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Fieldwork with a Cinema

Karl G. Heider

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 realization 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; (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 (see Heider 1976:6-7).

Holism, the insistence on studying and explaining human behavior in context, is the hallmark of ethnography. 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 Lumière, serve as totemic ancestors for the two moieties. The Lumière’s 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 there 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.

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.

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. 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, 1978:50–63, 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 filmmaker'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 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 filmmaker'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 starvation. 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 undesirable 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 benefited 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.

AI 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 Mayssles and other like-minded cinema 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. Sorensen (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 totality 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 aesthetic grasp for patterns and wholes. [Keesing and Keesing 1971:404]

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.

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.

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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Ethnographic Filmmaking in Australia: The First Seventy Years (1898–1968)

Ian Dunlop

Ethnographic filmmaking is almost as old as cinema itself.¹ In 1877 Edison, in America, perfected his phonograph, the world’s first machine for recording sound—on fragile wax cylinders. He then started experimenting with ways of producing moving pictures. Others in England and France were also experimenting at the same time. Among them were the Lumière brothers of Paris. In 1895 they perfected a projection machine and gave the world’s first public screening. The cinema was born. The same year Félix-Louis Renault filmed a Wolof woman from West Africa making pots at the Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale in Paris (de Brigard 1975:15). Three years later ethnographic film was being shot in the Torres Strait Islands just north of mainland Australia.

This was in 1898 when Alfred Cort Haddon, an English zoologist and anthropologist, mounted his Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait. His recording equipment included a wax cylinder sound recorder and a Lumière camera. The technical genius of the expedition, and the man who apparently used the camera, was Anthony Wilkin.² It is not known how much film he shot; unfortunately only about four minutes of it still exists. It is the first known ethnographic film to be shot in the field anywhere in the world. It is of course black and white, shot on one of the world’s first cameras, with a handle you had to turn to make the film go rather shakily around. The fragment we have shows several rather posed shots of men dancing and another of men attempting to make fire by friction. Haddon’s wax cylinder recordings, or those that survived, were deposited with the British Institute of Recorded Sound, London, in 1955 but it seems no work has been done on them.³

Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer

The first major existing contribution to ethnographic filmmaking in Australia is that of Sir Walter Baldwin Spencer. As a young man of only twenty-six Baldwin Spencer came to Australia in 1887 to take up the position of foundation Professor of Biology at Melbourne University. A few years later he made his first scientific expedition into Central Australia. In Alice Springs, which was then a tiny telegraph station, he met Frank Gillen, who was in charge of the station. Gillen had a deep interest in, and respect for, the Aranda Aborigines around Alice Springs. As a result of this meeting, Spencer and Gillen became firm friends and commenced a joint study of the Aborigines which lasted for many years. Together they went deep into Aranda country, participating in the sacred life that is normally kept strictly from outsiders.

In 1900 Haddon, now back from the Torres Strait, wrote from Dublin to Baldwin Spencer in Melbourne. After congratulating him on the anthropological work he was doing, Haddon went on:

You really must take a Kinematograph or a biograph or whatever they call it in your part of the world. It is an indispensable piece of anthropological apparatus . . . I have no doubt your films will pay for the whole apparatus if you care to let some of them be copied by the trade . . . I hope you will take a phonograph . . . You will have difficulty in getting your natives to sing loud enough. [Haddon 1900]

Baldwin Spencer took Haddon’s advice and in 1901, on his fifth trip to Central Australia, he took among his bulky equipment a large Edison phonograph and a Warwick Cinematograph which together were regarded as “magnificent equipment” (Moyle 1959:8), as well they might be—cinema was still only six years old, still in its infancy. To go filming in the heat and dust of Central Australia today with all our modern lightweight equipment is still something of a technical nightmare. In Baldwin Spencer’s day it must have been infinitely worse, travelling by horse and buggy or camel with such cumbersome and delicate equipment.

On his trip in 1901 Baldwin Spencer used his Edison phonograph (his wax cylinder recorder), for the first time a few days before he tried out the cinematograph. On March 22, 1901, he wrote in his diary, “The phonograph is a beauty” (ibid.:9). Several of his original fragile wax cylinder recordings still exist and have been successfully transferred to tape.⁴ I am still filled with wonder when I hear Baldwin Spencer’s voice announce, “A corroboree song of the Aranda tribe recorded at Charlotte Waters, 3 April 1901,” followed by the singing of a solo male voice.

Ian Dunlop is an Australian documentary filmmaker who has made a number of films on Aborigines and Aboriginal life.
On April 4, 1901, he tried out his movie camera for the first time. He recounts the event in his book *Wanderings in Wild Australia*:

There was a native camp out in the scrub . . . containing some thirty or forty men and women who had come in to perform a rain ceremony. . . . This rain dance gave us the opportunity of experimenting with the cinematograph. It was a Warwick machine, and, if not actually the first, was amongst the earliest cinematographs to be used in Australia. It was certainly the first used amongst the Aboriginals. A diagram showed how to fix the film in the machine, so as to make it run round, but no instructions had been sent out as to what rate to turn the handle, so I had to make a guess at this. The focussing glass was, of necessity, small and you could only get a sideways and not a direct view of it, but after a little practice with a blank spool, I felt equal to the first attempt in real life. . . . We had no idea what the Rain Ceremony was going to be like, so that all I could do was stand the machine on one side of the ceremonial ground, focus for about the centre of it and hope for the best. The lens allowed for a fair depth of focus, but the field of action covered by the natives was large and I had not, as in more recent machines, a handle to turn making it possible to follow up the actors if they moved about very much from side to side. . . . When the performers came on to the ground I was ready for them, and started grinding away as steadily as I could at the handle, though at first the temptation was great to vary the rate of turning to suit the rapid or slow movements of the performers. . . . The chief difficulty was that the performers every now and then ran off the ground into the surrounding scrub, returning at uncertain intervals of time, so that now and again, in the expectation of their suddenly reappearing, and fearful of missing anything of importance, I ground on and on, securing a record of a good deal of monotonous scenery but very little ceremony.5 [1928, 359–360]

Today we have preserved some 7000 feet of 35-mm film shot by Baldwin Spencer on two trips: the first in 1901 in the desert country of Central Australia and the second in 1912 in tropical Northern Australia. Considering the conditions under which the material was shot and the fact that it was not transferred from the original nitrate negative until 1966, it is remarkably well preserved. The original negative appears not to have been edited.6

Spencer donated his film to the National Museum of Victoria in 1916, and there it remained in the museum vaults for over forty years. To the museum it was of course a treasure but also, as time passed, an embarrassment for it knew it was sitting on a potential incendiary bomb of unstable, decaying nitrate film. Mercifully, the museum staff declined to take the advice of the chief fire officer of Melbourne to have it destroyed. I came across the film in 1966, when the director of the museum took me to a shed out the back. Here, for safety, were stored two tin trunks and in them, to my utter surprise, were Baldwin Spencer’s original rolls of nitrate negative, still in their original cardboard boxes. With the agreement of the museum trustees, the Commonwealth Film Unit (as Film Australia was then called) took over this material and supervised the making of a safety duplicate master from as much of it as possible. Some had disintegrated into jelly and some was just too badly shrunk to print, but most of it was saved. Duplicate negatives now reside with the National Museum of Victoria, the National Library of Australia, and Film Australia.

The 1901 material covers sequences from thirteen different Aranda ceremonies. Baldwin Spencer described the material as "the first attempt made to secure cinematograph records of native ceremonies: some of the negatives were quite good, others indifferent" (ibid.:I, 374). In fact some ceremonies were extremely well photographed, with individual shots of long duration in the best traditions of observational cinema. They appear to be mainly unposed and capture well the intensity of the individual performers.7

The 1912 material was shot in the northern part of the Northern Territory around Oenpelli, Flora River, and on Bathurst Island. Again, it mainly covers ceremonial activities. Baldwin Spencer now had a panning head on his tripod so he could follow his subjects as they moved about. On Bathurst Island he filmed his longest sequence, part of a Pukamuni ceremony (the Tiwi mortuary rites in which carved posts are erected around the grave of a dead person). It is interesting to compare this footage with very recent films of the same ceremony.8

On the 1912 expedition Baldwin Spencer also tried to film some domestic scenes but without much success. He explains why:

I spent some time trying to get cinematograph pictures of camp life. It would be quite easy to do this with a small hand machine of which, after a while, they would take little notice, but a large one attracts too much attention and makes their actions rather unnatural. [ibid.:II, 900]

One wonders what Baldwin Spencer might have been able to achieve if he had had our modern synchronous lightweight cameras and recorders.

In 1917 William J. Jackson filmed a number of scenes of Aboriginal life on the North-West Scientific and Exploration Expedition to the West Kimberley. Attempts to locate the film footage have not been successful, although documentation relating to the film is held in the Battye Library, Perth (Robinson: 1977). In 1922 Dr. Brooke Nicholls, a Melbourne dental scientist, filmed people belonging to the Wonkonguru (now spelled Wanggalnu) tribe living in northeastern South Australia or possibly southwest Queensland (Nicholls: n.d., a and b). One print of his material was located in 1966 in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. So far as is known it was the only print in existence. A negative has now been made from this.
The print consisted of four 3-minute edited films. They belonged to a series of films entitled *Native Australia*, apparently distributed by Kodak (Australasia) Pty Ltd. The four films are individually called *Australian Aborigines: Corroborees; Women at Work and Play; Implements and weapons; and Arts and crafts*. With the films went printed notes prepared by Brooke Nicholls, “the well-known travel-lecturer and naturalist [who] has spent many years in the study of the native tribes and wild life of Australia” (ibid.:a). The films, and their accompanying notes, were obviously designed for a popular audience.

Brooke Nicholls got considerably closer to his subjects with his camera than did Baldwin Spencer, but I have the feeling that, unlike Baldwin Spencer, he viewed his subjects as objects of curiosity rather than as human beings to be respected. Many of the written titles that are inserted between sequences, for which he was presumably responsible, are at best fanciful and at worst objectionable; for example, a shot of a man digging for roots is preceded by “The Australian Aborigines are the nearest living relatives of the extinct anthropoid ape-like man.” Nevertheless Brooke Nicholls has given us a valuable film record from an area not filmed before, or possibly since, by ethnographic filmmakers. His films cover a variety of scenes, albeit all rather short, including ritual, food gathering and preparation by men and women, games, making of artifacts, and armed combat between two men.

### Nonprofessional Ethnographic Films

One of the most important contributions to Australian ethnographic filmmaking came during the 1930s. Between 1930 and 1937 the Board for Anthropological Research of the University of Adelaide, in close cooperation with the South Australian Museum, carried out a series of anthropological expeditions mainly in Central Australia. During these expeditions a remarkable collection of film records was made with a total running time of over ten hours.

The country where most of these films were made, the Western Desert of Central Australia, was then largely unexplored by white Australians and many hundreds of Aborigines still lived a completely traditional nomadic life there. It was a country far off the beaten track, where camels were a much surer means of transport than the motor trucks of the day.

None of the men involved in making these films was a professional filmmaker and indeed few of them were trained anthropologists. Most were scientists and academics from other disciplines who were intensely interested in Australian Aboriginal culture and who realized the value of film for ethnographic recording. Norman B. Tindale was Curator of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum, Dr. T. D. Campbell was a dental scientist at the University of Adelaide, O. E. Stocker was a Sydney businessman and a keen and talented amateur cinematographer, and Dr. H. K. Fry (Dip. Anthrop., Oxford, 1912) was a medical practitioner in Adelaide. With little money and a minimum of film stock and equipment this band of enthusiasts produced one of the most significant contributions to ethnographic filmmaking in Australia: *Macdonald Downs Expedition 1930, Cockatoo Creek Expedition 1931, Mt. Liebig Expedition 1932, Mann Range Expedition 1933, Ernabella Expedition 1933, Diamantina Expedition 1934, Warburton Range Expedition 1935, Coorong Expedition 1937*.

They filmed a great range of activities in remarkable detail: daily life, food collecting and preparation, making of artifacts, studies in body movement, and a great deal of sacred ceremonial life. They used a mobile camera and a full range of shots from long shot to extreme close-up. Much of their film work is sensitive and of high quality. It reveals, with an extraordinary feeling of immediacy and veracity, the beauty and excitement of desert life.

In 1940 Charles P. Mountford, who was Honorary Associate in Ethnology at the South Australian Museum, made an expedition by camel southwest of Alice Springs into the country around Ayers Rock in Central Australia. Here he met a group of desert Aborigines with whom he carried out anthropological research.
He took a movie camera with him and with little knowledge of filmmaking, he shot what was to become one of the most popular films ever made in Australia. It was called *Walkabout* (originally titled *Brown Men and Red Sand*). It was in color, and was, as far as I know, the first Australian ethnographic film to have a sound track added to it at the editing stage. The film was edited and narrated by Mountford. Its style is that of a personal travelogue, with plenty of scenes of the expedition and the country around the spectacular and gigantic monolith Ayers Rock. But the film also contains much detailed ethnographic material on the lives of the Aborigines of the area.

In 1942 Mountford returned to Central Australia for further anthropological research and filming. From this expedition he made *Tjurunga*, again in color and with his own narration. This also has had immense popular success. In 1974, at the request of people living in the areas of filming, certain sequences of sacred/secret life were removed from *Walkabout* and *Tjurunga* and the two films were combined into one under the title *Walkabout*. This reediting was carried out by Film Australia which had inherited the safekeeping and distribution of these films from the old Department of Information. In 1948 Mountford accompanied a scientific expedition to Arnhem Land in Northern Australia and shot material which was made into *Aborigines of the Sea Coast* and *Arnhem Land*.

### Professional Ethnographic Filmmaking

In 1947 the first ethnographic film on Australian Aborigines to be produced by professional filmmakers was shot in Northern Australia. It was called *Primitive People—the Australian Aborigines*. The production company was Gaumont British Instructional Films but the location unit was entirely Australian. The director cameraman was veteran cinematographer George Heath; his assistant and the film’s narrator was the then young Peter Finch. The film was shot around Arnhem Bay in northeast Arnhem Land and shows traditional life in the bush. By 1947 many of the people in the film were, in fact, living for at least some of their time at Yirrkala and other isolated church mission stations in the area.

The film is in three parts: *The Nomads, The Hunt and The Corroboree*. The first part shows excellent scenes of daily life. The second part covers preparations for a wallaby hunt and the hunt itself. This is somewhat marred by intercutting between the hunters in Arnhem Land and their supposed prey in country that looks suspiciously like southeastern Australia. *The Corroboree* contains some important scenes of mortuary rites, but this is marred by a sound track of unidentified, but apparently Aboriginal music that is certainly not from northeast Arnhem Land. It is matched with the image so as to suggest that it is a synchronous recording. The commentary throughout the three parts attempts to be sympathetic but is inaccurate in places and somewhat patronizing. However, the fine black-and-white visuals provide us with a valuable record.

In 1949 A. P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University from 1934 until 1956, made a film, *Maraian Ceremony*, in southwest Arnhem Land. This was the first serious attempt to record a whole ceremony on film. It was also the first attempt to record a synchronous sound track of ceremonial music and singing. Synchronous sound equipment, in which sound recorder and camera are mechanically or electronically locked together, was not developed for 16-mm portable cameras until many years after this. So, although Elkin’s sound was recorded simultaneously, it could not be laid exactly in sync in the finished film because sound recorder and camera each ran at its own variable speed. Owing to the vagaries of the wire recorders of the day and the short-duration film magazines, the film is technically variable, but the importance and rarity of the record make it a valuable document.

In 1950 and subsequent years, T. G. H. Strehlow filmed over 900 ritual acts in Central Australia, mainly among Aranda- and Loritja-speaking people. Three films have been made from a small part of this footage: *The Kangaroo Ceremonies Linking Ajaii and Malupiti*, *The Honey Ant Ceremonies of Lyaba*, and *The Native Cat Ceremonies of Watarka*. The films are...
in color with correct, but not synchronously recorded, natural sound. The films were edited under Strehlow’s supervision by the Commonwealth Film Unit. Each film has an important commentary. Strehlow was born on Hermannsburg Mission in Central Australia and grew up speaking Aranda fluently. Because of his linguistic knowledge and his long association with the Aranda he had been able to give a rich interpretation of the songs and dances portrayed in the films. It is tragic that the remainder of Strehlow’s footage could not have been fully documented, annotated and edited before his sudden death in 1978.

In 1951 the Board for Anthropological Research at the University of Adelaide recommenced its film production program. Over the next fourteen years Dr. T. D. Campbell made nine color films9 with the support of the board and the voluntary help of his university colleagues. They were all made with Walbiri men and women of Central Australia who were living at Yuendumu Aboriginal settlement. Most of the films deal with Walbiri technology. They show this with detail and clarity. One of these films, Palya, shows the manufacture of gum from the resin of the spinifex grass of Central Australia. Spinifex gum has many uses, some, but not all, of which are shown in this film—in 1901 Baldwin Spencer used it to mend his wooden camera which was cracking in the heat of Central Australia (Spencer 1928:1, 374).

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies

Since its formation in 1961 the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies has been actively engaged in ethnographic film production, first by sponsoring productions and then by producing films with its own film unit. Its first production in 1962 was a coproduction with the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit, recording a series of dances at Aurukun Mission on Cape York. From this, two films, Dances at Aurukun and Five Aboriginal Dances from Cape York, were made. Because the sound could not be recorded with synchronous equipment, the cutting of the films is determined by the need to keep sound and image as closely in sync as possible. This inevitably mars these two films.

Starting in 1963 four major ceremonial films were made for the Institute by independent filmmaker Cecil Holmes. Cecil Holmes was one of the real battlers of the Australian film industry. His active film days were in the fifties and sixties when there was no Australia Council and no Australian Film Commission to give grants and blessings to would-be feature filmmakers. His four films for the Institute are all comprehensive records of complex Arnhem Land ceremonies: Djalambu (1963), Ubar (1964), Yabuduruwa (1965) and Lorrkun (1966). These films, which vary in length from fifty-five minutes to over two and a half hours, are by far the most detailed film records made up to that time of Aboriginal ritual life in Arnhem Land. The participants in the films were all living on mission stations but they maintained a strong commitment to their traditional religion and its sacred ceremonies. The films are all in color. The first, Djalambu, has correct but not synchronous sound. The other three have fully synchronous sound. They are the first ethnographic films in Australia to be recorded with synchronous sound equipment. They portray well the richness and complexity of Aboriginal ceremonial life.
The Last 25 Years

I myself first went into Central Australia, to the Western Desert, in 1957 to make a film on a very remote weather station. Several nomadic family groups were camped not far from the weather station, and I spent as much time with them as I could. On my return to the Commonwealth Film Unit I proposed a film on the daily life of a nomadic family. Eight years later my proposal was accepted jointly by the Commonwealth Film Unit and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies which was to sponsor the production. The only trouble was that in the intervening eight years the desert had become practically devoid of people. When I set out in 1965 with Bob Tonkinson, then a young anthropology graduate from Western Australia, and Richard Tucker, a brilliant cameraman, there were, as far as I knew, possibly three or four family groups living somewhere in the heart of the desert, somewhere in an area about the size of England, Scotland, and Wales put together. We were fortunate enough to meet Djagamarra and his family.

From our filming with Djagamarra and his family and other family groups on this and a subsequent trip to the Western Desert in 1967, I made a series of nineteen archival films called *People of the Australian Western Desert* and a more general film, *Desert People*. These films deal almost entirely with nomadic family life, hunting and gathering and technology. One family we filmed had been living at Warburton Mission for nine months. We took them back to their own country for filming. The other families we met in the desert. The films are black and white (originally shot in 35-mm) with no sound except commentary.

Later I attended a very private screening of one of Sandall's films in 1976 at Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land, where the film was shot. The film was of the Djunguan ceremony in 1966. Besides me, the audience consisted of five or six clan leaders who had been involved in the ceremony—but in fact they were not an audience; they were still participants. As the film started they asked me to turn down the sound and then, with tears rolling down their cheeks, they sang and gently clapped as they relived the ceremony. It was one of the most moving scenes I have ever witnessed.

The first seventy years of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia marks, more or less, the end of an era. During this period the subject matter of ethnographic film was predominantly that of traditional Aboriginal life. Today's films are about societies in change. Until recently, films were shot with a commitment to record whole events, both spatially and temporally. Outside of a small band of academics, this extraordinarily rich body of early work by Roger Sandall has remained virtually unknown in Australia because all the films are records of secret ceremonies and cannot be shown publicly. All of these were shot in 16-mm color with 100 percent synchronous sound. Nicolas Peterson was anthropological adviser for all of these productions. The participants were all living on government settlements or mission stations, but the filming often took place far from these settlements at important sites in the participants' own country.

All Sandall's ceremonial films are made with unobtrusive professionalism. They are characterized by a commitment to record whole events, both spatially and temporally. Outside of a small band of academics, this extraordinarily rich body of early work by Roger Sandall has remained virtually unknown in Australia because all the films are records of secret ceremonies and cannot be shown publicly. I attended a very private screening of one of Sandall's films in 1976 at Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land, where the film was shot. The film was of the Djunguan ceremony in 1966. Besides me, the audience consisted of five or six clan leaders who had been involved in the ceremony—but in fact they were not an audience; they were still participants. As the film started they asked me to turn down the sound and then, with tears rolling down their cheeks, they sang and gently clapped as they relived the ceremony. It was one of the most moving scenes I have ever witnessed.

The first seventy years of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia marks, more or less, the end of an era. During this period the subject matter of ethnographic film was predominantly that of traditional Aboriginal life. Today's films are about societies in change. During this first seventy years, while the relationship between the filmmakers and the people they filmed was mainly one of mutual trust and respect, it was unmistakably the filmmaker who guided the course of the film. Today there is a change of emphasis, a much closer cooperation in the filmmaking process itself between the filmmaker and the people being filmed. The filmmaker is now often invited by a particular community to make a film, and once there he is then guided by that community. The interaction between filmmaker and subject becomes part of the film. With the advent of synchronous sound shooting and translation of dialogue a whole new, intimate and human dimension is being added to ethnographic film. With continued government funding of ethnographic film programs and with the emergence of a number of new and talented filmmakers over the last ten years, ethnographic filmmaking in Australia looks as if it will be as productive in the future as it has been in the past.
Filmography

Note: This listing is reprinted from the original paper. The capitalization system has not been altered to agree with American usage.

Fils are listed in order of discussion in this paper. The information given here is:

a. Classification by secret/sacred content: * indicates that some parts or reels are restricted, ** indicates that all or most is restricted.
b. Title (or descriptive title if unfinished production).
c. Year of shooting (if known, rather than year of completion).
d. Source for further inquiries.
e. Source of print in Australia shown in brackets if this is different from (d).

The National Library, Canberra, holds prints of many of these films.

Haddon Film, 1888, University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge, (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra).

Baldwin Spencer Film, 1901, 1912, National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne.

Aborigines of Central and Northern Australia, 1901, 1912, Film Australia, Lindfield, N.S.W.

Native Australia, 1922, (i) Australian Aborigines—corroborees, (ii) Australian Aborigines—women at work and play, (iii) Australian Aborigines—implements and weapons, (iv) Australian Aborigines—arts and crafts, Mitchell Library, Sydney, (Film Australia, Lindfield, N.S.W.).

Macdonald Downs expedition, 1930, Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide.

Cockatoo Creek expedition, 1931, Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide.

Mt Liebig expedition, 1932, Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide.

Mann Range expedition, 1933, Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide.

