some curious complexities, but most scientists really don't care. They know that truth, as they used the word, and as the rest of us use it in the language of common speech, is what makes science work. That is good enough for them. On it rests the whole great edifice of modern science. [1971:191]

James Blue has made an excellent sympathetic/sarcastic exposition of truth as it figures in the theories of the Maysles and other like-minded cinéma vérité filmmakers (1964). And I cannot resist mentioning the talk which David Attenborough gave in 1961 before the Kinematograph Group, "Honesty and Dishonesty in Documentary Film Making" (1961).
Holism is sometimes misunderstood. Ruby, for example, does "not believe that the concept of wholeness whether applied to film or ethnography is very useful" (1977:235). But the concept which he attacks is:

> the mistaken assumption that it is possible to develop a descriptive system which would be universally exhaustive, that is, describe everything within a particular universe. [ibid.]

I know of no one who would defend that particular position. Well, almost no one: Sorenson (1967:446) advocating "the full motion picture record," may be an exception. But this leads Ruby to the position where he says:

> I would argue that Heider's notion that ethnography can and should employ a holistic system of description is mistaken and virtually without support from his anthropological peers. [ibid.]

In reply I can best refer to the entry "Cultural Anthropology" in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences:*

> . . . the basic methods of cultural anthropology . . . [are] . . . a holistic view, field study, comparative analysis, and a particular kind of molecular-molar theorizing. [Mandelbaum 1968:314]

Also, the concept of holism as I have used it [see 1970, 1972, 1976, et al.] is discussed in most recent textbooks of anthropology, for example:

> We may thus speak of the *functional unity* of sociocultural systems as a basic postulate underlying much of sociocultural analysis. [Harris 1971:141]

> A fundamental proposition of anthropology is that no part can be fully, or even accurately, understood apart from the whole. And conversely, the whole—Man and the total of all his manifestations—cannot be accurately perceived without acute and specialized knowledge of the parts. [Hoebel 1972:6]

> Another distinguishing feature of anthropology is its holistic approach to the study of human beings. [Ember and Ember 1977:5]

> This suggests that if anthropology is to perceive man as a whole, not simply a combination of neat pieces, a rigorous and precise analytical mode of approaching him must alternate with an esthetic grasp for patterns and wholes. [Keesing and Keesing 1971:404]

5 Jerry Leach's fascinating paper "Structure and Message in *Trobriand Cricket*" is a major exception (Leach Ms.). One can analyze the structure of *Dead Birds,* looking at segmentation and the use of bird shots; Ivan Karp has suggested (personal communication) that *The Nuer* is also amenable to such an analysis.
6 Gaye Tuchman (1973) has described a set of shooting techniques which characterize "objectivity" in television news footage. The newsmen themselves were quite aware of these rules, endeavored to follow them, intentionally violated them for effect in feature stories, but expected to be reprimanded for "distortion" if they violated them when shooting news events. The assumption in the United States is that television news can and should be objective. Although most (or many?) Americans believe that some television news commentators slant their reporting, Americans in general believe television news more than that which appears in newspapers.

The objective television bundle which Tuchman describes includes:

> shooting in real time (neither fast- nor slow-motion);

> head-on camera (neither bird's- nor worm's-eye view);

> fixed plane perspective (no vision in motion created when the camera moves out of a single plane); and

> middle-distance shots.

7 This sort of wide-angle shot has been criticized as mindless data-gathering by Feld and Williams (1975), and, interestingly enough, they use as an example a psychiatric interview similar to the one in the Beels and Ferber film. But they propose, instead of the wide-angle, fixed camera, a more flexible shooting style based on research design and intimate understanding of the behavior. They say: "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" (p. 32).

On the whole I would agree, but I would say that there are certainly some exceptions, such as I have mentioned, and that the sort of informed flexibility in shooting is especially important in ethnographic films, where the context is already analyzed. It is more likely to lead to trouble in research filming where, despite the best research design, serendipitous discovery is important. In the end, the proof is in the product. It is easy to show where the sort of flexible shooting style recommended by Feld and Williams has been misused to produce unjustifiable cuts or close-ups.

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