Ernabella expedition, 1934, Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide.

Diamantina expedition, 1934, Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide.


Coorong expedition, 1937, Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide.

Walkabout, 1940, Film Australia, Lindfield, N.S.W.

Tjurunga, 1942, Film Australia, Lindfield, N.S.W.

Walkabout (1974 Version) 1940, 1942, Film Australia, Lindfield, N.S.W.

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Mulga seed ceremony, 1967, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.


Walbiri ritual at Guradjan, 1967, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra.
Notes

1 This paper is not a definitive account of ethnographic filmmaking in Australia; my aim is to give a broad general survey only. It is based on a talk I gave to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Ethnographic Film Conference, Canberra, May 1978. That talk was liberally illustrated with excerpts from the work of the filmmakers I discussed. This article, in its present form, first appeared in Aboriginal History, Volume 3, Part 2, Canberra (1979).

2 Personal communications, Dr. G. E. Kearney, Department of Psychology, University of Queensland, and Peter Gathercole, Curator, University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge.

3 Personal communication, Gathercole.

4 For a full account of Baldwin Spencer’s recordings, see Moyie (1959).

5 Further details of the actual filming may be found in Gillen (1968).

6 In 1966 I made a 34-minute edited version of the Baldwin Spencer material under the title Aborigines of Central and Northern Australia 1901, 1912, for a Retrospective of Australian Ethnographic Film at the 1967 Festival dei Popoli in Florence. This film is not generally available. Rights to the Baldwin Spencer material reside with the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne.

7 Much of Baldwin Spencer’s footage is of secret/sacred ceremonies and should not be screened publicly. The same applies to other films containing secret/sacred material mentioned here. Extent of restriction is indicated in the filmography appended to this paper.

8 See, for example, Mourning for Mangatopi (1974) by Curtis Levy, and Goodbye Old Man (1977), by David MacDougall, both for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.


10 After 1966 Roger Sandall made several more ethnographic films before leaving the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1972.

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The Development of Standards for Scientific Films in German Ethnography

Martin Taureg

By the end of the 1950s, the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film (IWF) in West Germany had set down elaborate rules regarding the scientific purposes of ethnographic filmmaking. These rules were to guide anthropologists, who were usually unfamiliar with the medium of film, or filmmakers, who were equally little acquainted with the methods and objectives of ethnography. The rules were to ensure that scientifically satisfactory films would result from the cooperation of the IWF with ethnologists, filmmakers, and cameramen.

Neither these rules nor the related theoretical concepts have since been withdrawn or modified, though they have been subjected to some criticism in recent years. Even though the films produced and published by the IWF during the last fifteen years have differed to some degree from its earlier films, these changes have not yet led to a restatement of theory. One may assume, then, that the basic concept is still regarded as valid. At the least, the rules can be understood and examined as an expression of a particular stage of development of German ethnographic film.

In this article I will first describe this concept as well as the more practical requirements for ethnographic filmmaking that it brought about. Then I will trace some of the notions involved, and relate them to the historical context in which this particular school of ethnographic film originated. The central issues, as will be shown, had already been raised at the beginning of the century. Finally, I will consider whether the concept and standards described here are still adequate today.

The General Concept of the IWF

As the central institution for scientific film in West Germany, the IWF has been of extraordinary importance to ethnographic film since the end of World War II. Nearly all West German ethnologists who have engaged in filmmaking on their field trips have cooperated with the IWF. From their work and that of their colleagues from Austria, Switzerland, and other countries during the past 30 years stems a body of more than 1500 films. The films show a remarkable conformity, which is due partly to the standards issued in 1959 and partly to the range of topics that could be covered easily by means of film (technology, dance, ritual). There have been some changes in style and scope, because, for instance, of technical improvements. But, on the whole, one may speak of a particular school of ethnographic filmmaking.

The basic ideas of this school were derived from a general concept of scientific film, which was formed in the first decades of this century and further developed and refined by the staff of the IWF. It has been applied to a variety of disciplines, including biology, medicine, technical sciences, and ethnology. While there may be practical reasons for a central institution to have made this sweeping application, this procedure seems questionable on epistemological grounds, since different disciplines with different scientific problems to solve might be seen to require different methodological approaches as well.

The general concept has been described by Gotthard Wolf, the former director of the IWF, in several papers and books. According to him, scientific film is distinguished from other types of film by its purpose: in opposition to documentaries and other films popularizing science, the scientific film is "a film for science" (Wolf 1949:3). In his later publications, three categories of scientific film are discerned: the "research film," the "scientific documentation film," and the "university instructional film." Whereas the latter (like other instructional films) profits from the vivid character of motion pictures and from a didactic structure for the teaching of scientific knowledge to students, the first two types are designed to bring about new understanding in the analysis of movement. While the "research film," in the strictest sense of the term, is designed to solve one particular problem in the scientific study of movement, the "scientific documentation film" is designed to provide information on a particular type of movement of a particular object or species (Wolf 1961:16–20, 1967:9–14).

Films of this category, which was introduced by the IWF, form the basic elements of the Encyclopaedia Cinematographica (EC), a collection of films from various disciplines aimed at "systematic filmic documentation of movement" (ibid. 1961). It
was founded by Wolf in collaboration with German and Austrian scientists in 1952 (cf. Wolf 1952, 1961, 1967; Spannaus 1955, 1961; EC 1972). Plans for such an encyclopedia had been first developed by biologists interested in the study of animal locomotion and behavior (Koenig 1966).7

The documentation film is considered as a research film in a broader sense, as a “thorough scientific description” of a particular phenomenon, which may answer a variety of questions posed by different scientists at different times (Wolf 1967:10). There are two prerequisites: The description must be as complete as is necessary and possible; and the highest possible degree of objectivity or of “content of reality,” as Wolf puts it, is to be achieved.8 Though the documentation film employs basically the same elements of construction as does the educational film, its formal design is subordinate to its scientific purpose.9 Sound (i.e., original sound) and color are employed only when required by the subject (music, dance, etc.); intermediate or subtitles are used sparsely, if at all. Explanation by titles or narration is generally avoided, since this is regarded as an interpretation which would prejudice that of the viewer. All additional information on the film is to be communicated by an accompanying text.10 Together only with this text, a film is regarded as a complete scientific publication (ibid.:26–31, 163–167).

"Systematic filmic documentation" in the above sense is employed whenever the processes under study are either not amenable to observation by the human eye (use of slow- or quick-motion cinematography), unique or soon to be extinguished, or to be analyzed comparatively (behavior of different species, for instance). For ethnographic purposes, the recording of (sometimes unique) events and the opportunity thereby afforded for cross-cultural comparison have been considered most important. Apart from offering data for comparative research, ethnographic film documentation is seen as especially important in regard to rapid cultural changes taking place in most parts of the world. Scientific film, functioning as a means for ethnographic salvage, is to secure documents or “research material” for future research (Wolf 1952, 1961, 1967:117; Spannaus 1955, 1961).11

Since it is regarded as impossible to make a "monographic"—but not superficial—film on the life of a particular species or ethnic group (or on all properties of a given technical matter), the documentation films are made according to the principle of the "smallest thematic unit." These units should correspond to the precise answers an encyclopedia is to offer. They should be short enough to allow easy handling and free comparison to other units, but should be full enough to guarantee a sufficiently complete and detailed description of the phenomenon in question (Wolf 1967:23–25, 29–31).

The first films published in the Encyclopaedia Cinematographica were biological ones. But, since 1957, most of the ethnographic films have also been published by the IWF as documentation films for the EC. The films in this collection are arranged by two criteria: species and type of movement (or behavior), in the case of biological films, and ethnic group and type of activity in the case of ethnographic films (for example: "Suya [Brasil, Upper Xingu]—Making of an arrow"). The structure of the encyclopedia thus permits the comparison of a particular activity across several ethnic groups or the study of several activities of one particular group—as long as the corresponding films exist (ibid.).12

From the general concept of scientific film as described here, two central ideas may be isolated. The first is the notion that, by means of cinematography or film, it becomes possible to "fix" a movement, i.e., to take or cut out a part of reality and store it on film. Thus, film becomes a kind of "movement preserve" or "permanent preparation of movement,"13 ready for multiple future reproduction and scientific analysis. The researcher does not work with but rather on the film, which serves as a substitute for reality. Wolf once referred to it as "a kind of second reality" (1961:17). Film is considered less as a method than as an object of research, as terms like "research material" (Spannaus 1955:90) suggest.14 In many respects, it is regarded as more easily researched than reality itself. By this approach, an experimental situation (otherwise unknown in ethnological field research) is introduced, where the ethnologist may examine the same complex and non-persistent movement over and over, in full detail, and with interruptions and repetitions possible at every instant.

Closely related to this first idea is the notion that a film must "contain" as much reality as possible to be scientifically valid. The demand for a "content of reality" as large as possible seems indeed logical—and better suited than that for objectivity—when considered within this approach. For if one is convinced that film may reflect or substitute for reality (or parts of it) in regard to research purposes, one has to take care that as much reality as possible is "preserved" on film and remains unchanged during the stages of filmmaking, processing, editing, etc. As far as feasible, Wolf demands, the scientific filmmaker should avoid all possible distortions of reality, up to the final screening and viewing of the film (1967:171 et seq.). Though Wolf acknowledges the subjective influence of the filmmaker (in the angle and duration of the shots, lighting, editing, etc.), he is convinced that these "subjective traits" can be controlled and minimized or extinguished, if one is aware of them (but cf. Schlesier 1972; Koloss 1973; Dauer 1980; Taureg, in preparation).
Rules for Ethnographic Filmmaking

From the application of this general model of scientific film to ethnology, as well as from the critical examination of earlier films, rules for correct ethnographic filmmaking were developed and published in 1959. They are mainly the work of Günther Spannau, an ethnologist and the first head of the ethnological department at the IWF. According to him, the weakness of the earlier films—apart from technical shortcomings—is their "medley-type character." Incomplete sections of film, most of them shot by a stationary camera without the use of panning, long shots, close-ups, etc., were joined together only with the aid of the author's explanations. The then-existing technical difficulties of field cinematography (especially in tropical climates), the absence of any but the most basic filmic competence on the part of the ethnologists, and the lack of facilities for training and exchange of information and experience were held to be responsible for the poor quality of ethnographic filmmaking in Germany (Spannau 1955, 1961; see also Dauer 1980:65 et seq.).

The "Rules for Documentation in Ethnology and Folklore through the Film" that were issued by the IWF in 1959 to ensure better results from future filmmaking begin with the statement that "film is a sequence of moving images: the scientific film generally is a permanent visual record of phenomena" (IWF 1959:238). Then examples are given of activities that may be "preserved on film, and reproduced at any time for analysis and comparison with similar phenomena from other cultures" (manufacturing techniques, hunting, fishing, gathering, farming) and of "processes in which the sound is an integral part of the visual representation of movement" (dance, manufacturing and playing of musical instruments). The rules go on to state the following requirements:

1. Often, it will not be possible to record the phenomena in question entirely, since they may last for several hours or even weeks. For scientific purposes, it is regarded as sufficient and desirable "to film 'representative' extracts," thus enabling the viewer to reconstruct the whole process. Actions repeated during that process will be filmed only a few times, whereas singular and important stages have to be recorded in their entirety (ibid.; see note 3, below).

2. The "theoretical requirements for representative sequences," the need for "a good visual introduction," and the need for clear reproduction of complex processes determine the camera angle and field of view. To introduce and to show the background, general and panning shots should be employed. Frequent changes of camera position and a certain minimal length of shots can orient the viewer spatially.

3. Spatially separated sequences should be linked visually in a direct way, rather than by fades or intermediate titles, whenever possible.

4. The "anthropological type" of the population under study is to be shown by close-ups.

5. Associated events (like religious customs that accompany a manufacturing process) should be included.

6. Although synchronous sound recording will usually not be at the ethnologist's disposal, he "should always take a complete tape record of the accompanying music" and film, "repeating movements which correspond to musical repetitions" (usually quite short in the dances of primitive peoples).

7. His familiarity with the stages of a given process should enable the professional ethnologist to determine in advance what should be filmed as representative (ibid.:239 et seq.).

8. Scientific accuracy can best be achieved by sound knowledge, close human contact, and language proficiency. Modifications or even falsifications of the behavior of those being filmed because of their awareness of the presence of a camera have to be watched carefully. Any alterations being made (e.g., shifting manufacturing processes from shadow to light, compressing lengthy processes, etc.) must be recorded (see below) in detail (ibid.:240).

9. A detailed written record containing "all relevant facts" such as technical data, data on the group filmed, the personnel involved, etc., is required for scientific film documentation.

10. The above rules also apply to films on social history or folklore.
**Historical Origins**

These rules reflect the general concept of scientific film described above while they also make it more tangible by providing detailed practical instructions and examples. Although they were elaborated and published in this form by the staff of the IWF, they are built on a number of earlier efforts.

If one looks at the history of ethnographic film (and other related genres), it becomes clear that the German concept described above draws heavily on developments in two other fields: cinematography as a research tool in the natural sciences, and film as a teaching aid. The role of the culture history school of ethnological theory must also be taken into account, because of its emphasis on the study of "material culture." It has always been easier to film manufacturing processes than to search for the visual expressions of social and political structures. This may explain, for example, why film was used more by ethnologists from the German-speaking countries, who utilized a culture-historian approach, than by British social anthropologists.

Basic notions inherent in the concept described here, such as that film or cinematography can exactly reflect reality and then be reproduced and analyzed, may be traced back to the first period of scientific cinematography. This period was marked by the work of physiologists and biologists interested in the study of movement in humans and animals; their ideas had a strong influence on the concept of scientific film in general.  

Lepenies, in analyzing the changes undergone by the human and natural sciences during the nineteenth century, points to the shift toward positive science and experimental orientation that was largely influenced by physiology. This new discipline was then thought to be the appropriate model for all experimental science, not only the study of nature. In building his concept of sociology, for instance, Comte explicitly referred to physiological notions. This general development of the sciences—Lepenies calls it "the empirical turn of nature history" (1978:32)—should be kept in mind as a historical frame for the development of scientific cinematography arising from the demand for "exact" methods for the study of movement.

The notion of cinematography (or film) as an "exact" and "objective" method of recording motion was first introduced into ethnology/anthropology by Regnault, a French pathologist and physiologist with a strong interest in anthropology. His first "films" between 1895 and 1900 actually had more in common with serial photography than with film. He made them with a "chronophotographe," a camera for rapid serial photography that had been developed by E. J. Marey around 1888. He later described his first "chronophotographic" or cinematographic records as "physiologie ethnique comparée" (1923:681). In several articles, Regnault outlined the principal arguments for the scientific use of cinematography (Regnault 1900, 1923, 1931). He confronted sociology and ethnography with the "exact" natural sciences. According to him, the former had always subjective traits, even if most critical measures had been taken. In order to turn them into "precise sciences," "objective documents" such as "chronophotographies" were needed (Regnault 1900:422). Only these documents would allow for comparative analysis and measurement of movements and behavior.

Regnault was particularly concerned with the artifacts (these being "objective documents," too) collected in ethnographic museums, because only by means of cinematographic records could an exact description of the manufacturing and use of these artifacts be possible. In consequence, from 1900 on, Regnault demanded that museum collections be supplemented by archives storing the corresponding cinematographic records. At that time, however, his idea of establishing an inventory of principal movements could not be realized. It was not until fifty years later that a similar project came into existence with the founding of the EC.

In his writings, Regnault anticipated a number of features of cinematography that have since been recognized as beneficial to science. Unlike "reality," cinematographic records could be studied repeatedly and in every detail; they could be analyzed and measured frame by frame or assembled and compared with other records. Moreover, according to Regnault, cinematography would eliminate personal, subjective factors and introduce a laboratory-like, experimental situation (Regnault 1923).  

As there are close conceptual parallels between Regnault's plans for museum "film" archives and the encyclopedia that was later established by the IWF, it is not surprising that its staff frequently referred to Regnault (Spannaus 1961; Wolf 1967, 1975). Like Regnault, the institute has grounded its position on the paradigm of positive science and empirism. But Regnault did not see crucial differences between physical and social sciences in terms of how cinematography could be applied as a research tool. His main interest seemed to be in measuring and comparatively analyzing body movements, i.e., in physiology of movement and physical anthropology. One should be careful, therefore, in referring to Regnault as the "father of ethnographic film" (De Brigard 1975:15), because he used terms like "ethnography" and "cinema" differently than they are used today.

But, for the time, his approach was not unusual, as other scientists' remarks on the subject show. Little was written by ethnologists on film but, as the bor-
derlines between disciplines were obviously not that strict, scholars from other fields that treated the scientific applications of cinematography may also be mentioned here. Polimanti, a biologist, was one of the most active of these scholars in the first decades of the century. He emphasized the value of cinematographic records for ethnography and anthropology as being more exact than verbal descriptions, as Regnault did. Field researchers could use these records as evidence of their observations. Others examining these records might reinterpret these observations or even discover new phenomena (Polimanti 1911:770). These accurate records could substitute for the unreliable reports of travelers. Comparison of a number of records could lead to the formulation of general notions and laws (Polimanti 1920:270).

At the same time, Lehmann, a physicist, attempted to determine the status of cinematography in science in general. Adding a third group to Spencer's taxonomy of man's inventions, he distinguished between those inventions that enlarged the abilities of the limbs or the senses of man and those that, in a way, substituted for certain limbs or senses. Lehmann assigned cinematography to the latter group, because he regarded the movie camera as an "almost completely accurate copy of the human eye." But he also recognized that cinematography could enlarge the human eye's abilities to study very quick or slow movements, measuring velocity and distance by frame-by-frame-analysis (Lehmann 1911:3-6).

Within a few years after cinematography had come into use, a body of theoretical notions on scientific cinematography was developed, as these examples may have shown. This is partly due to the role of physiological and physical research in the development of cinematography. With the quick expansion of the cinema industry, however, attention to scientific cinematography waned, although the field enjoyed a reputation in some biological, medical, and technical laboratories (Michaelis 1955, bibliography). This was not the case with ethnographic film, which in those days had extreme technical difficulties to overcome. That was probably why theoretical and methodological considerations were not raised for some time, even then sporadically, and why—as the disciplines were not that strictly distinguished—they relied heavily upon ideas formulated by natural scientists. Other sources were cinema reform and educational film movements.

Institutionalizing Educational and Scientific Filmmaking

Commercial cinema had been a most controversial public issue from around 1907 on. Teachers, clergymen, and academics in Germany considered the "living pictures" indecent and dangerous, especially for children. While some rejected the cinema completely, others demanded that its potential value for school, university, and popular education be developed and turned to advantage. From these efforts, a more or less informal movement for cinema reform ("Kinoreform") originated. Despite producing many books, articles, and resolutions, the movement had little immediate effect other than to introduce censorship and other means of protecting youth. Attempts to improve the quality of films (more serious plots, etc.) failed because of lack of cooperation of the film industry (Grunsky-Peper 1978).

After the end of World War I, these issues were again raised. During the twenties, an "educational film movement" ("Lehrfilmbewegung") was formed, mostly by teachers who promoted the development of films better suited to educational purposes. These films, they maintained, should meet the demands of the German school system, be able to overcome other teachers' prejudices against film, and thus be widely introduced into schools. However, there were practically no subsidies or other support by the government. Only a few schools could afford projectors and films. Again, the activities of the movement were largely limited to publishing in specialized journals, organizing meetings, etc. There were also technical difficulties to be overcome, until the 16-mm safety film was finally introduced around 1930 (ibid.).

A fundamental change in this situation was brought about only when a central institution for educational films and other visual materials was established in 1934 by the Fascist government's Ministry of Education. As the National Socialists were convinced of film's great possibilities for instruction as well as propaganda, they eagerly installed a system of production and distribution of educational films, which soon covered nearly all German schools, colleges, and universities. In 1935, a university department was established at the central institute, the "Reichsstelle für den Unterrichtsfilm." Later, when its scope of activities was extended to university education and research cinematography, this name was changed to "Reichsanstalt für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht" (RWU). Its work—which the Allied forces judged to be neutral and objective, with a few exceptions—was continued in West Germany soon after the end of the war. The department of university and research films became an independent institute in 1956, the "Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film."
Lines of Conceptual Development

If one takes into account this historical development, which I have only sketched here, it becomes clear how deeply the concept of the IWF is grounded in a tradition of scientific and educational film. In addition to the ideas of the early promoters of scientific cinematography outlined above, other principles that form part of the IWF’s concept were raised by the reform and educational film movements: the "single concept film," which concentrated on only one subject and had to be short enough to be integrated into a lesson; the rejection of explaining titles and narration, which would interfere with the teacher’s personal concept; and the idea that films should cover only those topics in which movements played an important role (IWF, Rule 1, above).

By the end of the twenties, the promoters of educational film had developed their own independent concept of film, opposed to the theatre films which they criticized as hasty and superficial. Educational films were to treat their subject completely and with necessary details and had to be structured pedagogically (Grunsky-Peper 1978; Terveen 1959).

As early as 1914, for example, Häfker, a geography teacher engaged in cinema reform, outlined the shape and possibilities of film for geography and ethnology. Besides emphasizing the authenticity and vividness of cinematography, he pointed to difficulties arising out of perceptual problems (because of quick-changing shots, etc.). To overcome these problems, the screening of a film was always to be accompanied by additional material (photographs, maps, written or spoken explanation, original or imitated sounds). Attention had to be paid to the aesthetic shaping as well. Such a combined screening he called a “Kinetographie” (Häfker 1914:15–19). According to him, the screening “of a negro dance without the accompanying music” was not scientific at all (ibid.:24). All these precautions and measures were designed to achieve the highest possible degree of accuracy; thus, the cinematographic record could even substitute to a certain extent for the “real” object of research (ibid.:27).

Another reformer, Lange, demanded in 1918 that everyday folk activities be filmed for popular education. Concentrating on limited topics, these films were to be designed aesthetically to create an emphatic pictorial impression. On the other hand, Lange stressed the importance of authenticity, insisting that no scenes should be arranged artificially (Grunsky-Peper 1978:151).

Many similar ideas of the time were summed up and reviewed by Kalbus in his book on the history and the range of different applications of the educational film (1922). On ethnographic and geographic research films, he made some of the same points as Polimanti. Film could provide an irrefutable record of a researcher’s travels; it could retain changing or disappearing phenomena for future study and comparison. But to guarantee the scientific value of these films, special attention had to be paid to achieving a “genuine documentary reproduction of reality” (ibid.:135–140). Without compromising authenticity, compromises—in selection of the essential and the beautiful, for example—had to be made in order to produce an aesthetic product, too, at least for educational purposes. To supply additional, nonvisual information, Kalbus considered texts accompanying a film to be indispensable (ibid.:143–145).

During the following years, the concept of educational or instructional film was further developed, focusing more and more on the role of film in regular classroom lessons. The basic principles of the central distribution system put into practice in 1934 by the Nazi government had already been developed around 1931. International conferences on educational film in 1927 and 1931 helped to define more precisely terms like educational film and research film (Grunsky-Peper 1978:95–126).

Although some professional ethnologists during this period took cameras into the field, few produced noteworthy statements on the theory and methodology of ethnographic films. The only exception known to me is Krause, who, in 1928, came to the conclusion that films of foreign peoples were valuable cultural documents, offering others the opportunity to study these cultures at home and in detail that would not be possible in the field. He demanded that these films be made permanently available to science by the establishing of an anthropological and ethnographical film archive. The archive would store all the relevant material and make available single shots or sequences from these films for research or teaching purposes. Krause felt that the rapid decline of traditional culture made this task enormously important (Krause 1929).

When the university department of the RWU began its work in 1935, it naturally emphasized instructional films. A survey of existing university and museum films was made; those films that were considered scientifically valuable were re-edited and published according to the RWU’s standards for instructional films. Those considered to be unsuitable for teaching but of research interest were kept in the archive. Moreover, the term “research film” as defined by previous international conferences (Terveen 1959:170 et seq.; Grunsky-Peper 1978:97 et seq.) was divided into three categories by Schwarz, an RWU staff member, and K. Zierold (a ministry officer). The "analytical
research film" solved a specific scientific problem in the analysis of motion. The "document film" served as demonstration or evidence. The "film with the character of a scientific publication" (completed by a written record providing necessary data) offered a new way of publishing the results of research. Ethnographic films were usually classified in the second category (Schwarz 1936:29 et seq.; Zierold 1938:266).

Zierold also dealt with the knowledge to be gained by studying film. Whereas the "real" event could never be repeated in exactly the same form or manipulated to the researcher's convenience in other ways, the film could be reproduced again and again, repeated in part or examined frame by frame with details magnified. In some situations, according to Zierold, a thorough scientific observation might be possible only in this way (Zierold 1938:272).

The IWF's concept of scientific cinematography clearly relies to a great extent on the earlier notions of natural scientists like Marey, Regnault, Polimanti, and others, and equally on the ideas formed during the development of educational film. The notion that film may be used as a substitute for the real object of research—that it is possible to retain and preserve real motion on film to be studied by other, future researchers under a variety of different (even still unknown) conditions—dates back to the beginning of the century. If film is to function as "a kind of second reality" (Wolf 1961:17), it is vital to ensure that it "contains" the greatest possible "amount" of reality. Thus documentary accuracy and authenticity were also emphasized by these pioneers. Promoters of educational film also stressed this issue in expressing their ideas about the formal, pedagogical design of instructional films. Unlike theatrical films, instructional films were restricted to one topic only, which was to be treated fully. Camera angles and shot length were to enhance the viewer's understanding of the subject (Caselmann 1961:18 et seq.).

The film categories of the IWF, especially that of the "documentation film," can be seen to be a blend of principles from these two sources. On the one hand, as a cinematographic record of one particular process of motion, a documentation film is to function as the object of many-sided future studies. On the other hand, it has to serve as a "thorough scientific description," as Wolf demanded (1961:17). Thus, its formal design has to take into account principles similar to those governing the instructional film, as described above.

**Scientific Cinematography and Culture Historicism**

We have now located the general concept of scientific film that was presented by the IWF within a particular historical and theoretical context. One might ask, however, why this concept, which originated largely in the natural sciences, was applied to ethnology as well. I have already tried in part to answer this question above. But it will also be useful to touch upon the role played by culture historicism ("Kulturkreislehre"), which was dominant in German and Austrian ethology for a long time.

Generally, culture historicists may be characterized as "rigidly empirical," viewing "culture as an aggregate of objects" (Voget 1975:363). The comparative study of artifacts (mostly in museum collections) was a central concern of "Kulturkreislehre." A methodology of form comparison (based on the criteria of form and quantity) had been developed by Graebner and others in order to determine historical relationships and to arrange the objects under study into cultural elements, areas, and strata. Far-reaching historical reconstructions were then presented but were later criticized and rejected, on the grounds that the "methodological controls proved insufficient to justify the acceptance" of such broad reconstructions (Voget 1975:359).

This rejection seems to have led, at least in German ethology, to a deliberately non-theoretical, self-restricted attitude of "pure description." Some ethnologists tried then to escape the problem of defining precisely under what circumstances given objects could be considered the same. They argued that a careful examination of the process of their manufacture, carried out by film, would help (Spannaus 1957; Schmitz 1958). The study of these cinematographic records, moreover, according to Spannaus and others, would avoid "conceptual simplifications" produced by verbal description. A cinematographic record, on the contrary, which was regarded as an objective, "non-corruptible document," would make possible a "direct and unbiased observation" of the process in question (Spannaus 1957:254). This may explain why, even in the fifties, German ethnologists rooted in the culture-historical school still referred back to notions developed by physiologists and biologists half a century before, why they relied on issues such as accuracy, completeness, and direct recording.

Leaving aside for now the question of the importance of these ideas for the physical or physiological analysis of motion, I am convinced that the concept of scientific film and the rules for ethnographic filmmaking described here are no longer adequate for today's ethnology or cultural or social anthropology.
They must be seen to be the outcome of a particular stage of development in the history of science. Nowadays, "Kulturkreis" theory seems utterly out of date. The notion of the "objective photographic record" is brought into question by developments in epistemology as well as in film theory (information theory, semiotics of film). That is why the concept of the scientific ethnographic film has to be redefined and new standards have to be developed for the production and judgment of ethnographic films.

I cannot discuss here how this actually could be achieved. One very promising approach for future work, begun about ten years ago, is an integration of relevant ethnological and film theory (Ruby 1971; Worth 1972:12). Since then, there have been some other contributions that could serve as a starting point for further discussion (Ruby 1975; Feld/Williams 1975). Ethnographic film, like any other film genre, must be understood as a medium by which information (which is ethnologically relevant) is communicated, within a semiotic process. That is, information is coded into signs by the filmmaker and decoded by the viewer. From what we do know about the complex processes of coding and decoding, of generating and perceiving visual information, it becomes clear that objectivity in the above sense cannot be achieved at all. Only a relative objectivity is conceivable, within the limits of which all critical and reflexive social science research must be conscious.

Though the technical process of cinematography may store information mechanically and, within given limits, accurately, this is not what we "see" when we view a film. Visual perception and information processing must be regarded as generally active and selective processes; a filmic epistemology must take this into account.

Notes
An earlier version of this article was published in L'Immagine dell'Uomo, Rivista del Festival dei Popoli, Gennaio-Aprile 1982, No. 1, pp. 131-149 (Florence: Le Monnier, 1982). It was based on a paper presented at the Symposium on Visual Anthropology, IUASA-Intercongress, Amsterdam, April 23-25, 1981. The material for this paper was mostly collected in the course of my dissertation research on the history and theory of ethnographic film in Germany. For help in locating some of the literature and for useful advice I am indebted to D. Kleindienst-André (IWF) and A. M. Dauer (Graz). The views expressed in this paper and eventual errors are my responsibility, however. All citations from German and French sources are my translation.

1 The address of the IWF is Nonnenstieg 72, D-3400 Göttingen, West Germany.
3 The introductory panning (IWF Rule 4, 1959:239) was by and by replaced by other (syntagmatic) forms more suited to describe the setting (Dauer 1980:24 et seq.). From the mid-sixties on, the principle of filming "representative extracts" (IWF Rule 3, 1959:238) was given up in part. Under Dauer's influence, some ethnologists and filmmakers began combining events using a more developmental approach. By giving special attention to the transition between the end of one component action and the beginning of the next, this method ("intermittent method," or "AVE-Prinzip," Schlesier 1972:7 and Dauer 1980:88-116) aims at presenting processes genetically. Thus their inherent logic can be understood far better than by simply "extracting" more or less random pieces of action.
4 Since 1964, special expeditions have been carried out for synchronous sound recording with the technical staff provided by the IWF. This has allowed the production of films of a higher, more professional quality. There are some disadvantages, however, such as the high cost and the disturbance caused by large camera crews (Koloss 1973).
5 For scientific purposes, three possibilities offered by cinematography were considered valuable: the recording ("fixation") of dynamic processes, the slow- or quick-motion recording ("transformation of time"), and the comparative study of dynamic processes (Wolf 1961:21).
6 This definition of research film proper is narrower than that of Michaelis (1955:1): "A research film results from the application of cinematography to the systematic search for new knowledge in the sciences" (emphasis omitted).
7 The development of the EC, as well as of ethnographic film in Germany, is treated more fully in my dissertation (in preparation).
8 I have tried to give an adequate translation of the German term "Wirklichkeitsgehalt" coined by Wolf. According to Dauer (1980:8), this is a broader term than "objectivity," as it refers to all stages of the filmmaking and viewing process (cf. Wolf 1967:171 et seq.).
9 E.g., in the duration of shots, scientific structuring, and treatment. Portions of it, however, may sometimes be used for the assembly of educational films.
10 This text must conform to similar strict requirements. The attempt to avoid influencing the viewer's interpretation was rightly criticized by Koloss (1973) as being impossible.
11 In 1957, Wolf (who stressed this point very often) reported some German ethnologists to be afraid that in twenty years their discipline would turn into some kind of archaeology (1957:482).
12 Cf. other publications by Wolf and Spannaus. It is however, almost impossible to determine the limits of such thematic units, since they depend on the particular problem to be solved; see the detailed critique by Koloss (1973).
This record is considered essential for the publication of a film by the IWF. Every film is accompanied by a printed text, giving data on the conditions of filming, a summary of the contents of the film, a short general description of the ethnic group involved, and references. This procedure, which is indeed very valuable, originated before the war, as I will discuss.

17 Cf., for example, the work of Marey, Muybridge, and others; see De Brigard (1975) or Rhode (1978) for details of the development of film.


19 Topics were Africans walking, climbing, sitting down, etc.; see De Brigard (1975:15 et seq.) and Michaelis (1955:193 et seq.).

20 By "cinematography" I mean, as does Michaelis (1955:1), "a series of separate images, recorded on the same continuous light-sensitive ribbon and exposed at standard intervals of time, to represent successive phases of movement; when exhibited in rapid sequence above the fusion frequency of human vision, the separate images persist long enough in the mind of the observer to reproduce the appearance of continuous motion." By "film" I mean the use of cinematographic records in such a way as to produce the notion of a continuous process. In this way, cinematographic records assembled in a certain coherent sequence may be used to present or describe actions and other processes. A film may then be regarded as a special kind of (narrative or descriptive) text (Dauer 1980:7).

21 "En analysant, en mesurant ces documents objectifs, en les comparant, en les serrant, ils [scholars from all "mental sciences"] arriveront à fixer les méthodes qui conviennent à leur science et à connaître les lois de la mentalité humaine. Le musée d'ethnographie avec ses collections d'objets, de films et de phonogrammes deviendra leur laboratoire et leur centre d'enseignement" (Regnault 1931:306; cf. 1900, 1923).

22 Though he claimed at first that an "International Ethnographic Congress" held at Paris in 1900 had a corresponding resolution (the text of which he cites, 1900:422), I could not find any sound evidence for this or even for the whole congress. Wolf and Spannaus, who frequently referred to this fictitious resolution, obviously took it over from Michaelis (1955:193) who printed a not very exact translation of Regnault's text from 1900. Instead of "chronophotographie," which means something similar to serial photography, he put "film," for example.

23 "A science exacte, il faut documents objectifs, d'où le facteur personnel disparaîsse... Seul, le cinéma fournit en abondance des documents objectifs" (ibid.:680; cf. note 21, above).

24 There are only sparse remarks from ethnologists from the German-speaking area of that time. Most of these are simply reports of practical experiences. Their main use of cinematography was for ethnographic salvage and the vividness with which moving pictures could describe complex movements such as dances (Pöch 1907; Stoll 1918).

25 The so-called "natural shots" ("Naturaufnahmen") were generally considered ideal.

26 Most of the work carried out there concentrated on medicine and the technical sciences. Tolle (1961) gives a detailed description of the development of this institute; Grunsky-Peper (1978:177 et seq., 301 et seq.) critically examines its role in the Nazi state.

27 Most of the films received permission to be used again. Grunsky-Peper, in an analysis of folklorie films for primary and secondary education, has pointed to the implicit ideological values of these films (1978:301 et seq.).

28 Spannaus's critique of "Kulturfilme" and documentaries was grounded on similar arguments (1955:87, 94; 1961:71 et seq.).

29 This argument was raised again fifty years later by Fuchs (1966).

30 Here again is a close parallel to the later IWF concept. Härter employs the term "observation of reality" ("Wirklichkeitsanschauung") (1914:27).

31 This term comes quite close to Wolf's "content of reality."

32 He also mentions theatrical films like Nanook of the North and Moana by Flaherty, as well as rather superficial travelogues (Krause 1929).

33 Krause was later appointed to the advisory board of the university department of the RWU.

34 See, for example, Gauger (1937), Schwarz (1936), and Zierold (1938). These principles were chiefly the same as those formulated by the educational film movement during the twenties (see above).

35 The notion of a "content of reality" was thus closely linked from the start to the principles of scientific cinematography. This notion was criticized plausibly by Dauer (1980:16), who argued that reality could not be divided. Therefore, film could not "contain" even a part of reality; film could but give an "impression" of reality.

36 "Culture was located in tools, processes of manufacture, ideas, customs, elements of social organization, rituals, and other conventionalized components. The human environment could be brought under the scrutiny of science and studied as dispassionately as a cell under a microscope" (ibid.).

37 This attitude can even be found in Schiesier's 1972 article, though with some reservations.

38 For ethnology or cultural and social anthropology are not primarily concerned with studying or measuring human locomotion or behavior as such, but with the inquiry into the relations of man and culture.
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Comments on Work with Film Preliterates in Africa

John Wilson

Preface

The paper that follows is an edited transcript of an oral presentation made at Teachers College, Columbia University, on May 2, 1961, by John Wilson, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education in Tropical Areas, Institute of Education, University of London.

The presentation was made in the Seminar of Communication and the Communication Arts at Teachers College, about which I should provide a bit more information for context. Teachers College, the graduate school of education of Columbia University, has an institutionalized interest in the study of communication going back to the 1940s. The first interdisciplinary doctorate in communication was given in the mid-1940s, and we have continued to give degrees in that field, without pause, for over forty years.

At the center of the Interdivisional Program in Communication and the Communication Arts (we now call it simply “Communication”) in the early days was a Seminar in Communication and the Communication Arts, which met weekly. It consisted of both students and faculty members, with faculty members generally outnumbering students. The pioneer faculty members at Teachers College who formed the Program in Communication and the Communication Arts understood that the field had to be seen as interdisciplinary; otherwise it was simply English or Speech or Somesuch in new bottles. The scholars who served in the seminar—trying to gain a common body of concepts, a common set of terms—came from psychology, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, literature, and the other arts. It also included specialists in the teaching of reading, writing, theatre, special education, and English as a Second Language.

Chairing the Seminar was passed along each semester, and the chairing professor generally determined the topic on which to focus that semester. I chaired in Spring 1961, and we centered on, so my notes say, “The Concept of Literacy as Applied to Film and Television.” It was no accident that this was in my mind, for I was at the time deeply involved, as I was to be for about seven years, in studying the possibility of “accessible” film, which my colleagues and I in a research effort felt would soon be available because of the development of cartridge-loading 8-mm motion picture projectors. We assumed that such gadgetry, were it to come (our research began before the first Technicolor silent single-concept projector was introduced), would for the first time make film easily and randomly accessible to students. We further assumed that the style and content of the films used in the cartridges would be profoundly shaped by the fact of high accessibility and that perhaps the most important result would be the need for much more literate viewers of the medium. Our thoughts in those days are being realized now by cassette-loading television sets and in some measure, by computer programs. Interactive videodiscs will probably cap the venture in which we were interested. The need for literate viewers remains.

In any event, we focused in 1961 on film literacy, gathering together many people from the Columbia campus and film production agencies in Manhattan. John Wilson was visiting Teachers College that year as an exchange scholar in an Afro-Anglo-American Program in Teacher Education. He joined the Seminar with enthusiasm, because, as it developed, he had experienced firsthand some of the problems we were theorizing about and scraping around for anecdotes to analyze.

I personally transcribed the audiotape of Wilson’s informal presentation. He checked and approved it. Knowing John, I’m sure he would have changed it further if time had been available. Still, it is more than simply conventional apology when I say that any errors that may turn up in the transcript are mine. The original tape, alas, is not to be found.

I regret that I cannot answer a question that will come to your mind: What was the Crown Film Unit? In general, I recall it to be a group, based in England, which had an instructional filmmaking function in, among other places, Ghana and Nigeria.

After his year at Teachers College, John returned to the University of London, where I had the pleasure of paying him a return visit, while on my way to India, in the mid-1960s. He is now dead. If memory serves, his death occurred in the late 1960s.

I have a vague recollection that Wilson may have redone this piece for a Canadian journal. In any event, the original seminar give-and-take is here. It proves again, if we have ever doubted it, that many scholars were aware of the difficulties of “reading” images, before the popular (and welcome) rebirth of that area of inquiry.

Louis Forsdale
Professor of Communication and Education; and Chairman, Department of Communication, Computing, and Technology in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University
My first acquaintance with the problems of film literacy came after some ten years of schooling in Africa in problems of teaching people to read. I was aware of the fact that when you try to teach people to read something that is not related to their own culture, nothing happens. You get them reading gaily about railway stations and they've never seen a railway station. You pause and ask them to draw you a picture of a railway station, and they'll reproduce something that they saw in a book, not a railway station they would find if they travelled a hundred miles further south in their own country and saw a railway station. The personal concept of what a railway station is is just not there. This of course represents a very serious difficulty. One solution is to teach them to read and talk about only the things which they can see. But you are faced with a problem later on—how do you move from there to wider contexts? It seemed perfectly simple to me that this wider move should be made through pictures. I began looking through well-illustrated books, searching for materials, thinking I had the key.

Then I got into the field of community development in Africa, which is adult education or basic education, and about then a fellow who would be called a sanitary inspector in England came along. His job was concerned with the simple business of trying to train Africans to keep villages clean, to clean up standing water where mosquitoes breed, and so forth. He said to me: "You know, you're not doing very much with those pictures." I said, "Why?" He said, "I have had some experience with this. I've got a camera and I went around my village and I made pictures—stills—of those standing pools and mosquito breeding, and all the rest of it. I thought I was doing very well, and you know, I wasn't getting anywhere. The still picture did not relate to what I was doing. Nothing I can do with a still picture can get across to these illiterate adults what it is I am trying to say. If I go along and act and show them what to do, that's another thing." 

Then it dawned on me that I had perhaps made a bad mistake. I had assumed that to a primitive African a still was something simpler than a moving film. I had considered the complexity of the technique of films and imagined because the technique was complex that the impact of the finished product would be complex. But the sanitary inspector said this was not so, that he had discovered that a moving picture had much more meaning to a preliterate audience (I'm going to call them a preliterate audience) than a still film had.

There happened to be an artist in the company, and we put this question to him. Had he had a look at this business of difficulty of still photos? He said "Yes, I've had a look at the matter. It is a remarkable thing that these preliterate societies have not developed drawing. They have the most amazing complexities of drum rhythms, they have the most amazing complexity of three-dimensional art, but they have not got any two-dimensional art, and, when it is two-dimensional, it has no perspective in it. Of course, when you pause to think about perspective, it is a highly sophisticated convention that we have agreed upon as a convention for representing depth. In a photographic still you get perspective automatically, but this is still a convention. As far as the unsophisticated, untutored eye is concerned, this is a flat thing with no depth in it, and until the eye is trained to see this business of lines converging, until the eye is trained to this convention, the picture is not interpretable."

So I learned that even if you get a picture of something that is familiar, it may not necessarily make an impact; it may not even register as a picture of something which we know.

Our next bit of evidence was very, very interesting. This man—the sanitary inspector—made a moving picture, in very slow time, very slow technique, of what would be required of the ordinary household in a primitive African village in getting rid of standing water—draining pools, picking up all empty tins and putting them away, and so forth. We showed this film to an audience and asked them what they had seen, and they said they had seen a chicken, a fowl, and we didn't know that there was a fowl in it: So we very carefully scanned the frames one by one for this fowl, and, sure enough, for about a second, a fowl went over the corner of the frame. Someone had frightened the fowl, and it had taken flight through the righthand, bottom segment of the frame. This was all that had been seen. The other things he had hoped they would pick up from the film they had not picked up at all, and they had picked up something which we didn't know was in the film until we inspected it minutely. Why? We developed all sorts of theories. Perhaps it was the sudden movement of the chicken. Everything else was done in slow technique—people going forward slowly picking up the tin, demonstrating, and all the rest of it, and the bird was apparently the one bit of reality for them—a fowl that sort of flew away in terror. There was another theory that the fowl had religious significances, which we rather dismissed.

**Question:** Could you describe in more detail the scene in the film?

John Wilson was Senior Lecturer, Department of Education in Tropical Areas, Institute of Education, University of London.
Wilson: Yes, there was very slow movement of a sanitary laborer coming along and seeing a tin with water in it, you see, and picking the tin up and very carefully pouring the water out and then rubbing it into the ground so no mosquito could breed and very carefully putting this tin in a basket on the back of a donkey. This was to show how you disposed of rubbish, and he went along doing this very carefully. It was like the man in the park with a spiked stick, picking up the bits of paper and putting them in the sack. All this was done very slowly to show how important it was to pick up those things because of mosquitoes breeding in standing water. The cans were all very carefully taken away and disposed of in the ground and covered up so there would be no more standing water. These would have been familiar enough scenes. The film was about five minutes long. The chicken appeared for a second in this kind of setting.

Question: Do you literally mean that when you talked with the audience you came to believe that they had not seen anything else but the chicken?
Wilson: We simply asked them: What did you see in this film?
Question: Not what did you think?
Wilson: No, what did you see?
Question: How many people were in the viewing audience of whom you asked this question?
Wilson: Thirty-odd.
Question: No one gave you a response other than: We saw the chicken?
Wilson: No, this was the first quick response—we saw a chicken.
Question: They did see a man, too?
Wilson: Well, when we questioned them further they had seen a man, but what was really interesting was they hadn’t made a whole story out of it, and in point of fact, we discovered afterwards that they hadn’t seen a whole frame—they had inspected the frame for details. Then we found out from the artist and eye specialist that a sophisticated audience, an audience that is accustomed to the film, focuses a little way in front of the flat screen so that you take in the whole frame. In this sense, again, a picture is a convention. You’ve got to look at the picture as a whole first, and these people did not do that, not being accustomed to pictures. When presented with the picture, they began to inspect it, rather like the scanner of a television camera, and go over it very rapidly. Apparently, that is what the eye unaccustomed to the picture does—scans the picture—and they hadn’t scanned one picture before it moved on, in spite of the slow technique for the film.

Question: Was this the first film they had seen?
Wilson: As far as we know this was the first time they had ever seen a moving picture.

Question: Had they seen a sanitary inspector?
Wilson: Yes, this would be enacted almost every morning in their lives.

Question: Did they know why they had been invited to see the film?
Wilson: Yes, they had been invited to see a film about keeping their town clean. We said, “You’ve been told all about standing water and now we’re going to show you what you do.”

My point is that I think we’ve got to be very wary of pictures; they can only be interpreted in the light of your experience. Now, next we thought that if we are going to use these films, we’ve got to have some sort of process of education, and we’ve got to have some research. We found, also, some fascinating things in this research process. We found that the film is, as produced in the West, a very highly conventionalized piece of symbolism, although it looks very real. For instance, we found that if you were telling a story about two men to an African audience, and one had finished his business, and he went off the edge of the screen, they wanted to know what happened to him; they didn’t accept that this was just the end of him and that he was of no more interest in the story. They wanted to know what happened to this fellow, and we had to write stories that way, putting in a lot of material that wasn’t to us necessary. We had to follow him along the street until he took a natural turn—he mustn’t walk off the side of the screen, but must walk down the street and make a natural turn. It was quite understandable that he could disappear around the turn. The action had to follow a natural course of events; otherwise the audience wanted to know why this fellow went off the edge of the screen—where was he?

Panning shots was very confusing because they didn’t realize what was happening. They thought the houses were moving. You see, the convention was not accepted. Nor was the idea of a person sitting still while the camera was brought in to a close-up; this was a strange thing, this person growing bigger in your presence. You know the common way of starting a film: show the city, narrow it down to a street, narrow it down to one house, take your camera in through the window, etc. This was literally interpreted as you walking forward and doing all those things until you were finally taken in through the window.

All of this meant that to use the film as a really effective medium we had to begin a process of education in those conventions and make those films which would educate people to one convention, to the idea; for example, of a man walking off the side of the screen. We had to show that there was a street corner and have the man walk around the street corner, and then in the next part of the film show him walking away, and then cut the scene. A complete unit was set up in London to make films for this spe-
This then became a problem, of course: the time. How did you ever explain this to your illiterates? This is probably what sets motion pictures apart from films of swift change in culture you want to bring the people. You couldn't go on forever and ever making teaching situations where a character sings a song, the song is sung, and the audience is invited to join in. This audience participation had to be thought of as the film was made and opportunities provided for it. Live commentators who presented the films had to be trained to the last degree in what the film meant and in their interpretation of the film for different audiences. They were taken out of the teaching profession and trained for this business.

**Question**: In part you have answered my question, which was, wouldn't it have been perhaps more expedient instead of educating the audience to the film convention to have readjusted the film presentation to the audience?

**Wilson**: Well, the point really is this. In a situation of swift change in culture you want to bring the people to the stage of where they can appreciate any film that is going around. This was an educational process. You couldn't go on forever and ever making films for this society, at this particular level; it wouldn't have been desirable; in any case this would not have been an educational process. What you want is to get those people to a stage of film literacy.

**Question**: I've always been intrigued, and I think this is probably what sets motion pictures apart from other graphic forms, by the ability of film to condense time. How did you ever explain this to your film illiterates?

**Wilson**: Yes, this is one of the difficulties; it had to be progressive. This came about quite naturally, following the example of the time you took to show the man going down the street, then turning the corner. This then became a problem, of course: the films took so long.

**Question**: Could these films be used with other preliterate groups? Are they, in a sense, preliterate films or specifically Ghanian films?

**Wilson**: I can't say much about that with respect to motion pictures, although I've come up against this difficulty myself with respect to reading material for African societies. I was so convince of the need for specifically designed materials that I abandoned all the generalized readers in use in and wrote a set of readers for Ghana. My publishers—much against my will—wanted to use these new materials in another part of Africa, and the readers said: "These are very interesting, but all those pictures are of Ghana and the names are Ghanian names instead of Nigerian names." It is a difficult problem to start from a selective text and move to universal texts. You've got to start in the culture you are in and then move off to other cultures by the process of association and contrast. We haven't paid nearly enough attention to the problem.

**Question**: Have you ever tried to isolate content from convention in films, taking essentially the same script, using the same technique, but shooting with a Nigerian audience?

**Wilson**: In point of fact, we didn't do much of that. After we found the secrets about where the natives were confused about films, we began to be able to find shortcuts around them. The interchangeability of films for different cultures is something you have to be careful about. All right, we developed one film for teaching viewers to generalize about film. We took a film of successive shots of old men doing exactly the same thing in England and in Ghana, sunning themselves on the bench in the park, beside the well—just common situations. In another, we showed a mother carrying her baby in England, putting her baby in a pram, and a mother in Africa picking up her baby and tying it on her back—using situations from different cultures that had obvious meanings. We used techniques of that kind. But we didn't carry it out to the extent of teaching all the conventions and then showing a particular film. We used live interpreters, incidentally, to extend a film's usefulness. Even in those territories where we wanted to use a dubbed commentary, this would almost have been impossible because in twenty miles you can move into another language area. The interpreter generally could speak half a dozen different languages and interpret the film using different languages as your travelling unit moved forward.

One thing I should explain—the film showings did not stand out by themselves. There was a mounted unit with loud speakers, which went to the village and gave an evening's entertainment. The teaching film was embedded in the evening's entertainment. They brought along the local musicians. We would make a recording on the spot; the people would see a
The commentator of the situation: he did the job because the audience was expecting to be involved. We discovered the best commentaries were when they were roaring replies back, and the commentator made comments. This was always a problem when going around the corner. And all the audience made comments. This was all part of the game. Eventually we were able to come around to dubbed commentaries once we got our audience to a certain stage, but in some situations we still used the silent films.

**Question:** How long did it take them to become literate with film?

**Wilson:** The process is still going on. Oh, in general, I should say this was a process of three or four years, but there are some films that are still too sophisticated yet. For example, I think that possibly the trick of peeling leaves off the calendar to show the passage of time is better than just to fade out and fade in again.

**Question:** To put it another way, how long did it take a preliterate audience, one that had never seen film, to begin to get some meaning?

**Wilson:** I keep coming back to this film where we showed the contrast—the old men in Ghana and England, and so forth. That was a kind of watershed; the audience began to have a certain ability to equate different things in generalizations. We found that in about six months, a simple story of the Mr. Wise and Mr. Foolish type—the man who did all the wrong things and the man who did all the right things—went very well. By the way, we found a very interesting thing: that it paid us to reverse the process. Sometimes Mr. Foolish won out, and not Mr. Wise, because the audience was a very human one. We found, in fact, that buffoonery and the silent Chaplin films were absolutely wonderful. [An analysis of some of the early Chaplin films emerged.]

**Comment:** It is very interesting that Chaplin leaves the screen by going off frame or being cut off—he walks out of the picture exactly as the people demanded.

**Wilson:** Yes, he does that. It was a very smooth technique when you look back at it.

**Comment:** I thought it might be interesting to say that when I was much younger, in the days of silent films, in my teens, I was a movie organist on Broadway, and I played at many Chaplin films, and among them the one I remember was Shoulder Arms, which I played for six months three times a day, and I never tired of that film. Some films you saw twice and you never wanted to see them again, but the Chaplin films you could see endlessly and always see something in them. I think it was the best proof to me of real artistry. I played the opening for Valentino in Blood and Sand, and after two days I couldn’t stand the sight of the guy; I just hated him and there was nothing in the film to watch anymore, but with Chaplin you never exhausted that film; you saw things in it every time you never saw before, in spite of the fact that you had seen it hundreds of times. So it was interesting—your comment about the silent Chaplin films. Do you think they liked him because of the slow technique, because he did everything explicitly?
**Wilson:** Yes, that was it. He had to. If you missed the slightest movement, actually you had lost the point. I think something that gives a sidelight to your question is that we noticed in West Africa that the commercial film houses get their best audiences for films that don't have a closely knit theme—musicals get on better, something that will stand up by itself in terms of music, dancing or the like. This goes down very, very well indeed. Now the last British film I saw for my sins was *Henry V*. I found it awfully difficult to make sense out of that film. You had really to have a knowledge of the play and of the background of Elizabethan England. I think, myself, that it is a damn bad film. The film was not quite clear in its aim and didn't follow two simple characters in counterpoise to each other. It was very difficult for even the sophisticated audience to follow. And of course, you know, some films are becoming so damn sophisticated in their techniques that they're terribly difficult to follow, like some of the Orson Welles films.

**Question:** Do you have any information on whether or not young audiences or older audiences learn the difficult conventions faster?

**Wilson:** No, I have no information on that. The younger audiences in Africa were seeing teaching films in school, and we didn't make any special attempt with them. I've been talking about, really, what we would call bush areas in Africa, really isolated areas.

**Question:** On this matter of closely knit themes, which you said these audiences did not like or appreciate, is there an oral tradition in their culture? Does the typical story which they tell around the campfire or at night have a closely knit theme?

**Wilson:** No. One thing we were ignorant of at this time, and something that we ought to have known a lot more about, is that those African audiences are very good at role playing. Part of a child's education in a preliterate society is role playing; he's got to learn to play the role of elders in certain given situations. One thing, fortunately, we did discover was that the cartoon went down very well. This puzzled us until we found out that puppetry is quite a common pastime.

**Question:** Another art form which is so very conventional is their dance, reduced to a few very simple conventional gestures; and again in their sculpture there are certain very rigid conventions; apparently there is no transfer in the understanding of conventions.

**Wilson:** The conventions mentioned are three-dimensional, whereas film is two-dimensional. This probably accounts for some of the barriers to transfer until sophistication is reached.

**Question:** What about commercial motion picture houses that were close to more civilized areas? What process have they gone through to educate their city audiences to films?

**Wilson:** They were a post-product of ourselves. We built up the commercial houses and built up the circuits.

**Question:** There were literally no film houses there before you came in?

**Wilson:** As far as I can recall, there was only one in the whole of the Gold Coast—a fearful, lousy place patronized by the educated African and occasionally the European wanting something to do. The man who ran this was an entrepreneur in all sorts of things, and he got the most dreadful films. There was no popular use of the cinema at all until we came along. We subsidized the first commercial houses; got an entrepreneur who ran them. They were open-air houses on the style of the drive-in, and we got feature films of various types and subsidized them until they got on their own feet and were running quite well. These are the kind of things you've got to do when you're building up a young territory.
The writer James Agee described his collaboration with the photographer Walker Evans to document the lives of three tenant farm families as neither art nor science but “an effort in human actuality” (1941:x, 11). Lately the assumption that photography captures social reality has been questioned. In Documentary Expression and Thirties America, William Stott (1973:283–287) says Agee realized that he and Evans would fall short of the ideal; Evans, he says, selected his photographs for their propaganda value, omitting those that didn’t fit the social purpose of the book.

The great documentary photographers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—Edward S. Curtis, Robert J. Flaherty, Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine—combined artistic expression with social scientific interests. Critics recently have argued that in doing so these photographers distorted social reality. Curtis dressed his North American Indian subjects in costumes no longer worn in daily life and placed them in romantic poses that reflected his view of a “vanishing race” (Scherer 1975:67–79; Lyman 1982). Flaherty had an artificial half-igloo constructed for interior scenes of Eskimo life (Danzker 1980:5–32). Susan Sontag (1973:6, 61–63) argues that the photographs of Riis and Hine are not objective depictions of social reality but political statements against slum conditions and child labor. She characterizes the photographs taken in the 1930s under the auspices of the Farm Securities Administration as “unashamedly propagandistic.” Despite “the presumption of veracity” in the way we view photographs, Sontag writes, “the work photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth.”

The trend since the thirties has been to separate art from social science. Art photography has gone in the direction of personal expression. Some photographers, such as Robert Frank, Danny Lyon, and Bill Owens, have continued in the social documentary tradition, but their work, according to Howard S. Becker (1974:12), “suffers from its failure to use explicit theories, such as might be found in the social sciences.” Social science has gone in another direction. In anthropology, according to Sol Worth (1980:15–22), the trend has been away from “visual anthropology” and toward “the anthropology of visual communication”; instead of studying the social and cultural content of photographs, anthropologists today are more interested in photographs as a medium of communication. In folklore, fieldworkers with cameras generally do their own visual documentation rather than collaborate with artistic, documentary photographers.

Bruce Jackson (1978:8, 43), a folklorist-photographer, claims that photographs alone never tell us what we see in them. To know more about what is pictured in photographs, Jackson says, we must know more about the decisions made behind the camera—decisions pertaining to selection, framing, and editing. But this epistemological problem affects every field of knowledge, not just photography, and it need not necessarily lead us to a position of total relativism. If we as viewers look only at historical photographs, there is a limit to what we can know about these decisions. But if we as fieldworkers are present when the photographs are taken and help to make the decisions, the assumption that there is little or no connection between the photographs and social reality need not apply.

Inspired by the collaboration of Agee and Evans, Donald Lokuta and I set out to document the contemporary folklife of an ethnic group in New Jersey. The idea was to combine Lokuta’s vision as a photographer with mine as a folklorist. Both the artist and the social scientist should attempt to be true to the fieldwork experience. We understood that all experience is filtered through our own perceptions. What we wanted to see was whether there was any necessary contradiction between the point of view of an artist and that of a social scientist.
Because Slavic groups have highly visible folk traditions, we decided to choose one of them. So we looked in The Ethnic Directory of New Jersey to see which had the most organizations: clearly, it was the Ukrainians. The large number of Ukrainian organizations reflects an intense ethnic identification, which seems to derive from the feeling of many Ukrainians that they are a submerged nationality in Europe; therefore we do not claim that the persistence of folk traditions among Ukrainian-Americans is typical of other ethnic groups.

Furthermore, although there was a cross section of urban and suburban, white-collar and blue-collar subjects, we do not claim that the subjects we photographed are typical Ukrainian-Americans. We were looking specifically for "traditional" subjects—that is, people who have made a point of preserving their ethnic, folk traditions. We also note that the people we photographed are all from one region of the United States: the pictures were taken in northern New Jersey and at two Ukrainian resorts in the Catskill Mountains, Glen Spey and Ellenville, New York. And our subjects were recommended by members of their own community; it is always possible that such a method of selection will tilt the balance in favor of "model subjects."

Specifically we wanted to show how folk traditions have become symbols of ethnic identity. Here we were interested in communal and private expressions rather than what the folklorist Richard Dorson (1981:110) has called "public-presentational" ones. That is, we were looking for folk expressions of ethnic identity within the home and the community, not in the festivals that present folk music, folk dance, national dress, and ethnic foods to the public at large. For example, we photographed the hahilka, songs and dances performed by young girls on Easter Sunday morning that retain much of their folk flavor even though they are rehearsed. But we didn't photograph the dance ensembles that perform at the Garden State Arts Center, because they are too choreographed.

Furthermore, we were not looking for only the "pure" survivals of folk tradition. In his study of Ukrainian folklore Robert B. Klymasz (1980) argues that folklorists should study, along with the survivals of European folk traditions in America, those that have died out as well as newly created variations. In a rural community in Canada he found Ukrainian country- and western music. In New Jersey we found commercial ceramics decorated with traditional embroidery patterns.

We call this project "an ethnic portrait" because many of the photographs in it were posed. This is in keeping with Donald Lokuta's style. Erving Goffman distinguishes between "caught," or candid, scenes and portraits, or posed scenes. He states that "caught" scenes depict "objects and events as they are in regard to some matters other than photography" (1976:81). As Goffman notes, there is a limit to what can be depicted in this way. For example, we could not include the bride, groom, priest, and altar in a picture of the wedding ceremony without showing someone's back. Hence the need for portraits. But, Goffman notes, posing for portraits is not a normal social activity; it is an activity specifically devised for the needs of the camera (ibid.:85). He seems to imply that the only social reality in portraits is the act of posing.

But there is more in a posed photograph than merely the act of posing. There is a world of information about how the subjects present themselves and what their personal environments contain. We discussed the poses with the subjects. We did not tell anyone what to wear; it is of note that few of our subjects chose to be photographed in Ukrainian national dress. I often suggested which room should be used as the setting, usually because that room reflected something about the subject. Lokuta framed the photographs within these settings and suggested minor changes in poses and expressions.

Some of the photographs of folk ceremonies were candid; a few were posed. On one occasion we resorted to a reenactment; we missed the Saint Thomas Sunday memorial service in the cemetery, but the subjects were willing to simulate it for us later with some rearrangement so that we could show both their faces and the front of the tombstone. The photograph has the quality of a portrait. The picture of the blessing of the bride and groom shows the actual event, but we moved it outdoors so that we could include the entire wedding party. The subjects positioned themselves for the camera, creating a partly candid, partly posed photograph.

To avoid reducing the photographs to single meanings, we have chosen not to explain them in our own words. Instead we have accompanied them with excerpts from tape-recorded interviews. Some are in the words of the subjects of the photographs, others in the words of relatives or friends who, because of the subject's language difficulties or for other reasons, acted as spokespersons. Still others are appropriate comments made by persons unknown to the subjects.

What are some of the social realities in these photographs? First, they show how ethnic identity is expressed in celebrations, especially those pertaining to the life cycle and yearly calendar. As one priest noted, Epiphany has become a Ukrainian ethnic as well as religious holiday. This is also true of Easter and Christmas. Many of these traditions have been adapted to new circumstances in America. For example, the didukh (last sheaf of wheat), which had important symbolic meaning at Christmas in Ukraine, has been reduced in America to a tabletop center-
piece. Other traditions continue as a mixture of old and new. The bride in our photograph wears a non-traditional white gown embroidered according to tradition, but not with a traditional Ukrainian pattern; the groom wears a non-traditional tuxedo with a traditional embroidered shirt.

Second, the photographs show the importance of food as an expression of ethnicity. Ukraine has been called "the bread basket of Europe," and Ukrainian decorative breads, such as the kolach (Christmas bread), paska (Easter bread), and korovaj (wedding bread), play an important role in ethnic celebrations. Certain foods are associated with specific celebrations, such as kutia (wheat, honey, nuts, and poppy seeds) with Christmas. Sometimes food has a symbolic function; for example, the Christmas Eve dinner includes twelve dishes representing the Twelve Apostles. Food is incorporated into the ethnic-religious rituals, as when the food in the Easter baskets is blessed and then taken home for the Easter breakfast. Perhaps the most striking food tradition is the sharing of food and drink in the cemetery near the graves of deceased relatives on Saint Thomas Sunday.

Third, the folk art has become a symbol of ethnic identity. To some Ukrainians the preservation of authentic folk art from Ukraine has become a personal and political cause. Yet the folk art has not remained "pure." Reproductions of Hutsul (from the Carpathian Mountains) and Trypillyan (a prehistoric culture in Ukraine, ca. 2500–2000 B.C.) ceramics are made in America, and folk art has inspired various kinds of commercial art, such as the ceramics with embroidery patterns. Both the folk art and the commercial art are purchased in ethnic stores, which, according to Richard Dorson, function as "repositories of artistry" (Dorson 1981:116).

Furthermore, the photographs and our fieldwork refute two common misconceptions about ethnicity. First, ethnic traditions do not necessarily die out in the suburbs. Although suburban houses may look similar on the outside, many Ukrainian-Americans decorate the interiors to reflect their ethnic identity. Second, folk traditions do not necessarily survive longer among the lower classes than among the upper classes. We found that they survive in different ways. Wealthy, educated, and professional Ukrainian-Americans have become "purists" about folk art, distinguishing between authentic Hutsul ceramics and Hutsul-American reproductions and denying that the reproductions of Trypillian ceramics are "real" folk art. Blue-collar Ukrainian-Americans, on the other hand, often buy commercial items such as the embroidery-patterned ceramics and juxtapose them with folk art in their homes. Sometimes these commercial products are used traditionally. One of our photographs, for example, shows a reproduction of a traditional icon in a mass-produced wooden frame draped with a machine-made rushnyk (ritual cloth). Another reveals even greater diversity: a reproduction of The Last Supper (which is in the Italian Catholic tradition), draped with a rushnyk, hangs on the wall above a didukh with commercial porcelain angels on either side.

In summary, these photographs document, to paraphrase Robert Klymasz, the transformation of the Ukrainian-American folklore tradition from an immigrant to an ethnic folklore complex. "The result," Klymasz writes, is the emergence of a new and uniquely comprehensive dimension for continuity that is inextricably attuned to the demands and pressures of a swiftly-moving, modern civilization. . . . Like the old, however, the new ethnic complex reflects the same universal ability of folklore to bridge the gaps of time and to meet the needs of today by providing an ever-ready vehicle which, without fail, always leads jaded appetites to an amazingly-rich and seemingly limitless source of entertainment, instruction, wonder and pride. [Klymasz 1980:129]

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Marie Paluch, Wayne, New Jersey.
This is mostly a Ukrainian art store. We also have books, but mostly Ukrainian art. Our clientele is mostly Ukrainian, because this is the only Ukrainian art store here in the neighborhood. So Ukrainians come here and buy Ukrainian art, Ukrainian books, embroidery thread. We get our merchandise from all over, from the United States, from Ukraine, from Canada, and from some local people. We have a local lady who does ceramics.

We have Hutsul wood carvings, hand carved, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. We have Ukrainian ceramics. All different kinds. Trypillian, which is ancient Ukrainian, and Hutsul ceramics. And we also have commercial porcelain. This is not art work, but it is very popular. Then we have Easter eggs. Beautiful hand-decorated Ukrainian eggs—real eggs. And we have wooden eggs also. They are painted and then carved. All different kinds. Then we have books, embroidery supplies. We also sell Ukrainian records and tapes, and dolls in Ukrainian costumes.

—Alexandra Stebelsky
Commercial ceramics with embroidery pattern, Livingston, New Jersey.
Most Ukrainians love their folk art, and this is why they use it to decorate their homes. This is why we use it too. We have one room done all in Hutsul style, and we have some Trypillian ceramics here, dating back to 2,250 years before Christ. None of this is original. They’re reproductions, because no originals exist here in the West. These were made here. There are several women artists who do it. They’re always in three colors: terra cotta, black, and white. Spiral designs with animals. They’re reproductions of what was dug up.

We are collectors only of the Hutsul art. The Trypillian is readily available. It’s used only for decorative purposes. It does not have much value as far as collection is concerned.

Even though the Trypillian is very old, the shapes are contemporary. It goes in very well with contemporary furnishings. I think it adds to the beauty of any room.

What we have downstairs is, well, more than just decorating. It’s a whole room. The walls and everything are done in the Hutsul style. We have the whole room done this way simply because we love it. We love that folk art. We are Ukrainians. We think it is beautiful. Why collect something else if we could have collected ours, done in our Ukrainian tradition? And especially since we have a young daughter, we would like her to grow up in this way. When she brings her friends over, they can see that Ukrainian art is also beautiful.

—Roxana Kuzmak
Lubomyr Kuzmak, South Orange, New Jersey.
If you were in Ukraine, the last sheaf that is harvested is left in the stable until Christmas time. It was called the didukh. On Christmas Eve the head of the house with the oldest son would bring in the didukh and put it in a place of prominence in the house. The didukh is a link between the people that have passed away and the people that are going to be eating. It symbolizes the ancestors of the family. It is the last sheaf of the harvest time, whose grain is used to sow the first furrow in the spring.

Now I'm referring here to those people who live in the agricultural villages. In the towns this was done slightly differently. You buy the didukh from a florist or you can get it from the farmers. They will give you a piece to have in the cities.

In this country, unless you live in Pennsylvania or up in Canada, where you have fields to do this, you must go to a florist. The farmers usually will cut it a particular length. The didukh usually stands from the floor to the height of a regular sheaf of wheat. But the florists here usually make it as a big centerpiece. So you more or less have to modify it a little. But you stick to the traditional meaning of the didukh.

—Raissa Woluyczyk
On Saturday evening before Easter we have the blessing of the Easter baskets. In Ukraine, depending on what part of the country you’re from, this will vary. In some parts they will bless the baskets just after midnight. In other parts they will bless them early Easter Sunday morning. Around six or seven o’clock in the morning. In the village where my parents came from they normally blessed the baskets right after church services and just before lunch. And then there’s a big race to the house to see who can get home first. There’s anywhere from two to five thousand people who cram the church grounds. After the baskets are blessed everybody gets on their horses or wagons and there would be a mad rush. Here, of course, we don’t have that.

And then we come home from church and we have Easter breakfast. It’s supposed to be a breakfast, but we eat it around lunchtime.

—Peter Paluch
The hahilka are a fusion of early pagan songs and dances that were to welcome the coming of spring, which was the rebirth of life. With the sun and the warmth the earth will be producing. With the coming of Christianity these pagan songs were fused or accepted into the Christian calendar. They were then sung, not necessarily with the coming of spring, but at the time that the Easter festival was being celebrated.

Primarily, the hahilka are sung by young unmarried girls. The interference of the young men is strictly incidental. These are pranks which happen spontaneously. They’re not planned. Since spectators were there, the young men would join in or interfere, because there might be one or two young ladies in whom they might have been interested. So it was really a joking and happy way in which to enter these all-female, all-girl dances.

The symbolism of them was the greeting of the sun and warmth. The circle is very important. So very many of these dances have the circular form. They also have dances in which the girls are divided into two groups, and there is a dialogue in which they exchange information. Birds play a very important role in these spring songs. The birds are the ones who bring warmth and the coming of spring. Almost as if they were the physical transporters of the sun.

Today, when our young girls dance and sing, they prepare. They have to go and study and get the words. They usually learn the words from the older girls. They will prepare a dance sequence. Originally these dances were never really rehearsed. They were spontaneous. Today they are more stylized because we go to the trouble of preparing them. That’s the only way they can be performed.

—Zirka Voronka
It will not be a traditional wedding as in Ukraine. It'll be more a modern version. The traditions that are easily accommodated to the situation in the United States now.

Before the wedding ceremony itself there is the blessing of the bride and groom by the parents. It’s the bride’s father who gives the blessing. Both the groom’s parents and the bride’s parents are present, and the immediate family and closest friends.

I’ve translated into English the blessing that my father has written in Ukrainian: “We bless you, children, with this old icon, which has been in our family for hundreds of years. It has survived the joyous times as well as strife. Go now on your new path in life with God in your hearts. Remember to trust, honor, respect, and love each other. Love your fatherland, your church, and your family. Respect and love the country you live in. Be frugal in life, but be generous in time of need. Obey the Lord’s commandments. And in turn he will guide and protect you. With God’s blessing and best wishes of your parents, step under the wreath of matrimony. May the Lord and the Blessed Virgin always be with you.”

—Tania Bijcum
Wedding of Christina and Roman Kolinsky, Ellenville, New York.

The bride arrives at the church with her father. All the people will be seated in the church, and the bridal party will enter. And then the father of the bride gives the bride away to the groom at the door, not as it is done in other churches where the bride is escorted all the way to the altar by her father. The father gives the daughter away at the door. At the door he kisses her, and kisses the groom, and at that point the bride belongs to the groom, no longer to her father.

At the door they are greeted by the priest, who has the rings. First he blesses the rings. Then he places the rings on the fingers of the groom and the bride. The bride and the groom do not themselves exchange rings, as they do in some other traditions.

And then the priest leads them up to the altar. While they are at the altar, they are standing on an embroidered towel—a rushnyk. And at the altar there are prayers said. Then the priest places wreaths made of myrtle on the heads of the bride and the groom. The wreaths signify the crowning of a new king and a new queen—the beginning of a new family, a new dynasty. And there are some prayers said, they exchange vows, and the wreaths are taken off. And at that point they are pronounced man and wife.

—Tania Bijcum
The bride will have a white gown, and it will be embroidered. It’s not traditional embroidery as we know it. She decided instead to have flowers embroidered in blue going down her dress, which is also allowable on the wedding dress. She can either have a traditional pattern design or flowers. And she will not have a veil. She will have a wreath of flowers and ribbons coming down from her hair, just as in Ukraine. In the traditional Ukrainian costume the ribbons are colorful, but hers will be white.

The groom will wear a tuxedo, and he will have an embroidered shirt with a pattern that the bride and the groom chose. The bride embroidered the shirt by herself for the groom.

Instead of a wedding cake, as we know it, with the white frosting, Ukrainians have the korovaj, which is a sweet dough bread. It’s usually two or three tiers high. The korovajs differ, depending on what region of the Ukraine you come from. The one which Christina will have at her wedding is decorated with doves, grape leaves, and flowers made of dough. On top is what they call a Tree of Life. It has two branches meeting, which signifies Roman’s and Christina’s families meeting. Then it branches out into many little branches at the top. Two branches meet and then you’ve got all these little branches coming out from the top. In other words, two families meet, and they multiply, and they start a new family.

—Tania Bijcum
According to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the week after Easter we remember the dead and its relationship to the Resurrection. In Ukraine these services were held at different times—Monday, Tuesday, throughout the week. Here in the United States it’s different. In Ukraine, where the entire nation was of the Orthodox religion—especially in the eastern part—the people took off from work. Here we have obstacles. In order to carry out the tradition, this takes place on the first Sunday after Easter, which is called Saint Thomas Sunday.

—Father John Nakonechnyj

We call it (the Easter bread) paska. Paska means “passover.” The placing of the paska at the grave is a pagan belief, and it is kept for those people that died and that are not able to come to Easter. Because the deceased ones missed the paska and the eggs that had been blessed in church, we leave them by the grave in the belief that they will be for the dead. When we bury the dead, we bury them with food, in the belief that they might have enough food for eternity.

—Father Steven Bilak
We go from grave to grave, and we commemorate the individual or individuals that have died and are buried here. And we pray for them. The traditional foods—the paska (Easter bread), the eggs—are put on the grave, and later on they will be eaten by the family members. It's for the living and the dead to participate together in celebrating the Resurrection. Especially the foods that are eaten—the paska and the egg. The egg is the symbol of resurrection.

—Father John Nakonechnyj
Saint Thomas Sunday is a celebration of Easter with the deceased. Our deceased stay with us, one can say, because we do not honor them just once at the funeral, but also on the ninth and fourteenth days after the death, and then at least once a year, on Saint Thomas Sunday.

The food at the graves is a tradition that survives from pagan times. We became Christian in the tenth century, and there are still rituals the church did not do away with. Many are gone, but this one is traditional. It is not frowned upon. It is just the family getting together. Food and life go together. It is a strong symbolism for us to include our deceased.

—Bishop Iziaslav
Vernacular Photography: FSA Images of Depression Leisure

George Abbott White

Those deeply involved with the course of American history in the 1930s or the development of photography in general acknowledge the centrality of an immense body of work done by a handful of men and women: the Farm Security Administration photographs. While a spate of books (Rothstein 1978; Evans 1978; Meltzer 1978; Hurley 1978) has given us a much larger inventory of FSA photographs and, with Dorothea Lange and Russell Lee, the best inventory to date of biographical material about two of the FSA photographers themselves, it could be argued that quantity is no virtue. Indeed, in the case of these celebrated photographs, increasing the sheer number of them only compounds the problem.

Once again, two very familiar kinds of FSA photographs have been roused from their Library of Congress file drawers. For what purpose? To reinforce, in their condemnatory/celebratory "good pic" testimonial way, the image of the period and its people they already imprinted upon us the first (or was it the fifth?) time around. Absent then, as now, is a thoroughgoing examination of what FSA photographic work during those twelve mid- and post-Depression years was all about, what those nearly quarter million images may be said to have meant, if anything at all.

That examination cannot take place here, though the making of three assertions might perhaps begin it. First, what have become the "classic" FSA photographs of the 1930s, rather than containing in themselves—by way of raw information or more processed allusions and implications—anything like a comprehensive definition of that time and its people, as we have been taught to believe, are complex articulations of a dominant ideology that actually discouraged a comprehensive, structural definition. What needs explanation, however, is the way in which they unconsciously fulfilled two ideologically acceptable modes of visual representation, namely, superficial condemnation and superficial celebration.

Second, the process by which the classic photographs were made and then came to achieve their wide recognition and their wide acceptance in itself constitutes an important element of the ideology. Both aesthetic and political dimensions of this process require examination in order to force awareness of the large number—the bulk—of FSA photographs that were made in other ways and did not achieve classic status.

Third, it is just those "vernacular pictures,"1 organized around plain, seemingly mundane themes such as primary care medicine or games and sports, that may well provide us with a far more inclusive, fully adequate visual experience of the period, precisely because they break with the dominant ideology instead of reinforcing it. FSA photographer John Collier suggested as much when he said, in retrospect:

The pictures that we find to be the most important are going to be the ones that people think of as dull. It is the pedestrian shape of the file that holds the great cultural vision. The dramatic pictures will never finally be the thing that will tell us what was going on. [Quoted in O'Neal 1976:293]

Yet for reasons Collier did not or could not name, until now only the "dramatic" photographs have been read in careful, thoughtful ways. To understand the reasons for misreadings—to then place pictures of games and sports, for example, within a different ideological framework, thereby reading them in new as well as old ways—may convince us that the FSA photographers knew far more than they, or we, ever suspected.

Who Pays the Piper, Etc.

In a 1937 budget memo, the director of photography in the Roosevelt Resettlement Administration (the particular agency in the Department of Agriculture soon to become the Farm Security Administration, or FSA), one Roy Emerson Stryker, wrote the following justification for his project: "The sole purpose behind [the photographers' work] . . . has been a simple and unspectacular attempt to give information," (Roy Stryker Collection, University of Louisville Photographic archive). Some four decades later, speaking to a packed Boston University auditorium and asked what he believed his FSA photographs were for, Russell Lee replied, without hesitation, "The country was in terrible shape. The people in Washington just didn't know what it looked like. . . ." And, responding to a similar line of inquiry, artist Ben Shahn, who had made photographs for the RA/FSA from 1935 to 1938, observed:

We tried to present the ordinary in an extraordinary manner. But that's a paradox, because the only thing extraordinary about it was that it was so ordinary. Nobody had ever done it before, deliberately. Now, it's just called documentary, which I suppose is all right. . . . We just took pictures that cried out to be taken. [Quoted in Pratt 1975:x]

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Shahn is close to key insights about the process and about the nature of vernacular pictures—their *dumb* or inarticulate ordinariness—but at this moment we must raise another question: whether in fact it was the *pictures* that did the crying out. That is, tucked into all three candid statements is the assumption that certain conditions of American life were not known to middle-class photographers and their (essentially) middle-class audience, to departments and agencies of the federal bureaucracy, to the centers of power, to "Washington." Moreover, there is an even greater assumption as to what would happen: that the conditions would suddenly, through the powerful enabling medium of photography, become conscious to the American public, and that mysteriously, though subsequently, this mass arousal would translate to political action that would, in turn, result in appropriate social remedies.  

But let us assume that the situation was entirely other. That America's economic and social inequities wrought, in the 1930s in particular, terrible physical and psychological injury throughout the land was very well known—if not in specific detail, certainly grossly, as public "statistics." Let us assume that one quite variegated group at the highest levels of national power continued to find themselves agreed upon the proposition that it was possible to justify the *existence* of those inequities, whereas another, similar group, agreed upon the necessity of denouncing the *results* of those inequities. In effect, the first group would be blind to what the second group would see.

The New Dealers, of course, were the ones who saw. They gained federal power by announcing a vision and they defended their power by legitimizing an entirely new way of seeing, no small thanks to agencies like the FSA, whose photographers they employed and whose pictures they widely distributed. The institutional function of those FSA photographers was thus always clear, if at times seemingly in contradiction with public policy. And this contradiction was the case because the structural intents of the New Deal were decidedly not clear, at least not to more than a few in the 1930s.

It is now a commonplace of economic history that the New Deal was not a wholesale restructuring of the American economy, but an easing of certain social dislocations caused by structural changes already well in motion. Like the situation of Enclosure in England prior to the Industrial Revolution, people had to be moved off the land to emerging urban centers of manufacture. They had to understand that it was cities where they would live and work, that return to their villages and their farms was impossible because it had slowly become impractical. Where English social policy—seen two centuries later—destroyed the small farm and satisfied national needs through huge imports, American social policy of the 1930s had the effect of marginalizing the small farm by favoring, in national crisis, mechanization and the creation of vast farms which, in addition to great quantities of food—far more than could be immediately consumed—also produced enormous *surpluses:* an organic capital.

At this distance we can see that government agencies implementing the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) provided direct loans as well as a wide range of solid agricultural and social services to large and
middle-income farmers to keep them, and their expertise, on the land. Although there was grumbling from less economically sophisticated quarters, support for this massive governmental intervention continued throughout the 1930s, and by the decade’s end consolidation resulted in appropriately sprawling, industrially manageable tracts. Agri-business was an accomplished fact. Small farmers, however, were not overjoyed. Lacking much capital, lacking access by design to cost-saving finances, processing and transportation networks, they rapidly joined the tenant farmers who had once rented their land, the hands and part-time farm laborers whom they once had hired, in good years. Forced off the land, all took to the roads.

These were the Oakies, the Arkies, the black and white stream that would become, in Robert Coles’s apt phrase, “the South goes North” (Coles 1972). And what was to be done with these millions? In no way could such numbers of the new dispossessed be severed from the social fabric and then allowed to go their way. Sullen and fearful, they were also dimly aware of causes, certainly local and to some extent regional ones. Their frustration and anger was potential human dynamite whose explosion could easily provoke violent counter-explosions, in containment or in punishment. And then what? No doubt, went the reasoning, some of these people could be cooled out to urban occupations, as in England. Others, however, the really stubborn ones, would have to be supported as farmers, for a time.

The Resettlement Administration (RA), later the FSA, was given the task of picking up the pieces the AAA and parallel policies had created. Enter the Historical Section of the FSA, Stryker’s FSA photographers, whose role was twofold. On the one hand, the condition of these dispossessed required dramatic presentation to the American public—hence the condemnatory mode of visual representation. Increased public awareness, properly organized (or orchestrated), validated a social policy that guaranteed the RA some funds to make loans to small farmers, to establish government-supervised camps for migrants (those “good” camps seen in John Steinbeck’s novel The Grapes of Wrath) and in health care clinics at those camps. It was not enough recording the worn-out land or even the horrendous living conditions of those forced off their farms, on the road (the palpable
sons why men and women might actually be moved to revolt): the FSA cameras also had to demonstrate the other side—that FSA programs could work and, later in the 1930s, were working.

This second role required cameras searching out an ineffable but absolutely essential quality, character: hence, the celebratory mode of visual representation, which suggested that underneath the rags and the grime was a backbone capable of re-establishing a decent life. Given a helping hand, guided by experts, sheltered from the more aggressive economic forces, these dispossessed would make a go of it. And the public would thereby be reassured that they had once again settled back down into an unthreatening passivity.

The two kinds of classic photographs served an additional purpose, which had its not-too-farfetched parallel a decade later. Just as dramatic anticommunism, stirred up at the bottom but directed from the top, provided an ideological cover for launching the Marshall Plan and its successful penetration of post–World War II European markets, so dramatic images such as Lange’s “Migrant Mother” (Nipomo, California: 1936), “Ditched, Stalled, and Stranded” (San Joaquin Valley, California: 1935), or Russell Lee’s “Christmas Dinner in Tenant Farmer’s Home” (Southeastern Iowa: 1936), served on a smaller scale to engage and then to deflect public attention, keeping the fans watching the plays on the field while the real game was in the dugout.

Figure 3 Pat Terry. “Newport News, Virginia. May 1940. Negro shipyard worker finds recreation in hunting.” OWI 1923-E.
Figure 4  John Vachon.

Figure 5  Ben Shahn.
The Beautiful Pictures

Knowing the maker is nearly to know the process of making. More than most photographs of their time, more than many since, the FSA photographers were masters of the image—middle-class professionals who could deliver a particular image or group of images on demand.

This is not to imply that all were master technicians. Lange was, by all accounts, a notorious example of mechanical ineptitude; Evans openly scorned "technical tricks." Yet Lange also got exactly what she wanted, from skilled darkroom technicians to precisely the right image, as documentary filmmaker Pare Lorentz emphasized in his 1941 review of her pictures of the dispossessed:

"Figure 6 Gordon Parks. "Daytona Beach, Florida. February 1943. Bethune-Cookman College. Physical education class." 17087-C."

She has selected them with an unerring eye. You do not find in her portrait gallery the bindle stiffs, the drifters, the tramps, the unfortunate aimless dregs of the country. Her people stand straight and look you in the eye. [Quoted in Meltzer 1978:105]

And in his directions for the photograph, "Winter Resorters, Florida" (1941–1942), Evans could reveal an astonishing ability to locate, and then to insist upon, the detail he wanted:

NOTE FOR THE ENGRAVER:
Please note unsightly light triangles, seven of them, above the numbers. Could you simply black them all out, matching the black next to them. Also: try to get clearly the veins in the left leg of the woman, but without retouching. Also: We want the lettering on the newspaper at right to be as clear as possible, again, without retouching.
Yet even such demonstrable technical skill does not imply that all were aware of the ideological freight their work carried or the ideological uses to which their work would be put. But few of the FSA photographers would have agreed that their photographs were without freight and even after the passage of four decades would bridle at any evaluation of their work or its impact that regarded their work as mere conveyors of neutral information. Their flashy contemporary, outrageously exploitive Fortune photographer, Margaret Bourke-White, would dissemble, "With a camera, the shutter opens and closes and only the rays that come in to be registered come directly from the object in front." In marked contrast, FSA photographers repeatedly acknowledged the aggressive implications of their profession and were sensitive to the personal dislocations their intrusions could create. Moreover, for seven of the ten—Jack Delano, Carl Mydans, Marion Post Wolcott, John Collier, Evans, Lange, and Lee—there had been a formal association with the arts, and with the latter three experience including not only academic study and supervised making, but the commercial marketing of images to a discriminating clientele. Even someone at the furthest remove from this process, Gordon Parks, who was with the FSA marginally and briefly, was not immune to the ideological implications of the form. Parks had had an initially naive interest in pictures mainlined by the wife of Joe Louis, "who asked him [for what might be characterized as his tutoring in middle-class attention] to come to Chicago to photograph a new line of ladies' fashion."

Biographers of artists unfailingly recite the "sacrifices" their subjects have made in order to make art. Left unsaid is the fact that as a function of their class, these artists had a choice. Had they chosen not to do art, they had the tangible option of doing something else, and likely living quite well. FSA photographers were in a similar position, and, though novelist Eudora Welty was not one of them, what she wrote of the pictures she took while with a Works Projects Administration (WPA) agency, _One Time, One Place_ (1971), illuminates these issues:

And had I no shame as a white person for what message might lie in my pictures of black persons? No, I was too busy imagining myself into their lives to be open to any generalities. [p. 6]

A question is implicit in what Welty calls her need to "imagine" herself "into their lives," one she anticipates and then goes on to answer with a candor equal to Agee's:

Perhaps I should openly admit here to an ironic fact. While I was very well equipped for taking these pictures, I was rather oddly equipped for doing it. I came from a stable, sheltered, relatively happy home that by the time of the Depression and the early death of my father . . . had become comfortably enough off by small-town Southern standards . . . . I was equipped with a good liberal arts education (in Mississippi, Wisconsin, and New York) . . . . I was bright in my studies, and [yet] when . . . I returned home from the Columbia Graduate School of Business . . . of the ways of life in the world I knew absolutely nothing at all. [pp. 6–7]
A "background" that allowed her to know the world in reality allowed her to know only a fraction of the world. Like the FSA photographers of her time, Eudora Welty realized that the real irony was that social privilege resulted in, ultimately, personal impoverishment. And like them, she realized that this imbalance could be corrected only by bringing one's work closer and closer to the "everydayness" of black and white working people's lives, as they, not she, experienced it.

In this sense, it is more than unfair to regard the FSA photographers as "dupes" of either left or right wings of the New Deal, irresponsibly "naive" of the implications of their work, or as passive "agents" of an aggrandizing federal bureaucracy. The true situation was and remains far more complex and far more knotty than easy labeling will allow. But Welty's brief account suggests why the FSA photographers were never entirely subservient to the ideological directives outlined earlier. True, their professional status put them in a sharply asymmetrical relationship in any encounter, but their own unconscious needs ("I knew nothing at all") coupled with the needs of their work ("imagining . . . into their lives") were so apparent that their subjects satisfied both by being able to insist upon an element intrinsic to any authentic relationship—the subject's need for attention. So the meaning of Shahn's insight, the phrase "extraordinary manner," becomes clearer: nothing less than the same quality and intensity of attention must be paid to an "invisible people" as they, in the course of things, pay to the very visible people the social structure automatically rewards.

The appeal of the FSA photographs becomes obvious. Experiences denied by the confines of class were now available to that class, and if there was something slightly titilating and exotic about "how the other half lives," there was also the solid, four-square element of necessity, since these photographs stimulated the feeling of incompleteness in the viewer that, in turn, compelled attention.

Unfortunately, experiencing worlds through photographs cuts two ways. Susan Sontag (1977:24) writes about photographs as cheap knowledge. She warns that "they make us feel that the world is more avail-
Figure 8  Marion Post Wolcott. "Clarksdale, Mississippi. November 1939. Jitterbugging in a Negro juke joint on Saturday evening in the Delta area."
FSA 52596-D.

Figure 9  Jack Delano. "Greene County, Georgia. October 1941. The White Plains bridge club."
46202-D.
able than it really is." This is never more the case than with the classic photographs, the "beautiful" ones, because these photographs are made in such a way that they fulfill the viewers' need to be reassured that the world hasn't gotten any worse. The viewers get all they want—the "feel"—which preempts, in crucial emotional and political ways, any further involvement. The experience these photographs occasion is not an absolute one, nor even a matter of a continuum. Elements of either the condemnatory or celebratory mode can be identified in them to some extent and people are, after all, moved by them. The experience is at its most obvious and most extreme, however, with a third kind of classic photograph—the artists' photograph. This third group, as exemplified by certain work by Evans, has been intensively appreciated by a narrow spectrum of photographic artists and art historians for their abstract, formal qualities. They encourage instant identification as kinds, and they insist upon concentrated, involved analyses of the most demanding drill.

Arthur Rothstein's variously titled photograph of the 1936 Dust Bowl in Oklahoma is a striking example of the first mode. Some versions have been printed as lighter or darker, sharper in focus, it seems, than others, but all show a barren landscape where motion reigns supreme, where human life, in a not-too-distant background (a man, a youth alongside, a small child not far behind), is bowed by wind, where even solid man-made structures (a low plains house) visibly demonstrate the abrasive, bleaching effects of this natural force. Obviously what is being condemned here is less an "act of God" and more a social structure (or lack of one) that allows human life to be at its mercy.

The celebratory mode is exemplified by Dorothea Lange's "Hoe Culture, Alabama, 1937," a straightforward photograph of someone holding a portion of a handle. While basic elements can be located in photographs of the landscape or of man-made structures, the human presence is central to this mode and, if not directly present, is usually implied: What is being celebrated here is not virgin landscape, but the organic relationship of necessity between man and nature and, more particularly, in this period of time, between Americans and their land. The celebratory photographs reinforce the pastoral myth and revive a waning expectation that productivity must result from this relationship, even as the nation becomes irrevocably urbanized and rural values are made inoperative—except as nostalgia—for lack of an appropriate arena.

Man prevails, the viewer is persuaded, though this is made possible only by that earlier mentioned indomitable spirit—hence, photographs in this mode are essentially character portraits and borrow heavily from studio techniques. So, in Lange's photograph, we do not need to see either the head and shoulders, or below the thighs, as direct, close view we are given will provide us with ample enough details from which to draw our conclusions. The weathered, sweat-stained handle is part weapon, part enemy, part old friend, and as such has complex familiarity; not exactly cradled, it is not held in a vise grip either. The angles of handle and holding hands, arms, the quality of focus around details of badly worn denim field jacket and patched denim pants, are concentrated without clutter, and the soft richness—rather than glaring sharpness—of contrast has the further effect of ennobling these honorably worn garments, these work-worn hands and muscled arms and, by implication, the entire enterprise beyond. To sacrifice, in Greek, is to make sacred; these celebratory photographs assure us the ancient metaphysic lives by assuring us that this labor has, in effect, sanctified the laborer, whatever the material outcome in a troubled period.

Virtually any of Evans's FSA photographs will do as an example of the third mode, though some, of course, are better made than others. The first thing one notices is the surface polish and a terrific sharpness of detail. For contrast, whites are very white and blacks, as we might recall from Evans's "Note For The Engraver," quoted earlier, are very black, and matched. These points might be dismissed as simply a function of technical production, but it is a produc-
Evans’s interiors of Hale County, Alabama, sharecropper’s shacks or his haunting frontal views of rural churches are designed to beautifully freeze moments in time. Emotions are intensified—by careful positioning, enormous attention to the most minute detail, distinct, yet never too sharp a tone—such that something curious occurs. We don’t so much see as experience the things of this world, and we do so in such a way that the experience comes to take the place of the things of this world; we prefer the photograph of that church interior in Alabama to actually sitting at the keyboard of that organ and pumping away at the foot pedals.9
Figure 12  Russell Lee. "Crowley (vicinity), Louisiana. November 1938. Joseph LaBlanc, a wealthy Cajun farmer; standing on the steps of his home with some birds from an early morning shoot." 11777-M2.
Figure 13  O. S. Welch. "Atlanta, Georgia. July 1942. Mrs. J. L. Tuggle, of 885 Gilbert street, with a nine-pound bass she caught, using catawba worm bait on a No. 10 hook. This was her first experience as a fisherman." R2-904.
This would be all well and good if the experience would finally send us back into the world ready to do something after our moment of contemplation. It does not, and that moment can be a long one. The photographs' clarity humbles us, not to the discrete "I" who will act, but the "I" who, like the billions of other discrete grains of sand, simply is. The beautiful pictures are so complete in themselves that it is within them—emotionally—that we remain, during and after the time we view them. (The intensity of our involvement is fueled by the contrast between the pedestrian subject matter—peeling road signs or neat shelves of seed packets in a general store, in an Evans photograph—and the extravagant attention the photographer has paid to that subject matter.) We are rapt before the icon image, engaged, then quite relaxed. The pressure is off, and should we return to the internal hum of the photograph repeatedly, gone is that other need—to understand the conditions that caused the peeling paint, or why the seeds sit un­bought, why there is no money . . . much less to commit ourselves to a struggle that would address and then hopefully change those conditions.

**Vernacular Pictures**

In contrast, vernacular pictures\(^{10}\) are never cool and formalized; the poverty in them is rarely beautiful, in Whitman's or anyone else's sense; and the viewer, conditioned by the three previously noted modes of visual representation, is hard put to know how to respond to these images of the ordinary, photographed in an "ordinary" fashion.

Unlike the classic photographs, they present a bland and often somewhat confusing exterior, which is not immediately engaging. And vernacular pictures are not easy to be "in," once the viewer has managed to define and then gain a point of entry. Having seen them once, the viewer does not usually return. Why? Because the "subject matter" seems easily exhausted and, as a consequence, there is no intellectual or affective need. Absent as well are the formal elements of classic photographs, which might pump up emotion, enhance memorability. Trained on stunning surfaces and well-defined images, the viewer wonders about the grayness of it all, is annoyed by the inarticulateness of a construction that seems to require, as part of its meaning as well as its information, very specific captions below or alongside the pictures, detailed, explanatory texts, maps, and diagrams. Can't these photographs stand alone, the viewer objects? What was it that engaged the photographer in the first place; wasn't the photographer as puzzled as the viewer that the "essence" of the subject didn't turn up in the developer, or at least under the enlarger?

The point is that vernacular pictures are by nature shy, necessarily offensive, even hostile and unrevealing to the photographer or viewer who is tied to an ideology that trivializes them into "sociological studies" or mindless popular culture "highs" almost reflexively.\(^{11}\) On some level, the FSA photographers must have understood this immense vulnerability. Reprinting a negative shortly before her death, a negative she had made while with the FSA in 1936, Dorothea Lange began to cry. "The print is not the object," she said aloud, turning to her darkroom assistant after she had composed herself, "the object is the emotion the print gives you" (Meltzer 1978:153). She had gotten close to people's lives. For an instant, she had remembered the meaning of those lives again, as they must have once flooded over her, decades ago, in the midst of the Great Depression.

This selection of pictures, "Games and Sports in the South," could have included other similar images, though not many. None are available prior to 1937 because, up until then, the FSA was searching out things to condemn, not to celebrate. Besides, the notion of "relaxation" in itself conflicted with the still-operative work ethic; there was always the possibility of seriously misleading the viewer, suggesting that these people "played" entirely too much. So there are

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**Figure 14** Arthur Rothstein. "Lauderdale County, Alabama. June 1942. Tennessee Valley Authority. Julien H. Case and his wife pitching horseshoes on their farm." 3946-D.
Figure 15  Jack Delano. “Franklin, Heard County, Georgia. Spring 1941. A game of pool in the general store.” 44032-D.
Figure 16  Marion Post Wolcott. "Sarasota, Florida. January 1941. Guests of a trailer enjoying an evening of 'bingo.'" 56947-D.
few pictures, from any region, that fall into a category one would think deserved better in the 1930s, one which certainly gets more than its share of images today. At any rate, those pictures that do exist conform wonderfully to the subversive possibilities ever present in every art.

Stryker had wanted photographs of baseball and children playing (he didn’t have many ideas on the subject; something like the film “Greased Lightning” was out of the question because most of the towns his photographers visited didn’t have ten cars on a market day, let alone one you could put on a dirt track for ten laps), but the images that came back into the office in Washington were palpably congruent with the conditions of Southern reality encountered by FSA photographers: oppressive heat and grinding poverty. So it makes perfect sense that of all the activities, only two have any action—the baseball pitcher (Figure 17) and the horseshoe players (Figure 14), neither of whom is working up much of a sweat. Except for the most modest items, no activity includes either extensive or expensive equipment. Moreover, like the classic photographs, these pictures are neither candid nor spontaneous, but the openness of relationship with the subjects is in open collusion with the FSA photographer. This implies the existence of a shared motive: both photographer and subject want to give the appearance of a “real good time.”

Every picture has its awkwardness or anomaly, as if to say that on this click, at least, the professional wasn’t much in control. The white man with the strange look on his face (as he stares into the camera, wedged between two black dancers), in “Negro Juke Joint on a Saturday Evening” (Figure 8), shares something with the old gentleman “enjoying,” the caption argues, “an evening of ‘bingo,’” (Figure 16), but exactly what that is, beyond stark estrangement, will require the viewer to know much more about Clarksdale, Mississippi, in 1939, as well as what happens to old men who are outnumbered and surrounded at such events by old women, in places like Sarasota, Florida.

We know that the classic photographs reveal complex emotions, both in what they disclose and, to a greater extent, in what they invite. Their inner structure mediates strong feelings so that the viewer can sort out muted shades of anger or pain. These mundane pictures are emotionally more direct. They too contain an inner structure, but access to it is less a knowledge of formal aesthetics than it is a procedure involving complex “de-coding,” dependent to a far greater extent than classic photographs upon caption, text, milieu, and a knowledge of how they were made. The expression of anger in a number of these pictures is illustrative. The two fans, locked outside the posh Duke football game, are more than merely uncomfortable in their tweed and mink attire (Figure 1); they seethe with a cold fury born of entitlement. The same intensity of emotion may be seen in the face of the judge at the Virginia horse show (Figure 11), clearly dissatisfied with the photographer’s intrusion into this circle of privilege, and both the black migratory workers watching their fellow picker play checkers with a white man (white-shirted grower?) during what the caption regards as “slack season” (Figure 2) seem about as ready to break loose as the good ole boys watching that friendly game of pool, and decidedly not laughing, as is that smiling man with the cue (owner?), in Franklin, Heard County, Georgia (Figure 15).

As America edged into World War II, and then the war itself moved into higher and higher gear, federal agencies were dropped or conflated into others; programs and the ends they served changed radically. By the middle of 1942, Stryker was torn between staying in Washington and insuring the safety of the FSA collection (“The File”) he had labored to shape, and which he knew was regarded ambivalently by those both in and out of power, and leaving an office where funding was always in doubt and yet where requests from places like the Office of War Information never ceased, wanting shots they could send overseas to show Our Boys and Our Allies the good life that had been left behind, how unified we all were at home now, fighting fascism together.

Instead, a little like the CIO and busy Walter Reuther, the FSA photographers had already, by the late 1930s, been searching out a more complex, less cheery perspective on the land. They roasted 100 percent Americans at play, like the White Plains Bridge Club, in Greene County, Georgia (Figure 9), the blandly identified “group of men” who were contentedly “playing backgammon outside a beach house” near Miami (Figure 18), and got a few regular fellas shooting craps (“during lunch hour,” insists the caption) while building a war emergency pipeline from Texas to Illinois (Figure 10). One doubts that the American Rifle Association would have wanted to use
Figure 17 Marion Post Wolcott. "Shriever, Louisiana. Terrebonne, a Farm Security Administration project. A baseball game." 54345-D.

their shots of the black hunters and white hunters who are very posed (Figures 3 and 12) and who, in any event, would require rather special handling in an exhibition in order to avoid any "embarrassing" comparisons, though the price of Gordon Parks's trip to Daytona Beach must have been repaid, several times over, just hearing him recall what those laughing black basketball playing girls—in college, no less—were like in 1943 (Figure 6). The caption for Mrs. J. L. Tuggle and her "nine-pound bass" which she caught "using Catawba worm bait on a no. 10 hook" (Figure 13) leaves little to the imagination, or does it? And if that fellow in the rumpled baseball uniform, front row middle, at Irwinville Farms, Georgia (Figure 4), isn't stiff, he is doing an excellent job of "goofing" on the FSA photographer who is trying to form him up into a team picture.

Shahn was extremely gentle in handling his subjects. (His account of an auction in Central Ohio, actually a farm foreclosure, is the tenderest elegy in the FSA files.) But the dark lady dancing with three others at Cumberland Homestead, Tennessee (Figure 5), remains unassured, wary, does not give the impression she much trusts his purpose. The exact opposite is the case with Marion Post Wolcott's picture of those muskrat trappers (Figure 7), who appear to have been drinking cheap wine and having a damned good time since Prohibition began, and who are eager to have others join them. Indeed, if the viewer doesn't feel close enough to them to wonder about that giant, blank sky over the pitcher's mound in Shriever, Louisiana (Figure 17), and to wonder once again, just how far away that game is from those muskrat boys at Delacroix Island, St. Bernard Parish, the photographer has failed to make an essential connection: the very essence of vernacular pictures.

These glancing remarks, almost asides when one considers how much could and needs to be said about previously ignored background and technique, nevertheless begin to illustrate the manifold ironies and paradoxes, the latent energies, rich content, and unanswered questions even the slightest reading of vernacular pictures can yield. All of them are radically incomplete and, as a result almost wholly referential, and what they refer to is a region and a country that haven't yet begun to be explored. From a political point of view, they demonstrate the acceptance, in analysis, of the status quo and all the ideological implications of that position which necessarily follow. As art, they are another example of what happens to local or regional materials when they are inappropriately subjected to international "standards"; moreover, such neglect is an indication of the priorities that have dominated the American studies movement since its expansive, European excursions, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It is in an almost entirely
Figure 18  Marion Post Wolcott. "Miami Beach, Florida. January 1939. A group of men playing backgammon outside a beach house." 30471-M2.
overlooked area, however, that of the craft of photography, that perhaps the greatest mystification has occurred, and perhaps it is there that future reconsiderations of vernacular pictures in general and these FSA photographs in particular will have their origin.

For too long, photographers, historians, and critics of photography have attempted to put images into frames, as it were, as though they were taxonomists plucking bugs and butterflies into bottles, when the point has been not dissection and labelling—separation and isolation—but seeing the underlying unity and then telling others how all the pieces are connected. Shahn communicates some of what can happen to an artist, but for the ultimate benefit of us all, when these connections are made:

I remember the first place I went... one of the resettlements FSA built. I found that as far as I was concerned, they were impossible to photograph. Neat little rows of houses. That wasn’t my idea of something to photograph. And when they told me I went on to a place called Scott’s Run, and there it began. From there I went all through Kentucky, West Virginia, down to Arkansas, and Mississippi. Louisiana, in other words, I covered the mine country and the cotton country. I was terribly excited... did no painting at all in that time. [Quoted in O’Neal 1976:46]

Notes

1 Vernacular as the common, everyday speech of ordinary people is a well-established category in literary analysis. There, learned, formalized patterns of speech or highly conscious, highly stylized modes of construction (as in the principles of classical rhetoric with its rigid insistence on the appropriate occasions for particular figures, tropes, and metaphors) are frequently contrasted with non-standard expression that is native to a people or a region. Twentieth-century literature, like modern art, was energized by use of the vernacular, as in the writings of James Joyce and William Carlos Williams, and the rise of nineteenth-century English romanticism is regularly enough attributed to calls by the poets Wordsworth and Coleridge for a poetry whose language would be brought nearer to the real language of men. The most searching historical examination of the vernacular in literature is Eric Auerbach’s Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Virtually any of Freud’s seminal papers on psychoanalytic technique stress the centrality of common speech in psychotherapeutic transactions and the fact that something as common in constituent elements and form as the dream is nothing less than the “Roman road” to understanding the unconscious. And the history of Architecture is another field where the vernacular has been an important category encouraging the surge, most recently, of vernacular reconstructions in urban and rural, industrial and agricultural environments. Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Countries (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) for example, contains the following useful distinction by its author, R. W. Brunskill.

The building types included [in this work] are, of course, vernacular rather than “polite” in quality, and predominantly domestic and rural. They are “vernacular”—the products of local craftsmen meeting simple functional requirements according to traditional plans and procedures and with the aid of local building material and constructional methods, rather than “polite”—the efforts of professional designers, meeting the more elaborate needs of a formal way of life with the aid of internationally accepted rules and procedures, advanced constructional techniques, and materials chosen for aesthetic effect rather than local availability. [p. 15]

Introducing the vernacular as a category in the reading of photographs, however, raises special difficulties because not only is there mediation, but the central mediating device is nothing so simple as a typewriter transmitting words; it is a complex instrument known as a camera transmitting (? images. Since the burden of this essay is, at least in part, to argue for ways in which this category might be introduced, a Note is scarcely the place to begin to unpack the result of dealing with cameras and images rather than with typewriters and words, though here it is worth noting that, with pictures, the vernacular may well be both intrinsic to the subject (intrinsic to the person, place, region) and part of a particular process—a certain manner of commissioning, making, and reproducing photographs. Just as it would be an error to assume that all snapshots—with their often stereotyped expectations, formats, executions, and responses—are vernacular, so it would be an error to accept the single frame as a vernacular picture rather than groups of pictures. Thus, the FSA’s Roy Emerson Stryker was clearly on to something when he firmly instructed highly professional portraitists such as Russell Lee to “keep moving.” Like the licensed, university-trained architect sent “out” to work under local conditions with local materials, Stryker wrote to Lee in an extraordinary letter of January 1937:

Acknowledgments

The main line of argument in this essay emerged from conversations over a period of many years with photographers H. Ramsey Fowler, Stu Cohen, and, especially, Christopher Seiberling. Others who have helped me are Robert Arruda, Charles Collins, F. Jack Hurley, Grace Seiberling, and Robert Coles, M.D. The argument has been greatly focused by work with my colleague, John D. Stoeckle, M.D., and it will appear in a joint work by us in another context, expanded and more detailed, in a book to be published by the MIT Press in 1983: Plain Pictures of Plain Doctoring: New Deal (FSA) Photographs of Doctors and Patients.
There are some outstandingly fine things among them [recent pictures Lee made]. In general, I have one criticism to make, namely, that perhaps you have not told as full a story as you might have. . . . Would it not be better to have taken fewer families and spent more time with each?

Stryker went on, identifying further errors and outlining corrective techniques:

You have done many pictures of the families standing in front of their house or shack. They appear a bit stiff taken in this manner. These would be all right, provided we could show members of the same family in the house and doing various things. (Roy Emerson Stryker. Letter to Russell Lee, January 1937. Roy Stryker Collection, University of Louisville Photographic Archive, Louisville, Kentucky.)

2 For all the assembled information, this is in sum the reformist message one finds in Documentary Expression and Thirties America (Stryker 1973). Stott's work is primarily aesthetic, uninformed by either a critical history or a critical politics. As a result, the book's moral judgments become the very strafigy of documentary they claim to discredit: manipulative moralizing. Leaving aside the argument that all documentary is by nature manipulative, it is as if the reader is made to "feel bad" about certain economic and social conditions in the absence of any solutions or, worse, any explanations. An impressive close analysis of Walker Evans's photographs, one which delineates the difference between Evans's intentions and those of his subjects (the ones we know from Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, 1941) redeems an otherwise misleading excursion through the genre.

3 It should go without saying that the following historical reconstructions is of the sort that can only take place at a very great distance, and only after information from countless sources has been carefully sifted, argued over, and resubmitted. Even then, it cannot be assumed that all parties will agree, not only on what happened or what did not happen, but what it meant that X happened and Y did not. Sadly, partisans of individual historical actors or institutions will routinely treat such analyses as nothing less than the imputation of "conspiratorial" motives toward their favorites, insisting that no one knew what was occurring, or that A did not know what was occurring, or that A did and it is the analysis which has misunderstood or distorted A. The necessity of the Russian Revolution is a good example of this category, and Lenin's role, as seen by Trotsky, a good example of this subsequent partisan inquiry.

4 Perhaps the most self-conscious, self-critical form of this can be found in Agee's text for Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. There, scattered about and typical, is the following: "When they saw the amount of equipment stowed in the back of our car, they showed that they felt they had been taken advantage of, but said nothing" (p. 26).

5 For each, the world of high-pressure, high-income image manufacture was nothing new: Evans's father had been an executive with Lord & Thomas, a national advertising firm, based in Chicago. The son received art training at, in his words, "emergency private schools," and, after dropping out of Williams College, spent a year at the Sorbonne in 1926, which allowed him to view the School of Paris Painters, "a revolutionary eye education," as he would describe it years later. Lange's first marriage was to the painter and muralist Maynard Dixon, and she followed an apprenticeship in commercial portrait work in New York City with the establishment of a West Coast studio that, like her husband's murals, catered to San Francisco's well-off. Lee began as a chemical engineer and advanced to plant manager in Kansas City, where a first marriage to a painter and an inherited income from several of his grand-uncle's farms allowed him to move to "the world of West Coast art" in 1929 and then "an artists' colony" at Woodstock, N.Y., in 1931. There, like the others, he learned who bought what, and why.

6 The designation of kind is Christopher Seiberling's, though neither he nor the author is entirely satisfied with the actual word used to make the designation. A considerable debate has ranged among those who make pictures as to whether or not they are artists or photographers. As can be imagined, each term carries considerable freight. Until a more apt word comes along, the controversy is acknowledged but the word is kept because of its association with formal, aesthetic properties.

7 It is "Dust storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, 1936," in Rothstein (1973), "Dust storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, 1936, Arthur Rothstein," in Hurley's (1972); "Rothstein: Fleeing a dust storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, 1936," in Stryker-Wood (1973), and "Father and sons walking in the face of a dust storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, April 1936, Rothstein," in O'Neal (1976).

8 How the photographs received the captions they now bear is, however, another question. Historians of FSA photography have made suggestions but have not precisely sorted out either the process or the participants, and it may well be impossible at this point. But we do know that the photographers themselves had preferences, even demands. Meltzer (1978) has quoted the following account from Ron Partridge, Lange's driver-helper while she was photographing in the Imperial Valley, California, in 1937. "She would walk through the field and talk to people, asking simple questions—what are you picking?—and they'd answer, tossing her whatever fruit or vegetable it might be. She'd show interest in their clothing, their knives, their bins, their trucks. How long have you been here? When do you eat lunch? . . . Every hour or two she'd go sit in the car and write down whatever they said." (p. 19). Meltzer notes that certain captions Lange used would come directly from what she had heard.

In any case, we need neither the New Critics nor Walter Benjamin to suggest to us the ways in which captions alter our reading of the picture before us. That they are more important to the vernacular than the classic photographs is a point to be argued further along.

9 Little wonder, then, that these are among the most emotionally satisfying photographs of the FSA photographers, or that the more explicit portraits are almost without exception uniformly extraordinary. Those by Lange—"Migratory laborer's wife near Childress, Texas, June 1938," "Woman of the Plains," "Ex-slave, Alabama, 1937"—and Lee—"Negro crossing himself and praying over grave in cemetery, All Saints Day, New Rocks, Louisiana, October 1938," "Former sharecropper, New Madrid, Missouri, 1938"—are so superior as formal portraits as to cross the border into Evans's domain, discussed below.

10 Vernacular pictures should not be understood as somehow immune from the forces of ideology in a given culture that press upon the other modes, nor is their superior status, with respect to the other modes, a given. In the evaluation of literature, Leo Marx (1956) has written about Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn that while the vernacular may be its distinctive feature, accounting for its success—in that particular novel—is another matter. "It means nothing," says
Marx, "to contend that the novel is great because it is written in the native idiom unless, that is, we meant to impute some intrinsic or absolute value to the vernacular. That would be ridiculous." In the psychoanalytic tradition, however, a central aspect of treatment—and an index of relative health—is the patient’s ability to cut beneath successive layers of abstraction and to speak in their own language. These are all defenses, and mobilized with good reason. Take a psychoanalyzed liberal like Lionel Trilling, who could write of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1941: "[The one failure] ... is not a literary failure. ... It is a failure of moral realism. It lies in Agee's inability to see these people as anything but good. ... What creates this falsification is guilt. ... despite Agee's clear consciousness of his guilt, he cannot control it." (1942:102). The operative word here is of course control and Trilling's concern was that intellectuals should explore their own privilege relative to others' oppression but not lose control while doing so. Whether Evans read Trilling or not, he certainly demonstrated his disregard when it came time for a second edition of the book. Realizing he had had his version of their lives, he added their vision—their posed presentations of self—the second time around.

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Reviews and Discussion


Reviewed by Bennett M. Berger
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... and I should have shown that while the scholar seeks, the artist finds; that the man who goes deep gets stuck, gets sunk—up to his eyes and over them; that the truth is the appearance of things, that their secret is their form, and that what is deepest in man is his skin.

—André Gide, The Counterfeiters

I quote this passage from The Counterfeiters because I think that artist-scholar Howard Becker might find in it an apt epigraph for his book. In Art Worlds Becker has written what at least some culture guardians will think of as a skin-deep book, an opinion not entirely without some merit, given Gide’s view of the matter. But Becker has also written what is probably the most unromantic and severely sustained sociology of the occupation called art that has yet been produced.

The basic idea of the book is, appropriately, in its title. Becker uses the concept “art world” to argue that art is not produced by artists but by networks of cooperating persons (minimally in the practice of poetry, maximally in the production of grand opera) using a variety of skills and resources to make works which may or may not be designated as art and which may or may not find their way through channels of distribution to their audiences, who, by paying for them, enable the processes of art making to recur. Art making depends upon the manufacture of paper, canvases, potters’ wheels, oil paint in small tubes, trombones, oboe reeds, multitrack recording devices, scenery, costumes, looms, crocheting hooks, and so on; and on the work of editors, impresarios, curators, dealers, critics, aestheticians, carpenters, engineers, backers, boards of trustees—and, perhaps, butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers as well. Becker quotes Trollope crediting his manservant (who brought him coffee every day at 5 a.m.) with an essential role in the creation of his fiction, and he refers to Picasso sweet-talking his favorite printer (who didn’t even like Pablo’s work) into undertaking a nearly-impossible-to-print lithograph.

Art, then, doesn’t get made without the cooperation of a lot of people, and if made, doesn’t generally get seen, heard, or otherwise appreciated unless its delivery to audiences and publics can be accommodated within an art world’s system of distribution. There are exceptions, of course, and Becker pays careful attention to them, particularly in his discussions of “maverick” and “naive” art and in his chapter on change in art worlds. But art worlds are powerful, their systems slow to change, and the exceptions few, difficult, and remarkable. Becker pursues these themes in great detail and always with clear illustrations from the art worlds of music, painting, sculpture, photography, film, theater, dance, literature, and other arts (and crafts), emphasizing in separate chapters the role of conventions, material resources, distributors, and government (through art property law, censorship, subsidy), and the power of critics, aestheticians, and other “editors” to shape and alter the form and character of the finished art work. And he does it all with the kind of savvy that working artists will, I think, find accurate and real.

Is that all? Well, yes and no. When Becker turned his attention some years ago to photography and the study of art, comments were made that it represented a radical departure from his earlier work on occupations and deviance that made his reputation as an ethnographer. Excepting the fact that it is based on written sources rather than fieldwork, this book makes clear that it was not a departure at all. Like his earliest work, Becker’s plain empirical sense, his lucid writing, and his care for fully describing the way things actually are constitute the great strengths of this book, overriding the deliberate banality of its basic idea. Becker is one of the very few sociologists of art who, scratched, doesn’t reveal under the skin a thinly disguised prophet, critic, art-groupie, or guardian of culture. He does his conscious best to avoid making moral or aesthetic judgments about art, and he treats the data of art worlds no more or less reverently than he would treat the data of any occupational world.

Yet Becker knows that this posture will offend the dominant (“critical”) tradition in the sociology of art, whose very interest in art stems from the assumption that it is a specially resonant subject matter for sociological study; that it is created by people of special gifts or genius who make works of great beauty expressive of profound emotions and perhaps universal human values; and that for these reasons the study of art can reveal the deepest truths about society and culture. Becker is not a partisan of this view, and from the outset he tries to anticipate the thrust of this criticism of his work (e.g., so what else is new? why don’t you tell us anything about why this art is good and that bad?) by not quibbling if his book is called not a sociology of art at all but a “sociology of occupations applied to artistic work.”

Well, that is surely a defensible posture, and it makes his book entirely of a piece with his earlier work on occupations. But I think too that he need not have been so cordial. Becker seems to have written this book with the imagined hot breath of the sociol-
ogy of art establishment on his neck—or its monkey on his back. Anticipating their criticism that his book tells them nothing they didn't already know and nothing "critically" or aesthetically fresh, he states candidly his conviction that social science does not generally produce new discoveries but provides fuller understanding of the things that many people already "know." His book does that admirably. But it will also teach any nonartist a lot that he or she didn't know, and it provides a potentially workable model for the analysis of a variety of other occupational worlds beyond that of art.

But there is more; he goes on:

...it seems obvious to say that if everyone whose work contributes to the finished art work does not do his part, the work will come out differently. But it is not obvious to pursue the implication that it then becomes a problem to decide which of all these people is the artist... 

It is exactly this point that the book does not pursue in any systematic way, although there are recurrent intimations of a repressed argument never explicitly made. The book is most spirited and engaging when Becker is talking about—well—"deviant" art, whether it be minor or aspiring arts or maverick, naive, or folk art—i.e., the not fully "integrated professional" arts. Not exactly a surprise since, like his durable concern with occupations, it is continuous with Becker's long-standing sympathy with deviance of several other sorts. But the sympathy is less relaxed than usual in this book. The argument in behalf of these arts that one senses Becker wants to make goes largely unmade, except tangentially, when, for example, he lets slip his feeling for quilting and weaving (his involvement in jazz and photography—still not fully arrived arts—is well known), his apparent bewitchment by the uncategorizable Watts Towers, and his acid observation that when professional artists take up pottery they are careful to affirm their credentials as serious artists by making their product unusable for homely purposes.

That unmade argument represents a curious reticence, and it invites the question of why Becker, not well known for his prudence, should be so diffident, so unassertive in this respect. Is it deference to the power of established art worlds, with which (as a musician and photographer) he has to maintain at least some relations? To the granfallosos [à la Vonnegut] of the sociology of art by staying away from their questions if not their turf? Possibly, but not probably. A more likely explanation is that Becker is caught in the logic of his own aesthetic relativism, which dictates that art is what art worlds say it is, artists are those so designated by art worlds, and no aesthetic special pleading by a sociologist will change that.

Even sticking with his logic, however, he might have found a way to make the argument I think he wants to make, were he a sociologist less skeptical than he is of theory and political "positions." Herbert Gans, for example, whose relativism is no less severe than Becker's, was nevertheless able to argue (from strict and simple democratic assumptions) that culture industries underearn certain social groups (the aged and ethnic minorities, for example) for whom he claims a right to aesthetic equity from the institutions of popular art. The claim is made (as Becker might point out) to not much effect, but the argument is made explicitly, and within a relativist frame that conceives a specific aesthetic as a property of the culture of social groups (classes, ethnic groups, age groups) rather than as a function of the more specialized conception of art worlds.

Becker likes "big" theorizing even less than he likes politics (imagine: a major book by a prominent sociologist without a single reference to Marx, Weber, or Durkheim). Like Goffman, he is in the skin-trade: what-is-visible-to-the-eye-that-cares-to-look is what reveals. But unlike Goffman (who seeks the approval of prestigious theorists by exhibiting his concern with highly abstract and exhaustive typologies and other metaphenomena), Becker has pulled off the more difficult feat of establishing a major reputation in sociology while hardly ever lowering his eyebrow or uncurling his lip at the mention of "theory." It's hard to imagine the word falling from his tongue without a suspicious "so-called" prefixed to it.

Becker's macrotheoretical reluctance deliberately but unnecessarily limits the reach of this book. Marxist sociologists of art should take note, please, that Becker, a most un-Marxist sociologist, has written a book about art that deals comprehensively and almost exclusively with the forces and relations of production (and distribution) in a detailed way that no Marxist has come close to: not Lowenthal, nor Lukacs, nor Hauser, nor Adorno, nor Goldmann, nor Aronowitz, nor even Raymond Williams. These materials make possible a sociological analysis of the aesthetic issues from which Becker, oddly, withdraws, because, I think, their pursuit might require the kind of "European" theorizing in the sociology of ideas with which he feels uncomfortable.

It's an unnecessary loss because Becker understands that an aesthetic, like any body of ideas, is sustained, altered, or otherwise carried through time by identifiable groups of people who commit themselves to that aesthetic (rather than some other aesthetic) in ways and for reasons suggested by the pattern of constraints and interests revealed by the history and structure of art worlds, and by the ties of art worlds to larger social structures. Becker differentiates within and among art worlds sufficiently to indicate the diversity of interests involved but insuffi-
ciently to indicate how inequalities in the power wielded by different sectoral interests affect the prestige of art works, art workers, schools, genres, and media, and hence the aesthetic on which it rests. He does not ignore conflict and other disagreements within art worlds, but his emphasis is on the consensus-building that makes and unmakes reputations and on the cooperation without which the very concept art world would be difficult to deploy analytically.

Becker also knows that aesthetic revolution (and even aesthetic innovation) can threaten the vested interests of art world institutions and the general culture itself, but he offers no detailed account of any bitter struggles. He is willing to tell us that a new aesthetic will never make it into the art history textbooks unless it captures an existing art world or creates a new one (as some do), but he is unwilling to tell us what it is about some new aesthetics that induces unyielding opposition from existing art worlds and the obstruction of efforts to create new ones. He is willing to tell us that an art world discourages the making of sculptures too heavy for the floors of an exhibition space to support, and the composition of music (and other performance) too long for audiences to sit through. He is even willing to suggest how the discouragement can be overcome (Woodstock? Nicholas Nickleby? sculpture-become-architecture-or-landscaping?). But he is unwilling to show us how to convince art worlds of the unimportance of aesthetic revolution (and even aesthetic innovation) to general culture.

Critics are always telling authors what they should have done or might have done. But, strangely, authors persist in writing the books they want to write. Becker has written the book he wanted to. It is a very good book, and everyone, including not entirely satisfiable critics like this one, should be grateful.
through tightness” (p. 70). The other ethic to which fashion conformed was that of the church. Kunzle speculates that clerical opposition to tight-lacing, particularly in the nineteenth century, was not only an attempt to repress Eros but also to save Christian Europe from “a growing appreciation of the primitive, the sexual, and the magical, derived from the study [and I would add, colonization] of non-European cultures” (p. 295).

Western body-sculpture was most fully analyzed, however, not by clerics but by psychologists. Freud based his analysis of clothing fetishes on “male autoerotic practices” and concluded they were “basically a form of psychic masturbation.” Kunzle sees this as “an impossibly narrow view of the phenomenon” and argues that tight-lacing at least is “normatively heterosexual” and may allow for the “transcendence of sexual roles and lead to a special kind of equality between the partners” (p. 36). Kunzle then intermittently traces the process by which an individual fetish is transformed, sequentially, into heterosexual practice, group identification, social protest, persecuted cult, and marginalized subculture. Finally, he suggests the importance of the corset and tight-lacing as metaphors for technological, economic, and political crisis and division. To follow these subthemes, however, would take us, as it too often takes Kunzle, away from the central and most provocative argument of his study.

That central argument is that the “history of tight-lacing is part of the history of the struggle for sexual self-expression, male and female” (p. 2). Its centerpiece is the female tight-lacer of the nineteenth century, who is seen as both object and agent of increased sexualization in dress and, by extension, in society. “Body-sculpture,” Kunzle writes, “is designed to enhance and sexualize the movements of everyday life” as well as of the human form itself (p. 17). While all corsetry had this effect, tight-lacing was the “conscious and visible” means by which those outside the dominant, i.e., fashionable, social class sought to “rise out of a socio-sexually subject position” (p. 2). Kunzle argues that “insofar as this kind of sexualization contributed to the breakdown of the repressive stereotype of woman as a passive, exclusively home and child-oriented and indeed essentially sexless creature, it should be regarded as progressive” (p. 42).

Kunzle’s thesis merges with a slowly accumulating body of scholarship that rejects traditional characterizations of the Victorian era (actually expanded to embrace 1750 to 1900) as unrelentingly repressive of female sexuality.1 Angela Carter, for instance, reinterprets the works of the Marquis de Sade from this perspective. She poses Sade not as a feminist but as woman’s “unconscious ally” because he, too, contributed to the breakdown of repressive stereotypes: he offered “an absolutely sexualized view of the world” while refusing “to see female sexuality in relation to its reproductive function.”2 By “claiming rights of free sexuality for women,” he “install[ed] women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds” (Carter 1979:22, 27, i, 37, 36). Both Sade and tight-lacers, then, provided their contemporaries with new, highly sexualized, and therefore subversive images of women. In this way, they became part of the “discursive explosion” about sex analyzed by Michel Foucault in his brilliant study, La Volonté de savoir (translated as The History of Sexuality, 1978).

According to Foucault, Victorians contributed not to the repression of sex but to its discursive elaboration, refinement, and deployment. The resulting proliferation of knowledge about sex nurtured both mechanisms of power—new medical, legal, educational, and institutional controls over the body—and a “plurality of resistances” to that power (Foucault 1978:96). This resistance often meant the positive employment of the power of sexuality to new ends. Pornography and tight-lacing, as viewed by Carter and Kunzle, are two such resistances.

Kunzle, however, adds three crucial dimensions to the above schema: he alone analyzes women’s employment of their own sexualization as a weapon of resistance; he recognizes sexuality as a potential means of resisting class as well as gender oppression; and he demonstrates the specific role of visual imagery as a mechanism of both power and resistance in the battle for defining normative sexuality. He combines these concerns in his examination of transformations in the graphic depictions of corseting dur-

ing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With the aid of numerous plates and illustrations, he traces the dominant graphic image from the Renaissance to French Realism. In the earlier period, it was the half-draped classical female figure of biblical or mythological origin who, posing in an outdoor setting, was observed from afar by a passive male spectator. In the latter, it was a grotesque old coquette who sought, in the intimacy of her boudoir, to recapture her youth through tight-lacing before the lecherous eyes of a male companion.

In the interim between the two images, the “naturally” ideally proportioned female body which required only draping was replaced by the “naturally” imperfect female body which required “addition, subtraction, multiplication, [and] division” through the manipulation of multilayered garments (p. 211). There were male viewers-voyeurs in each setting but, as the scene shifted from outdoors to indoors, intimacy of contact increased while the male’s attitude shifted from distant admiration to proximate disdain. For a time, a maid servant intervened, assisting, protecting, and admiring her well-laced mistress. Gradually, this cross-class female bonding was replaced by the entrance of amorous, lecherous, henpecked, or lustful male companions, including potent-appearing male servants. Clearly, these depictions carried multivalent messages about sexual and class power and fears.

It was these images, vivid and widely dispersed, that communicated the sexual mores of the dominant social class to the broader populace. Yet the producers of such images could never assure their “proper” translation nor completely repress alternative images. For instance, those who opposed tight-lacing had to admit its sexualizing function in order to condemn it, thereby opening the door to a positive interpretation of that same function. Indeed, the ever-spiraling need to intensify the ridicule and denunciation heaped on tight-lacing suggests that the condemned act was all too visible in opponents’ lives.

The two primary purveyors of alternatives to the dominant fashions were lower- and middle-class practitioners of tight-lacing and those feminists who donned Turkish trousers and bloomers. The latter’s protest was short-lived, always secondary to other concerns, and convergent on the issue of tight-lacing with the misogynist critiques of male physicians and philosophers. Thus, female tight-lacers and their male supporters and co-fetishists provided the only sustained critique of both fashion and the elites who defined its specific forms. The primary mid-nineteenth-century vehicle for the expression of their critique was *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*. This was the most successful Victorian family magazine and appealed to the middling classes. Women here acknowledged the “pleasure” and “delight” experienced when tight-laced, insisting on their voluntary adherence to the practice, its benefits to good health and proper eating habits, and its contributions to equal and fulfilling heterosexual partnerships (p. 215).

Such fetishist correspondence heightened the visibility of fetishists and intensified attacks upon them. In response, some fetishists sought greater visibility, but most concentrated on strengthening bonds among themselves. Women, in particular, established “extended family” networks which embraced female rela-
tives, friends, and servants. The feminist salutation, “thine in the bonds of womanhood,” was clothed with new meaning for female fetishists. While individual feminists may have felt few bonds with the fetishists, Kunzle claims it was significant that fetishists “raised their voice, if not in the language, nevertheless in the context of feminism” (p. 217). The *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* and other journalistic havens for fetishist correspondents generally supported women's rights to education, vigorous exercise, and property and even discussed birth control. To the extent that tight-lacing was practiced by “the disfranchised” to manipulate “a sexuality that the patriarchy found threatening,” the practice offered its own critique of women's oppression and, according to the practitioners themselves, provided a concrete means of attaining personal and social emancipation (p. 299).

Despite this recognition of the feminist context and implications of female fetishism, it is in the analysis of the linkages between the two that Kunzle’s study falls short. Because of feminists’ denunciations of tight-lacing, Kunzle assumes an almost complete separation of feminists and fetishists. He thus eliminates feminists from the center of his analysis, isolating fetishists’ conflicts with anti-fetishists from other political and social movements of the periods under study. When Kunzle expands his study beyond tight-lacing, it is most often to elaborate other forms of fetishism, not to extend his analysis of the feminist implications or context of such practices.

It is not coincidental that the denunciation of both feminists and fetishists intensified in the late nineteenth century as their opponents increasingly feared the convergence of the two movements. The latter was represented in this period by the sexualized female who drank, smoked, and led an independent life (referred to as the “Girl of the Period” in England and the “New Woman” in the United States) and the former by the advocate of women’s suffrage, female property rights, and birth control. The misogynist males who presented their peers with images of the fetishist as a vulgar coquette simultaneously presented the feminist as an asexual, blue-stockinged spinster. The two images shared two characteristics—the female characters were old and their sexuality was questionable. The difference was that the fetishist old hag sought sociosexual power through the exaggeration of her female characteristics while the feminist old hag sought sociopolitical power by covering her female characteristics with masculine attire. By failing to place images of tight-lacers in the context of images of women in general, Kunzle limits our vision of the crucial links between perceptions of women's reproductive, productive, and political roles. This is all the more unfortunate since Kunzle notes that those who sought to preserve “the traditional concept of woman as a passive, domestic, child-rearing creature . . . detected some sinister link between female fetishistic exhibitionism and female political and cultural ambition.” They recognized the quests for “narcissistic-sexual and social-political power” as mutually “subversive of the sacred domestic and maternal role” (p. 228).

While accepting these links on the level of abstract concepts, Kunzle fails to examine concrete linkages between the two groups and their depictions in the larger society. The primary barrier for him is his assumption that feminists and fetishists resided in distinctly different class locations. This assumption is based on shaky evidence at best. At several points Kunzle uses the claim by tight-lacing’s opponents that the practice was the “very badge of vulgarity” as evidence of tight-lacers’ class origins, rather than as a comment on their sexual practices or as an effective means of frightening more respectable women away from the practice. Even his other sources of evidence force him to use the term “lower classes” to refer to everything from the “bourgeois aspiring to aristocratic rank” to “lower-middle and working-class elements” aspiring to bourgeois rank (p. 299). His claims for feminists derive from existing literature on the subject which is now being revised to demonstrate the middle- and even lower-middle-class backgrounds of mid-nineteenth-century feminism as well as the multiple points of contact between upper-middle- and middle-class female reformers and their lower-class female clients (Hersh: 1978; Hewitt: forthcoming). There is clearly room here to argue that fetishists and feminists shared certain forms of gender and class oppression, even if their responses to it were substantially different and if they were successfully kept from recognizing their mutual concerns.

When the fundamental feminist premise is that the personal is the political, we should work toward recovering those crucial linkages in the past. David Kunzle has contributed to that recovery by resurrecting the sexual politics of tight-lacing and other forms of female fetishism. Yet the successful liberation of women from the multiple forms of gender and class oppression requires a conjunction of this “narcissistic-sexual” quest for power with “social-political” quests. Otherwise, the images of the former will continue to be distorted by those who have the authority to define fashions in gender and class relations as well as in dress. Kunzle’s study will no doubt provoke vociferous feminist critiques. Let us hope it will also provoke feminists to new analyses of power and resistance to it that will replicate Kunzle’s sensitivity to the personal meanings of minority sexual practices, their subversive social potential, and the distorted images they will generate if disconnected from a larger political context.
Note

1 Kunzle does not place himself in this context and cites neither Angela Carter’s nor Michel Foucault’s work in his extensive bibliography.

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Reviewed by Paul Messaris
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Students of the visual media have often found it necessary to point out that “Western” systems of “realistic” pictorial representation are no less conventional than the systems developed in other picture-making traditions. In other words, in the former case no less than in the latter, the development of representational rules has been a matter of social validation and transmission. However, many writers have also taken the further step of equating “conventional” with “arbitrary” and, consequently, insisting that even the most “realistic” product of “Western” picture-making (e.g., an ordinary photograph) must be incomprehensible to a viewer who is unfamiliar with pictures of this sort. Despite the existence of numerous anthropological anecdotes and some systematic studies that have been taken to be supportive of this position, there are compelling theoretical reasons for accepting the contrary claim, namely, that certain aspects of the interpretation of “Western”-style pictures should not be influenced appreciably by the viewer’s degree of familiarity with such pictures. In particular, J. J. Gibson has demonstrated that “Western”-style pictures typically reproduce many of the kinds of information which “non-pictorial” visual perception makes use of (e.g., see Gibson 1971), while Hochberg (1972) has shown that the inevitable absence of some of these kinds of information from pictures is no impediment to the analogical use of “real-life” perceptual mechanisms in pictorial interpretation. Strong support for this position has come not only from cross-cultural research but also from several other kinds of studies (e.g., with animals; see Kennedy 1974 for an excellent summary of this material). Nevertheless, the issue is still controversial, and many of its details remain completely unexplored. Bruce Cook’s work on pictorial interpretation in Papua New Guinea is a useful contribution toward untangling the controversy and probing some of these details.

Cook’s book describes the results of a series of interviews with 423 villagers from several locations in Papua New Guinea. Most of the informants had “traditional” occupations (e.g., farming), and half of them were literate. Their previous experience (if any) with pictures is not described in as much detail as one would wish, but it can be inferred that this experience was limited. The interviews were based primarily on several sets of picture-stories produced specifically for this study and dealing with local subjects (e.g., a
woman growing and fetching corn, a man building a grass hut). Each story consisted of four drawings, and each set of four drawings was produced in five different styles: stick-figure drawings, faceless outline drawings, detailed black-and-white drawings, detailed drawings with color, and black-and-white photographs. The informants were asked to perform such tasks as telling a story based on the pictures, identifying specific components of the pictures, and choosing among alternative orderings of the four pictures in each story.

In certain respects, the results of this study can be summarized quite simply. Even in the case of the least detailed representations tested here, some of the objects represented appeared to cause interpretational difficulties for almost none of the informants, regardless of degree of previous experience with pictures. In particular, the overall rate for correct identification was 97 percent for human figures and 96 percent for tools and weapons. This finding is clearly supportive of the argument that at least some aspects of "Western" pictorial conventions are not arbitrary. If establishing this point were one's sole concern, it would not be necessary to probe any further into the results of the study. For a more precise understanding of pictorial interpretation, however, one must look more closely at those aspects of the task which did cause difficulties for Cook's informants.

An interesting example of a picture that was not interpreted as intended occurred in the picture-story of a woman growing and fetching corn. The second picture in this story depicts the corn in the process of growing and is bracketed by a picture of the woman planting and a picture of the woman harvesting the fully grown corn. Although identification of the corn does not seem to have been a problem, few of Cook's informants were able to infer that passage of time was being implied in the second picture. On the basis of this and other related findings, Cook concludes that the use of single pictures to portray passage of time is likely to be problematic for preliterate viewers, but a pair of more precise observations may be added to this: First, the implication of time passing would undoubtedly have been incomprehensible to any viewer who did not see this picture as part of the series mentioned above. Second, many of Cook's informants—especially the preliterate—were apparently unfamiliar with the "Western" comic-book convention of "reading" frames from left to right and from top to bottom. Consequently, it is quite likely that the reason for their "misinterpretation" in this instance was lack of awareness of the appropriate contextual boundaries within which to search for meaning.

With reference to pictures in a series, the point just made should be insultingly obvious. But it can be extended somewhat less obviously to some of the aspects of single pictures that appear to have posed interpretational obstacles to Cook's informants and, indeed, to inexperienced viewers in other studies. Typically, what these viewers seem to have trouble interpreting is features of pictures which, in and of themselves, lack sufficient structural integrity to permit identification, regardless of the viewer's degree of pictorial "sophistication," and which, therefore, can only be interpreted as elements in a broader structure—that is, in the context of the picture as a whole. Examples: fire or the horizon line in Cook's study, a road or the outline of a hill in other research (e.g., Kilbride and Robbins 1969). It might well be, then, that viewers' "problems" with such pictorial elements stem from insufficient familiarity with the conventions by which the various parts of a design on a page are treated as belonging to the representation of a single "scene." Since many of these conventions (e.g., a frame line surrounding the picture) surely are arbitrary, this hypothesis is a plausible way of tying together several of the findings of interpretational difficulty in Cook's study and in related research.

Cook himself does not offer either this or any other integrative theoretical scheme to account for his findings, since the focus of his book is mainly on methodology and the practical implications of his study. In both of these areas the book is an admirable achievement. The methodological discussion is especially impressive. It is consistently sensitive to the point of view and social circumstances of the informants, and in this respect the study should be a positive example for other investigators. Of particular importance is Cook's demonstration that several previous findings of "naive" viewers' inability to interpret pictorial depth cues (e.g., Hudson 1960) could be due to the investigators' misinterpretation of their informants' use of terms for distance (pp. 62--64). The book concludes with useful advice for people engaged in development campaigns. Although these people are in fact Cook's primary intended audience, his findings should clearly be of more general interest to anyone concerned with pictures as communication.

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Reviewed by Nancy D. Munn University of Chicago

A classic problem in the anthropology and archaeology of art, as in Western art theory more generally, has been the nature of visual representation and its correlate, that of likeness. This issue has been haunted by ethnocentric models and concerns, prominent among which is the question of the recognizability of the referential or object meanings of visual forms to the "uninitiated eye" (Holmes 1890:142). The degree to which such recognizability seems possible has frequently been taken as an index for typifying visual representations in terms of degrees of "realism" or "abstraction/schematization"; indeed, it has often been the underlying criterion upon which the assignment of the label representation (as against, for instance, symbol, design, etc.) has itself been based.

Archaeologists, and to some extent ethnologists of art and material culture (more notably, in the latter case, those of an earlier era), have had a special involvement with the "recognizability" issue, since their research has required examination of visual artifacts detached from their sociocultural loci of production and use and drained of those complex relations between actors, media, and action, on the one hand, and underlying sociocultural structuring processes on the other, that together generate meaning. Attempts to make sense out of this material, or to theorize about representation in general on its basis, have thus been easily deflected onto the question of what or how much extrinsic object meaning is intrinsic to a visual form or schema and can be extracted by an external observer simply by looking at it. This question itself is matrixed in the empiricism of certain core aspects of Western epistemology, and the related value emphasis placed on universally definable meanings and form-meaning relations. Descriptive models built upon presuppositions with this epistemological grounding ease the "horror vacui" created by the absence of sociocultural meaning.

Modern anthropology, however, with its emphasis upon sociocultural contextualization and the emergence of meaning from complex relational processes, has gone far toward the elimination of such frameworks. Perception of likeness is itself culturally coded (cf., in art history, Gombrich 1960 and Baxandall 1972), and the implicit rules of likeness in any given art are culturally and contextually (i.e., with respect to specific contexts of action) defined; furthermore, what constitutes likeness is ultimately only specifiable in terms of culturally/historically constituted systems of visual forms, or relations between such forms, not simply by reference to single elements or figures.

The theme of the present book, schematization in art, thus presents itself as something of an anachronism. Many of the contributors appear in one way or another to be aware of this problem, yet they are also constrained, and sometimes seduced, by the framework offered in the notion of schematization. On the one hand, the book is an attempt to reassess this notion (a reassessment that would seem to be more directly relevant to the methodological problems of the archaeologists involved in the project than the anthropologists); on the other, by this very focus, the book is caught within the assumptions entailed in posing the general theoretical issue of representation in its terms.

Schematization was the topic of a symposium organized in 1974 by Peter Ucko, then principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies; his concern with it arose initially out of his attempts to find a methodology for interpreting aspects of the object meaning (and other meaning dimensions) of neolithic artifacts. Grafting his archaeological interests to his newly acquired interests in Australian Aboriginal art, Ucko organized the symposium which is the basis of this book. The compilation of thirty-eight papers, which as is usual in such collections vary in quality, is subdivided into broad groupings: (1) "Schematisation and Form: A Question of Definition"; (2) "Variety of Processes in Representation"; (3) "Form and Identification in a Living Context"; (4) "Form and Identification in a Prehistoric Context"; and (5) "Form, Chronology and Classification." Papers cover primarily the rock art of prehistoric Europe and Australia and aspects of contemporary and recent Australian Aboriginal art; but single papers on Lega (African) art (Biebuyck), Northwest Coast Indian art (F. Morphy), and children's drawings (Goodnow) seem to have been added just for good measure. The result is (literally) a textbook example of a nonbook. Faced with such an artifact one can hardly comment on every paper, and I shall confine myself to remarks on one or two papers in each section and on the primary topics.

One result of the attempt to impose the book's theme of schematization on anthropological problems of representation is illustrated in Anthony Forge's paper. Apparently struggling to zero in on the theme, Forge dichotomizes graphic forms into signs and symbols. The former are representational: i.e., in his pigeon-holing, they are relatively abstract schematiza-
tions "constrained" by likeness to picturing some
fixed class of objects and typified by stick figures
such as those in Plains Indians pictographic writing
(pp. 28–29). Symbols, however, have multiple, refer-
ential meanings because they are "unrestrained by
the necessity of remaining unambiguously representa-
tional" (p. 31). Forge exemplifies the latter by circles
in Walbiri iconography.

It seems that lurking behind Forge's apparently
innocuous dichotomy are old stereotypes: forms the
observer can see as likenesses to a particular species-
class of objects (e.g., stick figures) are representa-
tional—identified with pictorial intentions (as Forge
puts it, they are "concerned with pictures of things," p.
31); forms like circles, whose generalized shape
precludes this level of recognition, do not depict (cf.,
for example, Beardsley 1958:270–271). This dichot-
omy not only distorts my own analysis of Walbiri icon-
ography (Munn 1966, 1973) but, more to the point, is
simply a variant of the ethnocentered formula: represen-
tation (with degrees of "realism" or "abstraction"), in
which the observer "sees" the object meaning as being
intrinsic to the form, is opposed to "symbol-
ism"/"design," in which any object meaning, not
being readily identified by the outside observer, is
said to be "read in," and the form is labeled nonrep-
resentational. Forge might well have taken his own
perceptive final commentary more to heart: "the
whole concept of schematisation ... may be a hin-
drance to their [the archaeologists'] search for mean-
ing.... The trouble is that we are applying the
categories of our understanding to what we look at...." (p. 32). But Forge does not seem to realize that
dichotomies such as his own, generated in terms of
the concept of schematization and its correlates, are
equally subjective "categories of our understanding."

In drawing attention to this problem in Forge's pa-
per, I wish merely to illustrate the fact that ethnocen-
tric formulas may still linger underneath accounts by
anthropologists who undoubtedly intend otherwise—
who may not mean to reproduce such formulas. Much
more blatantly "mythic" models can, however, be
found in this book. For example, a paper by A.
Gallus, concerned both with archaeology and with
psychic mechanism underlying symboling, asserts
among other things that Jung's archetypes are "inher-
eted engravemes" (p. 372) that yield at the conscious
level "mythic symboling," "metaphysics," etc. (p.
373). Gallus also divides art into two polar categories,
suggesting that the "iconic" pole consists of forms
which "reproduce visual perceptions" (p. 370).
Apparently, modern cultural anthropology has passed
Gallus by.

Other papers in the collection speak more critically
to aspects of the recognizability problem and its uni-
versalistic suppositions. Robin Layton does a detailed
critique of the psychologist Deregowski's assumption
of "cross-culturally valid criteria for recognising the
naturalism or otherwise [sic] ... of an art style" (p.
33). Deregowski's position is an extreme one, and
suggests again that outmoded universalistic assump-
tions, with their underlying ethnocentric value prem-
ises regarding representation, are not so readily eradicated.

Macintosh's reappraisal of his previous interpreta-
tions of rock art at Beswick Creek cave (northern
Australia)—a reappraisal made on the basis of an ini-
tiated Aboriginal informant's interpretations—is a use-
ful cautionary tale illustrating the hazards of outside
observer identification. For example, Macintosh's ori-
ignal identifications of one figure as a "wallaby" and
another as a "marsupial head" contrasted with his
Aboriginal informant's identifications of "paddy
melon" and "rainbow snake"; Macintosh's "head-
dress" was merely "red-ochred ringlets of hair" (p.
195). Although Macintosh's revisions are interesting,
neither he nor other researchers of Aboriginal rock art
in the book (for example, Crawford, on the historical
connections between Bradshaw and Wandjina fig-
ures; McCarthy on eastern and northern Australian
rock art) have undertaken anything as culturally sensi-
tive and exploratory as David Lewis-Williams's (1981)
recent interpretive reconstruction of Bushman rock art
(although such an attempt is certainly made by Moore
in his examination of the "hand stencil as a symbol").

A third paper providing a useful critical perspective
is Maynard's attempt to develop a carefully ordered
descriptive nomenclature for purposes of archaeologi-
cal identification of elements in Australian rock art.
Maynard takes a nominalistic position on labels which
attempt to describe, while at the same time imputing
a content to, the element being described: "Some fig-
ures resemble objects which are familiar to the ob-
server and are therefore named for these objects. I
may call a figure a 'kangaroo' because the arrange-
ment and relative size of the masses which comprise
its shape remind me of the shape of an actual kangaro.
But I cannot be certain of the original intention of
the artist who drew the figure" (p. 396). "Kangaroo"
thus enters into use for heuristic purposes as a des-
criptive label, not a substantive statement of object
meaning.

A number of papers are essentially ethnographic.
Putting together three of them—by Ross and Hiatt,
Keen, and H. Morphy—one can gain useful informa-
tion on northern Arnhem Land sand sculptures (one
of the less-well-known forms of art in this area) and
their important place in the ritual containment of pollu-
tion (bodily decay) at death. Another less explored
topic, the significance of the northern Australian
dwelling, is discussed by Reser. H. Morphy's paper
on the southern Australian Dieri toas (directional
signs) is a careful semiotic analysis aimed at defining
the system of visual features encoded in the toas
which enables communication about locality.
Among the papers on prehistoric European art, various attempts are made to define and use the notion of schematization (e.g., Perello on the prehistoric art of the Iberian peninsula, Brandl on stick figures in rock art). Rosenfeld, discussing profile human figures in Magdalenian art, is concerned with showing possible connections between certain forms "not immediately intelligible" to the viewer and other "more representational" elements from which he suggests the former may be "derived" by processes of simplification (p. 94). Rosenfeld seems to assume that what appears to him as the more "representational" form is by definition the "original model" for other apparently more simple forms; he therefore takes the latter to be derived from the former by "processes of schematization" (p. 107). There is in fact no valid basis for this assumption—one which, in fact, underlay some of the early evolutionary views attacked by Boas (1955) in *Primitive Art* more than fifty years ago.

An example of the mix of close micro-archaeological analysis with the speculation about cosmic significance which afflicts students of prehistoric art is Marshack's study of meanders in upper palaeolithic art. Marshack concludes his detailed discussion of meanders by speculating that they may constitute "iconographic arts of participation in which a water symbolism or a water mythology played a part" (p. 315). By this he means that "one's participation in the [iconographic] system may have had a relation to the continual flow of other processes, seasonal, biological, ceremonial and ritual. The river [which he has attempted to show is a basic meaning of the meander] may have represented the unreal river of a shamanistic journey" (p. 315). Other reservations one may have about Marshack's interpretations include his suggestion (with reference to plate 45) that "the sense of 'water' in the parallel, scalloped meanders attached to the horse is strong" (p. 316). Why should "scalloped meanders" suggest "water"? Marshack's culturally coded "eye" is surely the reason.

In conclusion, I would suggest that while this collection contains a number of useful papers for the student of visual art, as a whole, it is essentially misconceived and as cumbersome intellectually as the book itself is in size and weight.

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**References**


Reviewed by John Stuart Katz
York University, Toronto.

As two Jewish men were walking through a rough neighborhood one evening, they noticed that they were being followed by a pair of toughs who started taunting them with anti-Semitic remarks. "Max," said the shorter one to his friend, "let’s get out of here. There are two of them and we’re alone."

There is a saying that to be successful in the movie business all would-be moguls must do two things: think Yiddish and dress British. Since the days of the silents, the American film industry has been studded with Jewish executives, directors, writers, and stars. From Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, Louis B. Mayer, Irving Thalberg, Harry Cohn, Jesse Lasky, and Jack Warner through David Begelman, Daniel Melnick, and Frank Yablans, to name just a few, the executive ranks of the industry have always prominently included Jews. But how, and how prominently, were Jews themselves depicted on the celluloid for which moguls were responsible?

That is the question with which Lester D. Friedman grapples in his impressively comprehensive and valuable book, Hollywood’s Image of the Jew. Unlike other minorities, such as blacks and native Americans, Jews in the movies have not been created by others, but by Jews themselves. So, examining movies about Jews and with major Jewish characters can shed significant light upon “what some Jews thought about themselves, how the image of Jews in the national consciousness changed over the years, and what Jews were willing to show of themselves to a largely Gentile audience” (p. vii).

Therein lie not just the book’s strengths but also its weaknesses. Friedman divides Hollywood’s Image into seven chapters, one for the silent era, and one for each decade from the thirties through the eighties. It’s a convenient way to organize his material; it’s neat, clean and concise; but it also tends to oversimplify and often gives the impression that the Silent Stereotypes suddenly gave way to the Timid Thirties, Fashionable Forties, Frightened Fifties, Self-conscious Sixties, and Self-centered Seventies. That the Eighties are Emerging, there is no doubt. And, because of its desire to be as comprehensive about the Jewish films of each decade as possible, Hollywood’s Image often consists of plot summary after plot summary, interspersed with more thoughtful analyses of those films Friedman deems particularly relevant. Even so, this is not a major detraction from the book. The lists in themselves are valuable, as are the credits and his summaries. In fact, Friedman even gives us a chronological listing of Jewish American Films alphabetized in Appendix I and a list of those available in the United States in 16-mm, with their distributors, in Appendix 2. These are resources I will certainly use in booking and programming films in the future, but I can’t help thinking that the whole book might have been even more useful if it had appeared as a monograph on the portrayal of Jews in the movies based upon the major films Friedman analyzes and followed by an annotated filmography of the multitude of films he summarizes in the text.

Within each decade Friedman isolates certain categories of Jewish images. For example, he stresses Jews in relationship to Gentiles, assimilation, Jewish parents (mostly mothers), and later the Holocaust and Israel. Despite the prevalence of Jewish talent in the film industry, as often as not the image that emerges within these categories is that of a stereotype—the “handler”—present in movies all the way from The Cohens and the Kelleys (1926) to The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (1974); the quintessential “Yidische Mama” from His People (1925) to Portnoy’s Complaint (1972), Next Stop, Greenwich Village (1976), and beyond; and the bumbling “badken” or “marshalk” from the silent “Izzy” and “Mike and Jake” films to Woody Allen in Annie Hall (1977).

Even if the predominant feeling is that we’re alone and there are two of them, Friedman does not neglect to point out the numerous strong, sympathetic, and compassionate Jews which Hollywood has created. In doing so, he charts the image of the Jew as one might chart the stock market. The silents were an era in which the Jew was depicted primarily as an exotic outsider, an immigrant at best ambivalent about the Gentile world into which he must assimilate. America was being made conscious of the Jew, and the Jew more conscious of how he differed from the mainstream. This was followed by the lean period of the thirties; Jews were either unidentifiable as Jews on screen or ignored altogether. With the coming of World War II, the Jew returned to the screen, but now he is not only a Jew but a Jewish-American, defending what has become his homeland. Following the war, the prevailing image of the Jew remained bland and ethnically safe. Still under the influence of a few major studios, Hollywood was not willing to flaunt “Jewishness” until the independent producers of the sixties, seventies, and eighties took chances and were able to deal both with Jews being Jews of all sorts and with Israel and the Holocaust.
The quintessential "Yiddishe Mama," Mrs. Lapinsky (Shelley Winters), packs a lunch for her son, Larry (Lenny Baker), as he is about to go off on his own, in Paul Mazursky's Next Stop, Greenwich Village (1976). Friedman views Mazursky's attitudes toward the Lapinskys in a more accepting and positive light than one might expect, given his assessments of Goodbye Columbus and Portnoy's Complaint (pp. 269–273). (Property of John Katz)
Friedman’s discussion of Allen’s comic genius is pointed and comprehensive, even though he fails to mention that Allen’s original title for Annie Hall (1977) was Anhedonia, a helpful clue to understanding Allen’s persona (pp. 274–283).

(Property of John Katz)

A sophisticated Jewish reporter (Sigourney Weaver) unwittingly gets involved with a murderous and overzealous Israeli diplomat (Christopher Plummer), in Peter Yates’s Eyewitness (1981). Friedman spotlights this recent negative depiction of an Israeli as a significant and threatening precedent (pp. 291–293). (Property of John Katz)
Torquemada (Mel Brooks), the Grand Inquisitor, highlights the singing and dancing accompanying the torture of the Jews in Mel Brooks's History of the World, Part One (1981). What Friedman calls an attack on "anti-Semitism through his blend of slapstick and scatological comedy" (p. 302), others call Brooks's bad taste. (Property of John Katz)
Jake (Steven Keats) greets his wife, Gill (Carol Kane), and his son, Yossele, when they arrive in America from Russia, in Joan Micklin Silver's *Hester Street* (1974). Although Friedman faults the film for sentimentality and for oversimplifying Abraham Cahan's original tale, to many critics *Hester Street* serves as a milestone in the portrayal of the Jew in fiction film (pp. 266–268). *Hester Street* is particularly indebted to the Yiddish language films of the thirties. (Property of John Katz)
Although Friedman's stated focus is the Hollywood fiction film, he neglects two important areas of American filmmaking which not only reflected different images from those of Hollywood but also served at times as alter egos to the blandness of Hollywood, and may indeed even have influenced the way Hollywood came to depict the Jew on celluloid. First, there were the Yiddish language films of the thirties and forties, the most famous of which are Greenfields (1937) and The Light Ahead (1939). Yiddish films played to large audiences in major cities and proved that issues and problems of real Jews could be dealt with on the screen, albeit to a very specialized clientele. Second, from the sixties on, there have been numerous documentary films that also have played to a specialized audience, but not just of Jews. These documentaries have honestly and intimately chronicled Jewish lives and problems. Highpoints of this tradition include (1) the autobiographical works of Lenny Lipton, Amalie Rothschild, Miriam Weinstein, Maxi Cohen, Jeff Kreines, and Ira Wohl in the seventies and eighties; (2) biographical films such as Lenny Bruce without Tears (1972), I. F. Stone's Weekly (1973), and Chagall (1979); and (3) issue films such as California Reich (1976), Image Before My Eyes (1980), Memorandum (1966), and Sighet, Sighet (1967).

Friedman opens and closes his book with examinations of The Jazz Singer, first the 1927 Al Jolson version (called by many the first talkie) and finally with the Neil Diamond 1980 remake. Both films epitomize Hollywood's obsession to show that the Jew has the capability, indeed, is compelled, to assimilate into the "American way of life," be it symbolized by jazz or rock and roll. Friedman frames his book in one of the most poignant images of the Jew Hollywood has yet produced. The son of a cantor must choose between show business and the synagogue. Jackie Robinowitz (in the later version named Jess Robinovitch) is torn between the shtetl of his parents and his desire to become a jazz singer (in 1927) or its modern equivalent, a rock musician (in 1980). In the 1927 version, says Friedman, there was no doubt left in the mind of the viewer: Jackie must cut off from, if not completely reject, his traditional Jewish values. Just as this film reflects the attitudes Hollywood portrayed toward Jewish identity then, so the 1980 version presents, according to Friedman, director Richard Fleisher's message that traditional Judaism and American success are not contradictory. Friedman finds it significant that at the end of the film Diamond wears the traditional white and blue, a white tallis-like scarf when he performs on television Yom Kippur night, after having sung the Kol Nidre service in temple wearing a blue metallic yarmulke. Even if Friedman's interpretation is accurate, I see Fleisher's offering more as a sop to Cerberus than any indication of Hollywood's portraying a newly found harmony between tradition and assimilation. A truly radical departure in Hollywood's depiction of the Jew would be a film called The Cantor, in which a famous rock musician gives up the glamour of show business against the wishes of his father the manager, to become a chazzan at a small synagogue in Brooklyn.

Despite the few shortcomings of Hollywood's Image of the Jew, anyone interested in the social history of the United States and of movies, or in the treatment of minorities in the media, will find the book an indispensable addition to his or her library. To paraphrase the slogan of a famous rye bread, "You don't have to be Jewish to love Friedman's."
Briefly Noted


New textbooks are often touted with the claim that they contain a fresh perspective and/or fill a pressing need. Here, for once, is a textbook for which the claim would be fully justified. In its attempt to extend to movies the approaches of mass communications scholarship, the book is certainly a novelty, and there can be no doubt that our understanding both of movies and of mass communications had been hampered by the lack, up to now, of this kind of attempt. Within the broad framework of a mass communications approach, the book offers a synthesis of findings and ideas about several aspects of the relationship between movies, their audiences, and the broader society. There is excellent coverage of such topics as the economics and organization of the film industry, the characteristics of the movie audience, the psychology of viewing, the social effects and cultural role of movies, and the future of the medium. On each of these (and several other) topics, the authors provide comprehensive and well-organized summaries of existing knowledge, but they also contribute many valuable new ideas of their own. For these reasons and for the exceptional clarity of the authors' writing style, the book is admirably suited to classroom use. More generally, through this book Jowett and Linton have made an outstanding contribution to the study of the relationship between a visual medium and its social context.


A series of photographs of the major archaeological sites in the Southwest taken by Marc Gaede, with texts by leading archaeologists describing the sites and their importance.


This useful collection of fourteen essays, most of which appeared originally in Critical Inquiry, is loosely organized around the subject of the relationship between language and images. A few of the essays, as well as the author's excellent introduction, offer general theoretical perspectives on this subject. Most of them, however, are more specific in their focus, dealing either with painting, film, etc., as languages or with verbal language as a vehicle for imagery. There are several worthwhile contributions here, among them a previously unpublished piece by Gombrich and a superb essay by Leo Steinberg.


An annotated filmography of over 2000 films dealing with the family. A good source book for film programmers, teachers, and scholars.


Subtitled "Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America," this massive collection covers the years 1882–1977, although not always with equal attention (the last 25 years receive about 100 pages, but so do the 1930s, and the years 1900–1927 cover about 200 pages). The selections focus primarily on technical, economic, social, and cultural rather than aesthetic issues. Major themes highlighted in the documents are the economics of the film industry, film censorship, film content as social propaganda, and the influence of film content and Hollywood mythology on American culture. The book contains many important primary documents (the Hollywood Production Code, Supreme Court decisions, and congressional hearings testimony) as well as descriptive and analytic work from each decade. While no collection, even of this length, can ever be exhaustive, Mast can be thanked for an impressive and valuable achievement (if on the expensive side).
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Studying Visual Communication

Sol Worth
Edited, with an Introduction, by Larry Gross

One of the central figures in the development of the study of visual communication and founding editor of Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication, Sol Worth was a filmmaker and painter before he turned to academic pursuits. He began with the question of how film could be understood and studied as a medium of communication rather than merely an art form. From there he moved to larger and more profound questions about the nature of visual media in general and the role of visual images in the processes of shaping and constructing reality.

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Worth's contributions to the serious task of understanding the role and potential of visual media and visual communication extend far beyond the intellectual realms of theory and speculation. Indeed, they offer some of the most important challenges that face all of us in a world that is so much shaped by visual communications. A new volume in the Conduct and Communication series. $20.00, cloth; $9.95, paper.

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